

B.C. CO-OP NEWS



WINTER 1993

BIG CHANGES AT CCA/BC

--A PERSONAL MESSAGE FROM THE REGION MANAGER

From the what?

No kidding. The Canadian Co-operative Association BC region has hired its first manager.

I've been on the job since early August, preoccupied mostly with planning the Co-op Week events you can read about elsewhere in this edition, attending the CCA Annual General Meeting in Ottawa and establishing a strategic plan for the region.

My appointment may not be news to some of you. But for those of you who have not heard, let me introduce myself.

I've been active with a number of co-operatives in various capacities over the last 20 years. I was a founding member of both the East End Food Co-op and CRS Workers' Co-op. More recently I have worked in co-operative housing as education and marketing co-ordinator for Inner City Housing, and I'm past president of the housing co-op I live in--Trout Lake.

During the past two years I've taken some time away from the co-op sector to study

broadcast journalism at BCIT. I hope that new skill will help me to establish a stronger public presence for co-operatives in B.C., both in the media and with government.

My interest in communications should mean some changes to *BC Co-op News* as well. I hope you'll see it regularly every quarter, perhaps printed in a different seasonal colour, with an eye-catching masthead. I'd also like to make it a stimulating and informative read, but that depends partly on you. Stories from co-ops around the province are not only welcome but essential.

Some of those stories might even make it into the mainstream media. I'll be on the lookout for both business and human interest items with potential as a news story or radio interview. Please send me your ideas. The region office (yes, we have an office too!) is at #102-2250 Commercial Drive, Vancouver V5N 5P9. Phone: 255-9912; Fax: 254-6558.

I look forward to hearing from and serving you.

Dana Weber
CCA BC Region Manager

CO-OP WEEK EVENTS MAJOR SUCCESS

The CCA BC Region's Co-op Week Government Relations Forum was by all accounts our best forum yet. It was one of a number of events the region held in Victoria to mark Co-op Week.

On the eve of the forum, Wednesday, the region mounted an Information Fair with exhibits by co-op organizations and a reception for co-operators, MLAs and government officials.

Early risers on Thursday had breakfast with six cabinet ministers most concerned with co-ops. Then Deputy Premier Hon. Anita Hagen led participants, and local school children, in raising the co-op flag at the legislature.

Peter Podovnikoff's keynote speech was a testament to our movement's strength and as well as a call to future action.

The Hon. Lois Boone, Minister Responsible for Co-operatives, stressed her party's common roots with the co-op sector. Ms. Boone said the job of government is to ensure a strong regulatory framework that fosters co-operative development. She promised legislative changes with that aim during the government's mandate.

Opposition Finance Critic Fred Gingell said his party views co-operatives as an important part of a vibrant private sector. He said his personal experience with employee ownership has convinced him worker co-operatives can have both social and competitive advantages.

Panel and workshop discussions were the forum's centre-piece.

Alice Sundberg of the Co-operative Housing Alliance and Richard Thomas of B.C. Central Credit Union spoke from the different, but equally successful, government relations experience of their organizations. Nora Sobolov, of the Credit Union Central of Canada and CCA Ottawa, proposed a constituency-based government relations model that emphasizes ongoing contact **with** elected legislators **by** elected co-operators.

Our fourth panelist, Deputy Planning Minister Doug McArthur was a real find. A Saskatchewan native with personal experience in co-ops, McArthur finds co-op awareness in the bureaucracy much lower here. So any lobbying strategy may have to correct officials' reservations and misconceptions while also presenting a positive vision of co-op potential. He said caucus, cabinet, civil servants and central agencies like Planning and Treasury Boards are all legitimate lobby targets.

Speakers, panelists and workshops alike stressed the need for a clear consistent message from a united co-op sector, if government relations efforts are to succeed. Workshops identified future development opportunities for the sector--in housing, health care and community development--and they gave CCA/BC specific suggestions for mounting a successful government relations program. Professor Murray Rankin put the proceedings in context with his concluding observations.

FEATURE INTERVIEW: BARBARA DANIEL

Barbara Daniel is president of Four Sisters Housing Co-operative on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside--an area often dismissed as "skid road." Against all odds, the 153-unit co-op has created a thriving community in the heart of Canada's poorest neighborhood. It was a finalist in the 1991 World Habitat Awards for innovative social housing.

Yet there will be no more co-ops built in B.C. unless government funding for co-operative housing is restored. The federal co-op program was cut without warning earlier this year. The province shows no sign of filling the gap. Barbara Daniel is a vocal advocate for what she calls co-ops' "architecture of opportunity." Like 16 other single parents at Four Sisters Co-op, she's gone from welfare to working mom since moving in. Stories like hers testify to why co-operative housing must be preserved. Barbara spoke recently with Dana Weber.

DW: Where did you live before you moved into Four Sisters?

BD: For awhile I was living in a house on Bowen Island. The place was beautiful, but the house was falling apart. The septic tank was shot, the wiring was shot, and the landlord didn't want to put any money in it because he just wanted to turn an easy profit. Absentee landlord, right? When the ceiling started caving in I thought oh god, I have had it with this place. I moved into a converted warehouse space down the street from here with no kitchen, no bathing facilities. That's where I was when I moved into here. I had moved a lot. I probably lived three other places in the last five years.

Had you always wanted to live in a housing co-op?

No. Actually I was quite resistant to joining a co-op because I kind of thought of it as a way for the government to take poor people who were activists and put them in a place where they'd be at each other's throats. Get them so embroiled in internal politics they don't have the energy to do anything else. But finally I just had enough of landlords.

So has the experience been what you expected, or not?

At first I was determined I was just going to move in here, do my maintenance duties, and that was it. That lasted about two weeks, then I got drafted. So here I am president. I think, being in the downtown eastside, it's really a politically active and aware population, and we don't get into a lot of petty squabbles. People are quite down to earth.

What kind of effect has living in the co-op had on your own life?

What it does is provide me with security of tenure. I know that no matter what happens I'm going to have safe secure housing. And that's a really big one. It takes a lot of energy, especially with small children, just to move. And also continuously having this hanging over your head that you don't know where you're going to be in the next year. It's unsettling, for me and for the kids. There's the stress of deciding whether to keep them in one school or move them, knowing you might have to just move again in another year.

I was on welfare and wanted to stay home with my kids until my youngest was three. I thought it might be difficult going back into the job market, but I was able to start working at something I enjoyed. I don't think I could have made the transition that easily if I hadn't been living here. You never have enough energy to stabilize yourself financially and psychologically to go and make some contribution to the community.

There's a self-esteem factor too. When you're living in some scummy little basement suite you're kind of embarrassed about it, your kids are embarrassed about it. That has an effect on whether you can go out and make a positive contribution. You may feel what you have to say isn't worth anybody bothering with. ...Also the support system in a co-op is important to that transition. If there's a problem getting the kids back and forth to school, if you're working and it's an awkward time or something, the other people here are willing to pitch in and help you out.

How about the effect on your kids?

I'm torn about this, because the city has a lot of health factors that are negative: noise, pollution..., but are they ever aware of social issues from being in contact with all these other types of people. It's invaluable for the kids to get to know and understand other people so they don't measure their lives against what they see on TV.

What's most important for you about living in the co-op?

The community. Absolutely. It's like a big family. There is a very strong sense of community here. It's really really difficult to develop that anywhere else nowadays and I think that is one of the most important things about co-ops. My children for example, live thousands of miles away from their grandparents, but because of the age mix here they have a lot of contact with seniors, and with different ethnic and income groups. That mix is crucial. You can't have the same thing in straight social housing. This is why the co-op program is so important. You don't get the ghettoization.

And Oh, yes, the most important thing about the co-op is that we run it ourselves. And this is really important to people's self-esteem. What we have here is a \$10 million project being run by the people who live in it, and they are primarily people from the neighborhood, which is the poorest in Canada. Sometimes there's criticism that you can't have people on welfare running a \$10 million project. Well, guess what? You can. And once people on welfare realize this they've got some incentive to get off of it.

ICA CONGRESS REVIEWS CO-OP VALUES

From October 27-30, some 1500 delegates from around the world gathered in Tokyo to attend the 30th Congress of the International Co-operative Alliance.

Ten apex organizations representing Japan's powerful co-operative movement hosted the events. ICA's Japanese affiliates have about 34 million members.

Before the main Congress, ICA's 14 specialized sectoral organizations (e.g., banking, consumer, worker co-ops etc.) also met in Tokyo. And delegates had a chance to take extended tours of local Japanese co-ops, courtesy of our hosts.

The Congress discussed three main topics: 1) regionalization, 2) the environment and 3) co-op principles.

ICA regional offices have, or soon will be, opened in Europe, Asia, the Americas, and Africa. Member organizations will now meet regionally and internationally in alternate years. For Canada regionalization means increased trade opportunities with co-ops in the U.S. and Latin America.

On the environment, delegates heard about steps ICA members have taken to improve their ecological practice. The Japanese and "west" Germans seem to have the most innovative and complete programs.

Finally, the Congress reviewed a book prepared by long-time Swedish co-operator Swen Ake Book on the theme of Basic Co-operative Values. Book defined these values as:

- Economic activities for meeting needs;
- Participatory democracy;
- Effective human resource mobilization;
- Social responsibility;
- National/international co-operation.

The Congress agreed to adopt these values and use them as the basis for reconsidering the Six Co-operative Principles--the so-called Rochdale Rules last revised by the ICA in 1966. This new round of discussion on the Principles means a re-examination of democratic procedures, capital formation, and government and interco-op relations within the world co-operative movement.

Ian MacPherson was entrusted to facilitate this process, and he is interested in hearing from all B.C. co-operators who want to participate. Specifically, co-operatives, or groups of co-operators, are invited to respond to the questionnaire that will be an important part of re-assessing the Principles.

To get a copy contact Ian c/o:
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INTERNATIONAL YOUTH EXCHANGES

Would your co-op or credit union like to participate in a work exchange involving young co-operators from a developing country?

The International Affairs Department of CCA is interested in facilitating such exchanges and is looking for sponsor organizations. As a sponsor you would be able to select a member or employee between the ages of 18 and 25 to work for up to six months with our partner co-operatives abroad.

In return, you would be asked to provide employment and billeting for a young worker from the participating country.

This is a great opportunity for your members and employees to learn more about the role co-operatives play in international development—and at the same time contribute to it.

CCA would be able to assist with expenses.

Right now the areas most eager to foster youth exchanges are CCA's Americas Region and our projects in the Phillipines. If you would like more information on how your organization can participate, please call the BC Region office at 255-9912.

CO-OP PUBLICITY MATERIALS

CCA has developed an attractive brochure and poster to built around the theme "Canadian Co-ops: Economic Strength, Economic Innovation." The burgundy, blue and white brochure demonstrates the importance of the co-op sector in Canada's economy and our potential role in its future development.

The BC Region has contributed to the cost of developing the national brochure, and we have "customized" it with additional

information on the co-operative sector in our province. It will make an excellent addition to your new member orientation materials.

The brochure and poster will be available to CCA member organizations (or their affiliates) in the region without charge. Cost to non-members is \$.50 per brochure and \$5.00 per poster. If you'd like to place an order or see a sample, phone the region office at 255-9912.

CO-OPS A ROUTE TO HEALTH CARE REFORM

The Canadian Co-operative Association has called for a complete overhaul of the way health care is financed in Canada.

In a December policy statement, CCA says it continues to support medicare's primary objective. That objective, according to the Canada Health Act, is "to protect, promote and restore the physical and mental well-being of [Canadians]" and provide access to health services without financial or other barriers. But CCA says the current financial arrangements intended to achieve that objective are "ineffective."

The CCA policy statement calls for a consumer-based health care system that focuses on prevention. "Reform must include legislative and financial changes to recognize and promote community-based health care as an integral part of Canada's Health Care system," it says.

CCA and its member health care co-operatives intend to promote the co-operative model as a proven way of delivering more cost-effective and high quality community based care to Canadians.

Currently, co-operative health care centres are concentrated in Saskatchewan and Ontario. B.C. has some community-based clinics managed by consumer boards, but they are not organized as co-operatives.

However, all community health centres share some common characteristics. They:

- are community controlled
- emphasize prevention and education
- pay salaries rather than fees-for-service to health care professionals
- provide various health services in one location
- base medical services on group practice.

A 1990 study undertaken by CCA found co-operative health care centres offer significant economic and non-economic advantages. Their overall costs per patient are lower—as are their drug costs—and they lower hospital usage among their client group. They also offer relatively more preventive and health promotion services.

Several other independent studies have confirmed these findings, and in B.C. last year's Seaton Royal Commission report cited community health care centres as one means of accomplishing its goal of bringing health care "closer to home."

CCA's BC region has recognized the opportunity this presents for new co-operatives in the health care field and intends to make it a focus of its development and its government relations efforts.

NEW WORKER CO-OP FIRST IN SEVEN YEARS

The Vancouver Women's Bookstore has recently been legally incorporated as a worker co-operative. VWB had already been

operating as a successful collective. CCA congratulates the members on their new status and welcomes them to the movement.

CO-OPS CAN INFLUENCE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

At a federal-provincial conference this fall ministers agreed to seek ways to promote co-ops as tools for community development.

Community Economic Development, "CED," has become a buzzword lately, but in many ways it's just a new name for something co-ops and credit unions have always done.

Instead of depending on outside investment the CED approach mobilizes local resources for development that keeps both jobs and profits in the community.

What's more, CED is people-centred--concerned with the human, environmental and social dimensions of development as well as the economic bottom line.

Now these are all things on which co-operators are acknowledged experts, and the BC government may soon give you an opportunity to put that expertise to work.

The Provincial Ministry of Economic Development, Small Business and Trade has taken a strong interest in community-based approaches to economic development. It recently appointed five regionally-based Community Economic Development Officers. Each officer will be working with a Regional Advisory Committee (RAC) composed of CED practitioners and chaired by a local MLA.

Apparently, many details of this new CED structure remain to be worked out, including appointments to the RACs. But clearly local co-operators should be among them. CCA/BC intends to make recommendations for those appointments to the Minister on behalf of the co-op sector, and we will provide you more information on how to get involved as it becomes available.

THIS IS SPACE IS YOURS

Looking over back issues of Co-op News has been an interesting, but rather one-sided experience. The communication seems mostly to have gone one way. While region forums are always an exciting and energizing chance for co-operators to communicate face-to face, we'd like to create more, and more frequent, opportunities for that kind of dialogue. Co-op News can be another such forum. We welcome your feedback and comment in whatever form you wish to send it: Letters, opinion-pieces, photos, drawings and cartoons, graffiti--it's your choice, but we do want to hear from you for the next issue.

Until then, best wishes from CCA's BC region committee and staff for a happy, successful and co-operative new year.