



# THE NO BULLETIN

Volume 7 Issue 1

June 1997

## ERC and Benefit issues get top billing

Welcome back for the 1997 summer season! I hope everyone had a productive and healthy winter season.

The buzz lately has been about when the next general membership meeting will be. Wonder no longer, we have finally scheduled a meeting for Wednesday July 2nd and I hope that you will all be able to come out.

In addition to updating you on what has been going on since the last meeting we also hope to get some more input on your concerns in the workplace. We have an Employee Relations Committee meeting scheduled for June 20th and will hopefully have feedback by the July 2 meeting on some of the issues that were raised to our stewards and executive. We are also hoping to get back on track with regular ERC meetings to address concerns in a more timely manner. Since we had agreed with management to hold monthly meetings, it seems like all of our meeting dates have been postponed or cancelled.

The biggest issue that everyone is wondering about is what has become of our Benefit Committee and the forms that seasonal were asked to fill out. Please take the time to read the article 'Regarding Seasonal Benefits' on page 3.

Co-Chairs of the Committee, Debbie Grossi and Anita Simonetti and executive liaison, Colleen McComb-Page worked long and hard on trying to get an acceptable seasonal benefit package for our members. After months of research and meetings with insurance companies the Committee has run up against a huge roadblock. We cannot secure an optional group benefit plan. There is an OPSEU

group benefit plan, but it must be voted on and it is 'all or nothing'. At our last executive meeting we looked at our original mandate under the contract demand and, later, the striking of the committee. The mandate was clear-you wanted an optional plan. As a result, the executive felt that we would not be honouring the original mandate of the membership if we brought the issue to another vote. Please come out to the meeting to voice your opinion.

In any case, Debbi, Anita and Colleen should be recognized and commended for their hard work on the committee!

*In Solidarity  
Marie Stokes*

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"If employee morale doesn't improve soon, I'm going to have to fire some more of you."

## An Alternate view of Convention!

On March 22, I represented Local 217 as an alternate to the Regional meeting. This meeting consists of a slate of elections, most importantly the election of the Executive Board. (Convention reduced to three members per region in '96.) Incumbent Vic Vinerskis finished first with OPSEU President Leah Casselman taking third. Newcomer Wayne Ireson finished a strong second. (Incumbents Sherri Rosen and Jim Albreicht declined to run for re-election) Vic was re-elected as Regional VP, with Wayne the Alternate. Elections also took place for committees and delegates to the OFL, CLC and NUPGE conventions. Our Secretary Marie Stokes was elected an alternate to the OFL.

Annual Convention was held April 10-12 in Toronto. Elections were the top events. Leah Casselman was re-elected President in a narrow third ballot victory. The VP/Treasurer position was easily won on the first ballot by Len Hupet.

## Grievance Backlog tied our hands? Maybe not!

At this time, Local 217 has 67 Grievances at arbitration, representing a total of 42 members. Any member who has a grievance at arbitration realizes what a long, drawn out process this can be. We learned some facts about this situation at the OPSEU Convention.

There is currently a backlog of some 16,000 grievances that the GSB is waiting to hear. Priority at this point is given to dismissal, progressive discipline and sexual harassment cases. The remaining cases are fit in as time permits. Most of our cases fall into the second category, and with new cases being filed all the time, it may be many years before they are heard.

Does this mean our hands are tied? I do not believe so. With commitment on both sides, I believe that fair compromises to many issues can be reached at the local level. The Niagara Parks Commission is dedicated to quality service. A workforce that is treated fairly and with respect will go that extra mile for the employer and ultimately for the customer. However the Parks cannot expect an employee to give 100% if the issues that the workers feel are important remain unresolved for years.

Issues that are just ignored or that fall into the black hole of the grievance backlog frustrate the workers and this can result in the loss of morale in the work unit. Unhappy or frustrated workers have a negative impact on quality customer service. I have seen the results personally, in my work unit.

I believe that with regularly scheduled EERC meetings, many issues can and quite frankly must be resolved for the good of the entire park.

If any member needs assistance, or requires information, you may contact me at 684-0346.

*Yours in Solidarity,*  
Paul Martin

A heated debate took place on our membership with NUPGE. Some members wished to leave the affiliation outright, while others wanted a reduction of the dues we pay. Tempers flared but, in the end, Convention voted to remain in NUPGE with the same dues structure.

There were also discussions on OPS Bargaining and Grievance handling. This took up a huge block of time and was only partially relevant to us. With 15 of the

21 Board Members coming from the Ontario Public Service our union will tend to remain very OPS oriented.

The budget was far less contentious this year and was passed with little debate. We also learned that the Strike debt is now halved and will be fully repaid shortly. Convention also approved funds to attempt to eliminate or at least reduce the tremendous grievance backlog.

# Regarding Seasonal Benefits:

What about our benefits? This question has taken the lead for the all-time most asked question. We did not forget nor have we been dragging our feet. I don't think anyone realized how involved the issue is or how long it takes to go through the information. Here is the low-down.

The benefit committee took whatever forms were sent in by the February deadline and compiled the information given. No company would even give a ballpark figure for rates without some sort of overview of the employees age, status and needs.

Out of over 400 letters and benefit forms we sent, approximately \_\_\_ replied, of these about \_\_\_% were in favour of a benefit plan. We attempted calling the rest of the employees to get more feedback.

Using this information, we called many companies. We did get replies from these companies, but the news was not what we wanted to hear.

Many companies would not offer us any benefits because we are only employed seasonally and because the employer was not going to be involved in any payroll deductions. The majority of the companies wanted us to set up a trust fund with which to pay the plan fees. This is not as easy as it seems. The creation of such a fund would require forming a separate organization and becoming a company. This company would then be responsible for collecting all the monies from each employee and entering it into the trust fund. The benefit plan payment would be taken as one lump sum from this account

every month. Since we would be responsible for collecting and administering this fund, the work entailed would be great. The fund would most certainly require at least one or two people working full time at it. Our Local does not have the funds to pay such people for their work and the job is far too big for anyone to be expected to volunteer their time and energy. We had run into a real big road block.

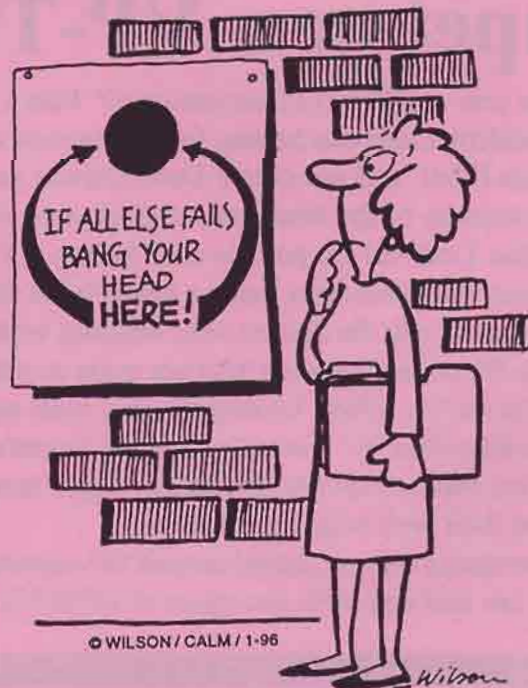
As a last result we contacted OPSEU Head Office.. OPSEU has organized many of the Broader Public Service unions together and formed just such a trust fund. They work through AETNA. This package was by far the best one we received, however there was one big catch.

The benefit plan was an all or nothing offer. The plan would have to be taken to a General Membership Meeting, discussed and put to a vote. Majority would rule (50%+1).

If the vote was in favour, all seasonals would be enrolled whether they wanted benefits or not. The monies would be taken off your cheque automatically each month and for those working short seasons, they would have to prepay for the time that they were laid off. Although the package seemed pretty good, the whole plan was not what we were mandated to come up with, (that being an optional plan.) This is where our committee has ground to a halt. There seems to be no other group alternative.

Thank you to all those employees who took the time to reply to our questionnaire. We had hoped to have had better news for you. Please come to the General Membership Meeting on July 2 to voice your opinion. Hope to see you there!

*In solidarity  
Committee Co-Chairs  
Debbie Grossi and  
Anita Simonetti*



## What do they have that we don't?

I'm sure I am not the only one who wonders why 5 Montgomery brother's labourers were contracted by the Niagara Parks Commission to come in with a half-ton pick-up and spend two weeks carrying out rotten timber from under the Table Rock Parking lot early this spring. That was two weeks work that should have gone to our own bargaining unit labourers. What about the early recall and extra work lists that we worked hard to get into our collective agreement? I am sure that there were many bargaining unit employees at home on layoff that would have jumped at the chance for two weeks work in March.

What did Montgomery's have that we didn't have?

It wasn't a generator or lighting for inside the tunnel. The Parks happily supplied this equipment to Montgomery's. Perhaps it was a gas sniffer for potentially hazardous gases or walkie-talkies to facilitate communications? No, it wasn't that, because the Parks gladly supplied these items to the contractor too! Was it disposal problems, or electrical expertise

needed? Hardly! Our tree department disposed of the waste in a controlled burn and our electricians installed the necessary lighting to do the job. Maybe we didn't have any trucks available, though I hardly think this is the case either.

Could it be that our health and safety watchdogs would have demanded more safety related precautions than simply lights, hardhats and a daily gas test? Items like each worker having their own personal lights, the presence of gas sniffing equipment at all times, continual radio contact with the surface and police in case of emergency and finally the proper shoring up of the deteriorating tunnel roof. I certainly hope not-health and safety should be paramount in these situations

Please correct me if I am wrong, but the only special expertise that Montgomery's would have supplied in this particular incident was probably cheaper labour. The Park seems to have supplied all of the rest. I think that if I was a labourer, especially one trying to support a family during my layoff, I would be mighty ticked (to put it mildly)

And the Park wonders why we sometimes have morale problems...

## Casselman re-elected President, Len Hupet new VP-Treasurer.

It was an election year at OPSEU's Convention 97. Four Unionists threw their hats in the ring to vie for the position of president. Leah was hoping for re-election to her second term. Former President Fred Upshaw, hard-liner Ron Elliot and newcomer Dave Calvert were also running. The winner of the election must receive the majority of the total votes cast. If more than one ballot is required, the low candidate drops out each time. Leah led the polls in each ballot, but it took three ballots for her to get the needed majority of votes. All candidates made a respectable showing and should be congratulated for their work. Ron Elliot gave Leah the closest race, keeping within 70 votes on all ballots.

The race for Vice-President/Treasurer was not quite as nail-biting. Veteran incumbent Bill Kuehnbaum declined to run for office, leaving the race wide open for Smokey Thomas, Len Hupet and our own regional Vice-President Vic Vinerskis. Region Seven's Len Hupet, a Correctional Officer from Fort Francis Jail won his majority on the first ballot. Again congratulations are in order for all candidates for their hard work and their well-waged campaigns.

This year's hot campaign topics centred around the continuing fight against the Harris cuts, fiscal responsibility and the fair and equitable treatment of OPSEU's own staff union.

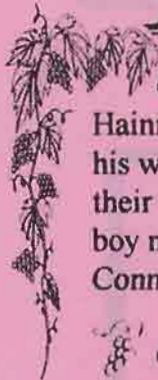
## The coveted Brass Nose-Ring awarded!

Remember our first presentation of the Bull-Paddy award for something that really stinks in the park? Well at the time, I also said I would bestow the coveted Brass Nose-Ring Award to the individual(s) who did something really great. Well the time has come. I present this prestigious award to General Manager Robert Tytanek and Human Resources employee Marlene Goodman for their treatment of the 1996 retirees.

For the first time ever, the retirement banquet honoured seasonal employees. Marlene brought forth the request that the Park should be honouring *all* their retiring employees and not just the full time employees. Mr. Tytanek was in full agreement and was surprized that this had not been done before. The motion was approved and the dinner was a great success. The inclusion of the seasonal employees resulted in the best turn out the dinner had ever had, (over 140 people)

Who the Park honours at the retirement banquet has always been a sore point with the union and it was so nice to see the Park finally recognizing those seasonal employees who in many cases have dedicated their lives to the parks. Kudos to Marlene who does a fantastic job organizing and running the banquet each year and Robert Tytanek, the first General Manager to grant Marlene's request to honour all retirees.

# Through the Grapevine



Congratulations to Duane Haining (QVP Horticulture) and his wife on the safe arrival of their first child, a bouncing baby boy named Conner Allen. Conner weighed in at 6lbs 14oz.

Our wishes for a speedy recovery to Colleen McComb-Page. Colleen was injured on the job and has been unable to return to work for almost a year.

Our deepest condolences to Barb Rowdon (Falls Parking) in the loss of her father in April

Kudos to Juliette Szcpanowski on her new full time position as Horticulturalist at Oakes Garden Theater. Juliette replaces Mark Stoner who has transferred to the tree department. Juliette has been working as a labourer in horticulture since March of 1990.

Happy retirement to Bob Nelson (QVP Horticulture). Bob has been with the Parks for 30 years and his knowledge and expertise will be sorely missed. Bob won't be giving up horticulture completely, it's a habit too hard to break. Bob will now be able to devote more time to his landscape business. All the best to you Bob!

Congratulations to Marvin Fast. Marvin is the new Horticulturalist in Queen Victoria Park. Marvin has some big shoes to fill, taking over for Bob Nelson, who retires this month. Marvin has worked at the Parks as Labourer and Lead Hand in section one since May of 1994.

Welcome to Local 217's newest stewards: Flo Cryderman, a people mover driver since 1986 joins our steward ranks at Rapidsview; Veronica Fawcett who has been a labourer in horticulture since 1986 will be helping out at the Floral Clock and Neil Reaker a seven year park employee, will be representing the Whirlpool Golf Course. All the best to our new stewards.



**OOPS!**

**My Mistake**

Due to the lateness of this *No Bulletin* coming to press, I was not able to insert an ad from Bernard Vilamil regarding signing up for the 1997 Corporate Challenge. My apologies Bernard. The Challenge went on Sunday June 1st despite the lousy weather. The Niagara Parks was marked as the team to beat because of the large number of first place finishes since the challenge came into being. Unfortunately Team NPC was edged out of the running finishing 8th. The City of Niagara Falls teams placed first and third and a dental clinic clinched second. A good (albeit soggy) time was had by all and the event raised more than three thousand pounds of food for the food bank. The NPC was proudly represented by Frank Brotzner, Kathy Durocher, Renato Greco, Tim Grottola, Jennifer Homan, Jenny Laffin, Nancy MacDougall, Paul Martin, Bob Mellveen, Candice Nichol, Tracy O'Brien, Donna Rossi and Bernard Vilamil.

**Mark this date!**

**General Membership Meeting**

Wednesday, July 2nd  
 Stamford Lion's Club  
 \* General Meeting, Updates  
 \* Benefit discussion

**Come and participate!**

**Our Motto (Besides No Bull!)**

The *No Bulletin* is published quarterly and mailed to all signed in members. The *No Bulletin* is **your** newsletter. If you have any related articles, jokes or cartoons, please give them to:

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We welcome your comments and suggestions and we reserve the right to edit for length and content.

Authorized for distribution: *W. Stokes*

