



NATIONAL EDITION

# Newsbriefs

Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 2, MAY 2000

## INSIDE

### New Blecker Street video premieres

Blecker Street Co-operative Homes will premiere its latest video at our AGM. Life is Blecker is a tongue-in-cheek look at everyday life in the co-op.

PAGE 2

### Co-operators extends coverage to same-sex partners

CHF Canada led the way in providing benefits to same-sex partners covered under our staff benefits package.

PAGE 3

### New shared revenue policy for federations

CHF Canada has a new policy for federations in our shared revenue program.

PAGE 4

### Co-op program administration agency—show your support

Your co-op can help us achieve our goal of a new co-op program agency by passing a resolution in support.

PAGE 5

### Rooftops Canada welcomes South African partner

The visit gave Canadian co-op members a chance to share their experiences and learn more about co-ops in South Africa.

PAGE 8

CETTE PUBLICATION EST AUSSI  
DISPONIBLE EN FRANÇAIS

VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT  
[www.chfc.ca](http://www.chfc.ca)

## Less than a month until the AGM

### Are you registered?

Only weeks remain until the biggest co-op housing event of the year—the CHF Canada AGM. The meeting takes place in Ottawa May 17–21. The week includes two business meetings—national and Ontario members, the Member Education Forum, Staff Development Conference and Youth Forum. If you're not already registered, get your form in quickly. Registration is close to matching last year's record-breaking numbers.

Need more information? Call us at 1-800-465-2752 (230-2201 in Ottawa) or e-mail [agm@chfc.ca](mailto:agm@chfc.ca). Our AGM registrar, **Sophie Rollin**, will be glad to help you.

We'll keep you busy during the business hours of the meeting. But there will be some free time to enjoy Ottawa. The CHF Canada AGM

see **Less than a month** on page 2

## Save money with new Business MemberTel™

Last year, we asked Canada's six major telecommunications companies for proposals to supply business telephone services to co-ops. Companies bid on the combined phone volumes of our member housing co-ops and the members of the Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA). CCA's members include large co-ops like Co-op Atlantic, Federated Co-ops, Co-operators, Gay Lea Foods, Mountain Equipment Co-op and CUMIS.

CHF Canada and CCA have selected Sprint Canada to be our partner in Business MemberTel. It offers a full range of phone services for your co-op office. We can handle all of your business needs.

"Sprint Canada offered the best combination of low prices and national coverage," says CHF Canada's **Thom Armstrong**. "Canadian long

see **Save Money** on page 2

takes place this year during Ottawa's famous tulip festival. The Canadian Tulip Festival grew from a gift of thanks given over 50 years ago. In the fall of 1945, Princess Juliana of the Netherlands presented Ottawa with 100,000 tulip bulbs. The gift was given in thanks for providing a safe haven for the Dutch royal family during World War II and for the role that Canadian troops played in liberating the Netherlands.

This year Ottawa businesses and community groups have taken up the challenge to plant two million more tulips to mark the year 2000 festival. This should bring the total number of tulips in bloom to almost five million.

There are concerts each evening and other events to celebrate spring in Ottawa. A Tulip Festival program will be included in your kit when you arrive. Or check out the festival's web site at [www.tulipfestival.ca](http://www.tulipfestival.ca).

You will find other helpful information in your kit. But if you want to start planning earlier, check the web site at [www.ottawa.com](http://www.ottawa.com) for information on other things to do in Ottawa.

Here are some other sites you might want to visit:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <i>National Capital Commission</i>     | <a href="http://www.capcan.ca">www.capcan.ca</a>                    |
| <i>National Gallery of Canada</i>      | <a href="http://national.gallery.ca">http://national.gallery.ca</a> |
| <i>National Arts Centre</i>            | <a href="http://www.nac-cna.ca">www.nac-cna.ca</a>                  |
| <i>Canadian Museum of Nature</i>       | <a href="http://www.nature.ca">www.nature.ca</a>                    |
| <i>Canadian Museum of Civilization</i> | <a href="http://www.civilization.ca">www.civilization.ca</a>        |

**Save Money** continued from page 1

distance is 6.5 cents a minute, and business line rentals start at \$33.95. Those are fabulous prices. And Sprint has a full-time team to bring MemberTel to co-ops and other member organizations."

"Once again," says Armstrong, "Our combined buying power has allowed us to save money together. At CHF Canada we've already switched our own office phones to MemberTel. We're proud to offer the same benefits to our members."

Business MemberTel, exclusively for CHF Canada member co-ops, is available now. Look for your signup package any day. ★

## Newsbriefs

NATIONAL EDITION

Published by

Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada

**National Office**

311-225 Metcalfe St., Ottawa, Ontario K2P 1P9  
Fax (613) 230-2231 Telephone (613) 230-2201

**Ontario Region**

207-2 Berkeley St., Toronto, Ontario M5A 4J5  
Fax (416) 366-3876 Telephone (416) 366-1711

**Vancouver Office**

201-133 East 8th Ave., Vancouver, B.C. V5T 1R8  
Fax (604) 879-4186 Telephone (604) 879-4116

**Manitoba Office**

Suite 192, 162-2025 Corydon Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0N5  
Fax (204) 487-6407 Telephone (204) 989-5963

Editor: Merrilee Robson

© CHF Canada 2000. Material may be copied. Please credit CHF Canada.



## New Blecker Street video premieres

Downtown Toronto's Blecker Street Co-operative Homes will premiere its latest video at our AGM in Ottawa this year. The co-op will also host a hospitality suite for conference delegates. Life is Blecker is a tongue-in-cheek look at everyday life in the co-op.

Blecker's earlier video, Living IS Diversity, was first shown at last year's AGM in St. John's, and will also be featured in the Co-ops on the Big Screen workshop at this year's member education forum. **Diane Frankling**, Blecker Street's manager, says the co-op hired two Toronto filmmakers to create the video. The film features candid one-on-one interviews with co-op members who share a little of their personal lives,

their feelings about Bleecker, and their belief in the importance of co-op housing. "The video really shows our very diverse membership," says Frankling, "and we want to encourage other co-ops to start talking about their own communities."

Bleecker Street has done a lot of work over the years to nurture a community within the co-op. Since 1990, they have provided priority housing for people living with HIV, and persons leaving abusive relationships. Their small community room is home to groups such as the Kids' Karate Club, Gay Line Dancers, and Adult Art Class. Their Computer Learning Centre, with 15 Pentium III work stations, is used after school for children, and in the evenings for adult classes. In the summer, the co-op runs a Day Camp that is free to all co-op kids.

The major social event of the year is undoubtedly the Annual Dog Pageant, held every December. The pageant is designed to bring members together and help resolve the problems that pets sometimes create in co-ops. "The dogs get dressed up in fabulous costumes and win prizes and everyone has a really great time," Frankling says.

Check out the co-op's website at [www.bleecker-street.com](http://www.bleecker-street.com) and be sure to visit the Life is Bleecker hospitality suite in Ottawa. ★

## We'd like to hear from you

Does your co-op have an interesting project you want to share with other co-ops? We are always looking for good examples of co-op living. Contact **Merrilee Robson** toll-free at 1-877-533-2667 (879-4116 in the Vancouver area) or e-mail [mrobson@chfc.ca](mailto:mrobson@chfc.ca). ★

### Check out *MemberTel*<sup>™</sup>

For information, call toll-free  
1-877-885-9961

## Serving Our Members

### Co-operators extends coverage to same-sex partners

CHF Canada has always included same-sex partners in the coverage offered under our group benefits plan with The Co-operators. But up until now this coverage has been optional in plans for other Co-operators clients. The Co-operators Life Insurance Company has now announced that coverage for same-sex partners will be included in all employee benefits plans in every province and territory. The change was made because of recent court decisions that declared same-sex partners to have the same status as common-law spouses. CHF Canada welcomes this announcement. ★

### Board approves barrier-free access policy

Delegates at last year's annual meeting passed a resolution calling on CHF Canada to make its offices and services accessible to people with disabilities. The resolution also asked us to promote the need for barrier-free access with our members and suppliers.

The CHF Canada board passed a new policy on accessibility at its February meeting. We believe that people with disabilities should have access to all of the programs and services we offer. The policy covers access to our offices, meetings and other events, and our programs and services.

We plan to tell all of our suppliers about our commitment to barrier-free access. We will ask them to let us know about their own policies so we can publicize their successes and improvements in Newsbriefs and other places.

We will encourage our members to adopt similar policies. Call **Louise Briglio** at 1-800-465-2752 (230-2201 in Ottawa) or e-mail [lbriglio@chfc.ca](mailto:lbriglio@chfc.ca) for a copy of the policy. ★

## New shared revenue rules for federations

The board of CHF Canada has changed the way federations will qualify to receive money from the shared revenue program.

Since 1990, CHF Canada has shared more than \$2.3 million of its income with member federations outside Quebec. This money comes from interest on the Endowment Fund and part of the sector support contributions received from federally-funded co-ops. It has been used to support regional federations in their work with housing co-ops.

Up to now, federations have had to satisfy a long list of requirements to qualify for a share of the pool. These requirements included offering a set number of workshops, publishing a newsletter, and charging high enough membership dues.

The minimum dues level remains—equal to at least 75 percent of the average dues charged by all the federations in the pool.

But the other requirements have been replaced by a simple test:

*by October 31, 2002, do at least half of the co-ops or co-op units in the federation's area belong to the federation?*

This will put the focus where it belongs—on the housing co-ops who make up each federation's membership. And it means that housing co-ops—not CHF Canada—will decide whether a federation has met the minimum standard for sharing in the pool of money that those co-ops helped create.

For a copy of the new shared revenue rules, contact **Louise Briglio** at our Ottawa office. Call 1-800-465-2752 toll-free (230-2201 in the Ottawa office) or e-mail [lbriglio@chfc.ca](mailto:lbriglio@chfc.ca). ★

## Help us meet your co-op's needs—get your survey in

It's time for CHF Canada to make sure that our information on housing co-ops is up to date.

This year we are surveying all housing co-ops outside of Quebec, following last year's survey of Quebec co-ops.

This is our third survey. This time we are asking co-ops if they have e-mail addresses, so we can get information out to them more quickly. Please let us know if you have a web site as well.

We are also looking for other information that will help us do a better job of serving our member housing co-ops.

We have included a stamped, self-addressed envelope with the survey, to make it as easy as possible to respond. Please send your survey as soon as you can. For more information, contact **Patricia Muller** at our Toronto office. Call her toll free at 1-800-268-2537 (416-366-1711 in the Toronto area) or e-mail [pmuller@chfc.ca](mailto:pmuller@chfc.ca). ★

## Stories for your newsletter

In the last issue of *Newsbriefs* we asked if members in your co-op were taking advantage of the services available from CHF Canada. We offered housing co-ops an article to put in their own newsletters. A number of co-ops took us up on the offer. The article outlines the various ways co-op members can save money through CHF Canada's group buying services. Individual members can save on insurance, long distance telephone and Internet programs.

We also have an article on our MemberGuard program. This popular program gives members excellent rates on insurance for the contents of their co-op home. And we have a piece on MemberTel, our long distance and Internet program.

Make sure your members know how your co-op's membership in CHF Canada can help them save money. Call **Merrilee Robson** at 1-877-533-2667 (879-4116 in the Vancouver area) for a copy of these articles, or e-mail [mrobson@chfc.ca](mailto:mrobson@chfc.ca). ★

## Pension plan for co-op staff

Housing co-op staff frequently ask us about group pension plans. The good news is that individual co-op staff are eligible to sign up with the Co-operative Superannuation Society (CSS) Pension Plan. This is where CHF Canada staff have their pension plan.

For more information, call our Ottawa office toll-free at 1-800-465-2752. Or you can contact the pension plan directly at (306) 244-1539 or e-mail: [css@sk.sympatico.ca](mailto:css@sk.sympatico.ca). You can also view their web site at [www.csspen.com](http://www.csspen.com). ★

### Politically Speaking

## Newfoundland agrees to join agency talks

Joan Marie Aylward, Newfoundland's Minister of Municipal and Provincial Affairs, has said she would be happy to have the Newfoundland government join in talks between the federal government and CHF Canada about the co-op sector's proposed agency. And Newfoundland government sources indicated they may also be willing to return co-op programs to the federal government, provided a fair financial agreement can be reached.

Last fall, Alfonso Gagliano, the federal minister responsible for Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, told CHF Canada he would be prepared to discuss the co-op sector's proposed agency if two or three provinces were also willing. Manitoba has already agreed to participate. ★

## Co-op program administration agency — show your support

Co-op members can help protect their co-op communities by passing a resolution supporting our proposed co-op program administration agency.

CHF Canada has been lobbying for the agency since 1996, when the federal government decided

to stop looking after social housing programs itself. We have proposed a new, independent agency based in the co-op sector to take over federal co-op programs from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC). We hope to start negotiations soon with the federal government and interested provinces. We want to get as many resolutions as we can to show the government that co-ops are behind the agency proposal.

The proposed agency will have many advantages. It will specialize in housing co-ops. It will act quickly when a co-op is starting to have problems and work with the co-op's board and members to fix them. It will also share the good ideas and practices of well-run co-ops with other co-ops, helping to build a stronger sector.

We'll hold a workshop on the proposed agency at the CHF Canada AGM. Other workshops will look at the national lobby campaign and how you can get involved.

Individual housing co-ops can help support this effort by passing a resolution in support of the agency proposal by writing to your own member of Parliament. We are asking co-ops to fax a copy of the resolution to the CHF Canada Toronto office at (416) 366-3876.

For more information or a sample resolution, contact your nearest CHF Canada office. ★

## Former Ontario rent supplement programs go national

One good piece of news came out of the recent signing of the Social Housing Agreement (SHA) between Ontario and Ottawa. About 60 percent of federal co-ops in Ontario participate in three different rent supplement programs, all run until now by the Ontario government. As a result of our lobby efforts, control of these programs will now be transferred to Ottawa.

This transfer should secure the long-term protection we have been seeking for these rent

see **Former Ontario rent** continued on page 6

supplement programs. Agreements with co-ops under the first of the three programs affected, the Community Sponsored Housing Program (CSHP), ran out quite a few years ago. Co-ops are still getting rent supplements, but in a very insecure arrangement. Agreements under the second program, Ontario Community Housing Assistance Program (OCHAP) have been renewed on a short-term basis only. There are no agreements at all under the third program, the Federal Co-op Housing Rent Supplement Program.

It will probably be some months before Ottawa takes over the programs from Ontario. CHF Canada has written to Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) outlining a number of outstanding program issues that we want addressed. In the meantime, we have been assured that payments will continue uninterrupted until there is a mutually agreed resolution of these matters between CMHC and our sector.

For more information call **Harvey Cooper** at 1-800-268-2537 ext.237 (366-1711 in the Toronto area) or e-mail [hcooper@chfc.ca](mailto:hcooper@chfc.ca). ★

## Working to help leaky co-ops

**C**HF Canada and the Co-operative Housing Federation of B.C. are working together to help housing co-ops with leaky buildings. **Wayne Callaghan**, chair of the CHF/BC committee working on the problem, says they are trying to bring all the co-ops together to solve the problem collectively. His own co-op, Paloma in Vancouver, has problems with rotting balconies and damp carpets.

**Mike Alsop**, a CHF/BC board member says the committee has identified over 30 co-ops with moisture problems. While his own co-op has no visible problems yet, they are having a building envelope study done to look for potential problems. The company that provides errors and omissions insurance for a majority of architects and engineers in B.C. has said that it will no longer issue policies covering claims for water damage, so co-ops will have to file their claims while their architect still has coverage.

The provincial government is providing interest-free loans to co-ops and homeowners who need to fix leaks. **David Lach**, CHF/BC's acting Executive Director, says 21 co-ops have already applied for loans under this program. Some co-ops need loans as high as \$60,000 per unit.

The two federations have been pressing CMHC to make changes to loan agreements with affected co-ops. In particular, the federations have strongly objected to proposals to limit co-ops' use of subsidy for low-income households. "Housing co-ops should be entitled to use their subsidy in the way it was meant to be used. It shouldn't be used to pay for the cost of extra help from the government," Lach says. He says a provincial government commission found that repair costs in housing co-ops were higher than in condominiums, because waiting for CMHC approval caused delays in starting the work.

CHF Canada is providing support to CHF/BC and the affected co-ops in their work to fix the leaks and get the best possible resolution of their concerns. ★

## Federal budget does too little to address housing needs

**T**he recent federal budget was a disappointment to advocates for more affordable housing. Calls for a national housing strategy and funding for a new housing supply program went unanswered. The government did announce that funds under the federal-provincial-municipal infrastructure program can be used to build new housing—if provinces and municipalities make that a priority. Other funds have been made available for community partnership projects to address "absolute homelessness." But as one Vancouver housing advocate recently commented, "The one part that's missing from the homelessness strategy is the homes." ★

## New B.C. housing minister

**Jan Pullinger** is the new minister responsible for B.C. Housing, following Premier **Ujjal Dosanjh's** March cabinet shuffle. Pullinger was

formerly the minister responsible for co-operatives and is very familiar with co-op housing issues.

The British Columbia government has announced five new housing co-ops recently under its Homes BC program. City Gate Housing Co-operative will build 102 units and Collingwood Housing Co-operative 80 units. Both are in east Vancouver. Hunter Hill Co-op will build 40 units in Surrey. Other new co-ops announced are Westwood, which will build 74 units in Coquitlam and Desert Breeze, which has 54 units under development in Kelowna. ★

### Information for Co-ops

#### AFC subsidy for co-ops

**C**HF Canada has learned that CMHC may extend its Additional Financial Contributions (AFC) to Section 95 (56.1) co-ops.

The AFC has provided additional subsidy to co-ops that:

- lost income-tested assistance (ITA) following a mortgage renewal at a lower interest rate, and
- suffered from a shortage of ITA as a result, and
- faced a viability problem solely due to the ITA shortage.

The AFC agreements between CMHC and Section 95 co-ops expire when those co-ops' mortgages renew again. But the renewals don't necessarily end the subsidy problems. Now CMHC has told us that co-ops may be able to ask for a further AFC if the conditions listed above continue after their mortgages renew yet again. CHF Canada will be talking more to CMHC about this issue; we'll have more to tell you in a future issue of *Newsbriefs*.

CHF Canada can provide you with the full details about the AFC—just call **Karla Skoutajan** at our Ottawa office (toll-free 1-800-465-2752, or 230-2201 in the Ottawa area). Or e-mail [kskoutajan@chfc.ca](mailto:kskoutajan@chfc.ca). ★

#### Books to help keep your buildings in shape

**N**ow that the weather is getting warmer, it's time to think about the physical upkeep of our buildings. The Co-op Housing Bookstore is promoting four books this month to help you with that work. On-Call Committee, Property Inspections, A Guide to Solving Building Problems, and Property Management all deal with different aspects of building management.

These books are helpful for co-op boards, staff and committees. They cover such topics as technical audits, financing, contracts, planning, procedures, schedules, move-ins and move-outs. Each book contains sample forms, schedules and checklists.

The set of four books, regularly \$58, is on sale for \$45 until July 31.

Order with the flyer included with this issue, view the web site at [www.coophousing.com/bookstore.html](http://www.coophousing.com/bookstore.html), or contact:

Co-op Housing Bookstore, 658 Danforth Avenue, Suite 306, Toronto, Ontario M4J 5B9, Phone: (416) 465-8688. ★

#### Make sure to file NPO return

**N**on-profit housing co-operatives, as organizations exempt from income tax, are required to file an annual Non-Profit Organization return (T1044) with Revenue Canada. The return is due within six months of your co-op's fiscal year end. The penalties for not filing or filing late are high—as much as \$2,500. With penalties this high, your co-op should confirm with its auditor that the return is being filed on time.

If your co-op has been charged a late filing fee, your auditor can consult Revenue Canada's Information Circular IC92-2 Guidelines for the Cancellation and Waiver of Interest and Penalties for information on how to appeal the fee.

A few very small co-ops (for example, with assets under \$200,000) may not have to file a return. Your auditor will be able to tell you if you are exempt. ★

## Rooftops Canada welcomes South African partner

Since 1992, Rooftops Canada has been working in partnership with the National Union of Mineworkers in South Africa to develop a range of affordable housing options. As part of this program, the B.C. Rooftops Canada committee hosted **Silas Diamond**, NUM's housing officer, for two weeks in Vancouver. Silas also travelled to Edmonton, Alberta to meet with housing co-op activists there.

NUM is one of the largest trade unions in South Africa and represents over 300,000 workers from the mine and energy sectors. The staff of the NUM Housing Unit are working to make hostels more democratic and to develop non-profit housing for mineworkers.

"This visit is an opportunity for Canadian housing co-op activists to share our own experience and learn more about the innovative housing work that is being carried out in South Africa", comments Rooftops Canada Board member **Sue Moorhead**. ★

## Quebec housing co-ops to save on cablevision

The Confédération québécoise des coopératives d'habitation (CQCH), the Quebec confederation of housing co-operatives, and its member federations have joined with the Quebec federation of cable distribution co-ops to help their members get lower rates on cable service. The program covers all areas serviced by Vidéotron.

Individual members could save over \$120 a year with this service. Over the next few weeks housing co-op members in Quebec will be receiving information about the new discounts. ★

## Changes at Columbia

**Jamie Ritchie** is the new Executive Director of Columbia Housing Advisory Association, a B.C. resource group. Jamie, formerly with Innovative Housing, is also on the board of CHF/BC. **Glenn Haddrell** retired last year after many years with Columbia. ★

## Housing co-op members elected to The Co-operators board

For the first time, two housing co-op members are serving on the 20-person board of The Co-operators Group of companies.

CHF Canada's Executive Director **Alexandra Wilson** will serve as one of eight Ontario region spots on the board. **David Lach**, Acting Executive Director of the Co-operative Housing Federation of B.C., will be filling one of two British Columbia positions. He had served on the board from 1986 to 1998. Directors were nominated in their regions and elected last month at The Co-operators' annual meeting in Calgary.

Housing co-operatives generate the second highest level of member business with The Co-operators, more than \$7 million each year.

The Co-operators invests most of its profits in expanding and improving its services. But one per cent is shared with members through a member loyalty program. CHF Canada's share of that payment this year is \$134,997. We will use that money to improve our services and keep our dues at a reasonable level. ★

Visit CHF Canada on the Web  
[www.chfc.ca](http://www.chfc.ca)