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CETTE PUBLICATION EST AUSSI DISPONIBLE EN FRANÇAIS

Victoria hosts 2001 AGM

CHF Canada members island bound for June annual meeting

Registrations are coming in quickly for the CHF Canada annual meeting, June 6-10 in Victoria. Register soon to make sure you don't miss out on any of the activities.

Kerry Panter, the local AGM co-ordinator, says the volunteers from Victoria are getting ready to welcome 800 co-op members to their city. They have planned some special activities to make this AGM memorable, including booking a bright red double-decker bus for the co-op tour.

Registering early is important

Registering early is important if you want to make sure you get your first workshop choices. There's a lot to choose from in the Member Education Forum, with workshops for new members and the most experienced. Co-op staff can learn new skills and information they can use in your co-op at the Staff Development Conference.

And everyone benefits from having their say — in regional meetings, including the annual meeting of Ontario members, and the business meeting on Saturday and Sunday.

Local committee hard at work

The local federation, **VICHA Services**, is hosting a welcome social on Thursday night. And the local committee is working hard to get things ready. "The volunteers are doing a great job," Panter says. "They're willing to give up their weekends to plan a great event."

For more information on our annual meeting, visit our Web site at www.chfc.ca or call your nearest CHF Canada office. ★

Members connect at Bleecker Street Co-op

Bleecker Street Co-operative Homes in Toronto has a Computer Learning Centre (the Mousepad) for members. The co-op offers training programs, free Web-based e-mail for members, and an after-school Kids Program.

Pete Kingdon, Operations Manager for the Centre, says that it is "a real hub of activity where our members can come down and relax surfing the Net, watch a movie in our lounge or participate in a course." Members can also use the on-line work request form available on the co-op Web site. "They can complete the form from home, work or anywhere there is a computer connected to the Internet," says Kingdon, who estimates that half of the members now submit their work requests this way.

Get your co-op on-line today

CHF Canada's Business MemberTel Internet offers your co-op 400 hours Internet use for just \$20.95 when purchased with Business MemberTel Long Distance. You can add e-mail accounts for your board, staff and committees, and register your co-op's unique domain name for a small extra charge. It's all made easy with step-by-step Internet account activation, on the telephone with a Sprint Canada E-services representative. Call Sprint Canada at 1-888-552-0165. For more information, call Nick Sidor at CHF Canada (toll-free 1-800-465-2752, ext. 231), e-mail nsidor@chfc.ca or visit our Web site.

Visit the Web sites for organizations mentioned in this article:

CHF Canada
www.chfc.ca

CHFT
www.coophousing.com

Bleecker Street
www.bleecker-street.com and
www.mousepadsite.com

Priory Square
www.priorysquareco-op.on.ca

Co-op Internet use skyrockets

From e-mail to Web sites, co-ops connect



Housing co-ops are using the Internet for everything from marketing units to research and volunteer training. Internet use by co-ops is growing across Canada. In Toronto, the number of co-op offices with e-mail doubled in the year 2000 alone, reports **Tom Clement** of the **Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto**.

CHFT offers complimentary prototype Web sites to their 160 member co-ops (co-ops can add information to these sites using access codes). It also has the capacity to offer e-mail addresses to co-ops. Last year, CHFT secured the donation of 17 computers and passed them on to co-ops who had a plan to use them.

Priory Square Co-operative Homes in Guelph uses its Web site to inform both co-op members and the general public about what is happening in the co-op. Included on the site are co-op by-laws, Board minutes, unit layouts, a list of outstanding volunteers, and answers to frequently asked questions. Over half of co-op members have e-mail addresses (including seven of eight Board members) and many have them included on the Member Directory alongside their phone numbers. **Scott Piatkowski**, Co-ordinator of Priory Square, uses individual and group e-mails to inform and consult with the Board, members, applicants and staff of other co-ops. In addition, in his role as Staff Representative on CHF Canada's Federations Committee, he regularly sends reports to co-op staff across Canada.

Other co-ops are just beginning to use the Internet, but are still finding it very useful. At **Artisan Co-op** in London, Co-ordinator **Cindy Warner** uses the Net to conduct research and found an interesting Non-Profit Leadership Course while on-line. She also regularly checks the CHF Canada Web site and uses the information she finds to "keep the Board and members aware of what is happening in the sector".

In June, CHF Canada will again offer workshops on Co-ops and the Internet at both the Member Education Forum and the Staff Development Conference. It's only a matter of time before virtually every co-op in Canada is using the Internet to expand their horizons. ★

Participation: Time to think again?

"The same people go to all the events and do all the work!"

"We have to hire people to do things, because we don't have enough participation."

Many co-op members are thinking hard about participation — and wondering if our traditional approach still works. In March of last year, the **Co-operative Housing Association of Eastern Ontario** (CHASEO) sponsored an all-day discussion on member involvement.

From the start, it was clear that "participation" meant different things to different people. Active volunteers said they were "too busy", resenting other members who weren't doing as much. Others said forcing people to participate had divided their co-op community.

CHASEO members aren't alone in re-thinking participation.

Participation Myths

One favourite myth about member involvement is: "Our co-op's biggest problem is lack of participation." Why is this a myth? It's clear enough — not one co-op has ever failed because of lack of participation. Bad construction, soft rental markets, vacancies and high arrears have caused co-ops to fail. But lack of participation has never killed a co-op yet.

Just a Theory

In general, Canadian housing co-ops are proud of their high levels of

member involvement. So why do so many members feel their co-op falls short, or that members don't work hard enough? Perhaps this is a legacy of the early leaders of our movement. Their theory — drilled into our co-ops' founding boards — was that co-ops needed each member to work, both to save money and to thrive as strong and united communities.

There's not a word about "participation" in the International Co-operative Principles. But today, we hear again and again that "people in my co-op won't participate." "We don't have enough committees". Or enough people to "plant trees," or even "clean units".

Often, the members saying those things live in a well-managed co-op, with great member involvement and a terrific community. But maybe the level of participation that we expected years ago just isn't possible today. And the approach that worked for a co-op community then just might not work now.

For sure, plenty of members still want to come and help out. But statistics tell us that times have changed. People are putting in longer hours at work. More mothers with young children work outside the home. More people are holding down two jobs. Canadians are older, and that includes co-op members. Why should we be surprised today that fewer of us are able to devote hours of time to unpaid work in our co-ops?

Getting It Done, Doing It Right

Let's agree that strong communities are what we all want — but that member participation is just one way to get there. Key management and maintenance tasks can't be ignored, but many co-ops are now finding different ways of getting them done. If co-op members decide they don't want to paint the fences, why not hire someone? Many co-op communities are choosing to use more paid help, and with good results.

Rethinking participation can help build stronger co-op communities!

Co-ops can't pay people to do everything. Only volunteers can supply informed democratic control as members and directors — and that *is* a co-operative principle. "Participation" definitely means that members make the key management and financial decisions.

But for other jobs, why wait for people to be "no shows"? Better to sit down, as a community, and find out what level of participation works for your members today.

What's your thinking on participation? E-mail mrobson@chfc.ca. And watch our Web site at www.chfc.ca for the full story of CHASEO's participation event. ★

Politically speaking

Housing co-ops tackle leaks

Charles Hill, a member of **Lakewood Terrace Co-op** in Vancouver, spent an entire night bailing out his storage room, as water poured in through a leaky roof. “I estimate that I emptied the equivalent of eight or nine full plastic garbage cans of water into the bathtub. I was exhausted but I’d saved the floor coverings in my unit and stopped the water from reaching my downstairs neighbour’s unit.” He then rigged a funnel and hose running from his storage room to the bath to protect his unit until a temporary patch could be put on the roof.

While many people would choose to leave such a damaged unit, Hill explains why he stays, “The co-op is my home.” But living in a leaky co-op is more than just an inconvenience. CMHC’s own Web site offers the following advice, “If you live in a damp house, or if you have ever experienced flooding, your home may be breeding an often-invisible and always unwelcome intruder — mold. Mold can cause allergies and respiratory disease. The toxins it produces can wear down the immune system, leaving people, especially

children, vulnerable to many illnesses. If you discover mold, it’s important to destroy it quickly.”

But CMHC hasn’t shown any interest in moving quickly to fix the BC co-ops facing serious damage from leaky buildings. Even though many co-ops are eligible for 10-year, interest-free loans from the province, only a handful of co-ops have received approval from CMHC to borrow funds. CHF Canada and CHF/BC are working to provide help to these co-ops. They need a faster approval process and, in some cases, additional financial help with the repairs, such as RRAP funding or Enhanced CMHC Assistance. ★

Ontario provincial co-ops expect big changes from downloading

Ontario’s Social Housing Reform Act became law in mid-December. The bill directly affects about 21,000 households in Ontario program co-ops. Federal co-ops in Ontario are not affected.

The new law is the first step in the transfer of the administration of Ontario provincial social housing programs to 47 municipal service managers. Ontario program co-ops will operate under existing legal agreements for a number of months. But big changes are expected when the transition from provincial to municipal administration begins later this year.

The action in Ontario continues on two fronts. Co-ops and federations are busy working with municipalities on the critical details of the transfer. Municipalities can make important choices in key areas, such as administration of rent-geared-to-income programs. Co-ops are working for the best possible deal on a municipality-by-municipality basis.

But there’s still plenty to do at the provincial level. Co-ops are active on ten provincial working groups dealing with issues from the new Social Housing Services Corporation to the financial issues.

CHF Ontario Region produces a newsletter called the Bulletin for Ontario program co-ops. It has the latest news and analysis on the provincial and municipal fronts, along with news of upcoming co-op meetings. The newsletter is being faxed and mailed to all provincial program co-ops, and is posted on the Ontario Region section of the CHF Canada Web site.

For more information, call **Harvey Cooper** or **Michael Shapcott** at CHF Ontario Region at 1-800-268-2537 (in Toronto, call 416-366-1711). E-mail: hcooper@chfc.ca or mshapcott@chfc.ca. ★

Ottawa vague on new housing

The federal government is offering only vague hints about plans for a new national housing program. The Speech from the Throne on January 30, setting out the government’s overall strategy for the current session of Parliament, had no new details on a possible housing program.

Housing advocates expect to get more details on Ottawa’s plans this spring. National, provincial and local groups are stepping up their lobby efforts. Co-op members can call their local MP and ask them to support a fully-funded, new national housing program.

For more information on housing and homelessness issues, log onto the Housing Again Web site at www.housingagain.web.net. ★



Help in building partnerships with co-op staff

Evaluating Staff gives co-op boards and committees a step-by-step process for doing staff evaluations. Employing staff is a big responsibility for housing co-ops and for volunteer boards. The newest Co-op Housing Bookstore publication has been written to help housing co-ops conduct effective evaluations with their staff.

Evaluating Staff regularly sells for \$12 each. It will be on sale at two for \$16 until June 1, 2001. Visit the bookstore's Web site at www.coophousing.com/bookstore.html.

A date to end racism

March 21 is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. The United Nations gave this name to the date in 1966. Canada was one of the first countries to support the UN motion. What can housing co-ops do to mark the day? You can show the videos produced by youth in the annual Stop Racism video competition. Or visit the Stop Racism web site (www.march21.com) for more ideas on how your co-op can help stop racism.

CCA meets in June

The Canadian Co-operative Association's Triennial Congress will be held June 20 - 24, in Saint John, New Brunswick. Visit their Web site at www.coopcca.com for details.

Rooftops bids farewell to Sarah Power

After eight years with **Rooftops Canada**, **Sarah Power** is leaving to take a job with the City of Toronto Housing Department. She will be working as a Housing Development Officer with the Lets Build Program. Rooftops Canada is co-op housing's international development organization.

Woman of the Year dreams big

By Theresa Wallace

"Everything I've done has involved getting together with other ordinary people, and applying the co-op principle — the idea that people can accomplish much more together than they can alone — to meet life's challenges."

That's how co-op activist **Betty Ann Baker**, named one of three Women of the Year in the January 2001 issue of *Chatelaine* magazine sums up her success. In its salute to what it calls today's activists, *Chatelaine* describes her as a strong, determined woman who looked around and found a way to help people in her community help themselves through the establishment of a successful business.

The business *Chatelaine* refers to is **Niagara Presents**, the for-profit co-op venture begun a few years ago by Baker and a group of women to market local produce under a distinctive label. Baker is also executive director of **Niagara Peninsula Homes**, a co-op resource group, which has developed approximately 2,700 units of co-op housing and manages several housing co-ops in the Niagara region.

Niagara Peninsula Homes owns 10 acres in the Niagara area and Baker dreams of establishing a co-operative built on the success of **Niagara Presents** and **Niagara Peninsula Homes** on this 10-acre site. "Based on our experiences with **Niagara Presents**, we would like to marry economic development and housing, and create a community which includes facilities to work in

the food sector. Perhaps there would even be an on-site greenhouse to grow produce. That's our long-range vision." ★

Niagara Presents: Giving producers a boost

Have you ever had a great idea for a food product, but felt discouraged when you estimated your start-up costs?

Anyone living near Jordan, Ontario can use **Niagara Presents'** unique incubator kitchen. The facility provides the equipment used by a network of small growers and processors who co-market their preserves and other local products under the **Niagara Presents** label.

Betty Ann Baker and her colleagues are always looking for ways to further expand the success of **Niagara Presents**, and have just set up the **Niagara Women's Enterprise Centre**, which raises money for product development and offers an eight-week course on food ventures. "Through our work with **Niagara Presents**, we know it takes about \$1,500 to launch a product. Let's say a co-op member has an absolutely great sauce recipe, but no start-up money. That person can now apply to the Centre for a loan. If we can raise enough money, we could help people from all over Ontario." ★

Regional Update

NOVA SCOTIA

Nova Scotia director elections April 21

CHF Canada members have voted to elect their regional director in the region. The meeting to elect the director will take place April 21 in Halifax. Regional elections are now possible because of last year's change in CHF Canada's by-laws.

QUEBEC

Positive signs for Quebec agency

Housing co-ops in Quebec are pleased with signs the Quebec government is seriously considering their proposal for an agency to administer co-op housing programs in Quebec. In a video-conference held February 6, the Société d'Habitation du Québec asked Quebec co-op representatives a series of detailed questions about the Quebec proposal. Quebec housing co-ops have proposed an agency that would work in co-operation with the national administrative agency proposed by CHF Canada.

ONTARIO

Talks in Ontario on municipal downloading

About half the co-ops in Ontario — provincial program co-ops — are facing big changes as the provincial government transfers administration of their programs to municipal service managers. Municipalities have a choice about how they administer co-op programs in their area. They are required to consult with co-ops about their plans.

CHF Ontario Region has held meetings with federations and co-ops in many parts of the province. At the meetings, we give a detailed overview of the new

legislation. We also give practical help to co-ops working through the transition process in their community.

In some areas, we asked municipal service managers to our meetings to hear our concerns about RGI administration, income testing and surplus sharing.

Check with your local federation for meetings in your area. Or call **Harvey Cooper** or **Brian Eng** at 1-800-268-2537. E-mail: hcooper@chfc.ca or beng@chfc.ca. More information is on the Ontario Region section of the CHF Canada Web site.

CHF Canada welcomes Judy Shaw as new co-op services officer

CHF Canada welcomes **Judy Shaw**, who has joined us on a one-year contract as Co-op Services Officer in the Ontario Region office.

Most recently, Shaw staffed the **Peel Halton Co-operative Housing Federation**. She also worked at a number of provincial co-ops both as a co-ordinator and a management consultant while with Homestarts Management Services.

SASKATCHEWAN

Meet your new director, Laine Braden

CHF Canada's newest director is **Laine Braden**, a member of **Rainbow Housing Co-op** in Saskatoon. She is the new Saskatchewan regional director, filling a vacancy left by Ambrose Reschny's resignation.

She moved into her co-op in 1994. "I didn't know that much about co-ops when I moved in," she says, "but I was attracted by the community aspects of co-op living." As a single parent of one

daughter, Braden wanted to live in a safe community. "The co-op offered a nice home in a good neighbourhood. Having a townhouse with our own yard was really appealing."

She quickly became involved with the co-op, joining the social committee in the first month, and becoming president in 1998. At the time, housing co-op programs had been transferred to the province and co-ops were being asked to make changes to their operating agreements. "There's nothing like a challenge to make you learn quickly," she says.

After having weathered that challenge, Braden is looking for new ones on the CHF Canada board. "My goal is to make Saskatchewan co-ops more aware of the services they can get from CHF Canada."

BRITISH COLUMBIA

New staff at CHF/BC

The Co-operative Housing Federation of BC welcomes **Scott Jackson** as its new Communications Director. Scott lives in **Tidal Flats Housing Co-operative** in Vancouver.

Vancouver office now accessible

CHF Canada's Vancouver office is now fully wheelchair accessible. We are sharing new space with the Co-operative Housing Federation of BC, COHO Management Services Society and the Community Housing Land Trust Foundation. The four groups held an office open house on February 21. The new office address is:

204-5550 Fraser Street
Vancouver, B.C. V5W 2Z4
Phone: (604) 879-4116
Fax: (604) 879-4186
Toll-free: 1-877-533-2667

Serving our members

Watch for more on Mr. and Ms. CHF 2001!

Check your AGM package in April for the guidelines on how to be a semi-finalist at the Mr. and Ms. CHF 2001 event at the Victoria AGM. The duties of Mr. and Ms CHF 2001 include the promotion of co-operative housing and its principles, involvement in the LGBT Caucus Hospitality night, assistance in the planning of the following year's show and a minimum of one fundraiser with proceeds being divided between the title-holders' co-op(s) and the LGBT Caucus.

For more information, please contact Mr. and Ms CHF 2000 (Craig Hunter James and Morgan James Hunter) at Breadandroses@on.aibn.com or call the Bread and Roses Housing Co-op office at (519) 742-4886.

Cathy Crowe honoured

Cathy Crowe, one of Canada's leading homeless advocates, will be awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Victoria in June. The honour recognizes her years of dedicated service as a street nurse providing primary health care to homeless and under-housed people. Crowe is a founding member of the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee. Crowe was named Person of the Year for the year 2000 in a poll of readers of The Toronto Sun. She is a long-time co-op housing member and lives at Windmill Line Co-op in downtown Toronto's St. Lawrence neighbourhood.

Need extra Newsbriefs?

Download extra copies from our Web site (www.chfc.ca/eng/chf/news_3.htm) and share them with members who don't have Internet access.

What's new?

Do you have news from your co-op you want to tell others about? An event coming up you'd like to publicize? Send it to us and we'll publish it in Newsbriefs or post it on our Web site. Contact Merrilee Robson toll-free at 1-877-533-2667 or e-mail mrobson@chfc.ca.

Group benefits consultations finished

CHF Canada recently completed consultations with co-op housing staff to get feedback from our members on our group benefits program. Commercial Services Officer **Linda Stephenson**, with our benefits insurance consultant **Barry Hutchins**, met and talked with 10 staff associations and federations across the country over a one-month period. Surveys were also sent out to all participants in the program. All this information will be used to negotiate the program renewal in April.

For more information on CHF Canada's group benefits, contact Linda Stephenson (toll-free) at 1-800-465-2752, ext. 234 or e-mail lstephenson@chfc.ca. ★

AGM youth forum will make a difference

Are you 16 - 21 years old? Join us in Victoria, June 7-10 for CHF Canada's sixth annual youth forum. You can make a difference by working with other youth to make co-op living more meaningful and fun.

There will be workshops, social activities and discussion groups. This is a chance for youth to be heard. And it's a great opportunity to meet young people from across Canada. There's still time to register. Registration is only \$50 when your co-op sends a delegate to the AGM.



Here's what some of last year's participants said about the forum:

"People, without knowing each other, did things together as a group, and really got along. That's what co-ops are all about."

"I think if the youth forum continues to make youth more aware, youth will benefit."

*"I met new people, learned how to co-operate."
"I had a BLAST!"*

For more information call **Karla Skoutajan** at 1-800-465-2752 ext. 241 (in Ottawa, 230-2201) or e-mail kskoutajan@chfc.ca. ★

Newsbriefs

THE LAST WORD



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Progress on new national agency for co-op housing

Talks with feds finally underway after years of lobbying

Members of CHF Canada's regionally based negotiating team met with CMHC and interested provinces on December 5 and February 12 in a working group to talk about the proposal for a new national agency for co-op housing. "We're pretty happy with the progress made so far," said CHF Canada director **Gary Panagiotidis**. In the first two meetings CHF Canada presented the proposal and answered detailed questions about how the new agency would work. The working group hopes to make recommendations on the agency proposal to the meeting of federal, provincial and territorial housing ministers in mid-August.

"After five years of lobbying, it's satisfying to be sitting down to talk about our plans to protect co-op operating agreements through an agency that specializes in housing co-ops", said **Heather Paynter**, the Atlantic representative on the committee.

Housing co-ops have been lobbying for federal government approval for the proposed agency since 1996. If the negotiations are successful, the agency would take on the work that CMHC now does for federally-funded housing co-ops in B.C., Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, and possibly other provinces.

CHF Canada will be keeping our members updated as the negotiations progress. For more information, call our office or visit the Members' Network section of our Web site (www.chfc.ca). ★