

# Newsbriefs

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**STRONGER  
TOGETHER**



**UP**LOAD  
co-op  
housing

With efforts to win amendments to the *Social Housing Reform Act* showing disappointing results, Ontario housing co-ops are seizing an unexpected opportunity to push for much bigger changes. The call to “fix the SHRA” has grown into a campaign to “upload co-op housing”.

The opportunity opened up when the Ontario government announced last summer that it would work with municipalities to review who pays for, and delivers, a range of services downloaded by the previous government to municipalities, including co-op and non-profit housing. This followed years of pressure on the Province from municipalities to take back these costs that have crippled municipal budgets.

The Ontario Council saw the review as a one-time chance, not only to help co-ops struggling to operate under the top-down, rule-bound SHRA, but to create a stronger co-op housing sector in Ontario. [2] ▶

## Stronger Together Upload campaign aims to unite Ontario housing co-ops

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Co-op representatives meet with John Milloy, MPP for Kitchener Centre, to discuss the upload campaign.

A package of materials to help co-ops in the campaign was mailed out in March and the Upload Campaign Centre has been set up on CHF Canada's website with all the campaign tools and resources.

Once the letters are in, co-ops should set up a meeting with their MPP and municipal councillor to win their support. Ontario Region staff can help you with these meetings.

The campaign is already in full swing. Co-op representatives have met with over 30 MPPs, with many more meetings scheduled. And letters from co-ops to the Premier in support of uploading are starting to flow. You can find a list of co-ops that have sent in letters on CHF Canada's website.

"The timing for the campaign is great," says **Harvey Cooper**, the Ontario Region's Manager of Government Relations. "With the provincial election scheduled for October 10, this is a good time to get the attention of all the political parties. This election will probably be very close. The votes of co-op members will be important to candidates."

For more information on the campaign or to get help with your letters, or setting up meetings, call Harvey Cooper (ext. 237) or **Andrew Noble** (ext. 239) at 1-800-268-2537 or go to the Upload Campaign Centre on our website at [www.chfcanada.coop](http://www.chfcanada.coop).

In December, the Council submitted a proposal under the Provincial-Municipal Review calling on the Province to

- transfer the cost and administration of municipally administered co-ops back to the Province
- enter into an agreement with the Agency for Co-operative Housing for program administration
- take advantage of the new agreement to fix the rules in the *Social Housing Reform Act* to make them work for housing co-ops.

"Our proposal has a lot going for it," says Ontario Council President, **Joseph Zebrowski**. "It gives the Province a way to provide municipalities with some financial relief without breaking the bank. Municipalities will get substantial cost savings and end up with a group of providers that have much more

in common – making program administration easier. And co-ops will be united under one roof with program administration and program rules more suited to their needs."

But Zebrowski cautions that being a good idea won't be good enough. "There will be lots of good ideas tabled with the Review," he says. "Our challenge is to make the shortlist of good ideas that get adopted. That's where the upload campaign comes in."

The Ontario Region is asking every co-op in the province to write to **Premier McGuinty** urging him to support the uploading proposal. Copies of the letter should be sent to the Finance Minister, **Greg Sorbara**, and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, **John Gerretsen**, who head up the Review on the provincial side. Also send a copy to your local MPP and to the Ontario Region office.

## Housing co-ops, youth benefit from internship program

“The relationship with my co-op mentor has been great,” says **Marcel Lambert**. “The environment in the office is very relaxed but professional. This has been a really good opportunity for me.” It is clear Marcel has enjoyed her experience at **Clarion Co-operative Homes** in Cambridge.

For the past six months Marcel has worked at the co-op as an intern under the Co-operative Internship Experience Program run by the Ontario Co-operative Association (**On Co-op**).

On Co-op matches interns with mentors in 26-week work

placements. Interns, who must be between 16 and 29, and have been out of the education system for three months, get on-the-job experience, training and a paycheck. Co-ops get someone to take on work that needs to be done at a low cost since the salary is supplemented by a grant from Service Canada.

“Marcel worked mostly on community development,” said **Fran Power**, General Manager at Clarion. “She also helped process membership applications, field routine questions from members and covered office hours if I was away at meetings. This really helped to lessen my workload.”

**Cynthia Lushman** has co-ordinated the internship program since On Co-op launched it five years ago. She says that the program has proven to be an effective way to attract young people to careers in the co-op and credit union sector. “Housing co-ops are really taking advantage of the program,” she notes. “Six of the 18 co-ops involved at the moment are housing co-ops.”

Marcel says her internship has helped her learn valuable new skills. When asked what she would miss most after it ends, Marcel points to the workshops and education events that she has been able to attend. “But,” she adds quickly, “I’m not going anywhere. I have been offered a position here at Clarion to continue the work I am doing and to learn more.”

On Co-op is currently negotiating the next program session with Service Canada. Lushman expects that, if funding is received, it will likely start this fall with about 20 internships available.

For more information or to apply call On Co-op at 1-888-745-5521 or visit [www.ontario.coop](http://www.ontario.coop).



**Marcel Lambert (L)** discusses committee budgets with **Fran Power**, General Manager, and **Nancy Nolan (R)**, Treasurer.





# Newmarket Co-op plugs into energy saving programs

**L**aura Hele talks enthusiastically about the work **Newmarket Co-operative Homes** is doing to control utility costs for its members. “Co-ops are about serving members and our co-op feels it has to do what it can to bring members’ utility costs down,” says Hele, the co-op’s housing co-ordinator. “Lower costs for members also helps the co-op indirectly because it will result in lower arrears.”

Newmarket Co-op recently received about \$50,000 from Newmarket Hydro for energy upgrades. “First they came and did an energy audit,” says Hele. “They did a blower door test, putting a large blower in the door of each unit to find out how tight the buildings were.” The audit, which was done a year ago, was used to determine the co-op’s eligibility for the program and to identify what upgrades would make the most difference.

This spring, the co-op will do all the work, which includes caulking, sealing and weather stripping, insulation, installing programmable thermostats and replacing the water heaters.

The co-op is also taking part in a pilot program with the Ontario Power Authority (OPA). The co-op has electric baseboard heating, which is very expensive for members. Retrofitting with forced air, natural gas heat was not a realistic option. Instead, the co-op, with funding from the OPA, is installing electric thermal storage units. These systems run at night, when electricity prices are lower, and store heat in high density ceramic tiles. During the day, when electricity prices are higher, the units use the stored heat to heat the units.

“We’re one of the first places in Ontario to get these storage units,” says Hele. Newmarket Hydro is getting ready to start billing based on when energy is used and co-op units already have smart meters which allow time-of-use billing. When this tiered pricing system is in place, they estimate the electric thermal storage units will save members about 35% on their heating costs.

Hele encourages other co-ops to watch for these kinds of opportunities. “There seems to be more and more money available to help with energy upgrades,” Hele says. “When Newmarket Hydro was looking for social housing providers to get involved, we jumped at the chance.”

## Where to find information on energy saving programs

- Check out the **Greenlight Initiative** of the Social Housing Services Corporation (SHSC) at [www.shscorp.ca](http://www.shscorp.ca). Or call **Elsie Harvey** at 866-268-4451 ext. 238. Greenlight is a comprehensive program of energy audits, grants and loans for retrofits, and resident education for co-op and non-profit housing in Ontario. Under the program, the SHSC can help your co-op access many of the funding programs that are available. Federal program co-ops are eligible.
- Ask your local electric or gas utility what programs they have to help reduce energy use.

## Cole Road works to meet the need for smaller units

As the housing needs of co-op members change, can housing co-ops adapt to meet those new needs? The members of **Cole Road Co-operative Community** in Guelph certainly think so.

When the co-op was founded in 1992, it was built with only two- and three-bedroom units. For 15 years the co-op has operated successfully as a thriving, diverse community. But, recently, co-op members have become concerned that some of their neighbours may be forced out of the co-op because they are “overhoused”. A number of longstanding members who have seen their grown children move away want to remain part of the community, but there are no one-bedroom units for them to move into.

Long-time co-op member **Sheryl Howitt** explains how the co-op has responded to the worries of members who fear they may have to move. “Many overhoused co-op members have health issues and were overwhelmed with the thought of moving and losing their home, community and the relationships that they have been part of for so long. We wanted to work towards solving the problem ourselves. So we started looking into adding some smaller units.”

▶  
**Cole Road Co-op plans to replace this community centre with an apartment with 10 to 12 units and a new community centre.**

The co-op fortunately has some land that can accommodate more housing. They hope to tear down their community centre and replace it with a low-rise apartment that could house 10 or 12 one-bedroom homes, along with a new community centre.

But, having an idea and having the space was only a start. The missing piece was finding the funding to carry out the plan. With help from CHF Canada’s housing development specialist, **Tim Welch**, the co-op applied for and received \$18,000 in SEED funding from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. They are using the money to develop the plan including doing a housing market study and preparing a preliminary design and an initial financial feasibility analysis. The co-op now hopes to get capital funding from the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program for the new units.

Cole Road is a municipally administered co-op and has also received support for its development plans from Wellington County.

The new housing would meet the needs of empty nesters who want to stay in the co-op. They would also serve people now on the waiting list for affordable housing, including those in other area co-ops who may be overhoused. Over half the people on the affordable housing waiting list in Guelph are looking for a one-bedroom unit.

“We’re not there yet but our members are very committed to making this happen,” says Howitt. “With support from CHF Canada and our service manager we are confident we will succeed. I think we may be blazing a trail that a lot more co-ops will follow as the housing needs of their members change.” 🏡



Denyse Guy (L) receives the Gary Gillam Award for corporate social responsibility.



## Ontario co-op secretariat wins key support

by Mark Ventry

In August of 2005, the Ontario Co-operative Association (**On Co-op**) released the White Paper on Co-operative Development that called on the Province to set up a provincial co-operatives secretariat to promote the co-op business model. Since then, co-op leaders have met with close to 20 MPPs to try to win their support.

Just before Christmas, the Ontario legislature passed a resolution proposed by MPP **Ted McMeekin** in support of a co-op secretariat.

In the lead-up to a provincial election this fall, On Co-op is working to get the support expressed in the resolution turned into a bill setting up the secretariat. Supporters from every part of the co-op sector will use all-candidates' meetings during the election to press candidates to support the proposal.

If your co-op wants to take part in an all-candidates' meeting in your riding please contact **Audrey Aczel-Castillo** at gov\_relations@ontario.coop or call 1-800-745-5521 ext. 37.

## First ever census of Ontario co-ops nears completion

by Mark Ventry

On Co-op has been collecting data on Ontario co-ops and credit unions to put together the first-ever census style report on co-operatives in this province. Over a four-month period, all co-ops were asked to respond to the same set of detailed questions.

The data will be used to:

- show the size, shape and economic impact of Ontario co-ops
- influence public policy
- promote the co-op business model, and
- identify the challenges within each part of the co-op sector.

When complete, the report will offer a unique and powerful study of Ontario's co-operative movement.

With data collection almost wrapped up, the census team is now beginning to review the

data. They will also determine which sectors or regions need more follow-up to refine the information.

Response from housing co-ops has been fairly strong, but many still have not completed their census. If your co-op has not yet responded, please contact **Karen Kew**, census project manager, at [kkew@ontario.coop](mailto:kkew@ontario.coop) to complete the survey.

## Denyse Guy wins social responsibility award

Congratulations to **Denyse Guy**, Executive Director of On Co-op, who has won the Gary Gillam Award for corporate social responsibility. The award, given by Credit Union Central of Ontario, recognizes Denyse's work promoting social responsibility in the co-op and credit union sector. Denyse is a long-time friend of co-op housing, working as a housing co-op manager and educator in central Ontario before becoming Executive Director at On Co-op.

## Abuse issues workshop gives co-op staff new tools

by Eliza Moore

This winter, co-op staff in several parts of the province attended a one-day workshop called “Maintaining Healthy Communities – Training on Woman Abuse Issues for Housing Co-operatives”. The course was developed by the Ontario Non-Profit Housing Association using a grant from the Province and customized for housing co-ops by CHF Canada’s Ontario Region.

The workshop was created in response to needs that staff in Ontario-program co-ops and non-profits have expressed. The increasing number of “special priority” applicants, who are generally the victims of spousal abuse, has created unique needs in many co-ops and non-profit housing communities.

The day started by looking at the signs of abuse, and the impact on co-ops and on staff. Participants worked in small groups to review case studies and discuss how to respond to common situations. After lunch, the group went on to identify the challenges of dealing with woman abuse, some safety issues, and how to take care of themselves when dealing with these difficult issues.

The response to the material and the interactive style of the workshop was generally very positive. The discussions at all sessions underlined the pressing need for more work in this area and the urgent need for more affordable housing and resources for victims of abuse.

## Introduction to Co-operative Housing Management

“Thanks so much. The workshop was wonderful and I’m so glad I could be part of it.”

That’s the response from one participant at the popular Introduction to Co-operative Housing Management course held in Toronto on March 6 and 7. This workshop was first held at the AGM in London and is quickly becoming a must-attend event for new managers. Thirty co-op managers, potential managers and service manager staff attended the session, which sold out within days of registration opening.

The two-day workshop program focuses on management responsibilities that are unique to co-op housing. Participants had high

praise for the quality of material, the practical advice, the tools provided and the knowledgeable and approachable workshop leaders. As another participant noted on their evaluation form, “I really enjoyed myself. I am leaving with a wealth of knowledge.”

Four service manager staff took part and commented that they left with a much better understanding of the broader co-op sector and how housing co-ops are different from other types of non-profit housing.

The course will next be offered at the CHF Canada AGM in Toronto in June 2008.

## Marketing help from CMHC

Your co-op needs accurate up-to-date information about the housing market in your area to make budget decisions and develop marketing plans. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) publishes lots of information, available for free online, that can help you out.

Of particular interest is the *Rental Market Report – Major Centres*, released each fall. It includes information about average rents and vacancies. Separate reports are available for 10 Ontario metropolitan areas and the “Ontario Highlights” reports on almost 50 smaller Ontario centres.

To download any of the CMHC reports, go to the Housing Market Information pages on the CMHC website at [www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca](http://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca).



Ontario Regional director and Ontario Council member Patrick Newman at the 2005 AGM in Edmonton.



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## Council profile: Patrick Newman

It was love that brought **Patrick Newman** to co-op housing. CHF Canada's Ontario regional director had heard about housing co-ops. He knew that co-ops provide affordable housing and that members are involved in the running of the housing. But it was meeting his wife Carol, a co-op member, and falling in love that led to his move into Toronto's **Cardiff Housing Co-operative** in 1994.

Once he became a member of the co-op, Patrick joined the co-op's finance committee almost immediately and was elected to the board the next year. At the time he moved in, CHF Canada's campaign to stop the download of federal co-op programs to the provinces was in full swing. "Cardiff was very involved," Patrick says. "I got a sense of national issues and the bigger co-op housing picture."

He got involved in the broader sector first by joining the **Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto's** diversity committee and then the CHFT board. He spent four years as CHFT's treasurer.

Patrick was elected as CHF Canada's Ontario regional director at the 2006 AGM. As the Ontario regional director he also sits on the Ontario Council and he is now Treasurer of the Council.

Concern about Ontario's *Social Housing Reform Act* was one of the things that prompted him to run. "I spent a year working at **Hospital Workers Housing Co-operative** and I know what a nightmare the SHRA is for co-op staff." He is also concerned that federal co-ops can't get access to Ontario rent supplements and supports a new campaign to help these co-ops get the subsidies they need.

Patrick would like to see CHF Canada's Board better reflect the diversity in our co-op housing communities. And he would like to see more young people involved. "They're the next generation for co-ops," he says.

Patrick is a keen cyclist and has done trips from Toronto to Niagara Falls and back. Twice a year he does the CN Tower stair climb, a fundraiser for the United Way and the World Wildlife Fund. 🚴