

AFL gears up to celebrate centennial in 2012

By Janet Szliske



EDMONTON—The Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) has partnered with the Alberta Labour History Institute (ALHI) to ensure that Alberta's labour history is known and celebrated through Project 2012. The AFL was founded

"Alberta Labour History Institute President Dave Werlin is working with the labour movement to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Alberta Federation of Labour."

in 1912 in Lethbridge by coalminers, railroaders, labourers, farmers, topographers and carpenters.

Labour's story is being told through historical booklets, posters, videos, a website, displays in art galleries and museums, community events and projects, theatrical and musical productions, and a two-day labour history conference. So far, thirteen communities throughout Alberta will hold events to celebrate the AFL's

100th Anniversary. The project will culminate with a day-long celebration for union members and the public in June of next year at Fort Edmonton Park.

The ALHI received a Centennial Grant in 2005 that funded a website and travel to interview people throughout Alberta. One of the first things they did was visit the Crowsnest Pass to meet with miners and collect their stories.

"There's a little building there that was originally a hospital built by the coalminers, before there was Medicare or hospitals to speak of," says retired CUPE Regional Director, former AFL president and ALHI President Dave Werlin. "We used that building for our interviews and it was filled with people. We interviewed them all day and into the night, for two days. A lot of the people who told their stories were coalminers or widows of coalminers."

Interviews were collected on tape and will be digitized and available on the ALHI website. This was repeated in different areas of the province including the Coal Branch, Hinton, Fort McMurray, Grande Prairie, and Medicine Hat.

Significant achievements and gains by local unions or organizations have improved the lives of Albertans, including women's rights, human rights, health and safety, labour standards, health care, pensions, etc.

"A lot of those advances were made during very difficult times," says Werlin.

Unions can give financial support to this ambitious project in various ways — contribute 25 cents per member annually until 2012; fund a specific component of Project 2012; or make a donation towards equipment and materials.

ALHI is an Alberta-based research institute made up entirely of volunteers. The group was formed in 1999 by trade unionists, community activists, archivists and academic historians to preserve and tell the story of working people and their organizations in Alberta.

The Institute has provided material and expert assistance on the subject of labour history. It has also produced calendars, videos, websites, and constructed an Alberta Labour History timeline and map to document labour events. ❁

Education cuts devastating to students

by Sheila Stewart



What's Next?

"CUPE education locals have launched a postcard campaign to protest provincial cuts to education."

Parents, CUPE members, and other education workers are fighting province wide education cuts which they say will have a devastating impact on students.

Hundreds of people descended on the legislature for a rally urging the Alberta Government not to drop the ball on education. "It is not acceptable" said Michelle Jackson, vice-chair of the Holyrood School Council. "Education is a right." As speaker after speaker chastised the government, children carried signs reading "The future is not bright, Mr. Hancock" and "I love my teachers".

NDP MLA Rachel Notley said cuts demonstrated the provincial government has lost "any sense of accountability" to voters in Alberta, and called on the province to increase funding and reverse the freeze on special-needs funding.

Across the province, the Alberta Teachers' Association predicts more than 1,000 teaching jobs will be eliminated. CUPE locals are warning that similar numbers of educational assistants, custodial workers and other support staff are facing layoffs — leaving classrooms without the resources they

need to meet student needs — just as class sizes are expected to grow.

"Teachers are expected to do their job, the Educational Assistants' job, and deal with bigger, more crowded classrooms," said CUPE 3550 representative Trudy Grebenstein. "That's bad news for everyone."

CUPE National Representative Kirk Oates added that the blame lies squarely with the provincial Conservative government, "Conservatives clearly don't care about our children or their future." ❁

Privatized services recycle same old problems

By Lou Arab

Grande Prairie – CUPE is often involved in campaigns to fight the privatization of public services. Be it in health care, the municipal sector, or even in education, there is always a long line of contractors trying to convince the public they could deliver better services for less money.

Of course, it never works out that way.

Brenda Kaplan has seen both sides of the public/private debate. As an employee of Aquatera – Kaplan works as a lead hand in the municipal Eco Centre recycling facility where she has been employed for over seven years.

Aquatera is a municipally owned company responsible for solid waste

including recycling in Grande Prairie, as well as running the water and waste water system for much of the Grande Prairie area.

But when recycling started and the Eco Centre was opened in Grande Prairie a dozen years ago, the service was handled by a private company.

According to Kaplan, the contractor was willing to handle the basic and more profitable products, like paper, cardboard and plastic. But over time as the operations expanded to include recycling hazardous products like used oil, paint, and electronic equipment – their interest died down.

“They backed out of the contract with the euphemism of saying those things were ‘beyond their expertise’, but it boils down to dollars and cents,” said Kaplan.

“It was not as simple as sticking a body in to babysit. There were all kinds of health and safety issues, and it was costing them money.”

In 2005, the contract ended and Aquatera brought the operation of the Eco Centre in-house. Employees and the public both saw immediate benefits to the way the service was run.

“Before, the service was run to the minimum they had to,” said Kaplan. “Now, it’s run to the best we possibly can. The focus is on service to the community.”

CUPE members working at the facility saw great improvements in their treatment by management.

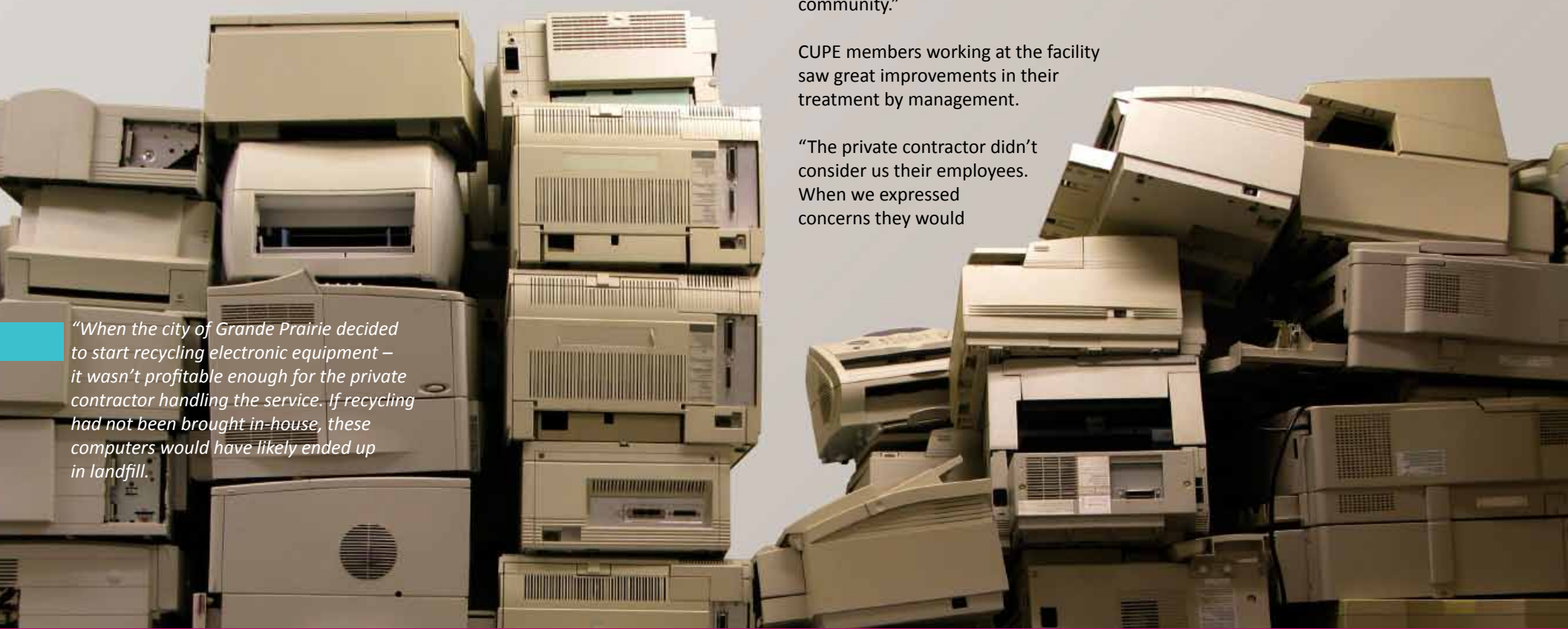
“The private contractor didn’t consider us their employees. When we expressed concerns they would

send us to Aquatera. Aquatera would in turn tell us to see our employers,” said Kaplan. “Nothing got resolved. We didn’t belong to anybody.”

Kaplan said since the service was brought in-house, many employee problems have been addressed. For example, employees now have the necessary protective equipment to handle toxic products.

Wages have also improved, allowing Aquatera to hire and retain better employees who understand the operation.

“Now, somebody is paying attention and taking ownership,” said Kaplan. “It was night and day the way the operation was run.” ✿



“When the city of Grande Prairie decided to start recycling electronic equipment – it wasn’t profitable enough for the private contractor handling the service. If recycling had not been brought in-house, these computers would have likely ended up in landfill.”

St. Albert brings waste pick up in-house



After experimenting with the contracting out of 40% of the city’s refuse pick up, the City of St. Albert Council agreed to invest \$1.25 million for the purchase of five automated trucks to be operated by CUPE members.

The move comes after the city’s Engineering and Public works Department successfully made a case to Council that having CUPE members

provide the service was more economical than contracting out.

CUPE Local 941 convinced management to showcase one of the new trucks in the city’s annual Rain Maker Rodeo Parade held on May 28th just before rollout of the new automated program. CUPE members walked in the Parade with the truck (decorated with CUPE banners) handing out candy to the kids. ✿

Private inspection brings public pain

Fort McMurray—Four CUPE locals in Fort McMurray are working together on a campaign to promote public services. “CUPE at your service” will feature CUPE members and focus on the advantages of public vs private services.

Residents have a recent concrete example; In March, seven buildings of the Penhorwood Condo Association that had been inspected and passed by private inspectors were declared unfit to occupy after a structural engineer’s report found that the buildings were unsafe. Condo

residents were given fifteen minutes to vacate their homes. Approximately thirty CUPE members and their families who lived in the condos are directly affected by this fiasco.

To add insult to injury the inspection company, Alberta Permit Pro, declared bankruptcy but has re-opened and are operating under the new name, Innovative Inspection Agency.

Inspectors have since been brought back in-house. ✿



“Shoddy building inspection by private contractors led to the fencing, boarding and evacuation of Penhorwood Condos in Fort McMurray.”

Members of CUPE Local 1038 affected by forest fires in Slave Lake

By Kathy Larson

The forest fire that ravaged the City of Slave Lake this spring claimed the homes of five members of CUPE Local 1038. All five members are bus drivers serving the High Prairie School Division.

Pearl Miller, President of Local 1038, says there is not much that can be done to aid those affected at this time as government agencies are coordinating clean-up and rebuilding efforts.

Nonetheless, the local has begun a campaign to raise donations to help those members who have lost their homes, or who were affected by the fires.

Some Slave Lake residents will be able to begin rebuilding now; others may need to wait for as long as two years.

One of the problems delaying the rebuilding process is that soil - contaminated by residue left behind from burned shingles and siding - needs to be hauled away and replaced. This is just one of the many obstacles being faced by those who have returned to Slave Lake and are determined to reclaim what was once home. ❁

High Prairie School Division Bus Drivers

During the recent fire in Slave Lake five homes were lost belonging to CUPE 1038 members.

The Local is accepting donations for the bus drivers in Slave Lake who lost their homes or were affected by the recent fire in some way.

Anyone wishing to donate may send a cheque payable to: CUPE Local 1038 (in trust)

Please send donations to:
CUPE Local 1038
Box 1735
High Prairie, Alberta
T0G 1E0

CUPE library workers open hearts, minds and doors to a brighter future!



CUPE participated in the trade show exhibits at the Alberta Library Conference held in Jasper, April 28th to 30th. Our exhibit demonstrated CUPE's long standing support of public and municipal libraries across Canada as well as CUPE's endorsement of increased funding for public libraries. ❁

Meet Marle Roberts

by Deborah Stewart



Medicine Hat Municipal worker Marle Roberts is the new President of CUPE Alberta.

Marle Roberts is a woman on the move. Since becoming the CUPE Alberta President in April 2011, she has crisscrossed the province numerous times and has attended meetings across the country. Nothing appears to stop Marle, including the four flat tires that happened over the course of six weeks. She is definitely a woman on a mission!

Marle hails from Medicine Hat and has been a municipal employee since 1986. She has a long history with CUPE, serving as President of Local 46 for eleven years. While Marle has always been interested in serving CUPE at the provincial level (and in fact did so from 2001 – 2006 as Alternate Area VP), she knew that

2011 was the right time to seek office as President of CUPE Alberta Division.

Fighting the provincial government attacks on public services is something that is near and dear to Marle's heart. In fact, she considers this one of the greatest challenges facing CUPE today. She feels CUPE must continue to place pressure on the politicians through lobbying and education. The power of creative coalition building goes hand in hand with lobbying efforts and Marle believes that a great deal can be accomplished when like-minded groups work together on projects that make a difference. Marle would like to see all locals – both large and small – receive

the tools that are needed in order to lobby and coalition build.

Marle was encouraged by the record number of CUPE members who ran for political office in the recent federal election. She would like to see more CUPE members run for office at all levels – provincial, federal and especially municipal. Marle feels that CUPE members have an unparalleled understanding of the issues; after all, CUPE members are the ones out there doing the work. CUPE members can make a difference at all levels of office and these efforts need to be encouraged and supported.

Marle is a passionate communicator and feels that ongoing communication is key to maintaining an active and informed membership. She is equally passionate about education, especially grassroots education. She has not forgotten her first union meeting and how intimidating that experience was as she came face to face with terminology and processes that she didn't fully understand.

Keeping her life in balance is an ongoing challenge for Marle. She is quickly learning that she can't be everywhere (did I mention the four flat tires?) and that flexibility and creativity are required in order to juggle multiple priorities and schedules. To help with this area, she is interested in exploring some of the new technology options available such as video conferencing. In spite of the challenges that she has faced as she grows and settles into her new role as President, Marle maintains a sense of humour and feels that is critical in order to survive. She is grateful for the strong family support that she receives in order to do this work that "doesn't feel like work." She looks forward to continuing to serve all members of CUPE Alberta. ❁

Long hours can kill

UCS/CALM

NEW RESEARCH says that those who spend more than 11 hours at work increase their chance of having a heart attack by two thirds.

U.K. researchers say the risk is so great that doctors should be asking patients how many hours they work along with how much they drink or whether they smoke.

A research team from University College London looked at more than 7,000 civil servants working over a period of 11 years and noted how many hours they worked on average a day.

From medical records and health checks, they also collected additional information like the condition of their heart. Over the 11 years, a total of 192 had suffered a heart attack.

The study, published in the journal, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, found that those who worked more than 11 hours

a day were 67 per cent more likely to have one than those who had a nine-to-five job.

The researchers say their findings could potentially lead to preventing thousands of heart attacks a year by helping doctors get a better idea of how likely a patient was to have one.

Patients already at high risk by being overweight or smoking, for example, would be encouraged to cut down on their working hours.

Lead researcher Mika Kivimaki says, "We have shown that working long days is associated with a remarkable increase in risk of heart disease."

"This new information should help improve decisions regarding medication for heart disease. It could also be a wake-up call for people who overwork themselves, especially if they already have other risk factors," says Kivimaki. ❁



Harmful effects of shift work

WHSC/CALM

THE SCANDINAVIAN Journal of Work, Environment & Health (SJWEH) says "shift work is definitely among one of the most serious occupational health problems of our time..."

The SJWEH is not alone in their concern. An expert working group convened by the International Agency for Research on Cancer in December 2007 said shift work involving circadian rhythm disruption was "probably carcinogenic to humans."

The human body functions according to a natural sleep-wake and day-night cycle referred to as a circadian rhythm. This rhythm, guided by environmental cues such as darkness and light, helps

control sleep and maintain biological functions including body temperature and hormone levels.

Shift work, particularly involving work at night, disrupts this rhythm and can lead to a range of adverse health effects.

Canadian researchers have recently added to the body of evidence that shift work is damaging to worker health, finding nine per cent of workplace injuries are associated with shift work.

With an estimated 2.8 million Canadians working shifts, the need to raise awareness and explore and implement workplace and regulatory prevention efforts is essential. ❁

Did you know....



HAVE YOU SEEN OUR SISTERS?

Over 3,000 women have gone missing or have been murdered across Canada. They were mothers, sisters, daughters, and grandmothers; eighty percent were from Aboriginal Nations. In 2008, two grieving family members started the "Highway of Tears" and the "Walk 4 Justice" to raise awareness of these horrible and unsolved crimes. This year, to support the families of missing and murdered Canadian women, the CUPE

Alberta Aboriginal Council has launched a postcard campaign to raise awareness about the plight of our missing and murdered sisters. The postcards call on the Canadian Government to establish a public inquiry to bring resolution and peace to the families of these missing women. Postcards have been sent to all of Alberta's CUPE locals; please look for your postcard, sign it, and send it in. Thank you for your caring support.

CUPE Pride



CUPE members participated in the recent Pride Parade in Edmonton. CUPE, as well as other labour unions, participate and sponsor Pride events across the country.

The United Leader

The United Leader is produced by the CUPE Alberta Newsletter committee:

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Back issues are available at www.alberta.cupe.ca

Do you have stories that need to be told? Photos that do the talking for you? Want to rant in a letter to the editor? Please send your content to Lou Arab (larab@cupe.ca)