

In this issue - PSAC North Convention wrap-up; RWC Cookbook; Member-of-the-Month; grievance procedure; workplace health issues

PSAC North Convention a success

More than 200 PSAC North delegates and guests from the Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut gathered in Whitehorse May 6-8th for the 3rd triennial PSAC North Convention. Months of planning and dedication by PSAC members and staff led to a memorable event - the largest



gathering of union activists in Yukon history.

Notable among many highlights was the re-election of Jean-François Des Laurier as PSAC Regional Executive Vice-President for a fourth 3-year term. Suzette Montreuil was elected as

the alternate REVP for the North. Their election marks the first time PSAC North representatives were elected at a northern convention.

Many motions and resolutions were discussed and voted on which included occupational health and safety, the fight against privatization of public services, First Nations' labour relations and social justice issues.

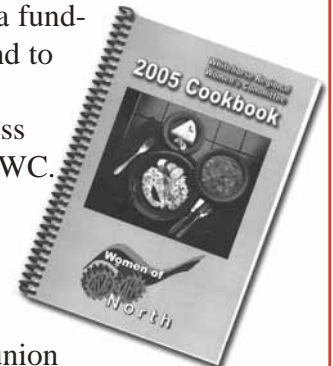
"The PSAC is the most important union in the North as we

represent one of every three Northern workers. We are proud of our solid record and we will continue to grow," says Nycole Turmel, PSAC National President.

Dene National Chief Noeline Villebrun also spoke to the union

RWC Cookbook published

The Whitehorse PSAC Regional Women's Committee (RWC) has published a cookbook for use both as a fundraiser and to increase awareness of the RWC.



Recipes submitted by Yukon union

members were compiled by a committee of sisters including Joanne Oberg, Jo-Anne Smith, Sue Christianson, Maureen Stephens, Sylvie Leonard, Darrel Blakney and PSAC staff member Nancy Debrecini — all great cooks!

The books arrived just in time for the PSAC North Convention, and were a popular item for delegates throughout the weekend.

Copies are available for \$15 from the PSAC office. Call 667-2331.

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Brent Mekelburg

Following his move to the Yukon from Edmonton last year, it didn't take long for Brent to become active in Yukon Hospital Workers Local Y025.

He had relocated to Whitehorse to accept a position as X-ray Technologist at Whitehorse General Hospital's Medical Imaging Department. But political and community activities were also on his agenda.

On campus, Brent whetted his appetite for social activism in the student union, and through studies about the political process. Involvement in Local Y025 offers him a practical opportunity to apply what he learned.

Brent had visited the territory previously while on vacation. That experience made the opportunity to return north for employment easy to accept. The Yukon suits his lifestyle as well because of his enthusiasm for "fishing, paddling, hiking and other outdoor stuff".

Brent's position at Whitehorse General Hospital is his first since

graduating from the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. He served a 1 year practicum as part of his training at the University of Alberta Hospital in Edmonton.

Regarding his career choice, Brent says he "always wanted to be in the health care field, and to work in a rural area". Although he grew up in Winnipeg, his family's roots remained in rural Manitoba. He feels he has an entrenched "understanding and appreciation for the challenges faced by rural communities, especially when it comes to issues like healthcare."

Brent's motivation for involving himself in union activities had its genesis in northern British Columbia. He lost a co-worker and friend, Jon Stansfield, in August 2000 as the result of a workplace accident while treeplanting.

He knew something had to be done to prevent this type of accident from happening again. Brent explained, "It was only in retrospect that I realized, that if we had a union in place, safety would have been a priority. We could have refused dangerous work, and a life could have been saved."



Brent's presentation at the PSAC North Convention caught the attention of the delegates.

At the recent PSAC North Triennial Convention, Brent accepted a nomination for the position of Alternate REVP, PSAC North. Although a newcomer, unknown to most of the convention attendees, his speech to the delegates impressed many and earned him a surprisingly strong second place finish in the voting.

"Occupational health and safety and involving youth in our Union are areas that I plan to involve myself with further", he added.

Brent has also expressed a keen interest in social justice issues, and plans to learn much more about the Yukon Employees' Union and its role in the community. YEU definitely welcomes him aboard.

WCB Recognizes Multiple Chemical Sensitivities

Multiple Chemical Sensitivities (MCS) is the most severe form of chemical sensitivity. It manifests itself as a hypersensitivity to minute levels of apparently unrelated substances (including fragrances). Although some believe the origin to be psychological, there is mounting evidence that it has a physiological basis.

Causes include acute toxic exposure (chemical spills), and low level exposure to chemicals for prolonged periods (sick buildings) — both workplace related. Studies suggest that up to 30% of the population may experience some impact, with the prevalence of MCS and chemical sensitivity rising world-wide.

MCS can lead to social isolation, inability to work, financial stress, marital breakup, and even suicide. Many people with MCS cannot work, but others can enter the workforce with appropriate workplace accommodation.

According to the Yukon News (April 05), Yukon Workers' Compensation Health and Safety Board reported that claims now include more cases of MCS. Prevention focusing on indoor air quality (IAQ) is cited as key to managing the disorder. As part of a public consultation to help prevent workplace injuries, the board is seeking worker and employer input about IAQ and environmental tobacco smoke by June 24. For more infor-

mation call 867-667-5645, or 1-800-661-0443. You can email: wcbconsultation@gov.yk.ca or see www.wcb.yk.ca. Written or electronic submissions are acceptable.

Addressing IAQ issues can enable many with MCS to continue working or return to work. Workplace prevention measures improve children's health and productivity (in schools), and extend service accessibility to more people. Now that MCS has been identified as a bona fied workplace illness, co-operative efforts can decrease its incidence and improve the quality of life for those affected.

by Liz Reichenbach

PSAC North Indoor Air Quality Survey 2005

The Public Service Alliance of Canada North released the results of its survey of indoor air quality this May. The questionnaire was developed by the PSAC Regional Health & Safety Committee, Liz Reichenbach and the staff at the PSAC regional office.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain an understanding of chemical sensitivities and indoor air quality problems for collective bargaining purposes.

The committee contracted Luigi Zanasi M.A. and DataPath Systems to conduct the survey and tabulate the responses.

Developers caution that the results were "self-selected", meaning that people with problems were more likely to respond, and were not representative of the entire population.

Nonetheless, the information obtained provides a reasonable assessment of the situation and good idea of the extent of the problems. It established a minimum number of people affected and the number of work-days lost, suggested symptoms and causes, and identified problem buildings and workplaces.

Respondents work in over 100 buildings and jobsites in the Yukon. Sixty-two percent reported they were negatively affected by the indoor air quality (IAQ), with one person in twelve suffering from an IAQ related problem.

While the age of respondents did not seem to affect the results, indoor air quality problems seemed to affect women far more than men (75% of those reporting problems were women).

Copies of the survey results are available from YEU or the PSAC North office.

New Grievance Procedure Training Begins

The Yukon Employees' Union and the Yukon government's Public Service Commission began implementing the long awaited new grievance procedure with a training session for Deputy Ministers on May 26th.

This DM information session is the first of many training workshops that will be held across the territory in the next few months.

The next session — for Union

Shop Stewards, departmental trainers, HR directors and advisors will be held in June. Following that, workshops will take place across the territory for all Yukon government employees/Union members and their representatives.

The new procedure significantly alters both the grievance process and the philosophical approach to dispute resolution. YEU strongly supported this change, and sees

it as a significant advancement that will speed conflict resolution and enhance meaningful dialogue.



Yukon union strategists hold a sidebar discussion. Such impromptu breakout sessions were common during the PSAC North Convention.

PSAC North Convention

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delegates about the unprecedented joint Dene/PSAC Research Project regarding Dene workers' rights that was initiated in January 2005. Chief Villebrun discussed the need for similar joint projects to be conducted with Aboriginal, Inuit and Metis groups in the Yukon and Nunavut, as well as across Canada.

YEU calendar

December 2-3, 2005

YFL Biennial Convention

High Country Inn, Whitehorse.

2nd Thursday, 6:30 p.m.

Monthly YEU Executive Meeting

YEU Hall. Members welcome.

2nd Wednesday, 5:00 p.m.

Y010 Monthly Meeting

YEU Hall, Whitehorse.

4th Thursday, 7:30 p.m.

Y017 Monthly Meeting

YEU Hall, Whitehorse.

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Members are reminded to notify the YEU office of any change of address or name changes. Call Linda Bidrman – Membership Services, email lbidrman@yeu.ca or fax the number above.