

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Chuck Vandergraaf

Leaves are changing colours already and, some mornings, there's a definite chill in the air. It was June, when I composed my last newsletter, —the one that is included in the summer issue of SAGE and should arrive in your post office mailbox soon, if it has not already. In that newsletter, I referred to the comments made at our April "BAM" (Branch Annual Meeting) that our branch finds itself in a precarious position with having no vice-president waiting in the wings. I agreed to serve as President for a one-year term at that time. By the time I wrote my last newsletter, two months had passed since the BAM was held. Now, at the end of August more than four months have passed and, by the time you receive this letter, it will be five months since the BAM. Just as I started composing the newsletter, I received an e-mail from Wayne Greenlay, our Vice-President, notifying me of his resignation as he is moving to B.C. This leaves the branch without a Vice-President and without a proper succession process. (More about this later.)

So, what has happened during this nice, long, and mainly mosquito-free summer? In June, I attended the 2018 AMM (All Members Meeting) at the Hilton Lac-Leamy in Gatineau, QC, just across the Ottawa River from our nation's capital. After a three-year absence from these meetings, I was happily surprised to note a lot less rancor and controversy. It seems

to me that the attendees have come to grips with the new structure of the organization that has evolved from, what used to be a collection of individual branches (a "bottom up" structure) to a truly national organization ("top down" structure). A reflection of this positive atmosphere was that the first three proposals received 100% approval. These unanimous approvals were not due to peer pressure because all voting is now done electronically with each branch president having as many votes as the branch has members. Most proposals were of a routine nature. What stood out for me was a proposal (accepted) that gives the organization some flexibility in recruiting news members by, for example, giving new members who join in September, three months free membership. Another proposal, one that I voted against, was to "upgrade" the paper quality of the branch report insert in SAGE to that of the magazine itself. In my opinion, this is money not well spent but I was in the minority. A proposal to increase funding for small branches was sent back to the National Board of Directors for further study.

The second day of the 3-day conference was devoted to training. The topics covered were advocacy and recruitment. Branches are expected to play a significant role in advocating and communicating with elected officials at

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the federal and provincial levels. Branches are also the natural entity to recruit new members, although these two activities form only a small number of the responsibilities of a branch. Others include member support, information sharing and volunteer development and support.

The national organization has been active in the Honour Your Promise campaign to protect the benefits of the Public Service Health Care Plan, but has now been expanded to protect defined benefits pension plans. Although the defined benefit plans of retirees appear to be safe, changes from a defined benefit pension plan (where pensions are guaranteed) to a defined contribution plan (where pensions are determined by return on investment) would affect potential future members. To assist branches in interacting with elected officials, the position of Provincial Advocacy Officer (PAO) was created. Gerry Jennings, the provincial PAO, attended our last BAM in April. The training session offered at the 2018 AMM dealt with such topics as meeting elected officials and arranging Town Hall meetings where the interests of the members could be presented and discussed.

Results from a nation-wide “branch health self-evaluation” earlier this year showed that, on a scale of 1 (Near Closing) to 5 (Robust), the scores for the Prairie District was 3.66 at the time of the survey and is projected to decrease to 3.16 five years from now. This downward trend exists across the country and makes a concentrated effort to increase the membership of the organization imperative

Recruitment is, in many ways, the lifeblood of the organization. The current membership stands at approximately 175,000. A “scrub” of the database found

about 6,000 “invalid” members. This represents about 3% of the membership and is not unusual in complicated databases. Many branches have considerable opportunities in recruiting new members: these branches are often in large urban centres with large numbers of federal employees. Our branch does not fit into that category. Pinawa was established as a “company town” with a crown corporation as its single employer. Now that, for all intent and purpose, AECL has withdrawn from the Whiteshell site, the supply of potential new members has virtually dried up and our only source of new members will be retirees who move into our region or area residents that are employed in federal organizations in Winnipeg.

What follows directly from the previous section is that our branch is facing a number of challenges. The lack of prospective new retirees does not mean that the branch will have to fold: the current membership stands just under 700 and is by no means the smallest branch. Of the 79 branches, our branch ranks 56th; the smallest branch has just under 200 members. The Central Manitoba (Portage la Prairie) Branch has just over 300 members and has managed to reach out to the Morden-Winkler area. In other words, our branch should be viable. We can operate as a branch for many years to come, as long as we are able to find volunteers to serve on the board. As I mentioned at the beginning of this newsletter, we are operating without a vice-president and my term as president expires at the next BAM in 2019 April. Without a president, our branch cannot operate legally, and we then have, basically, two options: one is to fold the operation and transfer our members to the nearest branch, the Winnipeg & Area (W&A) branch; the other is to become a satellite branch of the W&A branch.

Depending on the arrangement that could be made with that branch, we could have a presence on the board of the W&A branch.

So, how do we keep our branch up and running and honour the work done by its pioneers, John Weeks, Jock Guthrie and others? The simplest way is for volunteers to offer to serve on the board. The other is to consider a more radical approach by restructuring the board. I mentioned our dilemma at the 2019 AMM and had a brief discussion afterwards with Deborah Krause, the organization's governance manager and expert on all things dealing with organizational structures. I suggested a "rotating chairmanship" with two or more volunteers spelling each other off. She rejected that idea because one volunteer must be identified as president with the responsibilities that office entails. I was later approached by Peter Kerr, the Branch Services Coordinator for Nova Scotia who suggested an alternative consisting of only a small executive with official, identifiable positions but that would function as a group with the president's role rotating through the executive as needed. Volunteers could then be asked to take on roles that fall outside the official tasks of the executive such as arranging the semi-annual meetings. Regardless which approach we take, it cannot be stressed enough that, by the time you receive this newsletter, there will be only six months left for our membership to decide the branch's future.

One of the proposals at the 2019 AMM, a regulation on the Preferred Partner Program was withdrawn by the NBOD (National Board of Directors). Following the AMM, I agreed to serve on a Preferred Partner working group to canvass the presidents' view on the Preferred Partner Program in the Prairie District. The results have been reviewed and a revised Preferred Partner Program will be sent to

the NBOD for approval. The Preferred Partners have a mutually beneficial arrangement with the NAFR: NAFR promotes the preferred partners and the preferred partners provide a discount to NAFR members and provide financial support to NAFR. This support is substantial: in 2017, the revenue from the preferred partners exceeded \$1.2 Million and represented 17% of NAFR's revenue.

One note of caution when considering using a Preferred Partner if you want to maximize your savings: shop around because preferred partners may not always offer the best deal.

In other news, Bill Merchell, our regional Branch Services Coordinator, who supervised the election of the board at our last BAM, resigned unexpectedly. A call has been put out for his replacement and, as of last week, two candidates had been selected for interviews in October.

And that brings me to our upcoming Fall General Meeting, to be held on Thursday, October 11 at the Pinawa Alliance Church, starting with a light buffet-style lunch and then followed *immediately* by a presentation. Sandra Milotte, Palliative Care Volunteer Coordinator & Community Liaison, Interlake-Eastern Regional Health Authority, will give a presentation on advance care planning, the palliative care volunteer program and community grief groups. She will also discuss a resource available to organize them which was created by the program and Palliative Manitoba. As well she plans to share information about grief support sessions held in Winnipeg by Palliative Manitoba.

Our business meeting will then follow Sandra's presentation. One item that will be brought forward is the resolution that was withdrawn at the recent BAM. This resolution reads,

Be it resolved that the Branch Board of Directors shall investigate the

potential dissolution of the Eastern Manitoba Branch and amalgamation with the Winnipeg and District Branch if no candidates for Branch Executive, including President, step forward for election.

And that is the extent of my notes. I hope to see many of you at the upcoming Fall

General Meeting. I wish our snowbirds safe travels and plenty of sunshine and opportunities to enjoy the warm weather “down south”, those who travel –safe travels as well, and those of us who remain in Manitoba –plenty of sunshine.

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BENEFITS CORNER

Donna Wuschke-Benefits Officer

MEDOC Travel Plan: New Improved Benefits

Johnson Insurance has sent the 2018 September / 2019 August renewals for the MEDOC Travel Insurance Plan. You will have received this by e-mail or by post. The renewed plan includes some new additional benefits including:

- coverage for an unlimited number of trips within Canada of any duration
- up to \$12,000 per insured in-province Trip Cancellation, Interruption and Delay insurance;
- up to \$5000 non-medical evacuation coverage
- up to \$500 document replacement coverage for lost or stolen documents, and
- involuntary schedule change expenses for the lesser of the change fee charged by the airline or up to \$1000 for extra cost of one-way economy airfare to your next destination

We suggest that members read the policy material carefully to understand the complete MEDOC coverage.

NAFR New Veterans Membership Card: Airline Baggage Benefits

If you are a CAF veteran this may be beneficial to you. Air Canada, Porter Airlines and WestJet have agreed to accept the NAFR new Veterans membership card as identification for CAF veterans to be able to benefit from the airlines’ military/veterans baggage policies. Each airline individually establishes its own military/veterans baggage policy and the actual number of bags eligible for free transport. None of the airlines are extending their offers to spouses, RCMP veterans or our members generally. A veteran travelling with his/her spouse/partner would be able to check the spouse/partner’s bag within the limits established by that airline. Obtain your Veterans membership card from NAFR.

Getting Rid of Stuff

Many of our members are facing the problem of getting rid of ‘stuff’, either because they are moving, or simply because They would like to cut down clutter.

There are several possibilities for doing so. If you wish to sell things, there are the traditional methods of garage sales, and advertising on bulletin boards and in newspapers, as well as web sites such as E-

bay and Kijiji. Of particular interest to those in the Eastman area is the Pinawa, Whitemouth, Pointe du Bois Garage Sale Facebook website. However, most of these selling possibilities, especially a garage sale, involve a considerable amount of work, sometimes for very little profit. Another option is to give things away. There are several organizations that are willing and happy to accept them.

For clothing and some household items, the Diabetes Association, and the Salvation Army are only a phone call away (1-800-505-552 and 1-800-757-4483, respectively) and are willing to do pickups in many cases. The Diabetes Association will accept

- clothing, shoes, boots, bedding
- kitchenware and small household appliances,
- home décor (lamps, curtains, etc.),
- small electronics e.g., cameras, laptops, flat-screen tvs, cell phones)
- fitness, recreation and sporting goods,
- toys and games, luggage
- hand tools.

The Salvation Army accepts much the same items, but, in addition, will accept larger items of furniture and appliances, and provide free pickup for it if you request it.

There are also many other local charitable organizations that will accept donations. For example, in Eastman, Mrs. Lucci's in Lac du Bonnet will accept clothing and household goods and furniture of almost all kinds, and will even send a truck and helpers for furniture pickup. Another

option, particularly for used appliances or furniture, is to contact your local social workers to see if they know of someone who might appreciate a particular item.

Habitat for Humanity in Winnipeg (204-233-5160) is pleased to get donations of tools and hardware, building supplies and lumber, large appliances, plumbing and lighting fixtures and accessories, cabinets, windows, no-fabric furniture, and many other things. All donations must be clean and in working order. They do not provide pickup outside of Winnipeg.

Another option is a 'Giveaway Weekend'. It can be held in your garage, on your front porch, or even on your front lawn, or all of the above. This is like a garage sale, but far less work. You do not need to do any pricing, cleaning up items, or providing an attractive display. All that is necessary, other than putting things in place, is some local advertising, ideally only a few days before the event, on bulletin boards or local publications or maybe emails to your nearby friends. Things disappear like magic, and most everyone, apparently, is delighted with their finds. Even things that you may consider hazardous waste (like paints) or electronic waste are sometimes treasures to someone else.

If all else fails, in some communities, you may place many items curbside for collection with your local garbage pickup, if you affix a sticker which may be purchased at nominal cost from your local Municipal Office.

Our thanks to Gary Simmons for helping to write this "Benefits" report.

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MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Maureen Macdonald
Branch Membership Secretary

Membership (on record as of June 2018):

	2018-03	2018-09
Total Double Households	257	255
Total Single Households	171	173
Total Regular Households	428	428
Total Non-DDS* Households	35	36
Total DDS Households	393	392
Total Active Members	684	683

*Direct Deduction from Source

Note: Some numbers may not add up. We get our data from the membership database. NAFR Head Office inputs the new and recently deceased membership numbers; there are some time-differences when we generate our reports

Members or spouses deceased since last General Meeting:

Ken Loschiavo

Ron Spas