

Every member matters

In his speech yesterday at the 2019 SGEU convention, president Bob Bymoen welcomed elders, life members, guests, delegates and staff by thanking those who do so much, not just for the union but for the residents of the province. He reminded everyone that SGEU represents a wide variety of occupations under our six broad sectors.

"We are all unique and have some different needs. But every member is important. You matter," Bymoen said. "This is your union. You are why we exist and you are who we work for."

The president noted there are many reasons we hold conventions but one of the most important is to build and promote solidarity because together we can fight for what working people and their families need and deserve.

"We have a lot of work to do to live up to what we want for ourselves and future generations," he said. "It will be the labour movement that will continue to stand up for good jobs, decent wages, and a high quality of life for all."

Bymoen ended his remarks by wishing all delegates a productive convention filled with vigorous debate, learning, friendship and fun.



Welcome, first-time delegates!



(L-R) First-time delegates Yuliya Hirnyak and Lyudmyla Pastushenko, both from the Saskatoon Open Door Society

About 40 members attended the first-time delegate orientation Thursday morning to learn how voting works, how resolutions are passed, and what members can expect during the three days of convention.

Wendy Simonson, LTD Chair, said it's important for new delegates to feel comfortable and knowledgeable during convention.

"We really want this experience to be comfortable for them," she said. "We try to give them a few of the highlights on what

happens on the convention floor, and we encourage them to speak at the microphone. Really, we just want this to be a positive experience for them."

Gnanasceli Munasinghe is a first-time delegate and works for the Saskatoon Open Door Society. Asked why she decided to become a delegate, she said she wanted to learn more about what happens at SGEU, and become more involved in the union.

We welcome all of the new first-time delegates to the 2019 SGEU Convention!

Meet Elder Rockthunder

Elder Margaret Rockthunder opened the SGEU Convention yesterday with a prayer.

"I'm always happy to help out people when I'm asked to pray," said the 73-year-old elder from Piapot First Nation.

"I was a little nervous today because it's such a big crowd," she said with a smile.

Praying in Cree, Margaret asked the Creator to "shed light into this room" in order to help SGEU delegates have good relationships, use good words, and get home safely.

A retired housekeeper, Margaret was an SGEU member while working at the Plains Hospital in the 1980s. Today, she spends her time sewing, and with her many grandkids and great-grandkids.

Her advice to others: "love one another."



How can unions be more inclusive?



Darla Deguire was in her early 20s when she landed a unionized job. Inspired by her mother, who had been an activist member of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, Darla got involved with her union. A member of Beardy's First Nation, Darla faced challenges within her union, such as racial biases and negative stereotyping, but with her mother's support, and the "femtorship" of SGEU member Barb Byers, she persevered. Today, she is the Prairie Regional Director for the Canadian Labour Congress, and an advocate for ensuring that unions are inclusive.

Speaking to the Human Rights/Equity Caucus yesterday, Darla asked delegates to contemplate whether SGEU meetings and events reflect the diversity of Saskatchewan.

"Who's missing from our unions?" she asked. "Who's not in this room? Who's not at our conventions? Who's not included, and how do we change that?"

According to the 2016 Census, between 2006 and 2016, Saskatchewan saw an increase of just over 64,000 immigrants. In 2016, immigrants and non-permanent residents accounted for 11.65 per cent of the Saskatchewan population. Statistics Canada predicts the Indigenous population of our province will make up one in five people by 2036.

"Are we seeing these statistics in our workplace and union?" Darla asked, adding that the question of how to be more inclusive and inviting to a broader group of people is an age-old question for the labour movement.

Darla encouraged SGEU members to be mentors and femtors, and to keep the conversation of inclusivity alive.

"If you don't see a significant number of Indigenous and racialized people active in your union, then you need to continue to have a conversation about why that is," she said.

If you belong to an equity group, visit the Human Rights/Equity table outside the convention hall to fill out a survey about the challenges you face in your workplace and what the union can do to help.



Moose Hide Campaign

In your convention bag, you will find a small square of moose hide. As SGEU member Curt Woytiuk explained yesterday, the Moose Hide Campaign is a grassroots movement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and boys who are standing up against violence towards women and children. Wearing the moose hide signifies your commitment to honour and respect the women and children in your lives and to work to end violence against all women and kids.

Silent Witness



The Silent Witness presentation is a tradition at SGEU conventions, and takes place on Friday morning this year.

The goals of the project include honouring women who were murdered by a spouse, partner or acquaintance; creating awareness by sharing information about family violence; promoting action by sharing resources that support women coping with violence; and encouraging community and government action to help end all forms of violence.

Previous presentations involved a silent walk through the convention hall with large red silhouettes symbolizing victims of domestic violence, along with a voiceover script.

This year's presentation will be a way to start breaking the silence on a very difficult topic. We'll hear the difficult yet inspiring story of a survivor of domestic violence. It's a story that will motivate us to not just speak up, but also to take action. The harsh reality is our province has one of the highest rates of family violence and homicide by spouses. And it has to stop.

Women honoured with awards

Every year, the SGEU Women's Committee presents Bread and Roses awards to two women in each of SGEU's six sectors. These awards honour women's contributions to their union. Congratulations to this year's recipients!

Community Services:

Patience Umerewenza, Lynne Guick

Retail/Regulatory:

Brenda Peter, Sharon Friess

Crowns:

Debbie Wallace, Tammie Hardy

Education:

Tanya Turner, Ellen Leaman

Health:

Mona Laurans, Genny Goodyear

Public Service:

Ida Miller, Tamara Bailey



Top: 2019 Bread & Roses Award recipients; Bottom: Guest Speaker at the Women's Luncheon Lynne Guick, Moose Jaw Transition House