



Life of credit union and housing co-op mentor to be celebrated at gala, Oct. 19

GUELPH, ONTARIO, Oct. 11, 2011-- A mentor to many, co-operative leader Penny Bethke will be remembered by Ontario co-operators for a lifetime of achievement at the Annual Co-op Conference and Gala organized by the Ontario Co-operative Association (On Co-op) on Oct. 19 at the Burlington, Ont. Royal Botanical Gardens.

Bethke (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penny_Bethke) who passed away earlier this year at age 60, was most recently general manager of Toronto's Campus Co-operative Residence Inc. (www.campus.coop), a 75-year-old co-operative student residence. In her career, she had also been president of the Co-operative Housing Association of Ontario and director of Alterna Savings (formerly Metro Credit Union). She was also the first and longtime chair of the selection committee for the Gary Gillam Award for Social Responsibility. While at Alterna Savings she helped develop its accountability report, Spare Change Program where participating members donate to worthy causes, Board Corporate Social Responsibility Policy and a community-based committee to oversee the distribution of the credit union's charitable donations.

"Like many lifelong co-operators, she played a wide range of roles, from member-volunteer, board member, co-op board chair, co-op federation board chair," says Larry Gordon, a co-operative colleague, and alumni of Ontario's co-operative lifetime achievement honor. Tom Clement, executive director of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Toronto, notes that, "Penny's passion, vision and wonderful sense of humour have benefited and touched a whole new generation of co-op members."

Ten other leaders are also celebrated at the awards banquet, bringing the total number of honorees to 110 since 1999, the inception of the Co-op Spirit Award. The banquet is the culmination of a daylong conference that draws up to 250 co-operative and credit union directors, employees, and supporters from across the province. Its theme is "Gearing Up," and is one of the first events in Canada to launch the United Nations International Year of Cooperatives in 2012. More than a billion people belong to co-operative organizations worldwide.

The Ontario co-operative movement is a vibrant part of the province's economy. Ontario has more than 1300 co-ops, with 1900 locations in 400 communities. Ontario co-operatives employ more than 15,500 people and are supported by a network of 49,000 volunteers.

On Co-op, based in Guelph, Ont., is a resource and common voice for Ontario credit unions and co-operatives, with a mission to lead, cultivate and connect the Ontario co-operative movement. Visit www.ontario.coop to learn more.

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