

ADRP NEWSLETTER

Volume 10, Number 1, February 2011

Association of Dalhousie Retirees and Pensioners

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Wednesday, 27 April 2011

University Hall, MacDonald Building
Elevator available

1:30 pm – Meet & Greet
2pm to 3:30 Annual General Meeting
and Election of Officers

Day parking tickets for ADRP members for the AGM may be obtained through the
Security Office, McCain Arts & Social Sciences Building
6135 University Avenue

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From the Editors: Welcome to the first edition of the ADRP Newsletter for 2011. We hope you will take notice of the date for the AGM and mark it on your calendar.

We welcome contributions from you to our Announcements and Updates section of the newsletter. This is your newsletter so if there is an important milestones in your life, or in that of another ADRP member that you know about, or if you have an opinion to express, just email us at either krozee@eastlink.ca or tcreighton@eastlink.ca or write us in care of the ADRP, Rm.2831, Life Sciences Centre, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS B3H 4J1.

Editorial Policy: The ADRP intends to publish the newsletter every three months. It is hoped the newsletter will serve the following purposes;

To provide pertinent information;

To provide a forum for the free exchange of views on issues relevant to our membership;

To serve as a documentary record of matters relating to the ADRP.

The Editorial Board, under the ultimate direction of the ADRP Board, takes responsibility for the contents of the newsletter. Signed contributions will take the form of short articles and letters to the editor; these will normally represent the opinions of the author, and need not represent the views of the ADRP. Anonymous material will not be considered for publication. The Editorial Board retains the right to edit or reject contributed material and to elicit similar and opposing views surrounding any issue raised.

The Editorial Board: Ken Rozee, Blanche Potter Creighton

Ex-officio: Randy Barkhouse

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ADRP President's Report

Your ADRP executive have had a busy time since the previous newsletter which preceded the general meeting early in December.

That meeting itself was very useful for exchanging information with the membership on many issues – Blue Cross, the Pension Plan, ADRP's budget process, and future aspirations for the group.

There have been two ADRP board meetings since then, much e-mail exchanged among board members, several meetings of the DCoPS (Dalhousie Committee on Pension Sustainability), meetings with representatives of employee groups, and many meetings and phone calls with various Dalhousie administrators, including President Tom Traves.

While there is a danger in celebrating prematurely. I am quite hopeful that a resolution of most aspects of our Blue Cross concerns will have been obtained before the next annual meeting on April 27. That includes a premium holiday arrangement for those retirees who paid excessive premiums to the Blue Cross plan up to 2009. The Blue Cross premiums for early retirees are part of a DFA grievance which also is moving forward. The time for that to be resolved is uncertain. An arbitration hearing will be held March 14.

Pension Plan meetings have been held at about 2-week intervals since the December general meeting. The University presented a proposal for a new governing structure, a jointly sponsored, and jointly trustee plan. A similar structure has been in place for the HRM pension plan for many years. DCoPS had an informative q&a with the co-chairs of that plan's executive, and with the CEO of its administrative arm. Detailed information on the HRM plan and its governance are available at http://www.halifax.ca/pension_plan/index.html.

At the time of writing further pension discussions are in an uncertain state as the employee groups are reluctant to discuss a new structure and sponsorship rules while the Dalhousie Plan has a deficit. The provincial government has indicated that its pension regulations are likely to be revised this year. Three union groups will be involved concurrently with collective bargaining in the near future. Given the complex circumstances it is hoped that the province will grant a further year of solvency deficit relief to allow time for pension discussions to proceed.

Your ADRP board has two primary objectives, among several, for these pension discussions. One is to obtain increased involvement in supervision of the plan via a seat on the pension plan trustees. From that we want to achieve improved communication with pensioners, and improved performance from the plan assets. Neither will be a quick or simple task.

ADRP board members did have a useful exchange with pensioner trustee, David Cameron, in mid-February, and hope to effect improved Pension Plan communication for all pensioners as an outcome.

The University's proposal for a new governance structure included provision for a trustee representing ADRP, if we had a membership of at least 50%+1 of pensioners. A canvas of all pensioners is planned for March, urging those who have not yet joined ADRP to do so, in order that we can have influence on the operation of our pension plan, equal to that of each employee group.

As a group ADRP in a few years will have over 50% of Dal Pension Plan assets, and about 25% of its members. The employee groups with 75% of members, but less than 50% of assets will have much greater influence. Although our pension plan is probably our biggest individual asset, much greater in value than our homes or other possessions, we have little say in how it is governed, or in the information communicated to us about it. This is partly the consequence of archaic regulations based on a time when retirement with a pension was "a brief sunset enjoyed by a fortunate few". Pensioners now live much longer after retirement, and with sound minds. It is time we had improved control of our pension assets. To achieve this will require lobbying not only of the Dalhousie administration and its employee groups, but also of the Department of Labour and Workforce Development which governs pension plans in Nova Scotia.

Turning to a separate matter, work has commenced with our counterpart associations at St. Mary's and Acadia on forming a Federation of University Retiree Associations of Nova Scotia (FURANS). By the time of our April AGM this group may be a reality, one to promote the shared objectives of university retirees throughout Nova Scotia. There have been a number of interactions already with both the St Mary's and Acadia associations. The St Mary's group stands out for its social events, and the Acadia association for its informative and entertaining newsletter.

As comment on a final matter in this report, ADRP members and non-members have asked me whether ADRP will be considering activities supportive of the University's mission, perhaps in conjunction with External Relations, and its new Director of Alumni Engagement, Michael Perry. Member suggestions and feedback on this point would be appreciated. It has been suggested that a special additional, but optional, levy on the annual member's fee of \$2-\$5 to support an annual bursary might stimulate further participation from those who at present see ADRP as only a group that lobbies respecting benefits for its members. Assistance in recruiting students and faculty, and with alumni engagement, have also been suggested as possible ADRP member actions in support of Dalhousie. None of these have been broached with the administration so we have no indication of interest from the University. A broader span of involvement for ADRP members might be the basis for a University Retiree Relations body.

I hope to see many members at our AGM in University Hall, 1:30-3:30 on April 27 for further discussion on all the above.

Benefits Committee Report of 15 Feb 2011

Two months ago, ADRP held its half-yearly meeting at University Hall to a gratifying turnout.

At that meeting I made mention of a new initiative from Dal Admin to create a Retirees Health Benefits Committee. This was a result of much effort from Randy in dealings with several senior administrators.

Your Benefits Committee was and continues to be most concerned with settling the over 65 premium overpayment. As such we wish this to be the first order of business to be undertaken.

At the Ben Comm.'s meeting in mid January we were able to formulate two motions to give our advice to the ADRP Board. This excerpt from our 28 January meeting minutes illustrates:

“That we agree to begin meeting as the Retirees Health Plan Advisory Committee, without prejudice to the terms of reference of that committee as presented by the Administration, in order to discuss 2011 premium rates and expedite the compensation package for over-payment of health premiums.”

It was agreed that Blue Cross members should be notified of this action to facilitate possible recovery by the estates of deceased members deceased since February 2010. It is a priority of the committee that the overpayment of Blue Cross premiums be the first order of business.

“That we recommend to the ADRP board that the chair of the Benefits Committee (John Barry), Mike Bradfield, and Toni Laidlaw, if available, be appointed as representatives to the Retirees Health Plan Advisory Committee.”

These two motions passed unanimously.

Randy was then able to expedite having the Board vote on these motions from the Ben Comm. by soliciting Board members votes via the Internet. He will have provided more information on this matter in his report in this Newsletter . Finally, I'm grateful to Toni Laidlaw and Mike Bradfield for agreeing to serve on this new committee.

I also wish to thank Philip Welch whose understanding of how we were getting screwed on rates over the years led to a "new deal" on our premiums. And Philip's not even a subscriber to the coverage!

Further thanks to Philip and Mike Bradfield who spent a goodly number of hours over the past couple of years trying to move Dal Admin to a resolution of our grievances.

And to all members of the Benefits Committee my thanks for their consistent willingness to devote time to advise on the routes we've followed.

The latest info on the DFA grievance concerning the arbitrary Medavie rate hikes sprung on the under-65 retirees will likely commence the “hearing” process of the procedure by mid-March.

I hope members will favour us with a good turnout for the ADRP AGM on Wednesday, 27 April to be held once again in that spacious room, University Hall from 1:30 – 3:30 PM.

John Barry john.barry@dal.ca

The Secretary's Synopsis of Topics considered by ADRP BoD from June 2010 through Feb. 2011.

1. Blue Cross Premiums

a. The University Administration unilaterally raised premiums for extended medical benefits available to “early” retirees (those under age 65, or with a family plan including a spouse who was under 65). For former members of the DFA, this was a violation of the DFA-BoG Collective Agreement. The DFA grieved, and the matter is to be heard at arbitration in mid-March.

b. For many years, regular retirees (aged 65 and older) have been paying full BC premiums despite the mandatory reduction in benefits (no coverage while travelling; no prescription medicines). ADRP has been pressing the Administration to recognize this injustice and provide some form of compensation. Premiums were reduced in September 2010, but the compensation issue remains unresolved. Draft Terms of Reference for a Retiree Health Advisory Committee proposed by the Administration in November were not acceptable to the ADRP.

2. Pension Fund Trustees: Investment performance over the past 4-5 years had been very poor (dropping from 1st or 2nd quartiles to the 4th quartile among national university and other DB pension plans); trustees have only nominal control (oversight) over investment decisions, while University administrators actually make those decisions, even though none of them has a background in investments, and none work full time in this area. In January 2011, the Board heard that there had been no reliable reporting of Dalhousie's investment performance since January 2010, and no comparisons with other pension plans. Apparently, performance in the second quarter of 2010 was poor, but possibly improved later although investments were in the wrong asset classes. The retiree trustee (Dr. David Cameron) met with the ADRP Board on February 15, and agreed to provide regular feedback to the Association.

3. Pension Plan solvency problem, sustainability, and “reform”: In June 2010, the Province had given Dalhousie one year to resolve its pension solvency problem and report on the sustainability of its Pension Plan. ADRP had seen no evidence that the Pension Plan is not sustainable. In December, the ADRP Board and employee groups supported the Administration’s proposal to accept the government’s offer of partial solvency relief (by extension of an enhanced, make-up contribution period from 5 years to 10, with deferral of payments for one year) to give short-term relief to the University’s operating budget. The Dalhousie Committee on Pension Sustainability (DCoPS) has made little progress, and DFA, NSUPE, and NSGEU have withdrawn from this committee. The ADRP also will not attend unless the employee groups return. Liaison with the employee groups at Dalhousie is essential; their veto on changes to the pension plan is the best protection for pensioners.

4. FURANS – a prospective Federation of at least three University Retirees Associations in Nova Scotia would seek to appoint a representative to the “Group of [currently] 9”, which gives advice to the provincial Seniors’ Secretariat (a committee of five Cabinet Ministers chaired by the Minister of Seniors). Retirees from SMURA (Saint Mary’s) and RAFA (Retired Acadia Faculty Association), and a retiree from MSVU, met on October 15 and formed a steering committee to consider a draft constitution for FURANS. A consensus document will be put to each Retirees Association for adoption in March 2011 or as soon as possible thereafter.

Membership: Have you paid your 2011 membership dues? If you are not sure check with Gweneth Munteer at (902) 865-5677 or email her at gweneth.munteer@bellaliant.net or contact the ADRP office at (902) 404-7174. Cheques should be made payable to the ADRP in the amount of \$20.00 and mailed to Gweneth Munteer, Membership Chair, 45 Coles Rd., Lower Sackville, NS B4C 1T9.

SCANS – The Seniors’ College Association of Nova Scotia has been growing by leaps and bounds. We now have 317 members. In the fall of 2010 we started a chapter in Mahone Bay with 3 courses being offered and this winter there are 4 courses running there. In the greater HRM area 7 courses are being held. We were also able to start up a chapter in Truro this winter with 4 courses being offered. Plans are now well under way for the spring and fall terms.

Part of the mandate given in our Memorandum of Association is “to liaise, develop linkages and partner, when practicable, with other organizations that share common goals.” We are very please to say that this past month we have done just that with the Independent Living Association of Nova Scotia and they have generously given us office space in one of their rooms and space for our board and committee meetings. This is a tremendous boost for SCANS as we now have one central place for storage of our records and as we continue to grow, an administrative assistant to work there. To learn more about SCANS visit the web site at thescans.ca .

ASSOCIATION OF DALHOUSIE RETIREES AND PENSIONERS

Nomination form for the Election of Officers and Directors for 2011-2012.

Name of Nominee _____

Name of Nominator _____

Position for which Nomination is made _____

Short Biography (optional) _____

We, the above nominee and nominator, are Members of the ADRP and have paid the membership fee for ADRP for 2011.

Signature of Nominee _____

Signature of Nominator _____

**The elected officers and directors are
President; Vice-Presidents;
Secretary; Treasurer; Members-at-Large;**

Nominations, through the Nominating Committee, may be made for any of the above positions by Wednesday, April 20, 2011 by surface mail to Dr. Philip Welch, Chairperson, ADRP Nominating Committee, ADRP Office, Room 2831, Life Sciences Building, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 4J1; or by e-mail to welchjp@eastlink.ca . In the case of e-mailed nominations, a signed Nomination Form must be in the hands of the Nominating Committee Chairperson before the AGM begins on Wednesday, 27 April 2011.

To see current list of officers and directors visit our web site at adrp.dal.ca