

Saskatoon Writers' Coop President's Report to the Sixth AGM , March 27, 2008

It has been a pleasure serving as your president this past year, as the Coop embarked on its second half-decade. The mission set out by the Coop's founders has been honoured, though admittedly with some small refinements and occasional compromises with the realities faced by all volunteer-run organizations. There is only so much volunteer energy available within busy lives, and we have tried very hard to manage our responsibilities to avoid burning our people out. The fact that, at the end of a very busy season, all but one of this year's serving board members have agreed to stand again for election is a reassuring sign.

Board size and activity. At our last AGM we elected 12 board members, but within weeks the complexities of life had forced three of them (Wes Funk, Lorelie Sarauer, Beate Epp) to reconsider, and soon thereafter a fourth (Kamal Parmar) moved to another province. Fortunately we were able to recruit one more member, Jeff Smith, and we have thus operated this year with nine members. Needless to say, all have been very involved, most attending nine board meetings and a planning event as well as working with specific projects, and the entire organization has benefitted both from their efforts and from the excellent problem-solving discussions around the board table.

Board duties and responsibilities. The board consisted of Jim Weseen (president), Amy Jo Ehman (secretary and past president), Darla Tenold (treasurer), Jeff Smith (vice-president), Joanne Blythe (registrar), Jo Oliver, Lloyd Ratzlaff, Don Reimer, and Edda Ryan. Because of the small board size, I as president agreed to take on the additional jobs of *Coop Scoop* editor, website co-administrator (with Jeff Smith), and membership coordinator (with Jo Oliver's help), because these responsibilities seemed to fit well together and have a focus on internal (membership) communication. This allowed most other board members more time to work on various aspects of programming, which is, after all, the Coop's first priority. The results of their work are summarized in the Programming Report.

Committee structure. At our board planning workshop in June 2007, the board chose to move from a permanent committee structure to a more fluid project team approach, where teams of various sizes (usually 1 to 3 members) would assume responsibility for carrying out specific tasks that arose out of our planning, and would thereafter dissolve. Some project teams had relatively short-term responsibilities, while others remained in place for the entire year, but in general, and with some wrinkles still to be worked out (including ways to make more effective use of volunteers) the approach seems to have functioned quite well.

Priorities. At our June 2007 planning event, the board agreed to work on a number of priorities or targets, which may be summarized as follows:

- increase our community profile
- seek ways to collaborate with other groups, businesses, and organizations that serve local writers
- improve our Web visibility

- establish a regular date for board meetings, and plan and publicize our events calendar far enough ahead to avoid conflicts in scheduling
- maintain our membership level and hold our members' loyalty
- learn more about our members' interests, wants and needs
- continue to offer programming that is interesting and useful to our members, and that attracts new members or serves particular areas of interest
- remain both affordable and fiscally responsible

Accomplishments. I believe this year we have done reasonably well on all of these fronts. In addition to what you will see in the Programming Report, here's why I think so:

- We have actively fostered collaborative relationships with other writer-focused groups and organizations, as well as with local publishers and the print media, and two of our members (Jo Oliver and Don Reimer) took part in the city's Network for Culture initiative.
- Our redesigned and growing website averages well over 40 visitors per day, at least some of whom come to access our regularly updated community calendar of writer-oriented events.
- Our board at its planning event established a regular meeting date, and developed a planning calendar for the entire year.
- Our project teams were able to put together a variety of popular programming activities in time for us to publicize them well in advance, and thus for the most part avoid conflicts in scheduling.
- We conducted a comprehensive online survey seeking feedback from open-mike participants, and we are still in process of developing a "member profile" through an email survey of the entire Coop membership.
- Our membership is stable, our membership fee has remained unchanged at \$10, and our fiscal position is slightly ahead of last year.

Membership. At last year's AGM, our membership was 133, counting two honorary, two life, and 15 late-paying-their-fees members. This year, the total sits at 135, including three honorary, two life, and 10 late-renewing. Obviously, though some may have left us, more have joined. The best part is, most have stayed. Just for perspective, as I mentioned in introducing our recent emailed member survey, of the 60 members reported at the Coop's first AGM, 36 are still with us. As your board, we appreciate the support we receive from all of our members, and we hope we can continue to serve you well.

Retiring board member. Lloyd Ratzlaff has announced his intention not to let his name stand for a board position in the coming year. Lloyd has just completed two consecutive terms, the first as Programming Chair, as well as having served a full term and two partial terms in 2003-05. We very much appreciate Lloyd's contribution to board deliberations, and his commitment to the Coop in general. We will miss him.

Jim Weseen
President