

# Moving fourth

RTO/ERO aims to be “here for you now... here for your future” in its fourth decade as it tackles its governance and leadership roles; a dramatic increase in membership and reaching a wider spectrum of retirees; and considers where it can go as the voice of Ontario’s retired educators.

compiled by renee I.A. mercuri ALL PHOTOS COURTESY RTO/ERO ARCHIVES

This is the fourth installment in a four-part series chronicling the first four decades of STO/ERO – RTO/ERO in its 40<sup>th</sup> year. For parts one through three, see the *Renaissance* spring, summer and fall 2008 issues, respectively.

## 1998-99

**President James Baker, District 15, Halton**  
**Executive Director Pascal LaRouche (1996 - 2000)**  
**Membership: 42,585**

- ▶ The organization’s new name (RTO/ERO), new logo and new colours are finalized and put into use.
- ▶ Member fees: \$1.25 per \$1,000 of pension.



The December 1999 cover of the re-designed RTO/ERO newsletter highlighted the official opening of the organization’s new home at 18 Spadina Road on October 27.

- ▶ Over 21,000 member postcards are presented to the Mike Harris government in a campaign asking for direct participation of retired members in negotiations affecting the pension plan. In an April 22 throne speech, the government states it “... will also work to ensure that the voice of retired teachers is heard in decisions about the pension plan of which they are beneficiaries.”
- ▶ The *Newsletter* begins publishing quarterly, replacing five yearly publications (three *Newsletters* and two *Facts and Impressions*).
- ▶ Since January 1996, membership increases by over 50 percent, partially due to the reduction of the retirement factor from 90 to 85.
- ▶ RTO/ERO succeeds in lobbying for a special change to Canada’s tax laws to treat more fairly the lump sum Ontario Teachers’ Pension Plan (OTPP) entitlement review payments. The change, however, does not result in as fair a tax rebate.
- ▶ The Project Overseas Committee is replaced by the Project – Service to Others (STO) Committee, which through a grant program, provides assistance to community projects at the District level while raising the profile of retired educators.
- ▶ A ribbon-cutting ceremony is held on October 27 to officially open RTO/ERO’s new home at 18 Spadina Road. Special guests include the Minister of Health and Long Term

Care, and member Lou Irvine and her husband Paul, who was born at 18 Spadina in the 1920s and even had his tonsils removed there.

## 1999-00

**President Wayne Tompkins, District 20, Lennox & Addington, Frontenac, Leeds & Grenville**  
**Membership: 44,338**

- ▶ Beginning January 1, RTO/ERO offers a long-term care insurance program to members, to fill the gap between provincial coverage and the individual assets of members.
- ▶ By this time, the RTO/ERO website has seen almost 90,000 visitors since July 1998 and over 1,000 new members enrolled through the online application form.
- ▶ Through a motion, the Ontario Teachers’ Federation (OTF) agrees to give RTO/ERO a permanent, voting position on its Pension Committee and Pension Negotiations Committee, thus allowing RTO/ERO to participate in matters to be taken to the pension partners before negotiations.
- ▶ Extended health care premiums increase by 25%, the first increase since 1996.
- ▶ The provincial reorganization of political and electoral boundaries (Bill 160) leads school board boundaries to no longer be congruent with RTO/ERO’s District boundaries. An ad hoc committee says District structure should remain while a

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process for District and Unit formation is approved by Senate.

- ▶ The May Senate adopts three resolutions supporting active teachers: to oppose provincial testing and recertification of teachers; to support OTF and its affiliates in their opposition to the government's efforts to require teachers to provide extracurricular activities as a condition of employment; to encourage all appropriate education partners to consider the issue of school closures in a democratic manner, with the first criterion being the total welfare of students.

### 2000-01

**President Velda "Val" Alcock, District 42, British Columbia (at the time)**

**Executive Director Terry Lynch (2001 - 2004)**

**Membership: 46,590**

- ▶ RTO/ERO hires a full-time information officer (communications, public relations, recruitment and marketing) and a part-time pension and benefits officer (pension matters, health plans and other retiree and seniors' issues).
- ▶ Executive member district liaisons are established in order to enhance communication between the Provincial Executive (PE) and the Districts.
- ▶ The OTPP achieves Canada Pension Plan (CPP) improvements, a permanent 85-factor for retirement and the implementation of the best five years of service as the means to calculate pension. The latter brings RTO/ERO congratulations for its perseverance since 1984, towards achieving this goal.
- ▶ The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) establishes its public register on the status of certified teachers. Inaccurate information and the status of retired teachers, no longer working, listed as "Suspended - Nonpayment of Fees" presents

problems for RTO/ERO members. Senior staff meets with OCT and the status is changed to "retired."

### 2001-02

**President Ronald Stephen, District 7, Windsor-Essex**  
**Membership: 49,105**

- ▶ The spring Senate approves revised membership categories and rights and privileges including 15 distinct associate membership categories and allows associate members to serve on District Executives.
- ▶ A recruitment and promotional video is launched on the website and distributed to Districts.
- ▶ RTO/ERO makes two submissions to the Romanow Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada and a formal submission to the Ontario Education Equality Task Force.
- ▶ An Ad Hoc Committee on Senate Review investigates the possibility of moving to one Senate and creating a council of District Presidents that meet annually; however both motions are defeated by the spring Senate.
- ▶ The Communications Committee establishes an online help forum to assist the exchange of ideas and information among District webmasters.
- ▶ A recruitment recognition award is established for the District with the annual greatest percentage increase in membership.
- ▶ The *Newsletter* transitions to a polished and professional magazine that is circulated to more than 50,000. *Renaissance*, suggested by Wilfred Smyth, District 9, Huron, is selected as the publication's new name because "it suggests a new spirit, a reaching out to new and younger members and a revitalizing of the existing membership."
- ▶ A new slogan, "Here for you Now... Here for your Future" is coined by

Information Officer Simon Leibovitz, and adopted by RTO/ERO.

### 2002-03

**President Mickey Contini, District 3, Algoma**  
**Membership: 51,657**

- ▶ The Audit Committee is established to protect stakeholder interests and to demonstrate transparency of corporate governance and accountability.
- ▶ RTO/ERO establishes a policy stating that it "supports the right to strike of teachers and support staff in Ontario schools, both as a basic condition of employment and a legitimate means to achieve collective agreements."
- ▶ RTO/ERO surpasses 50,000 members in the fall.
- ▶ A full-time Manager, Financial Reporting is hired after the retirement of RTO/ERO's part-time financial consultant.



**In a brief ceremony at the east portico of the provincial legislature, then President Jim Baker, surrounded by members and Queen's Park officials, presents 21,323 RTO/ERO petitions in April 1999 to the Harris government asking it to amend the teacher's pension plan to allow for direct participation of retired members in negotiations affecting the plan.**

- ▶ The Communications Committee establishes an online information exchange network to facilitate communications between standing committee members.
- ▶ *The Next Ten Years, 1993-2003* a sequel to the *Book of Memories (1968-1993)* is unveiled at fall Senate, and includes reflections from each President and Executive Director during this period.

**2003-04**

**President Beverley Polowy,  
District 5, Cochrane  
Membership: 53,988**

- ▶ The Provincial Office adds a Coordinator – Provincial Office and a new administrative assistant.
- ▶ During the federal budget announcement in March, a 1% cap on investments by pension plans in business income trusts is imposed. OTPP invites the RTO/ERO to join a potential task force to develop strategies to tackle the issue. By the spring Senate, the federal Minister of Finance announces the suspension of the legislation.
- ▶ The first District Treasurers' manual is distributed by late spring.
- ▶ The Canadian Association of Communicators in Education chooses *Renaissance* as one of the recipients of its 2003 BRAVO Award of Excellence.
- ▶ In November, the Member Services Committee holds a provincial workshop and training session for District representatives to preview the new Retirement Planning Workshop (RPW) program.

**2004-05**

**President Helen Biales,  
District 7, Windsor-Essex  
Executive Director  
Harold Brathwaite (2005 to present)  
Membership: 56,075**

- ▶ Membership fees are reduced from \$1.25 to \$1.10 per \$1000 of gross pension.



**Renaissance magazine became the new face of RTO/ERO publications in winter 2002. On the cover, clockwise from centre front: Beverley Polowy, First Vice President; Ron Stephen, Past President; Helen Biales, Second Vice President; Mickey Contini, President; Isabel O'Reilly, Executive Member; Arnold Hull, Executive Member.**

- ▶ To address issues such as blackouts and other events that would affect the flow of daily business, the Provincial Office initiates a Business Continuity Plan.
- ▶ District 44 région du Ciel Bleu, the first francophone District, is formed. It has the same boundaries as District 43, Nipissing.
- ▶ The Goodwill program, which distributes emergency funds to members in serious need, is renamed the Emergency Assistance Program.
- ▶ Members who reach 100 or older are now reimbursed their membership fee, with a greeting from the President.
- ▶ The Members' Only section of the RTO/ERO website is launched and provides information such as fact sheets, tax tips, the *District Updater*, the provincial Constitution and *Renaissance* archives.

**2005-06**

**President Arnold Hull,  
District 8, London-Middlesex  
Membership: 57,867**

- ▶ District 45 EstaRiO, the second francophone District is formed, with the same boundaries as District 32, Prescott-Russell.
- ▶ RTO/ERO conducts a professional survey of a cross-section of its membership regarding its long term needs and priorities as part of the PE's strategic plan development.
- ▶ From the Executive Director's spring Senate report: "I was more than pleased when at the recent AGM of the Ontario Teachers Pension Plan on April, 7, 2006, Claude Lamoureux, President and CEO of the OTPP, twice confirmed that no changes can be made to the pensions and benefits of retirees." The comments come as the pension plan's funding shortfall continues to grow.
- ▶ The recruitment competition now includes an award for the District with an increase in the number of members.
- ▶ The Project – STO Committee develops eligibility criteria and an application process for the newly formed scholarship program, which will see scholarship money awarded to members' relatives seeking a career in teaching.
- ▶ The Communications Committee launches RE-Net (RTO/ERO Network), an electronic system to facilitate communications between the PE and Standing Committees.
- ▶ From the PE's fall Senate report: "RTO/ERO's organizational consciousness about good governance is not only reflected in its Code of Ethics and Whistleblower Policy, but is generally reflected in how we do business — from the reports of the external auditors to the

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Reports of the Standing Committees.”

### 2006-07

**President Ronald Poste, District 19, Hastings & Prince Edward Membership: 59,930**

- ▶ District 46, Muskoka and District 47, Vancouver Island are formed.
- ▶ The Health Services and Insurance Committee (HSIC) introduces changes to its claims appeals process to make it more fair and independent, and renames it the Benefit Entitlement Review.

- ▶ The federal government follows through with its promise to include pension income splitting in its March budget. RTO/ERO plays a prominent role in ensuring this happens through the actions of the PAC, which monitored the issue and in 2005, initiated a pension income splitting petition campaign throughout the province.
- ▶ A French recruitment video, conceived in French and featuring French-speaking members is first produced.



**The Provincial Office grew to 14 full-time staff in 2008, including: (back row, l to r) Kelly MacDonald, Tony Sawinski, Ewa Romanski, Dianne Vezeau, Simon Leibovitz, Liz Timms, Renée Mercuri; (front row, l to r) Kim Williams, Melanie Likamshum, Harold Brathwaite, Diane Simpson. Missing: Melanie Johnson, Gail Knox and Pauline Duquette-Newman.**

PHOTO: HUGH WESLEY

executive director who was present at the founding of STO/ERO. Other highlights include specially bottled wine, an anniversary cake at each Senate and numerous District luncheons and banquets.

- ▶ In spring, the *District Updater* becomes *Liaison*, in hard copy and electronic versions.
- ▶ The PE introduces the Distinguished Member Awards, designed to recognize outstanding member contributions provincially and at the District level.

### 2007-08

**President Brian Kenny, District 35, Dryden Membership: 62,000**

- ▶ RTO/ERO reaches 60,000 members on January 7. Harriet Stone is honoured for being this member at the 74<sup>th</sup> Senate.
- ▶ On March 13-14, RTO/ERO officially turns 40. Celebration highlights in 2008 include recognizing Robert

Lamb, STO/ERO historian and author of *The First Generation: The Superannuated Teachers of Ontario 1968-1988* and Bill Jones, former

PHOTO: SIMON LEIBOVITZ

- ▶ Senate approves membership category, and rights and privileges changes to support associate membership, including allowing teachers eligible to join RTO/ERO upon retirement to do so while still actively teaching.
- ▶ The former District and Unit Health Representative newsletter, first published in February 2005, is redesigned in full colour and renamed *Health Matters*.
- ▶ RTO/ERO hires its first middle management position, a Communications Associate, to support and expand the organization's communications, marketing and technology initiatives.
- ▶ The current President, Brian Kenny, is re-elected, a feat not seen since the first decade of RTO/ERO.
- ▶ *Renaissance* expands its content offerings, enhances its design and creates themed issues with a new look for 2009. 



**In 2006 the Provincial Executive met with Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty about health-related issues important to members. From l to r: Bob Lamoureux, Executive Member; Ron Poste, First Vice President; Helen Biales, Past President; Premier Dalton McGuinty; Arnold Hull, President; Clarice West-Hobbs, Executive Member; Harold Brathwaite, Executive Director.**

**Sources: RTO/ERO Monthly Membership Counts 1990-Present, maintained by Dianne Vezeau; RTO/ERO Newsletters and Renaissance magazine (1998-2008); RTO/ERO Senate meeting archives (1998-2008); STO/ERO Book of Memories 1968-1993, compiled by Mae Hill; The First Generation: The Superannuated Teachers of Ontario 1968-1988 by Dr. Robert L. Lamb; The Next Ten Years: 1993-2003, the sequel to the Book of Memories 1968-1993, compiled by Colette Cunningham, Assistant Executive Director.**