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Safety fun

Robert Baldwin School student Stephanie Bennett tries on a firefighter's helmet and coat during a recent State Farm Insurance-sponsored safety clinic that featured a 911 operator simulator. Inset, it looks like the helmet is a little too big.

Photos by GRAHAM PAINE



After eight weeks, OPSEU workers and government reach tentative deal

By FANNIE SUNSHINE
The Champion

A tentative agreement was reached early yesterday morning by the government and striking Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) members.

Wage improvements include 8.45 per cent over three years, plus an additional 1 per cent for employees at the top of the pay grid in every category except corrections. Corrections workers will receive 8.45 per cent over three years, plus an immediate 5 per cent wage increase.

Unclassified employees (part-time) will receive an additional 4 per cent in pay in lieu of benefits. Unclassified employees will also be able to apply for permanent status after 18

months on the job, as opposed to 24 months currently.

"In the last 51 days, OPSEU members have paid a high price to defend and improve their rights on the job and off," OPSEU president Leah Casselman said in a press release posted on OPSEU's Web site. "They will now have an opportunity to vote on the contract they fought so hard for."

Jim Richards, vice-president of Local 234 (Maplehurst Correctional Facility), told *The Champion* yesterday he's generally pleased with the new agreement.

"We've retained control over our pensions, which was one of the biggest issues for corrections. I'm pretty happy but I think the government could come up with something even better. The immediate 5 per cent increase was a pleas-

ant surprise."

He said voting on the new contract will take place over the weekend.

OPSEU workers at the courthouse in Milton and workers from the Ernest C. Drury School for the Deaf — including counsellors, maintenance staff, secretaries and kitchen staff — have also been on strike. Picket lines will still be manned until a contract agreement is finalized.

Mr. Richards said correctional officers banned from picketing in front of Maplehurst have joined other picket lines across the province, including the school for the deaf.

A court order by the Ministry of Corrections was sent out Monday afternoon, which prevented OPSEU members from gathering outside or near the corrections building to picket or slow traffic to the jail.

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