

CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Caretakers clean up with contract

BY JENNIFER BROWN
STAFF WRITER

Unlike their colleagues in Toronto, support workers at the York Region public school board are hoping to put the finishing touches on a new contract in the next few weeks.

Leaders representing Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) locals 1196 and 1734 of custodian and secretarial staff have been working with board negotiators behind the scenes since January and both sides say they are close to a deal.

"All the concessions we were faced with at the beginning of the process have now been removed from the table, like contracting out," said John Cromwell of CUPE local 1196 representing caretakers. "I'm optimistic with the help of a mediator we can bring back a deal we can recommend to the membership."

Meanwhile, CUPE workers in Toronto marched on the school board offices in the city last week, warning that school lunch programs and after-class activities will be cancelled and some washrooms closed if the 14,000 support staff go on strike.

The hot issues on the table for the 600 caretakers/maintenance workers and 500 secretarial/clerical employees in York Region have included salary, benefits and contracting out.

Now 1196 and the board must determine the length of the contract and any salary increase — the union wants a minimum two-year deal, but the board is pushing for three years.

"If it is going to be three years, there will obviously have to be some money tied into the third year," Cromwell added. "But I'm very pleased with the way negotiations are going. We've had one meeting with the provincial negotiator so far and it went to 1 a.m. and that's when we got most of the contentious issues off the table."

The secretarial union will meet with a provincially-appointed mediator March 4 for the first time, but negotiators are hopeful the outcome will be positive.

"It has been the tenor has been the same and it is my belief we will be as successful with 1734 as we have been with 1196," said Trustee Howard Shore, chairperson of the board's negotiation advisory committee.

ADVERTISING CORRECTION

In our Baby Event insert (promo #672) included in this newspaper, please note: Page 2, 20% off Oshkosh and Pooh Bedding. Our reg. \$140, Sale \$105, was incorrectly described. Copy should read: "Bedding. Our reg. \$140, Sale \$112". We sincerely apologize to our valued customers and regret any inconvenience or confusion this may have caused.

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