

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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*Superannuated Teachers
of Saskatchewan*

President's Report for AGM 2024

Welcome to AGM 2024!

This is our second in person Annual General Meeting of the decade. The 2023-24 President's Report and Committee Reports booklet includes reports from the various Committees of the Provincial Executive as well as the Executive Director's Report. In addition, there are reports from Executive members who represent the STS in our relationships with the national organization, ACER-CART, the McDowell Foundation and the Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism. This President's Report is an overview of the organization with much more detail found in the individual reports.

STS 50th Anniversary

2023 was a special year for our organization, both at the provincial and Chapter levels. We marked a half-century since October 10, 1973, when thirty-two Delegates from seven local Chapters already formed, met in Saskatoon to establish the Superannuated Teachers of Saskatchewan. The organization has grown significantly from the days when membership was just 545 in 1974, and the annual membership fee was \$1.

A key catalyst for local celebrations was the decision to provide \$500 in support to each Chapter to mark the occasion in a way that worked best for each. With an uptake by ninety percent of Chapters, this was truly a membership-wide celebration. It was my honour, and that of a number of Provincial Executive members, to be part of a good number of these events. It was a wonderful time to celebrate and to see Chapters experience significant turnouts to their anniversary events.

There are two learnings from what took place in 2023. The first, is that when supports are provided to Chapters, tremendous energy and creativity are unleashed. The second, is about the future: can the anniversary funding model serve as a template for future activity, not fifty years from now in 2073, but in the years immediately following the anniversary?

That is why a new line item has been proposed for the 2024-25 budget entitled, Special Projects Grant, which if approved, would continue such support for Chapter initiatives related to priorities identified by things like AGM resolutions. Although discussions are preliminary, and subject to what takes place at this AGM, marking the International Day of Older Persons in early October is actively under consideration.

STS Chapter Presidents' Meeting

The Chapter Presidents' Meeting took place on October 26 with 33 of 41 Chapters represented. Outside of the Annual General Meeting, this is the largest multi-Chapter gathering engaging local leadership along with the Provincial Executive. This event is important as it enables Presidents and another member from each Chapter to engage more deeply in the affairs of the organization in a format that is less formal than an AGM.

Discussion and feedback included:

- How we might celebrate the International Day of Older Persons, something mandated by an AGM resolution
- How we move forward organizationally with ongoing reconciliation with First Nations and Métis peoples
- Feedback on communications tools like the STS website, Facebook, *Outreach* and *Executive Notes*
- Experiences with the recent Group Benefits Health Spending Account
- Feedback on priorities for the new Group Benefits Agreement with Saskatchewan Blue Cross
- The future of the STS and STS Chapters

A number of other agenda items were also scheduled, including one with three Chapters reporting on how they marked the 50th anniversary of the organization. The three presentations were from Bev Magel (Last Mountain), Yvette Beutel (Melville) and Lyle Markowski (Saskatoon).

Provincial events like the AGM and the Chapter Presidents' Meeting are very important. Unlike many provincial organizations that have a large central administrative team or regional staff, we rely upon hundreds of volunteers investing thousands of hours at the Chapter and provincial levels. It is important for such volunteers to be able to network together at these events.

Group Benefits

As we know from the membership survey done in late 2021/early 2022, the number one reason why superannuates join the STS is to obtain insurance for health and/or dental coverage. As an organization, we place a high priority on ensuring that the Health and Dental Plans serve the needs of our members. Upwards of \$18 million in claims were paid out last year to support our members when accessing services covered by the Group Benefits program.

The operation of the Group Benefits program is also a major revenue component for the STS operating budget. The administrative fee of 3.5% on premiums collected supports around 75% of our operating budget revenue. It has enabled us to keep membership fees unchanged for many years, and to be able to sustain key services like Chapter rebates, Chapter Presidents' Meeting, supports for provincial recreation events, *Outreach* and many more.

We are following closely the slow trickle of information from the Government of Canada regarding the national dental program and now, the initial stages of a national pharmacare program, announced in late February. For both the evolving dental and pharmacare programs, STS members who belong to our Group Benefits plan are well-advised not to terminate coverages, and to make informed choices as the national dental program in particular, may not apply to our members, or will offer benefits that are less attractive. There is also some concern that some professional providers may not participate.

I want to thank Vice-President Sue Amundrud, Group Benefits Committee Chair Sunil Pandila, and Executive Director, Murray Wall, as the four of us worked through the fall of 2023 with our third-party Agent of Record, Elev8, to arrive at a one-year extension to the current Agreement with Saskatchewan Blue Cross. The decision to engage Elev8 several years ago continues to pay dividends both in terms of reduced administrative costs, and also significant support during discussions with Blue Cross leading to the 2024-25 Agreement extension.

As noted in the January letter to Plan members, a number of enhancements are included, as well as some new benefits. In addition, the Provincial Executive will be considering a Health Spending Account with possible implementation in 2025. Key considerations weighed by the Executive were on affordability for members in terms of keeping premiums unchanged for the coming year, as well as the sustainability of the Plan in the long-term with some Plan enhancements. Health care sector inflation tends to outpace cost of living increases in the broader economy, and member utilization continues to bounce back after a lull during COVID-19. As trustees of the Group Benefits Plan, we make decisions that keep both short- and long-term trends in mind so member needs are met on a yearly basis well into the future.

Governance and Executive Operations

As noted in the Governance and Handbook Review Committee report, we have been working on a multi-year project to update policies and procedures, and reflecting those revisions in our governance documents. Along the way, feedback from members has been important: AGM resolutions, the major membership survey in early 2022, input at Chapter Presidents' Meeting, and regional meetings two years ago.

A detailed review of the constitution, bylaws, policies and guidelines is not something that many people rush to sign up for. But it is necessary work that defines who we are, what we stand for and how we operate. Normally, governance is not top of mind until it is, and then we rely upon well-reasoned procedures identified in our foundational documents that reflect our best practices, values and traditions.

Financial Affairs

The Budget, Finance and Audit Committee monitors budget performance throughout the year and works to develop the operating budget for the next year. Our Executive Director, whose responsibilities include overall supervision of the financial affairs of the organization, is the key administrative staff member working with the Committee. Group Benefits, along with Budget, Finance and Audit, are two Committees which operate as Committees of the Whole with the full participation of all sixteen Provincial Executive members.

The long-term relationship with our auditors, Deloitte, will continue again this coming year. The audited financial statements for the past year are part of the Delegate package. Executive Director, Murray Wall, will have more to report on our finances in one of the Interest Sessions, as well as on Thursday when we discuss the proposed 2024-25 Budget.

This past year we engaged Connor, Clark and Lund to serve as Investment Manager for all of our funds including for the first time, funds held in reserves set up under the Group Benefits umbrella. CCL had been serving in this capacity for monies in the Contingency Fund with strong results over the years. In the past, the premium revenues remitted to the STS office by the two pension plans were turned over to Saskatchewan Blue Cross to manage on our behalf at prime minus 1.5%. We believe that the self-management of our funds by our investment manager will prove to be a wise one in the long-term, recognizing that the strength of Saskatchewan Blue Cross is in administering our Group Benefits Plan.

Advocacy

As the process for gaining public support of a cause or policy, the STS was formed in large part to advocate for retired educators with an initial focus on pensions for superannuates. Over the years, STS advocacy continued to push for additional enhancements.

The organization also began to form relationships with organizations like the Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism and ACER-CART, in addition to the formal relationship we have as a Local of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. As one of 28 Locals, our membership of over 12,200 works alongside 27 STF Locals with membership of over 13,000 teachers. The combination of over 25,000 STS and STF members in this province is a powerful force when mobilized.

The major membership survey conducted in early 2022 by Praxis Analytics, confirmed that access to health benefits is the prime motivator for joining the STS. Advocacy for retired members was number two as a reason for STS membership. As noted in last year's report, we have been looking for ways to augment our traditional advocacy work by expanding our impact as an organization. This is in recognition that our members are also older adults interested in broader issues.

As noted in last year's report, in September 2022, Murray Wall and I had a meeting with Ministers Everett Hindley (Seniors) and Dustin Duncan (Education). With the cabinet change last summer, the second such meeting in November was an opportunity to engage with/educate new Ministers Tim McLeod and Jeremy Cockrill (Seniors and Education, respectively) to advance knowledge about our organization, our support for public education and the STF, as well as our interests in public policy to support our members who are part of a growing and dynamic demographic in the province.

At the end of November, Murray and I met with the STF Executive. Some of the discussion involved how the STS might support the Federation in provincial bargaining, as well as the call for reinvestment in public education that has seen us slip to number eight in funding nationally. Since the beginning of sanctions in late January, superannuates around the province have been supporting educators in a variety of ways.

Based on ongoing dialogue between our Executive Director and senior STF leadership, a process has been identified to facilitate contact between the Federation and Locals with STS Chapters focused on the current bargaining situation. The two organizations operate somewhat differently, but the potential exists for some collaboration which will ultimately benefit public education and our teaching colleagues. Individual STS members and some Chapters have been engaging with STF Locals as part of recent job action related to provincial bargaining.

2024 is also a provincial election year, and the STS is looking to advocate on two levels: on our own, and with partners like SSM to magnify messaging around issues of concern to all older adults, whether they are members of the STS, belong to SSM member organizations or are unconnected to the two organizations. Under consideration are an STS election informational brochure, and using STS platforms like *Outreach* and Facebook.

Communications Advisory Committee

2023-24 marked the transition of the former *Outreach* Committee to the Communications Advisory Committee, with a broader mandate to examine and advise on the variety of communications platforms, not just the former *Outreach* consisting of five issues a year.

Outreach has moved from a detailed post-Executive and AGM reporting tool, to a publication with a much broader mandate, organized around themes. One of the interesting developments is that a number of members have indicated they now prefer the printed version and are shifting away from the digital publication. Upcoming themes include experiencing Saskatchewan and later in the year, a 'Saskatchewan Votes' focus.

Data was presented at the March 2024 Committee meeting showing significant traffic to both the provincial website and our Facebook page, with the website peak traffic occurring around the publication dates of the digital version of *Outreach*. The data also show that the website is being accessed primarily from Canada, but also the United States, Central America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and a number of nations in south-east Asia.

Because *Outreach* is no longer published after each Executive meeting and the AGM, *Executive Notes* has become the messaging tool to report on those meetings. Both *Outreach* and *Executive Notes* are posted on the provincial website at sts.sk.ca, with the latter also being provided to Chapter Presidents to pass along to their respective members. We thank the Chapters for engaging in the process of distributing *Executive Notes* in a timely way that works for their members.

Honorary Life Members

One of the innovations at last year's AGM was the PowerPoint featuring Honorary Life Membership recipients as well as Past-Presidents, from the past fifty years. A number of Chapters have also been showing this digital file at their Chapter events.

Approximately 150 STS members have been recognized as HLM recipients, and at this AGM we will be celebrating the addition of four new members to the growing list of recipients. Thank you to the Chapters who nominated members, and also to the HLM Committee for the work it did with a rubric in determining the 2024 recipients from a large field of nominations.

Appreciation

I want to thank all the candidates who have agreed to let their names stand in elections at this AGM. This is a positive sign of interest in public service. This year for the first time, the names of candidates were posted on the STS website to better inform all members about who is seeking office. In addition, the nomination form was revised to have nominees fill out a disclaimer to protect the organization.

At the time this report was written, fourteen members of the Provincial Executive have put their names forward, along with another five seeking office. We will hear from each of the candidates as part of the important democratic exercise of electing an Executive for 2024-25.

The STS continues to benefit from a strong administrative team. As the recent member survey shows, there is a high level of satisfaction with the service and support received from our team.

Our staff consists of:

- Murray Wall, Executive Director
- Heather Hase, Group Benefits and Finance Coordinator (formerly Assistant Office Manager)
- MJ Krips, Membership and Communications Coordinator (formerly Administrative Assistant)
- Michelle Brisson, Member Service Representative (position formerly Administrative Assistant)

I want also to mention our appreciation to Colleen Bailey, our former Office Manager, who retired at the end of 2023 after many years of faithful service to this organization, and to Sheri Schmitz who was with us briefly and subsequently moved to the STF. We wish both of them well in retirement and the new work place, respectively!

An AGM would not be successful without the participation of Delegates serving as Chapter representatives. Thank you for being at AGM 2024 serving both your local Chapter and the provincial organization, and for providing leadership during the past several years when we could meet only virtually. It takes many players to organize and stage an Annual General Meeting, and we thank each of you for the contributions you are making.

This is my second and final report as your President. It has been an honour of a lifetime serving in this role. I know that the new Executive will serve this organization well, and I wish the President-elect and the entire team all the best as we move into the new term on July 1. I look forward to serving all of you in a new role as Past-President.

Respectfully submitted,
Doug Still, Provincial President