



# From the President

November-December 2011

Editor: Donna Howey, President

Grand Erie Elementary Teachers Federation

GEETF Meetings and Events are listed on our website

[www.gefed.on.ca](http://www.gefed.on.ca)



Carol Ann Macsai, chair of the Status of Women Committee with the abundance of GEETF teacher donations to the Basketeer program

## Our Office

You will find us at our office at 49 Dalkeith Drive, Units 1 & 2, Brantford. Our phone number for local calls is 519 753-9291 and toll free at 888 753-9291. The office is open each day from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. Many evenings the office is open much later due to meetings and workshops. We also endeavour to leave Fridays at 3:30 pm.

## Thanks to the Jokers

There are always those people on staff who know how to use humour to relieve the stress of the situation. Thanks go out to those people. Your ability to use humour reduces stress and helps with maintaining a healthy perspective. The staff member who always sees the cup as half empty, or the person who boasts that their reports are done a full week before the due date, does nothing for staff morale. Maintaining a sense of humour despite the daily challenges faced in our schools builds others up and keeps everyone going.

## GEETF Teachers Show Their Generosity

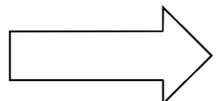
Once again, GEETF teachers have shown their generosity towards families who are in need. A full 16 baskets of beautiful kitchen, bath and bedroom items were donated to the women's shelters in the Grand Erie region through the Basketeer program. These gift baskets have been distributed to the women and children who are re-starting their lives after escaping from abusive relationships. I am proud of the generosity shown by elementary teachers.

## Work—Life Balance

David Posen MD, was the keynote speaker at the OTIP Conference this fall. He is the author of the book, Always Change a Losing Game. Dr. Posen spoke to us about the relationship between stress and control. He observed that usually, the less control we have over a circumstance, the higher the stress associated with the situation. He also presented a graph I seem to recall from a sports psychology course I took. The graph shows a U curve with stress on the x-axis and performance on the y-axis. There is an ideal place where there is just enough stress for performance to be at a peak level.

I know that our workplaces often present us with more than a desirable level of stress. I have been reading through the book and have found there are many points that ring true. One chapter is, "Becoming Aware of your Mind Traps". Mind traps are defined as "patterns of thinking that create distortions or lead to problems and upset." The mind traps that are discussed are perfectionism, over-identifying with roles, misinterpreting situations, taking things personally, and all or nothing thinking.

Your federation can advocate for desired changes that might reduce teachers' stress. We can hold the Board accountable to legislation, regulations, policies and our entitlements under our C.A. but teachers need to find their own strategies for managing stress and achieving a work-life balance. There are supports in place through your benefits that might help you to find that balance if it seems elusive.





## Switching Yard Duty and Prep

It is important that we are aware of the rights occasional teachers have under their collective agreement in relation to yard duty and prep schedules. Occasional teachers cannot be asked to cover a yard duty before the start of the school day. It is important that there is a plan in place for switching morning yard duties when a teacher needs to be away and for communicating those switches to all those who might need to know such as the OT, the person covering the duty and the office. Also, OTs have the right to the daily schedule of the teacher they are supplying for. That means there can be no last minute prep switches. We want to welcome OTs in our schools. We depend upon them. Respecting their rights upholds everyone's professionalism.

## Workplace Safety

Workplace safety may not be an exciting topic for teachers but we do have a role to play. The Occupational Health and Safety Act assigns responsibilities to both the employer and the employee. The employer provides safety training and information. The employee then has the responsibility to adhere to the safe practices. So, when Lena Latreille or Liz McAlpine sends out workplace safety memos, we need to consider ourselves informed. In the event of an accident, it is important that safety protocol was adhered to for WSIB and liability purposes.

## Local Labour Council Membership Could be in GEETF's Future

GEETF Teachers will be deciding whether or not to join the Brantford Labour Council. This is a cost item for our yearly budget. ETFO is already a member of the OFL and CFL, but unlike more than half of ETFO provincial locals we have not yet joined our local labour council. More information will be coming. The vote will be in May at the general membership meeting.

## In the Staff Room

What is Out of Bounds?

Teachers have many regulations that scrutinize both teacher conduct and performance. Teachers are held to these standards and can be disciplined when it is deemed the boundary has been violated. Where do teachers think the boundaries should be? There could be aspects of the boundaries that are not in line with teachers' own expectations of themselves. If your staff discussed the reported conduct below; where would their opinion fall?

What do you think?

The examples below are from all over Canada and have not necessarily been part of a discipline procedure. Decide if you think the behaviour upholds the professional standard of teachers.

- On an overnight class trip, the teacher goes to a pizza place with a few students—after curfew.
- A teacher goes to watch a student play a sport in the community
- A teacher overindulges while partying with friends during a vacation.
- A video of the teacher (at the above mentioned vacation party) is put on-line.
- A teacher tutors a student in their own class.

These examples are provided for you to think about where the boundaries of teacher professional conduct are. I also send the caution that it is always important to find yourself on the right side of the boundary line.