

Libro Credit Union, Simone Swail and Michelle Christmann to be honoured during provincial co-op conference on Sept. 28 in Toronto

GUELPH ON, Sept. 25, 2017 —Those involved in the leadership and direction of Ontario co-operative organizations will recognize three of their own for showing dedication to sustainability. They will be honoured during the Ontario Co-operative Conference, People, Planet and Prosperity: Co-operatives and Sustainable Development, on Sept. 28 at the Courtyard by Marriott at 475 Yonge St., Toronto.

Two individuals will receive the 2017 Ontario Co-operative Spirit awards for promoting co-operative identity. **Simone Swail of the Co-operative Housing Federation of Canada Ontario Region** and **Michelle Christmann of Quinte First Credit Union** engaged youth in co-op leadership.

Swail is past chair of the joint government relations committee of the Ontario Co-operative Association (On Co-op) and Conseil de la Coopération de l'Ontario. It successfully gained commitment from the provincial government to: “explor(e) the modernization of co-operative enterprises to enhance their contribution to sustainability and growth for our economy and communities.” The government also announced its intentions to transfer responsibility for co-op incorporations to the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services.

Christmann, a community relations officer, is a certified credit union “Each One Teach One” instructor who helps elevate financial literacy in area schools and among credit union members. Additionally, she brings the message of co-operation to high schools through the educational module, All 4 Each.

Libro Credit Union of southwestern Ontario also employed financial education to assist its community. The credit union is the recipient of the award recognizing organizations that practice triple bottom line economics, paying attention to the environment and people as well as financial soundness. Libro Credit Union developed a social purpose self-assessment tool based on best practices in social purpose banking and finance.

Nominator Michael Clarke of the credit union's Strathroy Branch Council writes: “Purpose has now become a lens through which Libro looks when making all decisions. This has been a fundamental shift in thinking that is leading to impactful change.” Since 2014, the credit union has become a living wage employer, increased diversity training, created a strategic community investment program, reduced its environmental impact, and more. The measurement tool has been shared with other credit unions.

“We are Not in Kansas Anymore,” is the title of the conference keynote to be delivered by Gay Lea Foods Co-operative Limited President and CEO Michael Barrett. “In the whirlwind of geopolitics, it is more critical than ever to have a strong foundation based upon co-operative principles,” says Barrett; “sustainability will be discussed as a principle.” Meeting participants will also reflect on food security, governance, climate change, renewable energy, and gender equality. The conference will end with a fundraiser for the Co-operative Development Foundation of Canada.

ABOUT THE ONTARIO CO-OPERATIVE ASSOCIATION

On Co-op exists to strengthen and unite the co-operative movement in Ontario. We believe that co-operatives are the solution to creating stronger communities, which help to build a better world. Our members are organizations that believe in the co-operative principles and are invested in the future of the movement. With their commitment, we are able to deliver co-operative research, education, advocacy, networks, tools and resources, that support the success and sustainability of all co-operatives and the movement as a whole. On Co-op is an information and resources network with a mission to lead, cultivate and connect co-operatives.

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