



**MEDIA RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE DELIVERY**

SARA BERTENS AND ST. JAMES TOWN COMMUNITY CO-OP TO BE HONOURED WITH CO-OPERATIVE SPIRIT AWARDS

GUELPH ON, Sept. 14, 2021 — Members of the Ontario Co-operative Association (OCA) and supporters of the co-operative sector will recognize two of their own for their dedication to their communities and to the greater co-operative movement. One individual and one co-operative organization will be honoured virtually during the OCA's Annual General Meeting on September 21, 2021.

Sara Bertens who will be recognized with the *Individual Co-operative Champion* award, is an owner/representative of Libro Credit Union in the London area. She is a passionate advocate for youth education and has facilitated at the Co-operative Young Leaders (CYL) program for the past ten years.

Nominator Carol Fleming, Director, Co-operative Young Leaders says: "Sara consistently demonstrates her support, passion and continued interest in the co-operative sector. In the summer of 2021, she chaired a committee to revise and update the CYL curriculum, giving up her evenings to review and update core programming to ensure it was consistent with the changes in technology and inclusivity practices of today's youth. In this volunteer capacity, Sara showed great foresight, organization and leadership, while always keeping in mind the co-operative principles we are guided by at CYL."

St. James Town Community Co-operative (SJT) of its namesake community in Toronto, will be recognized with the *Organizational Co-operative Champion* award. SJT is a social enterprise co-operative, established to bring together organizations and individuals who can assist and support the development of projects and enterprises initiated by and for its residents. They live the co-operative principles with agility and accessibility, to serve their community through various initiatives such as their OASIS Food Hub, Timebank and Emergency Food Relief program.

Nominator Shylah Wolfe, Manager, Local Food and Farm Co-operative shares: "Despite tremendous uncertainty and scarcity of space and funds throughout the pandemic, SJT members moved swiftly to implement programs that meet the urgent food access needs of their community. In creating the Emergency Food Relief program, the co-operative coordinated dozens of volunteers and raised enough money through grants, partners and crowdfunding to provide healthy and culturally appropriate fresh food and prepared meals to nearly 300 families and isolated people on a biweekly basis. The program has been a staple element of food security in the very diverse and dense, 20,000 person community, and continues to run despite the numerous challenges they have faced, refusing to leave anyone behind."

OCA is proud to have such exemplary individuals and organizations as part of its network and membership, and looks forward to celebrating these achievements at the upcoming AGM.

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ABOUT THE ONTARIO CO-OPERATIVE ASSOCIATION (OCA): Co-operatives are a different kind of business model that are driven by people, planet and profit. OCA supports, develops, educates and advocates for Ontario's 1,500+ co-operative businesses. We exist to strengthen and unite the co-operative movement and we believe that co-operatives are the solution to creating stronger communities, which help to build a better world. Visit us at <http://www.ontario.coop> for more information or contact Audrey Aczel, Communications & Event Manager, Ontario Co-operative Association, 30 Douglas Street, Guelph, ON N1H 2S9 Tel 519.763.8271 x 24 aaczel@ontario.coop

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