

**MEDIA RELEASE
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2019 Spirit Award Recipient Kerr Smith (second from right), pictured here with OCA Board Director Jennifer Woodhouse (second left), Michelle Christmann and Ove Hansen of Gay Lea Foods Co-operative.

LEADERS RECOGNIZED FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ONTARIO CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

GUELPH, ON – October 15, 2019 – Members of the Ontario Co-operative Association (OCA) honoured three of their own for their commitment and contributions to the Ontario Co-operative movement. They were recognized at the OCA’s Annual General Meeting on October 15 at Springfield Golf and Country Club in Guelph, ON.

Two individuals and one organization received the 2019 Co-operative Spirit Award: **Kerr Smith of Gay Lea Foods Co-operative, Kelly Storie of La Siembra Co-operative, and FirstOntario Credit Union.**

Smith was employed by OCA for many years as the Education Manager and began his career at Gay Lea Foods in 2016, where he is currently the Manager of Co-operative Community Engagement.

Nominator Ove Hansen, Gay Lea's Director of Member Relations, says: "Over the years, Kerr has shared his passion for education and the co-operative sector with many organizations and groups, and his belief in the transformative power of co-operatives always shines through."

Co-op Developer Russ Christianson, who has collaborated with Smith on many co-operative education projects adds: "Kerr has a curious intellect and an open heart that embodies the co-operative values. He is continuously finding creative ways to educate people of all ages about co-operatives."

Storie is also a tireless supporter of the co-operative movement, having been a Director on OCA's Board from 2015-2017, and currently serving as Director for Your Credit Union. As Executive Director of La Siembra Co-operative, she has led the worker-owned organization through a complete transformation and saved it from bankruptcy.

In support of Storie's nomination, La Siembra's Account Manager at Desjardins, Antoine Lacasse writes: "I developed an enormous respect for Kelly's dedication to the organization's mission, and became acutely aware of her great knowledge and endless work hours in her determination to bring the co-operative to a higher level."

FirstOntario Credit Union is a strong supporter of their local community, and proudly live and embody the co-operative principles. This is particularly evident in their employee volunteer program. Now in its ninth year, Blue Wave began as a committee of ten employees in 2010, and has grown to almost 300 volunteers who believe in the value of working together for the greater good. The Blue Wave program exemplifies their mission of being a financial co-operative that believes in doing the right things for the right reasons.

"With a commitment driven by the mandate of their members to support the communities they serve, this organization is a valued partner that believes in the importance of investing locally. They are a long-standing community leader, advocate and co-operative champion," says supporter of FirstOntario's nomination, Debbie Logel Butler, Executive Director of Cancer Assistance.

Since their inception in 1999, close to 130 individuals and organizations have received a Co-operative Spirit Award from OCA.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Jennifer Ross 1.888.745.5521 x 22 jross@ontario.coop, or visit ontario.coop/co-operative-spirit-awards for more information about the Co-operative Spirit Awards.

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.