

THE BELL PENSIONERS' GROUP - TORONTO & AREA CHAPTER
NEWSLETTER / BULLETIN # 19
JULY 24th, 2002

On Thursday May 30th, the Toronto & Area Chapter of BPG held its 7th Annual Meeting. The attendance exceeded 300 again. There was a real spirit of reunion in the hall as old friends renewed acquaintances.

Item #1.....The President's Message.....Linda Terrill

In our fall newsletter we reported that our membership was up to 5600 members. I am pleased to report we are now at approximately 6000 members.

As you know the BPG Board is made up of the 5 chapter Chairpersons and 6 other representatives from across our territory. We meet twice a year face to face in Montreal and approx. 10 times a year on conference calls. We tie our face to face meeting in with a half day meeting with Bell giving the full Board the opportunity to hear the dialogue. Our meetings with Bell have transformed over the years from being somewhat adversarial to a more positive and productive session. The fact that Bell published the BPG website in the December issue of IN TOUCH is a positive sign. At our last Bell meeting on April 10 of this year we discussed

- 1) The Call Centre concerns – we had heard from several BPG members that there are problems getting through at the Call Centre. Bell has agreed to review this and bring us an analysis of the types of calls to the September BPG meeting. In this way we can determine the major issues for the pensioners and see what we can do to assist in reducing call volumes.
- 2) Bell reviewed with us the software changes underway for the HR system that has been consuming all their time. It is expected that these changes will impact the appearance of **your** pension stub in the fall. Bell will review these changes with us and hopefully we can cover them off in our fall newsletter prior to them being implemented. (Unfortunately there will be no change in the dollar amount on the stub!!!!)
- 3) We passed on to Bell how pleased you were with the introduction of the annual personalized pension statement and discussed our hope that we could in the future add additional data relative to benefits. Once the HR system changes are in place this will be more feasible. For the next statement the only changes may be minor wording changes to make the statement clearer.
- 4) We talked again about the feasibility of using Bell's buying power to look into a supplemental dental plan which **pensioners** could purchase to supplement the Bell dental plan. Bell agreed to look at this in mid 2003.
- 5) We also talked to Bell about the feasibility of doing lobbying together of both the federal and provincial governments when critical issues arise that could impact the financial welfare of pensioners. Bell has done this with us once before on the seniors benefits proposal and it was very successful.

All in all the Board felt that our Bell session went quite well. As well since this meeting we have been successful in getting Bell to change its position on reverting back to the full pension in the event of a divorce or legal separation where the court document waves the spouses access to the survivor pension.

Your BPG Board also has 2 project teams in place. The first team is a group from Quebec who are assessing the medical coverage for the 65+ to determine if there is any **income tax discrimination**. The Ontario team is monitoring this project in the event of similar circumstances occurring there.

There is also a team looking at the pension surplus issue. Many of us have been reading in the newspapers about companies and unions fighting over pension surplus. The mandate of the BPG team was to educate us on the laws and our rights in this area. A meeting was held with the Federal Government (**the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions**) who monitors and regulates all federal pensions. We also investigated what educational material was available for training of ourselves and our PIC reps. What we basically have found is that surplus is more of an issue when a company is winding up or terminating a pension plan, which fortunately is not our situation. If the company wanted to use any of the surplus funds they would require 2/3 of the pension plan members to agree before they could do so. Our discussions with Bell also indicated that there are **no plans** at this time to fold any other companies into our pension plan. As such the project team has recommended that there would be no benefit to hiring any outside expertise at this time but that we will keep the BPG team in place to monitor the situation and continue to support the PIC reps.

Now on a very positive note I want to tell you how we are proposing to **save you** some money. First, many of you may have heard of a national organization called CARP (Canadian Association of Retired Persons). CARP is a group that lobbies the governments for improvements in seniors' benefits. They also market products such as insurance, etc. CARP is a national organization with offices in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver but currently publishes most of their information in English only. They are hoping to change this in the near future. CARP has offered BPG members the opportunity to join their membership **for free** for the first year. For those that are currently members they will extend the membership **free** for a year. Details are outlined later in this newsletter. BPG has made it clear that we do not endorse any products or services but we are prepared to allow our members to make their own personal decision about joining CARP. There are certainly some benefits for BPG as it would create the opportunity for BPG and CARP to lobby together on some key seniors' issues.

See the back page of this newsletter for the CARP application form and associated instructions.

I am also pleased to announce that we **will not** be asking you to pay membership fees for the year 2003. As an organization our goal has been to stay below \$200K in the bank. This reduces the amount of paperwork required by the government for non-profit organizations and is a reasonable amount to have in the event of needing immediate legal or outside expertise (Confederation legal bill would have been \$130K). The Board has recommended waiving membership fees for next year and at this time next year we will make a recommendation regarding fees going forward.

It has been a busy and productive winter for BPG and I wish you all a warm and safe summer.

Item #2...The PIC Report.....Art Smithard & Warren Grant

Reinstatement of Level Pension

A longstanding issue of concern to a number of Pensioners has now been resolved. Pensioners who have been divorced after going on pension, and who had opted for spousal benefits in the event that they predeceased their spouse can now apply to Bell for the reinstatement of their level pension. Previously Bell had taken the position that the Level Pension could not be reinstated as Section 24 of the Pension Act prohibited changes after the pension was granted. However, it has now been determined that Section 25 of the Act allows for the reinstatement of a level pension if the parties to the divorce have a legally valid separation agreement.

To qualify the separation agreement must clearly state that the parties are separate as to property, and both parties must sign it. It should be noted that **in our test case** the separation agreement clearly listed the Bell Pension as an item to which the former spouse was relinquishing any claim.

Bell Financial Results 2002

We reviewed the Pension Benefits note provided in the Bell Canada Annual Report and provided a brief overview of year over year changes. The market value of the plan's assets decreased approximately 2% when compared to 2001 results. However, given the volatility of the markets we considered this to be a reasonable result. We also compared Bell's performance to that of seven other major pension funds, which produced results ranging from, plus 2.6% to minus 14.3%

We noted that the Pension fund surplus had dipped to 60% of its 2001 value, and attribute the decrease to both the reduction in overall pension fund assets and the continued increase in the number of Bell Pensioners. We noted that the three main factors that enter into the calculation of Pension Fund future liabilities had changed and indicated that we will ask Bell what the surplus would have been if the 2001 factors had been used.

We will follow up on all of these points at the Annual PIC Meeting, and will report our findings to you at the fall BPG meetings and in the fall newsletters.

Item#3...The BPG Corporate 2001 Financial Summary.....Doug Frame

Membership fees for the year 2001 and Chapter investment income totaled \$90,251. Expenses for the year were \$87,316 which represents a 21% increase over the year 2000. The major portion of this increase was due to greater corporate expenses including the need for two additional face-to-face meetings last fall to deal with the pension surplus issue. These meetings involved the PIC reps as well as the BPG Board.

Also, since the Board now meets twice a year in Montreal in order to schedule meetings with Bell pension and benefit personnel, some members have incurred air travel expenses. However, for the year we had an excess of revenue over expenses of \$2,935.

As of 31 December 2001, \$47,935 had been collected for 2002 membership fees which represent about half of the total projected for this year.

BPG's total assets at the end of 2001 were \$191,600 which is largely held by the Chapters as short term investments and cash to cover daily operating expenses. This is a very comfortable "cushion" held in reserve for unforeseen expenses; however it is our objective to keep total assets below the \$200,000 level. This is the primary reason for waiving the fees for the year 2003.

Individual Chapter Financial Reports were reviewed at their respective Annual Meetings along with the Auditor's Report. As well, each Chapter approved a motion to re-appoint BDO Dunwoody as the Auditor for the year 2002. On a minor note, the Ottawa office of BDO Dunwoody has advised us that as of 1 May 2002 they have joined the public accounting firm of Collins Barrow Canada. This change will not have any effect on our relationship with them going forward.

In summary, BPG's financial health continues to be very strong, thanks to the support of its members and the many volunteers who contribute significantly to the continuing success of our organization.

Item #4...The BPG Toronto Chapter 2001 Financial Summary...Gerry Moss

Our membership fees and investment income for the year 2001 totaled \$34,927, and expenses incurred by your Toronto team were \$21,292. We also transferred \$9,440 to the corporation for a total outlay of \$30,732. That represents expenses of 88 cents for every dollar of income.

Both income and expenses increased by 39% over the previous year, mainly due to a concentrated effort to increase membership, a program spearheaded by Russ Donaldson, with a great deal of logistical support provided by Sandra Vella.

As of mid June, we have liquid assets in the area of \$45,000, which represents about \$22 for each of our Toronto Chapter members. The vast majority of our members have paid their 2002 dues, and the bulk of this year's expenses are ahead of us. This, along with the **membership fee holiday for 2003** will allow us to significantly trim our excess assets.

Item#5.....Phonebusters.....OPP, Detective Staff Sergeant Barry Elliott

The OPP's Barry Elliott came very highly recommended as a speaker, and he certainly did live up to his advanced billing. Barry's presentation touched on a host of issues. We have attempted to summarize what we felt were the most important pieces of advice.

TIPS

The OPP and the RCMP are involved in a National Task Force known as [Project Phonebusters](#). It was established to combat telemarketing fraud. A few basic suggestions from **Project Phonebusters** should help ensure that you do not fall victim to the tactics of fraudulent telemarketers:

DO NOT believe that everyone calling with an exciting promotion or investment opportunity is trustworthy, especially if you do not know the caller or their company.

DO NOT invest or purchase a product or service without carefully checking out the investment, product, service, and the company.

DO NOT be afraid to request further documentation from the caller so you can verify the validity of the company.

DO NOT be fooled by the promise of a valuable prize in return for a low cost purchase.

DO NOT be pressured to send money to take advantage of a "special offer or deal."

DO NOT be hurried into sending money to claim a prize that is available for only a "few hours"

DO NOT disclose information about your finances, bank accounts or credit cards (not even the credit card expiry date).

DO NOT be afraid to hang-up the phone.

DO contact Project Phonebusters if you are contacted by someone who promises you great prizes, but you are required to send money in advance for shipping, handling, taxes, etc.

DO contact Project Phonebusters if you are contacted by someone who says that you have won a prize, but you have to purchase a product to qualify.

Please contact *Project Phonebusters* to lodge a complaint or request more information:

- Toll-free telephone: 1-888-495-8501
- Toll-free fax: 1-888-654-9426
- e-mail: info@phonebusters.com

- Website: www.phonebusters.com
- Mail: Box 686, North Bay ON P1B 8J8

Also contact the fraud departments of each of the two major credit bureaus.

- **Equifax:** (800) 465-7166 and
- **Trans Union:** (800) 663-9980 **except Quebec residents (877) 713-3393.** Request that a "Fraud Alert" be placed in your files. At the same time order copies of your credit reports.
- Contact the fraud department of creditors for any accounts that have been opened or tampered with fraudulently. This may include credit card companies, phone companies, banks and other lenders.
- File a report with your local Police or the Police in the community where the identity theft took place.
- Contact Phonebusters National Call Centre. Phonebusters is currently central sourcing all pertinent information on Identity Theft to identity trends and patterns; information is also used to assist law enforcement agencies in possible investigations.

Remember: There is no reason to be paranoid; there's just reason to be careful. If someone wants desperately to target you, they can probably get a lot of information about you -- so you just need to minimize the criminal's opportunities to get that information. You can make yourself a harder target and that's your best defense. If you are a victim, do not panic, you will not be out any money. The losses will be attributed to the banks and or companies associated with the fraud

Minimize Your Risk

While you probably can't prevent identity theft entirely, you can minimize your risk. Identity theft is on the rise and it can happen to anyone. It can happen to you. By managing your personal information wisely, cautiously and with an awareness of the issue, you can help guard against identity theft.

A new video has been launched called Stop Phone Fraud-IT'S A TRAP. It is available to the public for **free** by calling 1-888-495-8501. The video clearly describes how to recognize such a "trap" and should be viewed by all.

Item #6.....Comtech Credit Union

Recently we have been contacted by BPG members who were confused when trying to close a Comtech Credit Union Savings Account. As a result, we have invited Comtech to publish the following clarification.

If you are a **..pre 1997 Comtech member**, please review the following. If you have further questions please contact Comtech direct at: 1-800-209-7444.

Comtech's Life Insurance Coverage for Savings Accounts

Have you been a member of Comtech Credit Union for at least six years? If so, your estate may be eligible to receive up to \$3,000 in life insurance coverage on your savings account upon your death. The amount of noncontributory life insurance is dependent on several factors:

1. Life insurance coverage on savings accounts is provided only for deposits **made prior to January 1, 1997.**
2. Life insurance coverage on savings accounts is payable to a maximum of \$3000.

3. Life insurance is payable upon the death of the account holder.
4. Deposits carry life insurance at 100% coverage provided the funds were deposited **before the account holder's 60th birthday and maintained for the duration of their life**. For example: An account with a balance of \$2,500 would receive an additional \$2,500 (100%) in life insurance upon the death of the depositor, bringing the value of the account to \$5,000 if the original \$2,500 was on deposit prior to age 60 and not reduced through the account holders life.
5. Deposits made after age 60 and before age 65 are insured for 50% of their face value. For example: A \$1,000 deposit made at age 63 is valued at \$500 for insurance purposes as long as the \$1,000 balance was maintained.
6. Deposits made after age 65 and before age 70 are insured for 25% of their face value. For example: A \$1,000 deposit made at age 67 is valued at \$250 for insurance purposes as long as the \$1,000 balance was maintained.
7. Life insurance is not provided for deposits made after age 70.
8. **An administration fee of \$75 - \$150 will apply only on life insurance claims paid by Comtech, to cover the escalating cost of administration.**

NOTE: Life insurance coverage is applicable to **ALL** accounts, including spousal accounts and trust accounts for children.

Item #7.....Bell Canada's First Rate Calling Plan

On your May 2002 Bell Canada bill you may have noticed that there was a new charge of \$4.95 monthly associated with the First Rate Calling Plan. Further, you will notice that the employees/pensioners 35% dis has not been applied to the \$4.95. We have been advised that for reasons associated with a system billi (computer) problem, the 35% discount will not be applied until years end. **At that time it will be applied retroactively**. Please direct any further questions re this issue to Bell Canada's, Enterprise Services, (HR) at 391-0005. We continue to push Bell for a 35% discount on the \$1.25 "Network Charge" which appears on 2 of your monthly account, if you subscribe to one of Bell's LD plans, ie First Rate.

Item #8.....BPG Toronto & Area Chapter Membership Statistics

We are pleased to report that our chapter membership numbers continue to grow. As of June 28th, 2002 we have 2048 members in our chapter. Thank you to everyone who is helping us locate Bell Canada pensioners so that we can inform them of the advantages of being a BPG member. Please keep the leads coming. All we need is a name and address. We will make the contacts.

Item #9.....Need Manulife CME or Dental Forms?

If you have access to the Internet, go to the HR web site and print off whatever forms you require. This is an excellent site that contains important information on your retirement benefits.

<https://www.bellprotection.hroffice.com>

Type this URL exactly as shown. This is a secure site!

This link is also available on our BPG Corporate web site - www3.sympatico.ca/b.p.g/

From there click on The Toronto Chapter site and choose "Links". Select "Your Benefits" and the rest is self-explanatory.

For those who do not have access to the Internet, please call Manulife at 1-800-558-8909. They will mail you blank forms on request. You should also get a blank form when you receive your reimbursement cheque.

Item #10..... Disability Pensioners

A long-term employee and disability pensioner recently advised us that he had been notified by Bell that he did not qualify for the 35% employee/pensioner telephone account discount. Through the combined efforts of BPG and your PIC representatives, the matter was resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Apparently Bell made a clerical error and sent several disability pensioners a letter they never should have received. To our knowledge all the errors have been corrected with letters of apology from Bell.

Item #11.....CME Pays 90%....For PSA Tests

You will recall that we issued a reminder in our last newsletter regarding CME paying 90% of the cost of PSA, Prostate Tests for men. Since then we have been advised that the cost of a PSA Test has risen from \$20 to \$25. CME continues to pay 90% of the \$25.....or.....\$22.50. We are advised that they will accept bills dated as far back as 2001. Be sure to have the test annually and be sure to submit your bill to Manulife Financial for reimbursement.

Item #12.....We Would Like To Hear From You

We are having a meeting with Bell Canada on Friday September 27th, 2002. One of the subjects on our agenda is, "pensioner's problems while trying to contact Bell by telephone at 1-888-391-0005". Over the years Bell's Call Centre has gone through a number of changes. We would like to know your opinion. Is the service good or bad? You can email your thoughts to: russ.donaldson@sympatico.ca, or you can drop me a note at 131 Carroll Cres. Cobourg, ON, K9A 5K5. Thank you for your help.

Item #13.....Manulife Claims

This item will be of interest to Bell pensioner "**couples**" **who both worked at the Bell** and who both make dental & medical claims through Manulife, (CME). Manulife has made a recent software change in their computer system which has resulted in their loss of information related to Bell pensioner "couples". The net result of this problem has been dental & medical claims being returned with zero reimbursement. If you have experienced this problem please contact MANULIFE immediately at 1-800-558-8909.

This problem only affects Bell pensioner "couples" **who both worked at the Bell**.

Item #14.....Next Meeting

Thursday, October 24th. Our keynote speaker that day will be former Bell Canada VP, Carol Ann Cole. It should be quite a meeting and reunion! **Plan on being there!**

Item #15....Recognizing Our Volunteers

As Chair of The Toronto & Area Chapter of BPG, I have to tell you that the only way we get things done in our organization is because we have a legion of volunteers who are prepared to help every time we call upon them. In particular I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the following:

Dave Grieve.....Membership, WEB Site etc, etc coordinator

Gerry Moss.....Treasurer

Sandra Vella.....Mailing and meetings coordinator

Anne Barwell.....Secretary

Barb Wallace-Price.....Budgeting coordinator

Ken Harris.....Advertising coordinator

Dorothy Paudler.....Envelope preparation

Fred Kempster.....Committee member at large

Martin Murphy.....Committee member at large

Alex Robinson.....Committee member at large

Alice Gould.....Committee member at large

In addition, Carol Robbins has also agreed to join the committee effective July 1st.

Also, we would like to thank the many people who continue to volunteer to assist us to run our annual May & October meetings. We appreciate everyone's support and help very much!

Sincerely.....Russ Donaldson....Chairperson.

Item #16.....And Finally.....A Little Telephone Humour

There is no humour in the tragic events of September 11th, 2001. However, in view of the fact that this story involves a telephone, we thought it might bring a smile to your face.

The first divorce directly related to September 11th has been filed in New York City. It appears a gentleman with an office on the 103rd floor of The World Trade Centre spent the morning of Sept 11th at his girlfriend's apartment with his phone turned off. **He wasn't watching TV.** When he turned his phone back on at about 11AM, it rang immediately. It was his hysterical wife: "Are you okay? Where are you?" she asked. "What do you mean? I'm in my office, of course" he replied.

ATTENTION EMAIL USERS...WE ARE HAVING TECHNICAL PROBLEMS SENDING YOUR NEWSLETTERS VIA EMAIL . THAT IS WHY YOU ARE RECEIVING THIS NEWSLETTER THROUGH THE ROYAL MAIL.

FREE OFFER TO JOIN CARP

WHAT IS CARP?

CARP is Canada's Association for the fifty-plus, a national, non-profit organization working to improve and maintain the quality of life of all Canadians 50 plus. CARP takes important issues to all levels of government such as pension and health care concerns.

