

A Short History of OSSTF/FEESO ARM Over 25 Years

As the almost 4,000 members of Active Retired Members (ARM) of OSSTF/FEESO prepare to collectively celebrate 25 years of formal existence within our union this year, I have undertaken to research and prepare this summary both to offer a corporate history and to provide an understanding about the challenges and achievements of the early activists or 'pioneers' of ARM. I hope the result will inform and provide you with an overview of our collective roots, which will then see the current eleven ARM Chapters fill in the 'gaps' by their local leadership.

Early Ideas (1991-1995)

Originally, a "discussion paper" was written and presented by OSSTF/FEESO President **Malcolm Buchanan** (dated August 29, 1991) for the consideration of the Provincial Executive. It was the first attempt to "seriously consider a provincial structure along with local chapters...and representing all retired educational workers - in particular OSSTF retirees". The factual information included the STO executive structure, provision of a health plan (not OTIP), a regular 3x newsletter, fee structure (\$1.25/ \$1,000 of gross pension), organized lobbying priorities and strategies of governments (via OTF) of pension and other issues of relevance to retirees, support for travel/social events likely at the local level, and library services in the STO head office in Toronto accessible to members.

The discussion paper also raised some important questions such as the "feasibility" of such an organization, retirees' eligibility for AMPA representation, fee structure and start-up costs for the Federation and similar groups in other education unions (i.e. NYSUT/AFT). A recommendation ended with the establishment of "an in-house committee to study the feasibility of creating an OSSTF Retiree Organization with recommendations to the October 7-8, 1991 Fall Planning Meeting". The in-house committee met, as proposed, but the Provincial Executive had seemingly lost any interest in the concept, as other political and fiscal priorities had become of greater interest...the Bob Rae government was following an austerity agenda (incl. "Rae Days"). No further actions were taken on creating a retirees' group until 1995.

An Idea Gains Momentum (1995-1996)

A renewed interest in creating an OSSTF/FEESO retirees' group seemed to have gained new traction under the presidency of **Earl Manners** and new General Secretary, **Malcolm Buchanan**. Consequently, the PE invited a group of retirees to a meeting in late November 1995 "to discuss ways and means in which retired OSSTF members can be advocates of the Federation." A formal small work group would then be the result. Based on the new work group meeting discussions, the PE instructed this work group to then produce a report, with recommendations for the upcoming December meeting of Provincial Council on December 12, 1995.

Growing interest inside of OSSTF/FEESO grew significantly during 1996, leading to AMPA 1996 and Provincial Council adopting motions, which created a new membership category in the Constitution (**Active Retired Member**), created an annual membership fee of **\$50.00** and began discussions with the OTPP and OTIP for an offering of health plan options. The director of Protective Services (a.k.a. Chief Negotiator), **Jim Ross**, was also instrumental in supporting this initiative, with special interest in developing a benefits plan for retirees that would be able to compete with the existing STO/JOHNSON benefits plan offered to their larger subscriber group.

It is now important to identify and praise the early local activists in the founding of ARM, who included **Jim Austen, Bev Coon, Herb Connell, Lorne Creighton, Eileen Konkin, Debbie Leighton, John McNeil, Shirley Telegadas** and **Don Wright**. PE members included **Mike Walsh** (Chair of the ARM work group), **David Eaton** and Pension Officer, **Gerald Armstrong**. Approval of a name for the retirees' group, **Active Retired Member Organization (ARMO)**, occurred by late 1996, and concrete investigative work began related to recruitment of new members, development, marketing and management of an OTIP-based benefits plan with a 1997 roll-out, and the creation of a membership card were ongoing issues for the work group.

Constitutional governance of **ARMO** within OSSTF/FEESO would be following a council model comparable to the then OSSPC, so reporting and making recommendations directly to the PE (incl. the formation of new local chapters) and **no representation** at PC. Any assistance for operation would be offered from existing internal groups such as P and B, PAC and the Treasurer/Finance Committee. In addition, once the new Council was operational, it was proposed that it have an inaugural AGM funded through ARMO fees, and that the composition of the Council be **five members** (initially appointed by the PE) and formal liaisons from the PE, Secretariat and PC.

An ARM Structure is Operational (1997-1999)

The ARMO work group crafted and submitted resolutions to AMPA 1997 to approve an interim structure, while also beginning an ambitious recruitment campaign for new members in areas where there was already a small group of activists. By 1997, there was already a list of some 50 "activist volunteers" spread across the GTA, Hamilton and urbanized centres in Eastern and Southwestern Ontario. Consequently, by March 1997, the first ARM newsletter was published to announce the formal launch of, and the announcement of, a new OTIP **Insured Benefits Plan** with these "highlights": guaranteed rates for three years, lower premiums than the competition by at least 10%, and payment of prescription drugs and fees over a deduction of \$25.00 annually.

Due to the ravages of the Harris agenda by the government's mid-term, this also motivated politically experienced retirees to propose what the "political" role of ARMO should be. It was quite clear that a goal was to show support for the plans and strategies by the PE/External Policy Department and PAC groups both at Provincial Office and locally.

The unexpected enactment of the amalgamation of many municipalities and school boards by Harris in 1999 through legislation also resulted in OSSTF/FEESO Districts being re-structured – just as new ARM Chapters were created in Toronto, Hamilton, London, Windsor-Essex and elsewhere.

AMPA 1999 then formally approved the creation of **ARM Council** and a revenue stream based on an annual membership fee of \$50.00, which has not changed to this day.

ARM Expansion and Integration (2000-Present)

Since 2000, ARM Council has developed a more sophisticated structure and greater respected image within OSSTF/FEESO, other retirees' advocacy organizations (CURC, OFUR, CARP, etc.) and the labour movement, as OSSTF/FEESO has affiliated itself with both the CLC (1996) and the OFL (2002) and most recently with the well-organized, activist group, Ontario Health Coalition (OHC).

Today, the eleven local ARM Chapters have also often decided to make such affiliations with their respective labour councils, local CURC/OFUR organizations and OHC Chapters. At the same time, political activism has also increased over the past two decades, both at the municipal and provincial levels. Clearly, the experience and activism of many ARM members has been sought after and utilized by Provincial OSSTF/FEESO and local Districts/BUs in all regular pre-election preparedness, partisan campaigns and organized lobbying activities going back to the “Days of Action” in the mid to late 1990’s.

The governance of ARM continues through its own constitutional structure both at the provincial level (ARM Council/Biennial Conference) and in local Chapters, which represent some 3000 retirees in these active Chapters and another 800 members elsewhere. Finally, the creation of a more user-friendly ARM Council webpage (www.armcouncil.osstf.ca) in 2020-2021, combined with greater non-voting ‘representation’ at AMPA and PC, and outstanding regular local online newsletters and events during the current pandemic will surely keep current and future ARM members informed and engaged in the years ahead.

Credits and a Thank You

At this time, I want to thank a few people who made this researched investigation possible. Firstly, to my own Chapter 12 member and mentor, **Don Wright**, for his archival materials and personal experiences. These items provided me with invaluable information and content in preparing this article. As one of the so-called “founders” of ARM in the mid-1990’s, he and a small group of like-minded political activists and retirees supported the Provincial Executive and staff and those local leaders mentioned earlier. The common objective was to see an organized ‘retirees group’ gain legitimacy and become an *alternative* to the only existing organization devoted to retired educators (STO) exclusively since the late 1960’s. Welcome, Don, as an invited guest to the 2021 ARM Council Biennial today.

Many thanks also to former OSSTF/FEESO Information Coordinator, **Scott Burgess**, for directing me to a centenary-inspired document, *A Timeline History of OSSTF/FEESO, 2018*, which he co-authored with fellow OSSTF/FEESO Librarian, **Mary Lu Brennan**, who is currently a Chapter 12 member. Lastly, my appreciation to long-time OTIP representative, **Robin MacDonald**, for some insights into the early efforts to create a very competitive OTIP/RAEO-run ARM benefits plan.

Please find any additional information from your local ARM Chapter elsewhere in your Biennial Information package to complete the quarter century history of OSSTF/FEESO ARM.

In Federation,

Manfred Netzel. President
ARM Chapter 12 (Toronto)

May, 2021

Founding Presidents of the ARM Chapters

Chapter 3 Rainbow	Lee Ferguson	2016
Chapter 9 Greater Essex	Scott Hunt	1998
Chapter 11 Thames Valley	Peter Chapman	1998
Chapter 12 Toronto	Ian Cameron	1998
Chapter 13/16 Durham/York	Colleen Ireland	2017
Chapter 17 Simcoe	Joe Kelly	2002
Chapter 18/21 Upper Grand /Hamilton-Wentworth	Gerry Price	1998
Chapter 22 Niagara	Frieda Smyth	1998
Chapter 24 Waterloo	Richard Clausi	2016
Chapter 25 Limestone/Ottawa-Carleton /Renfrew/Upper Canada	Terry Taller	1998
Chapter 29 Hastings-Prince Edward	John Zikopoulos	1998

Provincial ARM Council 2008

Standing from left: John Zikopoulos, Chapter 29, Frieda Smyth, Chapter 22, John Jansen, PC Liaison, Scott Hunt, Chapter 9, Peter Chapman, Chapter 11, Ian Cameron, Chapter 12.

Seated from left: VP Chester Faulkner, Chapter 21, Chair Joe Kelly, Chapter 17, Terry Taller, Chapter 25.

Absent: Ruth Kirkham, Secretariat Liaison, Sandi Sahli, PE Liaison



Bob Beames Provincial Newsletter Award, 2008

OSSTF/FEESO Vice President, Paul Elliot and Provincial ARM Chair, Joe Kelly, present John Zikopoulos the Bob Beames Provincial Newsletter Award, 2008. John accepted the award on behalf of ARM District 29 and Bob 'Old Dog' Cottrell, editor of "ARM-y Times".



ARM Council Chairpersons 1998-2021

Donald Wright	01-Jul-00 to 30-Jun-02
Terry Taller	01-Jul-02 to 30-Jun-04
Betty Ann Bushell	01-Jul-04 to 30-Jun-08
Joseph Kelly	01-Jul-08 to 31-Aug-12
Chester Faulkner	01-Sep-12 to 30-Jun-14
Ray Marshall	01-Jul-14 to 30-Jun-18
Dina van den Hanenberg	01-Jul-18 to 30-June-21