

Leo Derkach/Gary Iskiw

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CSU 52 Office

Interviewer: Winston Gereluk

Camera: Ron Patterson

LD: I'm from Edmonton. My dad was a butcher. I went to high school in Saskatchewan at St. Joseph's College in Yorkton. Graduated and came to Edmonton and attended NAIT taking civil engineering technology. I graduated in 1971. I had worked with the government for one year, and after that decided I'd had enough of traveling. So I applied for a job with the city. I've been there ever since, basically with water and sanitation, which changed its name to environmental services, which changed its name to sanitation department. Now we're called management of public works and services.

GI: I was born in a small town, Myrnam, Alberta. It was a community of about 500 at that time. We lived on a farm just north of town. It started with my grandfather, who came from Ukraine in the early 1900s. At that time he went as far as Winnipeg by train and from there he had to get his way all the way to Myrnam. I don't know if it was walking or how he got here, but he got a homestead and it all started from that farm. Right now, currently, I have a trunk that my grandfather came with to Canada. The names of the major cities that he went through are burnt into that trunk. I still have that trunk. It's part of something that we kept.

From when I graduated from high school in Myrnam in 1967. I went over to NAIT and I wanted to get into architecture. But the closest university for architecture was in Winnipeg. It was one of the better ones in Canada at that time. So the closest thing to it was a two-year course at NAIT. After I graduated in '67 I went to NAIT for two years, graduated. The first job I had offered to me was working for a pre-cast company here in Edmonton. After they tried to get me to leave school a few months earlier and I said there was no way. So I graduated towards the end of June and started within days working as a draftsman for Conforce Limited. It was a pre-cast company.

The first job I worked at was the finishing of AGT Towers. That was the pre-cast panels the company was providing. My first job I started on was the girders on the James MacDonald Bridge, which the company was supplying for the city. That was interesting because that was a big project at that time. Once I drew up these girders they were installing them so they decided to take me out as a fieldtrip out there to inspect these girders. These girders were about six feet wide over the river. Being young in the company, the guys tried to get me a little bit nervous in walking this girder over the river. Six feet is twice as wide as a sidewalk, but yet walking on top you see the water down below and you're up high, it was quite an experience. I remember one of the guys laughing and saying, well don't worry Gary, if there's anything wrong and you fall over, there's a boat there to pick you up. So that was one of the experiences.

The next job that was starting there was the Coliseum, which they were talking about with the city. So at that time a lot of companies were putting in bids for this Coliseum. The one that we were involved with through Conforce was where it was supposed to carry all the supports in one building and a covered roof. The company spent a lot of time working on this for a proposal for the bid. Then it went as a plebiscite to the city of Edmonton and the people turned it down. During that time, this was around '71 or '72, it was a tough time with the city. There were layoffs during that time, the economy wasn't exactly on the boom yet. Right after that we didn't have that much work in the company so I got laid off. I was laid off for a few months and trying to find work for myself. Eventually I got work with a company called Muttarts, designing homes for them. That was quite interesting because I started off where I got to design homes privately as a side job for some extra cash.

Q: Tell me a bit more about Muttarts.

GI: The building that we were at was just a block north of Jasper Avenue. It would be about 84th Street, someplace around there. It was an older building. They designed prefab homes. It was framed walls that were prefabbed and then you got the shipment as a package and put the houses together. My big thing was designing a brochure for them with different types of houses so they had something to use as a sales package for the sales people. That was one of the big things. From there I got involved in doing work on my own besides.

Q: How did that company link to the Pyramids?

GI: The owners of the company were Mr. and Mrs. Muttart, who at that time I didn't really meet. But the person who ran the company was Mr. Mildon. That was the son-in-law. At that time they donated a lot of money, and one of the major donations was the creation of the Muttart Conservatory down in the river valley. That was one of the big items that I recall during my time with Muttarts.

Q: Leo, I want you to describe your boyhood.

LD: I grew up in Edmonton in the Norwood district, close to the union office. I attended elementary school there. My dad wasn't in a union. However, they did help him in one case. I think Alberta Federation of Labor helped him on one of his appeals, or I can't remember. But they did help him because he was in a non-union environment. I thought there was no way I would ever consider working for a company that didn't have a union, that didn't support the workers, because I'd seen the struggle that he went through without a union. I don't know his name, but he was representing Swifts. Yes, Harry Kostiuk, that's the one. But my dad didn't work for Swifts, he worked for a small meatpacker. I attended elementary school in Edmonton and for high school I went to a Ukrainian Catholic college in Saskatchewan for four years.

Q: What do you remember about your boyhood?

GI: What I recall, I didn't know even that it had an impact later on in life, but what I remember is at that time when I grew up we didn't have a lot of money. Everybody in the community around us was at the same level financially. People had approximately three quarters of land, everybody did mixed farming. I remember going to town and the big thing during that time was Saturday on the weekends. That's when everybody came to town to buy their groceries and spend time with their families. I remember going in and my parents would give me 25 cents and say, here, go to the show. After the show I'd meet them and they'd have their groceries bought and we'd go to the café. They'd give me a nickel or 10 cents and say, "Gary, that's all we can give you. You can have a pop and a bag of chips or a pop and a chocolate bar." That's the way it went.

When I was five years old my mom's parents were living on the farm and they decided to move to town. At that time they were buying a lot, but they moved over and lived with my parents and us in our house. At that point they just spoke Ukrainian. That's how I learned. I spoke Ukrainian at home. First day going to school for grade 1, there was about two classes of kids that year. They were trying to thin it down so they could have reasonable sized classes. The superintendent at the school was asking me questions, it was raining outside, what it was doing outside. I didn't understand him in English. At the end he told my parents, maybe what you should do is take him home this year and spend some time teaching him some English, and bring him back to start grade 1 next year. So I started my schooling at seven years old. As I grew up on the farm, things weren't always the best. I remember horses when they started off. Eventually, dad had a tractor but still a lot of stuff was done by horses.

One of the things that got me thinking about unions and things like that is at the time, the farmers were trying to organize during those years to try to get the prices stabilized for grain at the farms. I remember the farmers getting together and trying to form an association to get the prices of grain up and things like that. Within the community there was some farmers that believed in it and some didn't. There was a bit of squabbling within the community, because some people, they have to sell grain and they were trying to hold out, and some people couldn't afford it. It was difficult times during that time. So that was a taste of unionism and what it could do, and the politics of it, from my childhood. But really it had no relative thing on my mind at that time. From there I joined the 4-H and from there they sent me to youth camps for youth training. One of the first ones I went to was at Bulls Eye Camp in the mountains north of Kananaskis on the Thompson Highway. There used to be about 200 kids at one time, and that was for leadership programs. At that time I was sponsored by the UFA to go out to this leadership camp, and through the 4-H club too of the community. It was kind of interesting. They were indirectly trying to get people to be leaders. It was something I found a lot of interest in. From that they would pick out certain people from there and call them back from year to year. I was one of the lucky ones that they kept asking to come back to these leadership camps.

I did that until I went to NAIT. Back to when I worked for Muttarts, and then at that point, I got laid off and tried to get back into the working area. I decided to apply with the City. That was in 1975. The way it started there was it was a situation about trying to

negotiate for money with Muttarts, and I felt I wasn't getting enough. I thought I'd try something else. So I joined the City. I got called in for an interview and they said there was an interview with drainage at that time. The closing date was that day. So I went in for this interview on a Friday. The interviewer was a person by the name of Donnas who was the person interviewing me from the City. He asked me how he could get in touch with me. I said that I was going out to the farm that weekend, so I gave him the number.

Q: Leo, you said you went to work for the City. You went into the Water and Sanitation department. Describe what the department looked like in those years.

LD: When I went to work for water and sanitation in 1971, the department consisted of the water section, the drainage section and the sewer construction section. That has changed a few times. Now the department has lost both the water treatment plant, the Epcor plant, and who knows what else.

Q: What was it like working there?

LD: The job I started at was in the customer services office on the counter, taking applications for sewer and water for residential, commercial, industrial services. In those days I was the youngest person there, the rest of them were all well seasoned employees. Some were ready to retire and I was the young kid on the block. I had told them that I think we deserve to get more pay. They were all excited to hear this. They said, how do we go about doing this? I said, well we'll go for a re-class. We tried that. HR sent over a person to interview us. Oh no, it didn't require us to be reclassified. So I still kept insisting and telling the older employees, I think you guys ought to be paid more than what you're getting now. We told the general manager this and he agreed with us and brought the fellow back and of course we did get reclassified. The employees were happier, everybody got reclassified. Even the boss, even though he was in management, he got reclassified and he had something to gain also. So it worked for everybody.

Q: What was the value of the service you provided at that time?

LD: When I started the City was just developing, Mill Woods was just opening up, Castle Downs was just opening up. We had to work a lot of overtime just to keep up with the contractors. Some of the older people didn't want to work overtime so it kind of fell on our shoulders to make up for them. Some nights we worked until 10 o'clock, 11 o'clock, just to keep up with the contractors doing these improvements to service all these residential lots, because there was a big boom going on.

GI: I joined the City at that time and got hired on February 17, 1975. I was hired in the drafting department. Like Leo was mentioning earlier, it was a boom. Mill Woods was one of the areas where the city was trying to set up a self-serving community for people that couldn't afford houses but yet were able to get houses. The city started off a program in Mill Woods for people who had a tough time to qualify. That's how Mill Woods started growing in that area. I remember doing the drafting. When I started off it was kind of interesting, because I started off with the CN Towers on my first day.

Within a short period of time the union called some sort of study to break away and go in front of City Hall. I didn't really understand, I'd just got to work. I didn't really understand unions and that was the first time I was on their union working for the city. I followed everybody else and stood in front of City Hall. That was an experience in itself. I remember coming that same year, three months later we got moved from CN Tower to Century Place, which was just a new building that they were moving a lot of city departments into. From there we go to City Hall. I remember there was a big difference for me. I was making around \$700 gross at that time, and we got a 13% increase, which was quite a substantial increase for me. All of a sudden it became, hey union is doing something for me.

Q: What do you remember about that staff incident?

LD: It was a work study, I believe. It happened on a Friday of a long weekend. When we came back to work on the Monday the city didn't want to pay us for the long weekend. The union stepped in and somehow we did get paid for that day. It was only a couple of hours but they tried to make a big issue out of that. I can't remember why we did that, but it was something to do with negotiations or something. I remember old Steve Greschuk was running up and down the halls trying to recruit everybody to come out to support this rally in front of City Hall on a Friday afternoon. Steve Greschuk used to be our shop steward. He did everything else but draft. He was in charge of making coffee, he was in charge of taking everybody's paycheques to the bank on payday Tuesday and bringing back the cash. He was quite the operator.

GI: I remember him because he was our shop steward at the time. Steve was very involved with the union at that time. The business agent was Alex Sczechina during that time. I remember Steve lived in the Boyle Street community. Through Steve they were trying to do things for the Boyle Street and he was organizing to build a hall that they have right now at Boyle Street, and things like that. Steve got me interested.

About 1976, a year after I started working, the next thing that came up was a strike. That was again something new for me. Just being a member of an organization, this was all new stuff for me. The next thing I was told, and Steve organized, was for us to walk the picket lines. I remember my picket line where we had to walk was what we called the Westin Yards, which is now Coronation Yards. I remember there was about four of us from the same section that walked together on this picket line. In fact, I remember it had to be sometime around November, because at that time I had a truck and camper so I brought it to the picket line and we took turns sitting in the truck and camper to keep warm, and then go out and walk. It was a very interesting strike because the City offered us, if I recall right, around 9%. We were out for about 10 days. The strike was over and I think we got a little over 10% as an increase. As soon as that happened people were happy, we got an extra 1%. The next thing we know, Trudeau was in power at that time, and he created a Canada wage and price control, and everything came down to 8%. So in reality the strike, we ended up getting only 8% for all that experience that we had as a union. So that was interesting times.

Q: What do you remember about that strike?

LD: I remember we kind of got conned into going on strike. It was before a long weekend, in fact it was the Thanksgiving long weekend. We went on a Thursday. Our business manager didn't expect it to go more than one day. We went on strike for 1.5%. The City offered us 9% or whatever it was. We walked the picket line for 10 days. That's when they were building Commonwealth Stadium. Some picketed in front of Commonwealth Stadium, others picketed various city buildings, Century Place, City Hall, and so on. The City bowed to our wishes and demands. We got what we wanted and the next thing you know we were rolled back because of wage and price controls. To me it was kind of a useless strike. The fellow that organized it was Fred Pyke, but we called him Strike Pyke because of the incident. We thought that surely he would know better what the conditions are. It was a time we shouldn't have been on strike but we were.

Q: What do you remember about those years of wage and price controls in the late '70s?

GI: I was a year into it with the City at that time. We all depended on Steve. Steve was our leader in our area. He convinced me to take a group of people and become a shop steward. Sometime around 1977, I became a shop steward in water and sanitation. At that time I looked after the people in the drafting department. Steve was there also, and he helped me along. I know that we broke away from CUPE. Once we broke away, Steve asked me if I would be interested, because we were starting a new part. We used to belong to the association for charitable donations. I don't know the exact details of why we broke away at that time, but it was something to do with we wanted some help for a member and within the association we couldn't get the money. Lloyd Egan, who at that time was president but only half time in the office and Alwitz was still the manager of the office. The big thing was we were going to form this committee, which would also help our members. They asked me to help organize and start off this committee. There were about five or six of us members that were put onto this committee. I was one of the original members to sign the first agreement for our charitable assistance program, which was donations. After the whole thing was over, 60% of our money that came in from our membership went to help the community in different charitable organizations, and 40% stayed within the membership to help needy members. Also it was set up for bursaries, which was help for members' children going to post secondary school. In fact, I think the first setup was a 70/30 split and then it was changed a few years later to a 60/40 split.

Q: Leo, what do you remember about the breakaway?

LD: When our executive would go to CUPE national conventions they would always ask for the books to be opened so they could see if all the unions across Canada were paying the same per capita. Every time they asked it was denied. Rumors were out there that the bigger unions down east were paying a lot less per capita than the west was paying. Also because of what happened during the strike, that we asked for money for the strike and CUPE national said they'd give us a loan. After paying \$250,000 a year in those days, we considered that quite a bit of money, so it was like a slap in the face. We thought that at

least they could give us the money. A few of these incidents happened and we decided that we were self sufficient, we had our own business agent. The only thing that would happen was once a month a CUPE rep would come to our general meeting and give a five minute presentation and he was gone, you didn't see him for the rest of the month. We had our own business agent and we looked after our members ourselves, so we decided that we don't have to pay this \$250,000.

Q: Were you at the meeting where that decision was made?

LD: I believe I was. They came into this office and tried to seize the books. At the time there were only a couple of people in the office. Somebody came to our assistance because we had a bunch of other unions in this building. The letter carriers were here; we had the hospital workers, the firefighters union. There was a struggle that broke out with Verne Bartee and some other CUPE rep. They never did get the books. We've been on our own ever since. I don't know what the per capita would be these days, but we've certainly supported ourselves. We haven't asked for any money from anybody, and we're self sufficient. We have our own business agents and our own legal counsel on staff.

Q: What do you remember about Lloyd Egan and Alex Sczechina?

GI: I was just getting involved with the union at that time. Lloyd was our president half time in the office. A very easygoing individual, very easy to talk to, always seemed to be willing to help you. That was my recollection of Lloyd when I started off. Alex was a little different. He was the go-getter, he was the one who wanted to create a name. I think both working together the way it started off, it was the beginning of our union separated from CUPE. You needed both of those personalities to make it work, and that's the key of those two individuals for our union.

LD: At the time that we broke away, I don't think Alex was here yet. He was a very good speaker, he could get your attention. But when it came to negotiations, things seemed to dwindle. They kind of broke down every time because of the fact that he always thought that in negotiations he should have the head of labor relations at the meeting. That's not the way the City operates. They'd always send a junior and he didn't want to talk to a junior. Negotiations would break off and you wouldn't have anything until the union called back and asked to start negotiating again. Negotiations were always tough when Alec was around. Then one year Alec decided to go on holidays in July. When the City found out that he was on holidays, they phoned Lloyd up and asked if we wanted to start negotiating. By the time Sczechina came back from holidays, we had a contract. That was in 1980, and it was downhill from there.

GI: For me that was the beginning of my interest. The way it started off for me was when I started with the City in 1975 in February, I went on three months probation, like everyone else. Then after the three months I was hired on permanent. This was around June or so. Then around October my supervisor came to me and said, Gary, you were supposed to have a medical, you never had a medical when you joined the City. So I took a medical and during that medical it came back and they said, you're overweight. At that

time I was about 240 lbs. They said I was overweight and because of that they couldn't give me life insurance through the City. It was a big thing.

We got married, we were thinking of a family, that was important to me. That was one of the reasons why I wanted to join the City, for a bit more stability. In order to stay with the City I wrote away the life insurance back to the City. That's the only way they kept me on, otherwise they'd have to let me go. Once I started with the union, and this really got my interest, I got involved and one of the business agents with the union, Gary Ahlstrom, found out about this thing. We were chatting one time at one of our meetings. He says, Gary, this is not right. There's human rights and they can't do something like that to you. So he says, I'll look into this. So he went in to bat for me and eventually I get called by HR and told, no, we're going to give you the full life insurance back again, and they reinstated me with my life insurance. So that kind of got me really interested in what the union was doing. We had our meetings at City Hall every first Tuesday of the month, at City Hall upstairs. It was kind of interesting because we used to have quite a few members show up and fill the place.

One of the key people there was Steve Sumka Sr. He was really involved with our union also at the time. He eventually got me interested to run as an assistant chief shop steward. I did and I became an assistant chief shop steward in 1978. As assistant chief shop steward, that position was part of the executive board, but without full vote. I could speak but I couldn't vote on any decisions. So I did that and then a year later became the chief shop steward and really started getting involved in union business. During those times negotiations and everything was done with the executives and the business agents. Also what was interesting is I look back now in the last little while, at the increases. I started in 1975. Between 1975 and 1985 my personal increase was 90% in wages during those first 10 years. From 1985 to 1995 it was 31% of an increase. From 1995 to 2005 it comes just over 19% of an increase. It just shows you what was happening within the City and the unions in Alberta at that time.

LD: The year I started with the City in 1971, I was asking the shop steward questions. He didn't seem to have the answers, in fact he didn't even go to the meetings. So one day he said, do you want to take over? I said, sure, I wouldn't mind. So that's when I started attending the general meetings and became a shop steward. I've been involved ever since. From a shop steward I became a trustee in about 1977, then the chief trustee. Then I was nominated and elected the treasurer of the union and I've been the treasurer ever since, about 12 years or more.

Q: What does a trustee do in a union?

LD: The trustee, on a monthly basis they check the expenses of the union. They go through all the cheques and balance as required on a monthly basis. They're involved in the audit and set the per diems.

Q: Talk about the breakaway from the Charitable Assistance Fund.

LD: In 1979, one of our member's daughters required a bone marrow transplant. We only had one voice on the Edmonton Civic Employees Charitable Assistance Plan. We went there. The bone marrow transplant was supposed to be done in Seattle, Washington. We presented our case for our member. At the time every union had just one voice. We were turned down. We found that unusual. Here we are trying to help a family in need, one of our members, and they can't get a bone marrow transplant. So we decided that we'd had enough of this one voice. We were the biggest union in the Charitable Assistance Fund. There were other unions in there, some only having 50 employees, and here we are with thousands of employees. We decided that we were going to break away and form our own charitable assistance fund. In 1980 we did that and we've been on our own ever since. The committee now meets every month, the fourth Wednesday afternoon of every month. We help out charities, we help out our members in need, our members that have children going to post-secondary education. We fund up to \$1800 for the first year for a bursary. That's basically our fund, and there's seven members that sit on this committee.

Q: What determines what outside charities you're going to help?

LD: The charities that apply to us, we help most charities that don't get any help from United Way. United Way is a big fundraiser and there's a lot of charities that can't get any help from United Way. They help the big charities but not the small ones. We basically help the small ones.

GI: What we learned was, we used to support United Way originally. Then what we found out was a few charities that we were supporting, the smaller ones, came to us and started telling us that when we give them money, if they were part of United Way, United Way would subtract that portion that we gave them as the money that they give to these organizations. At that point we decided, a lot of these smaller ones, they don't have campaigns to organize, they're too small for that. The bigger charities have larger manpower and they could get their own money from there. So we stayed with the major ones, like heart, cancer, we were always big contributors to the major ones. But we also tried to help the smaller community ones. When we found out that United Way was kind of not giving them the full amount that they were supposed to because we were giving some on the side, we decided that what we would do is hold the money from United Way and break that money down that we're giving United Way to all these little ones, and give them more. That's one of the big decisions that we switched over. Most of ours is we try to do the local community charities, other than the major charities.

Q: Just mention the name of a few.

GI: Of the big ones, the heart, diabetes, Cross Cancer. The smaller ones food bank, meals on wheels, I don't have the list now. Sonja Wisjini was the chair of that committee for many years. There is a major list that we have of all of them. Leo is still a current member of that committee. I got away from the committee later '80s and got involved in different areas in the union and never got back onto the committee. But I solely support that committee's work and all the good it's doing for our members.

Q: In the '80s the assault began on the public sector. Talk about some of the challenges and losses of the '80s.

GI: I have a list of the increases that we got from the year I joined the City all the way up to the present. I know that in the early to mid '80s we hit about three zeros in a row, for increases. That was hard times. But in reality, our union was fortunate enough that we didn't get too many layoffs in the area, because we were always able to somehow work with the City and have these people placed in different areas. One of the biggest things for us was when TELUS broke away, Ed Tel, because that was a major part of our union. I don't have the years, in the '90s already. But our union in the early days, Ed Tel, there was a lot of members. A lot of our union was based on the strength of Ed Tel, our executive from there. Later on when Ed Tel left it created a bit of a void for us. But it was one of the things that our union learned from its experience of losing those members. There were companies that tried to raid us after that, but we learned from that experience and were able to stay afloat. But they were difficult times.

LD: There was a perennial item with ATU. They had Sandy Stewart, and Sandy Stewart always thought that a lot of the members in ATU or a lot of the members working in transit should've been ATU members and not 52. We have the clerical staff and all that. He was forever convincing the executive of ATU that they belonged to them and not to 52. We were constantly being raided. We had to always go to court in order to defend our members from going to ATU. When we had our members in Ed Tel and the sale of Ed Tel, the campaign, I'm sure you were involved in that campaign and know all about the lies that were coming out that Ed Tel was not on the information highway. When our members did go over to TELUS we found that it was the other way around, that Ed Tel was far ahead of everybody else and TELUS was not on the information highway. That's what got Ed Tel sold to TELUS, sorry, AGT and then TELUS. What happened after that was TELUS decided to go for the same employer status. They called for a vote and 52 was not the biggest union. The biggest union was TWU, the telephone workers union out of B.C. They won the vote so therefore all our members were given up. First it was IBW then it was to TWU. TWU was the common employer.

GI: We joined forces with TWU because it was IBEW that was trying to take all the membership away. We united with TWU and formed a coalition. They seemed to be very reasonable with us in trying to look after our members. We knew because of us being small we don't have the national backup and chances were we weren't going to be able to hold onto them. So TWU, we worked with them and they seemed to be a very good fit with us. So we backed them with them taking over our members and that seemed to work the best for us. TWU eventually got all of TELUS members under themselves.

Q: Around this time we had the emergence of the coalition. Describe the coalition.

GI: Our president, Marion Leskiw, was the key to getting that united as a coalition. I left the union in '89 because we had a bit of turmoil within the union and changes in leadership. I had a family growing up and they were of age where I had to spend more time there, so I decided to leave the union. I came back, Marion Leskiw was the president

already. He got back to me and convinced me to get back as the vice president of the union in 1995. At that time Marion had this coalition going and I remember him talking to me about it. It was to negotiate properly. At that time the City had a situation where they were using the unions against each other, trying to fight for the membership, trying to get certain groups of membership. What happened is Marion, negotiations weren't easy at that time, so Marion tried to form this coalition within all the local Edmonton unions to get together to have a bit more strength in negotiating rights for our members and for the members of other unions. He would probably be the individual who could give you the most background.

Q: Which unions were involved?

LD: The unions involved in the coalition were CUPE local 30, ATU, the Firefighters Union, the ambulance, and local 52. It seemed that ambulance weren't sure if they should belong or not, and they were teetering. They weren't very cooperative with regards to issues that were happening. They weren't listening to us. When they negotiated they negotiated on their own, they didn't want to tell us what they were negotiating. It wasn't a good fit so they came back once and broke away again. They had their own agenda so we didn't bother getting them back. But the coalition is very strong. One of the reasons that we did form this coalition is because of the fact that because of constant raidings, our legal fees used to be around \$350,000 a year. Now we have our own legal council and they're probably down to a third of that. Because of the cooperation we're getting, we can iron these things out without lawyers getting involved. If we see that some of these are not in the right union, we will help them and put them wherever they should belong.

Q: What other services besides Ed Tel were lost?

GI: Ed Tel would be the first major one where we lost a good 20% or a quarter of our membership. It was quite a big chunk of our main membership. EPCOR was formed from Ed Tel, and that's kind of like a semi-private company.

Q: Did you lose members there?

LD: They're still our members, however, they're under like a semi-private company, owned by the City of Edmonton. They have their own separate agreement.

GI: The members are still there but we have now separate negotiations for that group of members. We didn't lose any members in that area but it was the first step of going towards privatization of services within the city.

LD: Another one we lost was the water department. We didn't even know anything about it, it just came up in council and all of a sudden there was a vote and we were caught short. We didn't even know that vote was happening, so we were unable to do any lobbying in that case.

Q: What happened to the water department?

LD: The water department was taken over by EPCOR. EPCOR was growing and they requested that the water department be under their company. Also the manager of the water department was in favor of this, because of course he got a big bonus. He has since retired.

GI: Going back to the coalition, one of the bigger items that the coalition took part in was the Shaw Conference problem. UFCW was trying to organize the workers there. Certain unions in the city felt that they were part of the city so we should be trying to help those workers. The food workers union were fairly big and they're the ones who took it upon themselves to go ahead and represent those workers, and the coalition at that time took a big part in helping the food workers union. As a result, the food workers union joined the coalition as a member, or just a portion of those that belonged now to Shaw Conference, as part of our coalition. They still are, except they don't sit at the table, but they are there and they do support the coalition as a whole.

Q: How has EPCOR been operating since they took over the utilities?

LD: EPCOR has a rep on our executive, however, they negotiate at different times. EPCOR, since they took over the water operations, have tried to get the drainage department as a whole. I don't know what year that was, probably four years ago. They tried, however, the coalition was very active and managed to quash that request. However, in 2008 it was brought back that EPCOR wanted to buy a waste water treatment plant. The coalition was successful in getting a stay in the hearing at the October 20th council meeting, and the hearing was postponed until January 20th for a hearing and a vote. At that time, Gold Bar was lost with a 7-6 vote. Now they have to do all the required paperwork for the transfer to be effective April 1st of 2009.

Q: Why did people vote to get rid of our waste water plant under that company?

LD: They offered the city \$75 million over 10 years, which is I don't think makes sense. Their reasoning is they want to grow throughout Canada and the United States on the backs of taxpayers, of these different counties and municipalities.

GI: Right now, like Leo has mentioned, our members are also part of EPCOR. As an employer, we have no problem with EPCOR as being a good employer to our members. The only thing is, the union's stance is we'd like to see services kept within the city of Edmonton's control. That's the big thing where our union backs or tries to work within this community of Edmonton in trying to have utilities still part of the city of Edmonton and under the city of Edmonton control. EPCOR is a large growing organization. They see certain parts that could help them become bigger. When you look at it, they already have water and power. To add to what they could become and what they could provide, all other areas across Alberta and even through Canada and North America, if they could contain some utilities like drainage and stuff, that just becomes something that they could provide other municipalities and say, we could do it all as one thing. From their viewpoint it's a very logical and profitable way of doing things.

Q: Is EPCOR a totally city-run organization, or not?

GI: They provide money to the City of Edmonton as a corporation, but they're run by an executive board that makes decisions. Those decisions are made by the executive. I don't think we even have a counselor who sits on that board. Decision-making within that corporation is totally independent of the City of Edmonton. But as dividends, yes they do provide money back to the City of Edmonton in dividend payments to the City, but when it comes to reality, the City says that they are part of the City, but decision-making wise, my feeling is no it's not. They're independent and they make independent decisions.

LD: I agree with Gary, that's exactly what it is. The counselors don't have a clue what's happening in EPCOR, even though the City owns it. They report to them in closed door meetings twice a year or something like that. The counselors have nothing to say about what's going on there.

Q: Is there any fear that they plan to privatize?

LD: It was understood at the hearing in January of this year that if they ever did intend to sell, they'd have to come to council.

Q: Have they tried to privatize?

LD: Marion knows all the details on that. I don't know the whole story about it. It was 1999 that it was one vote away from selling EPCOR. I think it was Larry Langley that Marion took out for lunch and persuaded him to vote to quash the sale. It was another 7-6 vote but it was in our favor. But so close, it's scary.

Q: What's happening with the union these days?

GI: My view of the future of our union here in Edmonton is there's a young generation now being employed. Our union's goal in the past was try to keep everything localized within civic politics; that's our basis here. What we're learning now is it's getting tougher and tougher to do that, within even civic politics now. The way I feel, possibly this union should be heading to is to work closer with the community and the taxpayers. I don't think the individual taxpayer really realizes what's happening. They read what they read in the papers. The union is closer to what's actually going on within civic politics. Our thing is to work with the taxpayer of the city of Edmonton and side with them and have their interests in mind, which is our interests as union 52. I think that's our direction for the next little while. The biggest think I also see is our membership is changing a lot. It's getting younger. When you look at the civic employees, there are a lot of people that are going to be retiring within the next 10 years of the civic politics. That means a lot of younger people coming in. It's tough for a union to try to convince these younger members coming in what the actual importance of unions, and for them to be part of in the city of Edmonton. That's the direction we have to really start concentrating, as union 52.

LD: I think the union is healthy. There's no issues. We have a good negotiating committee, they always seem to get good contacts. There's really no issues. The only time you know there's issues is when you get general meetings that are crowded, then there's issues. But normally our general meetings are the same as our shop steward meetings, there's the same people attending both meetings. When there's no issues they don't seem to want to come out to a meeting. I think everything is running well with our union. There's no big issues and most of our members are just concerned about getting new contracts and getting good remuneration for their work. I don't believe there's any big pressing issues with our union. We have good business agents that seem to look after our membership. We have a good president and he seems to work hard at getting us decent contracts. I would say that we are healthy in 2009.

Q: Is the union serving its members well? If so, in what areas?

GI: For the time I've been with the City, I've seen different directions. When it comes down to the whole thing, Alberta is a unique province. It's a province where it seems to be the economy here has always been a lot better in the last little while. As long as that's happening, members are happy. Once the economy starts to go on the downswing, which now is the trend, things start becoming more important. That's when the union has to step up. That's when members are getting into problems, they're afraid because their jobs may be put into jeopardy, things like that. That's when they really rely on what it is. I think, as Leo mentioned, our staff has been around for a while and is very good. We service our membership very well. But when the hard times start coming in, that's when the office staff really shows what they can do. It's to keep things going as best they could and keep the membership working, that's the biggest thing for our members. They want to work, they want their jobs. That's the prime goal of the union, to keep our membership working.

LD: One of the good points that we have with regard to the retention in our office is due to them being steelworkers. At one time they used to be CFC 52 workers. When there was a new change in the executive there was a turnover in business agents. Whenever that happens there's chaos. They would lose files on purpose and we'd lose grievances on deadlines, and so on. That was an excellent move to get them out of the politics of the union. This way there's a lot more stability in the union. They've been sticking around a lot more. We've had business agents that have been here for 17 years. That's unheard of in a union atmosphere, to work that long in an office.

GI: Within union politics, what was difficult for 52 was being part of the coalition. There have been changes in all the other unions in their presidents and things like that. Ours, Marion, is still on, but I know he's talking about retiring right now. That's one of the parts, we've had stability all the way through. I think that's going to be one of our big learning curves here, is when Marion as a president leaves. What's going to be very important is our staff at that point. Our staff has the experience and they've been around for a long time. That's something that's important to our union right now. But it's going to be changing because Marion is planning to retire fairly soon, from what he's talking about. Those are things that we're going to have to grow into down the road.

[END]