

STEWARDING THE LAND AT ST. MARGARET'S SCHOOL



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ACCESSIBLE LEARNING

A big win for working conditions and collective action at UVic.

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Jordan Bolay, Teacher, PC

St. Margaret's School
Beverley Waterfield, Teacher

University of Victoria
John Foxgord, Senior Systems Administrator
Ori Granot, Senior Staff Scientist
Ash Senini, Co-op Coordinator

THE PRO.

Editor
Jordana Whetter

Art Direction
Caroline Segonnes

Copy Editor
Carla Sorrell

Cover Image
Aaron Lutsch

Publications Mailing Agreement
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Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:
Professional Employees Association
505-1207 Douglas Street
Victoria, BC V8W 2E7

FOSTERING LEADERSHIP

In April, it was a pleasure to welcome members from across the province to the PEA's 2026 Education Conference. Once again, this gathering reminded me why our union is such a strong and supportive community. The conference gave us space to learn, to reflect, and to connect with one another in ways that feel increasingly important in the world we are working in today.

The depth and quality of the sessions were exceptional. Many members have shared how meaningful it was to engage with ideas that challenged our assumptions and expanded our tools as union leaders. Discussions around leadership, respectful and effective practices for facing management, addressing hostile behaviour, and integrating Indigenous ways of knowing sparked thoughtful dialogue that continued well beyond the sessions themselves. What stayed with me most was not any single presentation, but the shared commitment in the room—to care for members, to advance justice and equity, and to lead with intention and integrity.

I also want to extend sincere thanks to the PEA Education Committee and our staff team. Their work shapes the tone and substance of this conference every year, and their thoughtful planning ensured that the program spoke directly to the realities our members are navigating. The conference reflected a clear understanding of what members need now and where we are headed as a union.



CLIFF HAMAN
President
Senior Academic Assistant, UVic
chaman@pea.org

Celebrating Service Award Recipients

Another highlight of this year's conference was the opportunity to present four PEA Service Awards, recognizing members whose sustained commitment has strengthened our union in lasting ways.

Ronda Field

Ronda was recognized for her extraordinary breadth and consistency of service. For more than a decade, Ronda has been deeply involved across nearly every area of PEA work, bringing a steady presence to governance, bargaining, finance, education, equity and member representation. Whether at the association or chapter level, she shows up with reliability, compassion and a strong social justice lens. Her leadership, including many years on the Association Executive, reflects a deep commitment to supporting members and building a strong, responsive union.

Stuart Venables

Stu was honoured for his practical, results-oriented leadership and his long-standing role in advancing collective action. Over the course of five successful rounds of bargaining, Stu demonstrated patience, focus and sound judgment. He also played a central role in establishing his chapter as an independent and sustainable part of the PEA, and helped develop career laddering initiatives that directly improved member opportunities. His ability to advocate firmly while maintaining constructive relationships speaks to the professionalism and credibility he brought to his work.

Marc Schuffert

Marc received a service award in recognition of nearly two decades of thoughtful and principled involvement. As a long-serving local representative and bargaining committee member, Marc has been a steady and trusted presence for members facing difficult issues. Known for his calm, reflective approach, he has a rare ability to lower the temperature in challenging conversations and help guide discussions toward resolution. His dedication, including extensive travel and personal sacrifices to participate, reflects a deep sense of responsibility to members.

Manika Rajan

Manika was recognized for truly transformational service. Her leadership played a key role in expanding inclusion within her chapter by helping bring paralegals into the union, turning an idea into a successful certification and lasting change. Her work strengthened collective power, improved working conditions and broadened who gets to belong and have a voice within the PEA. Her commitment to fairness, health and safety, and inclusion has had an enduring impact on her colleagues and the association as a whole.

Please join me in congratulating each of these recipients and thanking them for the remarkable contributions they have made to our union.

And finally, as we head into the summer months, I hope you are able to relax and recharge with family and friends. This past year was quite a journey, marked by significant challenges, sustained effort, and an extraordinary level of commitment from members across the union. Taking time to rest and reconnect is essential to the work we do.

In solidarity,

Cliff Haman
PEA President





Lindsey Walker, SGS AXYS Executive, shares her experiences during the member panel.



BC Federation of Labour President Sussanne Skidmore.
All photos: Aaron Lutsch



Facilitator Kerry Palmer shares his knowledge on effectively addressing hostile behaviour.



From left to right: PEA Service Award winners Marc Schuffert, Ronda Field and Stu Venables. Manika Rajan missing.



MELISSA MOROZ

Executive Director
250-385-8791 ext. 203
mmoroz@pea.org

STRONGER TOGETHER

Over the past year, PEA members have shown extraordinary commitment, resilience and solidarity. This round of bargaining has asked a great deal of members across sectors, and we have seen members step forward to support one another and stand up for fair agreements.

Government Licensed Professionals

After ten months of bargaining and a historic eight-week strike, members in our Government Licensed Professionals chapter have ratified a tentative agreement with the provincial government's Public Service Agency. This agreement was hard fought and it was worth it. Because of members' determination and resolve, this agreement helped reshape this round of bargaining not only for PEA members but for unionized workers across the province.

The four-year agreement includes general wage increases of 3 per cent per year through March 31, 2029, along with significant non-monetary gains. These include stronger employment security, enhanced health and wellness benefits, improvements to overtime compensation and important provisions for government lawyers who joined the PEA in 2023. The agreement was ratified with 95.8 per



cent support, reflecting the remarkable unity members showed throughout an exceptionally difficult round of bargaining.

The GLP strike, together with the BC General Employees' Union (BCGEU), was instrumental in pushing government to move to the full enhanced bargaining mandate. That pressure changed what was possible not only for GLP members but across the post-secondary sector and the broader public sector. It is a powerful reminder that solidarity works.

University of Victoria

Through unprecedented coordination with other unions on campus, UVic members have now also been offered the full enhanced mandate. That progress did not happen by accident. It was driven by member action. Throughout this round, PEA members have shown up in visible and meaningful ways by wearing buttons and taking part in solidarity events, rallies, pickets and on-campus actions.

The strong member solidarity, alongside CUPE Locals 917, 951 and 4163 and the Faculty Association on campus, sent a clear message that workers were united and determined. That unity helped build momentum that could not be ignored.

Health Science Professionals

Our Health Science Professionals chapter, through the Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association, has also secured a strong agreement. Members voted 90 per cent in favour of the new collective agreement, which is in effect until March 31,



Over 10,000 workers came together for the Fund the Frontlines march and rally in Victoria on October 6, 2025. Photo: Jeff Topham

2029.

The agreement delivers a 12 per cent wage increase over four years, retroactive to April 1, 2025, along with substantial gains in classifications, premiums, special leave, isolation allowance, portability, employer-paid professional fees, scheduling and occupational health and safety. It also includes a one-time \$3.5 million professional development and education fund, increased annual funding beginning in 2027, a new Cultural Revitalization Fund for Indigenous employees, expanded Cultural Days of Significance and a commitment to end the practice of contracting work in or out.

Growing Our Union at the Law Society of BC

I am also very pleased to share that we have expanded our membership to include all employees at the Law Society. Lawyers first joined the PEA in 2006, followed by paralegals in 2023 and officers in 2024. This latest expansion brings 139 new members into our union, including legal assistants, auditors, forensic accountants, IT specialists, communications professionals, analysts, coordinators and others. These workers chose union membership to secure better wages and benefits, stronger protections and a meaningful voice at work.

We are proud to welcome them and are stronger for having them with us.

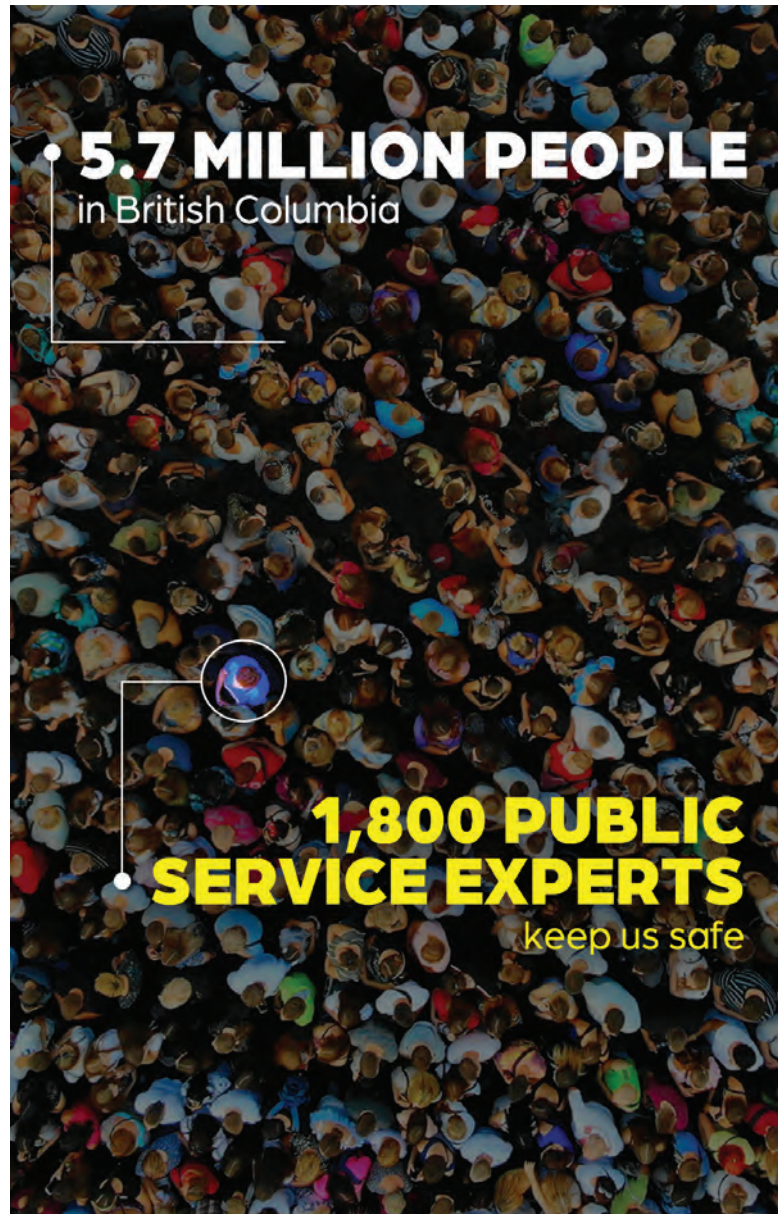
Moving Forward Together

Taken together, these developments reinforce something members have shown again and again throughout this round of bargaining. Unity, persistence and visible solidarity change outcomes.

Thank you to every member who wore a button, showed up to an event, stood on a picket line, supported a colleague and stood strong together.

In solidarity,

Melissa Moroz
Executive Director



One of the BC Experts ads that ran across digital platforms during the GLP strike.

SERVICE WITH LOVE

ST. MARGARET'S SCHOOL GROUNDSKEEPER IAN HOLT STEWARDS
THE LAND AND GIRLS EDUCATION

WORDS: JESSICA NATALE WOOLARD
PHOTO: AARON LUTSCH

Walk onto the St. Margaret's School (SMS) campus in Victoria, and you'll see Ian Holt's handiwork on every inch of the 22-acre property. As groundskeeper, he meticulously maintains the park-like premises from the treed entryway to the chip trail through the forest; the manicured garden beds to the Garry oak meadow; and the sports fields to the outdoor gathering spaces.

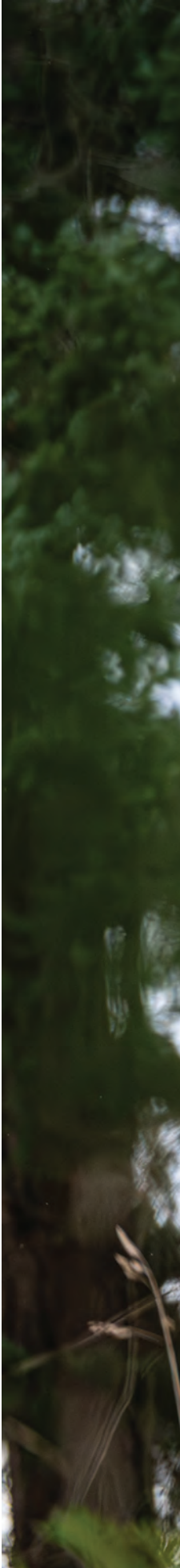
The campus is a haven that underpins the education of the approximately 300 students at the all-girls, K-12 independent school. A member of the SMS chapter of the Professional Employees Association, Holt serves as steward of the campus, ensuring it looks healthy, flourishing and orderly, in complement to the learning experience. He is also responsible for the set up of indoor spaces in the eight buildings on campus, including the academic facilities, athletics centre, library commons, four residences and dining hall. As part of this work, he prepares the spaces for special events such as assemblies, school fairs and sports tournaments.

His enthusiasm for the school pours out of him. "It's the most rewarding thing ever, to know you've made a difference," he says. "I love this school. I love the kids, I love the teachers, I love the staff and the parents. I love the campus. It feels like home."

As he speaks with The Pro this day in late fall, he is hanging white twinkle lights in the junior school library to create a fairytale ambiance. He hopes the lights will fuel the girls' imaginations as they read, learn and create in the space. Through special touches like twinkling lights, Holt uses his groundskeeper role to support positive learning experiences for the students.

"I'm very proud of my work; I want everyone to think it's awesome," he explains. Then, he laughs. "You're going to hear the word 'awesome' a lot," he adds. "This job is awesome. It's the best."

Born in Blackburn, England, near Manchester in the north-west of the country, Holt led a varied career before arriving at SMS five years ago. No matter the field he's worked in, what remains constant is the high level of achievement he's reached in every role. By his own admission, he never does anything "halfway; I always go full send."



As a teenager, he was offered an opportunity to play professional soccer, but he turned it down because it would have required a move and a shift in loyalty away from his home club. Instead, he earned the equivalent of four Red Seals in carpentry, joinery, painting and decorating. With this broad skill set, he worked for various companies in England and Jersey in the Channel Islands, where he lived for many years after leaving Blackburn.

While living on Jersey, he developed a taste for scuba diving, so he followed that interest and became a scuba diving instructor. It was while taking an eight-year-old for her first dive that his passion for children's education surfaced.


"I remember it to this day, helping this eight-year-old take her first breath underwater," Holt recalls. He describes the scene in vivid detail: the outdoor swimming pool overlooking the ocean, the bright blue sky overhead, the girl with her child-sized scuba tank and face mask. He remembers how the girl grew increasingly courageous with every breath and eventually how she swam around the pool underwater. "It was the greatest feeling ever, teaching a kid how to do something," he says. From that moment, he knew he wanted to work in a school to help children learn, grow and achieve.

When Holt and his wife emigrated to Victoria eight years ago, Holt set out to find his dream job in education. Upon arriving, he worked at Bear Mountain Resort as a landscaper on the golf course and then at the Hotel Grand Pacific as a painter. When the SMS opportunity came about a few years into their tenure on the island, he was thrilled. "I found my perfect job," he says.

Holt has embedded himself into the fabric of the school and embodies the school motto, *Servite in Caritate*, which translates to "Service with Love." In addition to his groundskeeping responsibilities, he volunteers as a coach for multiple sports teams, including swimming, soccer, cross-country running, basketball, track and field, and badminton.

"Coaching the kids is the best. It's just awesome," he says, using his favourite word again.

His impact at the school is tangible. Before he stepped in as assistant coach, the soccer team had never, in the school's 150-year history, earned a berth to provincials. Under his leadership, the team made it to provincials twice in the first two years he coached. The swim team has also blossomed under Coach Holt. The club had been shut down for eight years when Holt started it up again, building it into the school's largest sport, with 45 athletes participating despite the 6:30 a.m. practices.





Holt has garnered such respect at SMS that he is frequently invited into classrooms when his areas of expertise can complement the curriculum. Recently, he led young science students along the one-kilometre chip trail on campus to examine erosion. He also teaches about plants and maintaining vegetation, for example, the crowd-favourite *Milanthus Major*, also known as the Peanut Butter plant because it smells like peanut butter when it's touched.

The students adore Holt. Any given lunch period, as many as 20 students will run to his office to visit. Last school year, grade 5 students built him a cardboard mailbox for his fan mail—cards and letters of thanks from students, colleagues and parents. One recent letter from a grade 6 student credits Coach Holt for helping her learn about herself through participation on the swim team. One line stands out, written from the heart in pencil in her homemade card: "I've found so much in myself that I never knew I had—thank you for showing me that."

Contributing to the girls' education and seeing them progress is what drives the groundskeeper and coach. He and his wife don't have children—they've been on the adoption list for eight years and are ever hopeful—so he gives everything he has to the SMS students, he says. Not afraid to change careers again, he has begun an educational assistant course online through Langara College in Vancouver, with a goal of moving into the classroom permanently, preferably at SMS.

"I want to spend more time in the classroom and retire at the school," he explains. "I love it so much. I just love having a laugh with the kids. I'm so myself here. It just feels perfect."

The SMS community supports Holt's education. Three parents wrote him letters of recommendation, sharing how Coach Holt has changed their children's lives for the better.

As he has done throughout his life, he will chase his dream and do all it takes to become proficient at this work. He is guided by a clear goal: to be of service to the students.

"It's remarkable when you get to see the difference you've made in a student's life, say, from grade 3 to grade 7," he says. "Watching the students grow and mature into young adults is the best job ever."



PRESCRIBING HOPE

BEHIND THE LOCKED DOORS OF BC'S ONLY FORENSIC PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL,
ONE PHARMACIST IS HELPING SOME OF THE PROVINCE'S MOST COMPLEX
PATIENTS FIND THEIR WAY BACK TO STABILITY

WORDS: JESSICA NATALE WOOLLARD
PHOTOS: JEFF TOPHAM

Steps from where the Coquitlam River empties into the Fraser, at the southern tip of ʔéxətəm Regional Park (formerly known as Colony Farm Regional Park), sits the secure compound of British Columbia's Forensic Psychiatric Hospital (FPH). Beyond the chain-link fencing is a campus of several buildings where treatment is provided to up to 190 mostly involuntary patients from around the province who have been found by BC courts to be either (1) not criminally responsible for a crime or (2) unfit to stand trial due to a mental disorder.

It's a workplace like no other, operating at the intersection of health care and the justice system. Psychiatrists, psychologists, pharmacists, social workers, nurses and other health professionals work in partnership to provide complex psychological care, while forensic services officers provide security and keep staff and patients safe. At FPH, compassion must be balanced with custody; trauma-informed medical care coexists with locked units and security protocols.

A hospital pharmacist, Professional Employees Association member Magdalena Kowalska-Villarroel lends her expertise on the FPH's clinical healthcare team. Part of the Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association—along with just eight other PEA pharmacists—she provides treatments that help patients stabilize and, if possible, return to their lives.

"A lot of patients come [to FPH] when they're quite unstable. They have committed offences linked to symptoms of severe mental illness," Kowalska-Villarroel explains. "After their stay here, many patients are completely turned around. You can see how much of a difference medications and proper medication management can make. It's a life changer for a lot of patients."

Most FPH patients live with complex mental health issues, frequently a psychotic disorder such as schizophrenia. Often, their disorder coexists with another, such as a mood or personality disorder like post-traumatic stress disorder or borderline personality disorder. Sometimes, addiction is the comorbid condition. Many arrive for short stays, transferred from correctional centres for assessment or treatment under BC's Mental Health Act. Others reside at the hospital for months or years, until they are treated with therapy and medications and, once recovered, can slowly and carefully reintegrate into their families and society while supported by FPH outpatient services. Still others will remain at FPH for life.

With medication therapy playing a key role in the treatment and stabilization of complex mental illnesses, Kowalska-Villarroel's contributions are vital to the care provided at FPH. As a hospital pharmacist, she serves as an active decision-maker on the clinical healthcare team. Her work includes recommending, reviewing and monitoring medications and doses; mak-



ing adjustments where needed; and ensuring the medication is working safely and effectively for the patient during their stay and once discharged. Along with the team of pharmacists, she helps to prevent errors in prescribing by managing the dispensing of drugs, overseeing inventory and ensuring proper storage and stability. She also participates in ward rounds and patient care meetings and educates residents on their medications.

“You see how much support the patients need,” she reflects. “[Their illness] is a struggle for them; it’s not something they chose. It’s just so rewarding to be part of their recovery stories.” Sadly, she adds, “not all cases are recovery stories.”

Some of the duties of a hospital pharmacist overlap with those of a traditional community pharmacist, such as drug distribution and verification, but Kowalska-Villarroel’s presence on the hospital clinical team means she has more information to work with and can consult patients’ histories and test results to make better decisions about what medications to use for each patient. This advantage is part of what prompted her to depart community pharmacies after 12 years. She started her career in community pharmacies, working for two years as a pharmacist and then a decade as a pharmacy manager.

The graduate of the University of British Columbia’s pharmacy program made her first move into hospitals in 2018, taking a position with Fraser Health at a clinic in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES). The site operated as an embedded ambulatory clinic pharmacy located inside a medical clinic, giving Kowalska-Villarroel her first experience working collaboratively with other health care professionals. Together, the team oversaw pharmaceutical treatments and education for street-entrenched clients living with substance use disorders.

Her experience on the DTES gave rise to a desire to focus on psychiatric care. In 2021, Kowalska-Villarroel accepted her role at FPH, as well as a casual pharmacist position at Eagle Ridge Hospital, a small acute-care hospital in Port Moody.

In addition to splitting her time between the two hospitals, Kowalska-Villarroel serves as a member-at-large on the executive of the PEA’s Health Science Professionals Chapter. She joined to ensure “pharmacists have a voice in decisions that directly affect our work and our patients,” she says.

With significant support from Idil Farah, a labour relations officer for the PEA, Kowalska-Villarroel played a role in securing forensic pay premiums for pharmacists at FPH, in recognition of the site’s specialized nature and associated risks. The forensic pay was implemented in April 2026.

“For me, union involvement is not just about helping achieve fair compensation for members,” says Kowalska-Villarroel. “It’s about safety, equity and ensuring pharmacists are recognized and supported, so we can focus on what matters most: our patients.”

Helping FPH patients rebuild their lives after the serious and often heartbreaking situations that led to their admission is what Kowalska-Villarroel finds most meaningful about her work.



"Most of the offences [that have resulted in interactions with the justice system] happen because of untreated mental illness," she says, noting that many patients come with past traumas that never healed and, especially in the case of female patients, often arrive in acute states of vulnerability. Because the events that led to a patient's admittance to FPH frequently involve harm to a family member, many patients, once treated, "feel deep remorse for what happened and struggle with profound guilt, shame, stigma and depression," she continues.

The situation is traumatic for the whole family, but despite the harm done, "many of our patients are really deeply loved by their families. There are strong family bonds; parents come visit, they send gifts and medications. They're very involved with the care of their loved ones."

Kowalska-Villarroel recalls a patient with a complex neuropsychiatric disorder whose story ended well. The individual had been involved in a serious incident and was later transferred to FPH for assessment and treatment. "With the help of medications, our patient made meaningful progress in their recovery. They were able to work again and reconcile with their family," she recounts.

If a patient like this one is doing well enough to be discharged from the hospital, they will first move into supervised housing in their home community in BC. Outpatient services follow their progress carefully, ensuring they continue to take their medication as prescribed and continue with treatment plans. If all goes well, they will eventually be able to return to their families and their lives.

A return to a stable life is what Kowalska-Villarroel hopes for every patient, though it is not possible for everyone. She approaches each case with care, compassion and respect for the person behind the illness.

"They're someone's child, someone's spouse, someone's mom. We work with these people in the most difficult moments in their life," she says. "You can see how a little bit of heart makes a huge difference. We can help them regain their dignity and start rebuilding their future."



"After their stay here, many patients are completely turned around. You can see how much a difference medications and proper medical management can make. It's a life changer for a lot of patients."

- Magda Kowalska-Villarroel

COLLECTIVE PRESSURE, REAL PROGRESS

A BIG WIN FOR ACCESSIBILITY, WORKING CONDITIONS
AND COLLECTIVE ACTION AT UVIC

WORDS: JORDANA WHETTER

Thanks to sustained pressure from PEA members and our allies, the Provost at the University of Victoria recently announced significant new investments in accommodations. This includes a new centre for accommodated assessments and process improvements. If implemented properly, these changes will strengthen support for students and improve working conditions for our members.

Throughout 2025, the PEA, as well as other unions and student groups on campus pushed hard to ensure accommodation needs were taken seriously through letter-writing, a petition, and recent advocacy to the Board of Governors. This is an important win, not only for the PEA, but for all unions and student organizations on campus. For years, unions, staff, faculty, and students have been raising concerns about the growing crisis in UVic's accommodations system, which has fallen far short of what students and the staff supporting them need. Demand for accommodations has grown significantly, but institutional support has not kept pace. The result has been a patchwork system marked by underfunding, short-term fixes and growing pressure on already overworked instructors and support staff.

Students have been asked to write exams in environments that did not consistently meet the conditions outlined in their accommodation letters. Instructors and staff have been expected to fill service gaps without sufficient training, preparation, workload recognition or resources. For PEA members, this is especially significant. Our members have seen workloads rise, support erode, and expectations shift without meaningful consultation or adequate resourcing.

This is why the investment in accommodations by UVic matters so much. A dedicated centre for accommodated assessments to support instructors and a renewed focus on universal design signals a return to what unions and student groups have consistently called for. The campus needs a long-term, centralized system to meet students' needs. Having centralized coordination will be more consistent and sustainable while reinvigorating the development and implementation of new systems and design, that put the student's accommodation at the heart of the work. Student need for accommodation will continue to evolve over time and so too must policy development. A centre for accommodations that takes seriously the notion of where universal design and traditional accommodations approaches intersect will put UVic on a path to being a leader in student-focused accommodations.

This is why faculty, support staff, graduate students, undergraduate students, and disability advocates spoke with a shared voice to fight for these changes. Together, we made it impossible for the administration to ignore the seriousness of this problem. We will continue to hold UVic accountable throughout this next phase and will be watching closely to ensure that consultation is meaningful, transparency improves, and these commitments are turned into real, lasting change.

PEA UPDATES

WINTER SCHOOL 2026

The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) is the largest labour organization in Canada, bringing together dozens of national and international unions, provincial and territorial federations of labour and community-based labour councils.

The CLC Pacific Region Winter School is the largest labour school in the country, offering the very best in labour education over five weeks from mid-January to mid-February each year. Since 1975, this school has been held at the unionized Harrison Hot Springs Resort.

The PEA sent 11 members to Winter School this year, and University of Victoria member Katy De Coste shared their experience:

"Participating in the Young Workers in Action class with ten other young labour activists was an incredible learning experience. Our course gave me insight into important issues for young workers, from workplace safety to collective bargaining to the role of local representatives in supporting our members. I also learned about the changes young workers are making in their unions and in the labour movement, and I'm excited to connect with other young PEA members in my chapter to share this learning.

Even more impactful, I got to meet young workers from all kinds of backgrounds and unions like CUPE, BCGEU, BCTF, USW, MoveUP and HEU, who taught me so much about the labour movement and the power of our unions. We built solidarity, learned from each other, and formed friendships that I deeply value. I feel privileged to have learned from my fellow classmates and from our course facilitators. I am also so thankful to have been welcomed by the Sts'ailis people onto their traditional territory at Qwólts for this week of education and connection."



Winter School's Young Workers in Action class of 2026. Photo above and below: Katy DeCoste.



Katy's team was the choir group winner during that week at Winter School.

HAPPY RETIREMENT

Congratulations to longtime GLP local rep Phil Croteau, Production Insurance Claims Manager with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food who retired in March 2026.

CONGRATULATIONS

The PEA is proud to recognize our long-serving staff whose dedication and experience strengthen the work of the union. In October 2025, Database and Membership Coordinator Marianna Azouri celebrated 25 years with the PEA, an impressive milestone reflecting decades of service. In January 2026, Executive Coordinator Toshie Arakawa marked 15 years, a significant contribution to the PEA's success.

UPCOMING COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT EXPIRY DATES

BC Energy Regulator: June 30, 2025

In bargaining

Family Maintenance Agency Lawyers: March 31, 2025

In bargaining

Hospital Employees' Staff Union: March 31, 2027

Legal Aid BC Lawyers: September 30, 2025

In bargaining

Okanagan Regional Librarians: December 31, 2026

Pearson College: August 31, 2027

St. Margaret's School: June 30, 2026

Tentative agreement reached. Ratification in progress at time of publication.

University of Victoria: June 30, 2025

In bargaining



Executive Director Melissa Moroz, Labour Relations Officer Idil Farah and Second-Vice President and HSP Co-chair Ronda Field at the Health Science Association of British Columbia rally in Vancouver in support of public health care.

CONTACT US

505-1207 Douglas Street
Victoria, BC, V8W 2E7

Telephone: 250-385-8791

Toll Free: 1-800-779-7736

Visit us online at pea.org

STAFF

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Melissa Moroz

mmoroz@pea.org

250-385-8791 ext. 203

LABOUR RELATIONS OFFICERS

Rhiannon Bray

FMA, LABC, LS, ORL, PC, SMS

rbray@pea.org ext. 204

Idil Farah

GLP, HSP, UVic

ifarah@pea.org ext. 111

Brett Harper

Senior Labour Relations Officer

bharper@pea.org ext. 206

Laura Kate Jeffreys

BCER, BCSPS, HESU, SGS AXYS

ljeffreys@pea.org ext. 202

Andrea Mears

GLP

amears@pea.org ext. 207

Stephen Portman

UVic

sportman@pea.org ext. 209

COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

Jordana Whetter

jwhetter@pea.org ext. 210

FINANCIAL OFFICER

Jennifer Bond

jbond@pea.org ext. 212

ORGANIZER

Duncan Pike

dpike@pea.org ext. 208

EXECUTIVE COORDINATOR

Toshie Arakawa

tarakawa@pea.org ext. 205

MEMBERSHIP AND DATABASE

COORDINATOR

Marianna Azouri

mazouri@pea.org ext. 201

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Michelle Cuthbert

mcuthbert@pea.org ext. 100

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

Laurence Toffoletto

ltoffoletto@pea.org ext. 213



SAVE THE DATE

Basic Local Rep Training

September 17-18, 2026

PEA Office, Victoria BC

Watch your email for registration details.

P|E|A

BC's Union for Professionals