



Guelph, January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2012 – Thousands of co-operative and credit union members across Canada will be taking part in events on Thursday, January 12<sup>th</sup> to officially launch the United Nations International Year of Co-operatives.

The national launch will take place in Ottawa, while 13 regions across the country, including Guelph, Ontario, will be conducting their own festivities on the same day. Events will also be happening in Europe and elsewhere.

The Ontario launch will take place in Guelph where event organizer, the Ontario Co-operative Association – the provincial organization which is a key resource for all co-ops and credit unions in Ontario - is located. Celebrations begin at 11:30 a.m. with a public flag-raising ceremony at City Hall, including opening remarks from Guelph Mayor Karen Farbridge, as well as from Guelph MPP Liz Sandals who will be bringing greetings on behalf of the Premier. Planet Bean Coffee, owned by Sumac Community Worker Co-op, will be serving up some hot beverages for attendees.

Leaders and stakeholders from the co-operative movement across the province, along with members of the Guelph Co-op Network and business community, will gather at The Co-operators in downtown Guelph following the flag-raising ceremony, for a networking luncheon that is by special invitation only. Attendees will watch a live webcast from the nation's capital at 12:30 EST, which will include remarks by Kathy Bardswick, president and CEO of The Co-operators, and Monique Leroux, President and CEO of Desjardins and the Honourable Steven Blaney, federal Minister of Veterans Affairs and the MP for Lévis-Bellechasse.

The webcast, which will also include the premiere of a co-operative musical work by the Montreal group Samajam, will be available for public viewing at <http://s.coop/canada2012live>. Co-operatives and others are encouraged to gather in groups to watch the broadcast.

For years, the Ontario Co-operative Association, together with members of the co-operative community have been trying to convince government that co-ops strengthen communities, create jobs and build resilience, and have been doing so for over 140 years. "The International Year is the perfect opportunity to leverage this reality, backed by the United Nations declaration," said Mark Ventry, On Co-op's Co-op community Manager. He added, "Ontario's 1,300 co-operatives and credit unions are excited to be part of the worldwide celebration brought about by the International Year."

For its first-ever provincial co-operative awareness campaign, On Co-op has produced a series of billboards across the province highlighting the number of co-ops in Ontario communities. The billboards, which will be up for the month of January in most areas, are tailored to the community in which they're located and include messages such as, "Guelph's 45 co-operatives build a better community." The signs all include a QR barcode that, when scanned by a smart phone, provide more information on the province's co-operative movement.

In December 2009, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming 2012 the International Year of Co-operatives, in recognition of the contribution co-operatives make to the social and economic development of communities around the world. In doing so, they are urging governments to take measures aimed at creating a supportive environment for the development of co-operatives. The theme of the International Year is *Co-operative Enterprises Build a Better World*.

While January 12<sup>th</sup> marks the official launch, the Ontario Co-operative Association was already gearing up for the International Year long before 2012. “Co-operative Enterprises Build a Better Ontario” was the theme of the annual Queen’s Park Reception, held in May 2011 – where leaders and stakeholders of the co-operative sector met with MPPs to raise awareness of the successes and challenges facing Ontario’s 1,300 co-ops. The annual Co-operative Conference and Gala, held at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington, and hosted by the association each October during Co-op Week, was themed *Gearing Up and Leading Up*, in anticipation of the International Year, and included the official kick-off to provincial International Year events.

Media representatives are invited to attend the Guelph events, which are expected to attract politicians, community leaders as well as co-operative leaders, members and employees. Representatives from the co-op movement will also be available for interviews before, during and after the launch events.

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## BACKGROUNDER:

### Co-operatives in Ontario: Facts and Figures

- A co-operative is a unique, legally-incorporated business enterprise owned by and operated for the benefit of those using its services.
- Co-ops are an internationally-recognized business enterprise, with similarities to both not-for-profit organizations and private businesses.
- Close to one billion people world-wide are involved in co-operatives.
- Co-ops are unique in that they are member-owned, democratically controlled businesses that operate on the principle of one member, one vote, regardless of the amount of investment.
- There are more than 1,300 co-operatives in Ontario, operating in 1,900 locations and in 400 communities.
- Ontario co-ops employ more than 15,500 people, and 49,000 volunteers contribute to the movement, including 10,000 board members.
- Over 1.4 million individuals are members of a co-operative or credit union in Ontario.
- Ontario co-operatives operate in virtually every sector of the economy, including: financial services, insurance, agricultural supply and marketing, renewable energy, natural resources, utilities, communications, housing, childcare, retail, transportation, culture, social and even funeral services!
- Ontario co-operatives have over \$30 billion in assets, making a significant contribution to the local economies in the communities in which they operate.
- Research shows that co-operatives are more durable than other types of business enterprise. Studies conducted in Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta have all found that new co-ops are likely to survive longer than other new businesses over the same period of time.
- Some well-known Ontario co-ops include Mountain Equipment Co-op, The Co-operators, Desjardins Group, Gay Lea Foods and Organic Meadow.

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