

BULLETIN

Lab tech encourages growth through union activism

June 1, 2008

The Report: June / July 2008 vol.29 num.2

by LAURA BUSHEIKIN



ith her characteristic modesty, it might be understandable for medical laboratory technologist Nancy Banks to ask, "What, why write about me?" when approached about being profiled in *The Report*. With over 30 years of HSA activism behind her, Banks says she has participated on more HSA committees than she could possibly list but she says that is simply a part of being an involved union member.

However, she sees this profile as yet another opportunity to support the union.

"I feel very honored to have this chance to talk about how rewarding union involvement is. I've wanted to see more people get involved so they too can get the benefits that I got from HSA. The union doesn't run without its members getting involved and learning from it," Banks said.

Banks is the Laboratory Quality Management Coordinator for the Kootenay Boundary region of Interior Health, a position that combines her background in health sciences with skills she obtained from a Quality Management Certificate program at the University of Manitoba.

She says HSA involvement helped her develop the leadership skills needed for this position.

"This is a regional position where I provide Quality Management service and resources for the lab sites in the Kootenay Boundary. I also present our recommendations to Interior Health Lab Steering Committee and other related working groups or committees. So I have to make sure I am short, concise and to the point," she says. This is where her HSA training and experience help her out.

"My professional association gives me the academic background, but for me to be involved in leadership, the union gave me that," says Banks. Over the years, she has received a variety of training from HSA: occupational health and safety, leadership for women, facing management, and supervisors in the workplace, for instance, as well as attending the Canadian Labour Congress Winter School.

"I have to thank HSA for all the excellent resources they have. The education they provide is superb; it is very high caliber. The instructors have always been very knowledgeable, very dedicated," she says.

"The skills and concepts I've learned apply not only to work, but to all aspects of my life," says Banks, who is also active in community groups such as the Nelson Mental Health Support Group.

-My latest education was most useful. This was the CLC Winter School, which had to do with parliamentary procedure. We learned how to run an organized meeting, how to stay on task, how to do public speaking, how to get your point across in a short length of time, how to concentrate on a topic and not get sidetracked. It was very, very useful for me," she says.

Nancy Banks Laboratory Quality Management Coordinator Kootenay Boundary Region Interior Health

Banks became an HSA member in 1975, when she worked at Penticton Regional Hospital. She hadn't thought of herself as much of a union person until she moved to Prince George in 1977. At her workplace, she was increasingly noticing potential safety hazards and she wanted to do something to help.

-There was a position open for an HSA Occupational Health and Safety Steward. I saw a need and thought this was one area I could help my staff in my site. Then I realized it could help not just in my site but within my region. I went to meetings and workshops and met other safety stewards. I realized the interconnection people had. I saw how valuable it was to pass information on and get information. The union was the core that let us connect with each other. I saw this as a big plus," she says.

As she learned about HSA, Banks' interests widened. -I saw the huge scope that is available for members, and I realized that occupational health and safety was just a stepping stone. I took some local Labour Council courses which got me more into union activism. I went to steward training, and advanced steward training, and became a site steward. I've also been a member-at-large for a few years in the Prince George area. I've been on committees such as education, occupational health and safety, the pension committee •its a very long list," she says.

Banks moved to Nelson to work as chief technologist at Kootenay Lake Hospital in December, 1999. The area already had a lot of effective union activists, so Banks decided to step back a bit. Currently, she doesn't hold any union position, but she stays involved by attending regional meetings and annual convention.

Banks is also an enthusiastic supporter of Run for the Cure and has participated several times.

-It's important, because of how much breast cancer touches our lives, through our loved ones, our friends, people we see in our lives and people we see in our work. We see the women coming through, and we are all cheering them on.

-Breast cancer is so in our face. It's important we support the Run for the Cure because who knows to whom breast cancer will fall on next. Both my mother and grandmother have had it, so that's why I feel it so closely," she says. -It's great that HSA is so involved with the Run for the Cure and that more and more members are signing up for the run."

Banks says she'll participate in the Run again and is also looking forward to continuing her union activism. She says she would consider running to be a member-at-large again, because she likes being able to participate in the provincial committees and learning what works and what doesn't in the regions.

-And occupational health and safety, which is where I started way back when, is still a topic very dear to my heart. When I notice things are not being done right I still approach the supervisor or management and make a suggestion or say this is a topic we need to review. It's always in the back of my mind," she says.

Thirty-some years on, Banks still has the same passion and the same commitment for union activism she had when she started, now strengthened by over three decades of training and experience. 

Type:

[The Report](#)

- [Print](#)
- [PDF](#)

180 East Columbia
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website
www.hsabc.org

Telephone 604-517-0994
1-800-663-2017