



# BIAC-ACLC EXPRESS

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## Second Annual BIAC Conference brings Health Minister, survivors and supporters from coast to coast to Montreal. *New board members bring fresh blood to growing organization*

By Amanda Shuchat

**A**fter two brain injuries—Rejean (John) Dignard faced the world on July 16, sharing his hope and feelings of connectedness. As one of several speakers at the second annual Brain Injury Association of Canada (BIAC) conference, he moved 50 delegates to tears with his story. A brain injury survivor, he now lives independently with the help of Goliath, his memory aide dog, who died shortly after the conference.

Like Rejean, BIAC has made great strides forward in the year since its initial Annual Meeting one year ago. Major accomplishments include launching a new national website, publishing its first newsletter and establishment of a headquarters with a part-time professional.

Picturesque Villa St-Martin in Pierrefonds, Quebec was again the setting for the July 15-17 conference. Delegates from Victoria, B.C. and St. Johns, NF attended the conference, most arriving late Friday afternoon, in time for a dinner of sole, green beans and mashed potatoes.

*Amanda Shuchat is a Journalism student from Ryerson University in Toronto.*

### MAKING HISTORY

Lounging on the terrace Friday night, delegates mingled, forming unexpected friendships and making BIAC history. President Mireille Provost chaired the meeting and did an excellent job. Past president Yvan Teasdale presented her with a gift to celebrate her first year as president. “We have much to be proud of,” said Mireille, herself a mother of a son who is a survivor of a brain injury.

Robert McNeely, executive director of Newfoundland Brain Injury Association, arrived early Saturday morning, proud to be the province’s first ever delegate. First-time student delegates Amanda Shuchat and Elena Nikolaeva both from Toronto, ON connected with Bette Brown, President of the Manitoba Brain Injury Association. Delegates ranged in age from 20 to 75.



Public Health Minister, Dr. Carolyn Bennett, meets with over 50 delegates comprised of survivors, families, professionals and representatives from brain injury organizations.



Public Health Minister Carolyn Bennett presents Howard Brown with the Volunteer of the Year 2005 award for his work raising \$30,000 at the first annual Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey in Toronto.

## Volunteers Recognized for Hard Work and Devotion

Public Health Minister, Dr. Bennett presented the first “Volunteer of the Year 2005” award to **Howard Brown**, BIAC’s co-chair of Finance. Howard played a major role in the Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey, a fundraiser at Rick Montgomery’s Miller Tavern in Toronto, raising over \$30,000 in one evening. “...In recognition of his extraordinary volunteer contribution...Mr. Brown is a role model for volunteers who want to get involved with a not-for-profit organization. It will be a tough act to follow,” she read from the citation. Certificates were presented to each board member.

## Speakers Tell Their Stories

In addition to large delegations from Ontario and Quebec, there were eight delegates from the Atlantic provinces including an impressive four from Prince Edward Island and more than a dozen from Western Canada. Delegates heard dynamic presentations from brain injury experts and survivors including:

1. **Rejean (John) Dignard** spoke about his proudest accomplishment—training Goliath, the first Memory Aide Dog. Goliath helped Rejean live independently finding his car, locating items in stores and returning to a hotel room in a strange city. Rejean is the founding director of the Canadian Assistive Animal Association (CAAA).
2. **Barb Butler**, past president of the Saskatchewan Brain Injury Association and **Larry Carlson**, the association’s current president, presented “The Road Not Taken”. Both shared their survival stories, speaking candidly about tragic car accidents that changed their own and their families’ lives forever. “I took the road less traveled and that has made all the difference,” said Larry. “My wife says I am not the man she married. Luckily, she loves both of us.” Barb, a founding member of BIAC, has been on the board of directors since its establishment in 2003. Larry was elected to the board shortly after his presentation.
3. **Richard Kinar**, an advocate working with the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) cleared up confusion regarding helmet enforcement for bicycles, motorcycles, inline skating and skateboarding. He enforced the need for approved helmets at all times.
4. **Dr. Richard Riopelle** of McGill University, spoke to the board of directors at their meeting on Sunday. He discussed a new initiative to study different neurological disorders. Brain injury is one of 11 being studied. Dr. Riopelle is also the Director of Research for the Ontario Neurotrauma Foundation Government of Canada
5. **Dr. Carolyn Bennett**, Canada’s Minister of Public Health who opened the conference. “It is an interesting sort of spectrum of responsibilities that you as an organization have taken on from the supports and services and the human rights and what people ought to be able to expect...the ability to prevent others from this really important disability,” said Minister Bennett in her keynote address. She came to the conference from another meeting in Quebec City and spent two hours meeting with both the Board of Directors and delegates. Dr. Bennett left her medical practice in 1997 upon her election as MP for St. Paul’s riding in central Toronto. She continues, however, to follow a long-time patient, Jenny, who was in a car accident resulting in a brief coma. This enables Jenny to benefit from ongoing treatment for her acquired brain injury. As past chair of the parliamentary sub-Committee on the Status of Persons with Disabilities, Dr. Bennett acknowledges developing an umbrella strategy on injury prevention is a work in progress. With that implemented, a specific brain injury prevention strategy can be developed.
6. The Honourable **Marguerite Delisle**, Minister for Youth Protection and Rehabilitation for Quebec, sent greetings.



## BIAC Board of Directors

Howard Brown, Toronto, Ontario  
Barb Butler, Regina, Saskatchewan  
Larry Carlson, Regina, Saskatchewan  
Larisa Chernysheva, Iqaluit, Nunavit  
Barb Hart, Halifax, Nova Scotia  
Shirley Johnson, Victoria,  
British Columbia  
Tom Lush, St. John's, Newfoundland  
Marie Mossey, Souris,  
Prince Edward Island  
Mireille Provost, Gatineau, Quebec  
Anne Snow, Lincoln, New Brunswick  
Richard Kinar, Vancouver,  
British Columbia  
Howard Stevenson, Mississauga, Ontario  
Yvan Teasdale, Gatineau, Quebec  
Madeleine Welton, Mississauga, Ontario

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Brain injury advocates from Victoria to St. John's - Left to right (front row) Nadine Renaud, Sharon Garroway, Mireille Provost, Shirley Johnson and Madeleine Welton. Second row (left to right) Larry Carlson, Yvan Teasdale, Richard Kinar and Barb Butler. Top row (left to right) Howard Brown, Robert McNeely and Don Matheson. Sharon recently stepped down and Robert is the Executive Director of the Newfoundland and Labrador Brain Injury Association.

## Four New Members Elected

**W**ith the resignations of Sharon Garroway, Janet Fisher-McGuire, Louise Leduc and Nancy Baron, four new members were elected. Candidates were nominated by their fellow delegates and then spoke individually about their histories and qualifications. The four newest board members are:

1. **Madeleine Welton** is from Mississauga, ON. In 1993, Madeleine endured a terrible car accident after which she spent almost a month in a near-fatal coma. A brain injury survivor, Madeleine is an athletic mother of two, who recently achieved her personal trainer's certification and works as a real estate agent. Over the last three years she has worked on three fundraisers for the Ontario Brain Injury Association and BIAC, helping to raise over \$60,000.
2. **Richard Kinar** is a father from Vancouver, BC. His son was saved by a helmet when he fell off his bicycle. An advocate on behalf of the Canadian Standards Association, Richard is an expert on helmet laws and strives to prevent brain injury.
3. **Howard Stevenson** is from Mississauga, ON. Howard is a former circulation manager for Readers Digest and currently serves as the treasurer of Liberal party of Canada (Ontario). He is a father and grandfather.
4. **Larry Carlson** of the Saskatchewan Brain Injury Association became a brain injury survivor when he was in a car accident in November 1992. He works with Saskatchewan Education as a Special Education Consultant. Since 1998, he has been Program Manager for the Employability Assistance for People with Disabilities Program.

This conference gathered a large number of survivors including BC BIAC director Don Matheson who served as the official photographer and joke teller. He even gave gifts to all participants upon leaving.

## Committees Help the Cause

Committees have been set up and are striving toward great achievements. Communications will again be headed by Barb Butler, who oversaw the first issue of the BIAC newsletter. The Liason committee is chaired by Yvan Teasdale, Finance is chaired by Shirley Johnson and Fundraising, is chaired by Howard Brown and the Research committee by Richard Kinar.



## Survivors Presence Gives Hope

Survivor speakers Rejean Dignard, Barb Butler and Larry Carlson touched each delegate, opening our eyes through their dynamic presentations. Marie Mossey of Prince Edward Island was the only survivor to attend from the Atlantic region, but served as a role model for all. Madeleine Welton was the life of the party and former OBIA director Fred Welling, nominated her for the board of directors. Fred was attending his third national AGM, as was Nancy Baron. Nancy said the conference was “a nice move towards the future as...survivors talked about their own survival and...there was more energy in the room than I have seen in recent years, I think this is due to a change in the people attending. I also think that having new people on the board really creates energy.”

Other first time delegates include Dianna Sandford, a survivor, and Robert Rivera from the Ottawa region. One woman read an ad for the conference in the Ontario Brain Injury Association Review and showed up on her own. Other newcomers included recreational therapist Derrick Moran and lawyer Ali Ehsassi, both from Toronto, Evelyn Jollimore and Gladys Kenny from Prince Edward Island

## Sponsors Make Travel Possible from Coast to Coast.

Sponsors for BIAC's first annual meeting in 2004, Dominion General Insurance Company of Canada donated \$10, 000 for travel of which some of the funds were used this year to bring delegates in from nine provinces. Many delegates even raised money for the costs of coming to the conference including Eric Creamer and Marie Mossey from the newly-formed Brain Injury Association of Prince Edward Island. Sponsors of the Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey in Toronto were congratulated for their contributions. They included Glaxo Smith Kline, RBC Financial Group, London Life, Miller Tavern, the Posluns Family Foundation and Brown & Cohen Communications & Public Affairs.



John and his dog, Goliath, meet with Carolyn Bennett.



Toronto delegates Howard Brown, Ali Ehsassi, Amanda Shuchat, Elena Nikolaeva and Madeleine Welton head home with Fred Welling of Oshawa, Barb Butler of Regina, Nancy Baron of Sudbury and Don Matheson of Salmon Arm, B.C.



Delegate Nancy Baron of Sudbury, Ontario, celebrated her 30th birthday with BIAC friends from across Canada.

## Upcoming Events

The 2006 BIAC conference will again take place at Villa St.-Martin on July 7-9, 2006. The second Toronto Hawaiian Oyster Odyssey will be celebrated at the Miller Tavern on February 28, 2006. Hawaiian Oyster Odysseys are also planned in 2006 for Saskatoon, Gatineau, Halifax (February 8 confirmed), Edmonton, P.E.I., Vancouver and Winnipeg. Visit our website regularly for updates on coming events.

