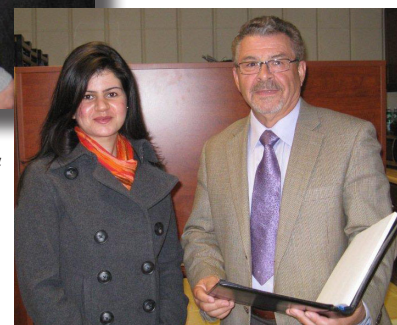


## Local 556 Bursaries 2011

by Tom Tomassi



*Above: Bursary recipients from left to right: Elissa Green, Louisa Cantor and Jolene May. At right: Tom Tomassi presenting Enas Rabee Al-Abdullah with her bursary.*

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Pleasant issues are not a normal occurrence at the local union office. Recently however, there *was* one of those days where the work that was done in our office brought about that warm and fuzzy feeling that makes you feel really good about what you do. What I am talking about is the awarding of the Local 556 Bursaries. As you may know this bursary was established four years ago with the main criteria being for student(s) of aboriginal background. Last year we had a motion put on the floor at our Annual General Membership Meeting to add another \$1,000 bursary in recognition of faculty retirees. In addition, we have been able to raise money in other venues—such the GBC Golf Tournament—to double this amount.

This year we were overwhelmed with the number of applicants and the support of their Professors. We are proud to announce that Elissa Green and Jolene May are this year's recipients of the Aboriginal Bursary and Enas Rabee Al-Abdullah and Louisa Cantor are this year's recipients of the Faculty Retiree Bursary.

I am sure you join me in congratulating Elissa, Jolene, Enas and Louisa and wish them well in their pursuit of their chosen studies and careers. I also want to thank you all for making this bursary program possible. ▼

# The 2011 Festival of Learning

## Celebrating Mythic America More Than Either Education or Development

by Ed Ksenych

This year our college's Festival of Learning centred on the remarkable story of Erin Gruwell. For those who missed the movie and lecture by Ms. Gruwell, it's the story of her as a young, naïve woman landing a job teaching English at a middle school in an inner city area of Los Angeles after the Rodney King beating and race riots. Inner city LA was a war zone of competing impoverished communities and gangs organized along racial lines—Asian, Black, Hispanic and White. And the war regularly spilled over into the schools, as it did in Ms. Gruwell's classroom.

But Ms. G (as her students came to call her) valiantly responded to the impossible, disheartening teaching conditions and hostile, disaffected students with brilliant insights into the human condition and psyche. Her imaginative moves in the classroom, dedication, and struggle to overcome entrenched institutional prejudices were heroic. She slowly won over the students and introduced them to the power of literature and writing in addressing human violence, suffering and injustice. In the end, they reinvented themselves as "freedom writers".

It really is a remarkable story of hope and individual perseverance in the midst of despairing conditions that would overwhelm most of us. And I found it very moving and inspiring. At the same time I found it deeply depressing.

Part of what was depressing was the condition of the inner city of this iconic American city. How could the people who live there have allowed conditions to deteriorate to the point where they would re-

quire such heroic actions? And I wanted to ask Ms. Gruwell for her opinion on how things had managed to reach such a point.

But what was also depressing was that the movie and the PD event were giving us another version of the familiar mythic American narrative of how to overcome problems one encounters in one's society and the world—a Horatio Alger story. For those who think they're unfamiliar with Horatio Alger, you're not. You've encountered the hero of his 19<sup>th</sup> century books countless times because his storyline was, and continues to be, the formulaic backbone of most American movies. In it, the main character encounters incredible difficulties but heroically overcomes them and succeeds through individual initiative, imagination, perseverance, and hard work—just like Ms. G. Although Alger's books were originally about rising from rags to riches, I wanted to ask Ms. Gruwell to what extent she thought her story, heroic as it truly was, may also be feeding into the same kind of mythic narrative that, in part, generates and legitimizes the very conditions her heroic individual efforts had to overcome.

But I never got to ask those questions. The event was more of a highly orchestrated, feel good affair than a professional development event. Ms. Gruwell spoke, not only to us, but also to classes of visiting high school students who were invited to this event and sitting in the rafters. From what I could follow, one of the schools had just experienced the senseless death of a student, and came to be comforted and inspired by Ms. Gruwell. Such events are tragic, and caring for how our youth

deals with them is very important. So on the one hand, I'm glad our college was able to help the students and the community out. But by doing so the Festival of Learning turned the whole event into a 'love in' that made it impossible to have a dialogue over her work. And there are problems with what we were having a 'love in' over, problems that concern the overall message being presented by Ms. Gruwell and Paramount Pictures (her movie producer).

First, neither the movie nor Ms. Gruwell really ask us to think about how the situation she personally managed to overcome originated in the first place. Instead, we're put in the position of simply accepting it as a starting point. But this starting point is not accidental. It extends beyond inner city LA. And it relates, in part, to the very ideals, principles, and practices that are currently part of America. For instance, the U.S. currently has the most productive economy on earth. The entire GDP of Canada is equivalent to that of Texas; that of France to California's; and that of Brazil to New York state. Despite this productivity, the U.S. has the highest degree of social inequality between the wealthy and the poor in the Western world. Alongside the myth of being a land of opportunity, it actually has the lowest rate of social mobility among wealthy nations. And alongside its valuing of equality, the United States continues to be among the most racialized Western societies. So before falling in love with stories of single-handedly overcoming such institutionalized conditions, shouldn't we be thinking about where and how those conditions arose? Otherwise

Festival *cont'd* page 3

Festival *cont'd from page 2*

you could just end up engaging in activities that directly or indirectly produced the mess being confronted in the first place. I'm concerned that this is what is occurring with how Ms. Gruwell's actions are being portrayed.

As remarkably heroic and inspiring as her actions were, they're not going to overcome the problems facing American society. America's problems are structural in nature—social, economic and political—not just a matter of needing to be individually inspired or motivated enough. They will require a radical reworking of the very way that American society is currently organized and legitimizes its inequities. While such changes can be inspired by individual heroism, they can only be realized through collective action oriented to a common good, not individualized excellence or successes. As presented, Ms. Gruwell's heroic actions do more to support a dominant ideology that is confronting its limits than challenge or transcend it.

But there was something else troubling about this event, and it has nothing to do with Ms. Gruwell's thought-provoking story. Instead, it had to do with our habitual turning to educators and educational ideas in the United States to generally inspire, inform and update us. Why do we keep doing this?

I raise this not because there aren't many fine educators and educational thinkers in the United States we can, and should, learn from. But given my experience in our college system, there's more to it than that. Generally, educational decision-makers in our province take their bearings from whatever happens to be going on in the US. If the US is doing learning objectives, then we should be doing learning objectives...or outcomes-based education (OBE), or the "excellence" movement, or a "student success" focus. Despite our ongoing

advocacy of critical-thinking in post-secondary education, you'd think Canadians couldn't think for themselves.

But there's another reason to be wary in selecting what we want to adopt, or work with, from America regarding education. One of the main social structural reasons for the socio-economic issues that America faces is the general failure of its public education system. In an article on "Inequality, Economic Mobility, and Social Policy" written for a book aimed at explaining America to non-Americans, Burtless and Haskins tell us: "Particularly at the bottom end of the income distribution, American institutions are less successful than those in other rich countries in equalizing the opportunities available to children. This fact should dismay American voters...In spite of the faith that Americans place in their education system as an institution for equalizing opportunity, children from poor backgrounds fare badly in school."<sup>1</sup>

They go on to point out that America's public education system is inadequately funded, and "poorer students aren't provided with sufficient financial support after high school". In addition, there's the problem of "ineffective and underperforming schools". But I would contend the problem is much deeper than this. The public education system is under-funded, ineffective and under-performing because, wherever they can, many American states are turning what is fundamentally a public matter—education—into another site for commercial and entrepreneurial approaches and interests, and relying on philanthropy to solve the problem.

So instead of following current American lines of thinking, why don't we take a page from Ms. Gruwell's inspirational curriculum. Rather than inviting Americans to present us with ideas on how education should be done, why don't we invite someone from outside of America,

just as she and her students brought the woman who cared for Anne Frank to speak to them. Let's invite someone from Europe, Asia, Australia, Africa, South America. And then after that, let's take yet another page from her imaginative curriculum and encourage Canadians to tell their own story about education, as she asked her students to do.

America has much to be proud of and be respected for. But please, no more uncritical believers in the American dream, which at the moment seems to be turning into a nightmare for many, many people. And no more over-managed professional development events, which make little or no room for dialogue and development. ▼

1. Peter Schuck and James Wilson (editors), Understanding America: The Anatomy of an Exceptional Nation, New York: Public Affairs, 2008: 520-1.



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THE GREEN CORNER

# Porky's Profitable Poop Products

by Jill Edmondson

According to the article "Road Hogs" in the November 2010 issue of *The Atlantic*, scientists are coming up with innovative ways to waste less... waste. A St. Louis based idea factory called Innoventor, has found a way to turn porcine poop into paving and roofing products. As well, they can use the processing by-product to produce liquid fertilizer. Innoventor's experiments with hog waste have been helped along with \$1,000,000 in funding from the Environmental Protection Agency.

Innoventor's Swine-Manure-to-Energy-Unit essentially uses heat and pressure to convert hog feces into bio-oil. This modern day alchemy is significant when one considers the amount of animal excrement

produced on an annual basis. According to one farmer, his 10,000 pigs produce about 5 million gallons of waste per year. It's easy to imagine how this impacts manure lagoons or how contaminated waste water interacts with ecosystems.

One use Innoventor has found for their modified manure is as asphalt binder. The processed pig poop passed a number of tests before being granted permission for use by transportation officials. In April of last year, the eco-friendly asphalt binder was used on a trial stretch of roadway in Missouri, one of America's largest hog farming states. Indications thus far are that the pork pavement is durable...and it has no offensive odours.

The potential of this development is great. Innoventor hopes one day to produce a pound of pig oil per day. In addition to as-

phalt materials, there is an as yet untapped market for the liquid fertilizer created in the production of the oinker's oil. The prognosis is good: reduced animal waste in the environment, a green alternative to construction materials, and a readily available fertilizer. It's possible that Innoventor has indeed found a way to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.



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## Annual General Membership Meeting

Tuesday, May 17, 2011

St. James Campus, 200 King St. E. ~ SJA, Room 128

4:00 pm ~ 6:00 pm

*To be followed by a social get together at Betty's*

# ***OPSEU to Premier:*** **Restore democratic rights to part-time college workers**

*In a letter (dated February 3, 2011 ) to Premier Dalton McGuinty, OPSEU president Smokey Thomas writes that the Minister of Training, Colleges and University has the legislative authority to order Colleges to count the ballots of part-time college workers who voted more than two years ago to organize.*

Dear Premier McGuinty

After years of lobbying by OPSEU and its members in our community colleges, your government amended the Colleges Collective Bargaining Act to allow part-time academic and support staff the right to unionize and to participate in collective bargaining. This was an historical achievement that helped lay the ground work for Ontario's economic and social prosperity.

More than 9,000 part-time academic and support staff signed membership cards and chose OPSEU as their union believing they would gain collective bargaining rights.

In 2009, thousands of part-time College workers cast a ballot to join OPSEU. Since then, the Colleges have mounted a costly and anti-democratic legal fight to block the counting of those ballots. Both votes remain uncounted because of their unscrupulous tactics. Surely this was not the intent of your government when it amended the Act more than two years ago.

The International Labour Organization, a respected agency of the United Nations, has taken notice. In a decision released three months ago, the ILO urged your government to sit down with OPSEU and to arrive at a solution that respects the democratic wishes of those who voted. Instead of taking action, your government continues to ignore the growing international condemnation over the denial of basic rights for part-time college workers. At the end of the day, the ILO decision is about allowing the votes to speak for themselves—in a democracy, our elected officials have a responsibility to make sure this happens.

There is a way out. Under s. 4(1) and s. 5(1) of the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act (2002) the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities may intervene into the affairs of the Colleges to ensure the public interest is met. In other words, Minister John Milloy can order the Colleges to withdraw their objections to counting the ballots under s. 31 of the CCBA (2008) to the two applications for certification by OPSEU.

What makes this particular group of Ontarians so unique that they continue to have their fundamental human right to join a trade union, repeatedly and blatantly ignored? What is so special about the men and women who are charged with the education of the youth of our province that allows the Colleges to deny them their collective bargaining rights? These college workers not only teach and support our next generation of highly skilled workers. They are also responsible for retraining displaced workers who are vital to our province's economy.

There is an honorable manner by which full democratic rights can be restored to thousands of employees of our community college system. The solution is contained in the legislative authority vested in the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

I strongly urge you to uphold the democratic process and to respect the will of part-time academic and support staff at our community colleges. It is in your power to order the sealed ballot boxes to be opened and the votes to be counted.

Sincerely,

Warren (Smokey) Thomas, President

# The Professor, in the Bar, with the Knife

by Tom Tomassi

We are always proud to announce the accomplishments of our colleagues here at George Brown, but we are especially happy to note the achievements of our Local 556 members, in particular those of our Local Executive Council (LEC).

In early March, Madeline McCarthy and I (along with a number of other GBC faculty members) attended the launch party for a mystery novel called *Dead Light District*. The novel was written by our own Jill Edmondson, a Communications professor in the Faculty of Hospitality and a Local 556 steward.

This is Jill's second novel in the Sasha Jackson Mysteries series. The first instalment, *Blood and Groom*, was released in November 2009, and received many great reviews in such publications as Quill & Quire, The Globe & Mail, The Hamilton Spectator and other periodicals.

But Jill's not the only one who's pleased as punch at the release of *Dead Light District*. Jennifer Stellings, a Graphic Design professor in the School of Design and 3rd VP of Local 556, also had a hand in bringing this book to life. Jennifer designed the cover, a cover that Jill absolutely loves and which she feels matches the contents of the book. What's interesting is that Jennifer came up with the cover illustration without having read the book! Jill provided Jennifer with only a synopsis and some key words and themes.

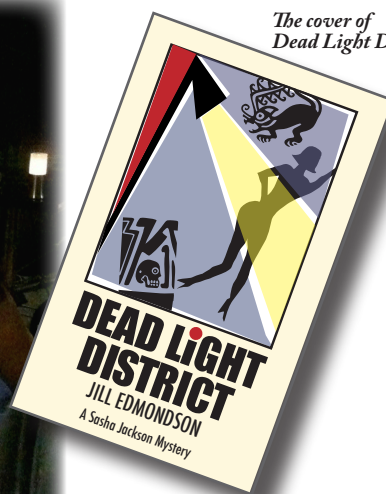
As many of you might guess, publishing is a tough business and getting the word out about a new author and a new book

is a challenge. Because of this, Jill decided to throw a launch party for the release of *Dead Light District*, just as she did with *Blood and Groom*. Since the novel features a Mexican character, that theme was played up at the party. Food and beverage included nachos and tequila, the music included Los Lobos and Richie Valens, and the centrepieces were (what else?) cacti. Of course, since the book is a murder mystery, the room was covered with yellow crime scene tape!

We all left the party with signed copies of the book and we're looking forward to book number three. ▼



Above: Jill signing her new mystery novel. At right: Jill talking to Madeline and me.



The cover of Dead Light District.



PHOTOGRAPH IDEN FORD



Roses adorned with the cover design were given out at the book launch.

the VOCAL LOCAL

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