



Pension Airwaves

Episode 8 - SPP 50th Anniversary Part 2: CUPE 116 (*Transcript*)

Hi there and thanks for tuning in to this episode of Pension Airwaves.

Today we are kind of doing a “Part 2” to our acknowledgement of the SPP’s 50th Anniversary, which we celebrated in 2022. The first acknowledgement we made is in Episode 6, *“Looking back, it’s always been about looking forward”* and if you want to listen to that episode, it’s listed on the Pension Airwaves website. That one featured Jay Parker and Brian Evans, two former SPP pension board members and significant contributors to the Plan’s achievements and successes during those 50 years. We wanted to add to the conversation by talking to another very significant contributor, Dave Lance.

Dave is currently the president of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 116. CUPE 116 is a large, diverse union group, and it maintains three collective agreements, including UBC, UBC Aquatic Centre, and Koerner’s Pub with the Grad Students Society, and they advocate for fairness in the workplace, excellence in public services, and fair wages, benefits and opportunities for working families. CUPE 116 coordinates actions on major issues, provides resources to members, and assists in organizing, bargaining, political action and education.

Dave started out at UBC as a student, and then became an employee and member of CUPE 116, and then was elected to the role of President in 2015. He also served on the Staff Pension Plan board from 2008 to 2016. Many important Plan milestones took place within those years, and in particular, Dave was a part of the expansion of SPP eligibility to include hourly CUPE 116 members. I sat down with Dave recently to talk a bit about his experiences on the pension board, and what he thinks about working at UBC. I hope you enjoy the interview.

Chelsey: Welcome to the podcast, Dave, thanks for joining me!

Dave: My pleasure!

Chelsey: So when did you start working at UBC, and what was your role?

Dave: I started working at UBC in 1999 just after I graduated, and I started out as a member of the landscape crew over in, what was at that time, Plant Operations, now it’s part of Facilities.

Chelsey: And how long were you there for?

Dave: I worked on the crew over there for 4 or 5 years until I became a full time officer of CUPE 116.

Chelsey: When did you become President of CUPE 116 and how did that come about? What drew you to that role?

Dave: I became the President in 2015, and I had been a full time officer since about 2004 or so. And so it was a bit of a natural progression to move from the Second Officer role to the President's role. Having that additional responsibility, having more direct involvement in the collective bargaining process, those were a couple of the major reasons why I wanted to become the President. And as well, just continuing the good work that we had been doing over the years.

Chelsey: Can you talk a bit more about the role of CUPE 116 at UBC? In case there are listeners who aren't familiar with all of the union groups here.

Dave: We're one of three CUPE locals on campus, predominantly a service employee local. We have many different members in many different roles: trades and technicians, Food Services workers, Parking, Campus Security, we have members in the bookstore, we have landscape technologists, we have arborists, members at the Aquatic Centre, Campus Mail, over at Housing. We also have some student roles, we've got residence life members, as well as some at the Aquatic Centre, and at the Koerner's Pub. So, a very diverse membership.

Chelsey: About how many members do you think there are, in total?

Dave: In total across the three collective agreements, we're probably around 3000 members - so, quite a number.

Chelsey: I'm curious about your relationship with the Staff Pension Plan. Why were you interested in joining the Pension Board, and how long did you serve?

Dave: I had become involved with the Pension Office a little bit, as part of my role with CUPE 116, just learning about some questions our members had and some issues that arose, administrative issues, mostly. But then I'd developed a bit of a relationship with Jay [Parker] who was the chief administrator at that time, and become involved in discussions around some Plan design changes that were being undertaken. I was really interested in that and had some good conversations with Jay, and ultimately got more involved, got more interested, and was initially appointed to the Board, and ultimately ended up serving 9 years. So, quite a long time, an enjoyable time, and a useful time.

Chelsey: As you know, we're celebrating the SPP's 50th anniversary in 2022. And throughout that, we've been acknowledging some of the major Plan milestones. You were a long-term Pension Board member and were a big part of many of those milestones - specifically, you were very involved in the 2013 Plan eligibility changes that allowed CUPE 116 employees to join - can you talk a little bit about what led up to those changes, and what the process was like for you, for the Board, etc?

Dave: Yes - that change was to allow hourly paid members of CUPE 116 at the University to join the Plan. That was a sizeable group of employees, who prior to eligibility into the SPP, were only able to access a defined contribution plan with a much lower contribution rate. And so, it did not provide (we thought) a good, reliable source of potential retirement income. Having learned more about the SPP, about the Board, and about eligibility requirements, it was a change that we at CUPE 116 and thankfully the University and the Pension Board, were interested in and supportive of as well. That change happened predominantly in and around (although there were obviously other discussions involved) the collective bargaining process in 2012 that led to the eligibility change in Spring 2013. [There was an] option then, for many, many additional members for CUPE 116 to become members of the SPP and avail themselves of a better Plan and a greater likelihood of

being able to retire with a reliable source of retirement income. A very important change and very happy that we were collectively able to make those changes to the Plan.

Chelsey: Those are really significant changes and I'd expect it was really positive for everyone involved. Anecdotally, how do you feel that those eligibility changes have affected CUPE 116 members?

Dave: Having spoken to some - in an anecdotal form, but in preparation for the decision to retire and hearing some stories about retirement - knowing that that Plan was there for them and that they have access, even at that point it would have only been for a few years, but it made a notable difference to them to have that stable income and to participate in the Plan. So, the longer that time goes by, more members will have had more duration in the Plan and will see that benefit even moreso.

Chelsey: Are there any other Plan milestones that you remember during your tenure on the Board, that you would like to acknowledge?

Dave: Yes there were a number of important changes. One very significant one was the Plan design changes that came into effect in July 2009 that changed the contribution and the benefit formula rates and allowed for a more equitable Plan and more member contributions. Another important change, which was actually implemented after I ceased to be on the Board, was the introduction of mandatory enrolment, not allowing deferral of entrance [*into the Plan*] when eligible. That was a fundamental change, a very important one. A lot of people over the years have had conversations about regretting not joining the Plan as soon as they were eligible. So, that that is no longer able to happen is a good thing.

One thing I came to really appreciate about being on the Board, was how mindful all Board members were (and consultants) about the need to have any changes or any thoughts about the Plan, be mindful of all income levels and employment types. I thought that was very important and I was happy to be able to observe that. And as well, a continual focus throughout the years on ensuring that the Plan was reliable, sustainable, viable, and was as likely as possible to be there for members in retirement. But having a continual mindful focus to the long-term sustainable, viable pension retirement income, it was really a pleasure to be a part of that.

Chelsey: What are the main things about working at UBC that you enjoy?

Dave: Aside from the setting, which is really quite something, and the beauty of the campus which is notable, one of the things that I've come to appreciate more and more with my relatively long tenure here now is the opportunity that it provides a number of different people from all sorts of walks of life. I think that is something that is unique to an institution like this, and something that I do appreciate and have seen to be beneficial to my members and others.

Chelsey: What advice would you pass on to our listeners who are thinking about planning for their financial future? (That can include those who are young and new to their career at UBC, or those who may be starting to think about retirement soon.)

Dave: The answer would be similar, and that is to become familiar with the Pension Plan, what other aspects of retirement income are important or necessary, but to become familiar with it, to take advantage of the education that the Pension Administration Office provides, because it really is one of the most important benefits that lots of us are lucky enough to have at UBC. So, understanding how it works and how it can best aide in retirement, is very important. The information is there, people need to (in my view) avail themselves of it and learn about this benefit.

Chelsey: Well Dave, thank you very much for speaking with me today about the SPP's 50th Anniversary, about CUPE 116, about your tenure on the Board. I really appreciate your time - thank you so much.

Dave: Happy to do so.

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If you have questions about the UBC Staff Pension Plan or your personal situation, you can reach out to SPP Member Services at spp@hr.ubc.ca, or visit staff.pensions.ubc.ca/contact.