

Chapter Activist Profile

John Dressler – Williams Lake, B.C. Chapter Chair

Williams Lake is a city nestled in central British Columbia, home to more than 11,000 people and the hub of the Central Cariboo region. The Williams Lake chapter formed in spring 2006, bringing together people who wanted to make positive changes in their community.

CP: What prompted you to start the chapter?

John: There were so many issues that needed looking into and I thought that if we wanted to change things we needed to start in our own back yard. We needed to work with the people we know and start close to home.

CP: And what issues were people concerned about?

John: We heard from the chapter members that the environment, our energy extraction, health care and our electoral system all needed addressing. But then when the local water issue came forward, it was clear that this was where we needed to concentrate our energy. It was such a blatant problem that it needed our input.

CP: What was the problem?

John: The Mayor of Williams Lake had decided that the management of the city's drinking water would be handed over to (the private company) Epcor – the City's own customer. Epcor currently uses water from the local aquifer to cool pipes for their energy production. That in itself is wrong, but now the City was going to let Epcor control our drinking water treatment! In an attempt to deflect public attention from the Mayor, Council formed a Drinking Water Advisory Committee and the chapter decided we'd be their watchdog. There were four or five of us who attended all the meetings of this committee. We put in our opinions even when we weren't welcome, and



Williams Lake, B.C. Chapter Chair John Dressler looks through papers during a recent meeting of chapter activists. The chapter has been actively involved in stopping water privatization in their community.

we have had influence. So much so that one of the six recommendations from the committee was that the water system remain in public hands.

CP: How long did that process take?

John: It was about eight months.

CP: How did the chapter stay on top of the issue?

John: The chapter met frequently, about 25 of us. We talked about the issue and we made plans to ensure that we were maintaining our presence. We had a letter-writing campaign – we have some great writers in the group. The information we included was solid, there were lots of intelligent arguments, there was the occasional rant, but we used detailed facts in our letters. The group attracted three of the city's former water superintendents, so that gave our group a lot of community clout.

(As a result of the chapter's presence at the Water Advisory Committee meet-

ings, John has been named to the city's permanent Water Committee and continues to be a voice for public control of municipal services.)

CP: And how are your chapter members feeling?

John: There is a good feeling among us. Last meeting was a cold and miserable day, but we still had the usual 25 members come out to the meeting. We are as determined as ever.

CP: What is on the horizon?

John: Our big objective is to see some electoral reform provincially and federally. And we also want people to have a greater awareness that our media are controlled by a few corporate hands. We are working month by month, but these are our two big targets.

CP: Do you have a word of advice for other chapters?

John: Establish a phone list and use it. Call members and let them know about meetings, ask them to attend. Even if you have a notice in the paper, make that personal phone call. I've been told by lots of people that the phone call is the reason they make sure to come to meetings.

For more information about how to join a chapter in your area, visit our website at www.canadians.org, or call 1-800-387-7177.

