

City hit hard by Sears layoffs

By Natalie McMullen

On Wednesday afternoon, 529 Sears Canada Inc. employees in Quinte were told they were losing their jobs.

The majority of the cuts were made at the customer contact centre. A move to outsource these positions abroad means 453 Quinte area residents are out of work.

An additional 56 employees were given notice at the national distribution centre – the warehouse located on College Street East.

This follows a series of layoffs announced in 2013, beginning with 120 jobs cut at the warehouse last January.

According to one source who was let at that time after 21 years with the company, there have been more cuts in recent months.

He said some of his friends, who were let go in November and December, still haven't received their severance packages.

The source asked to remain anonymous because he said stipulations in his separation agreement prevent former employees from making any public statement that would present the company or its associates in a negative light.

Another former employee said the clauses in the separation agreement "stop everyone from giving their names (to the media)." He said former employees' hands are tied because they're told if they say anything about the company, Sears will go after their severance.

"Big corporations do their best to protect their image," said the source.

According to their severance contract, the laid-off employees cannot work for the time period covered by their severance pay. If they break this agreement, the source said, they risk losing their severance.

After 21 years' service, the former employee received 50 weeks of severance.

"I got a year's pay and I didn't have anything after that."

In addition to being unable to look for work during this period, they are also ineligible for Employment Insurance programs.

"E.I.'s no help at all until your severance package runs out."

Asked about the company's transparency and tact when laying off employees, the source said that during last January's cuts, he and others were required to leave the building immediately upon dismissal, without saying goodbye to colleagues.



Photo by Matthew Desouza

Tom Forster, a seasonal employee at the Sears logistics centre in Belleville, was given notice Thursday that his contract was being terminated a month prematurely. Forster's wife, a full-time Sears employee at the logistics centre, is also being laid off. His wife has until April 4, before her time at Sears expires.

"Layoffs have nothing to do with people. It's just a fact of life of the business."

He said he hasn't yet contacted friends who lost their job yesterday because he remembers what it was like when it happened to him.

"It's turned into such an awful place to be."

The source heard that people were rounded up yesterday and told their jobs

would end in four to nine months. He added that he was told "a bunch of people quit right on the spot."

City of Belleville Mayor Neil Ellis called the cuts "a major blow" and said "it's a sad day with any job loss numbers like this."

"Sears said they'll help with retraining and resumés and any type of job relocation they can do and the city is here to help in any way we can too," Ellis added.

The former employee said the city only pays lip service to helping those affected by the cuts.

"I never received help from the city. The city has no more pull than anyone else."

The source said the scope of the cuts is too great for the city to manage.

"They can't absorb 550 (people). These weren't minimum wage jobs. At least 300

of those people had been there 20 years, making \$15-20/hour. Full-time jobs with benefits."

He said he feels those who will be most affected are the ones who aren't yet ready to retire, but have worked with the company for most of their lives.

"A lot of people let go yesterday are 40-50 years old, with 20 years of service."

H1N1 flu strain makes appearance in Ontario and across the country

By Mandy Larade

From coast to coast, the flu is making its way across Canada and it isn't slowing down.

The infamous H1N1 has also made an appearance, and is believed to be responsible for over a dozen deaths and hundreds of hospitalizations in Canada in provinces including British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario.

H1N1, otherwise known as "swine flu" had its first outbreak in 2009. The World Health Organization announced it as a

global pandemic. However, because the virus has already been around once, there is believed to be more immunity this time.

Registered nurse Lauren Deans of Loyalist College, says that getting a general flu shot will suffice to protect against the H1N1 virus.

"It does have some H1N1 properties," Deans says.

The flu is known to disrupt airways in the body, making it harder to breathe. Symptoms include coughing, sneezing, nausea, fever, chills, sudden headaches, fatigue, loss of appetite, sore muscles,

and sore throat. H1N1 is unique because it not only affects the air passages, but it also affects lung tissue which causes inflammation. When it comes to age, H1N1 is not selective. From young to old, everyone is susceptible to contracting the virus.

Deans says that prevention is easy if we take the time to be careful.

"The biggest tip of all is to wash your hands," Deans says.

Sanitary precautions are necessary when it comes to flu prevention because of how easily it spreads through the environment.

"That's how it is transferred – through touch, through air."

Deans also reminds us that it's better to avoid personal contact with others to stop the spread of the flu.

"If you're sick, stay home," Deans says.

Deans says it's important to make sure common surfaces are regularly sanitized.

"Keep an eye on the surrounding areas. If you work in a place where there's a lot of people touching stuff, make sure you clean that spot off on a regular basis."

While the western provinces have been struggling with the amount of vaccine

running low in some major cities, Deans says "It's not been that bad yet in Belleville."

It is advised that flu shots be taken earlier in the season.

"They take two weeks to kick in," Deans says.

However, there is still time to receive a vaccine. For students, the shot is available in the student health centre at Loyalist.

"I'll give a flu shot to anyone who wants one. Just come on in. We generally do them on Wednesdays and Thursdays," Deans says.

Protesters continue their support at Frank Meyers' farm

By Anica James

Approximately 20 protesters occupied the Hamilton Road farm on Wednesday afternoon, keeping a watchful eye on the demolition equipment in the distance.

"I feel really bad that we didn't have the balls on Monday to go out there and clean that barn," said Lisa Gibson, activist and creator of the Facebook page Save Frank and Marjorie Meyers Farm. She was addressing her small group of supporters in regards to the demonstration held at the farm earlier in the week when police officials showed up.

"He didn't want us to," Ken Dearborn added. "We asked him if he needed help but he doesn't want any of us to get into trouble."

Dearborn, a resident of Yarker, Ont., stirred a pot of soup over a makeshift fire as other supporters passed around coffee and baked goods from Tim Hortons.

Frank Meyers cleared out a trailer on his property so that supporters could take shelter from the wind and snow, while his wife made sandwiches for the protesters on Wednesday.

"They want us here," Phil Ostroskie said. "I don't know why some people think that the Meyers do not want our support, because clearly they do."

Conductors of Canadian National trains waved or gave the thumbs-up as they drove past the few protesters waving Canadian flags next to the tracks. Signs and flags peppered the property and barns on Meyers' property that was expropriated by the Department of National Defence. Protesters trespassed on the property to place the flags in a last-



Photo by Anica James

Lisa Gibson, activist and creator of the Facebook page Save Frank and Marjorie Meyers Farm, sits next to Frank Meyers in his truck on Wednesday afternoon discussing the number of people that are showing their support online.

ditch effort on Tuesday afternoon, hoping that it would slow down the demolition process due to flag desecration.

"I'd like to see them go and rip their own flags down," Ostroskie said, regarding

the flags flying on the DND property. "Because they're not allowed to do that."

The land, which was expropriated by the DND in 2012, was scheduled to begin demolition on Monday, but so far nothing

has happened.

"They are not making a move because there are too many votes lost," said Gibson. "I'm sure that they are just waiting until our backs are turned or until the media

disappears in order to make their move."

Sitting next to Meyers in his truck on Wednesday afternoon, Gibson discussed the number of people that are showing their support online, and how the Facebook page, which she began in October 2013, has grown to 34,000 likes to date.

"The Conservative Party of Canada Facebook page only has 27, 328 likes," she said, laughing. "We are going to win this thing. We have to."

Both Gibson and Meyers said they are pleased with the number of people who are willing to put forth the time and effort to make a stand against the expropriation of Meyers' farm, both online and in person, and hope that the support will continue to grow.

"When the people we pay to protect our backs do not have our backs, that's messed up," said Gibson from inside Meyers' truck.

"We've got to rise up," Meyers said. "Everyone's got to rise up. This is the beginning of a revolution across Canada, across the world, and somebody's got to start it. Did I start it? I don't know, but I am getting the feeling that I did."

The property that was expropriated by the Department of National Defence is crown land and has been owned by the Meyers family since 1798. Frank, who is a descendent of Capt. John Meyers, a United Empire Loyalist and original founder of the Belleville area, is upset with how the Conservative government doesn't seem to care about Canadian history or its people.

"I will build a monument up here and all the bureaucrats' names will be on it and what they did to the Meyers family," said Meyers