



# PUBLIC PERSPECTIVE

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## United Effort Brings Success

### **Undervalued. Underpaid. They're not sentiments that any worker wants.**

Yet for the Customer Service Officers (CSOs) at Museum Victoria, these are the thoughts that they held for years; sentiments they carried with them while they went about their duties. These duties, upheld the highest standards of courteous and professional conduct, and arming our community – especially our children – with invaluable knowledge about our heritage.

For CSOs Trevor Newman, Will Patten and Ken McLeod, being appropriately classified and remunerated meant much more – it was a matter of professional integrity.

Their effort formally kicked off in April 2005, but really started back in 2004 when the new VPS classification system came into play and the Museum shifted across. It was then that momentum started building across the three campuses.

"On good advice from the union we decided to go ahead with pushing for a Work Classification Review. We'd wanted to do it for ages because we'd felt undervalued and unappreciated by Museum Victoria, particularly when compared to how other organisations treated employees more favourably," says Trevor.

Working with Team Leader Anthony McAleer on the notification of intention, Trevor says he realised that a united, group-driven effort could be needed to present the most forceful case.

As Ken recalls, "We discussed the fact that people who take the system on, purely on their own, rarely get anywhere. The collective approach is always the best."

"We undertook a course run by CPSU which was tremendously helpful," says Trevor.

"CPSU had recently had success with a Work Value Review at VicPol, so industrial staff were excellent in giving us as much information as possible about how we were to describe our roles, and provided valuable guidance about the process. It demonstrated the effectiveness of working together as a group, not just individually."

All the training and well-thought-out preparation, however, certainly didn't mean that the task was easy.



Trevor Newman, Will Patten and Ken McLeod – Customer Service Officers at Museum Victoria.

"The day we submitted our notification of intention was pretty much out of a sitcom", Trevor recalls with good humour.

"There were 40 applications to put together, 70 pages each, and we were burning out photocopiers and printers all over the place. Anthony and I finally piled them all together on a trolley to take up to HR with only five minutes left before the cut-off. It was magic to see the look on the HR Manager's face!"

While the application was initially rejected, the membership group, not dissuaded, got together and decided to appeal. It was an 18 month wait for the appeal hearing, but the closer the date approached, something strange started to happen.

"It seemed as though fate was coming together to divide the team," says Trevor.

"You wouldn't believe it, but the week before the panel was due to convene, I got called up for jury duty. HR also tried to prevent Anthony from appearing, because he was a Team Leader and not a CSO."

"The tri-partite panel met in September. As things turned out, Anthony persisted and presented his case anyway. And thankfully, Will was able to step in for me and did a tremendous job, as well as Ken."

While it was supposed to be an hour long hearing, it ended up going for three and a half, Trevor says, which enabled the team to present its case in detail. The effort is even more the admirable for the fact that Ken and Will work part-time for the Museum.

"Meanwhile, I ended up spending four weeks in the Supreme Court and having no part to play in what I'd spent so much time in preparing!" Trevor laughs.

According to the group, how the news was delivered was very unusual, and "The Manager

of Customer Service and HR gathered us together out the front of the Museum, and began talking to the group in a sombre, serious manner," Trevor says.

"They then made passing mention of the change in our classification, and we almost missed it! After a short time, I realised the significance of what had just happened. I got up and said, "Guys! We're successful! We got this!" The whole group just erupted with cheering. There was so much cheering that the HR Manager struggled to finish."

"It was such a proud moment for us, as it was a solely member-driven effort."

"We knew we stood a good chance of success as we were well organised and we'd rallied all the campuses together," says Trevor.

While the transfer will have taken effect in November for non-member staff, CPSU members will be back paid to April 2005, meaning that they stand to benefit quite substantially for being part of their union.

"We're still waiting on the final figures to come through about how much back-pay is owed, we do know that it'll be significant. A lot of it will depend on individual circumstance, but full-time staff back paid to April 2005 could get up to \$10,000."

"Some of us will use it towards our mortgages or other commitments, but it's also a big help leading into Christmas and the holidays," he says.

"In fact, one of my colleagues had already booked a trip overseas. Now he has decided he'll use it to upgrade his accommodation."

But more important than money, however, is that Trevor, Ken and Will see the win as a big help towards another goal – which is shifting an attitudinal and generational divide among Museum employees.

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Level 5, Rear Building, Victorian Trades Hall, 54 Victoria St, Carlton South 3053  
Postal Address: PO Box 200, Carlton Sth 3053  
Ph: 03 9639 1822 or 1800 810 153 toll free.  
Fax: 03 9662 4591  
Website: www.cpsuvic.org  
Email: enquiry@cpsuvic.org