



UNION MEMBERSHIP MAKES AN ECONOMY BUILT TO LAST

BY TOM GRAHAM, PRESIDENT, CUPE SASKATCHEWAN

Unions. When it comes to Saskatchewan's economy, it may not be the first word that comes to mind. Yet, over 151,400 union members make a significant, positive economic impact.

Union members in Saskatchewan earn on average \$5.28 more per hour according to a recent study by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) which analyzed the impact of union membership in

29 communities. Women earn up to \$15,000 more per year with full-time work if they belong to a union.

To grasp the extent to which better union wages boost the economy, comparisons can be made with the contribution individual sectors make to the provincial Gross Domestic Product (GDP). If the higher-than-average union wages, sometimes called the "union advantage," were considered to be its own sector,

the union advantage sector would be two percent of the provincial GDP - relative to the size of the tourism industry and slightly higher in impact than accommodation and food services. While union members work in many sectors and spend their wages on a variety of goods and services, the comparison illustrates that better union wages are worth over \$1 billion annually.

In Regina, union members contribute an

extra \$7.3 million each and every week supporting businesses, creating demand for community services, and bolstering the local tax base. In Saskatoon, union members contribute an extra \$8.5 million each and every week to the local economy.

Union membership also results in indirect economic support. Almost twice as likely to be covered by a medical and dental plan, union members attract and support professional services. Nearly three times as likely to be covered by a workplace pension, union members improve retirement security for the province. Union members are also active in their communities. In one union survey, 73 percent of members indicated they belonged to a volunteer organization or volunteered in some capacity.

Non-union small business owners also recognize that good union jobs and good wages make for a healthy local economy.

“When people have more money in their pockets that means there is more disposable income to spend fixing your car,” says owner of Driven Automotive Daryl Kulcsar. Driven Automotive is a local auto repair shop located on the 500 block of Broad Street in Regina.

Fellow business partner, Jason Mancinelli, also sees the value that union members bring to their small business.

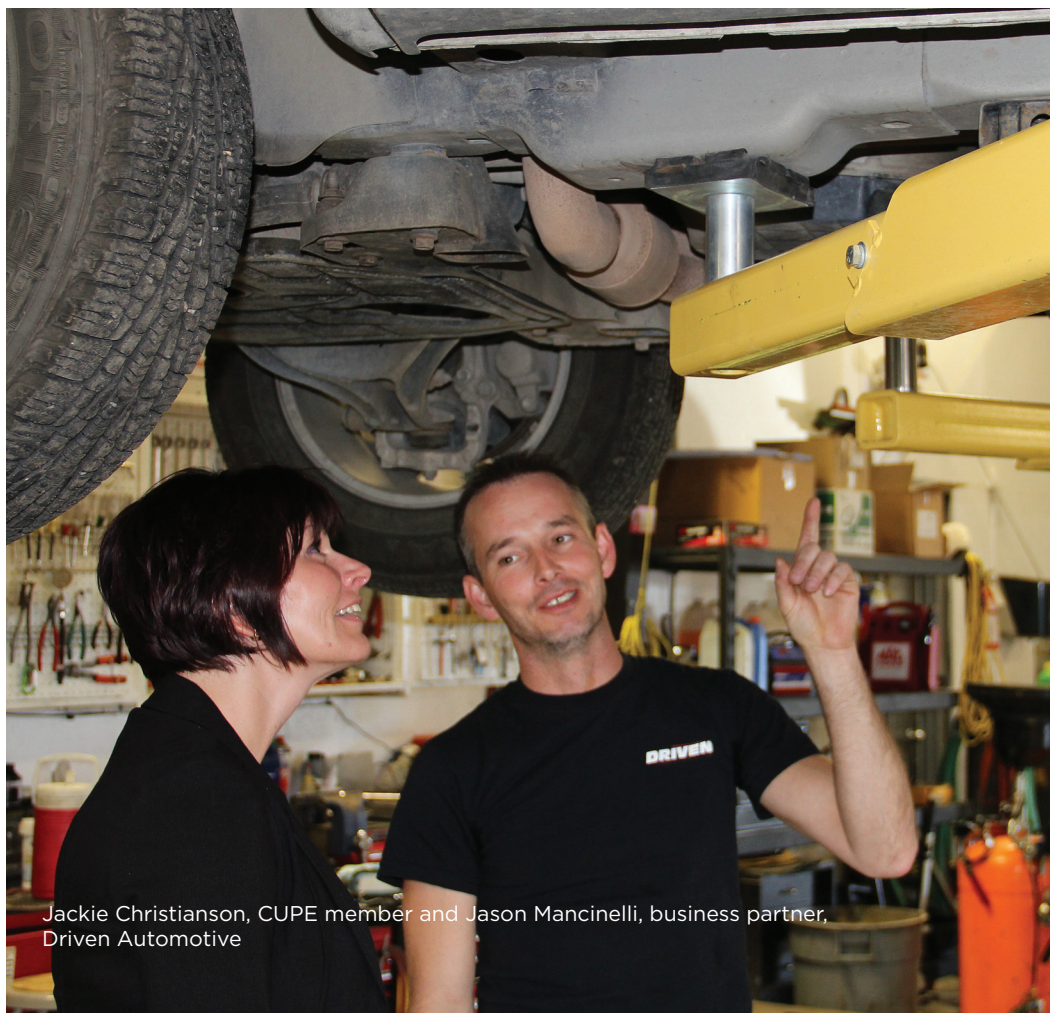
“We depend on our community doing well to make our small business work,” says Mancinelli. “When everyone has a decent wage, they can support our local business. In turn, we can have a successful full-service auto repair shop.”

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Saskatchewan has launched an initiative to highlight the positive economic impact of unions by encouraging members to drop off cards with the message “Our wages=your profits” when making purchases.

“We hope to highlight the benefit union members make to the economy and businesses they support,” said CUPE member Jackie Christianson who delivered one such card to Driven Automotive while paying for repair work for her vehicle. BR



Daryl Kulcsar, owner, Driven Automotive and Jackie Christianson, CUPE member



Jackie Christianson, CUPE member and Jason Mancinelli, business partner, Driven Automotive