



For immediate release

Alphonse Desjardins honoured as Greatest Canadian Co-operator

Ottawa, June 19, 2009 – Alphonse Desjardins, the father of Canada’s *caisse populaire* movement and founder of Canada’s sixth largest financial institution, has been named history’s “Greatest Canadian Co-operator” following an online vote by more than 8,000 people across the country.

The Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA) announced the winner of the Greatest Canadian Co-operator award at a gala dinner in Ottawa Thursday evening celebrating the 100th anniversary of Canada’s organized national co-operative movement. Mr. Desjardins, who died in 1920, was one of 14 pioneers of the Canadian co-operative movement nominated for the award. All 14 were inducted into the virtual Canadian Co-operative Hall of Fame, which was launched at Thursday’s event.

Mr. Desjardins, born to impoverished parents in 1854, established North America’s first co-operative savings and loan society – a *caisse populaire*, or “people’s bank” – in Lévis, Quebec in 1900 as an alternative to commercial banks that charged exorbitant interest rates to farmers and workers. His example inspired the creation of credit unions across Canada and the United States and today, Desjardins Group is Canada’s sixth largest financial institution. It is also the largest co-operative organization of any kind in Canada, based on turnover, and the 33rd largest co-operative in the world.

CCA launched the Hall of Fame project in an effort to honour Canadians past and present who have made a significant contribution to the Canadian co-operative sector. Co-operators and supporters across the country were asked to nominate deceased individuals who had made an important historical contribution to the movement, then vote online for the Greatest Canadian Co-operator. The Hall of Fame, which will be posted on CCA’s website www.coopscanada.coop later this summer, will also include past, present and future winners of CCA’s two awards for living co-operators, the Canadian Co-operative Achievement Award and the Global Co-operator Award.

“When we launched this project, we did not anticipate the extent to which the Greatest Canadian Co-operator award would capture the interest and imagination of co-operatives and their members,” said CCA President Dave Sitaram, who announced the winner of the competition to more than 200 co-op and credit union leaders Thursday evening. “When the voting closed at the end of April, more than 8,000 people had cast their electronic ballots. Needless to say, we were delighted.”

In addition to the Greatest Canadian Co-operator, CCA presented the 2009 Canadian Co-operative Achievement Award to Glen Tully, President of Saskatoon-based Federated Co-operatives Limited. The award honours outstanding individual contributions to the co-operative movement in Canada.

The 2009 Global Co-operator Award, which honours an individual who has demonstrated an extraordinary commitment to CCA's work in international co-operative development, was presented to Olha Zaverucha Swyntuch of Toronto for her successful efforts to develop credit unions in Ukraine over the past 15 years.

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The Canadian Co-operative Association is a national association for co-operatives in Canada, representing more than nine million co-operative and credit union members from over 2,000 organizations. CCA members come from many sectors of the economy, including finance, insurance, agri-food and supply, wholesale and retail, housing, health and the service sector. CCA provides leadership to promote, develop, and unite co-operatives and credit unions for the benefit of people in Canada and around the world.