



**Owner-Operator's Business
Association of Canada**

**Association professionnelle des
routiers autonomes du Canada**

*...from the
director's chair*

It's a Cryin' Shame

With a sentence of one year's house arrest and an order to pay back a little more than half the money that vanished from OBAC's small start-up budget, the OBAC vs. Leckie case is closed, as far as our criminal justice system is concerned. Over two years later, OBAC is still reeling from the consequences of its former accountant's crime.

The money, advanced to the newly incorporated association from Industry Canada, was intended to mount a website, select the directors, and publicly launch the organization that was to be the voice of the steering wheel crowd.

These activities took place – but were not paid for – and OBAC was in debt before it got off the ground, a fact discovered only after Leckie's disappearance the day of the launch.

In the wake of this discovery, directors worked with Industry Canada to determine the extent of the loss, and to satisfy themselves that there was no wrongdoing or mismanagement on the part of OBAC directors and other volunteers. While it was clear that OBAC was a victim of fraud, it was months before Leckie was found and charges were laid.

Unable to defend or even explain their situation, OBAC and its supporters became the target of negative media coverage. The protracted nature of the case – it would be close to two years before Leckie pleaded guilty to fraud – cast a pall over the credibility of OBAC and its supporters.

Tragically, without resources to hire an Executive Director, OBAC was unable to

set up an office, develop business strategies, implement a communications plan and recruiting campaign, and develop products and services for members. In effect, it could not operate. This lack of stability caused skepticism among individual drivers and owner-operators across Canada – the very people who were to benefit from OBAC – making it next to impossible to generate revenue through memberships.

OBAC also lost the confidence of some industry suppliers who had agreed to make an investment in the organization. With no leadership and no strategic plan, they withdrew their sponsorship.

There were other victims of this crime: OBAC's first members, who joined in good faith, then got nothing for their money, were certainly victims. So were OBAC's creditors, many of them small businesses who could ill-afford the loss of revenue.

The financial consequences of Leckie's crime have been devastating. Failure to recover vital financial records left OBAC unable to give a proper accounting to Industry Canada for the advance payment, and further funding was denied.

Friends of OBAC are still digging into their pockets to cover expenses; each day is a struggle for fiscal survival. Every membership counts, as does every in-kind contribution from suppliers and other organizations.

But OBAC is still here, and doing what it set out to do. We're making it onto the various government stakeholder lists, and all indications are that the voice OBAC is bringing to the table is very much welcome. Quietly,



**Joanne
Ritchie:
OBAC
executive
director**

in the background, we're helping dozens of owner-ops sort out daily challenges.

Of course, we're nowhere near where we had hoped to be by this time, but OBAC has survived and continues to gain strength. This speaks not only to the tenacity, creativity, and determination of its volunteers and supporters, but to the tremendous need for an organization that gives a voice to owner-operators across the country.

While the theft might have satisfied some need of Leckie's, it left Canada's 40,000 owner-operators out in the cold for two regrettable years – and that's a crying shame.