

# The Pioneer

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Photo by Justin Chin

**Multi-vehicle pileup on Hwy. 401 occurred westbound between Glen Miller Road and Wallbridge-Loyalist Road near Trenton. OPP said about 25 tractor-trailers and 10 smaller vehicles were involved in the string of collisions at about 11:45 a.m. Wednesday. OPP closed down the westbound lanes in the area and reopened them just after 3 p.m. Quinte West Fire Chief John Whelan described the scene as carnage, and multiple people were extricated from their vehicles. There is no exact number of injuries or their extent at this time have been reported.**

## Ramada Inn strike enters fifth month

By Dayna Lefebvre

Day after day, unionized workers at the Ramada Inn in Trenton walk the picket lines – and they have no intention of stopping any time soon.

The workers, who are members of the Local 175 of the United Food and Commercial Workers union, are striking against their employers, Royal Host. They have been on strike since Oct. 1 of last year. Not all of the employees are unionized – many are still at work in the hotel.

“The only thing we’re out here for is to keep what we got,” said Pat Viney, a server at the hotel who is on strike. “We’re not asking for extra. We’re not greedy.”

There hasn’t been an agreement in

place since the contract between the parties expired in March 2013, and picketers say there has been little contact between them.

“We’ve been willing to sit down with them since the beginning to negotiate something and try to reach an agreement,” said Jacques Niquet, a union representative out at the picket line. “We just want the company to talk to us.”

Jordan Vaeth, general counsel and corporate secretary for Royal Host, said by telephone that the company has no comment on the matter.

The strikers say they are fighting against changes to their benefits, vacation times, wages and seniority.

They are out every day at the entrance to the Ramada, stopping cars to let them know what is going on. Typically they are

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Server Pat Viney

out there up to six hours a day.

“When it was warmer weather we used to go all the way through, but it’s too cold to do that now,” explained Viney.

Originally, 35 workers walked off the job back in October, but only 16 remained out on the picket lines after the first day.

“There’s nothing we can do about that.

That’s their choice. It’s a personal choice,” said Niquet. “Since then it’s been the same. Everybody is still here.”

Despite the freezing temperatures, morale appeared high within the group of picketers. “It’s made a lot of people closer. I’ve met a lot of nice people,” Viney said.

“They’ve been pretty strong,” says Niquet. “We’ve been here since October. We’ve been through the cold, we’ve been through Christmas and New Year’s, and they are still here.”

Generally the public has been supportive as they drive by. Strangers have brought the strikers coffee, food, supplies such as umbrellas and made donations to the cause.

However the reactions haven’t been all positive.

“A lot of people think that we are trying

to get more money, but we’re not,” said Jesse Kulyk, a server at the hotel. “We’ve had people who aren’t from around here be rude to us. They don’t understand.”

The strikers say they have had to deal with hostility from clients staying at the hotel. “There are people with big trucks who just run right at us when we’re standing out here,” says Viney.

Reviews online for the Ramada Inn have been generally negative in the months since the strike, with many customers complaining that they weren’t notified of the strike. One review on TripAdvisor.ca says: “If I had known you had staff members on strike, I would have booked a room at another hotel.”

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## Residents waiting to get back home

*Bel Marine residents staying in hotel while retirement home makes repairs*

By James Wood

Craig Chamberlain has been settling into his new accommodations as best he can.

“It’s been nice,” said Chamberlain, walking towards his hotel room. Usually living on his own in Bel Marine Retirement Residence, Chamberlain is now sharing room 415 in the Belleville Travelodge with a roommate.

The Electrical Safety Authority evacuated residents from the Bel Marine Retirement residence, located in the east end of Belleville on Dundas Street, from their complex following an inspection on Sunday.

After a small electrical fire knocked out power to parts of the building, and became a safety concern for the building occupants, residents have been relocated across the area, staying with family and being put up in other residences. The remaining former occupants are staying at the Travelodge on Bay Bridge Road.

In order to move residents as quickly as possible, off-duty staff were called in with their personal vehicles.

“A lot of the staff who were not necessarily on duty came in,” said Chamberlain, “with their vehicles, they drove us over here.”

To pass the time while waiting to return to the retirement residence, Chamberlain walks down to the lobby of the hotel and talks with the other residents. He is keeping himself occupied while waiting to go home.

The comfortable settings of his temporary home have their charm, but “I’ll be glad to get back to Bel Marine; I like restaurant food but not every day,” said



Photo by James Wood

**Craig Chamberlain, a resident of Bel Marine Retirement Residence Craig Chamberlain relaxes in his hotel room at the Travelodge Hotel. Following a small electrical fire, residents were evacuated to numerous locations across Belleville. The fourth floor of the hotel has been put into use as a temporary residence for the evacuated seniors.**

Chamberlain.

Chamberlain said that communication between residents moved to the Travelodge and the managerial staff at Bel Marine has been good, with residents being kept up to date on the situation.

“We were informed today that the work will be done tomorrow, the inspection will take place on Thursday, and we’ll be back in the old place by Friday,” said Chamberlain.

Half of the fourth floor of the Travelodge has been given over to the Bel Marine

group at a reduced rate, and a temporary nurse’s station sits in the middle room.

“The fire marshal and the Electrical Safety Authority felt, that in the safety of the residents, it would be best to relocate them,” said Bel Marine manager Jeannie Griggs, standing in the restaurant of the hotel.

Griggs is co-owner as well as daily manager, and shares ownership with Raj Uthaya. Both said they hope to get their residents home as soon as possible.

“We’re aiming for Friday,” said Griggs. However, if the situation gets more com-

plicated, there are backup plans, she added.

Reached yesterday morning, Griggs said she was unsure of the exact return timeframe, as the weather had complicated the arrival of contractors and repairmen.

“At the best, we’re looking at one week till we can go back. At the worst, two weeks,” she said.

Bel Marine has been in operation since June of 2012, and this has been its first major mechanical issue, according to Griggs. The time of return for the residents is still unclear, but will be resolved in the next few days.

## Documents show government involvement in bus dispute

By Emily Cumming

A group of independent bus operators say that newly released documents from the Ministry of Education show the government’s involvement in an ongoing court battle over school bus contracts.

The internal government email correspondence was released by the Independent School Bus Operators Association on Feb. 5. The documents were obtained by the ISBOA through a Freedom of Information request.

At the heart of this new development is an ongoing five-year legal battle about funding structure changes to contracts between bus operators and local school boards and how those contracts are awarded and renewed.

Small independent school bus operators say they are upset about a funding structure being implemented called Request for Proposal, or RFP.

With a RFP, a school bus operator would have to apply for a new contract every five years, and many operators fear that this new policy will threaten to put them out of business.

Although contracts are negotiated between school bus operators and the local school board consortium – not directly with the provincial government – the released email correspondence indicated that the controversial change in funding structure was being driven from the Ministry of Education.

In one of the released emails, Adam D. McDonald, senior policy co-ordinator in the school business support branch of the Ministry of Education writes on February 27, 2012, “We’ll have to be prepared to justify why the Ministry has rejected each and every item in the report.”

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