



Photo by Justin Chin

Ken Skinkle, 52, makes his delivery runs to different garages. Skinkle is currently earning \$11 hourly, which is the new minimum wage, announced by the Ontario government in late January, an increase from the current \$10.25 per hour. The increase is meant to reflect the rise in Consumer Price Index.

Living on minimum wage

Paying the basics with little left

(Editor's Note: A rising share of Ontario's workforce is working for minimum wage. The amount of adults at this rate more than doubled between 2003 and 2011. Many living wage campaigns and anti-poverty organizations are calling for an increase in minimum wage from \$10.25 to \$14 an hour to address the income inequality that is growing in the province.)

By Justin Chin

"I barely get by," says Ken Skinkle.

Skinkle, 52, is a deliveryman at an auto parts store in Belleville. People call him Kenny.

He makes \$11 an hour, working 40 hours a week, with a 20-year-old son at

home.

"I pay the basics — I pay my bills, with a little left over for groceries. I don't go out for meals. So I don't have any disposable income," he says.

Skinkle is currently earning \$11 hourly, which is the new minimum wage announced by the Ontario government last Thursday, an increase from the current \$10.25 per hour. The increase is meant to reflect the rise in Consumer Price Index.

"It's not really helping because everything else goes up," he says. "People don't have that extra income to spend money, to have that disposable income. That's why the economy is so low."

Skinkle wakes up every morning at his

home in Trenton and arrives at the shop in Belleville at 7:30 a.m. from Monday to Saturday. He delivers auto parts from the company to different garages around the Quinte area, travelling sometimes up to 500 kilometres a day.

He would also take up other jobs, such as cleaning cars, to help with his income.

"If I can make, idealistically, \$13 an hour, I would be happy," he says. "But you would never see that with this kind of a job because they can replace me in five minutes."

Skinkle has been working for the auto parts shop for four years, and was making \$10.25 until a year and a half ago.

"I'd like to be able to do more, but real-

ity is, I can't. As long as I keep reality in check and I am on top of the bills, I am happy.

"I don't know if they are going to bump me up to \$12," he says, after the new minimum wage comes into effect.

"I want to take it easy someday," Skinkle says, "I'd like to go to Cuba, somewhere it's cheap and nice. I can go there for less than \$1,000."

The last time he went on a vacation was 20 years ago when he was still married.

Skinkle started in the workforce at 15 working part-time jobs. With a Grade 12 education, he has been in factory jobs working night shifts or cleaning cars for car dealerships since his teens.

"Everyone said, 'Why don't you do better?' I want to do better, but there aren't many jobs."

He estimates that he spends about \$1,500 each month on his mortgage, Internet, phone, hydro and heat, car insurances, gas and groceries.

He buys lots of meats and vegetables and put them in the freezer. He brings his own lunch to work, and eats out for lunch once a week.

He normally goes for a Subway sandwich or visits the drive-thru at Tim Hortons.

"I have no choice. That's the way life is, if I want to have what I have, things I want to have. If I want to be able to provide the necessity, that's the way life is."

Floorball championships come to Belleville in 2016

By Samantha Quinn

For the first time ever, U-19 women's world floorball championships will be held outside of European soil as announced Jan. 21 by the International Floorball Federation.

Belleville has been selected to host the U-19 women's world floorball championships, which will be held at the Quinte Sports and Wellness Centre on May 2 to May 8 of 2016.

Belleville was able to outbid a larger unnamed city in Switzerland, which will bring in more than 400 athletes from 16 different countries.

Floorball is a form of floor hockey created in Sweden in the 1970's, mostly popular in Latvia,

Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, and the USA.

Compared to other similar sports like ball hockey, etc. floorball has much less padding and protection for the players and goalie, and has much different equipment.

"There has been a rapid growth in interest for floorball in Belleville. Before this we just had a kids team, now there are men and women from everywhere looking to join teams. We grew from 25 to 170 people," said Davis.

In the 2014 U-19 Women's World Floorball Championship, taking place in Babimost, Poland from April 30 to May 4, Belleville will be represented by Raven Tabobandung, Ashley Boulter,

CJ Tipping, and Hannah Wilson.

Of the four girls attending the 2014 games, Wilson will be the only one legible to attend the games in 2016.

"This will be big for Belleville. It will bring in many people into the Quinte Wellness Centre, and the Floorball leagues quickly growing," said Bob Millard, Business professor at Loyalist College. "I was approached in the beginning of December to become involved with students in the social media plan and organization for the 2016 games."

Since the press release at the beginning of January, seven generous volunteers from the Business and Administration program at Loyalist College have been donating their time outside of school

to help with the social media plan, being put in charge of putting together all of the media outlets such as the teams Facebook and twitter pages, videos, presentations, booths at Bull's games, as apart of the social media plan.

"Although many current volunteers graduate before 2016, there will be more students coming in for the next two years, which will give us recruiting to more volunteers which means more promotion," said Millard.

Despite their recent loss to Germany in 2012, the team has been given a second chance, now as a B-Division team in the 2014 championships. If they win, they will be ranked 8th best in the world, putting them at A-Division.

Independent bus operators upset by report

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McDonald was referring to a report made by Hon. Coulter Osborne, an independent Chair of the Task Force investigation of RFPs.

In that report, Osborne suggested that RFPs are not the only funding structure that could work in this case and suggests that the ministry could continue to have the process evaluated by an independent body.

Osborne's report also alludes to a risk of monopolization of the industry by big business, since small school bus operators could be put out of business under the RFP structure. A monopoly would ultimately drive prices up in the long run.

Karen Cameron, the executive director of the ISBOA, says that McDonald's correspondence speaks to the larger attitude of the ministry's position, and says that "there was no integrity around trying to learn lessons about whether or not this was in fact fair for small operators." Cameron suggests that the ministry was dismissive of Osborne's recommendations to consider alternatives to RFPs.

"Six or seven years ago, when there was the eHealth and OLG scandal, that's when everything really went sideways," says Cameron. She believes that in a bid to appear more accountable and transparent, the provincial government have overlooked flaws in the new funding structure.

A request for comment from Ministry of Education officials regarding the release of emails and documents



Photo by Emily Cumming

Sherry Parkhurst of the local Al Parkhurst Transportation, is one of the plaintiffs in a legal battle against the local school boards regarding their contracts. Under a new funding structure, local bus operators must compete for new contracts every five years under a policy called "Request for Proposal (RFP)."

was not received by deadline. Many family-owned bus operators have been in business for generations and have been servicing the same routes for decades. In the past, contracts were negotiated and renewed privately on a case-by-case basis.

"The problem is that if small businesses lose their local routes and local business, they will go bankrupt overnight. They cannot relocate easily, in the way that multi-nationals are able to," says Cameron.

According to Cameron there have

been at least 20 school bus operator businesses in Ontario that have folded since RFPs have become the dominant funding structure in 2009.

Some question why the funding structure was changed in the first place, considering the relative low

wages earned by school bus drivers to begin with.

"School bus operators are some of the lowest paid employees of all" Cameron said. "They are pursuing RFPs on the back of drivers."

"School bus drivers transport some pretty precious cargo," said Sherry Parkhurst of Al Parkhurst Transportation, a locally-owned bus operator. "They certainly don't make the same kind of money as the guy that drives the beer truck or the garbage truck."

Al Parkhurst Transportation is one of 15 plaintiffs to take the local school board consortium to court over RFPs. They are currently operating in good faith without a contract, since a provincial Judge ordered the school board consortium to negotiate out of court.

Sherry's grandfather, Alvin Parkhurst, started the business in 1957 as a means to transport his disabled son to and from school. The business started with vans and station wagons, and now safely transports thousands of students across the Quinte region.

Gord Taylor CEO of Tri-Board, one of the consortium members that independent school bus operators in Belleville have taken to court, said in an interview that their priorities were to "provide a service that is safe, reliable and within the provincially set guidelines."

Taylor said that they wait for provincial government guidance and direction on decisions of funding structure.

"Government position is crucial."