2026 Canadian Labour Arbitrators Conference

By: Jim Casey, Edmonton, Alberta

On September 22 to 24, 2026 the National Academy of Arbitrators Canadian Labour Arbitrators Conference was held in the beautiful, Rocky Mountain town of Canmore, Alberta.

About 65 arbitrators attended from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Quebec, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and the U.S. Many "significant others" and family members were able to join us to enjoy the crisp mountain air and the beautiful scenery of the Bow Valley. We were pleased that colleagues from the United States were able to join us from: Philadelphia and Media, Pennsylvania; Chicago, Illinois; Gloucester, Massachusetts; Falmouth, Maine; and Alameda, California.

The conference was held at the beautiful Malcolm Hotel. About 20 of us started off the conference Tuesday afternoon with a guided walk from the Malcom Hotel to the Three Sisters Viewpoint returning along the Bow River. The walk was led by locals Bernie Asbell and Drew Holloway who shared their knowledge of the flora, fauna, geography and local history.

The conference was officially kicked off with an Opening Night Reception on Tuesday, September 22, 2026. We enjoyed Hors d'oeuvres and drinks while greeting old friends and meeting new ones.

The next morning Mark Asbell (Alta), Conference Chair, opened the conference with welcoming remarks and provided an overview of events.

One of the focuses of the conference was to develop a true pan-Canadian focus with both attendees and presenters. As a result, it was appropriate that our first session was "Set the Table: Review of labour relations jurisprudence and legislation from across Canada." The panel providing this cross-Canada tour was the Canadian Labour Relations Committee: Mark Asbell (Alta, Moderator); Colin Johnston (Ont); Ginette Brazeau (Ont); Jim Casey (Alta); Koml Kandola (B.C.); Marc Mancini (Que); and Sheilagh Murphy (N.L.).

The second panel of the morning explored the fascinating world of arbitration in sports: "Amateur and Professional Sports Adjudication in Canada and Abroad". The panel members were suitably attired in their favourite sports jerseys: Steve Raymond (Ont, Moderator); Allen Ponak (Alta/Ont); Jim Oakley (N.L.); John Stout (Ont); and Sarah Atkinson (Ont).

We then broke for the day so that attendees could get outside in the near perfect autumn mountain weather and enjoy activities such as golf, hiking, biking, going for walks, visiting the hot springs, shopping, dining at local restaurants and generally exploring the beautiful Bow Valley including Banff and area.

We resumed the conference at 5 pm with a welcome address from Walt De Treux, President of the National Academy of Arbitrators. Walt stressed the importance of the Canadian arbitrators as part of the NAA membership and the many leadership roles they have undertaken in the Academy. Walt also emphasized the collegiality and mutual support that binds all the members together regardless of which side of the border we reside. We then listened to an entertaining and thought provoking "Fire Side Chat" with renowned Canadian arbitrator and mediator Andrew C.L. Sims, K.C. (Alta) in conversations with Dean Emeritus Daphne Taras (Ont, Sask, Alta). Andy reflected on his half-century of pan-Canadian experience as a labour arbitrator, mediator, and policy adviser. Daphne was a perfect foil to Andy given her deep labour relations experience as an academic and policy adviser. A delicious dinner at the hotel was then served where more new friendships were formed.

The morning of Thursday, September 24, 2026 started with "Perspectives from the Bench: A Discussion with Justice Kristan McLeod of the Alberta Court of Kings Bench". Prior to her appointment to the Bench, Justice McLeod was one of the leading labour lawyers in Alberta with deep experience in the labour arbitration forum. Kristan reflected on the strengths and weaknesses of the arbitration process, the value of med-arb, and the challenges of transitioning from an advocacy to an adjudicative role. Jim Casey (Alta) served as the Moderator.

Our final panel took us on a deep dive into the world of mediation – "Grievance Mediation: Perspectives, Practical Advice and Pitfalls to Avoid" with a panel of: Jim Casey (Alta, Moderator); Amal Garzouzi (Quebec); Amanda Rogers (B.C.); and Jules Bloch (Ont). This panel discussion was filled with lively conversation and some debate.

Mark Asbell then closed the conference and invited those willing to convene in the evening for a pub crawl of some of Canmore's finer drinking establishments.

Some attending the conference left that afternoon; some left the next morning having survived the pub crawl; and some stayed a few more days to continue enjoying the beautiful Rocky Mountains and the Bow Valley.

We all looked back and considered the conference to have been a great success. The attendees provided very positive feedback on the substantive content of the conference, the beautiful location, and the opportunities to connect with other Canadian arbitrators.

Preliminary planning is already underway for the next conference of Canadian arbitrators. Stay-tuned.

To close, let me say thank you to all our speakers and to all those who attended from across Canada and the United Stated. I would also like to thank the NAA Canadian Advisory Committee which served as the conference organizing committee: Mark Asbell (Conference Chair, Alta); Jasbir Parmar (Ont); Jim Casey (Alta); Steve Raymond (Ont); Christopher Albertyn (Ont); Marc Mancini (Que); Koml Kandola (B.C.); and Jules Bloch (Ont). And a special thank you to Marlene Leslie who handled the logistics and administrative arrangements for conference.

We hope to see everyone soon at the National Academy of Arbitrators 2027 Annual Meeting and Education Conference being held next year in Montreal, Quebec on May 4 to 7, 2027!



Mark Asbell, Conference Chair



Walt De Treux, President of the National Academy of Arbitrators



Review of recent labour relations jurisprudence and legislation from across Canada. Panel: (left to right) Sheilagh Murphy (N.L.), Koml Kandola (B.C.), Marc Mancini (Que), Colin Johnston (Ont), Jim Casey (Alta), Ginette Brazeau (Ont), Mark Asbell (Alta, Moderator)



Amateur and Professional Sports Adjudication in Canada and Abroad. Panel left to right: John Stout (Ont), Sarah Atkinson (Ont), Steve Raymond (Ont, Moderator), Jim Oakley (N.L.), Missing from photo: Allen Ponak (Alta/Ont)

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Grievance Mediation Perspectives, Practical Advice and Pitfalls to Avoid. Panel left to right: Amanda Rogers (B.C.), Jules Bloch (Ont), Amal Garzouzi (Que), Jim Casey (Alta, Moderator)



Fire Side Chat with renowned Canadian arbitrator and mediator Andrew C.L. Sims, K.C. in conversation with Dean Emeritus Daphne Taras. Andy is a former Chair of the Alberta Labour Relations Board and Public Service Employee Relations Board and part-time Vice-Chair of the Canada Industrial Relations Board. He chaired the 1996 Task Force to review the Canada Labour Code. In 2011 he received the Bora Laskin Award for his contribution to Canadian labour law and in 2019, he received the W.P. Kelly Award for Lifetime Achievement as a Labour Mediator.



Perspectives from the Bench: a discussion with Justice Kristan McLeod, Justice of the King's Bench of Alberta in conversation with Jim Casey. Prior to being appointed to the Alberta Court of King's Bench in 2025, Justice McLeod was the managing partner and practiced with Chivers Carpenter Lawyers with a focus on labour, employment, human rights, constitutional, and professional regulatory law.

Candid Photos from the Conference



Maryann De Treux -
Drew Holloway – Canmore, Alberta (Hiking Guide)



Chris Albertyn – Toronto, Ontario



Andy Robertson – Calgary, Alberta
Marc Mancini – Montreal-Nord, Quebec
Marilyn Nairn – Toronto, Ontario



Andy Robertson – Calgary, Alberta
Jordan Kirkness – Fenelon Falls, Ontario
Ryan Goldvine – Vancouver, British Columbia



Ginette Brazeau – Cumberland, Ontario
Marc Mancini – Montreal-Nord, Quebec



Navdeep Dhaliwal – Oakville, Ontario
Jasbir Parmar – Oakville, Ontario
Rob Herman – Toronto, Ontario



Archana Mathew – Toronto, Ontario
Chantal Homier – Ottawa, Ontario
Lynne Poirier – Hammonds Plains, Nova Scotia
Marilyn Nairn – Toronto, Ontario



Natasha Vandenhoven – Toronto, Ontario
Steve Raymond – Toronto, Ontario
Tim Liznick – Mississauga, Ontario



Randy Noonan – Sidney, British Columbia
Nicole Bishop – Sidney, British Columbia
Arnie Peltz – Victoria, British Columbia



Alan Symonette (in the background) – Media, Pennsylvania
Lisa Kohn – Chicago, Illinois
Liz Neumeier – Gloucester, Massachusetts
Walt De Treux – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Allen Ponak – Toronto, Ontario



Maheen Merchant – Toronto, Ontario
Dan Randazzo – Ancaster, Ontario
Colin Johnston – Belle River, Ontario



Amal Garzouzi – Outremont, Quebec
Nicholas Glass – Vancouver, British Columbia
Pierre-Marc Hamelin – Lorraine, Quebec



Sheilagh Murphy – St. John's Newfoundland and Labrador
Joanne Cavé – Gatineau, Québec



Adam and Carmen Letourneau – Lethbridge, Alberta



Ginette Brezeau – Cumberland, Ontario
Amanda Rogers – Vancouver, British Columbia
Sheilagh Murphy – St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador



Joanne Cavé – Gatineau, Québec
Mark Asbell – Calgary, Alberta
Sheilagh Murphy – St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador



Kelly Williams-Whitt – Calgary, Alberta
Kevin Banks – Wakefield, Quebec
Daphne Taras – Toronto, Ontario



Jules Bloch – Toronto, Ontario
Alan Symonette – Media, Pennsylvania



Jasbir Parmar – Oakville, Ontario
Koml Kandola – Vancouver, British Columbia
Chantal Homier – Ottawa, Ontario
Annie Berthizume – Ottawa, Ontario
Lynne Poirier – Hammonds Plans, Nova Scotia



Andy Sims – Edmontonn, Alberta
John Hall – Vancouver, British Columbia
Randy Noonan – Sidney, British Columbia
Jim Casey – Edmonton, Alberta



Rick and Sue Wilson – Calgary, Alberta



Heather Ann McConnell –Toronto, Ontario
Donovan Vincent – Toronto, Ontario



Cheryl Yingst Bartel – Wheatland County, Alberta
Tom Hodges – Niagra-on-the-Lake, Ontario
Rick Wilson – Calgary, Alberta



John Stout – Toronto, Ontario
Steve Raymond – Toronto, Ontario



Marc Mancini – Montreal-Nord, Quebéc
Leanne Young – Edmonton, Alberta



Barry Winograd – Alameda, California
Mark Asbell – Calgary, Alberta



Cautionary Bear Spray for Hiking!
Annie Berthiaume – Ottawa, Ontario
Lynne Poirier – Hammonds Plans, Nova Scotia



Margie Brogan – Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
Mark Asbell – Calgary, Alberta



Kristan McLeod – Edmonton, Alberta
Jim Casey – Edmonton, Alberta



Jules Bloch – Ottawa, Ontario
Amal Garzouzi – Outremont, Québec



Discussing Very Important Things



Jim Casey – Edmonton , Alberta
Chris Albertyn – Toronto, Ontario
Debra Albertyn – Toronto, Ontario
Alan Ponak – Toronto, Ontario



Part of the B.C. contingent:
Nicole Bishop – Sidney, Ryan Goldvine – Vancouver, Najeeb Hassan – Vancouver, Shelina Neallani – Vancouver, Sara Haave - Vancouver, John Hall - Vancouver



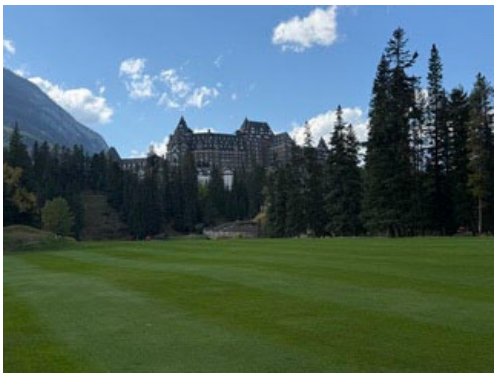
Early morning



Golf in the Rockies? Heaven!
Pierre-Marc Hamelin – Lorraine, Quebec
Marc Mancini – Montreal-Nord, Quebéc
John Stout – Toronto, Ontario



John Stout – Toronto, Ontario
Banff Springs Golf Course





Banff Springs Golf Course



Mark Asbell – Calgary, Alberta
Daphane Taras – Toronto, Ontario
Allen Ponak – Toronto, Ontario
Bernie Asbell – Canmore, Alberta (Hiking Guide)



Chis Albertyn - Toronto, Ontario
Canmore First Nations Celebration