

THUNDER BAY & DISTRICT INJURED  
WORKERS SUPPORT GROUP  
PRESENTS:  
Your Voice Matters Series



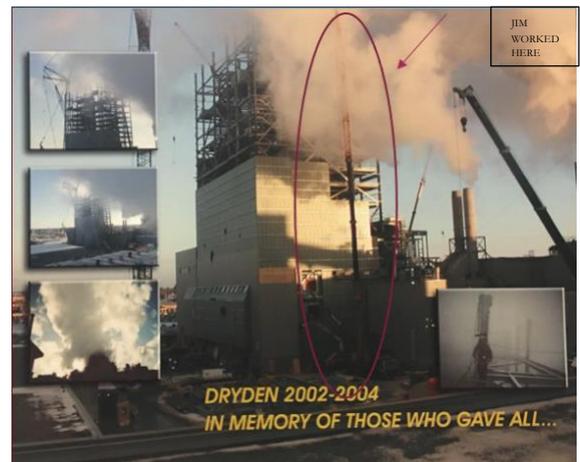
## JIM LITTLEFORD

Jim Littleford is 57 years old. A dedicated worker, Jim began his employment journey in the 1980's. As an experienced journeyman electrician who has worked on countless construction sites over his career – were taking more than 40 different sites, Jim is passionate about the work he does. He also is a life-long learner and strives to become as educated about the field he's in. Jim actively pursues learning opportunities and holds various safety licenses, is a Level 2 traffic light technician, and holds a certification for the basis of supervising from the Construction Safety Association of Ontario.



When Jim joined the RB4 project at the Dryden Paper Mill in June of 2003, this young, dedicated and passionate worker could never have anticipated his life would be forever changed. The once sharp and quick-witted man was now suffering from memory loss and brain fog. His energy for work had been replaced with crippling headaches, daily battles with gastrointestinal problems and a constant battle with tinnitus. His passion for the job was overridden by the countless appointments to doctor offices and specialists. His life became consumed by appointments to cardiologists, neurologists and neuropsychologists. Doctors' offices any person would dread even opening the door to, they became part of Jim's normal routine in his desperate need to find answers about what was happening in his body.

The answer was painfully obvious: the RB4 Project in Dryden. Jim was stationed at the center of the building and worked as an electrician on the project installing fire alarms and safety wiring. Jim described the stairwell at his station as a "chimney for all the smoke in the building". He described the working conditions at Dryden Mill as "full of smoke and chemicals all day, every day, and on days when the wind blew from a certain direction, the big stack would blow directly into the building I was working at". Jim also described the lengthy work hours, 10 hours a day for 7 days a week. Well above the acceptable time period to be exposed to dangerous and harsh chemicals. Jim explained that "if you sensed something around you, if you smelled something around you, you had to keep working until a tester showed up". The problem was, sometimes this took 4 hours. This was 4 hours that this employee was being subjected to dangerous chemicals from the paper mill emissions such as mercury, carbon monoxide, methyl mercaptan, and hydrogen sulfide.



Jim spent 7 months on the project, and during that time period he left his job site twice, and both times he was unconscious. The first time we woke up in the lunch trailer with an oxygen mask on, completely unaware how he had

gotten there. He received oxygen and was sent back to work. The second time, Jim was taken to Dryden Hospital. Much like the first instance, he woke up with the oxygen mask on, and you guessed it...was sent back to work. But this time, Jim understood that he wasn't alone. As he walked out of the waiting room, he described a scene of countless other young and old men, in the waiting room of the hospital, all receiving oxygen. The working conditions were taking its toll.

But the effects are never singular. Not only is Jim forever forced to deal with the aftermath of the unsafe working conditions at Dryden Mill, so too does his family have to adapt. Jim described how the aftermath has added significant stress and strain on his spouse. Unable to leave his house without a caregiver and unable to drive because of his onset of seizures, taking care of her husband became a full-time job for Jim's wife for several years. Jim described the incredible difficulty of acclimating to his new life, he said it "made it hard to go from being the breadwinner and leader of the family to someone who required family to look after me".

And despite everything that Jim has experienced in his life, you are guaranteed to be greeted with a warm smile and a joke or two. The true strength is being able to persevere. And Jim is bright example of perseverance.