

## One of ours

### Claudette MacKay-Lassonde, P.Eng., 1948-2000

by Patrick J. Quinn, P.Eng.

I first heard of Claudette MacKay-Lassonde when she became president of PEO in 1986 and gave a straight-from-the-shoulder interview to the *Globe and Mail*. Our profession, or its establishment, tends to take criticisms personally, and attack the messenger. She moved on.

In 1989, when the murders of 14 women—12 of them engineering students—took place at École Polytechnique in Montreal, she and some others in the profession took it personally. Nobody did more in response to that event than MacKay-Lassonde. To her, it was not a random and irrational event, it *did* implicate engineering, and it *was* part of a continuum that had to be stopped.

She devoted a huge effort to bringing change to engineering, to making our profession sensitive to new and old realities, and open and welcoming to all. She also worked tirelessly to remove barriers and hostility to women, and to persuade those who believed that change should occur at its own pace.

When people who had been fighting to be heard for years objected to the attention I received for my efforts to promote women in engineering, I asked her advice. I got the same straight-from-the-shoulder goods. In somewhat saltier words, she said she didn't care who got the credit, she just wanted results.

Her achievements are chronicled elsewhere in detail, and they are of gigantic proportions that speak for themselves (see abbreviated list on this page). I can only add that, for me, she was the genuine article: smart, direct, honest, loyal, modest and with a sense of humour and a laugh that was, like her nature, irrepressible.

Our community of engineers, now closer to her expectations of us (because



Claudette MacKay-Lassonde, P.Eng.

of her efforts), has lost one of our best, one of our most spirited contributors.

Claudette MacKay-Lassonde pushed

barriers aside, broke through restrictive ceilings, persuaded us that we could be strong, open and welcoming, and that we could embrace the arts and humanities. She graced our profession and the lives of all she touched.

She passed away in June, after a battle with cancer, and the void she leaves is immense. To her family, we express our great sorrow for their loss, and our great thanks for her gifts to our profession. As the poet said of other heroes and remembrance: "Age shall not weary, nor the years condemn."

We, the community of engineers, will remember MacKay-Lassonde. ◆

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### Achievements at a Glance

#### Education

- ◆ Earned master's of business administration from the University of Toronto, 1983
- ◆ Earned master's degree in nuclear engineering from the University of Utah, 1973
- ◆ Graduated from École Polytechnique in chemical engineering, 1971

#### Career

- ◆ Held positions at Ontario Hydro, Northern Telecom, the Ontario government, Firelight Investments (president), Xerox and Enghouse Systems (chair and CEO)
- ◆ Corporate director for Enghouse Systems, AGF Group of Funds, Abitibi-Price, Clearnet Communications and Les Laboratoires Aeterna

#### Service to the Profession

- ◆ Established Canadian Engineering Memorial Foundation, 1989; chair, 1989-94
- ◆ Chair, Canadian Engineering Manpower (now Resources) Board, 1988-90
- ◆ Member of National Advisory Board on Science and Technology, 1987-88
- ◆ PEO Council, 1982-88; first woman to serve as PEO President, 1986-87
- ◆ Organized first Canadian Convention of Women Engineers, 1980
- ◆ Founded Women in Science and Engineering, 1979

#### Awards

- ◆ Officer, PEO Order of Honour, 1995
- ◆ Canadian Council of Professional Engineers Meritorious Service Award for Professional Service, 1994