

*Consensus building, inclusiveness, policy formulation and upholding the engineering-public interest link are among the top priorities for PEO's latest President.*

**BY MICHAEL MASTROMATTEO**

**T**he setting was PEO's recent annual meeting and the speaker was MPP Greg Sorbara, then former Ontario finance minister, a man bidding his time in hopes of a return to the provincial cabinet (he has since been reinstated). Sorbara had been invited to bring greetings from the Ontario government to PEO members at the AGM.

That Sorbara would sprinkle a couple of off-colour comments into his otherwise effusive greeting to engineers was a clear disappointment for second-time PEO President Pat Quinn, P.Eng., just beginning his term. Although Sorbara later apologized for his remarks, the incident reminded Quinn of the "fragility" of things like image and rep-

utation, and how the use of unguarded language can undermine years of effort and dedication to an important cause.

Quinn, in fact, was drawn to more active involvement in engineering governance in response to the December 1989 massacre of 14 women, most of them

# Drive for change still burns in Pat Quinn

engineering students, at École Polytechnique in Montreal. Although the Dublin native had been involved as a councillor with the Corporation of Engineers of Quebec (later the Ordre des ingénieurs du Québec [OIQ]) in Montreal in the late 1960s and early '70s, it was the massacre that drove Quinn to a deeper commitment.

"For me, the shooting was sort of a Damascus moment," he recently told *Engineering Dimensions*. "I said: I am not going to let this settle out the way it appeared to be settling out, and allow us to get into a situation where we appear to have such antipathy toward women in our midst."

The incident brought out something of the crusader in a self-described pacifist. And, if Quinn takes pains to avoid the violence, confrontation and machismo on the physical plane, he does not shy away from the rough and tumble of striving for more effective governance of the engineering profession.

The Montreal incident launched Quinn into a one-person public relations campaign, lobbying the profession to better appreciate such values as transparency, access and diversity. Combining the talents of designer, builder and moralist, Quinn gave interviews and wrote countless newspaper and magazine articles designed to prod the engineering profession to a new awareness of certain issues.

## Climate for change

In December 1999, the 10th anniversary of the Montreal massacre, Quinn offered the following insights to the University of Toronto's *Varsity* newspaper: "Without the Montreal massacre, there wouldn't have been the impetus for change. What we said made a profound impact because of this event. An idea for change has to meet a climate for change." It can be argued that since 1989, Quinn has made it a priority to prepare PEO for this "climate of change."

After relocating in Toronto with his Quinn Dressel Associates firm, Quinn became an ordinary, if vocal, member of PEO. For part of the 1980s, he served as a member of the Professional Practice and other committees, but by the late 1990s, he was ready for bigger things. His first term as PEO President in 1999-2000 was characterized by his efforts to involve more people, especially younger members, into the organization's consensus-building/decision-making apparatus. It was an attitude he chose to reflect on in his "farewell" President's Message in March 2000—"It is only on an individual basis that ideas are contributed and commitments made. But it is in the organized cooperation of individuals that actual building is done, or change completed."

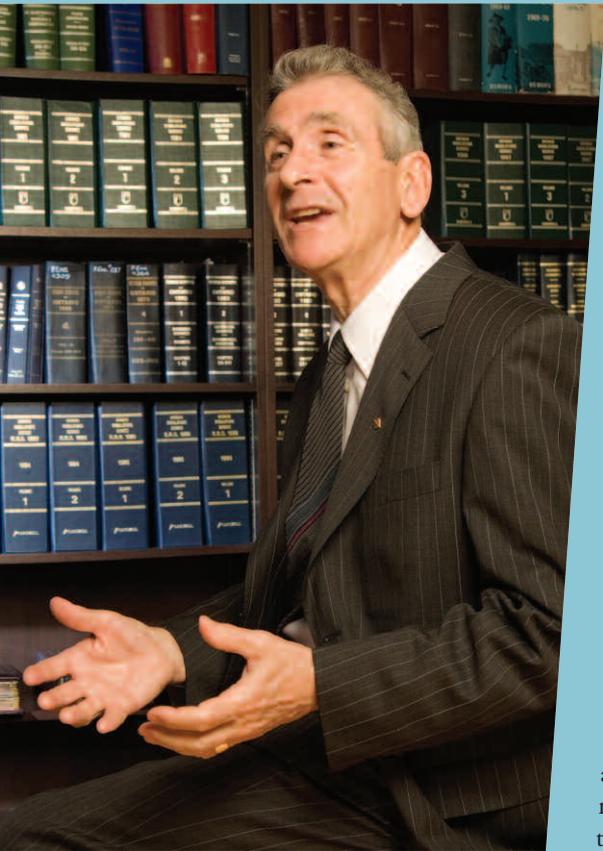
So, now that he is back for a second iteration as PEO President, does Quinn

believe his goals of six years ago were unmet? "Essentially, I tried to get younger people to step forward because I felt there was a need for a change in the direction of PEO," Quinn said. "I was unsuccessful in getting young people [to step forward]. The few that I talked to said they were too busy with work, too busy with raising their families, and that they can't give the kind of time that is required, so I came to the conclusion, at the end of the day, that if you want to get something done, you'd better do it yourself. So that's why I came back."

Certainly, the new President has a set of objectives in mind, one of which involves re-examining how the regulator really gets things done. He suggests policy initiatives and other major decisions undertaken at PEO lack sufficient input and consensus of the wider membership. In comments since taking the reins as President, he has alluded to the "13 or 14 committee votes" or "minority opinions" that he believes currently drive change within the organization.

Yet despite his personal views on making PEO more transparent and responsive to member concerns, Quinn is clearly on side with the engineering profession's efforts to celebrate the value of licensure and to hold fast against legislative incursions on the self-regulatory realm. He has referred to the Bill 124/Ontario Building Code reform situ-

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ation, for example, as the “canary in the mine” for Ontario engineers.

### Turning point

“I actually think we’re at a turning point in the profession,” he says. “It hasn’t really been recognized how crucial this point is. And that often happens in life. Some event takes place and it doesn’t have to be so dramatic that it makes a huge impact. And frequently it’s just a small turning, but down the road it has tremendous implications, which had we known at the time, we might

have dealt with the incident in a different way.”

He believes PEO turning to the court to seek legal clarification of the application of the recent *Ontario Building Code* amendments in relation to PEO’s exclusive jurisdiction over regulation of engineering under the *Professional Engineers Act* could result in the provincial government finally tipping its hand in the whole matter.

“I’m not sure if the government understands what it is doing, but it may well be that we don’t understand that the government has an agenda,” Quinn suggests. “We really need to know what the [provincial government’s] intentions are. We need to understand if they appreciate what they are doing. And, if we conclude that this is a deliberate ploy on their part, or a part of a longer-term objective, we need to understand that. The only way to catch their attention is to go into a court where they’ll have to tell us the reasons behind their changes or their interference with our jurisdiction.”

Accordingly, Quinn supports PEO’s ongoing Government Liaison Program, not only as a way to keep the public interest elements of professional self-regulation on government radar screens, but also to help groom future leaders from within engineering ranks. He is a firm believer in the importance of engineers, from whatever political persuasion, seeking public office for the betterment of the profession and society in general.

“I think the next phase of the Government Liaison Program should be

one in which we try to get people into various levels of government,” Quinn says. “And I think we should do more than pay lip service to that. I think we should find ways of training people, encouraging people, molding leaders, finding people who can articulate the issues, and finding ways of encouraging them to get into public life.”

But between developing leaders, working for wider consensus in policy formulation, and making the engineering profession more open to women, minority groups and internationally educated professionals, is Quinn trying to do too much in too little time? When asked if he fears the radical or reformist label in the face of his deeply held convictions, Quinn has a ready response. “I don’t like to see myself described in that way [as a radical or reformer]. Reform is a funny word because it can have a pejorative side. I certainly see myself as being willing to do the things that need to be done at times to make change, and people who lead change frequently suffer for it because the response to change is often a reaction or a push-back... I’m also blessed in the sense that I’m retired now and I don’t have the pressures of business niceties to think about all the time. My life is pretty well laid out, and I think I can stand the type of criticism that is sometimes put on people who are put into these situations.”

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