

GLP ratchets up, recruits women

By HOWARD BROWN

In 2005, PEO set up its Government Liaison Program (GLP), which has been recognized as one of the most successful communications programs in the country.

PEO Council recently endorsed an aggressive expansion of the program to increase the number of engineers in the legislature. Right now, there are no engineer members of the Ontario cabinet and only two engineer members of the Ontario legislature—Phil McNeely, P.Eng., and Norm Sterling, P.Eng.

To accomplish this, it will mean encouraging all 37 chapters to look for candidates to run in the next election. Our aim is to have engineers running for election in every party, in every riding.

Between now and the next election in October 2011, some of the sitting members will retire. All parties will need candidates and it's clear engineers possess a unique blend of technical expertise and solid management experience that is well suited to roles in government.

Candidate college

So, how do we do it? First, we have to acknowledge that potential candidates

have to learn about the process of getting elected. PEO is planning a "candidate college" in the fall to teach potential candidates about selecting a party, picking a riding, raising their profile, building a team, raising money, winning a nomination and everything else that a candidate might need to know.

We'll be inviting MPPs, former MPPs, campaign managers and officials from all parties to be a part of the faculty. We'll be actively recruiting engineers from diverse backgrounds, women and new engineers for the campaign college.

Women welcome

On June 14, Premier Dalton McGuinty stressed the importance of female candidates at a reception honouring Margaret Campbell, the first woman elected as a Liberal to the Ontario legislature. I worked with Margaret 30 years ago and she was a great role model. The premier proudly announced that day that seven of the 11 new members of his party now in the legislature are women, and said he is looking for more.

All parties have proactive programs to recruit female candidates. Even without active programs within the engineering profession to recruit women to leadership roles, many have taken the reigns anyway.

Some of these women include:

- PEO President-elect Catherine Karakatsanis, P.Eng.;
- PEO Vice President Diane Freeman, P.Eng.;
- Consulting Engineers of Ontario President Anita Smith, P.Eng.;
- Engineers Canada CEO Chantal Guay, P.Eng.;
- Ontario Society of Professional Engineers CEO Angela Shama, P.Eng.;
- Engineering Student Societies' Council of Ontario (ESSCO) President Ruth Anne Vanderwater.

ESSCO's Vanderwater recently told me: "Today's women in engineering are prepared to take on senior roles in business, government and society. I'm 23 years old. I'm getting involved politically and I want to encourage other women and diverse groups to come aboard."

If one of PEO's goals is to elect 11 engineers to the 2011 legislature, why not strive to have women make up at least half of those elected?

Howard Brown is president of Brown & Cohen Communications & Public Affairs Inc. He has worked with PEO since January 2005 on its Government Liaison Program. ❖



Clockwise from top right: PEO Vice President Diane Freeman, P.Eng. (right) with Hon. Donna Cansfield, MPP Etobicoke Centre and natural resources minister; Ruth Anne Vanderwater, ESSCO president; PEO President-elect Catherine Karakatsanis, P.Eng.