

# DAVID ADAMS: MAN ON A MISSION

Through collaboration and trust, PEO's new President hopes to engage the engineering community in achieving an ambitious program of regulatory improvement and public service.

BY MICHAEL MASTROMATTEO

New President David Adams, P.Eng., was mildly taken to task recently for addressing audiences at PEO's annual general meeting as "gentlemen" rather than "ladies and gentlemen."

But it's an oversight not likely to be repeated by this President, eager to establish a culture of collaboration and trust within the engineering community in Ontario.

As a part-time lay preacher with a Lutheran parish in his home town of Hanover, Ontario, and former co-host of *Take God's Word for It* on local radio station CFBW 93.1 FM, Adams has learned to choose his words carefully—a skill he'll bring to nuancing the finer points of engineering regulation and inspiring PEO licence holders and volunteers to a new era of activism.

The new President is also a successful business owner who favours solid corporate governance as a way of moving the profession forward. He is proud of the electoral support he received in all of PEO's voting regions, and believes he has a clear mandate to proceed with his platform.

His experience as principal of several processing, milling and furniture operations, including his present position as president of Maple Leaf Engineering Corp., have provided him a perspective on engineering practice in industry. He has noted how economic downturns stifle opportunities for practitioners, and he's sensitive to the impact that engineers, as custodians of technology, can exert on Ontario's financial competitiveness.

As well, Adams is already fully up-to-speed on PEO operations, having served two terms as a Regional Councillor, and having accumulated a healthy record of service in chapters, committees and task forces. He continues to chair the Audit Committee and is a member of the Advisory Committee on Volunteers.

During his first four weeks as President, Adams has already signaled his intended collaborative approach. His Ten-point Work Plan for 2008 (p. 3), for example, lays out an ambitious set of priorities for PEO Council. Adams has also signed a multi-faceted leadership agreement with PEO Registrar and CEO Kim Allen, P.Eng. (see *Engineering Dimensions*, May/June 2008, p. 30), which he hopes will set the tone for the working relationship between Council and PEO senior executive.

## Impatient by nature

Adams suggests there is a lot of work to be done to ensure PEO's and the engineering community's place in the foremost ranks of Ontario's self-regulated professions.

"I'm a little bit impatient by nature," he told *Engineering Dimensions* in early June,

"and I want to drive home the message that we're all here to get something done."

Adams pulls no punches in declaring that despite sincere effort and the best of intentions, PEO is hampered by an inefficient governance and decision-making apparatus. He believes it's important for PEO to improve its internal operations if it is to be taken seriously as an advisor to governments on key public policy matters.

"We can't be advising the government on policy matters without a good feel for what is going on in our own backyard," he says. To this end, Adams describes himself as an "action-oriented" President who hopes to take a more hands-on role in implementing Council directives.

"I don't think we've had a hands-on, involved President for some time now," he says, "and in suggesting that, I'm not criticizing any of my predecessors. But I think it reflects some of the divisiveness and inaction we've got to overcome."

One of the new President's central objectives is to elevate Council as "more active participants" in the work of the association. He believes Councillors have not always been directly associated with the work of the volunteers on task forces and committees, which has resulted in something of a disconnect between Council and its network of volunteer resources.

"We plan to assign one or more Councillors to each committee, with the express purpose of bringing committee ideas and problems to Council, and vice versa, thereby connecting all committees with relevant Council deliberations," Adams says. "In this way, over time, the whole of Council ought to become conversant with the realities encountered in the implementation of the policies it sets."

In addition to his governance and policy-setting objectives, Adams has taken up the challenge articulated by Past President Walter Bilanski, PhD, P.Eng., to consider changes in the way engineers are educated.



He believes the recently approved move to a multi-tiered licensing model, and in particular its emphasis on internships and work experience opportunities for undergraduates, will help keep engineering students on the path to the P.Eng.

Of equal concern to Adams is a review of the major exception clauses in the *Professional Engineers Act*, which allow engineering work under certain conditions to be done by unlicensed personnel. While these exceptions come with conditions, Adams and others believe they constitute a “huge loophole” in the Act, which devalues the profession and discourages some engineering graduates from applying for their licence.

“Some [young engineers] do not subject themselves to the rigours of licensure because they feel it does not apply in their field of practice,” Adams says, “while many lean on the exemption clauses in our Act in what amounts to avoiding responsibility.”

Although Adams has some concerns about PEO losing prominence among Canada’s engineering regulators, he remains optimistic about the profession’s ability to be a source of sound technical advice to government policy makers. Drawing on his experience with PEO’s Governance Task Force, Adams in 2006 co-authored a report for Prime Minister Stephen Harper, making the case for science and technology as “the critical factors governing innovation, production and employment within the globalized economy.” In its own way, the report anticipated the call for professional engineers to become more intimate with policy making, and to exploit the profession’s generally positive image to become trusted advisors to government.

### “Wiki” advocate

In addition to his interest in refining PEO governance, Adams is a proponent of the new wiki style of shared learning and information. Based on the book, *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything* (authors Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams), wiki systems focus on mass collaboration, peer production and open-source technology to help individuals and organizations expand their knowledge base.



During his tenure, Dave Adams plans to achieve a much closer working relationship with CEO/Registrar Kim Allen, P.Eng. (left).

Adams’ Ten-point Work Plan cites wiki-style collaboration as a key element in his proposal to involve Internet-based mentors in support of a beefed-up internship program for aspiring engineers.

Adams is pleased that Councillors and senior staff have “signed on” to his Ten-point Work Plan by autographing a vintage photograph of construction workers sitting on girders some 40 storeys above a 1930s urban landscape. If the photo looks to some like going out on a limb, Adams says it also represents his belief that overcoming division and building stronger teams involves some risk taking.

Adams appears to be a President determined to make change by winning adherents to the logic of his proposals, while recognizing that in the absence of absolute consensus, a President must overcome stalemates and move a project forward. He is the latest in a series of PEO Presidents to bring their own preferences and approaches to the position. As Pat Quinn, P.Eng., emphasized inclusiveness and transparency in consensus building, Bilanski focused on engineering education as the chief plank of his term as President. For his part, Adams is adamant about having something to show at the end of his term—with the help of PEO’s vast volunteer expertise.

“Having served in the chapter system for many years, and chairing committees on the Governance Task Force, I am very much aware of the fact that volunteers are the lifeblood of our organization,” Adams says. “Without their whole-hearted support, PEO would be unable to perform its duties as a regulator.”

### A little history

PEO’s new President was born in Ottawa, and took an arts degree at Carleton University before earning a bachelor of engineering degree at McGill University in Montreal. He later obtained an MBA in finance and marketing from the University of Western Ontario.

His resume includes a wide range of power and design engineering experience with such companies as CIL, Cockshutt, Abitibi Paper, Rio Tinto Mining, Massey Ferguson and Atlas Steels. He once owned Canada Spool Company, which is no longer operating.

Adams and his wife Dorothy have two sons and a daughter, and five grandchildren.

A past president of the local chapter of the Rotary Club, Adams is also a member of Gideons International, which distributes Bibles. ❧