

# Meet PEO's new chief executive

Kim Allen, MBA, P.Eng.



He led the pre-amalgamation of Toronto's utilities in 1998 and reduced customer interruption costs by 60 per cent for Scarborough's public utility in 1997. A master of change management, he founded a private utility solutions provider that helped more than 15 Ontario utilities restructure in response to the province's *Energy Competition Act*. In 2000, he transformed an engineering and construction company into Universe2U Inc., an integrated reseller of broadband products and content, and took it public.

Now Kim Allen, P.Eng., is suiting up in the corner office at PEO.

By Karen Hawthorne

**Q: What brought you to PEO?**

**A:** Throughout my career I've looked to broaden and change fields, so rather than specializing, I've gone through work in the public sector, operating Scarborough utilities, which is a large entity in the public sector, then to private sector start-ups, where we took one public. An area that I hadn't been exposed to was the regulatory area. The regulators have a very significant impact on whatever the industry, or the profession.

**Q: Why did you want to become an engineer in the first place?**

**A:** Part of the influence was exposure to the PEO chapter in North Bay, where I grew up. They had an engineering night. I was president of the high school's student council and my vice president's father, Mr. Crossman, was an engineer, so he dragged me along. I was also good in math and sciences, so it was natural. This looked like a good profession for me.

**Q: What was your first job out of university? Tell us about your career highlights.**

**A:** I went directly to Ontario Hydro's graduate training program for nine months. Later my first real job was in the northeast regional office in North Bay. As a lines supervisor, I was the engineering advisor, helping with work programming and the designing of the lines (serving Sudbury, Manitoulan Island and Algoma). The major project was linked to the revitalization of Elliott Lake. It was two-fold: building the residential area and getting service into the mines. The next move was to head office were

I developed work methods and equipment for the line trade.

Later, I moved on to information systems just when everybody was getting PCs. I was involved with the Regions' Branch and we did a province-wide geographic information system. We developed a process that looked at data collection, so in five years, 10 years, whatever, when you wanted to put the system in, the data would be in much better shape.

I went into executive management, heading the retail operation in the Essex Area in southwestern Ontario. One of the very interesting projects was serving Pelee Island. At that time, there was a cable about 12 miles from Point Pelee to Pelee Island. There was a submerged line but it was right in the shipping channel so boats would catch it and, when you lost the cable, the island would go down. And in the winter there was nothing you could do, so there was a diesel site set up as a backup. We ended up changing the location of the cable and running it through a longer route from Kingsville in deeper water through a different channel.

From there I moved to Scarborough utilities. The attraction there was pulling together the engineering and operating divisions. Scarborough was a very big proponent of moving into open markets and deregulation. I was one of the founders of the Stakeholders Alliance for Competition in Electricity to help drive and work with the government about how things should unfold. Whereas many of the public sectors carried on business as usual at Scarborough PUC, we really instilled a very strong private sector attitude.

**Q: Are you a proponent of professional development?**

**A:** My sense with any competency skills development is that it is only effective if it comes from within.

Engineers are typically a curious group. They like to solve problems. Engineers may view their career as problems to solve. I think that they very quickly come to the assessment that professional development is good for them.

**Q: What's your take on the relationship between PEO and the Society (Ontario Society of Professional Engineers)?**

**A:** I think it is the natural evolution of PEO, or any regulating body. The entity had a split personality: services for the members and regulating the members. From a regulatory point of view, if you try to provide services to the members you become self-serving. The focus for PEO has to be: How do we become the best self-regulating organization we can be?

My sense is that people haven't thought about what an excellent self-regulating body looks like. We need to look outside the pro-

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**Q: What do you think your biggest challenge will be?**

**A:** The biggest challenge will be helping drive the alignment of the licence holders, the members, the Society, the Council, the staff of probably both organizations, on what we're trying to do. Both of us are trying to do something very good and positive for the profession and we're charged to do it from two very different angles. It's getting over the separation and the pain of all the

has consistent standards that are applied across the board so that we can move people through the system and let them know where they stand in a very timely way. Because for anybody who's looking to us for a licence, we're holding them up from moving on with their life. If we have clear, defined standards, they're open and transparent and everyone knows exactly what they are.

On the other side, the CEO is instilling a process of ongoing improvement in the organization so we're always looking to get better at what we're doing and being clearly focused on what it is that we're

## “building high professional standards is part of the job of the regulatory body”

profession to see what other bodies are doing. Many view the split on a black and white basis, but there are many issues that aren't black and white and there needs to be some juggling on areas of overlap. Consider the debate on the chapter system: Should it stay with PEO? Should it go to OSPE? As a self-regulating body, we need a whole array of volunteers to help us out. We need members engaged and participating. I think it is a very difficult thing to do without the chapter system.

**Q: What is your vision for PEO?**

**A:** I've tried to talk to many people—staff, stakeholders alike—but I'm still formulating one. We want to have the Ontario public well served by the engineering profession, with the self-regulatory body being effective in helping to facilitate that.

Raising the brand profile of the P.Eng. is something that is tied to the function of the self-regulatory body. It does have some real brand value—it's important to build on that.

I believe that it's up to the regulatory body to say: “Here's what the standard is. Here's what we hold these people accountable for.” If you think about the title of P.Eng.—and think of the P.Eng. as an honest, professional, ethical person—that has significant value. You build on that. Where that fits—if it can be made to work to make more money for professional engineers—that's clearly the job of the Society to help people with those issues. However

things that have happened with the separation and moving forward to better the profession. I think the challenge is that we've got a whole wide range of views—some 65,000 engineers out there. If we continue to fight internally, it won't do us any good presenting ourselves externally. We all need to feel good about being a P.Eng.

**Q: What does it mean to be a strong CEO/Registrar?**

**A:** One of the interesting aspects is the two hats. A good Registrar is one who

responsible for delivering. This creates the needed stakeholder alignment.

The elements of having clarity around jobs, holding people accountable and responsible for their performance happens whether it's in a volunteer organization, a hockey team, private sector, public sector—it doesn't matter. People will function better if they know what their roles are, and how their performances are going to be measured. I think walking through that with the organization will make a difference. ♦