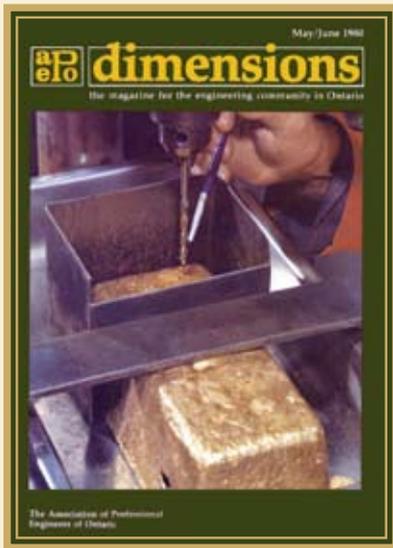


Three decades of *Engineering Dimensions*



It doesn't seem that long ago that PEO's engineering journal hit the quarter-century mark. But now, at age 30, *Engineering Dimensions* continues to aim high.

By Michael Mastromatteo

The closing of the first decade of the new millennium brought out the usual retrospectives in the mainstream media as to the high points and memorable moments of the years 2000 to 2009. There's no doubt it was a unique period in recent history, ushered in as it was by the Y2K "non-event," and brought to an ignominious close with sometimes overwrought ruminations on the largest economic recession since the 1930s.

Midway through the decade just closed, PEO's *Engineering Dimensions* magazine noted its own significant anniversary. The year 2005 was its 25th, an occasion marked with a four-page spread saluting the birth, growing pains and maturity (we hope) of this publication (see "25 years on the engineering beat," *Engineering Dimensions*, May/June 2005, p. 58).

And now, but five years hence, the Ontario engineering community's publication of record will in May hit the big 3-0, with all the attendant challenges, hopes and ambitions that age and experience bring.

Because *Engineering Dimensions* celebrated the quarter-century mark just five years ago, this look back will concentrate on the period of 2005 to 2009, when such battles as "government incursion" into PEO's regulatory realm were first joined, and when PEO's efforts to forge new and stronger links with legislators and policy-makers were still in their infancy.

The government incursion episode was the catalyst for PEO's Government Liaison Program (GLP), which over the last five years has brought

the "regulating in the public interest" message to elected officials at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. It's a point frequently made by Ontario MPPs, including David Zimmer (Willowdale), who have pointed out that the engineering profession's profile has risen steadily at Queen's Park since 2004.

The magazine, during this time period, also covered other issues keen to engineering practitioners, including access to the profession for internationally educated graduates, the tendency of recent Canadian-educated graduates to follow through to the P.Eng. licence, the engineering response to climate change science, renewal of urban infrastructure, and innovations in energy supply and sustainability.

More recently, the magazine has devoted space to labour mobility and licence renewal issues, most notably last year's National Framework for Membership and Licensure, an all-encompassing proposal to add value and relevance to the generic P.Eng. licence.

2005 TO 2007

One of the magazine's more provocative decisions in 2005 might have been to give space to engineer and Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing bureaucrat David Brezer, P.Eng., to discuss the government's position on Bill 124, the *Building Code Statute Law Amendment Act*, the Ontario Building Code-related reforms that proved to be at odds with the *Professional Engineers Act*.

Appearing during an intense period of negotiation between PEO and the housing ministry as to the legitimacy of the proposed bill, the Brezer piece (January/February 2005, p. 60), was seen by some as a bold bit of balance and objectivity, while others described it as a surrender—allowing a ministry apologist a platform to defend a piece of legislation sure to rile an engineering soul.

The following spring, the March/April 2006 cover of *Engineering Dimensions* seemed to up the stakes in the struggle with the housing ministry. Our "It's War" cover, showing a tug-of-war, was a somewhat tongue-in-cheek announcement of PEO's decision to seek a judicial review of the applicability of certain of the building code amendments to professional engineers. The case was heard in October of 2006, with the news of PEO's ultimate victory in May 2007 reported in the July/August 2007 issue.

Not surprisingly, magazines during the period 2005 to 2007 reflected PEO's stepped-up efforts to raise awareness of the value of engineering self-regulation for the province



and the general public. The first-ever engineering day at Queen's Park was held at this time, while the GLP moved from the drawing board to active engagement of policy-makers throughout the province.

PEO chapters across the province readily took to the GLP challenge and organized town hall meetings and other events to further the case for engineering self-regulation, and to promulgate the view that engineers' technical expertise is underutilized in the development of sound public policy.

Other key reporting from the era focused on PEO's plans to find a new corporate headquarters. The Accommodation Task Force was established in 2005 to review the question of ownership versus leasing office space. Its work led five years later to the purchase of a new building at 40 Sheppard Avenue West, and the work-in-progress move into our new site.

Reports on governance effectiveness, strategic plans, reversal of policy direction and occasional bureaucratic lethargy also spiced up the magazine's news pages during this time and made it plain to readers that PEO council, volunteers and staff are all too human.

PRESIDENTS AND PLATFORMS

Despite the appeal of trying new things in its second quarter-century, *Engineering Dimensions* maintained some traditions, including profiles of incoming PEO presidents. Pat Quinn, P.Eng., was elected for a second time in 2006, only to be outdone the following year by four-time president Walter Bilanski, PhD, P.Eng.

In the first President's Message of his fourth term, Bilanski sounded a

refrain eerily familiar to engineering watchers in the opening decade of the new millennium: "I am still troubled," Bilanski wrote, "by how licensure in our profession has seemingly become less relevant over the years. My hope is that our council will make every effort to reverse this alarming trend. There is much work to be done."

Engineering Dimensions alluded to a president's disappointment over some unmet objectives as the Bilanski presidency came to a close. The same disappointment was more palpable when his successor, David Adams, P.Eng., commented in the pages of the magazine about PEO "thriving on no leadership."

But in seeking to capture the collective PEO mood, *Engineering Dimensions* also noted the sense of optimism that greeted Catherine Karakatsanis' presidency in 2009. As the fourth female president in PEO history (and the first since 1997), Karakatsanis, P.Eng., pledged a collaborative approach to engineering governance and regulatory effectiveness.

Most recently, the magazine's focus on the future of licensing, technological innovation and the engineering-public policy link suggest bigger, more significant news on the profession's horizon. Last May's Engineering Summit in Montreal, culminating in the Montreal Declaration (July/August 2009, p. 40), indicates a profession poised to exert new influence in helping shape a safer, more secure and technologically sophisticated society. And while the scope of these ambitions go beyond the realm of pure engineering regulation, they speak to one of the central editorial objectives of the magazine—namely, to promote

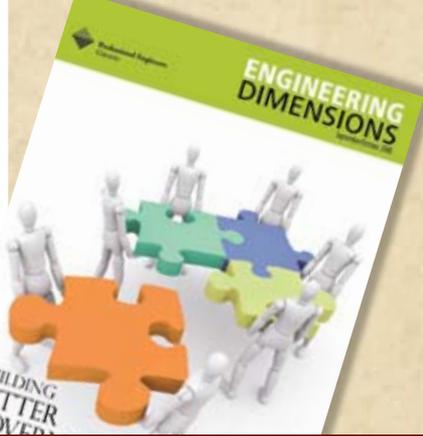
awareness of the *Professional Engineers Act*, the role of the association and the responsibilities of professional engineers, including how the public interest is served and protected through the practice of professional engineering.

CONTINUITY OF STAFF

As *Engineering Dimensions* marks its 30th anniversary, the magazine has benefitted by having the same editorial personnel in place since 2005. This lack of turnover has greatly assisted the writers and editors as they struggle to understand, interpret and describe the nuances of modern engineering regulation. The November/December 2009 issue, for example, reported on the "new era" for self-regulation, and provided a primer on how the engineering profession is regulated internationally.

However, despite its mandate to focus on regulation of the profession rather than its technology, some of the biggest changes to the magazine as it turns 30 are technical. The September/October 2008 issue is noteworthy as the first issue of the magazine available in digital form. Beginning with that issue, subscribers have the option of receiving the printed version, or opting for an online, interactive edition, a link to which is emailed to their homes or workplaces.

The September/October 2008 issue was also the debut of an entirely redesigned publication, one editor Jennifer Coombes describes as easier on the eyes. "I'll spare you the technical terms from now on but, suffice to say, we think your strain-free eyes will be happier. I know the dryly humorous former president, Bob Goodings, P.Eng., will be. He once made me laugh by commenting



that he thought *Engineering Dimensions* contained just too many words,” Coombes writes in her Editor’s Note in that first redesigned issue.

Redesigns are standard fare in the magazine publishing business, but this one was completed with special emphasis on online presentation and distribution.

For the future, *Engineering Dimensions* continues to look for ways to become more relevant and useful to PEO membership—an *Engineering Dimensions* iPhone app, perhaps?

Meanwhile, *Engineering Dimensions*’ annual call for ideas remains the channel for members to bring their best ideas forward as possible grist for the editorial mill. While some of their ideas won’t fit the magazine’s mandate, others have formed the basis for startling new insight on the profession.

For *Engineering Dimensions*, the past five years are characterized by the magazine’s efforts to concentrate on the regulatory and licensing aspects of a changing engineering profession. With the

growth and maturity throughout the last decade of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE) as the voice of professional engineers, the magazine shed its advocacy-related reporting in favour of an emphasis on the nuts and bolts of regulation. To be sure, this sorting out is still cause for some confusion among readers as to what actually makes a good story for *Engineering Dimensions*. But making the call is what editors and publishers are for, with input from an occasionally prickly, but hopefully always engaged, readership. Σ



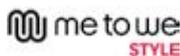
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