

A CONCRETE ERROR

I thoroughly enjoyed reading “Honouring Highway H₂O” in the September/October 2009 issue of *Engineering Dimensions* (p. 26). My parents took me on several tours of the construction while I was still in elementary school.

I’m now at an age where very few things cause my stress level to increase. I no longer get upset when my non-engineering friends refer to “cement” sidewalks. They don’t know better. But I do get upset when my professional magazine makes the same error. On page 29 of the story, it refers to “ship crew members pass steel wires to lock personnel, who winch them to cement bollards....”

If the use of the word “cement” is correct here, it may well explain the decline in shipping traffic, as cement bollards would be very prone to blowing away in the slightest breeze, causing the ships to drift off into oblivion. If, on the other hand, the correct word is “concrete,” this error should have been caught before the printing of the article.

Ernie Parsons, P.Eng., Stirling, ON

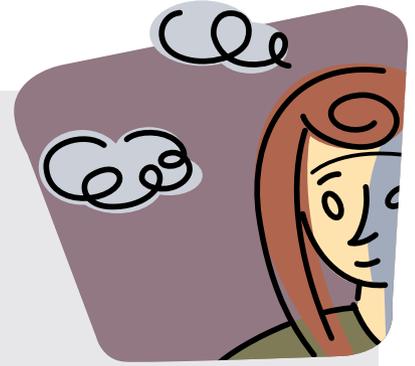
THOUGHTS ON QBS

Re: “Parliamentary committee gives thumbs up to QBS” (*Engineering Dimensions*, November/December 2009, p. 16)

When I worked with the late Peter Haines, P.Eng., in the engineering branch at the External Aid Office (now CIDA) over 40 years ago, one of our concerns was to ensure engineering consultants for overseas work had the necessary competence to carry out a project for which the Canadian government was providing funding. Thus, we maintained a file provided by consultants, who indicated a desire to work overseas, of projects completed and their key personnel; and from this inventory we would extract a list of competent consultants to be sent to the minister, who made the final selection for a project. I asked Peter once what he did when he received a call from the minister’s office asking that a specific consultant be included. He replied that he asked the aide to send him a memo asking that this be done. He added: “I never received a memo.”

In his time, we established the practice of asking the chosen consultant to respond to a specific statement of the scope of work, and only after this had been negotiated was an estimate of cost determined. He insisted that professional engineers did not “bid” for a project on price.

Eugene L. Fytche, P.Eng., Almonte, ON

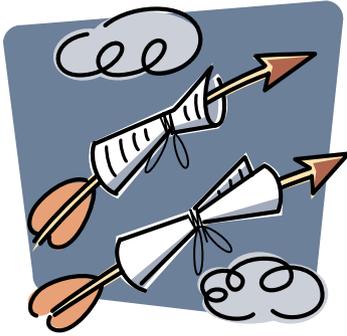


VOLUNTEERING AT PEO

Despite its well-specified regulatory role, which seems to be rather limited in influence, PEO is truly a multi-faceted organization that touches the lives of engineers across the province in more ways than one. From the perspective of a young engineering graduate, PEO has done an excellent job of cultivating the engineering spirit—the reason that made us work through four or maybe six years of tough training. The PEO volunteer program has provided a platform for young engineers to interact with more experienced peers and learn from their experiences. The program provides an excellent networking opportunity and, through free-flowing interaction, it has enabled the younger generation of engineers to educate themselves on different engineering specialties and available opportunities, and empowered them to plan their careers better.

In terms of personal experience, I consider myself lucky to be a part of this program, as it has brought me in direct contact with seniors in my field who have willingly acted as mentors. Their experience and insight has helped me gain an informed perspective on what it is like to work as an engineer and what direction I want my career to take. The interactions at various PEO events has enriched me with knowledge and provided me a peek into some of the organizations and/or roles I would love to work for, and enabled me to align my skills and experience with those particular organizations’ expectations. Working in teams with other engineers (and engineering interns) on organizing events, I have cultivated a sense of belonging to the “engineering community,” and I take pride in the profession more than ever before. I can see the bigger picture, beyond the “me, myself and I.” I look forward to staying an integral part of this program as well as with PEO as a whole.

Penny Dorka, MEng, engineering intern, Mississauga, ON



A WASTE OF TIME

My graduation year was 1942 from good old SPS, so my ability to express myself via the written word may not be long with me so I need to get this done while I can.

First, the President's Message, "Changing with the times" (*Engineering Dimensions*, November/December 2009, p. 3): She [Catherine Karakatsanis,

P.Eng.] states that soon it [PEO] will require members to annually declare that they have acquired and maintained knowledge in areas they wish to work in. I well remember a time when such a requirement would have been intensely opposed and considered a waste of time. I was employed at the time by Research Enterprises, and our task was to design Canada's first aero jet engine. Every day, we sought out whatever information we could lay our hands on—even some German textbooks were obtained (Stodolla). Reporting this to PEO would be a waste of time and there was nobody offering courses in gas turbine blade design. Your boss is the only judge.

In some well-established fields such as building construction, where standards have been developed, knowing about those is a must, as standards represent proven solutions to recurring problems. But if you are working for someone like RIM, reporting what you learn to PEO is just not going to happen.

My other beef arose as I contemplated paying my dues. There was the reference to the memory of the 14 women along with the need to contribute to a scholarship for, not students, but only women studying engineering in Canada. Why, oh why, do we keep remembering that awful day and keep repeating what caused it? A playing field, which was not level but tilted heavily to benefit women, apparently still is. PEO should be gender neutral, but it isn't, and that can bug a man!

Mel Phipps, P.Eng., Etobicoke, ON

PENSION RIGHTS

For nearly 40 years, I have enjoyed membership in the APEO and I recently read *Engineering Dimensions* with renewed interest. As usual, PEO is continuing its pursuit of equitable employment for the profession with a survey of current salaries. Such coverage cannot help but attract new blood to the profession. Similarly, the role played by PEO in both federal and provincial governments is helping to promote the interests of the public in the application of professional engineering, wherever necessary. The move to license federal P.Engs is an example of the excellence for which our members are becoming renowned.

As a retired engineer, I have in the past recommended the opportunities found in the engineering profession to classes of school children seeking their future calling. However, today, such a future does not look so rosy. As you are no doubt aware, many retired professional engineers and their past business associates are suffering in the current economic downturn. Inadequate legislation at both federal and provincial government levels has created a situation where people who have served the engineering profession throughout their working careers are essentially being robbed of their pension rights. In a recent public demonstration on Parliament Hill, the NRPC, representing Nortel retirees, obtained the support of the three federal opposition parties, as well as substantial support from the CAW union. A bird's-eye view of this activity is found at www.nortelpensioners.ca.

While PEO has done a great job of promoting private pension plans through Manulife, sometimes employers effectively prevent the use of such means. Consequently, I have been wondering if PEO considers it within its mandate and professional interest to lend support to the current quest by engineering retirees and others to obtain fair pension compensation in the event of bankruptcies.

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Address letters to jcoombes@peo.on.ca.