

## Chapter Leaders Conference looks to the future

by Joyce Rowlands, Senior Project Manager

### Conference speakers discussed approaches to restructuring the profession and how PEO chapters would fit into the picture. Here's what they had to say.

**T**he theme was "Chapter System Renewal—its Future Role and Direction," but the subtext and "buzz" focused on advocacy, and how the

chapter system would fit into a restructured profession. About 90 chapter representatives from all across Ontario congregated at the Toronto Airport Marriott February 19-21 to explore the role and organization of a renewed chapter system. They wrestled with a wide range of issues related to PEO's current structure and the separation of regulatory and non-regulatory functions into two separate bodies.

#### Council blessing

Separation of the two functions is the direction being pursued by the Joint [PEO/Canadian Society for Professional Engineers] Advocacy Implementation Committee (AIC)—with the support and blessing of PEO Council. Discussions are underway to develop a memorandum of understanding leading to a staged transfer of PEO's non-regulatory functions to CSPE, under that society's provincial charter.

In his opening remarks, President Walter Bilanski, P.Eng., stressed that the role of the chapter system in a restructured profession

is among the most important issues the joint committee has to resolve. "That's why we're here this weekend—to hear where you see the chapters fitting in," he said. And Bob Goodings, P.Eng., chair of the joint committee, made it clear that no decision has been made yet about the role of chapters or where they belong in a restructured profession.

#### Mandate given

"Council's direction this year has been to foster development of an independent, advocacy [member-interest] body in engineering," Bilanski said. "Council believes members have given us this mandate through the results of last year's Council elections and the [accompanying] referendum on advocacy."

#### Professional obligation

President-elect Pat Quinn, P.Eng., told the group that, as professional engineers, "we need to plan, predict and control our future without conflict of interest with the regulatory body." He suggested that PEO members should not look upon membership in a renewed member-interest society as optional, but rather as an integral part of being professionals. "If we are dedicated to our profession, we have an obligation to join and support it," he said.

Vice President Peter DeVita, P.Eng., demonstrated that the profession has been losing ground for many years in attracting engineering graduates to membership, particularly those in the emerging technology areas. He suggested this is an issue a renewed member-interest body would vigorously pursue.

Goodings reiterated reasons why a regulatory body cannot engage in member-interest advocacy of the kind members say they want. "As a statutory body whose authority derives from government, the regulator cannot engage in turf wars or

advocacy for the economic interests of one group over another," he noted.

#### Possible options

Goodings also highlighted certain ideas under consideration by the Joint AIC for

#### Government's position on advocacy for the profession

Following are excerpts from a 1995 address to PEO Council by former Ontario Attorney General Marion Boyd:

" I can assure you that an organization that presents and explains the position of the engineering profession to the government and the wider public will be a very welcome partner... The question is: Should the association, in addition to its statutory responsibilities as a regulatory body, take on an advocacy role to act as the voice of the interests of the engineering community, or a leadership role to steer the engineering profession in new directions? Or should another organization or organizations take on that role?... My responsibility is to make it clear that, from our perspective, there must be a distinct separation between the body that regulates the engineering profession and any organization that acts as an advocate for, or a leader of, the profession... "

Some members of your profession may not see the problem in having a single organization involved in both governance and advocacy. The position, however, that is supported by Ontario's laws and policy takes the opposite direction and insists that combining governance and advocacy in one organization is a very real problem. Our practical experience over many years of governance has affirmed, for all of the governments that have been in place in the last few years, a similar position. You need to know that this position has been upheld by every Attorney General since the passing of the Professional Engineers Act in 1984... The association's statutory responsibility to protect the public interest is ultimately not compatible, in my view, with the association acting as an advocate or a leader of the engineering profession. "

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ensuring the viability of the renewed member-interest society. One is the possibility of "grandparenting" all PEO members into the advocacy body as an interim strategy (possibly for two or three years), accompanied by transfer of non-regulatory funds to the new body. Another would be an item on PEO's membership renewal form enabling members to indicate their wish to join the member-interest body.

Along these lines, Quinn has suggested recently that one approach might be to establish a dedicated advocacy unit within PEO for some interim period (perhaps two to three years), until such time as the new body is strong enough to function effectively on its own. Under this scenario, CSPE would serve as the basis for the new unit. The key would be to ensure the unit's independence as a member-interest voice, quite apart from PEO's regulatory functions, until it has the resources to stand on its own. "PEO would provide the soil, the light and the sustenance until such time as this new plant is flourishing and producing fruit," said Quinn.

Ben Burke, P.Eng., a CSPE director and member of the Joint AIC, suggested that chapters should be centres for networking, technical learning, information, mentoring, lobbying and social activity, among other activities. "Chapters are the glue for the profession," he said. He also noted that chapter activities currently fall largely on the non-regulatory side, a reality acknowledged by numerous speakers from the chapters.

#### Skeptics remain

Among delegates to the conference, there appeared to be a fairly high level of support for the advocacy movement, though this was by no means universal. There are skeptics who do not accept that a built-in conflict exists in having the same organization serve and protect the public interest at the same time as it tries to represent members' interests. Quinn's answer to that is to point out that the proof is in the pudding: "Historically, efforts to advance and promote members' interests have run a distant second to regulatory duties and, for the most part, have fallen by the wayside."

*A full report of the Chapter Leaders Conference, including what chapter representatives want in a renewed chapter system, will appear in the April/May issue of The Link.*

Chapter leaders from the Northern Region discuss their vision for a renewed chapter system. From left: Tony Cecutti, P.Eng., Barry Bradford, P.Eng. (Northern Region Councillor), and Dan Lalonde, P.Eng.

