

GLP ACADEMIES EDUCATE ENGINEERS ON BUILDING LOCAL MPP RELATIONS

By Howard Brown and Kaitlynn Dodge

ONE OF THE MOST important parts of ensuring the PEO Government Liaison Program (GLP) continues to flourish across the province is to provide PEO chapters with the tools they need to succeed. Toward this end, PEO regions are holding GLP academies to bring together local MPPs and chapters in their ridings and to plan for activities for the year ahead. The one-day forums allow PEO chapter GLP volunteers to learn about strategies and tactics to engage government by inviting MPPs and government relations professionals to share their expertise.

PEO's Western Region held its second annual GLP academy and congress on February 25, 2012 to accomplish just that. Organizers attracted over 40 engineers from the Western Region to participate. The event was hosted by Grand River Chapter and featured such speakers as Government House Leader and Minister of Community and Social Services John Milloy, MPP (Kitchener Centre); Elizabeth Witmer, then MPP (Kitchener-Waterloo); then PEO Past President Diane Freeman, P.Eng., FEC; lobbyist Marc Kealey; PEO Manager of Student and Government Liaison Programs Jeannette Chau, P.Eng.; and PEO government relations consultant Howard Brown.

"Participants have a chance to meet MPPs after the speeches and to network with other speakers," says Gabriel Tse, P.Eng., who has been GLP chair of the Grand River Chapter for three years and has a long history of engineering and political involvement. "The most important component of the academies comes after the speakers have finished and participants share ideas about what they want to accomplish in the year ahead in their chapters."

Speakers provided participants with knowledge of on-the-ground realities at Queen's Park and past successes of the GLP. "I think our discussions at the academy helped provide chapters with crucial components for their own local GLP initiatives," says Tse.

After the success of the Western Region GLP event, the inaugural East Central Region GLP academy and congress was held at PEO headquarters on April 21, 2012. The event was well attended by GLP

chairs and delegates from the six East Central Region chapters: East Toronto, Lake Ontario, Scarborough, Simcoe-Muskoka, Willowdale-Thornhill and York.

The academy and congress was spearheaded by then PEO Vice President and East Central Region Councillor Thomas Chong, P.Eng., FEC, and chaired by York Chapter GLP Director Sadiq A. Pirani, P.Eng.

Participants learned about approaching and engaging elected members of provincial parliament, regional and municipal council representatives, political parties and community leaders on matters pertaining to the engineering profession. Engineers were encouraged to discuss issues of public safety and the regulation of engineering in addition to issues that serve the development and progress of Ontario.

Four guest speakers made short presentations and participated in an interactive discussion panel. A key consideration that was highlighted was the need to respect the very busy schedules of the elected members—they do not have time to settle disputes and expect delegations to speak with one voice and be well prepared with a clear message.

"Hosting a regional meeting is a terrific way to connect your chapter with local MPPs. GLP regional academies are particularly useful because you are not only fostering connections, but are also giving chapters the opportunity they need to maintain those relationships," says Chong.

GLP academies are being planned for the fall in eastern and northern Ontario and, beginning in 2013, PEO hopes to hold similar events in each region annually.

Ensuring each region of Ontario has the training, skills and relationships needed to fulfil its GLP mandate is crucial to the long-term success of the program. Σ

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