



# New president keen to focus on regulation

A firm believer in accountability as a central component of leadership, PEO's new president hopes to make Ontario's engineering community greater than the sum of its parts.

By Michael Mastromatteo



Annette Bergeron, P.Eng., has close ties to Queen's University (seen here gracing one of its hallowed halls). She graduated with a bachelor of science degree in materials and metallurgical engineering and was, until recently, general manager of the university's Alma Mater Society, Inc.



**T**he Ontario engineering regulator's 94th president takes the reins of the association at a crucial time in its history.

Annette Bergeron, P.Eng., the third female president in the last five years, is optimistic that a consensus-building approach to governance and policy development will pay big dividends for PEO in both the short- and long-term time frames.

A native of Kingston, Bergeron was elected president-elect in PEO's 2011 council elections, pulling in more votes than better-known candidates Patrick Quinn, P.Eng., FEC, Corneliu Chisu, P.Eng., FEC, and Allen Jones, P.Eng.

But at a time when the regulator seeks to improve relations with the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE) and, at the same time, focus on its core regulatory mandate, Bergeron might well be a serendipitous choice to lead Ontario's 76,000 professional engineers.

Having served as president and chair of OSPE in 2004 and again in 2009, Bergeron clearly appreciates the advocacy and member services roles that so effectively complement PEO's regulating and licensing work.

Former PEO presidents who have also served as head of OSPE include Bob Goodings, P.Eng., FEC, and Catherine Karakatsanis, P.Eng., FEC.

But with limited experience with PEO chapter and committee work—the traditional recruitment avenue for grooming future council members—Bergeron had to overcome the outsider tag in winning the presidency.

"My first exposure to volunteering in the engineering community was through the PEO Engineer-in-Residence (EIR) program from around 1996 to 2000," Bergeron told *Engineering Dimensions* in May. "So I got to know [former president] George Comrie, P.Eng., FEC, and [former PEO volunteer coordinator] Tom Chessell fairly well and I attended a few events at PEO headquarters. At OSPE, we attended almost every PEO council meeting and worked closely with PEO on the Joint Relations Committee and Ontario Professional Engineers Awards."

Some of that early involvement sensitized Bergeron to the engineering community's response to the Bill 124 battle

of 2004-2006, the proposed reforms of the Ontario Building Code that would have subjected Ontario engineers to an external qualification scheme established by the province's housing ministry. PEO took the housing ministry to a judicial review in Ontario divisional court, which found that the aspects of the legislation dealing with professional engineers encroached on PEO's authority under the *Professional Engineers Act* (PEA).

Having seen the Bill 124 fight up close, Bergeron never felt the part of outsider, despite her non-traditional path to the PEO presidency.

"Through OSPE, I have also attended several chapter events in Kingston, North Bay and the occasional PEO town hall, so I felt that I had a basic understanding of PEO, in addition to my governance and corporate leadership experience, and it would be up to the licence holders to vote for me or not," she says.

#### FAST LEARNER

Bergeron also notes her "fast learner" skills in taking over an organization to which she had, until now, only limited exposure. "This is not the first time I have joined a board from the 'outside,'" she says. "I was nominated to the board of directors of the Kingston General Hospital with little health-care knowledge, so I am used to a steep learning curve. I applied the same approach to my year as president-elect of PEO (2012): listen and learn carefully in preparation for my year as president."

She has been on the board of directors at Kingston General since 2006. As the longest-serving member on the current board, Bergeron also chairs its research and education committee.

Tom Buchanan, chair of the hospital's board of directors since 2012, is well acquainted with Bergeron's administrative skills. "Annette has been a very valuable member of the board," Buchanan says. "I understand that since 2006, she has sat on every committee of the board and chaired other committees as well. She is also our liaison with our hospital auxiliary. We rely on her for her knowledge of the past, her sound judgment in deciding on our direction, strategy and all around common sense."

Buchanan also cites Bergeron's leadership qualities as exhibited by her preparation, attendance record and overall participation in committee work. "This is where the real work of the board gets done," he says. "I cannot think of a time when she has not agreed to do any task that we asked of her. I believe the time investment in her career, family, plus PEO, likely kept her from assuming the role of chair at the hospital. There is only so much you can do and she would never take on a task unless she knew she could devote the time and energy to succeed at it."

Bergeron comes to PEO with a mix of engineering and business in her education. She graduated with a bachelor of science degree (materials and metallurgical engineering) from Queen's University in 1987, and holds an MBA from the Schulich School of Business.

Bergeron believes business and administrative savvy is every bit as important as an engineering background in effectively managing large corporations. Some of her campaign material during the presidential election focused on her ability to manage money and allocate resources at Kingston General, which has an annual operating budget of about \$300 million.

She also cites her work as general manager of the Queen's University Alma Mater Society Inc. as an indicator of her responsible financial stewardship. In that role, she oversaw an annual budget of some \$16 million. Bergeron has left that position to devote more time to her work with PEO in Toronto, and to her daughter, who is completing her final year of high school.

Previously, Bergeron was a lecturer at the Queen's School of Business for two years. Her resume also features a six-year stint as director, first year studies, at the Queen's faculty of applied science and engineering, and a nine-year term as an instructor.

Some of her first engineering work experience came as a production engineer at Dofasco Inc., in Hamilton, from 1987 to 1995.

Bergeron was first licensed by PEO in June 1990.

Bergeron's views on financial stewardship of PEO align somewhat with those of outgoing president Denis Dixon, P.Eng., FEC, who, in his farewell remarks at PEO's recent annual general meeting, suggested technical knowledge alone is not enough to run the \$25-million corporation that is PEO.

During the election campaign, Bergeron cited concerns about PEO's purchase of a headquarters building in 2009. She said that while the building cost wasn't her main reason for running for the president's office, it was clearly a concern to a number of PEO members at large.

"We have to be careful in terms of Canada Revenue Agency that we occupy the majority of the space in our building and are not seen to be in the business of being a landlord," Bergeron says. "We are a not-for-profit association. The majority of our financial resources must be dedicated to our core mandate."

## HOT TOPICS

Among the new president's wish list for council to consider are taking a second look at improved professional development for members, creating a more effective council, and encouraging greater member engagement with the regulator—up to and including higher turnout for elections.

She also wants to look at the lack of legislative constraints on the areas in which a licensee can practise, and the lack of specialty-specific certification procedures. As with all PEO leaders since 2003, Bergeron also proposes dealing proactively with any threats to engineering self-regulation.

On the question of council effectiveness and governance enhancement, Bergeron is aware that a president can only do so much. "A president can't do it by herself," she says. "Council has to want to govern effectively and make any changes neces-

sary to do so. All I can do is share my governance experience and help to lead council where they want to go."

But there's little doubt that a focus on separate, but complementary, roles for regulator and advocate are top of mind for Bergeron. She describes herself as a proponent of consensus-building negotiations and has already made high-profile outreach to OSPE's new executive to effect more fulsome relations between the two groups.

"It is very important because, according to the *Professional Engineers Act*, our core purpose is regulatory and licensing matters. The only advocacy that PEO needs to engage in is changes to the act, for example, repeal of the industrial exception. PEO is advocating for improved public safety in manufacturing—we are not advocating for more jobs for engineers. Part of the reason licence holders voted to create OSPE was to eliminate that perceived conflict."

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Regarding member disengagement with PEO, and low voter turnout at election time, Bergeron has a number of irons in the fire.

"Council is addressing this issue with a formal licence holder survey and we're all looking forward to the results so we can work to improve our voter turnout for next year and beyond," she says. "As for licence holder engagement, I encourage engineers wherever I go to get involved in their profession. In addition to face-to-face encouragement, I use social media every day to highlight regulatory issues in our profession and attempt to engage licence holders, government and the public."

It should be noted that Bergeron made special effort to include OSPE President Paul Acchione, P.Eng., in the cover photo of this issue of *Engineering Dimensions*. It's not the first time a person other than the president has appeared in the presidential cover shot, but it's the first time an OSPE official has been involved. In many ways, the move backs up Bergeron's commitment to consensus-building negotiations in word and deed. As she noted in her first president's message: "We have two engineering bodies in Ontario, leaving PEO the luxury of focusing on regulation, and OSPE on advocacy and member services. I know we can leverage each other to make PEO better than it has even been." Σ