

# PEO ROLE IS NO SOFT LANDING FOR NEW REGISTRAR

Drive for continuous improvement and administrative efficiency are prime motivators for Gerard McDonald, MBA, P.Eng., as he takes over PEO's top administrative role.

By Michael Mastromatteo

Ontario's engineers shouldn't expect any immediate surprises or bold moves from new PEO Registrar Gerard McDonald, MBA, P.Eng. But that shouldn't be taken to mean the regulator's corporate leader has no irons in the fire.

In his first major interview since taking over the top administrative position January 6, McDonald says he plans to learn all about the engineering regulator as he settles into his new role.

With more than 30 years' experience in public service with the transportation ministry, the Privy Council and other federal departments, the 55-year-old father of five is keen to get back to the profession where he began his career in 1982.

It's likely to be a steep learning curve for McDonald, especially as he divides his time between the family home in suburban Ottawa, and his Monday-to-Friday residence in Toronto. Nonetheless, it's a challenge McDonald appears eager to take on.

In a January 8 meeting with PEO employees, McDonald outlined his vision and objectives for the regulator. At the outset, he asked staff and senior management to lend their expertise in moving PEO forward as an organization. He also hopes to maintain licence holders' and the public's trust in PEO's ability to regulate the profession. In addition, McDonald hopes to make the organization as efficient as possible, in both the regulatory and service sides of the business.

McDonald sat down with *Engineering Dimensions* January 16 to offer additional insights about himself and his hopes for the organization.

**Mastromatteo:** What are some of your impressions after two weeks at PEO?

**McDonald:** I'm really impressed with the dedication and hard work of the staff and that of the various volunteers that I've been fortunate enough to meet thus far—volunteers and councillors, I would say. It's evident to me that this is a very passionate organization and one with a proud tradition that we want to uphold and enhance as we move forward.

**Mastromatteo:** Did you seek out the registrar position or was it brought to your attention?

**McDonald:** It was kind of a double-barreled recruitment. I did notice the [opportunity]. I recall it was June [2013] and I had just undergone back surgery. I picked up the *Globe and Mail* one day and noticed the job ad, and I thought, "that's interesting." I started considering whether this was something I should apply for or not, because I was at a point in my career where I was about to obtain all my years of [service] to collect my public service pension, so it gave me the luxury to consider other career alternatives. But before I had a chance to give much more thought to the idea of submitting my candidature, I got a call from the recruiting agency PEO had hired—a bit serendipitous in a way—and the more we talked, the more it just seemed to be a very good fit for me.



Gerard McDonald, MBA, P.Eng., attended his first PEO council meeting February 7. The new registrar looks to involve licence holders, staff and volunteers to build a more efficient, member-focused organization.



Gerard McDonald, MBA, P.Eng., prepares to deliver his first-ever registrar's report to PEO council. PEO president Annette Bergeron, P.Eng., FEC, is seated to his left.

**Mastromatteo:** What did you know about PEO and its way of doing business?

**McDonald:** Those who were on the recruitment committee, I would have to say, were very upfront about some of the challenges of the organization. That being said, I accept that no organization is going to be perfect. And, I think PEO has some good points. It has some points I think we can improve on, so I come in with my eyes open. I've heard from various licence holders, council members and staff, their impressions about the organization and some of the challenges that we have, but I do look at them as just that—challenges, rather than obstacles that might prevent us from moving forward. When I considered taking this job or changing careers, for that matter, I wasn't looking for a so-called "soft landing" or something where you get into a cushy job and just while away the hours. I wanted something that was challenging. I wanted something that pushed me. I wanted something where I felt I could make a positive difference.

**Mastromatteo:** Other than maintaining your licence and membership in PEO, how much contact did you have with the profession in your years with the public service?

**McDonald:** I always maintained my membership. I always tried to keep abreast of issues that were before the organization but, to be honest, I didn't follow it that closely and the more I got into senior management, the more engineering issues became less top-of-mind for me. That being said, I've always been largely in the transportation industry, so engineering was never too far from my scope of interests.

**Mastromatteo:** What would you say is PEO's biggest challenge?

**McDonald:** In my discussions with people, I think everybody is willing to do whatever it takes to improve the organization and really, I guess, what I see as my biggest challenge is coming up with a consensus on what it is we should be doing. There are only so many things you can do within a certain period of time, so to say we're going to be all things to all people immediately is just not realistic. I really see my role as being the coach or the leader who can help us organize our priorities, agree on what they are, and then monitor our performance on what we feel those goals should be.

**Mastromatteo:** How do you plan to get along with PEO council?

**McDonald:** Certainly, as registrar, I take direction from council. They have given me a great vote of confidence in picking me to run the organization and I take that very seriously. That being said, I also feel it's my role to provide fearless advice to council and to be upfront and honest with them on the implications of decisions they might be making. But in the same light, I also see my role as one of providing solutions and options to council.

**Mastromatteo:** How can PEO stay focused in its core work?

**McDonald:** Something I like to say often, and I think it applies to this organization, is I think we really have to concentrate as an organization on sticking to our "knitting"... what it is that PEO is supposed to be doing, and make sure that we're doing the best we can, as opposed to trying to invent new objectives for the organization that really aren't part of what its core mandate is. That's really what I see. Let's get a good agreement on what our core mandate is and make sure we're really good at that.

**Mastromatteo:** There has been some confusion about regulatory versus advocacy work at PEO. With that in mind, what are your thoughts on working with the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE)?

**McDonald:** It's been a number of years since OSPE was formed. I certainly want to work very closely with OSPE and help them in their mandate, but also to get a clear understanding of what the delineation is between them and us. It's not productive to be working at cross purposes with that organization. Let's come to an understanding—we do this, and you do that—and let's make sure we're working together.

**Mastromatteo:** PEO seemed to become more politicized when it appeared the provincial government was stepping over the line in some aspects of engineering regulation. Do you have any concerns about government incursion on PEO's turf?

**McDonald:** I think with any provincial government and any self-regulated body, there is always going to be a wax and a wane, on where do our responsibilities start and where do yours end. And that's always an area for healthy debate. But it's very clear professional engineers have been given the responsibility to self-regulate their profession, and it's something we have to take seriously. I would also say we have to make sure that we justify the responsibility that has been placed on our organization, and preserve the public confidence in what we do.  $\Sigma$