

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE



Jennifer Coombes
Editor

“IF WE WIN Lotto 6/49, it would be fun to wait 25 years to collect the prize,” said no one ever. A similar test of patience, except on a provincial scale, is playing out with what’s been dubbed the Ring of Fire—a discovery of what’s thought to be enormous quantities of chromite (a key alloying ingredient in stainless steel) in Ontario’s far north. It’s likely the biggest mining opportunity Ontario will ever see.

According to some estimates, the quantity of chromite in the Ring of Fire could keep North America in the mineral for at least a couple of centuries and would essentially make Ontario a chromite superpower (and give the handful of other countries with appreciable quantities of the stuff a run for their money).

But before we get too excited, there are just a few obstacles to overcome. With the dearth of roads and rail lines, getting to the site—all 5000 square km of it—is itself an achievement. Getting power there will be the next challenge. And, of course, there is the difficult and time-consuming nature of coordinating the development of these basic requirements with all the stakeholders, including multiple layers of government and First Nation communities.

In “Ring of Fire puts spotlight on northern Ontario’s mining industry” (p. 38), Nicole Axworthy outlines some of the project’s current roadblocks and explores the role of Ontario’s engineers in realizing the potential of this vast resource, while also ensuring that environmental concerns and cultural sensitivities are fully taken into account.

With our second feature, we switch gears a bit and discuss the contributions made by the mining industry to modern, workplace health and safety.

Ontario’s workers owe a debt of gratitude to the mining industry and, most especially, to the late James Ham, ScD, P.Eng., who, with his 1976 *Report of the Royal Commission on the Health and Safety of Workers in Mines*, laid the groundwork for Ontario’s *Occupational Health and Safety Act* (OHSA), which came into force in 1979. Ham, of course, was the father of the IRS (Internal Responsibility System), a revolutionary concept at the time that put the responsibility for health and safety squarely on the shoulders of absolutely everyone at a workplace. The “right to participate” concept remains the backbone of the OHSA.

In “Mining review unearthed whole new way of approaching worker safety” (p. 44), Michael Mastromatteo retraces the history of Ham’s groundbreaking review of the province’s health and safety practices and looks at the more recent components of the OHSA, as well as the Ministry of Labour’s ongoing mining safety review, which is intended to increase further the safety of mine workers.

Please also take a moment to read the inspiring biographies of the 11 engineers who will be recognized this year with Ontario Professional Engineers Awards (OPEA) (p. 9). They will be celebrated at the November 22 OPEA gala at the International Centre in Toronto. For tickets and more information, please visit www.ospe.on.ca. Σ

Engineering Dimensions (ISSN 0227-5147) is published bimonthly by the Association of Professional Engineers of Ontario and is distributed to all PEO licensed professional engineers.

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Engineering Dimensions is audited by the Canadian Circulations Audit Board, and is a member of Canadian Business Press.

Indexed by the Canadian Business Index and available online in the Canadian Business and Current Affairs Database. US periodical postage paid at Buffalo, NY, 14211, USPS #001-089. US POSTMASTER: send address changes to *Engineering Dimensions*, P.O. Box 1042, Niagara Falls, NY, 14304.

CANADA POST: send address changes to 40 Sheppard Avenue West, Suite 101, Toronto, ON M2N 6K9. Canada Publications Mail Product Sales Agreement No. 40063309. Printed in Canada by Web Offset.

SUBSCRIPTIONS (Non-members)
 Canada (6 issues) \$28.25 incl. HST
 Other (6 issues) \$30.00
 Students (6 issues) \$14.00 incl. HST
 Single copy \$4.50 incl. HST
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 Approximately \$5.00 from each membership fee is allocated to *Engineering Dimensions* and is non-deductible.

