

The EDGE

January 2001 Issue

Equity & Diversity in Geoscience & Engineering

Please don't hesitate
to give your input...

Send submissions
to the DAWEG
Newsletter Editor

Maggie Wojtarowicz, E.I.T.
wmaggie101@yahoo.com

*(please save your submission in
Word for Windows 95
or include your submission
in the text of your e-mail)*

in this issue...

DAWEG Turns 10! ...2

DAWEG Christmas Party ...2

"A Smart Employer Will..." ...2

"The Truth About Reindeer" ...4

School Interaction ...4

Upcoming Events... ...5

- Fun Run
- Wine & Cheese

DAWEG

*Newsletter for the Division for Advancement of
Women in Engineering & Geoscience*

A Division of the Association of Professional Engineers & Geoscientists of British Columbia

DAWEG Turns 10! - Let's Celebrate -

This year will be DAWEG's tenth anniversary and we would like to celebrate DAWEG's achievements over its first decade.

If you have suggestions for how DAWEG should celebrate, please forward them to Cathy Marr at (604) 731-7187 or cmarr@istar.ca.

DAWEG Christmas Party - An Elegant Affair

By Cathy Marr

For those who attended DAWEG's Christmas Party you know it was a wonderful opportunity to relax and chat with old friends as well as meet some new ones. Many thanks to Evannah Edge who graciously hosted the event at her elegant apartment. Evannah, that view of English Bay is incredible!

"A Smart Employer Will..."

By Karen E. Savage, P.Eng., President, Horizon Engineering Inc

As I've seen a lot of my women engineering colleagues leave our profession and, especially in light of the fact that I am now an employer, I've been giving a lot of thought to the issue of staff retention. What does it take to keep trained staff from going elsewhere? Money, of course, although 'they' say that monetary compensation ranks 4th or 5th on the priority list of what makes for a positive work experience. Being recognized and valued for their unique contributions. Corporate planning for the professional development of each individual. Being able to work toward, or better yet, achieve a work-life balance. Attaining equity within the company.

I predict that the excuse 'staffing shortages' will become commonplace in the next few months and that the associated problems won't start to be overcome until about 2007. Why do I think this? Because, as the baby boomers start to retire, the work force will shrink, but the population to be serviced will not. 'They' also say that the next North American demographic blip is the baby boomers' children who are currently in their late teens - early 20's. These people still need to become educated and gain experience before they can contribute effectively to the work force. Thus 2007. A

smart employer will try to keep those staff that they have and to be seen as an attractive employer for potential new staff.

It's interesting that different cultures have different demographic blips. For example, birth control was outlawed in post-revolution Iran and there is currently a large population of children in that country who will have to compete hard for education and employment opportunities. A smart employer will avail themselves of opportunities to integrate qualified individuals from other countries into their teams and develop systems to make this integration efficient.

'Flexible work options' and the new jargon 'work-life balance', in which definition I include reduced work weeks are, I believe, very important. Some clients may prefer that project staff be available 40 to 50 hours per week but, in the long run, I believe they would prefer to build a relationship with a person who is content and who will be available for many years. Although the boundary between traditional parental roles is becoming blurred, it is still the mother who usually assumes the role of primary care-giver. Finding appropriate solutions to work-life balance issues may be especially important for



working mothers and especially challenging where the work entailed cannot be scheduled or clearly defined as 'tasks'. Engineer managers and many other professional women would fall within this category. A smart employer will develop systems which value working mothers and allow them to maintain career satisfaction. A smart employer in a traditionally male discipline will look beyond the 49% to fulfill their staffing requirements. A smart employer will realize that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and ensure that an individual working 28 hours per week is not valued at 0.7 of a person.

When I had my first child, I was employed as a project engineer. I took my 6 months of maternity leave and returned to a flexible work schedule. With my second child, although I was not entitled to federally-funded maternity benefits (being self-employed), I was in a position to take a leave of absence from my engineer-manager role. But I just couldn't. I felt that continuity had to be maintained and that it would be career (or business) suicide to be completely unavailable for several months. Similarly, a friend and former engineering classmate has just officially returned to work as an engineer-manager from her maternity leave. In reality, she has been yarding her babe into the office for several few-hour stints each week for the past few months.

What will it mean when the maternity benefits are extended to 12 months? I think it will mean that the rate of attrition of professional women from traditionally male careers will increase. Did you know that up until this year maternity benefits were roughly 55% of one's salary to a ceiling of \$1,790 gross (approx. \$1,500 net)? When one's gross salary (employment and maternity benefits combined) exceeds \$40,000 for the tax year, part of the maternity benefits must be returned.¹ For professional women earning upwards of \$70,000 per year, this is a pay cut of at least 35%. Maintain this budget

for 12 months and you will find that you do not need it anymore. So why bother going back full-time when you just want to stay at home with your kids anyway? The work force loses. It loses the insight and skills of a trained, experienced individual. It loses the humanity that may be gained from welcoming this individual back in a role now shared with her new family.

¹Information provided by Lianna Mah

The current and new maternity leave model is well-suited to the traditional ghetto-ized careers of women; namely nursing and teaching, not to mention pink collar jobs. But I would advocate a different model for managers. What about a graduated maternity leave which empowers women to schedule their own lives and requires that employers cooperate in developing reduced work weeks in the latter months of the 'leave' where the maternity benefits are used to subsidize the women for the unpaid portions of their time? Informally I expect that this already occurs to some degree and that women managers on maternity leave actually bank some time that they work during their leave so as to allow them some flexibility when they return to work 'full-time'. Isn't it a shame that it's a 'rob Peter to pay Paul' situation and wouldn't it be nice if you could just say "I'll be working 11:30am 'til 5pm five days per week and I'm glad you are pleased to see me at all".

Addendum By Lianna Mah

Maternity leave is covered under Employment Insurance (EI), and thus, EI forms must be filled out. Many of the questions, e.g., are you looking for work, why were you fired/laid off, will you be reporting weekly, etc., don't apply to women seeking maternity leave benefits. They just confuse the whole application process. Considering that women form 51% of the population, isn't it logical that a simple maternity leave form be provided for such purposes?

“The Truth About Reindeer”
Courtesy of “e-mail funnies”

According to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, while both male and female reindeer grow antlers in the summer each year (the only members of the deer family, Cervidae, to have females do so), male reindeer drop their antlers at the beginning of winter, usually late November to mid December. Female reindeer retain their antlers till after they give birth in the

spring. Therefore, according to every historical rendition depicting Santa's reindeer, every single one of them, from Rudolf to Blitzen.....had to be a girl. We should've known. Only women would be able to drag a fat man in a red velvet suit all around the world in one night, and not get lost.

School Interaction – Volunteer Opportunities
By Cathy Marr

Are you interested in working with students to increase their awareness of engineering and geoscience careers? There is a wide variety of opportunities available to those who are interested in volunteering their time. DAWEG is often called upon to provide volunteers for career awareness events.

The two upcoming opportunities are requests from schools to provide speakers at career events (see below).

Other opportunities range from joining Science World's Scientists and Innovators in the Schools

program, judging at Science Fairs and participating as a role model at school career fairs or Science World's Opening the Door events. Events targeted at young women, such as the Douglas College Quantum Leaps program for Grade Eleven girls or SCWIST XX Evenings for young women in post-secondary, are looking for women, in particular, to participate as role models. The time invested can often be as little as a few hours but it can make a tremendous difference to a young person who is examining potential career choices. If you are interested in getting involved, please contact Cathy Marr at (604) 731-7187 or cmarr@istar.ca.

Seaquam Secondary School, North Delta

- Request for an Engineering Speaker

Thursday, February 8, 2001
60 minutes
(between 8:30 am and 1:45 pm)

Contact:
Sharon Rowa
tel: 591-8072 fax: 591-8656

Cariboo Hill Secondary, Burnaby

- Request for a Guest Speaker

Tuesday, February 6, 2001
11:30 am to 12:20 pm

Contact:
Penny
tel: 664-8205



UPCOMING EVENTS...

Call for Volunteers for Seventh Annual Engineering Feets Fun Run

DAWEG is again organizing the Engineering Feets 10 km Fun Run / 5 km Walk. This is the seventh annual one! The Engineering Feets Fun Run will be held on

*Sunday, March 4, 2001
at 9:00 am
at Lumberman's Arch in Stanley Park.*

In addition to being the kick-off event for National Engineering Week in British Columbia, this is a major fundraiser for DAWEG. We rely on the participation of our membership as volunteers to help ensure this event is an ongoing success. Volunteer opportunities include race marshals, race marshal guide, timers, lead biker, rear biker, water station attendant, registration desk, photographer, food preparation, pick-up and drop-off of rental equipment and more. This is also a good opportunity to network and catch-up with old friends!

If you can help us out as a volunteer, please contact

*Lianna Mah
(604) 293-1411
mahl@burnaby.associated-eng.com*

If you want to participate as a runner or walker, contact

*the Running Room
(604) 684-9771*

or pick-up an entry form from

*the Running Room
103 - 679 Denman Street
Vancouver*

or download the entry form from

*the APEGBC website's upcoming events page
(www.apeg.bc.ca).*



UPCOMING EVENTS (con't)...

Annual Mentoring Wine & Cheese Event

*DAWEG is pleased to present
the Annual Mentoring Wine & Cheese Event*

Thursday, March 15, 2001

6:00 - 9:00 pm

Staff Lounge

Civil and Mechanical Engineering (CEME)

Room 2202, 2324 Main Mall

University of British Columbia

*Please contact Evannah Edge at 408-5212
if you are interested in participating in this event
or would like further information.*