

SPRING 2024

ENGINEERING DIMENSIONS

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65 YEARS

of Supporting Ontario's Future Engineers

The Ontario Professional Engineers Foundation for Education, a not-for-profit charity that has given more than \$4 million in scholarship funding to over 4000 engineering students in Ontario, celebrates its 65th anniversary this May. **BY ADAM SIDSWORTH**

MAY 1959: A quart of dairy milk was 23 cents, a pound of chicken was 47 cents and a pound of butter clocked in at 70 cents. A dozen eggs? 52 cents. The average hourly salary across Canada was \$1.72. A typical buyer of a house had an annual income of \$5,716 and bought a bungalow costing \$14,516.

That same year, there were almost 16,000 undergraduate engineering students across Canada—of whom just 73 were women—and they paid on average \$382 in school fees, plus an average of \$82 for books and supplies and \$507 on room and board during the school year. Paradoxically, students earned approximately \$660 in summer jobs and part-time work. And, importantly, only 29 per cent of engineering students received bursaries and scholarships, which totalled \$564.

Given the financial strains of engineering students at the time, a group of PEO volunteers decided to take action to help remove barriers to engineering education. On May 7, 1959, PEO volunteers incorporated the Ontario Professional Engineers Foundation for Education (foundation) at the provincial level—and later that year registered with the federal government—as a not-for-profit corporation with a mandate to provide funding for students studying engineering across Ontario.

Indeed, PEO Council's meeting on July 25, 1959, had a note from one-time licence holder and volunteer



Scholarship recipients gather at PEO's headquarters in Toronto, ON, on June 25, 2019, during the annual general meeting of the Ontario Professional Engineers Foundation for Education.

C.D. Howe, P.Eng., minister of munitions and supply during the Second World War, read into its record. "The Engineering Foundation for Education is now a fact," Howe wrote. "The Scholarship Committee will meet in early September to prepare recommendation[s] as to its operation."

FUNDING SCHOLARSHIPS

The mandate of the foundation, as defined in 1959 included, among other things, "to promote the training and education of professional engineers... to provide for scholarships to persons attending or proposing to attend any school, college or university...to provide for bursaries or financial assistance" and "to solicit, receive and accept all manner of contributions, gifts, bequests and legacies from any person, firm or corporation...."

The original foundation directors included a who's who of PEO licence holders, including past and future presidents John Fox, P.Eng. (1957), Charles Carson, P.Eng. (1958), Andrew McQueen, P.Eng. (1959), Dwight Simmons, P.Eng. (1960) and Gordon McHenry, P.Eng. (1968).

The ability of PEO to include scholarships as part of its activities is indicative of PEO's historical dual role as a regulatory and advocacy body. (Advocacy was officially devolved from PEO's activities in 2000.) Indeed, PEO had existing scholarships for engineering students at the University of Toronto (U of T) and Queen's University going back to at least 1951. In July 1958, Council passed a motion to further explore raising funds for engineering scholarships that would qualify for tax exemptions for donors.

However, with the expansion of engineering schools in Ontario—11 more were being introduced—and a legal opinion that licence holders could only be solicited for funding through a separate corporation, the foundation was born in 1959. Initial funding was pegged at \$250 per scholarship for students in their first, second and third years of study at U of T and Queen's; a \$500 entrance scholarship for the Queen's student with the highest mark; and a Gold Medal for the fourth-year student at both U of T and Queen's with the highest exam marks. By the time the initial foundation scholarships were granted in May 1960, U of T and Queen's were joined by the University of

Ottawa and the University of Western Ontario (now Western University), followed by other schools.

Today, the foundation provides annual funding of \$153,000 in scholarships to students from each of Ontario's 16 accredited engineering schools in Ontario. It raises the funds through donations and forwards the scholarship funds to the individual schools, whose award committees choose the recipients based on criteria provided by the foundation.

To date, there have been 4000 scholarship recipients who have received an accumulative \$4 million in scholarship funds. Currently, the foundation provides 106 scholarships annually, with each accredited Ontario engineering school receiving two entrance scholarships and between two and eight undergraduate engineering scholarships.

The foundation continues to provide the Gold Medal to each accredited school's graduating engineering student with the highest academic standing in their class. The current value of the individual scholarships is \$1,500.

"Ideally, we would like to increase the size of our individual scholarships to match the current needs of students. The greatest wish of the foundation is that we are fully funded to continue to gift those most talented and deserving in perpetuity," notes foundation President Réjeanne Aimey, MBA, P.Eng. "To do this effectively, an increase in donations annually would help. So too would bequests from those who are in a position to assist future generations of engineers."

DONATING

through the decades

MEETING EVOLVING NEEDS

In 1960, the foundation raised \$3,500 for its initial crop of scholarship recipients. In 2022, the foundation had received close to \$90,000 in donations, with almost three quarters of donation funding coming from PEO licence holders. Other sources of donations include individual donations through the foundation's website and from members of the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers.

Historically, licence holders renewing their licences in PEO's online portal have been able to optionally click on a box allowing PEO to forward a donation from the licence holder to the foundation. However, that will come to an end on December 31, 2024, due in part to PEO's data-protection policy, which aims to have PEO "share personal data with a third party only for regulatory purposes or when required by law." Additionally, because of PEO's increased focus on its regulatory mandate in recent years, any participation on the part of PEO in the work or fundraising of the foundation could be perceived as impacting the impartiality PEO needs to maintain its role as the engineering regulator.

Aimey remains optimistic that licence holders will continue to recognize the importance of the work of the foundation. "The essence of engineering and the engineer has long been the pursuit of an ideal that ultimately shapes our world for generations to come. This is our gift to the public, and I know we will always support those who pursue what we cherish," notes Aimey, who also observes that the foundation has long supported increasing equality, diversity and inclusion in the engineering sector.

Indeed, in 1990, the foundation decided to mandate a gender-balanced awarding of scholarships to each school and in 2018 reaffirmed a gender-balanced awarding of all scholarships by the following year. Additionally, in 2021, the foundation signed five-year donor agreements with each accredited engineering school stating that in addition to the criteria already stated by the foundation's board of directors, each engineering school will:

- Endeavour to select an equal number of students who identify as women or non-binary as those who identify as men;
- Try to give preference to students from underrepresented minorities in the schools' engineering programs; and
- Make sure students' combined scholarships for the academic year should not be more than \$10,000 from all sources, including the foundation.

"Our founding directors would be pleased at what has been accomplished and how we have continued to facilitate pathways for all genders to participate in engineering," says Aimey. **e**



To make a donation to the foundation, visit <https://engineersfoundation.ca/donate>

Since its beginnings in 1959, the Ontario Professional Engineers Foundation for Education has provided scholarships to the growing number of accredited engineering schools across the province. Here is a timeline of when Ontario schools started receiving scholarships.

1960

University of Toronto, Queen's University, University of Ottawa, Western University

1961

Carleton University, McMaster University, University of Windsor

1962

University of Waterloo

1964

Royal Military College of Canada

1968

University of Guelph

1975

Lakehead University

1986

Laurentian University

1993

Toronto Metropolitan University

2007

York University, University of Ontario Institute of Technology

2021

Conestoga College