

Students at convention have positive outlook

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When Ryan Pippy, a geology student at the University of Waterloo, attended the student-industry luncheon during the 2009 Prospectors and Developers Association of Canada convention, he learned that the global economic downturn had severely curtailed his options for summer employment. Mineral exploration companies were there but few were hiring.

One year later and things were noticeably different. Companies are hiring and the mood among students was buoyant.

“Last year everything was in survival mode - very depressing. This year we’ve got a lot more hope,” said Pippy, who will be graduating soon and working for at least a year in Australia.

The luncheon is organized by the PDAC’s human resources development committee and has been a staple of the convention for a number of years.

“We want to get the students in touch with people in industry and government and help them find jobs,” said Scott Jobin-Bevans, co-chair of the committee, along with Felix Lee.

Jobin-Bevans said more than 900 students registered for the convention and, out of those, only 59 were non-PDAC members.

The luncheon room was packed with students seeking either full-time or summer employment.

“It’s very difficult to find summer jobs. There’s a lot of us and there’s not as many jobs so we come here to try and find employers and just something so we can work in our field and get the experience,” said Kathryn Franklin, a third-year geological engineering student at Queen’s University.

There are 70 students in Franklin’s class at Queen’s, about half of whom are women. When Agnico-Eagle Mines technical writer Jane Werniuk graduated from the geology program at Queen’s in 1979, only seven graduates were women.

Elizabeth Sonnenburg, who is graduating with a master’s degree in geology from McMaster University, has student loans and attended the luncheon to find stable employment.

“I am essentially here to get a feel for what’s out there right now. I am at a point in my life where I need to make some pretty big life decisions after ten years of university,” Sonnenburg said.

She has been attending the convention for five straight years and during that time she’s witnessed a significant shift in what employers are seeking.

“The diversity of what skills people are looking for has really expanded. It’s not just about knowing how to look at rocks. A couple of companies were looking for people with social science backgrounds. They’re looking for people who have environmental knowledge. They’re looking for people with First Nations experience. So it’s not just about rocks anymore,” Sonnenburg said.

Former Assembly of First Nations National Chief Phil Fontaine was the luncheon’s keynote speaker and he urged students to build relationships with First Nations communities, noting that most aboriginals live where the many of the students will be working.

“We need to collaborate; we need to co-operate,” Fontaine said. “Look to the aboriginal people to be your (business) partners.”

There was also a presentation of the Mary-Claire Ward Geoscience Award, presented each year to a graduate student at a Canadian university whose thesis uses geoscience mapping as a significant component.

Joel Cubley, a Ph.D. student at the University of Calgary, won for his paper titled *Structure and Metamorphism of the Grand Forks Complex*. The award comes with a \$3,000 prize.

“Basically I’m looking at extensional structures on the edge of the core complex and how those may or may not channel mineralizing fluids,” Cubley said.

Cubley noted there is almost no funding for his kind of work.

“There is little funding available in Canada for base level mapping. A lot of the funding now is going toward very targeted projects. There are a lot of areas in Canada, and especially my area of (southeastern) British Columbia, that have only undergone primary reconnaissance mapping in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. And they really need a re-evaluation. Trying to get funding for that is difficult.”

“A lot of times now it comes down to support from the Geological Association of Canada or PDAC,” Cubley said.

Cubley has about 1.5 years left to wrap up his Ph.D. and is deciding whether or not to go the industry or academic route.

He said that most of his \$3,000 prize would “probably go toward funding summer research.”