

OCCCI Delivers First 'Construction Day' for High School Students



Over 60 high school students from the Waterloo District Catholic School Board area got a firsthand look at careers in civil construction on September 29, when they attended the first 'Construction Day' organized by the Ontario Civil Construction Careers Institute (OCCCI).

Students started out with a safety talk and orientation at two Steed & Evans Limited locations. During the day they visited the maintenance shops before getting on buses to see road work, bridge construction and a sewer and watermain project close up. At each site there were experienced people to talk to them about the construction projects and the various jobs involved in delivering them.

Reaction from the students was overwhelmingly positive. Outfitted

with work boots, hard hats and safety vests provided to them, they had lots of questions about choosing a career in civil construction. Not surprisingly the most commonly asked questions were: how much does it pay, what are the working hours and how soon before they could get to operate the heavy equipment? Some of the students attending the inaugural Construction Day have some experience with summer construction work and others admitted they had never, until that time, considered a career in civil construction.

Steed & Evans played the leading role in making Construction Day a reality by hosting the students and arranging all of the site visits. Both Construction allowed the students to visit their bridge project on the massive Highway 8 expansion project in Kitchener. Hanson Pipe and Precast came to the

table to sponsor lunch for the students and members of the Conestoga Heavy Construction Association came out to do the barbecuing.

The first Construction Day initiative was a scaled down trial of what could become a much bigger event in the future. OCCCI will now consider whether it should be expanded in 2011 to be able to accommodate many more students and to stage events in different parts of the province. Based on the experience September 29 there is no question the event was successful in establishing civil construction as an attractive option for students. However plans for the future will be tempered by the funding available and the ability to mobilize many more companies to volunteer as hosts.

What began as an informal discussion between several Ontario civil



construction related associations two years ago at the Canadian Construction Association meetings in Victoria is now a fully-operative coalition of 13 organizations that has made considerable inroads in promoting civil construction careers to high school students. ORBA and the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association were the driving forces behind OCCCI's creation and remain the lead funding partners. The Ministry of Transportation is also a member of OCCCI.

Under the direction of the OCCCI Board of Directors and Jessica Stefler, director of careers promotion, OCCCI's track record in only its first two years is an impressive one. Accomplishments include:

- Development of the OCCCI website that provides career promotion and assistance to students. So well received, the website will be the model for a national initiative under the CCA banner;

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- Development and distribution of career profiles and continuing education information to all high schools in Ontario;
- Delivery of 149 classroom presentations at 71 different high schools over the past year, in all areas of the province;
- Promotion of civil construction careers at 28 job fairs and skills tradeshow in the past year. The OCCCI display booth features a backhoe simulator that was donated by Toromont CAT and is extremely popular with high school students;
- Participation in eight major conferences related to OCCCI's objectives, such as Skills Canada and Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program events.

Not prepared to rest on their laurels, OCCCI partners met on October 7 to develop year three objectives and a broader five-year plan. The strategic planning session will identify priorities – whether it is just getting better at what it does or if it wants to put in place additional resources and expand into other areas of related activity. ■

