

Minister Chambers Issues Call to Action to Employers



The Provincial Partnership Council (PPC) and the Honourable Mary Anne Chambers, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, have issued a call to action challenging Ontario's employers to help solve the skills shortage by offering high school students work experience, as part of the *Passport to Prosperity* campaign. The PPC is comprised of key leaders from private, public and voluntary sectors, working together in the effort to get more employers on board.

"I commend those employers who are already providing school-to-work experience – it is an investment in education and the workforce of tomorrow, but we need many more employers. I challenge all Ontario employers to get involved," says Chambers.

Will Galante, Branch Maintenance Manager, Ryder – Logistics and Transportation Solutions Worldwide and Liam Burke, co-op student, Jean Vanier Catholic Secondary School, show the Honourable Mary Anne Chambers, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, how to perform a brake job on a large company truck.

"In the years ahead, Ontario faces a severe shortage of skilled workers," says Len Crispino, President and CEO, Ontario Chamber of Commerce, a *Passport to Prosperity* partner. "This will have a drastic impact on our economy and our standard of living. It is essential that as employers, we engage young people in real-life work experiences when they are making critical decisions about what they will do in the future."

Will Galante, Branch Maintenance Manager, Ryder – Logistics and Transportation Solutions, sees the value of this first hand. He has trained and hired two Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) students and is currently training a third.

Outstanding Employers Recognized for Training Students

There are thousands of employers in Ontario doing their part to train the workforce of tomorrow. Of these employers, some have demonstrated long-standing commitment to providing school-work opportunities to high school students across the province.

In Fall 2004 the Provincial Partnership Council called for nominations from local communities for the *Passport to Prosperity* Employer Champion Awards. Five outstanding employers were selected for the award and five additional employers received merit awards. These employers were recognized at the *Passport to Prosperity* forum on April 26th.

Employer Champions:

Amazing Canadian Art Centre, Mississauga

Kar Cheung, President-Founder of the Amazing Canadian Art Centre in Mississauga, believes that every student has potential and that given the right guidance and ownership over their work, students can excel. Mr. Cheung launched The Amazing Canadian Magazine, to give students a creative outlet. The home page of the online magazine urges youth to "be creative, think for yourself." Mr. Cheung trains cooperative education students to run the magazine from start to finish. Topics include layout and web design; music and video production; proposal and creative writing, and editing; marketing promotion and publicity. For 12 years Mr. Cheung has been providing school-work opportunities to empower the workforce of tomorrow.

Bruce Power, Bruce County

The staff at Bruce Power, a nuclear power generator in Bruce County believe in investing in high school students through school-work partnerships. Bruce Power has been providing school-work opportunities for the past 12 years, ranging from workplace tours and visits to schools, to cooperative education placements and partnership events. The company takes on at least 25 students per semester. The organization has an on-site teacher to better link the high school curriculum with their work experience. Students are keen to participate because they hear about the high quality of the learning experience.

Les Suites Hotel, Ottawa

For four years, co-op students at Les Suites Hotel in Ottawa have been exposed to the hospitality sector by working in every department of the hotel. Students work in both English and French in reception, sales, room cleaning, maintenance, data entry and special projects. Steve Georgopoulos, General Manager, takes time to meet with the students to discuss their progress. He also introduces the students to other professionals in the industry.

"Thanks to employers, thousands of high school students across the province are benefiting from on-the-job training, ensuring they have the skills and confidence they need to lead successful, productive working lives."

Ian Cunningham,
Executive Director,
Mississauga Crime
Prevention Association
and Strategic
Partnerships Task Force
Chair, Provincial
Partnership Council.

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Outstanding Employers Recognized for Training Students Cont'd.

Rector Machine Works Ltd, Sault Ste. Marie

In a city where many youth have a hard time gaining employment, Rector Machine Works Ltd. has been instrumental in training Sault Ste. Marie high school students and helping them find work. For 20 years, the company has been providing co-op and OYAP opportunities in welding, fabricating, metal sales, drive-line and hydraulics. Herb Rector, Owner and Larry Girardi, Foreman, have also actively supported youth and promoted the skilled trades in Sault Ste. Marie through their involvement with the Algoma District School Board.

Shelley Machine and Marine, Sarnia

For more than ten years, Shelley Machine and Marine has been actively involved in providing school-work opportunities to students. The staff have given career talks, participated in panel discussions advocating the skilled trades and have regularly presented at Sarnia's Skilled Trades and Technology Fair. Shelley Machine and Marine has provided many OYAP and co-op experiences to students in the areas of welding, machining and mill wrighting.

Merit Award Winners:

Aramark Canada – Food Services, Mississauga

Dr. Bruce Gibson – Dentistry, Lakefield

Kruger International – Manufacturing, Pembroke

Niagara Health System – Healthcare, Niagara Region

Reko Tool and Mold – Manufacturing, Oldcastle

Students with Learning Disabilities Find Their Earning Abilities

At 19, Shane McCowan's work experience record is better than that of most teens his age. With glowing references describing Shane as eager to learn, hard-working and someone who boosts employee morale, he would be an asset to any company.

Shane has many challenges when it comes to academics. His reading skills are around the grade four level and he has the comprehension level of a grade three student. However, Shane's drive, determination and winning attitude have helped him gain valuable work and life experience, to become a productive member of society.

"Shane has always demonstrated a keen interest in being a good student," says Debra Malandrino, Shane's coach at Maplewood High School. "We wanted Shane to be able to succeed not only in school, but also in life."

As part of the *Passport to Prosperity* initiative, Shane participates in the co-op program at Maplewood. Shane has had placements at Global Pets, Parker Pet Care, Toys R Us and is now at Zellers.

"When Shane came in for an interview I was really impressed with his enthusiasm and motivation," says Julie Martin, Manager, Parker Pet Care. "Many teens work because they have to, not because they want to. Shane was always happy to be here and truly enjoyed working and taking care of the animals. He did a great job."

The co-op program has given Shane the skills he needs to participate effectively in a community setting and lead a more independent life. "Shane has developed a heightened sense of awareness as a result of his co-op experience," says Darlene McCowan, Shane's mother. "He has a greater sense of his responsibilities in the adult world and a deeper, realistic understanding of his own potential and abilities."

According to Shane, his work experiences are meaningful because he is part of a team and gains valuable experience that can follow him anywhere - not to mention that he also gained part-time employment and a paycheck for his hard work.



Shane McCowan was recently featured in The Toronto Sun and on CP24, Toronto's 24-hour cable news station. The broadcast showed Shane at his co-op placement at Zellers and in his classroom.

"These students are an untapped source of quality workmanship and should be provided these opportunities based on their capabilities, not on their restrictions. Their limitations are far outweighed by the positive influence and hardworking demeanour they bring to the workplace."

Ed Ogden, owner and co-op supervisor, Danforth Valumart, speaking about co-op students from Maplewood High School.

Employers Value Independence and Ingenuity

Willie Nimijohn and Steve Parsons work in different professions, but they both value employees who are hard-working, responsible and independent. Both employers have been taking co-op students for years because they enjoy teaching them new skills.

Mr. Nimijohn owns a large farm in Ancaster. He wants all of his sons to do well for themselves and enjoy what they do. When his youngest son James asked to do his co-op placement on the farm, he was ecstatic. And when James chose welding for his next co-op, Mr. Nimijohn was just as happy because farming is a tough industry and it's best to be prepared.

Arriving on the farm mid-afternoon James needs to decide what chores to tackle. As Mr. Nimijohn says, "The rest of us would be 30 miles away so James would have to figure out what to do – there would be no one to ask, and James really came through." Because of his co-op experience, Mr. Nimijohn now trusts James to handle the work of a lead hand – a position that some of the previous co-op students have advanced to as well.

As much as he enjoys farming, James also loves welding. He was exposed to the trade on the farm for many years, but really took a liking to it in a high school manufacturing class. James is now in his second co-op placement at Parson's Welding.

Mr. Parsons has taught James welding, cutting and prep work. He says, "When we bring in students we don't expect them to know what we know, but we do expect them to have an open mind and a good attitude." Mr. Parsons thinks that James has both and that these traits are essential. "Welding is a field where you can read all the text books in the world but you have to do it to be good at it."

James says that he wants to be a welder, but he still likes farming and wants to contribute to the family business. Mr. Nimijohn's farm is so big that they have their own welding shop onsite, so combining the two careers is a definite possibility. Mr. Parsons jokes that he is "training the competition," but he says he still enjoys teaching James and will continue to take on more co-op students. "Many of the skilled trades are being overlooked. We will really need people to do the work."



James Nimijohn, co-op student, Highland Secondary School and Willie Nimijohn, owner, Brae Lane Farms, harvest the crops.

Delta Toronto Airport West Hotel: Capitalizing on Co-op as a Recruitment Tool

"It's always hard to find good people, but after attending the *Passport to Prosperity* forum in the fall, we have really started to change our approach to taking high school co-op students," says Karen Dobbie, HR Generalist at the Delta Toronto Airport West Hotel.

The hotel has been taking co-op students for more than five years. "Now we work closely with the teachers to make sure we are offering a work project that complements the student's curriculum more directly."

"By rotating through all the departments, the students get an idea of the big picture and they can start to figure out which areas they enjoy." The students usually work at the front desk, in human resources, accounting, housekeeping and the kitchen.

To other employers who might be skeptical about taking on a student, Ms. Dobbie advises, "You get to decide who you will take on. We interview all our co-op students beforehand. Also, now that we have a close relationship with the teachers, they tend to send us the more motivated students."



James Taylor Jr., co-op student, Turner Fenton Secondary School and Alexandra Asuncion, co-op student, St. Francis Xavier Catholic High School at their co-op placement, The Delta Toronto Airport West Hotel.

Getting Creative: Business Owner Brings Assembly Work to the Classroom

Tom Feeney didn't have the space in his shop to bring in another co-op student but wanted to provide a school-work opportunity – so he brought the placement to the students.



Sydney Oy and Reyadd Kahn, co-op students, Maplewood High School and Tom Feeney, owner, Feeney Hardware Ltd, assemble hardware.

Mr. Feeney owns Feeney Hardware Ltd., an industrial hardware company located in Toronto's North York region. Every Tuesday, he visits Maplewood High School – a school for students with special needs – for a few hours, to simulate the assembly environment at his store.

Seven years ago, Mr. Feeney thought co-op students were from college or university only. He said, "A college person wouldn't come for a warehouse job. I didn't think we had anything to offer." Now one of Mr. Feeney's full-time employees is a former Maplewood student, who has been working for him for three years.

When Mr. Feeney witnessed first-hand how much work placements could change high school students, he wanted to get even more involved. When Debra Malandrino, a co-op supervisor at Maplewood, called and asked him to consider taking one of her special needs students this year, he really wanted to help. They chatted about an alternative to a student coming into his shop, since he didn't have the space.

Every week, Mr. Feeney brings assembly work to the classroom at Maplewood. He prepares detailed instructions that students can easily follow by placing the parts on the pictures he has drawn on sheets of paper. Because many of the students have trouble counting, Mr. Feeney also brings boxes with just enough slots to fit the completed parts. The students know they are finished when the box is full.

Mr. Feeney is quick to say students have a really positive effect on his staff. He says, "My staff look forward to having a student. It helps them develop their leadership skills." When asked why he does what he does, Tom refers to the confidence that the students get from the experience: "A lot of them get excited about performing; they want to tell you what they've done. When you realize how confident they've become – wow, what a difference."

Ms. Malandrino has noticed that the teachers have all been pleasantly surprised by the effect of Mr. Feeney's Tuesday visits: "Even their own classroom teachers have said that they could never have imagined the students being able to do what they are doing on the job. There is a big change in the students – they are more empowered; they have grown."

Ms. Malandrino says that these school-work opportunities have taken the students above and beyond what many of their teachers – and even parents – thought they were capable of: "Who would have thought? They don't just get an experience, they get jobs." For many of the Maplewood students, the idea of working full-time had never even occurred to them. These school-work experiences give them the training and confidence to believe in themselves and their future.

Mr. Feeney has something to say to hesitant employers: "I highly recommend getting involved in providing school-work opportunities because it will benefit your staff and it really does benefit the kids. All you have to do is get creative. It gives me a good feeling. It's worth it."

Get Involved

For more information about *Passport to Prosperity*, please call 1-800-387-5514 or visit the website at www.edu.gov.on.ca/passport/.

For information on providing a work experience opportunity to a high school student in your community, please contact the Ontario Business Education Partnership (OBEP) at 1-888-672-7996 or visit www.olpg.on.ca/en/home.htm. OBEP is a province-wide network of 26 business-education councils and local training boards facilitating partnerships with employers and schools in local communities.

The Provincial Partnership Council and the *Passport to Prosperity* Campaign are supported by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities. Partners include the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario (HRPAO), the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, the Toronto Board of Trade, and the Ontario Business Education Partnership.