The 156 OACETT members in Sault Ste. Marie make a solid contribution to the city's economy. Many work for the local consulting engineering firms in projects ranging from water treatment to construction of the new Steelback Centre and the new hospital. Others work for Algoma Steel, Brookfield Power, the City of Sault Ste. Marie, the Flukeboard plant and St. Mary's Paper. A number are owners/operators of their own businesses.

In addition to their work in technology, the OACETT members of the local chapter play a significant role in educating the public about the profession to demonstrate to young people that there are challenging, rewarding careers in technology.

A recent visit to Sault Ste. Marie by OACETT president Gene Stodolak, C.E.T. and executive director David Thomson included a breakfast meeting with the chapter to discuss association initiatives.

"We're also here to promote the role of engineering and applied science technicians and technologists improving the health and safety of the community and enhancing the competitiveness of northern Ontario's industries," Stodolak said.

In the past year, president Stodolak has visited Sarnia, Ottawa, Kitchener-Waterloo, Ajax and Hamilton. Each visit includes meetings with local colleges, industry, local government, and MPPs.

The Sault Ste. Marie visit included meetings with major employers — the City of Sault Ste. Marie, the Flukeboard plant, Sault College and the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre — representing both traditional employers and the new economy.

The local chapter is a hub of activity. It supports the members and promotes engineering technology careers to the public and students. One of only two women in the chapter, chair Elaine Oliana, C.E.T., has been active in the chapter for more than 15 years. Owner of Life Designs, a contract drafting and design company, Oliana is on the local National Engineering Week committee that organizes a Jeopardy-style math competition, an egg-drop contest, and engineering displays.

The OACETT chapter also participates in an annual bridge-building contest run by Sault College and financially supports the local high-school robotics team.

"We're also working on a mentoring program to match members with students," says Oliana.

At the breakfast meeting in January, Elaine Oliana and Alvin Olar, P.Eng., of the Sault PEO chapter presented a cheque of $1,500 to the association president for the Carole and George Fletcher Foundation, supporting engineering technician/technologist students at Sault College and other Ontario colleges.

The two chapters raised money in a golf tournament last summer for the Fletcher Foundation, the PEO Foundation for Education and the Sault Youth Council.

"The golf tournament was an overwhelming success and we raised $8,000 for the three groups," reported Olar.

OACETT president Gene Stodolak
thanked the Sault chapters for supporting the development of youth.

“We’re delighted to see the Sault OACETT chapter and our PEO partner raise significant money for scholarships for students attending the local college,” he said. “We offer about 25 scholarships annually across the province.”

Stodolak outlined the association’s six strategic objectives: government relations, succession planning; employer outreach; association; compliance and standards; and professional development.

“The association has established solid relationships with the Ontario government to the point where the government is now asking for our expertise,” he reported, mentioning a supportive letter from the Citizenship and Immigration Minister, Michael Colle.

Stodolak offered to bring a professional practice exam seminar to the city to make it easier for members to prepare for and then write the exam.

With the Northern Region councillor Rod MacLeod, C.E.T., chapter chair Elaine Ollana, and chapter executive member Dan Ollana, Stodolak and Thomson visited the Sault Ste. Marie City Hall. They met with many people from the engineering department, including CAO Joe Pratesi, Jerry Dolcetti, commissioner, Engineering & Planning, and John Luszka, commissioner, Human Resources, to discuss the benefits of OACETT certification.

President Stodolak told the city staff that OACETT is supportive of the city’s engineering technology staff joining the association and advancing to certification. He offered to arrange a lunch and learn session with staff to discuss the benefits of membership and certification.

“As noted in our discussions, an increasing number of municipalities and cities are encouraging OACETT membership and certification as a preferred hiring requirement,” Stodolak said.

The group also took a tour of the Flukeboard plant, visited the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre (see sidebars) and Sault College where they met with President Max Liedke and dean of Technology, Skilled Trades and Natural Resources Colin Kirkwood.

SAULT INNOVATION

In town for only a few years, the Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre (SSMIC) has successfully harnessed local high-tech know-how to help the city.

A not-for-profit organization with a mandate to help Sault Ste. Marie and area with economic diversification in information technology or knowledge-based industries, the centre is a “catalyst for change,” says executive director Tom Vair.

The centre operates a business incubator, hosting four companies: a web application development company, a software developer, an online content provider and a geographic information system (GIS) firm. It also offers support to the 70-plus IT companies in the city, providing networking events, training workshops and links to funding opportunities.

SSMIC also works on market development projects for IT and healthcare projects.

One avenue for market development takes place through the SSMIC-operated Community Geomatics Centre (CGC), a unique group in Canada that shares geospatial data, tools, technology and knowledge among community organizations such as Algoma Health Unit (AHU), Public Utilities Commission (PUC), and community infrastructures like fire services.

The GIS project generates data such as this image of birth density to help track social issues and programs.

The GIS project is a “shining example” of market development, Vair says. A team of 10 GIS technicians manages the centre that has won numerous awards for its work.

SSMIC collaborates with local health and social agencies to add health and social issues data to the community’s municipal GIS dataset. As a result, it has tackled problems in the areas of early childhood development, handicapped accessibility, public safety and environmental health.

SSMIC also visits high schools to promote science and technology careers to grade 8, 9 and 10 students, showing a five-minute DVD that features local entrepreneurs talking about their careers. This program is partially funded by the Ontario Ministry of Small Business and Entrepreneurship.
“The market is there for a quality service provider,” he says.

With two engineers and an English major on staff, he’s now looking for an engineering technologist as his business continues to expand. The company’s work is mainly outside of town, from British Columbia to Maine and Montana, and possibly even Africa. Hydro Tech is a good example of how a local technologist has built a successful company based on his technical expertise.

The day of the OACETT tour through Sault Ste. Marie, The Globe and Mail reported that the city’s Algoma Steel Inc. set a record for steel production last year at 2.4 million tons and has a long-term vision to double that figure to five million tons annually.

The Globe reported that chief executive officer Denis Turcotte told a Toronto conference, “We’re in what is going to be a good run for steel.” The steel maker’s target in a three-to-five-year time span is to boost output to four million tons of steel annually, Turcotte said. At the time of writing this story, Algoma announced that it was considering a takeover bid from a German company.

When local industry such as Algoma Steel, Flakeboard and Brookfield Power are flourishing, local techs can benefit.

As Algoma Steel is upgrading its infrastructure, it creates work for engineering techs in design, such as Shane Gillespie, owner of surveying and design company Gillespie Technical Services. He’s completed projects at Algoma Steel and the Flakeboard plant in the last year. Gillespie is also the secretary of the Sault OACETT chapter.

Through her company Life Designs, Elaine Olivera does AutoCAD drawings for Brookfield Power and Flakeboard Company, preparing mainly electrical and mechanical drawings. Flakeboard recently committed millions of dollars to upgrading its facilities. It employs more than 100 workers now, most of them technicians and technologists, including Dan Olivera, an OACETT associate member and an executive member of the local chapter.

The competition was tough for jobs at Flakeboard when it opened, Olivera recalls. The plant received 5,000 applications, interviewed 400 and hired 60 techs and 17 management personnel. Olivera was one of 60. The plant looked for people who were interested in learning, demonstrated through their post-secondary education, and who were effective working on a team, he says.

Another prominent employer, Brookfield Power (Rod MacLeod, C.E.T., Northern Regional coun-

www.oacett.org

March/April 2007 21
cillor and Sault chapter member, is a senior civil technologist there. See The Ontario Technologist, Jan-Feb. 2006), recently brought phase 2 of its Prince Wind Energy Project on line. With 189-megawatts of installed wind energy capacity, it’s the largest wind farm in Canada.

With the Wind Energy Project in place, the community is opening a new energy-training centre featuring a small-scale wind turbine later this year at Sault College. Funded by Brookfield Power, Duke Energy, FedNor, the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation and Sault College, the Brookfield Power Energy Training Centre will train students in hydroelectric power, cogeneration, transmission and distribution.

Alvin Olar, P.Eng., a structural engineer, was involved in materials testing for the Wind Energy project. He is currently employed by the consulting firm Totten Sims Hubicki Associates (T.S.H.), and was representing his PEO chapter at the Sault Chapter breakfast. Another project he recently worked on was the structural engineering for the Steelback Centre that opened up last fall.

Also on that project was Doug Leask, C.E.T., the president of Walker Engineering, and a past-chair of Sault Ste. Marie chapter who has been an OACETT member since 1972. Walker Engineering was responsible for the civil package for the Steelback Centre, one of many projects completed for municipalities, private developers, First Nations, and government. The engineers and staff at Walker Engineering have expertise in water treatment and distribution and sewage collection and treatment, environmental engineering, land development, marine and waterfront development, transportation, and hydro-electric power generation.

Leask also managed the Sault Ste. Marie Infrastructure Program, integrating the work of 12 consulting engineering firms and 21 general contractors to bring a $70 million project in ahead of schedule and under budget.

His company employs engineering technicians who perform contract administration and technical design, four professional engineers and one architectural technician, a total of 18 employees. Currently the team is working on the design of the site servicing for the new Sault-area hospital.

The Sault Ste. Marie visit with chapter members and employers provided insight into the opportunities for engineering and applied science technicians and technologists in that northern Ontario city.

Colleen Mellor is editor of The Ontario Technologist.