



AABO: Up to the Challenge of Supporting Apprenticeship



AABO meets throughout the year at various locations in Ontario including: Tyendinega (pictures right). They also meet with various stakeholders including the Ontario Power Generation (pictured left) and participate in trade booths (pictures centre).

With six years under our belt, the Aboriginal Apprenticeship Board of Ontario (AABO) has had a taste of the difficulties in supporting apprenticeship initiatives across the province. “We’ve had an equation since we started and our equation is supply meeting demand,” explains co-chair Brian Doolittle. One of the major challenges AABO has been faced with is to acquaint the demand side (industry) with the supply side (AHRDAs). “There is this wealth of human resource that’s not being tapped into so we’re making industry aware of it and trying to get them committed to participate in taking Aboriginal people on,” adds Doolittle.

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On the other side, trades careers aren’t well known among the Aboriginal population. According to Doolittle, unless there is a legacy of family members in the trades, the career option can go unnoticed. “If my father was a carpenter then I could probably get into the union to be an apprentice too. But if they’ve never had that in their community then there’s no way of being introduced to the system,” explains Doolittle.

That’s why AABO focuses on awareness and promotes various trades throughout our newsletters which are distributed to AHRDAs, Aboriginal friendship centres and employment and training organizations.

AABO is working on initiatives, which develop relationships to unite the supply and demand sides at national, regional and local levels. “Relationships, that’s the basis of anything that’s going to be successful,” says Doolittle, adding “I think we’ve got the right formula now it’s just we need to take another major leap and that’s implementing the rest of the strategy, which we haven’t been doing.”

To continue implementing the Ontario-based Aboriginal Apprenticeship Strategy, AABO feels we are ready for an administration. “What we’re working on is to put together what we’re calling a secretariat and we’re actually in the process right now of filling that place with secondments with the government and support of industry and the AHRDAs,” says Doolittle. He estimates that AABO will have systems up and working within a year.

“We’re six years into it and we’re not there yet,” says Doolittle, adding, “After a year or so, a lot of people get frustrated but we’ve been able to go beyond that and keep this vision and keep the work going.”

Apprenticeship Feature

Power at your Fingertips

When young children are playing with their Tonka trucks in the sand, they dream of controlling life-sized equipment. For some, that dream becomes a reality. A career as a heavy equipment operator puts you at the helm of real-life Tonka trucks including bulldozers, tracked excavators, tractor-loader-backhoes and many more under the umbrella of hoisting equipment.

If you have ever dreamed of controlling machines that dig trenches, build foundations or put pipe in sewers, then a career as a heavy equipment operator may be in your future. Working in high heat environments, heavy equipment operators are often found at roadwork sites, in quarries, working for logging and mining companies and breaking ground at new construction sites. Wherever ground needs to be moved, a heavy equipment operator is sure to be near.

The heavy equipment operator designation is a new trade available voluntarily for apprenticeship. Specifically, apprentices will learn how to operate bulldozers, tracked

excavators, and tractor-loader-backhoes. Similar trades, including grater, side boom and scraper operators, are not recognized by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities as true trades. Industry leaders and stakeholders are lobbying to have related trades require apprenticeship rather than just training.



The Life of an Heavy Equipment Operator

Work Environment

Heavy equipment operators are found in all trades sectors including new home building, heavy industrial, institutional and commercial, and civil engineering. They're found working on road upgrades, at airports, and mines and quarries. They work most often out in the elements, exposed to the beating sun, biting winds and fierce rain.

Are You the Right Fit?

Are you a team player who can work with grounds tradesmen on a busy job site? Do you communicate well and have the ability to follow instructions? Because they are using expensive pieces of equipment, which also have the potential to harm other workers, heavy equipment operators must have good judgement to maintain the safety of themselves, the machines and those working around them.

Education/Training

To train to become a heavy equipment operator you must be at least 16 years of age and have a minimum Grade 12 education. A mechanical background is helpful as is any volunteering involving mechanical equipment.

Mighty Machines

Heavy equipment operators use a variety of machines but only three are available for voluntary apprenticeship including:

Tracked excavators – Digs, excavates material in large volumes and loads material. It is often used in construction, mining and forestry sectors.

Bulldozer – clears and levels land.

Tractor-loader-backhoe - The front loader bucket is used to grade, level, excavate and move material. The back bucket digs trenches, performs excavation jobs, levels and grades surfaces.

How Much Can You Earn?

Heavy equipment operators can expect to make between \$21 and \$32 an hour depending on experience, contract, collective agreements, economic conditions and area of expertise. Apprentices will make a percentage of the journeyman's rate, usually 50-60 per cent in their first year then increase in wages at each level of apprenticeship.

Job Prospects

Employment for this occupation is maintaining current numbers of trades people at this time focusing on new workers and workers from outside Ontario. Employers are expected to be actively seeking workers through 2011 and 2012.

Harness the Power as an Heavy Equipment Operator

As a female in a male dominated trade, Jonel Beauvais says, “There’s nothing better than when you’re on the job site and your boss tells you to jump in that machine and you know what you gotta do. All those guys look at you and they’re kind of in awe.” The 24-year-old Awkwesasne native works seasonally as a bridge worker alongside tradesmen for the Seaway Bridge Corporation. Her crew handles everything from roadwork, jack hammering, and maintenance to traffic control and road painting. However, when work becomes scarce in the off-season, workers face layoff unless they have an edge to keep them above the pack.

In 2006, Jonel found her edge when she decided to upgrade her skills and take the tractor-loader-backhoe operator course offered through the Operating Engineers Training Institute of Ontario (OETIO) in Morrisburg, Ontario. Recommended to her by her crew leader she says, “He explained to me that unemployment pays for it so it worked out great as something to do in the winter time. It’s beneficial down the line because we’re not always guaranteed a job every year and if they let me go I still have something to fall back on.” The tractor-loader-backhoe is one of three machines eligible for voluntary apprenticeship under the heavy equipment operator designation through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

The course offered at the OETIO was six weeks long and included 10 days of classroom instruction as well as 20 days of machine specific practical training. “I think the hardest part about the training was getting to know the mechanical parts of the machine because they want you to know every part,” says Jonel. As someone new to the mechanics of machines, Jonel said she felt intimidated by the men in her class who’d grown up using them and to whom it came natural. “I had to learn quickly. You had to be there every day, you had to really listen and stay awake. The first two weeks are all safety and you really have to pay attention because you have to have 100 on your final test at the end of the course,” she says.

Jonel’s trepidation melted away as she felt the thrill of harnessing the power of a large machine. A tractor-loader-backhoe consists of a front loader bucket which is used to grade, level, excavate and move material while a rear bucket digs trenches, performs excavation jobs, levels and grades surfaces. It is one of the few machines used on the



Seaway and Jonel is now one of the few operators on her crew. “I guess you could say it’s an adrenaline rush, just to be in a machine that size and to be able to move things and dig landscaping or dig trenches and just feeling like you’ve got a lot of power,” she says. Of course, knowing that she now has skills her male counterparts don’t, adds to the ego boost. “A lot of times a man on a job site thinks he knows more than you and because you’re a girl you don’t know how to do something. So it’s nice to be able to go to a job site and know how to do something they don’t,” laughs Jonel.

Even with more and more women venturing into the world of trades, Jonel says she still faces a lot of negativity on job sites. “I’ll be honest, and even my instructors were honest, you’re in a man’s world when you’re in that kind of environment, there’s no doubt about it and you have to learn to put up with certain attitudes and opinions. Some people just don’t think you need to be there,” she says. However, for Jonel, it was her own ambition as well as the hardships she faced which pushed her harder. “I really wanted to just one up on some of the guys,” she laughs.

With Jonel’s new skills, she’s a versatile employee and is excited about the opportunities the training opens. Someday she hopes to operate her own landscaping business, a venture for which her skills will come in handy. “I think the most exciting part was actually seeing what I had accomplished. Just from jumping into the machine for the first time and driving it, I was so excited,” she says. For Jonel, the excitement will continue when she returns to the OETIO to train on another machine. “Then you’re a more valuable employee, rather than just knowing one machine,” she says.



Partnering for Apprenticeship

Partnership has always been a main focus of the Aboriginal Apprenticeship Board of Ontario (AABO). As outlined in the 2009 Implementation Plan, it is one of the seven components of the strategy.

In 2009 AABO focused on the development of new partnerships through the Aboriginal Construction Employment Referral Service (ACERS). This initiative was developed in 2008 and implemented the following year to complement the provincial and frontline components of AABO's delivery model. Its role was to develop partnerships and tools which facilitate, enhance and support the recruitment, retention and advancement of Aboriginal people in the skilled trades.

Now well into 2010 AABO is continuing its mandate to expand the number of active participants among stakeholders.

To date AABO has nine partners, each from different sectors to provide a rounded approach at apprenticeship enhancement. These members include:

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC)
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC)
Construction Sector Council (CSC)
Canadian Apprenticeship Forum (CAF)
Canadian Union of Skilled Workers (CUSW)
Ontario Power Generation (OPG)
Hydro One
Ontario Civil Construction Careers Institute (OCCCI)
Northern College

To reflect the importance of partnerships AABO has incorporated the partners' logo into the design of our quarterly newsletter. Fostering beneficial partnerships is one of the best ways to create awareness among stakeholders and government, and further AABO's goals.

Partners in Apprenticeship



CONSTRUCTION
SECTOR COUNCIL



CONSEIL SECTORIEL
DE LA CONSTRUCTION



Human Resources and
Skills Development Canada

Ressources humaines et
Développement des compétences Canada



Indian and Northern
Affairs Canada

Affaires indiennes
et du Nord Canada