

# Mine Training Society perseveres

Partners help avert financial crisis despite funding loss



Hilary Jones, the general manager of the Mine Training Society

Since 2004, the Mine Training Society (MTS), which operates out of Yellowknife, has partnered with Aboriginal governments, industry partners, the government of the Northwest Territories and the federal government to train Aboriginal individuals for mining jobs.

MTS has assessed 1,900 Aboriginal people over the past eight years, training and/or counseling 1,300 and obtaining employment for 737. “These are jobs like underground miner, mineral processor, camp cook, diamond driller, mine administration – not entry level jobs,” stresses MTS general manager Hilary Jones.

## Federal funding cuts

In March 2012, when the federal government ended a significant source of funding – the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership program – Jones did not panic. She knew it was time to get creative, and started to look for alternatives. She is committed to keeping the program, which won PDAC’s Special Achievement Award for 2012.

“Currently I’m working on a proposal to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC),” Jones says. “Each training-to-employment project can receive up to \$10 million [from HRSDC]; right now, our project is looking to cost \$16.5 million, so our partners are giving us the other \$7 million.”

These partners include BHP Billiton, Diavik, DeBeers Canada, Avalon Rare Metals and Tamerlane Ventures, as well

as Aboriginal governments including the Gwich’in Tribal Council, the Inuvialuit, the Kitikmeot Inuit Association, the NWT Métis Nation, the Tlicho government and the Akaitcho.

Jones says the funding from industry and government partners will give her a two-year reprieve, so MTS can continue doing what it does best: train Aboriginal people for mining jobs. “There are three existing mines and six advanced stage projects [in the NWT]; two are going into construction next year, so we need a lot of people,” she adds.

She says it is not cheap to train an underground miner, but that cost is offset because the trained graduates find meaningful jobs with the mines, which fund the training, almost immediately. And as a bonus to government, “they become taxpayers quickly.” The program costs \$53,000 per person; the training lasts 32 weeks, which includes a six-week community-based introduction, 12 weeks in Yellowknife at the training facility

and 12 weeks of on-site training. “That’s more than a thousand dollars a week to train one person,” Jones explains. “It’s a very skilled occupation – this isn’t pick and shovel anymore. You’re dealing with computers and \$6-million trucks.”

She adds that the completion success rate of the underground mining program is nearly 100 per cent, of which 90 per cent are offered employment at the end of their training.

## Training done right

MTS takes a comprehensive, holistic approach to training. “We do career counselling to ensure people are successful,” explains Jones. “We don’t want to set people up for failure.”

If someone does not qualify for a program, MTS will work with the interested party to identify where the gaps are in their skills, referring them to other organizations for literacy training or even medical counselling.

The most popular program is the underground mining program, for which candidates are hand-selected. “We go out into the communities and do an introduction to underground mining, where we do two weeks of job-readiness skills, and four weeks of mining education about subjects like geology and safety,” she says.

To help prepare families, MTS involves the students’ significant others to improve their understanding of the mining schedule, which includes shift rotation. They also discuss the reality of having a partner away for two weeks at a time. “There has to be an honest conversation about who’s going to look

after the firewood and what they're going to do with the money," says Jones. "By the time they finish that six-week session, they can make an informed choice as to whether they want to proceed."

### A model for export

MTS receives applications from all over North America, and its model has been copied by other territories. "It's been emulated in the Yukon and Nunavut," says Tom Hoefler, executive director at the NWT and Nunavut Chamber of Mines. "We have new opportunities for mining and we're going to have steady demand for workers that are job-ready. MTS has been critically important. Without it, the mines wouldn't have been able to achieve what they have for northern and Aboriginal employment."

Hoefler says in the North, where there is a lower educational achievement level, "the MTS helps fill that gap, by giving people job-specific training and job-ready skills."

The three territories are now working together to implement a pan-territorial approach for federal support. "The North is an area that has a lot of opportunity right now, and the prime minister has noted that the mining industry is important to Canada's wealth creation," Hoefler says. "The resource industry is going to be critically important to Canada to help balance the books again, after the big recession."

Hoefler estimates there could be \$12 billion in capital investment in the territories over the next five to 10 years. "We estimate the total number of new jobs could be 6,000 in just one year."

He adds that there is a baby boom in Nunavut, and a pressing demand for opportunities. "Our resources are a tremendous advantage to us in the North, and to take maximum advantage, we need to have training."

Hoefler says that, although he is not a tax expert, he knows mining will be good for the federal coffers. "The federal and territorial governments will reap a lot of benefit by putting people to work and having these operations move forward – it's a small investment to put money into training."

Jackson Lafferty, NWT minister of education, culture and employment, says meetings have already begun with Leona Aglukkaq, federal minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency about the pan-territorial approach. "We've always collaborated in the past," he notes. "There's a lot of discussion right now and it's just a matter of time; we have to maintain a positive mindset."

Lafferty hopes the pan-territorial plan will be in place by the next fiscal year. "That's our push. We want the Mine Training Society to continue producing these talented individuals, and we need to be innovative and creative with the mining industry to move forward with this successful project."

Jones says she estimates there will be 2,000 Aboriginal people to train over the next two years, and she is looking forward to it. "At our first graduating program in 2005, a student gave me a big hug and said that now they had a life," she says. "I get to deal with folks like that every day. I can see changes in people's lives – and that's how I count our success, one person at a time." **CIM**

### GIVING BACK



Richard Lewandowski, president of Endress+Hauser Canada

Courtesy of E+H

### Endress+Hauser backs education

**Endress+Hauser Canada** announced it will give \$1.4 million to the new SAIT Polytechnic Trades and Technology Complex in Calgary, Alberta. The donation, which will fund the Endress+Hauser Process Lab, will help develop the next generation of skilled workers who are attending SAIT's MacPhail School of Energy. It will also help mitigate the growing demand for trades people, technologists and technicians, and concerns about the labour shortage. "We have a long history of supporting the development and training of the industrial automation workforce," said Richard Lewandowski, president of Endress+Hauser Canada. "Because of this culture, getting involved with SAIT was natural. By providing students with the best measurement equipment and training materials, we believe that we are in turn investing in our future employees." MacPhail School of Energy dean Mary MacDonald said the support offered by Endress+Hauser, a global leader in measurement instrumentation, services and solutions, will give students a first-class facility. "We continue to be committed to providing state-of-the-art technology and a skills-oriented education," MacDonald added. "SAIT has always been known as a trailblazer in research and innovation and we feel that this new facility is very reflective of that."