

The job hunt continues....

by Cathy McDonald

It used to be going to university was a sure ticket to a job. A few years ago, that truism became no more, but no one thought engineers would be out of a job until this year.

The most shocking news came to engineers last summer when many graduates were notified that jobs they had accepted were no longer there. Oil companies have cancelled exploration, utilities have cancelled hydro projects, and big companies ranging from mining to chemical companies just aren't recruiting anymore, rather, they're laying off engineers.

Dropping into the Student Employment Office at Technical University of Nova Scotia is like entering a morgue, in one student's words. On the third floor of the students' residence, on Barrington and Morris St., six interview rooms stand empty, ready for use. Beautiful career booklets and impressive company binders, with information on the oil barons and other industrial giants, all brag of challenging, rewarding futures.

"We're looking for energy. Yours," declares an Esso double page ad in a career planning magazine.

"First Imperial Oil pulled out," John Rodgers, manager of the employment centre, said, thinking back to last summer. "Their big project at Cold Lake fell through...then there was Tarsands." Three companies pulled out, Shell, Dome and Petrocan. "Shell used to be a big customer of ours."

"Last year was a good year. Some fellows got seven, eight, nine job offers. Students felt pretty good, salaries were pretty good." Students made their choice of

employer and sat pretty, some even going to Europe and buying a car based on that salary coming their way. But in June and July, many companies withdrew their job offers. There was a snowball effect, as companies took a hard look at their situation.

About 30 students ended up looking in their mailboxes and realized the job-hunt was on again. Thirteen of the 30 students are still looking for jobs, Rodgers said, and it took the Employment Centre all winter to place the other 17.

This year, 61 companies came to recruit at Technical University, as compared to 118 last year. And they're all hiring fewer students. Last year 60 per cent of students had jobs by the end of the year. This year they'll be lucky if 25 per cent have jobs," Rodgers said.

Gerrard Walsh left his pure science studies four years ago to go into engineering, because he wanted to be sure of a job. An A-student, he'll graduate with a Bachelor in Metallurgy, the study of metal alloys. But both mining and manufacturing industries are hard hit in the recession, he said, and no one in his class of five has any job offers. Of 10 graduating from the metallurgy Masters program, one has a job.

Walsh thinks he'll go back to school and enter the Master's program. "It's better than sitting around and doing nothing. If an employer next year looks at a resume, and he sees the guy's been sitting on his ass, he thinks his mind's probably gone lunk." But it's a difficult time for Walsh. He's looking hard for a job. "My finances are pretty bad. I would like to get a job."

Those that didn't get jobs last

year make the competition harder for graduates this year. The Masters program at Tech has surged in enrolment, with students dropping out as they find jobs, Rodgers said.

Some students can be seen walking around campus with big stacks of paper - form letters to companies. Others are pounding the sidewalks.

Technical Service Council, a non-profit placement agency run by industry, says mining graduates at one university are prepared to consider labouring jobs in the mines.

Two other severely affected areas are civil engineering, because of the drop in construction, and fields associated with the petroleum industry.

One recruiter that is offering more jobs than ever is the Canadian Armed Forces. From only a couple of placements last year, the Armed Forces will hire 45 from Technical University this year, and 100 from across Canada.

And, not surprisingly, graduates have found a renewed interest in the army. A student who wished to remain nameless said "I have to do some thinking about going into the Armed Forces. It's not really what I want to do, army life and all that. Last year I wouldn't think about it, but if it's that or nothing..."

But Rodgers cautions against hopelessness. The situation is bad, he said, but only temporary. Companies cannot afford to go long without hiring grads to keep the training process going.

"They shouldn't have to wait too long, summer jobs are good this year," he said, as companies try to free money to help students in the short term.

Don't lose hope, he said, and he asked that be put in this article.



Morris/Dal Photo

Catherine Ricketts, News Editor for the 1982/83 version of the Gazette, has just been elected grand Helmsperson for the 1983/84 version. Long may she run. Campaigning on frequent hugs for a morally depressed staff, Ricketts sachéed into office. Non-smokers, beware.

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