

December 6, 2014

On December 6th, 2014 we will remember fourteen young women who lost their lives 25 years ago in 1989. On this day, known now as the “Montreal Massacre”, an enraged gunman, roamed the corridors of Montreal's École Polytechnique and killed 14 women, 12 of whom were engineering students. Details of the event outlined how the gunman went into a classroom of engineering students on the last day of classes before exams began. He separated the men from the women and opened fire on the women. Many of these women were in their final year of study in their engineering programs and would have graduated in May 1990.

In 1989, it was an unusual choice for a woman to decide to enroll and study engineering in Canada. To put things in perspective, enrolment reports from 1989 indicate that of the 33,000 students who were enrolled in undergraduate engineering programs across Canada only 13% or 4,900 of the students were women. Statistics Canada numbers also show that at this time there were just over 3,300 faculty members teaching in these engineering programs with a very small fraction of these, less than 2%, being women.

The Montreal massacre sparked renewed interest and commitment to promote women in engineering and technology, to end violence against women and to strengthen Canada's gun laws. In a more focused vein, the events of December 6th, 1989, forced the engineering community both in Canada and around the world to pause collectively and reflect on what the experience must be like for Women in Engineering and understand why women were not choosing to study engineering in greater numbers. Additionally, in 1991 the Canadian government established December 6th as a National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women (white ribbon day).

Following the Montreal massacre, the Canadian Council of Professional Engineers issued its groundbreaking report “More than Just Numbers” in April 1992 which documented the barriers that young women face when entering the engineering profession. This ignited a number of initiatives aimed at encouraging women in engineering and through the 1990's the numbers of women enrolled in engineering programs across Canada steadily climbed. However in 2001, the trend reversed and the percentage of women enrolling in these programs started to decline. This may have been related to the overall decline in engineering enrolments that followed the bursting of the dot-com bubble in 2000-2001.

In response to this, in 2005, all of the Ontario faculties and schools of engineering and applied science made an unprecedented decision to work collaboratively to address the persistent low enrolment of female engineering students across the province through a

the creation of a network now known as the Ontario Network of Women in Engineering (ONWiE). This initiative was led by Professor Valerie Davidson who at that time was the Ontario region NSERC Chair for Women Science and Engineering. The Council of Ontario Deans of Engineering (CODE) was so impressed with ONWiE and the value of a collaborative impact approach to support and encourage women in engineering that they committed to supporting the network financially to ensure its viability. Considering all of the Engineering and Applied Science schools across Ontario educate ~40% of all the undergraduate engineering students across Canada, this represents a significant and focused effort towards addressing issues around women in engineering. For the past nine years, ONWiE has provided a platform to work in partnership with respect to outreach programs to youth as well as best practices in positive messaging of the engineering profession and its diversity and the network has is seeing success.

Fortunately over the past few years we have again begun to see an upward trend in the number of women studying engineering across Ontario and Canada and in September 2014 record high numbers and percentages of women entering 1st year engineering programs were seen across Ontario.

While good work has accomplished much over the years, it never hurts to remind ourselves that we can do more to ensure that our engineering and applied science schools and faculties are inclusive, equitable and safe for all members. We can also use this occasion of remembrance to express our commitment to strengthen our progress on issues related to women in engineering and ensure all of our schools and faculties continue to foster a safe and supportive campus community for all faculty, staff, and students in engineering. And, finally we remember those 14 young women who so tragically and needlessly lost their lives twenty five years ago. We will not forget them.

- Geneviève Bergeron (born 1968), civil engineering student
- Hélène Colgan (born 1966), mechanical engineering student
- Nathalie Croteau (born 1966), mechanical engineering student
- Barbara Daigneault (born 1967), mechanical engineering student
- Anne-Marie Edward (born 1968), chemical engineering student
- Maud Haviernick (born 1960), materials engineering student
- Maryse Laganière (born 1964), budget clerk in the École Polytechnique's finance department
- Maryse Leclair (born 1966), materials engineering student
- Anne-Marie Lemay (born 1967), mechanical engineering student
- Sonia Pelletier (born 1961), mechanical engineering student
- Michèle Richard (born 1968), materials engineering student
- Annie St-Arneault (born 1966), mechanical engineering student
- Annie Turcotte (born 1969), materials engineering student
- Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz (born 1958), nursing student

Andrew Hrymak, (Chair of CODE),

Mary Wells (ONWiE Chair) on behalf of CODE Members:

Carleton University

Lakehead University

Laurentian University

McMaster University

Queen's University

Royal Military College

Ryerson University

University of Guelph

University of Ontario Institute of Technology

University of Ottawa

University of Toronto

University of Waterloo

University of Western Ontario

University of Windsor

York University