

## Women key to meeting mining industry's demographic needs

Canadian mining industry will need 100,000 new people in the next decade, and focusing the search on female employees could be a solution

By Joel McKay

**H**elp wanted! That's the message the mining industry wants to get out, and experts say there are few places better than Vancouver to start a career.

"Vancouver is tremendous that way," explained **Eira Thomas**, executive chairwoman of **Stornoway Diamond Corp.** (TSX:SWY). "Canada has a fantastic brand in mining and it's something we celebrate. There's opportunities to get involved with the major [companies], which are terrific training grounds for young geologists or businesspeople who want to get into the business."

And it's not just an old boys' club anymore.

Earlier this month, Thomas was one of three female business leaders the **Minerva Foundation for BC Women** honoured at this year's Women in Natural Resources Awards luncheon.

Thomas took home an award for leadership in diamond exploration and industry development, while **Lyn Anglin**, president and CEO of **Geoscience BC**, received an award for community leadership and excellence and **Barbara Caelles**, the founder of **Women in Mining Vancouver**, was presented with an award for philanthropy and



Stornoway Diamond chairwoman Eira Thomas believes groups such as Women in Mining encourage younger women to consider careers in the industry

volunteerism.

The ceremony honoured women who are role models in an industry traditionally dominated by men.

Thomas said there's no better time to get more women involved than now.

"A couple years ago, the industry was reporting that over 50% of the participants in the industry are expecting to retire in the next 10 years."

According to the **Mining Industry Human Resources Council** (MiHR), the Canadian mining industry will need to hire 100,000 new

workers by 2020 thanks to the baby-boom retirement and industry expansion.

Even if commodity prices tank, Canada's mining sector will still need another 56,000 workers in the next decade.

In B.C., MiHR projects the industry will need to hire 10,200 people in the next 10 years, with a need for 3,440 of them in the next two years.

And one of the best places to get started in the industry is Vancouver.

The city is home to more than 800 mineral exploration companies, numerous



Women in Mining Vancouver founder Barbara Caelles: "yes, there were barriers but I tried to ignore them"

legal, accounting and engineering firms that support the industry and post-secondary schools such as the **University of British Columbia** and the **British Columbia Institute of Technology** that offer mining-related programs.

Thomas, a seasoned geologist who led the team that discovered the Diavik diamond pipes in the Northwest Territories in the 1990s, believes if the industry wants to attract more women it needs to gear its advertising toward them.

"We have to do a better job explaining the opportunities that exist in the mining industry, they're varied," she said. "It's not all about getting out there with a pick and shovel and spending time in remote mines in Northern Canada.

"Opportunities in the mining industry span everything

**100,000**

the number of workers the Canadian mining industry will need to hire by 2020

**10,200**

the number of workers B.C.'s mining industry will need to hire by 2020

**14.4%**

the number of jobs women account for in the Canadian mining industry

from financial opportunities to ... legal to environmental stewardship to socio-economic opportunities. It has a huge number of varied opportunities that I think are sometimes overlooked."

When Caelles joined the industry as a field geologist decades ago she had doors slammed in her face just because she was a woman.

But perseverance paid off, and Caelles said she ignored gender barriers and carved a niche for herself.

"I always found something I liked to do in the industry, even though I changed part-way through from being a field geologist to working in the office," she said.

Years later, she founded **Women in Mining Vancouver** to help other women network and connect with one another.

These days, the group has more than 400 members and hosts monthly meetings, but Caelles believes some barriers still exist for women in the industry.

"I think there are definite unwritten rules in how employees or people advance through an organization,"

she said. "I don't think it's because women are left out deliberately, [but] very often the top positions in organizations will be held by men and often when they reach out to mentor someone they'll mentor someone that's similar."

According to a 2009 **Women in Mining Canada** report, two-thirds of female respondents said they see gender-specific challenges to career advancement in the industry.

Meanwhile, less than 30% of employers agreed with that view.

"If you have a male-dominated environment then it can be a detriment or impediment to the advancement of women," Caelles said.

As well, women in the report said flexible work practices, such as accommodating maternity leave, was the primary working condition that needed to be addressed.

Geoscience BC's Anglin believes women, who account for 14.4% of Canada's mining jobs, can play a key role in addressing the demographic need but employers need to be ready to make room for them.

Said Anglin: "If we in the mineral industry want to capitalize on the best people out there half of them are women, so we want to make sure that they have a place." ■

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