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Industry Education Council OF HAMILTON

'Mentoring the future workforce in Horticulture'

Landscape Ontario projects that the Landscape Horticulture Industry is expected to double in size by 2021 and that 50% of the workforce is expected to retire in the next 5-10 years, leaving a big gap in skilled workers. As a result, promoting careers in the industry and attracting young people is a huge task facing businesses and agencies in the sector.

One of the major ways to mitigate the anticipated shortage is to provide work placement opportunities to high school students through Cooperative Education and Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) programs. Harpers Garden Center is setting a good example by partnering with both H-W District School Board and H-W Catholic School Board.

Production Manager at Harpers Garden Center, Dominic Hagger said that they have been taking co-op students for a number of years, who are interested in careers that involve working with plants including gardening, sod production, tree/shrub nursery, environmental management, landscape design and so on.

Having discovered his fascination in horticulture through the tutelage of his grandmother's gardener, Dominic believes that mentoring the next generation is important for the development of the sector. Dominic said, had it not been for that gardener's willingness to share his knowledge with him, he might not have decided to go to a Horticulture College later on to pursue a career in this field. When he accepts co-op students and embraces them as part of the Harpers Garden crew, Dominic hopes he and the team will trigger that same interest in the students and enable them to make an



The Harpers Garden team appreciates the input the students bring to their crew

informed decision about whether they want to work or go to continue their post secondary education and further develop their skills.

Horticulture and Landscaping SHSM program is being offered at Saltfleet Secondary School.

Dominic asserts that as long as the students have interest in horticulture and love to work outdoors, the advantage of mentoring works for both sides. Dominic has noticed that students who are in the Horticulture and Landscaping SHSM program are easy to manage and guide. Through the SHSM program, the students are already familiar with the concepts of plant science, greenhouse structures, propagation and landscape design. This makes it easier for employers like Dominic to take the students and provide them with an environment where they can utilize what they learn in class in a real life workplace.

Citing Kristen Sandvall, Horticulture and Landscaping SHSM student from Saltfleet School, Dominic said having students from the SHSM program interests him as an employer because he has seen the difference between a student with no background information and a SHSM student. When Kristen joined their team to do her placement, they were experiencing a shortage in their workforce. Dominic said 'Kristen is steady and works very fast. She is trained, so we didn't have

to hand hold her. She also enjoys what she does, which is why she volunteers to work more even after she is done with her placement.'

Other members of the Harpers Garden team also appreciate the input the students bring to their crew. Nancy Logie values co-op education because she entered into horticulture herself after she did her high school co-op placement with a florist. Now working at Harpers Garden, she enjoys working and sharing her experience with the students.

The horticulture and landscaping SHSM program is one of the many SHSM programs that are available in different high schools in Hamilton. Are you inspired by the Harpers Garden team and the way they train their potential future workforce through this program? To learn more about the SHSM programs in your specific sectors and to find out more about how to get involved in preparing your future workforce, contact IEC. We will help you make the appropriate connections, customize your involvement and promote your opportunities at www.employerregistry.ca, the online community dedicated to connecting local employers with tomorrow's workforce.

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Six Nations seeks to upgrade fire brigade

BY DENISE DAVY

OHSWEKEN ♦ Six Nations fire department is requesting \$2.7 million from the federal Ministry of Indian Affairs to update its equipment and hire much-needed firefighters.

Fire Chief Mike Seth said his department's equipment is outdated and it is forced to rely on volunteers, some of whom put in up to 45 hours per week.

"I know I can rely on them but it's tough on them," Seth said. "They go out to calls at 3 a.m., then they have to go to work or school the next day. It all becomes too much."

Fire departments on reserves rely on funding from the federal government, which uses a template from the 1960s that doesn't fit today's standards, Seth said.

He said newer trucks have improved pumping capacity. The funding template also relies on a system based on volunteers. Six Nations has 50 volunteers.

The funding would allow the reserve to hire 12 full-time firefighters and four full-time captains. On top of that, adds Seth, it could use another 50 volunteers.

Last year, volunteers responded to more than 800 fire calls and 125 car accidents. Of the fires, 110 were cars and 40 were structures. Fire damage cost \$4 million.

Seth said it's a testament to the volunteers the reserve has had only one fire fatality over the last 15 years. Dallas Wesley Sault, 28, died of smoke inhalation last week when his house on Onondaga Road went up in flames.

While volunteers are given a basic stipend, Seth said it amounts to well below minimum wage.

Six Nations is the largest reserve in Canada with approximately 12,000 people and about 3,000 residences.

Seth said his department is working under a funding model designed for a population of around 3,000.

The biggest problem is the fire station, which was built in the late 1950s, does not meet health and safety regulations and lacks storage space.

Seth said the department is lucky to have some volunteers who have stayed with it for more than 30 years.

"We need to alleviate some of the pressure they feel," he says. "It's tough for them and we keep asking for more and more."

The reserve met officials from the local department of Indian Affairs last week and expect to hear this week about their proposal.

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If you see a factual error, please contact the newsroom at 905-526-3420 or by e-mail at corrections@thespec.com.

Correction

A web story on thespec.com on the weekend incorrectly stated that Highway 403 was closed due to a native protest. In fact, it was closed because of a serious accident. We apologize for the error.

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