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October-November 2011

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Heavy Equipment Apprenticeship: offering an exciting career

By L.M. VanEvery



A meeting between Brandi Jonathan, Apprenticeship Co-ordinator at **GREAT** and Eric MacDonald, General Manager of AECON Infrastructure revealed that one of the largest construction and infrastructure development companies in Canada was looking to replace almost half of their workforce in the future due to retirement over the next 5 – 10 years. Brandi saw this as an opportunity for the workforce of Six Nations and the beginning of a solid partnership between **GREAT** and AECON.

GREAT created a program that would service this new partnership. Brandi chose five candidates from **GREAT**'s clientele to be interviewed for two positions in the program. AECON agreed to hire the two successful candidates who completed the 14 week program along with the approval of the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 793.

The Operating Engineers was involved in offering a pre-apprenticeship training program in Morrisburg, Ontario for **GREAT**'s two candidates. All five of **GREAT**'s selected candidates participated in writing the Trade Entrance Exam. After taking the Trade Entrance Exam on which the candidate needed to score a 70% or higher, MacDonald interviewed the candidates who scored the top three highest scores. He selected two to continue in the program. The two successful candidates for the program were Josh Martin and Jordan Wright. Josh and Jordan then attended 6-week pre-apprenticeship training followed by an 8-week on-the-job training working on an AECON construction site. **GREAT** assisted them both with a training allowance while they trained in Morrisburg.

During their training, they had an opportunity to work on a variety of heavy machinery so they could eventually select one that they wanted to specialize in. Jordan, 19, chose the TLB (tractor/loader/backhoe) on which to specialize. To run this machine, Jordan says the skill set includes "patience, precision and concentration." Asked why he selected this machine, he said, "It's the machine used the most." Before setting on this new career path, Jordan was working at framing houses and working seasonally on a farm so he was familiar with large machines such as tractors and combines. "I drove around farm equipment all my life," he said.

Jordan completed the required 8-week 'on-the-job' training and has now been hired full-time at Aecon Construction. He is working on construction sites and logging in his first year apprenticeship hours. Jordan has also joined the Union of Operating Engineers. The hours are long, the travelling is regular but Jordan says that every day at work is a new experience. He never knows what location he'll be at. The most challenging part of his new career is being an early riser. Jordan is on the road to his job at 5:30 am and he wouldn't have it any other way. "You have to be really dedicated," he said.

Jordan's advice for anyone thinking of this career path is this, "Make sure it's what you want to do. It's a big responsibility." Jordan's future goal is to upgrade his skills and learn how to drive a bigger excavator. But for right now, he wants to be successful, get to know more people at work and work on bigger jobs.