

Regional council supports Sheridan College vying to be a university

By Bill Rea

Officials at Sheridan College are seeking certification to be known as a university, and they recently found plenty of enthusiasm around the Peel Region council table.

College President and CEO Jeff Zabudsky and Board Chair (and Caledon resident) Bryan Dawson recently received a very favourable reception when they put forth the notion to council.

Councillors unanimously passed a motion endorsing the plan.

Zabudsky said a new strategic plan was approved for the college in 2011, and that includes seeking the higher status. He added they are working on getting ready for that, seeking advice and guidance.

Enrolment has been increasing steadily since 2009, and Zabudsky said it will have passed the 20,000 mark by 2021.

"The growth has been remarkable," he declared.

There are 20 universities in Ontario, and in terms of enrolment, Sheridan would rank in the top 10. Zabudsky also pointed to a wide program mix offered at Sheridan, especially a focus on applied bachelors degrees that help students get jobs, as well as post-graduate certification. He added the province has approved eight new bachelors degrees which will be available in September, and that helps make the case for university certification.

Zabudsky also stressed they plan to maintain the range of credentials that Sheridan is known for offering.

Zabudsky said the college hires instructors who have actual work experience, while offering them chances to enhance their academic credentials and professional development.

He also said Sheridan is well-known for its undergraduate research, adding it's applied research and working with industry to solve problems. The investment from the private sector, as well as the federal and provincial governments have been increasing over the years. Sheridan is the top research college in Ontario and it ranks sixth in Canada.

"Our students, of course, are our greatest pride," Zabudsky said, pointing to numerous awards that have been won.

"I believe Peel deserves another university," he said, stressing the population base is in place.

He also stressed this isn't aimed at duplicating the work done at any other institutions.

"We're focused on the world of practice," he said.

Zabudsky added it will be a technical university. The skill trades, etc., will remain very important.

"We're not leaving people behind," he said. "We're not leaving students behind."

Zabudsky pointed out Sheridan has been part of Peel since the college was established in 1967. The Board of Governors is from all over the community.

"We are about Peel," he said. "This is your college and soon to be your university."

Regional Chair Emil Kolb observed there are some 16,000 children born in Peel every year, but the Region still has high unemployment. He thought this was strong advertising for local students to attend post-secondary school close to home.

"Everything that Sheridan does, I'm really impressed with," declared Brampton Councillor John Sanderson.

"Your enthusiasm is infectious," added Mississauga Councillor Bonnie Crombie. "How can we not support you?"

"I think it's time," she added. "I think it's overdue time."

Crombie also said one goal is to train local youth close to home and get them working here.

Zabudsky told her the university would be concentrating on student-focused research, meaning the faculty would spend much of its time with students. He added they would not be asking the Province for a lot more money, or for a big hike in tuition.

"We're not abandoning our college roots," Dawson added, stating they want to maintain what has been built over the years.

In terms of timing, Zabudsky told Brampton Councillor John Sprovieri faculty preparation is going well. There are hopes there will be an accreditation team to conduct a review in about two years. Dawson added the government promised three more universities in the last election, but they haven't delivered yet. He said this one could be up in two years with minimal costs.

Caledon Councillor Allan Thompson, whose son attends Sheridan, pointed out it's college graduates who create employment for university graduates, and he doesn't want to see that lost. He said Ryerson University has done a good job in that regard. The demand is for the technicians, he said.

"You're good at what you do," he added. "You're just taking yourself to the next level."