



# THE FUTURE IS NOW

TRAINING IS THE BACKBONE OF CREATING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR NORTHERNERS IN THE NORTHERN MINING INDUSTRY. IT'S GOING PLACES LIKE NEVER BEFORE. **BY ROBB COFFMAN**

**STORIES ABOUT CAREER TRAINING USUALLY BEGIN** with a quick profile of a person who's taken the plunge and discovered a world of new and satisfying opportunities. This is especially true in the North, where the realities of life in remote communities create barriers to employment and skill development. So, there's a reason for this general approach to storytelling. The profiles inspire. They put a face on positive trends and bring statistics to life. Which is exactly why we're going to use the tactic here – but hopefully with a small twist.

Meet Darren Clunie. A lifelong Yellowknifer, now aged 43, he was already in an established career when he caught the mining bug. Since graduating from high school in the late 1980s, he'd been working for the Government of the Northwest Territories. His first job was with the Health Department filing chest x-rays dating back to the 1930s of the men who worked in the territory's old mines. From there, he worked his way up the government ladder in medical record keeping and, after taking education leave, moved on to the Social Services Department as an income-support officer. >

Training at Agnico-Eagle Ltd's Meadowbank mine has included practice sessions in truck simulators. Agnico-Eagle also employs 12 full-time trainers at the site. Photo Graham Oxbby/Meadowbank mine.

A couple of years ago, however, Clunie started to feel it was time for a change. So he signed up for a mine-training program at Aurora College. “There were a lot of people younger than me in my class, just out of high school,” Clunie says, laughing. “But I knew this was going to be hard work and I wanted to see if I could do it.” Today, Clunie works at the Diavik diamond mine in the plant where the company converts mined granite into cemented rockfill, which is used to back-fill underground stopes. He celebrated his first anniversary as a Diavik employee in July and he’s happy with his new career. Not only does he enjoy the work, his two-week rotation gives him more time to spend with close family in Kelowna, B.C., than he could ever muster on the Monday-to-Friday schedule that most of us live by.

Clunie’s story says something important about the evolution of mine training and employment in the North. Although it is usually spoken of in terms creating jobs and opportunities in remote communities where unemployment runs high, the awareness of its benefits are becoming more and more widespread. Even people who already have established careers are looking at its potential.



Safety is a key component in programs offered by the Northwest Territories Mine Training Society. Here, trainees practice cold-water rescues.

And not a moment too soon. There are already four active mines in the NWT and six advanced-exploration projects that have the potential to become full-fledged mines over the next few years. In Nunavut, there are eight major projects with the same potential. That’s in addition to Agnico-Eagle’s Meadowbank mine near Baker Lake, and it’s likely the territory will soon be punching far above its weight as an active mining jurisdiction. All of this activity adds up to a definite conclusion: the North needs people to work in mining – fast. According to projections from the NWT Mine Training Society, direct employment in the territory will increase by almost 5,000 positions in the next few years. There’s a good chance demand will be just as great in Nunavut. The good news is that training efforts on the part of mining companies, businesses, colleges and governments in the North are making strides – and they are going further than ever before.

OF ALL THE PEOPLE involved in Northern mining, it’s doubtful there are many who feel the mounting need for mine training as acutely as Hilary Jones. As the general manager of the NWT Mine Training Society – a non-profit partnership comprised of industry, Ab-

original communities and government to deliver training programs in various job categories – she sits at the intersection where the supply and demand for mine employees meet.

Jones describes the rising need for people to work in Northern mines as a “deer in the headlights” moment. “Keep in mind that for every mining job, there are three service jobs attached to it,” she says. “We’ll need 15,000 people.” Of course, not everyone who works at a Northern mine, or with a mine contractor, has to be a Northerner. But the goal is to put as many residents in those positions as possible. Making the challenge even greater for organizations like the NWT Mine Training Society is that the national Aboriginal Skills Employment Program, which provided funding for their work, came to an end in 2012. Other federal programs still exist, but the total pool of financial support for training is more modest.

Since then, the mining industry and the territorial government in the NWT have stepped up, providing gap funding to keep the NWT society going for the next two years. They are also now collaborating on a new, pan-Northern funding proposal for training to present to Ottawa. That industry and government have moved so quickly to support the training society speaks volumes about the value they put on the organization. The simple reason is that the society, and others like it, gets results. Since the fall of 2004, the NWT society has trained more than 1,300 people, and more than 700 of those people have obtained employment in the mining sector. Likewise, the Kivalliq Mine Training Society blew past projections for the number of people trained and the number of people who found work, according to its 2010/11 annual report.

The secret behind the success has been a shift in how training is coordinated and delivered. Once, it was a speculative process. Programs would be put on, students would enroll and, at the end, hopefully find employment. Today, the system has evolved into what Jones calls “just-in-time” training – that is, delivering programs just before company’s are ready to start hiring – with an emphasis on delivering those programs locally in affected communities.

Here’s how it works: When a mining company is working in an area, it will make commitments to affected communities, either through impact-and-benefit agreements, cooperation agreements and/or socio-economic agreements with territorial governments. The agreements cover benefits such as community development and

### Where the jobs are

A breakdown of Northern employment at the North’s major mines.

**Ekati** BHP Billiton  
(First year of production: 1998)  
Total Employment: 1,213  
Total Northern: 650 (53%)  
Total Aboriginal: 317 (26%)  
Total Non-aboriginal: 333 (27%)

(Source: Ekati Diamond Mine 2011 Year in Review)

**Diavik** Diavik Diamond Mines Inc.  
(First year of production: 2003)  
Total Employment: 1,165 (100%)  
Total Northern: 642 (55%)  
Total Aboriginal: 291 (25%)  
Total Non-aboriginal: 351 (30%)

(Source: Diavik 2012 Mid-Year Socio-Economic Monitoring Report)

**Snap Lake** De Beers Canada Inc.  
(First year of production: 2008)  
Total Employment: 678  
Total Northern: 249 (37%)  
Total Aboriginal: 145 (21%)  
Total Non-aboriginal: 104 (15%)

(Source: De Beers Canada 2011 Year In Review)

**Meadowbank** Agnico-Eagle Mines Ltd.  
(First year of production: 2010)  
Total Employment: 746  
Total Inuit Employment: 276 (37%)

(Source: Agnico-Eagle 2011 Corporate Social Responsibility Report)

\* Figures for Meadowbank are for direct employment. Other figures include employment by mining companies and their contractors.



The workforce at Agnico-Eagle’s Meadowbank gold mine is 35 percent Inuit. A commitment to training helps the company maximize local employment.



ABOVE: Underground mining students assemble and bench-test mine rescue breathing apparatus. RIGHT: A trainee in a diamond-driller helper program gets on-site experience.

engagement with local business. Establishing local hiring targets is an important component as well. These days, much of the work for meeting targets is coordinated through mine training societies. With hiring targets established, the societies work to coordinate the human resource needs of the companies with the skill capacities of communities. Gaps are identified and then the societies, in collaboration with colleges and local employment coordinators, go into the communities to run training programs focused on specific hiring objectives. Mining firms also participate, both financially and through guest talks and site visits or on-site training opportunities. Community members can then move on to further training programs at colleges if they wish, which enhance their likelihood of success.

“We won’t run a program unless there are jobs attached to it,” Jones says. “We also look at community needs to see if there is a cross-over. A community may need heavy-equipment operators in terms of truck drivers and so on. The mine may need truck drivers as well. These would be the first programs we go after because there’s opportunity on both sides.”

An example of this approach is the More Than A Silver Lining training program, which launched this past July and will run until March 2014. A collaboration between Canadian Zinc Corp., local Deh Cho community governments and the federal and territory governments, it aims to train Deh Cho residents for jobs at Canadian Zinc’s Prairie Creek project. The courses, which are managed by the NWT Mine Training Society, include diamond drilling, camp catering and emergency medical services, among others.

This shift to a partnership approach arrived with the diamond-mining industry, especially after the opening of BHP Billiton’s Ekati mine. Ekati has set important standards with its investment in training, but as the first diamond mine in the NWT it also had a greenfield opportunity for local hiring when it opened in 1998. When Diavik started ramping up operations a few years later – it officially started production in 2003 – it had a smaller labour pool to draw on. To help address its needs, it collaborated on a community-training test project with the territorial Education Department, Aurora College and the federal government in the communities of Dettah and Łutselk’e. “It turned out to be a very good experiment,” Jones says. More than that, it laid the groundwork for what mine training in the North has become today.

ABOUT A YEAR AGO, Patrick Moloney, human resources manager for Fortune Minerals Ltd., found himself in the gym at Weledeh Public School in Yellowknife, swarmed by school-aged kids. The occasion was the NWT Rocks! Day at the 2011 NWT Geoscience Forum, part of a youth program developed by the territorial education department, the NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines, the NWT Geoscience Office and the NWT Teachers’ Association. During that session, hosted at the forum’s trade show, Moloney and other companies participated in a passport game in which groups of kids had to visit each booth and find answers to pre-set questions. “You’d have a gaggle of 15 or so kids show up at the booth wanting to know things like where your site is and the uses for what you’re producing,” Moloney recalls. “It was really good. It gave you an opportunity to talk to the kids.”

“We’ve been struggling to get people in areas like mine engineering, geology, financial management in terms of accounting and environmental sciences so this is a fantastic initiative.”

Gaeleen MacPherson, the manager of human resources and administration for Snap Lake

Those youngsters obviously weren’t hiring prospects for Fortune Minerals. But they just might be in a few years. The company’s NICO project – a gold-cobalt-bismuth deposit about 160 kilometres north of Yellowknife in the Behchoko region – just completed public hearings for its environmental assessment in September. Assuming all goes well, it will be looking to hire 400 people to work on the construction of its mine in the not-too-distant future. Longer term, it will need a permanent staff of about 180 people to handle production, with the initial figure at around 270 due to work on a shorter underground mining phase. That means hiring and training have been high on the company’s radar for some time and much preparatory work is underway, including ongoing meetings with nearby communities and business organizations to discuss anticipated needs and expectations.

But mine production isn’t the only point at which Northerners are participating in the minerals industry. Opportunities are arising at ever-earlier stages in the process, and Fortune has been taking full advantage of local hiring during exploration. “We’ve been tracking this since

2007,” Moloney says, “and 75 percent of the people we’ve hired to work at the camp have been First Nations people from the North.” Moreover, Fortune is not alone in this trend. Avalon Rare Metals, which is proposing to build a rare earths mine at Thor Lake in the Akaitcho region south of Great Slave Lake, collaborated with the NWT Mine Training Society, Aurora College and Foraco Canada Ltd., its drilling contractor, to create a driller’s helper training program targeting young Northerners. This program marked the first time the training society developed a program in collaboration with – and specifically for – an exploration company.

As training and employment opportunities are expanding at earlier stages of the mineral development process, serious efforts are also underway to increase opportunities for advancement within companies. Trades apprenticeships are an important component of this development, and ongoing support will have the added benefit of leaving a legacy of skills in the North when mines come to the end of their lives. Diavik, for example, has a commitment to skilled trades, with 36 apprentices now working at the site, according to the company’s 2012 mid-year socio-economic report. BHP Billiton’s Ekati mine recently announced a five-year, \$300,000 partnership with Skills Canada NWT to support trades programs. Meanwhile, De Beers Canada had 15 apprentices in seven trades at its Snap Lake mine during 2011.

Creating management capacity is also a major goal. This year, De Beers Canada announced a new post-secondary scholarship program, worth \$30,000 in the 2012-13 academic year, to help people prepare for professional careers associated with its Snap Lake mine and Gahcho Kué advanced-exploration project. “We’ve been looking at the question of how to get people from the North into professional positions,” says Gaeleen MacPherson, the manager of human resources and administration for Snap Lake and herself a lifelong Northerner who’s charted an upward career path since completing a bachelor’s degree in management at the University of Lethbridge. “We’ve been struggling to get people in areas like mine engineering, geology, financial management in terms of accounting and environmental sciences... So this is a fantastic initiative.”

The NWT Mine Training Society also offers a program to help prepare Northerners for management positions: the Northern Leadership Development Program. Pioneered by Diavik and then taken over by Aurora College, it provides students (all of whom are funded by their employers) with an eight-module program that covers subjects such as team leadership, communication skills, conflict resolution, diversity and problem solving. It too has been a success.

Expect more to come as future opportunities and demand move ever closer to reality. After all, the goal – for industry, business, government and communities alike – is to create opportunities for Northerners to build better futures. Mine training plays an important role in reaching that objective. And it benefits more than the people directly involved when you consider the spin-off benefits of having a healthy, local labour market. In the long run, everybody wins. ■



BILL BRADEN/MINE TRAINING SOCIETY