



# Accountant shortage looming in Ontario

Industry opening opportunities for university grads

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From the largest corporations in the world to mom and pop shops around the corner, sound financial advice could be harder to find if Canada fails to attract more of today's youth into the accounting profession.

That was one of the messages delivered to local members of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario Wednesday night at Clarion Resort Pinewood Park.

"We are not in a crisis yet," said Brian Hunt, president and CEO of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario, who spoke in North Bay about changes in the industry. "But if we do nothing and continue the way we are, there will be a shortage."

Hunt said the problem is that the growing complexities of doing business in the world economy are creating increased demand for accounts' services. But given 35 percent of the organization's members are 50 years of age or older, the supply will decline as they begin to retire.

While he said the organization will not allow Ontario to become short-staffed, such a shortage could curtail the growth of business in the province, especially limiting people's access to financial advisers, affecting every business and personal investments.

As a means of growing the organization's membership, Hunt has been working with his counterparts across the country to open more training opportunities for university graduates to complete their articling term. Traditionally, potential accountants could only article in licensed chartered accounting firms. The new plan, which could get off the ground next fall, will see 1,100 students articling in not only accounting firms, but also the public and corporate sectors.

"What we've come to realize is that no two chartered accountants receive the same articling experience, because depending on the clientele of the firm, the students get exposed to very different training experiences," Hunt said.

"What do we want to do (in the articling experience) is expose students to the skills required to be chartered accountants, and we think we can duplicate that experience in the corporate sector as well as accounting firms."

Not only is it important to find more training ground where accounting students can article, but Hunt said more needs to be done to attract students into the profession.

If the opportunity to travel and the challenging and interesting nature of the work isn't enough, Hunt said accountants are also well paid. He estimated the organization's average member makes more than \$100,000 a year.

Also compounding the problem for accountants is that Ontario currently offers little liability protection when things go wrong. In fact, under current provincial law, if one partner in a firm acts illegally, the assets of all partners can be seized. Only when "full-shield" liability protection is introduced will partners be protected from the wrongdoings of their colleagues, he said.

### **SHORTAGE**

- The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Ontario is concerned about a decline in accountant graduates each year in the province.
- In 1990, it licensed 1,666 graduates of the mandatory three-year articling term. In 2002, there were only 692.
- Over the past few years, graduate numbers have increased slightly but still hover between 800 and 900 in Ontario. National numbers are also down.