

Founder's Day speaker breaking down borders

By Ian Howarth

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An international poll commissioned by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and conducted between October 2005 and January 2006 showed that people around the world overwhelmingly see Canada as a good role model. Of the 33 nations and 40,000 people polled, 52 percent gave Canada a positive rating, just behind Japan and Europe as a whole.

It wouldn't be too much of a stretch to say that Engineers Without Borders (EWB) Canada is contributing to Canada's positive international image. Since its inception on the heels of the signing of the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000, EWB Canada has gone from a basement operation to a full-fledged non-government organization (NGO) with 15,000 members nation-wide in 30 chapters including McGill, Concordia and École polytechnique.

The idea began with University of Waterloo engineering students Parker Mitchell and George Roter, both 23 at the time, who ran with the idea that the Canadian engineering community – students, other professionals and companies – is passionate about making the world a better place.

Canada takes global stage

"We've been overwhelmed by the response and growth over the years," said Mitchell in an interview with the Reporter. He has been invited to be the keynote speaker for the McGill Faculty of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Macdonald Campus 99th Founder's Day celebration today, February 9. "EWB's growth has been dynamic," he added. "There is always continuous learning and evolution. I think we've managed to raise awareness about what we can do to make Canada a model global citizen – knowledge that will ultimately provide the foundation for change."

Co-founders and now co-CEOs of Engineers Without Borders, Mitchell and Roter have garnered some high praise and several awards for their efforts, including the CIDA/CME Award for International Co-operation. Both Mitchell and Roter have been recognized by Canada's Top 40 Under 40 Award as young,

accomplished Canadians. The 2005 Founder's Day speaker and the UN special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, Stephen Lewis calls the growth of EWB "positively supernatural."

EWB has sent more than 150 volunteers overseas since 2000, mainly to countries such as Ghana, Senegal, Tanzania, Burkina Faso and Zambia. Student volunteers can do either a four-month tour or a full-year of service working closely with other NGOs on the ground on projects like small-scale irrigation systems, water and sanitation facilities, and mechanized food-processing equipment.

Volunteers undergo a period of on-line training as well as an orientation session in Toronto before travelling to Africa. "We don't necessarily look for people who have a certain kind of expertise or background. The number one quality we look for in an applicant is humility," said Mitchell, who added that EWB often has more applicants than available positions. "They have to understand what they need to do to gain the trust of the local people they're going to work with." A little spirit of entrepreneurship doesn't hurt either, Mitchell explained. In fact, about 15 percent of EWB volunteers do not come exclusively from the field of engineering.

Current McGill EWB chapter president, Lindsay Mitchell, is also involved in Founder's Day activities. She will be giving a presentation on the four months she spent working for EWB in Ghana. This is the McGill chapter's fourth year, and it has sent three volunteers to Africa since 2001, each for four months. The McGill EWB chapter helps to raise the \$6,000 necessary to sponsor a volunteer, which covers the cost of airfare, training, a daily stipend (volunteers live on approximately \$8 to \$10 per day) and medical insurance.

"It was an incredible challenge," said, Mitchell, a 23 year-old fourth year civil engineering student who worked with an NGO Enterprise Work in Accra, the capital of Ghana. "It made me realize the role we play in Canada and how the decisions made here affect the global economy. The four months I spent there changed my perspective on what I thought was important."

Other students are doing their bit to help right here in Montreal. McGill agricultural student Jacob Beaudry decided to cycle for 24 hours on a stationary mountain bike in the main lobby of the

Macdonald Campus building, February 8 and 9, to raise \$6,000 in support of EWB. On February 11 and 12 at the downtown McConnell Engineering Building, students are participating in a 24-hour fast to bring attention to the Make Poverty History program as well as to raise money for the McGill EWB chapter. For more information call Christian Beaudry at 398-5736.