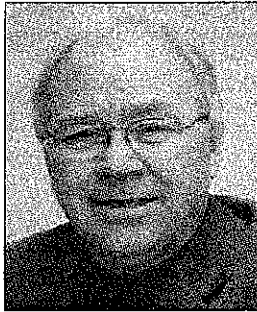


## NEWS

## ▼ EDUCATION

## Combine business with technology

**JOHN LEECH**  
CONTRIBUTOR



*John Leech*

I visited Kelowna in March to meet with community leaders and regional members of the Applied Science, Technologists and Technicians of British Columbia, and to again enjoy one of the major events our professional association sponsors—the Okanagan College annual Spaghetti Bridge Contest.

Again this year, scores of students and teachers from the K-12 system took part, with students from throughout B.C. competing against those from nations as distant as Hungary and Japan.

Several other community-minded organizations join us in supporting the event. And there was history.

This was the 29th annual edition of the contest—organized, promoted and supported over those many years by Okanagan College. So why do our 10,000 technology professionals give financial and technical support to a “fun and games,

student event?” For a host of reasons. We have the means, opportunities and the obligation to do something important for our province. We promote science and technology to our youth, as a path for their education and for career development.

We seek to inspire their curiosity, their interest in math and science, engineering and technology. They are urgently needed for a universe of rewarding, secure careers opening in applied science and technology.

That “silver tsunami” of retirements has begun—and it includes technologists, technicians and technical specialists.

B.C. already has shortages in several engineering and technology fields that help drive our provincial economy.

It’s not enough to want to design and develop the games that will be played on their X-Boxes and PS3s. We need bright young minds to develop and maintain the systems and networks that enable people to work and play together.

Remote medical care and robotic surgery increasingly rely on technicians, technologists, robotics experts and network and telecommunication specialists to keep many of us alive and healthy.

As urgently as we need tradespeople to build B.C.’s infrastructure, we need the civil and design engineers and technologists to design, oversee and manage the projects.

We can’t assume that someone else, in another jurisdiction, will provide the innovation or the expertise that invents, drives and maintains new technology. We need to continue to develop the cap-

acity here in British Columbia. Our own young men and women are a vital resource and we have every reason—selfish and otherwise—to ensure that British Columbians are trained, employed and rewarded properly.

I’ve been thrilled watching students wrestle with spaghetti and glue guns as they apply basic principles of physics, and felt their excitement as they test their bridges to the breaking point.

In the process, we see them developing a culture of applied science learning that will lead many of the competitors to more advanced opportunities in science and technology.

By next March, with much consultation and discussion behind us, ASTTBC plans to have developed a technology training plan for the province, drawing input and advice not only from our members, employers and industry associations, but also involving the school districts and the great B.C. post-secondary institutions including Okanagan



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**THE OKANAGAN COLLEGE** spaghetti bridge building contest shows how learning science and technology can be a fun experience.

College.

The plan, which we’ll share with government, should give us direction and focus on how we can work together to inspire the curiosity and interest that is at the heart of events such as the Spaghetti Bridge contest, the Western Canada Robocup Competition and the Math Contest. We’ll need to do exactly that, to meet the challenge of this century and realize the promise of this province.

*John Leech is executive director of the Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of B.C.*