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Okanagan College Writes About Tech Careers; Mentions ASTTBC

The Director of Public Relations at Okanagan College, Allan Coyle, wrote in the *Capital News* on March 18, 2011, about science in K-12, science fairs and technology education. And, good friend that he is, he mentioned ASTTBC's role in promoting technology education and careers. "ASTTBC has a strong working relationship with Okanagan College," said Executive Director, John Leech. We appreciate all they do to promote science and technology careers. Bruce Stevens, ASCT, ASTTBC Regional Manager, Okanagan, said "I work hands-on with Okanagan College in areas such as their technology programming and in providing services to members."

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NEWS

▼ POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Closing the gap on shortfall of science and math aspirants

This year has been deemed the Year of Science by British Columbia's government. I was reminded of that several times recently, as late as Thursday.

Walking through the atrium of Okanagan College's Centre for Learning as School District 23 officials were setting up for the regional science fair, I was captivated by the names of the experiments and demonstrations that students were going to be bringing to the fair.

It's obvious that there is still a great deal of curiosity among young students for the physics, biology and chemistry that make things work, that drive things such as X-boxes and volcanoes.

But somewhere between that elementary and high school interest in science and enrolments in post-secondary education, there's an issue.

Some of that student interest evaporates like dry ice. The result is not as many students as there should be pursue science, technology and technical education in their post-secondary studies.

It's one of the reasons



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that the provincial government has invested to promote science this year.

Industry, educators and innovators have sounded the warning bell about the disconnect between the need for people with these skills and knowledge and the numbers who are responding to the opportunity.

Yes, for some programs there is a great deal of interest. Civil engineering technology and university engineering programs are examples of that. But for others—computer information systems, for example, or network and telecommunications engineering technology—the interest levels fall short of current and predicted employer demand. And the demand is woefully short from one particularly important group: Females.

Many postulate about

the reasons for the lack of interest in science from girls and young women. Some suggest that there are stereotypes that scare girls away. (Think The Big Bang Theory on television, as an example.)

Others say that the sciences aren't viewed as a destination to find social careers, where you get to work with people. (That's far from true—ask almost anyone who works in technological fields or in science.)

Ignoring the gender gap for a minute, there is an issue we need to address for the long-term health of our economy.

Companies like RIM don't sprout magically—innovation on the technical front requires people with the right skills. A cure for cancer requires biologists, research scientists and lab technicians.

The provincial government is not the first agency to step in to promote science and technology as a career pursuit.

The Applied Science Technologists and Technicians of British Columbia have been working with many agencies, organizations and individuals

to get the word out. (One of the reasons they are so supportive with sponsorship of events like Okanagan College's Spaghetti Bridge competition, Robocup, and math com-

petitions). UBCO, OC, school districts, Science World, even individual companies and firms are stepping up to the plate.

We need to take the curiosity that makes sci-

ence fairs so exciting for kids and nurture it, let them see the careers and opportunities that can unfold. If you want to help, and need some raw material to inspire someone

you know, a great place to start is the Year of Science website at www.yearof-sciencebc.ca.

Allan Coyle is the director of public affairs at Okanagan College.