

A Brief History of the Geotechnical Society of Edmonton

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The Geotechnical Society of Edmonton (GSE) was registered as an independent Society on February 5, 1969 and is affiliated with the Canadian Geotechnical Society (CGS). Signatories on the incorporation documents of the Society were **Murray Harris, P.Eng., Stan Thomson, P.Eng., B. Alexander, P.Eng., Ron Innes, T.E. Berg, P.Geol and E.C. Luck, P.Eng.** The GSE is one of the oldest geotechnical groups in Canada and has an average membership of approximately 190.

The GSE was initially formed to bring professionals and non-professionals together so they could share their geotechnical experiences and ideas with one another. Membership to the GSE is extended to those individuals in private consulting, government, industry, students or anyone else who has an interest in geotechnical and geoenvironmental issues. Approximately once every four weeks from September to May, feature speakers address the membership body to discuss new developments and challenging projects in geotechnical and geoenvironmental engineering on both the local and global scales. The annual roster of meetings also typically includes two distinguished Cross-Canada Lectures supported by the Canadian Foundation for Géotechnique, a charitable organization independent of the CGS and of which the GSE has been an ongoing financial supporter. The season culminates with the Annual General Meeting which includes a business dinner meeting, the election of a new Executive and a presentation by a distinguished speaker.

Held at various venues in Edmonton, including the University of Alberta and the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, the meetings provide members an opportunity to network and to enjoy a meal together, followed by presentations by local practitioners or visitors. The presentations span a wide range of geotechnical and geo-environmental topics, as well as related issues such as professional practice, risk, legal issues and new technologies and construction techniques.

Since 1995, the GSE has also sponsored an annual spring symposium or seminar on various geotechnical and geo-environmental related themes. These events typically attract 80 to 130 registrants.

In 1982, the GSE introduced its highest award, the Geotechnical Service Award. Stan Thomson, one of the founding fathers of the Society was the first recipient of this award and the award was subsequently renamed in 1999 as the **Stan Thomson Geotechnical Society of Edmonton Award**. This award recognizes a particular individual's contribution to the development and growth of the GSE and to geotechnical or geoenvironmental engineering in the Edmonton area. The award consists of a commemorative plaque and a lifetime membership to the Society.

In 1985, the GSE introduced the GSE Graduate Student Award, In 1999 the award was renamed **N.R. Morgenstern Student Award**. The award is given to the graduate student who submits the best paper as selected by the professors in the Geotechnical Division of the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Alberta. Along with a \$1500 monetary award and a certificate, the award winners are invited to present their paper to the general membership at a wine and cheese reception, held in the early fall. The wine and cheese meeting is the September meeting where the N.R. Morgenstern Graduate

Student Award winner from the previous spring gives a presentation to the group. A poster session by other graduate students is also held at the reception, to allow the representatives from industry to meet and discuss current research projects with the students.

In 2003, the Civil Engineering Department at the University of Alberta held the first of what was to become an annual competition for its graduate students, challenging them to put the theory they were learning into practice. They were required to design and predict the failure strengths of model reinforced retaining walls that they had to construct on the day of the competition, with no opportunity to undertake trial tests. In 2004, the format of the competition was expanded, with guest judges from various local geotechnical consultants. The guest judges evaluate the various designs for innovation and give small prizes to the students supplied by various local firms, along with a cash prize for first place provided by the Geotechnical Society of Edmonton and one or more corporate sponsors.

By 2005, the competition was expanded to allow the participation of students from NAIT. In addition, this year saw the first appearance of a trophy for the first place student team. The trophy was designed by **Mr. Paul Boos** and was financially supported by his firm, Reinforced Earth Company.

The trophy mimics the appearance of a reinforced wall with a roadway running across the top. The cruciform wall panels typically associated with a Reinforced Earth wall are modeled by brass plates which are inscribed with the names of the winning students. The trophy is kept on display at the Civil Engineering Department at the University of Alberta between competitions. In recognition of his long term service to the University of Alberta and to the local geotechnical community, both the competition and the trophy were named after **Dr. Don Scott** in 2005.

The GSE has hosted five annual CGS's annual conferences, including the ones in 1962, 1974, 1985, 1998 and most recently in 2008. The GSE has also hosted a number of specialty conferences, including the 1994 First International Conference of Environmental Engineering with the ISSMFE, the 2001 Assessment and Remediation of Contaminated Sites in Arctic and Climates (ARCSACC) and in 2003, the 3rd Canadian Conference on Geotechnical Engineering and Natural Hazards.

Submitted by Dr. Mustapha Zergoun Chair of CGS Heritage Committee