

MICHAEL RICHARD BLEAKNEY (1956–2013)

Edited by his geotechnical engineering colleagues
in the Ottawa and Canadian geotechnical communities.
Based in part on articles from the *Ottawa Citizen*, *Ottawa Sun*,
Maclean's Magazine and *Geotechnical News*.



Michael Richard Bleakney was born in Perth-Andover, New Brunswick in 1956. He graduated from high school at age 15, and at age 16 enrolled in the engineering program at the University of New Brunswick. While completing his degree in Civil Engineering (1980), Michael worked for a construction company and met his wife Kathryn on a road-building project where he was the site manager. Michael graduated from the University of New Brunswick in Civil Engineering.

After graduating, he worked for thirteen years in private industry before joining the New Brunswick Department of Transportation. There, among other projects, he did post-construction monitoring of the Confederation Bridge to Prince Edward Island.

In 2001, Michael and his family moved to Ottawa, where he joined Public Works and Government Services Canada (PWGSC). In that position, he was technical adviser on the three main bridges crossing between Ottawa and Gatineau. Later, as a senior geotechnical engineer with PWGSC's Real Property Branch, he worked primarily with the Parliamentary Precinct Branch overseeing excavations on Parliament Hill as part of the restoration of the Parliament Buildings. He was also responsible for Parks Canada's heritage buildings across Canada. These included the York Factory National Historic Site on the Hayes River near the shores of Hudson Bay.

Michael was actively involved in the Ottawa Geotechnical Group, a section of the Canadian Geotechnical Society. He served on the Executive Committee of the OGG and was Chair from 2004 to 2006.

Michael Bleakney was a man for whom work was a profession and not simply a job. He had a wide range of other interests and was much more than just an engineer. He was described by one colleague as an exceptional intellect and voracious learner, who, unable to say no, good-naturedly carried the interest of others on his shoulders, and who, in the peculiar manner of the uncommonly curious, appeared to grow younger by the day. He sang in four choirs, ballroom danced with his wife Kathryn, learned Gaelic and in the rare times he stood still, enjoyed sampling single malt Scotch whiskeys. In 2011, he said he would take Kathryn to

Scotland for a choir competition if she learned Gaelic and sang in a choir. She did both, and their choir came in third place.

In a successful bid to lose weight, Michael regularly biked 25 km to work. His secret was eating carefully and biking the 25 km from Barrhaven to Ottawa and back. If he was late, he would load his bike on the front of a bus. He and five others were killed in a bus-train collision outside Ottawa on 18 September 2013. Michael is survived by his wife Kathryn, and four adult children.