

Alberta program helps Ukrainian nationals work in their homeland career

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Refugees that have knowledge about engineering are getting some major help from an Alberta group in that career field.

The Association of Science and Engineering Technology Professionals of Alberta (ASET) has made a change to one of its programs that helps newcomers to waive fees.

"We're working with refugees from any nation and what made us aware of the urgency to do something about it was the speed at which Ukrainian refugees are arriving in Canada," explained Barry Cavanaugh, chief executive officer and general council at ASET.

Cavanaugh said in many cases refugees don't come to them until they were already settled in the county but they wanted to help get these newcomers into the fields they were trained in.

"We believed we could help get them qualified and working in their field rather quickly. A few years ago, because we were concerned about making a level-playing field for foreign trained applicants, we spent a long time with subject matter experts to develop a fully objective and competency-based acceptance system," Cavanaugh said. "We ruled out things like 'Canadian experience' and developed a fair and objective approach."

He said for those who fled quickly and can't prove their academics through documentation, they have developed a comprehensive certification exam that ensures they know the field.

"We can get them into their profession's rather quickly now," Cavanaugh said. "We decided we would waive their examination and application fee for people with refugee status, which was costing up to \$1,000 and we decided it was important to waive that from these people coming from hardship already."

Cavanaugh said the program allows them to become Engineering Technologists, who work in the engineering field adding they are not considered professional engineers but do work alongside them.

The competencies program has been around for about eight years now and Cavanaugh said it has helped quite a few new Canadians get re-established in their field in Canada.

Mila Wagner, a single mother from Ukraine, left her home after the invasion of Crimea in 2014 and when she arrived in 2016, she discovered her multiple degrees from Ukraine did not transfer to Canada.

"As soon as I started my civil engineer and technology program at Lethbridge College I was introduced to ASET and became a member," explained Wagner. "After I graduated I got a wonderful job with an engineering company in Lethbridge, which was due to the ASET program."

Wagner said had she known about the program when she first arrived, it would have helped her get into the field faster.

"If I had this opportunity when I arrived in 2016 it would have made a huge difference in time, money and everything else," she said.

Cavanaugh said he is happy the program and the fee waving is helping newcomers now and hopes to see more refugees apply so ASET can help them work in their professions.

"The ones I've spoken to recognize we've done our best to level the playing field and give them equal access to the profession. It is also good for Alberta to bring new talent in from elsewhere and frankly, all the refugees and immigrants who come forward, we can use their talents because this country needs to grow and expand the economy," Cavanaugh said. "We've always been a nation of immigrants and we need to continue that and respect it."

There are 543 ASET members in Sherwood Park and 110 in Fort Saskatchewan.

You can find out more about the program at aset.ab.ca. tdosser@postmedia.com
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