Energy superpower, Ring of Fire — and Fleming Frost grads

RANDY NEALS
ANALYSIS

Canada has no shortage of plans to build.

Prime Minister Mark Carney wants Canada to become an energy superpower and is seeking to catalyze $1 trillion in new investment in mines, energy, electricity and transportation infrastructure.

Premier Doug Ford has his own enormous building agenda: critical minerals, the Ring of Fire, nuclear power, transmission lines, highways and housing.

But neither agenda can be built by a press release. Capital does not drill a hole, blast rock, operate an excavator, install a water main or wire a building. People do.

Some of the people Canada and Ontario need are already being trained at Fleming College's Frost Campus in Lindsay.

As a Fleming graduate, I think Kawartha Lakes has seriously underestimated what we have on Albert Street South.

Frost is home to the Parnham Training Centre for Drilling and Blasting, heavy-equipment training, geomatics, forestry, environmental and water programs. Fleming says it is the only college in Canada providing training in both resources drilling and blasting. Its drilling students spend 80 per cent of their class time in hands-on learning and Fleming reports a 92 per cent graduate employment rate.

This is not a niche curiosity. It is workforce infrastructure.

Critical minerals begin with exploration and drilling. Mines need blasting, heavy equipment, roads, water management, geomatics and environmental expertise. Energy projects require skilled trades and civil works. New housing needs carpenters, electricians, plumbers and equipment operators.

Frost sits directly in that talent supply chain.

Ottawa and Queen's Park know labour is a constraint. Carney's Team Canada Strong initiative aims to recruit and train 80,000 to 100,000 additional Red Seal trades workers by 2030-31 for housing, infrastructure, resource development and defence. Ontario is investing $1.7 billion in more than 70,000 additional post-secondary seats in high-demand fields, including 3,800 new trades seats.

Why shouldn't Frost be part of that expansion?

Start by growing what Frost already does exceptionally well, particularly drilling and blasting.

Then go further.

Fleming already provides the classroom portion of apprenticeships for general carpenters, construction and maintenance electricians and plumbers at its Sutherland Campus in Peterborough. These are precisely the workers Kawartha Lakes needs to build homes and infrastructure. Ontario and Fleming should examine whether some of that training can also be delivered at Frost.

Forty kilometres between Lindsay and Peterborough may not look like much on a map. It looks different to an 18-year-old from Kinmount, Coboconk, Bobcaygeon or Fenelon Falls who may already travel a considerable distance just to reach Lindsay.

Distance means a vehicle, fuel and time. Sometimes it means rent. One of the simplest ways to make post-secondary education more affordable for rural families is to let young people live at home while they train.

That idea is remarkably consistent with the history of Frost Campus.

Leslie Frost was a Lindsay lawyer and Ontario's Progressive Conservative premier from 1949 to 1961. After leaving office, he supported the emerging community-college system and lobbied his former colleagues for a Fleming campus in Lindsay with natural-resource education at its core.

Frost described education as an investment in human resources. That is exactly what this discussion is about.



Drilling students spend 80 per cent of their class time in hands-on learning and Fleming reports a 92 per cent graduate employment rate.

There is another local political legacy worth remembering.

For 28 years this area was represented in Ottawa by Bill Scott, the Kinmount farmer, merchant and Progressive Conservative MP — and father of our current MPP, Laurie Scott.

In 1983, Bill Scott complained in the House of Commons about the way Ottawa allocated student summer-employment money. Students were expected to register through federal manpower offices, but Scott argued that rural young people often lacked the transportation or money to reach them.

"Students in rural Ontario do not have the facilities nor the funds to travel to the manpower offices," he told Parliament.

His point remains relevant: an opportunity that exists on paper is of limited value if geography puts it out of practical reach.

Ward 5 Coun. Mark Doble has already helped put Frost on council's agenda, advocating for stronger support for its drilling, blasting and heavy-equipment programs and for expanded skilled-trades training.

Whatever the composition of council after this month's municipal election, that work should continue.

Laurie Scott was raised in Kinmount and is a Loyalist College nursing graduate. Her government is spending heavily on skilled trades, post-secondary capacity, critical minerals and infrastructure. If Frost can help supply the workers Ontario says it needs, our MPP should be making that case at Queen's Park.

Jamie Schmale was raised in Bobcaygeon and graduated from Loyalist College's Radio Broadcasting program. If federal workforce, apprenticeship, critical-mineral or major-project programs can help expand Frost, our MP should be making that case in Ottawa.

I have some personal skin in this argument too.

I grew up in Bethany and earned an Electronics Engineering diploma from Fleming. In 2003, Fleming nominated me for a Premier's Award for work I had done on ORION, Ontario's research and education fibre-optic network. I later worked at Google, Facebook and Amazon Web Services, planning and building global networks, including work on the Hawaiki trans-Pacific submarine cable to Australia.



Fleming already delivers the in-class training for apprentices in general carpentry, construction and maintenance electrical work, and plumbing at its Sutherland Campus in Peterborough — exactly the trades Kawartha Lakes needs to build new homes and modern infrastructure.



Some of the people Canada and Ontario need are already being trained at Fleming College's Frost Campus in Lindsay.

All of it rested on the foundation of a Fleming diploma.

ORION was itself a public investment in infrastructure and people. Today its 6,000-kilometre network connects 1.7 million people across Ontario's universities, colleges, hospitals, research institutions and school boards.

My Fleming education helped me participate in building digital infrastructure in Ontario and around the world. Frost graduates can help build the physical infrastructure of the next generation.

Scott went to college. Schmale went to college. Doble went to college. I went to college.

We had our opportunity. Now we should build theirs.

That starts with Fleming and with Scott and Schmale developing a serious, costed plan: expand drilling and blasting capacity, determining which apprenticeship programs make sense in Lindsay and identifying the instructors, equipment and facilities required.

Frost itself also deserves renewal. Fleming's 2015 campus master plan already contemplated an expansion of the Parnham drilling and blasting centre, along with new academic space and better connections between the campus and Lindsay. More than a decade later, that plan deserves another look.

If Canada wants to be an energy superpower and Ontario wants the Ring of Fire, power plants, highways and homes, governments must invest not only in projects but in the people capable of building them.

Frost Campus can be part of that answer.

It should not be an institution Kawartha Lakes worries about preserving. It should be a campus we expect to grow — training young people, serving industry and remaining a central part of Lindsay's civic and economic life.

We already have one of the places that trains the people Canada needs.

It is time to stop asking how we save Frost Campus and start asking how much more it can become.

View us Online: kawarthalakesweekly.ca