

# AIC's Counsellor, Professional Practice focuses on:

- Conflict prevention
- Conflict resolution

**I**n September of 2005, Robert Patchett joined the Appraisal Institute of Canada (AIC) as its new Counsellor, Professional Practice. Robert's hiring is another important step in the Institute's evolution to better serve the ever-changing needs of its members and the public. Robert's extensive background with conflict resolution and mediation makes him an ideal choice to spearhead the AIC's Professional Practice program. In the following interview, he shares his related experience as well as his vision for the important role he is undertaking.

### **Q. How would you define your role as the AIC's Counsellor, Professional Practice?**

A. I see it as being three-fold. First, my primary function will be to serve as a conflict coach to our members. By that I mean helping them develop conflict prevention strategies so that they can prevent problem situations from arising in the first place and also helping them to better deal with conflict when it does arise. For complainants, my role is to listen, to encourage open dialogue and to try to find resolutions that are mutually agreeable to both parties concerned. When a formal complaint is lodged, it is then my responsibility to ensure that the basic principles of natural justice are adhered to and that everyone has the opportunity to be listened to and treated in a fair and respectful manner.



Robert Patchett, LL.B., CD

### **Q. Your career path leading to the AIC seems ideally suited to effectively fulfilling this role. Can you explain what brought you to this position and how those experiences fit with your responsibilities here?**

A. This is really a second career for me and one that I find very appealing for a variety of reasons. I entered the Canadian forces right out of school and was employed by the Government of Canada ever since. Still in my early 40s, I was looking for a career move into the private sector, one, which would allow me to

use my training and experience, and one that would provide an alternate legal career path. This position meets all of those criteria.

As far as my experience is concerned, much of my training as an army officer prepared me for active participation in peacekeeping missions around the world. For example, in the mid-1990s, I was part of a United Nations peacekeeping effort in Yugoslavia. As an unarmed observer, my most valuable resources were my communication and resolution skills. Today's Canadian Forces is much different than it used to be. There is a formal mediation program that teaches one to deal with conflict in a more informal manner and to coach people through difficulties. Having received a great deal of this conflict resolution training over the years, I became a qualified mediator. I then applied to law school where a number of courses focused on mediation and alternative dispute resolution. Following graduation, I articled with the Ministry of the Attorney General for the Province of Ontario and was subsequently employed at the Legal Services Branch of the Ontario Financial Services Commission. With the Federal Government having legislated mandatory mediation throughout its public service, my training and background in these areas proved invaluable.

### **Q. What do you see as the biggest challenges facing the profession from a professional prac-**

**...tice perspective and how will you help members meet these challenges?**

A. One of the biggest issues facing our membership is dealing with the uncertainty that exists whenever a professional practice complaint is launched. There is considerable anxiety with many members over the entire process and a belief that they could get raked over the coals, so to speak, as the complaint process unfolds, often slowly and laboriously. I want to work within the existing process and create an environment where our member and non-member complainants alike know that they will be dealt with in a fair, respectful and timely manner. I want to be a conflict coach that can help them work through unfamiliar situations, to provide advice before problems arise or get out of hand, to help them with prevention rather than reaction, and to provide the advice they need to deal with whatever situation does arise. I want to be a counsellor in the true sense of the word.

There seems to be dissatisfaction with the formal process that has existed to this point in time. I believe that we can promote an informal method of dealing with complaints to avoid the formal process wherever possible. My first approach is to encourage people to talk and make their concerns known. This is the most important step in any form of conflict resolution. At the end of the day, if a formal complaint is still the way to go, then so be it. But, before it reaches the formal stage, people will have had the opportunity to have input and to be heard.



**Q. How should the membership view the fact that you are not a designated appraiser?**

A. The volunteers on the various committees I work with, i.e., Investigating, Adjudicating, Appeal and Standards Committees, are appraisers. However, sometimes that can cause a degree of discomfort in that some appraisers may not want other appraisers judging how they conducted themselves. With my background, I can be neutral and independent. I do not come with any biases. I understand the nature of a complaint and can understand appraisal standards just as a complainant would. As for knowledge of the profession, I am working to enhance

my understanding by participating in the Standards Seminar and taking appraisal courses through UBC, i.e. *BUSI 330/BUSI 112*. I want to learn as much as I can about appraisal practices and the business of the Institute and to fine tune my skills so that they can be effectively applied on behalf of our members over the phone or in person.

The Appraisal Institute of Canada is committed to making all of its programs as professional as they can be...to raise the bar even higher. I believe that my background and the role I am here to fill helps to raise that bar and to give our organization added credibility with the public, major clients and the government.

**Q. What is the added value that members and the public can expect from you as a trained mediator?**

A. The value-added is my ability to listen, to understand the complaint, and to help find a resolution. With my legal training, life skills and experience, our members and the public can be confident that they will have an opportunity to tell their story and be treated in a fair and just manner. Although it is an important part of my background, I was not hired as a lawyer, but rather as a mediator. I am not here to provide legal advice, but to help our members avoid conflict in the first place and to resolve it in the best manner possible when it does occur. When someone has a problem, they go to an expert. Conflict resolution is a professional matter that requires a professional approach. I believe I will bring that to this process.

I want to work within the existing process and create an environment where our member and non-member complainants alike know that they will be dealt with in a fair, respectful and timely manner.

**Q. The Institute is presently developing a brand strategy to reposition the organization in the marketplace. How do you feel you can assist members in ensuring that the AIC brand, or image, presented to the public is consistent and has integrity?**

A. We want to be known as the 'go to' people in this industry. If that means restructuring and reorganizing to accomplish that goal, then that is what must be done. Members need to keep themselves informed, to maintain an open mind, to talk things through, to seek the opinions of others (including clients), and to remove emotions from the process. They also need to have faith in the Communications Committee, the Board, and the organizational branding professionals involved in the process. Just as members have business plans, the Institute is working on a business plan to meet the ever changing demands of the marketplace. And just as appraisers want clients to seek their professional advice when it comes to property valuation, we are seeking advice from experienced branding professionals. By working together, we have the best chance of being successful.

In regards to my role in the presentation of our brand, as I have stated previously, by raising the bar of our Professional Practice program, we are ensuring that the claims we make of being the industry 'professionals' and the 'go to' people are indeed true. When people know that we are committed to resolving problems that may arise in an open, fair, respectful, just and expedient manner, then we are demonstrating our professionalism.

**Q. There are significant changes occurring within the Professional Practice programs. How should members view these changes?**

A. The most significant change is the development of a Professional Affairs Coordination Committee

I am not here to provide legal advice, but to help our members avoid conflict in the first place and to resolve it in the best manner possible when it does occur.

(PACC), which met for the second time in November 2005. By coordinating the efforts of AIC committees such as Professional Practice, Adjudicating, Appeals, Standards, etc., this group can ensure that these committees are functioning cohesively, consistently and efficiently. With the PACC responsible for analyzing statistics, discussing trends, reviewing procedures and communicating on a regular basis with the other relevant committees, our members can be confident that our processes are functioning with the utmost integrity and that they are being reviewed, modernized and improved where necessary. This provides a unique opportunity for PACC to provide valuable insight into training successes and what improvements can be provided from a claims prevention and complaints prevention perspective.

**Q. What would you recommend members do to prepare for these changes?**

A. The Institute is modernizing its structure and its processes to maintain its leadership position in the industry. The Institute is looking out for the interests of all members and everything being done is geared to

ensuring that we are the pre-eminent professionals in this industry and that we are perceived as such. Members need to review their own personal business models, improve their business practices, expand their business applications and the value they bring to the table, and have confidence in their skills to do so.

**Q. Having shared your career experiences with us, what about your volunteer activities?**

A. Although I retired from the regular forces, I still remain involved in a part time capacity through the reserves. This involves some weekends and evenings and gives me an opportunity to pass on my knowledge and share my experiences. The military also has a public speaking program that enables me to go into public schools when asked to speak about Remembrance Day, peacekeeping, etc. I feel that it is important for people in any profession to stay involved in some capacity even after they have retired. The knowledge someone has accumulated throughout a career is too valuable not to pass on. That is the case with two mentors that I have in both the legal and mediation fields who continually provide me with personal and career advice. If you have knowledge to offer, I highly recommend that you do so.

Away from career matters, I have three children and have worked very hard to maintain a balance between work, family and recreation. My 21-year-old daughter is a college graduate while our two teenage sons are involved in activities like air cadets and soccer. Although I was fortunate enough in the past to spend time with them as a scout leader and trainer, it is now more a case of encouraging and supporting their activities. And yes, conflict resolution and mediation definitely come into play on the home front as well.

Now that I've relocated to Ottawa I am seeking a volunteer opportunity in the community. 🍷