



Gail Smyth, CAE
Executive Director, Skills Canada – Ontario

Biography

Gail Smyth is the Executive Director of Skills Canada – Ontario, a not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting careers in the skilled trades and technologies to young people in Ontario.

A tireless champion of this organization and its mandate, Gail has inspired her team and her associates with her “can do” style of leadership. Her career as an advocate for industry and youth began in the community college system in 1985 at Conestoga College in Stratford, Ontario as a community liaison officer. In 1995, assuming the role of cooperative education advisor at the main campus in Kitchener, she worked diligently with business leaders to secure co-op placements for students in such fields as woodworking, robotics, and food and beverage management.

Gail first became involved with Skills Canada—Ontario as a volunteer in 1990, immersing herself in numerous roles and responsibilities. She was appointed Executive Director, a full-time position, in 1997. Since then she has taken a fledgling venture to a dynamic, province-wide organization with headquarters in Kitchener and satellite offices in Ottawa, Peterborough, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Toronto.

In the beginning, two programs were offered across Ontario: the Ontario Technological Skills Competition (OTSC) and cardboard boat races, with a total outreach of approximately 3,000 students.

Today, the Ontario Technological Skills Competition has grown into the largest of its kind in Canada, attracting over 30,000 visitors every year. In fact, so popular is the OTSC with students that seven of the 63 contests require contestants to first earn their eligibility at provincial qualifying competitions. Many other programs have taken flight under Gail’s leadership, such as the highly sought-after in-school presentation “Skills Work!®, What’s Out There,” delivered in both official languages in thousands of affiliated schools. The year-long calendar of events also includes networking dinners for women, a young women’s conference, summer camps for grade 7 and 8 students, and the expanded cardboard boat races, now taking place in several cities across the province.

Skills Canada - Ontario has come a long way from the early days when Gail first took the helm; moving the organization from a budget deficit and a modest mandate to a financially viable venture which now reaches over one million students every year.

As a result of Gail’s vision, the organization has earned such high-level accolades as the Yves Landry Program of the Year Award, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce Outstanding Business Achievement Award for Skills Development, the ICON Program of the Year, and the Partners for Change Award from the Ontario Women’s Directorate. Gail has also received personal recognition for her hard work: In 2002, The National Board of Directors from Skills Canada honoured Gail as the first recipient of the “Contributor of the Year” Award. She has also been appointed as a member of the Minister of Education’s esteemed Curriculum Council in Ontario and the Advisory Board for the newly launched College of Trades in Ontario.

When she isn’t working, Gail enjoys travelling, supporting live theatre, and cooking with her husband Ron. She cherishes time spent with her seven grandchildren, who have inspired a renewed appreciation for turning humble craft supplies into art.