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Merit Canada closer to opening a national office

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Merit Canada is taking the first step towards establishing a national office by appointing a new manager to deal with the rapid growth of their membership in eastern Ontario.

"We are launching the Ontario office now and the national office will be opening in the new year," said Marie Sonnenburg, executive director of Merit Open Shop Contractors of Ontario.

"We will get space in the first quarter, which will be a joint effort between Merit Canada, Merit Ontario and the Pre-Apprenticeship Training (PAT) Institute. Merit Canada will focus on federal political issues and advocacy, while Merit Ontario will focus on membership development, member service, benefit programs and training programs."

Merit Ontario is launching a new office in Ottawa to deal with the rapid growth of members in 2010.

"The Ontario Association has been growing quite rapidly," said Sonnenburg.

"We have grown by almost 40 per cent to 200 companies in Ontario this year. In eastern Ontario, the growth rate has been around 800 per cent, as we went from about two companies to 18 this year."

A kick off meeting for the new office was held on Nov. 16. The groups are hoping to find a permanent home soon.

Nick Kastelick has been transferred from the Toronto office and promoted to the position of eastern Ontario manager as of Dec 1, in order to establish the new office.

The PAT Institute, which is a private career college that offers academic credits to prepare young adults for entry into an apprenticeship, will require the largest share of space in the office.

Sonnenburg said Merit Ontario is preparing for the next provincial election in October 2012, by pushing the Liberal government to restore balance to labour legislation. She argues that the Liberals have been supporting unionized labour through the building trades.

"So, we are supporting the Conservative Party to work on two main issues: apprenticeship ratios and card based certification," said Sonnenburg. "There are no secret ballots in Ontario to vote for union certification. We also want to reduce regulation and red tape."

According to Philip Hochstein, president of the Independent Contractors and Businesses Association, Ontario contractors are facing the same situation that B.C. contractors found themselves in during the 1990's.

"The labour laws are bias, because there is no certification vote and government mandated union only construction," he said. "They have uncompetitive and unproductive work rules around apprenticeship and the ratios of journeymen to apprentices under their collective agreements."

Hochstein said Merit Ontario is getting ready to be part of a province wide change to control government spending and special deals with unions.

"We are just waiting for these forces to be unleashed, in order to create jobs and economic growth," he said.