



# Get out of your comfort zone and try something new

As a recent graduate, mining engineer Nathan Skubovius offers advice about finding ways to enter the mining industry

By Tom DiNardo

**N**athan Skubovius didn't originally plan on pursuing a career in mining. In fact, he first received a diploma in architecture and engineering technologies from Thompson Rivers University. It wasn't until he won a design competition and spent the summer as a drafter at New Gold's New Afton mine, designing buildings for the mine site, that he considered the industry. "I got a lot of encouragement at the mine to return to school for engineering," said Skubovius.

After that experience, he decided to enroll in the mining engineering program at the University of British Columbia. Each summer during his mining degree, Skubovius made a conscious effort to work in a different area of the mining process rather than pigeonhole himself in one domain too early. He spent time as a geologist assistant for Teck Resources' Schaft Creek project, a ventilation engineer and glacier road surveyor at Pretium Resources' Brucejack mine, a land use planning coordinator at the Tahltan Central Government, and a geotechnical engineering assistant at Kutcho Copper.

In 2019, Skubovius became the first member of the Tahltan First Nation (whose territory covers 11 per cent of northern British Columbia, including the communities of Telegraph Creek, Dease Lake and Iskut) to graduate from the Norman B.

Keevil Institute of Mining Engineering at UBC. After graduation, he landed a job in the geotechnical engineering department at Teck's Highland Valley Copper Operations and in July he took on the role of drill and blast engineer.

**CIM: What does it mean to you to be the first Tahltan graduate from UBC's mining engineering program?**

**Skubovius:** I think my success will help pave the way for future Tahltan mining engineers. I am not the first engineer in my community and I think that helped motivate me to pursue an engineering degree. I knew it was possible and I hope that others will see my success and continue their education.

**CIM: Have you done any career mentoring with Tahltan youths?**

**Skubovius:** Through the entrepreneurship program I took at UBC, I came up with the idea of creating a high-school adventure program that would combine adventure, culture and training for Tahltan students with an overarching goal of giving students a passion to pursue a post-secondary degree. I helped to manage and run the program over the last three years, but I took on the roll of sponsorship manager as I transitioned into a full-time job after university.

**CIM: What has that experience meant to you and how has it helped you prepare for your career?**

**Skubovius:** The experience has been very rewarding as I was a program guide each year and was able to help teach the next generation of Tahltan students. I believe that this program will help inspire students to continue their education and I am happy that I can be part of this. Through the process of starting this program, I have learned how to work with others, start a

non-profit and work with a board to make decisions. It has been challenging and definitely a work in progress, but I am happy with the vision the program has and how it is developing. This year, because of COVID-19, we are having our lead guide host guide training to have more guides trained up for next year.

### **CIM: What are your career ambitions?**

**Skubovius:** I'm really keen on being part of the decision-making level of an organization when it comes to designing a new project. I think going forward, I am most excited about project design, with my background in architecture and mining engineering, it's a little bit different than a traditional mindset.

### **CIM: You've held many different positions so far in your early career. What is the connecting thread?**

**Skubovius:** The connecting thread was that it was all different. When I was at New Afton, I got to be good friends with everybody. At that time, they said, "Get as much varied experience as you can, so when you do graduate, you know what direction you want to go in." I had that in my back pocket before I even started applying for jobs, and that's why I really didn't go back to any one company through school.

### **CIM: Did that make it hard for you to sell yourself and your skills in a job interview?**

**Skubovius:** I think I was a little untraditional in how I received jobs because basically I rarely applied to a posting. It was all networking, meeting people and following up by email.

### **CIM: What kind of networking were you doing?**

**Skubovius:** At UBC in Vancouver, you have a massive group of companies that are in such close proximity. When there are events, you have a lot of different companies showing up. Being social, talking to people, finding out where they work and what they do, that was super useful. In Vancouver, you also have the CIM events and you have AME Roundup. Attending all of those, saving business cards, writing what you talked about on the card so that you can go back and email people and bring up the conversation, those are all things that I did to talk to people and find out if there were any job openings in the upcoming summer.

### **CIM: How would you suggest approaching people at a networking event?**

**Skubovius:** I think the biggest thing is to introduce yourself if there's an opening. Try to get somebody to talk about where they work, where they grew up maybe, if it's not too personal, what kind of experiences they've had, or even if they have any recommendations for somebody who's just joining the industry. Then you have them maybe tell a story or something but keep it light and calm and don't be super aggressive.

It was recommended to us to get business cards when we were in school, so early on I got a stack of business cards with the UBC logo on it, my name, and I asked for business cards, I gave business cards. That was a key piece of networking.

### **CIM: What was the most valuable experience that you had at university?**

**Skubovius:** I think it might have been really two classes that I took that were outside the traditional engineering schedule. Those classes were Anthropology 101 and Entrepreneurship

101. Even though these classes were on the other side of campus and I was usually late to them and had to miss some, I think I gained the most world knowledge while I was in those classes. The anthropology class was learning about different cultures all over the world and then the entrepreneurship class really changed my mindset as to how to take an idea, fulfill that idea and really lay it out.

### **CIM: What advice would you give to an eager first year mining engineering student?**

**Skubovius:** Be social. Make sure you're taking part in as many departmental activities as possible. When you start applying for jobs, it's usually your classmates or students in the upper years who work at the places where you're applying, so they're going to be the ones recommending you to people. If they know who you are, usually you get a good recommendation. The other piece of advice is to buy some nice clothing, get some business cards made up and start attending the alumni dinner, the CIM student nights and as many industry functions as possible, including CMP, PDAC, SME, and MINExpo. One more suggestion would be to not be afraid to get out of your comfort zone. Many jobs are located in all parts of the world and you shouldn't really be afraid to try something new.

### **CIM: If you were looking for a job right now during the COVID-19 pandemic, what would be your job search strategy?**

**Skubovius:** Make sure the résumé is updated, make sure LinkedIn is also updated and then really start applying for as many jobs as possible. I think there are ways to use LinkedIn that are really smart. Definitely follow different mining companies you're interested in, but if you can, start finding out who works in HR at the different mines and connect with them because those people usually end up posting jobs on their own personal LinkedIn versus the company one.

With it being such a tough climate right now, if you do get an offer and it's not exactly what you were hoping for, I would probably take it. The industry right now is going through quite the change with people retiring, so there is quite a bit of movement within the engineering offices. You won't have to wait too long for an opening in your field, and ideally you're already there and it's not hard to move offices.

Then linking back to the networking piece, I save most of the business cards I receive. There are notes on the business cards from years ago that I wrote on there. Reach out to those contacts and ask if their company might have an opening or if they might know something or know a company that's looking, and just be on it. Approach getting the job as a job and go for it. 

## MINING MENTORS

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