ECOO-CS Programming Competition

In 2015 The **ECOO programming competition** celebrated its 32nd anniversary. From the first contest that began in 1984 until the most recent contests in 2015, these competitions have brought together "the cream of the crop" of Ontario secondary school computer science programming teams.

The *Educational Computing Organization of Ontario* (ECOO) sponsors several special interest groups. Among them the *Special Interest Group for Computer Science Teachers* (ECOO-CS). There is some history behind the ECOO computer programming contests, some in the archives of previous editions of ECOO's quarterly, *Output* and some in the archives of the minds of current ECOO-CS members.

In the spring of 1984, *Touche-Ross* of Detroit invited ECOO's Special Interest group *ECOO SIG-CS* to co-sponsor a Computer Programming Contest. Sixteen teams from across Ontario participated. The top six teams competed in the finals held at the 6th ECOO conference. Newtonbrook SS in North York was the winner, and advanced, as Ontario's representative in Detroit at the North American Championships where they finished second.

In 1985, 26 teams, representing 26 boards of education, entered the playoffs in Burlington in which the 10 finalists went on to compete at the ECOO Conference in Toronto. **Paul Rehak** (pictured on right) of Scott Park SS in Hamilton organized the contests in 1984 and 1985.

In 1986 ECOO SIG-CS decided to continue the contest with **Doug McDougal** (photo on the left) organizing the event. Each team consisted of four students, with at least one student in Grades 10 and 11. One team was allowed per board of education and twenty-two teams participated at the regional level. The teams were asked to solve four programming questions. The entry fee was $10.00 per team and the top 10 teams met in the finals. Contests were traditionally held at area high schools with the finals at a central location in the Toronto area.

In 1989 and 1990 the finals were held at the Ontario Science Centre. In 1990, *Watcom International*, a Waterloo based company that supplied programming and information tools to scientific and engineering markets worldwide, donated a trophy. *THE WATCOM TROPHY* (photo at right) has been awarded "For Programming Excellence" to the provincial computer programming champions since 1990. The trophy proudly displays the team champions from 1990 until 2003.

In the first ten years of the contest, the computer programming languages that were used by teams at the contests, were *QBASIC, Watcom BASIC and Watcom PASCAL*. Input was entered either by keyboard, or, in the case of QBASIC, input data was inserted in the first couple of lines of the program itself. Programs were copied on floppy disks and submitted to the judges, and tested on the judges' machines. The programming contests evolved over the next ten years, under the leadership of **Bob Baron** (London CDSB) and others.

In 1995 students could choose their own programming language, and have their program tested on their own computer. Test data now came in the form of a text file on floppy disk.

Over the next ten years the programming contest expanded under the leadership of **Roy Parteno** (Dufferin-Peel CDSB), **John Ketelaars** (Toronto DSB) and **Kim O'Halloran** (University of Toronto). Before this time large boards were assumed to have their own internal contest, and send the winners (usually two teams) to the regional contest that was held in various places.

In 2000 the ECOO SIG-CS name was shortened to ECOO-CS. The special interest group now made available a set of contest questions for the use of the School boards, thereby officially creating three levels of competition. This set was made available for free to any convenor of the Board who was a member of ECOO. ECOO, the parent organization of ECOO-CS supported the programming contest financially.

The regional contest in the West was consistently a school in London. The central region was held in a school in the greater Toronto area, such as in Peel region, York region or one of the Toronto cities. In the East, the traditional place was Duncan McArthur Teachers College in Kingston, but once or twice in Ottawa, and at least once in Cornwall.

In 2004 several changes were made to ECOO-CS and the programming contest. Under incoming president **Will Sentjens** (London Catholic DSB, see picture on left) and secretary-treasurer **Ron English** (formerly Saint Andrew's College) a partnership was developed with York University, University of Western Ontario and McArthur College. The **York University trophy** replaced the **Watcom trophy**.

During this time also, ECOO reorganized itself and did away with membership fees. It also changed the date of its convention from the spring to the fall. ECOO could no longer subsidize its special interest groups and ECOO-CS was on its own.

ECOO-CS continued to grow in under the tenure of **Ron McKenzie** (Greater Essex County DSB) who became president of ECOO-CS in 2008. In 2012 **John Ketelaars** retired from setting contest questions, having written over 150 original programming problems over 13 years. This position was taken over by **Dr. Sam Scott** and his team from Sheridan College.

For over ten years, **Will Sentjens** had been regional coordinator In London, and **Chris Kulenkamp** in Kingston. The Eastern branch of ECOO-CS has had a great supporter in **Dr. William Egnatoff** of Duncan McArthur College in Kingston who until his retirement in 2014 provided the venue for the Eastern Regional contest and **Richard Lindley** of Queens University who provided a venue for years acted as convenor for three eastern Boards of Education.

The 2015 winners, Don Mills CI, with coach Helen Strelkovska (left) and president Dr. David Stermole (right)

Under the direction of **Dr. David Stermole** (retired, TDSB) over 1600 students participated in the Round 1 contest (formerly Board-wide contest) in 2015, sending over 100 teams to the Round 2 contest in London, Oakville's Sheridan College and Kingston.