

A career in politics

by Heidi Riley

CAREER PATH

Robert Ghiz became the youngest Premier in Canada at the age of 33. He recently sat down with students from Charlottetown Rural High School and answered questions about the path his professional life has taken so far.

Q: Where did you go to school?

A: "I grew up in Charlottetown, and attended school at West Kent Elementary, Queen Charlotte, and then Colonel Gray High School, where I was in one of the first French Immersion classes.

"I had a wide range of interests and I got involved in many different things. I played clarinet in the band, I participated in Student Council and in school plays, and I was on basketball, badminton, and volleyball teams. I think it's important to be a well-rounded person. The more things you open your eyes to, the better off you will be."

"After high school, I planned to become a lawyer. I attended **Bishops University** in Quebec and started out by pursuing an English degree. But my interests changed, and I ended up with a Political Science degree."

Q: How did you get your start in politics?

"After earning my degree in 1996, I went back to PEI not knowing exactly what I wanted to do. At the age of 22 in 1997, I volunteered to work on a federal election campaign, and had the opportunity to meet **Sheila Copps**, who was the Deputy Prime Minister at the time.

"I had been reading and learning as much as I could about politics, and I built up the courage to ask her about an issue that I had read about. I ended up getting a job in her office in Ottawa. It was a junior position, and it paid \$35,000 per year. At 23, I was nervous about this new opportunity, but I learned as I went.

I left my job on Parliament Hill on good terms, and at age 25 was offered a job as a Manager of Government Affairs for the Bank of Nova Scotia, a job I held for three years. I felt I was in over my head at first, but I learned on the job. The job involved long hours and a great deal of commuting, but it was a great opportunity for someone like me, because I was single with no major responsibilities. I later became the Prime Minister's advisor for Atlantic Canada, and moved back to PEI.

"In 2002, the Liberal Party of PEI was looking for a leader. Though I thought that at 29 my young age would be a hindrance, I quit my job to run for the leadership. I had no dependents, so it was a good time for me to take a chance. I was the Leader of the Opposition for four years, and I've been Premier since May 2007."

Q: What do you enjoy about your job?

A: "Although I was nervous coming into each new job, my job as Premier is the one I feel most comfortable in. My years in Opposition prepared me for this job. It's challenging, rewarding, and different every day. However, it's not a job for everyone. You need to be thick-skinned, and not let criticism bother you, or you won't enjoy what you're doing."

"I could be at a meeting or working on policy or attending an event every hour of the day. It is a matter of balancing all these things. My phone rings at all hours, and I often have to deal with some really tough issues.

Q: How do you handle the criticism that comes with a public job?

A: "The media and the Opposition look for the negative in every issue, and don't acknowledge good decisions. As a politician, I need to sell myself and my decisions in order to get re-elected. We will make some mistakes. As a government, we sometimes have to take the hits.



Premier Robert Ghiz talked to Charlottetown Rural High School students at Career Day in November.

"It's impossible to make everyone happy all the time. Every decision we make could annoy someone. To counteract all that, a stable personal life is very important. When I come home after a long day, I have the support of my wife. She loves me no matter what."

Q: How much do politicians make?

A: "At present, an MLA on PEI makes about \$65,000 per year. Cabinet Ministers and the Leader of the Opposition make about \$110,000, and the Premier makes about \$130,000 per year. PEI politicians are the lowest-paid in Canada."

Q: How would I begin a career in politics?

A: "First, get involved in a political party. Look for a party that stands for what you believe in. It's easy to get involved. At the age of 14, you can join a provincial party.

"Volunteer to work on an election campaign. This will help you meet people. Deliver flyers, knock on doors, or help manage a campaign."

Q: What advice do you have for people deciding on a career?

- Be a well-rounded person. Having a broad range of knowledge and experience is the best preparation for life. Learn languages, and participate in everything. There are lots of opportunities out there.
- Don't burn any bridges, and treat everyone with courtesy. You never know what friendships may help you in the future.
- Even if you are an introvert, try to be outgoing, and take opportunities to speak in front of a crowd. It may be tough at first and you may feel sick to your stomach, but the more you do it, the easier it will be. You will gain more confidence.
- Get a college or university education. The knowledge economy is huge, and there are jobs out there. PEI's opportunities in Aerospace and Healthcare are endless. Jobs for nurses, doctors, psychologists, trades people, accountants, and scientists are in demand. Even if you know what career you want to pursue, keep an open mind and don't close any doors.
- There is no perfect job, and there will always be good and bad days. Nothing in life is great all the time. Pick a career based on what you like to do, and what you find rewarding and enjoyable.

The employment scene on PEI

Check the Inside Out



PEI's economic forecast for 2009 _____ 4

High schools help students make career decisions _____ 5

Parents & teachers play an important role in students' career decisions _____ 5

High school student Noelle Smith _____ 5

Showcasing more than 90 careers at Charlottetown Rural High School _____ 6-7

Employment options in trades and technology _____ 8-9

Take Our Kids to Work Day: Aerospace _____ 10

Trade Essentials: Roger Kelly _____ 11

Opening doors in the IT profession: Alet Pieterse _____ 12

Video game design: Nick McKinnon _____ 12

Self Employment: Rhéal Repairs & Renovations _____ 13

Family trucking business: Thomas M. Carver _____ 13

Transition Expo: PEI Council of People with Disabilities _____ 14

Assistive Technology: Catherine Llwyd _____ 14

Adult Education Montague: Lorna Larocque, Gary Bellefontaine _____ 15

Adult Education Morell: Kelsey MacDonald _____ 15

Calendar of Events _____ 16