



## Companies join force to fast track unskilled employees

At the end of 2006, Cerro Vanguardia, Sandvik, Minera Santa Cruz, Manatíal Espejo (Triton) and Mina Martha (Coeur), four mining companies and a service supplier operating in Santa Cruz Province, joined forces to develop a new initiative to train local unskilled employees. The need arose in the context of a global mining skills shortage, and particularly the dearth of qualified mining employees in Santa Cruz Province, which has become a significant mining centre. While the province covers the largest area of land in Argentina (located at the southern end of Patagonia) it has a small population of only 200,000 inhabitants and suffers from a lack of major economic activity.

The companies identified different training stages for new employees. The first and common need identification process resulted in the development of an 11-day course which the local university, University of Patagonia (UNPA), was asked to present. The UNPA was very responsive to the request, assisting with the rapid design of the programme and, by April 2007, the first group of employees has started their training.

The programme involved eight courses (undertaken between April and November 2007) for aspiring mining company employees. Each course included theoretical and practical classes, and culminated in a visit to Cerro Vanguardia. The course comprises 11 modules, covering aspects such as mining and sustainable development; safety and environment, communication, applied mathematics and basic geometry, physics and chemistry, labour relations, computer science, measurement, map reading, general and specific tool handling, managing and maintaining equipment.

Cerro Vanguardia has actively contributed to the programme by sponsoring a teacher, visits to its facilities and the donation of a hydraulic teaching module. Based on the speed at which the programme was put together, the programme is called "Fast Track". A total of 151 students attended the programme from all the companies during 2007, 52 from Cerro Vanguardia. A further 30 employees are expected to participate in 2008. The total cost of the programme to Cerro Vanguardia during the year was \$15,000.

A second training initiative will begin during 2008, focusing on technical skills training to prepare employees for the maintenance of mining equipment. Cerro Vanguardia changed its operational structure in 2006 to undertake owner-mining, so this is an important skills set for the company.

