

Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences Embarks on New Phase



Groundbreaking in Port Alberni, BC

For long-time NIDMAR Board members, the creation of the new Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences is the culmination of a decades old dream. With the support of three levels of government in Canada, the new degree-granting university has embarked on a strategy to deliver "Excellence in Destination Education." On September 24, 2009, government officials, NIDMAR principals, and a group of enthusiastic supporters attended the official groundbreaking ceremony in Port Alberni, British Columbia, marking the next step in a four-year journey to bring the global center of excellence to fruition.

Wearing yellow hard hats and brandishing brand new shovels, a number of dignitaries instrumental to the creation of Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences (PCU) turned the soil at an afternoon ground breaking ceremony at the university's 3.5 acre site in Port Alberni. Local media from print, radio and television covered the landmark event as a group of about 40 individuals gathered to commemorate the occasion.

Dr. James Lunney, MP, Alberni-Nanaimo, noted, "This is not only a Port Alberni story; it's a national and international success story coming right out of the Alberni Valley." He added, "This will keep people employed in tough economic times."

Scott Fraser, MLA, Alberni-Pacific Rim, set off a cheer when he said, "Port Alberni is about to become a university town." He continued, "This is a big gain, not just for Port Alberni, but for the whole world."

Photo taken September 24, 2009 – L to R: Viateur Camiré, NIDMAR Co-Chair and fr. Vice President Human Resources, Abitibi Bowater; Dr. James Lunney, MP Alberni-Nanaimo; Mayor Ken McRae, City of Port Alberni; Ken Neumann, NIDMAR Co-Chair and Canadian National Director, United Steelworkers; Scott Fraser, MLA Alberni-Pacific Rim; Judy Geary, NIDMAR Board Member and Vice President, WSIB of Ontario; and Brian Payne, NIDMAR Board Member and Project Manager.

Port Alberni Mayor Ken McRae talked about the 21 years he had spent in union halls and gave credit to the people involved in local labour organizations who had taken an active part in helping create the new institution. He noted the contributions of the late Henry Nedergard, a founding director of NIDMAR and a former health and safety director of IWA Local 1-85, and of Brian Payne, NIDMAR co-founder and past president of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada.

Mayor McRae summed up by saying, "We've got something the world doesn't have and we'll be bringing people here from all over the world."

This point was also made by Ken Neumann, national director of the United Steelworkers and NIDMAR labour co-chair, who said that if Canada hadn't developed the university, the German Workers' Compensation Board had already expressed an interest in picking up the concept.

He also cited the sad statistic that about 1,000 workers are killed each year in Canada. "The statistics are alarming. On top of that, 60 percent of people with disabilities live below the poverty line."

Of PCU, he said, "It's a victory for government and workers in Canada – and for workers around the world – that we had the opportunity to build a world-renowned university in Port Alberni. There are so many to credit from the federal government for funding and all the politicians who pushed it." He also cited NIDMAR's Wolfgang Zimmermann for being an outstanding spokesperson for disabled workers and for working tenaciously to provide them with the same opportunities in life as everyone else.

With the ground officially broken for the university, MLA Scott Fraser's final comment reflected the enthusiastic mood of the audience, "We look forward to balloons and the ribbon-cutting in 2011."

That celebration may come even sooner. Brian Payne, who has been appointed project manager on behalf of NIDMAR, said the construction tender process would begin as early as December 2009 and that the building must be completed by December 2010.

In the meantime, this issue of the *Bulletin*, now takes a reflective look back at the many milestones along the way that contributed to the successful creation of PCU.



*Photo taken April 15, 2005 – L to R:
Ida Chong, BC Minister of Advanced
Education; Wolfgang Zimmermann, Executive
Director of NIDMAR; and Gillian Trumper,
MLA Alberni-Qualicum*

NIDMAR sets sights on new university

The first step toward establishing the university was taken on April 15, 2005 when British Columbia Advanced Education Minister Ida Chong, Alberni-Qualicum MLA Gillian Trumper and NIDMAR Executive Director Wolfgang Zimmermann signed a Memorandum of Understanding to establish a new global centre of excellence and degree-granting educational institution. The world class institution would focus on occupational health and safety, disability management and rehabilitation education.

The signing of the agreement followed months of negotiations with government. Initial support for the proposal came from key business, labour and government leaders across Canada and around the world.

At the signing, Minister Chong declared, "We will support the institution by providing technical assistance in establishing it as a private degree-granting institution in the province of British Columbia."



*Photo taken May 25, 2006 – L to R:
Trevor James, NIDMAR Board Member and
Vice President Human Resources, Canfor;
Jerri New, NIDMAR Board Member and
President of the Canadian Office and
Professional Employees Union; Mike Rushby,
NIDMAR Co-Chair and Vice President
Human Resources, Weyerhaeuser; Wolfgang
Zimmermann, Executive Director of NIDMAR;
Dr. James Lunney, MP Alberni-Nanaimo;
Ron Cantelon, MLA Nanaimo-Parksville; and
Scott Fraser, MLA Alberni-Qualicum*

Proposed university receives grant

Just over a year after the Memorandum of Understanding was signed with the Province, Western Economic Diversification Canada announced on May 25, 2006 an investment of \$47,500 to NIDMAR to develop a business strategy for the proposed world's first special purpose, degree-granting educational institution dedicated to occupational health and safety, disability management and rehabilitation studies.

Together with matching funds from NIDMAR, the funding was slated for development of a business strategy to determine workplace safety and occupational health priorities through a national consensus obtained from leading employer, labour and government organizations.

At the same time, Ron Cantelon, MLA, Nanaimo-Parksville, announced that he would bring a private bill forward by the next parliamentary session, adding the premier of British Columbia had given his unequivocal endorsement to the university initiative.

Scott Fraser, as the MLA for Alberni where NIDMAR got its start, expressed pride and added that he would be honoured to second a bill supporting the new global centre of excellence.

Further support at the event came from Jerri New, president of the Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union (COPE) and from Trevor James, vice-president of human resources for Canfor, who in praising the initiative said, "This is a natural and right evolution for NIDMAR."



University initiative passes major hurdle

On May 14, 2007, the *Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences Act*, proposed and advocated by NIDMAR, passed third and final reading in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia with unanimous bi-partisan support.

The university, intended to be a leading global educational and research centre, would use an interdisciplinary approach to the critical issues associated with the lifelong workplace health cycle – health and safety, return to work and disability management, and rehabilitation, all of which are underpinned by international instruments as follows:

- Occupational health and safety – *International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on Health and Safety*
- Return to work and disability management – *ILO Code of Practice on Managing Disability in the Workplace*
- Rehabilitation/disability studies – *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*

Introduced as a private bill by MLA Ron Cantelon and seconded by MLA Scott Fraser, the initiative was a true bi-partisan effort.

Cantelon said that supporting the university seems to happen automatically once people are aware of the status quo. “Three hundred thousand people in BC are of working age, but 55 percent of them are not in the workforce....they are just not working when they could be.”

Supporting the bill on behalf of the official opposition, Fraser explained, “Passing this bill represents the formal dismissing of partisanship between labour and industry....This kind of example was already laid out for us. There is a unity factor that seems to come with NIDMAR. We see it at the level of the board of directors – it’s cooperation between groups that don’t always see eye-to-eye on issues, and they’ve obviously all come together on this.”

NIDMAR’s Wolfgang Zimmermann noted that from its inception, the university had enjoyed an ever-increasing number of key supporters, whether they’re front-line workers, executives or key decision-makers from across all stakeholder groups and the political spectrum in Canada and around the world. “Consensus has been key all along, and will continue to be essential as we move forward. All of the proponents involved have recognized the value and potential impact of this initiative, while advocating its goals and objectives,” he concluded.

Photo taken April 25, 2007 on first reading of the Bill – L to R:

Claude Richmond, Minister of Employment and Income Assistance; Scott Fraser, MLA Alberni-Qualicum; Ken Neumann, NIDMAR Co-Chair and Canadian National Director United Steelworkers; Wolfgang Zimmermann, Executive Director of NIDMAR; Lee Coonfer, Director of Public Affairs for Canfor; Ron Cantelon, MLA Nanaimo-Parksville; and Murray Coell, Minister of Advanced Education



Photo taken August 6, 2009 – with an aerial view of the land being donated by the City of Port Alberni – L to R:

Mayor Ken McRae, City of Port Alberni; Dr. James Lunney, MP Nanaimo-Alberni; Wolfgang Zimmermann, Executive Director of NIDMAR; and Scott Fraser, MLA Alberni-Pacific Rim

University a go for Port Alberni

Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences cleared two more hurdles during the summer of 2009 with a major announcement by the government of Canada and a significant donation of land by the City of Port Alberni.

With the announcement of a \$1.65 million grant from the Canadian federal government under its Knowledge Infrastructure Program, MP Dr. James Lunney joined NIDMAR principals and the City of Port Alberni in celebrating the news that was officially announced by Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper on August 5, 2009.

“It is particularly satisfying to me to see this project established on Vancouver Island and in the city of its origin after years of advocacy,” said Dr. Lunney. “Pacific Coast University will ensure Canada’s leadership role is recognized and will be a hub for improving services to injured workers around the world for years to come.”

The City of Port Alberni donated a 3.5-acre parcel of land with spectacular views of Mount Arrowsmith and Vancouver Island’s Beaufort Mountain Range. “This is a big day for us. We’ve been involved with this for a long time,” said Port Alberni Mayor Ken McRae. “This is where it was born. It started right here in Port Alberni.”

Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences will be a special purpose university primarily focused on a combination of distance learning and on site delivery, targeting professionals in the human resources and occupational health field who also have an additional involvement in disability management and return to work, and are keen to see value added education and certification in this field as an opportunity.

While the current architectural design is for a \$3.3 million, 12,000 square foot learning centre, new fundraising efforts could see it increase to 15,000 square feet with future expansions after that. Architect Peter Ridgway of TRB Architecture, who is responsible for designing the building, explained it will be built to LEED Gold environmental standards. The cedar clad building will include a distinctive water feature, six classrooms, a 100-person lecture hall and room for 18 offices.

With construction now underway, NIDMAR’s executive director Wolfgang Zimmermann already sees a timely, crucial need that PCU can help meet. “We have soldiers coming back from Afghanistan now with physical injuries and psychological problems. We hear about the soldiers who are killed, but we don’t hear much about those who are seriously injured. And often we don’t think about the huge number of those who return with post-traumatic stress disorder. Programs at the university will help workers from all occupations.”