



Proposed university receives grant for strategy



From left: Trevor James, vice-president, human resources, Canfor; Jerrri New, president, Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union; Mike Rushby, vice-president, human resources, Weyerhaeuser; Wolfgang Zimmermann, executive director, NIDMAR; Dr. James Lunney, MP, Alberni-Nanaimo; Ron Cantelon, MLA, Nanaimo-Parksville; Scott Fraser, MLA, Alberni-Qualicum.

VANCOUVER: On May 25, Western Economic Diversification Canada announced an investment of \$47,500 to NIDMAR to develop a business strategy for its proposed Pacific Coast University for Workplace Health Sciences. The university will be the world's first special-purpose degree-granting institution dedicated to occupational health and safety, disability management and rehabilitation education.

Dr. James Lunney, MP, Alberni-Nanaimo made the announcement on behalf of National Revenue and Western Economic Diversification Minister Carol Skelton.

Together with \$42,500 from NIDMAR, the funding will go towards developing a business strategy to determine workplace safety and occupational education priorities through a national consensus from key employer, labour and government organizations.

Between 900 and 1,000 workers are killed on the job annually in Canada, and about 24,000 permanent disabilities occur every year. Canadians living with disabilities face an annual hiring rate of only one per cent, and 55 per cent live below the poverty line. Aimed at changing these grim statistics, the university and centre of excellence will serve as an information hub for workplace health and safety in B.C., providing education, and benefiting all Canadians.

Ron Cantelon, MLA, Nanaimo-Parksville announced that he will bring a private bill forward by the next parliamentary session, and assured his continued support, adding that the premier has given his direct, personal and unequivocal support to this initiative.

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

Also present was Jerrri New, president, Canadian Office and Professional Employees Union (COPE), who talked about how labour took a leadership role in developing the Code of Practice for Disability Management leading to a global *Code of practice on managing disability in the workplace* which has now been translated into 30 languages.

Mike Rushby, Weyerhaeuser's vice-president of human resources and employer co-chair of NIDMAR recalled that when he spoke in Brazil on behalf of NIDMAR, at least 15 people came up to him afterward asking how they could participate in the education program – evidence that there is a need for education programs and a centre to focus on this area.

Trevor James, vice-president, human resources, Canfor also voiced his company's support of the initiative, saying that this is a natural and right evolution for NIDMAR.

The funding comes one year after signing a memorandum of understanding between NIDMAR and the provincial government. Gillian Trumper, former mayor of Port Alberni and MLA, was instrumental in establishing the memorandum of understanding. ■