

TOP BRASS, POLITICIANS ATTEND DEW PICNIC

CEO says company poised to provide lasting employment in Miramichi for years to come

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Amid the pony rides and petting zoos of the annual DEW Engineering Ltd. company picnic yesterday, an interesting cast of political and corporate power players were conspicuous by their presence at the Miramichi facility. DEW CEO Timothy Dear was joined by Minister of State for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency Keith Ashfield, Miramichi MP Tilly O'Neill-Gordon, and John K. Coors, CEO of Colorado-based ceramics firm CoorsTek and member of the vaunted Coors brewing family. As to how they all ended up at the same party, Ashfield shrugged off any suggestion that the visit was political in nature, saying that it was merely a coincidence.

The company, operating in Miramichi since 1994, manufactures lightweight armour plating and also restores armoured military vehicles which are used in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The armour is designed to withstand the impact of roadside bombs.

The provincial government presented the company with \$600,000 in forgivable loans last December.

DEW was acquired by CoorsTek in a deal last summer and is now a subsidiary of the company which, in turn, is a subsidiary of the Adolph Coors Company, whose other holdings include the Molson Coors Brewing Company.

"I thought this was a great opportunity for me to come over to the Miramichi and look at the new facility," Ashfield said. "ACOA has had some investment in DEW over the years and one of my goals as minister is to try and get around to as many clients as I can. Ashfield toured the converted air hangar that serves as the company's base of operations, and praised Dear for his long-standing commitment to providing meaningful employment to the Miramichi. Gesturing to the carnival-like atmosphere that was arranged for employees and their families -- which included face-painting, raffles, games, live music, and a barbecue -- Ashfield said it's clear that DEW isn't your average engineering firm. "There aren't a lot of companies that do this for their workers," he said. "They're committed to their people. They like the workforce here, and if you find the type of combination that features a state-of-the-art facility, workforce, and good people, it's pretty hard to beat."

Dear, who is based at company headquarters in Ottawa, said it was important for both him and Coors to attend the company picnic, adding that having Ashfield and O'Neill-Gordon present was an added bonus. The CEO said the reputation and skill of his Miramichi workforce has helped DEW to secure contracts and build a lasting rapport with clients in the aerospace and defence sectors around the world.

He said the company was honoured for its quality armour development last year by American defence conglomerate General Dynamics as its supplier of the year, something he called 'an amazing accomplishment' in the face of competition from several other suppliers around the globe. On the vehicle refurbishment side of DEW's Miramichi operation, Dear said the accolades have been just as consistent. "The compliments that we've received from the original manufacturer of the vehicle has stated that the vehicles come off as good or better than they did the first time around, so that speaks to the top-notch employees in the Miramichi."

With the uncertain futures of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Dear said he's optimistic the company will be able to adapt to whatever contracts are needed. He said he sees a thriving DEW Engineering remaining in Miramichi well into the distant future. "The key about the employ is that it's flexible; we've done the Leopard Tank here, we've done the armoured vehicle re-life, we've done the Bison (armoured personnel carrier), we make armour for New Zealand, the United States, and Canada," he said, "So whether it's in ceramic technologies or other vehicle programs that Canada's looking to embark on, there will be a role in that for Miramichi." DEW Engineering employs an average of about 200 staff in Miramichi, with the numbers varying depending on the number of contracts that have been secured.

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