

The Working Forest

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Forest High

School forestry program sparks interest

BY JESSE THOMAS

Only three years ago Norwood District High School (NDHS) near Peterborough, Ontario was on the verge of permanent closure due to lack of enrolment. Being inventive Bill Mitchell, NDHS' former Vice Principal, supported by Principal Leigh Facey-Crowther, sparked an idea that led to the pilot for the Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program, now in its second year.

"Mitchell had run a natural resource management course at his previous high school so the concept of running a forestry program evolved from that. Over the next year Mitchell and I began to conceptualize the program, draft a curriculum and mass resources," Mike Burke, Technical Department Head, Forestry Technology at NDHS said.

Enrolment numbers for Norwood District High School were expected to fall this year, but surprisingly numbers rose significantly with the introduction of new innovative programs such as Forestry.

NDHS' original aim was to simply keep kids in school. Now the SHSM which used to be more of a workplace program will expand this year to encompass college and university bound students. Due to programs such as the SHSM, enrolment at the school has stabilized.

"Fleming College, Lakehead University, Confederation College and Algonquin College will most likely be the first to get onboard. The major goal is continual awareness of the advantages of the SHSM curriculum," he said.

The program has received unimaginable support across the board. Burke said the Forestry industry welcomed the course. Due to the amount of success the course has had thus far, coupled with data that has been accumulated through MNR surveys and studies showing a great need for forestry courses like this, industry has been able to see the value of

the program and support is growing.

"What we have created here is a unique pathway not only for students who wish to continue education in college or university but for youth who will graduate high school and go straight to the workforce," Burke said.

"SHSM offers a better transition between school and the workforce. Students get the certification they need; they obtain a broad knowledge of forestry skills ranging from silvicultural and forest sustainability (a resounding favourite among students) to working with machinery or learning the ropes of managing a forest company, and so much more" he continued.

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Continued on page 2

school forestry program

Continued from page 1

High school students will have documentation on their diploma and a permanent transcript stating they have successfully completed this specialty course.

Burke pointed out, "If we are to maintain a successful forestry course we must have high standards. Noting the specialty course on a student's record is very

effective and appealing to the forest industry. The course has gone beyond our expectations and we are expecting great results from province-wide initiative."

In addition to existing government funding, many people and organizations continue to donate to and assist with the program. One of the most valuable contributors to this program was Peter Schleifenbaum, owner of Haliburton Forest and Wildlife Preserve (60,000 acres).

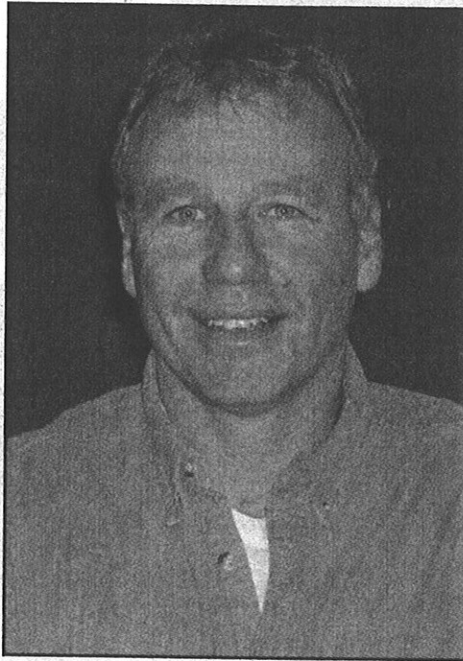
"We asked Tembec what the requirements are to hire someone to work in the bush and they said six months experience. Amazingly, Schleifenbaum immediately said alright I'll give the kids a six month co-op and bought a skidder, skid-steer, a work truck and hired a logger to work with 20 students."

Burke continued, "Furthermore, he takes our top three students from SHSM and allows them to log for credits instead of pay for three additional weeks. They stay

in cabins at the site and get first hand life experience working as a crew."

Burke reflected on how the course has transformed students, "There was one student that was at serious risk of not graduating, but by the end of the second year, he made a complete turn around, completed the SHSM course and went straight into the workforce with a cut and skidder operation in the North. This course is a way of teaching that is slightly different from traditional methods and it is motivating students like never before."

The biggest reason for the program's success is because it was turned into a provincial initiative not just a local concern.



Mike Burke

"Steve Wilkins, Provincial stewardship coordinator said the program will be at NDHS regardless so let's make this big and take it to the next level, and the province is supporting a breakthrough program for the forest industry that NDHS will continue to benefit from," Burke said.

The forestry program will become an official course code, available to high schools across Ontario.

Lumber Market Report

From: Random Lengths updated Dec 8, 2006

KD Western S-P-F #2&Btr 2x4 R/L Mill Price	\$237
KD Eastern S-P-F #1&2 2x4 R/L, delivered Great Lakes	\$320
North Central 7/16-inch Oriented Strand Board	\$155

All prices in US funds. Prices based on 1000 board feet