



## History of the “Forest Capital of Canada” Designation

Every year around this time most Canadians look excitedly to the forest for a hint that spring is here once again. For some of us, the budding leaves might be the most wondrous sight and for others perhaps it is the sound of leaves fluttering in the wind that we yearn to hear. Regardless of the season, forests play an incredible role for all of us and it is crucial that we are actively involved with them in a healthy, wise, and sustainable manner. It is for this reason that the Canadian Forestry Association (CFA), established in 1900, dedicated its legacy to bringing awareness and recognition to forest ecosystems and associated water and wildlife. The CFA has strived to ensure that the many regions and communities in Canada involved in the forest sector have had an opportunity to be honoured for their own forest legacies. In 1979, a national initiative to celebrate and recognize a community or a region for its connectivity to the forest began when Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan was honoured as the first Forest Capital of Canada.

The Forest Capital of Canada campaign is often accompanied by a series of events, shows, tours, and community attractions that are hugely successful at drawing out large crowds. Dave Lemkay, General Manager of the CFA, was first hired to manage the Forest Capital of Canada campaign in 1984 when the Upper Ottawa Valley held the title. This was the first year that the campaign stretched out for the full year. Dave reminisces, “our public appearances were always in costume of a sort, with vests and top hats to resemble the Valley’s legendary timber barons.” That year, the “Shanty Trouper”, a 12-person theatrical group that performed original musical plays was formed. To this day the Valley’s Stone Fence Theatre and Odyssey Theatre in Ottawa have shared roots with this theatrical group.

This year the Town of Whitecourt and Woodlands County carry the Forest Capital of Canada title proudly. Whitecourt is in central Alberta,

approximately 177 km northwest of Edmonton at the confluence of four waterways—the Athabasca, McLeod and Sakwatamau rivers and Beaver Creek. This Alberta region has a rich history of connectivity with the forest. Although originally the few settlers in the area were heavily involved in the fur trade, as the community grew small-scale sawmills were established. By the year 1910, more and more settlers arrived, mail began flowing into the area and the town was officially named. December 1921 was marked with a catalytic event when the first train steamed into town; suddenly, local timber producers had access to a wider Canadian market. With the introduction of the rail came major changes to Whitecourt and forestry quickly developed a strong foothold in the local economy: “Forestry was and still is a major component of the industrial development around Whitecourt” says John Dahl, President of Whitecourt and District

Heritage Society for 33 years, curator of the Forest Interpretive Centre, and former mayor of Whitecourt.

The Whitecourt and District Heritage Society plays an important role in honouring the region’s rich history. The Forest Interpretive Centre was a long-held dream for the Society; the first whisperings of this project manifested sometime in 1985 and the Centre was officially opened in 2000. The building was constructed using local wood products and without accumulating any debt for the community, largely due to contributions from local industry such as Millar Western, Blue-Ridge Lumber and the Alberta Newsprint Company. It is now an important piece of infrastructure for the town, boasting a multi-media gallery and interpretive trails that explore the role of forests in the local area.

For anyone interested in learning more about the detailed history of Whitecourt and Woodlands County area, the Society is publishing *White-*



Welcome to Whitecourt and Woodlands County, Forest Capital of Canada for 2013!

court: *A History 1975–2010* that will be available in a few months. Among many other things, the book records a unique tree that was discovered in 1949 when the massive Bear Creek forest fire passed through north of the town. Although not many people know its whereabouts, there is a Tamarack about 97.5 cms (39 inches) in diameter and

approximately 135 years old that narrowly escaped the heat of the blaze. To John Dahl, this tree is part of the heritage of Whitecourt.

The Canadian Forestry Association congratulates the Town of Whitecourt and Woodlands County residents for their dedication and energy in supporting their local economy and sustaining

their forested landscape and ecosystems through sustainable forest management practices.

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## PRACTITIONERS' CORNER ❖ LA RUBRIQUE DES PROFESSIONNELS

# Classroom and Teaching Resources for Forest Practitioners

We are often asked to visit classrooms and talk about what it is that we do out in the forests. These invitations may come from friends or strangers, for high school and elementary school ages, and be in conjunction with career fairs, environmental days, National Forest week, or some other event—or just out of the blue. As professionals, we are trained to a high standard in a variety of disciplines within the industry. However we may not always be knowledgeable about how to transfer this information to young people in a classroom setting. While it is ideal to be able to take youth out to the woods—whether to an active harvesting site or to the local park—it is not always practical or possible to break out of the classroom. However, there are many resources to help bring the forest to the classroom including: teaching kits; samples and specimens; and pictures, videos and other multi-media. And one should never forget about the power of storytelling!

### Teaching Resources

Whether one is looking for electronic or print materials, there is a plethora of information available online regarding forests and forestry. The following links are some that are particularly useful:

- One of the best resources available is the *Forest Teaching Kit* series produced by the Canadian Forestry Association (CFA). These booklets have a variety of activities for children of all ages. Each of the eight booklets concentrates on a theme, such as *The Boreal Forest* or *Forests and Wetlands*, and is available in French and English. There are a vari-



Andrea Ellis Nsiah and Matt Meade at the Eco Mentors Conference in Ottawa.

ety of individual, partner, and group exercises provided, divided between those for outdoor learning and those for inside the classroom. Other than the postage costs the kits are free and one can choose to order them in any denomination. They are also available as pdfs on the CFA Web site at [www.canadianforestry.com/kits](http://www.canadianforestry.com/kits).

- At the CIF/IFC's *Think Forests!* there are several multi-media presentations aimed at informing students about forestry and forest careers. These can be accessed at [www.cif-ifc.org/site/thinkforests](http://www.cif-ifc.org/site/thinkforests).
- Tree Canada has a variety of resources at [www.treecanada.ca](http://www.treecanada.ca), including an interactive exploration into the Trees of Canada, Tree Trivia, and information on Tree Killers (forest pests and invasive species).
- For information on old forest ecosystems and values, the Royal BC Museum *Living Landscapes* has pre-

pared an “Old Forest Ecosystem” study unit available at [www.livinglandscapes.bc.ca/cbasin/oldgrowthforest](http://www.livinglandscapes.bc.ca/cbasin/oldgrowthforest).

- *Real Trees 4 Kids* focuses on tree farming and has a variety of information on topics such Christmas trees, conifer physiology, soils and nutrient cycling, and is organized by grade. [www.realtrees4kids.org](http://www.realtrees4kids.org).
- [www.breitlinks.com/myforestry/for\\_teachers.htm](http://www.breitlinks.com/myforestry/for_teachers.htm) has loads of links, information, and activities on fire prevention, forest products, invasive species and forestry careers.

### Tips

The following are a few considerations for a successful visit with the class. Speak with friends and colleagues who have presented to youth before, or contact someone from your local CIF/IFC Section or naturalist group.

Before heading to the school, talk to the teacher about his/her expectations.