

Local forestry workshop draws biggest crowd in province

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

Organizers of a workshop on tax relief for forest owners were surprised and impressed to enjoy their biggest turnout in Essex Oct. 23.

Members of the Trees Ontario Foundation and the Ontario Forestry Association held their grand finale workshop at the Essex Civic Centre after visiting 21 communities since February.

The Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MFTIP), is a provincial government initiative that began in 1998.

Recent changes to the program have provided incentives to forest owners, including a 75 percent tax reduction.

More than 100 people attended the workshop. "We ended with a bang,"

said Ron Wu-Winter, forestry programs manager for the Ontario Forestry Association. "I was very impressed. This area traditionally has very low forestry."

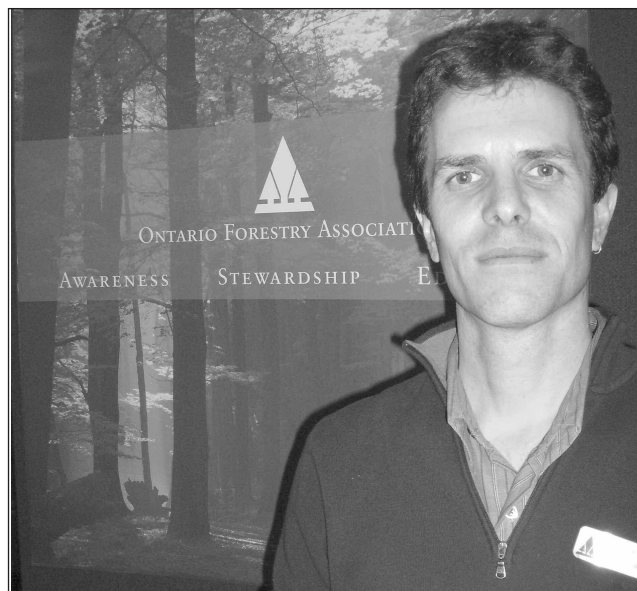
Wu-Winter said the program was started "to ensure the legacy of healthy forests in Ontario."

Those who attended the workshop were given forms to apply for the program.

To qualify, landowners must have more than 9.88 acres of forest on their property.

They were encouraged to draw detailed maps of their forest and submit the form to a provincial approver by June 30, 2007.

If accepted, the property will be reassessed and taxed at one-quarter of the residential tax rate in the following year.



Ron Wu-Winter, forestry programs manager for the Ontario Forestry Association, was one of a group of presenters who provided local landowners with a tax incentive workshop in Essex Nov. 23. More than 100 people attended the workshop, making it the biggest turnout for the province-wide tour.

Farmers who own agricultural land, however, will not receive any further relief through the program.

Wu-Winter also gave those in attendance the opportunity to join the Ontario Forestry Association.

"The OFA is membership driven and numbers are important to us," he told the crowd. "With numbers, we can go to the government or the private sector and say, 'we represent these landowners.'"

Wu-Winter said the workshops have educated about 1,000 people from Ottawa to Essex.

He said the OFA promotes tree planting and serves as "a voice for the trees."

In the 1980s, the Ministry of Natural Resources was planting 18-20 million trees annually, he said. It's down to 2 million now.

"It's too low," he said. "We're trying to get the numbers up to higher levels."

The program is also an incentive for landowners with open spaces on their properties to plant trees, Wu-Winter said.

Matthew Child, a coordinator for the Essex Region Conservation Authority, said part of the interest among local residents about tree planting comes from the devastation of Emerald Ash Borer, which began killing trees in 2002.

"Since then, people are more connected with trees," Child said. "It created an interest, as awful as that pest has been."

Child said he is expecting the MFTIP to grow.

OFA convention elects Kamenz new president

Geri Kamenz, a Spencerville area livestock and cash crop farmer in Grenville County, was elected president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture at the annual OFA convention held Nov. 20 in Toronto.

Kamenz had served three terms as vice-president of OFA and previous to that on OFA's Executive Committee. He takes over the post held for four years by Ron Bonnett, an Algoma area cattle producer. Bonnett previously announced his plans to retire after four years in the position.

Paul Mistele, an Elgin County livestock and poultry producer, was the other

candidate for the post. He too has served a number of years on the OFA executive, most recently as vice-president.

The election was the highlight of the first day of the two-day OFA convention as Kamenz captured 184 of the 320 votes cast by convention delegates and OFA directors.

Earlier in the day delegates showed support for a number of recommendations put forth by the structure review committee following a year of consultations with OFA members, county federation organizations, directors at OFA meetings and other farm organizations. The exercise was kicked off at the 2005

convention with a resolution calling for a structural review of the organization as it celebrates its 70th anniversary of serving Ontario farmers.

Kamenz told convention delegates he intends to place strong emphasis on working with other farm organizations in search of solutions to the ongoing farm income crisis, and the need for an improved farm income safety net system. He said he intends to consult with farmers, commodity organizations and OFA staff in his search for solutions.

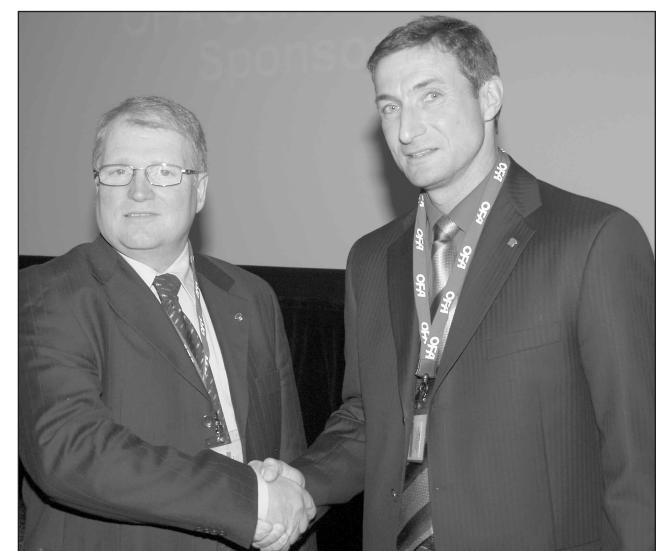
"I want to inspire these people to reach for better things for Ontario farmers," he said.

Two vice-presidents were

elected Nov. 21 - Bette Jean Crews of Northumberland County and Paul Mistele from Elgin County.

Executive Committee members are: Don McCabe of Lambton County; Terry Otto of Ottawa Region; Wendy Omvlee of Haldimand County; and Debra Pretty-Straathof of Arnprior Region.

Some of the key recommendations approved by those at convention are: enact a constitutional linkage between OFA and county federations; produce of a cost-benefit analysis related to a smaller board, reduced from the current 101 to no more than 18 and report to the 2007 convention for a go-ahead decision; develop



Retiring Ontario Federation of Agriculture President Ron Bonnett, left, congratulates newly elected President Geri Kamenz during the OFA convention Nov. 20 in Toronto.

a communication plan that will enhance two-way communication between OFA, county federations, grassroots members, and other stakeholders.

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