

# \$10M from B.C. will aid shipbuilding

## Provincial sectors preparing for federal contracts can access funds

BY CARLA WILSON, TIMESCOLONIST.COM DECEMBER 5, 2011

The province said \$10 million in funding announced Monday will help the shipbuilding sector get ready for the massive influx of federal contracts heading its way.

Other sectors will also be able to access funding to help meet their future manpower and training needs.

B.C. training organizations, industry and organized labour are working together to map out what manpower and training will be needed to build \$8 billion worth of federal ships.

Details need to be nailed down soon so that colleges and training bodies can prepare for the 2012-2013 budgets and line up courses for future students. Colleges are refining their training programs now for the upcoming school year, Doug MacLaren, CEO of the Resource Training Organization, said from Vancouver. The RTO oversees the development of apprenticeship training for the resource sector.

The shipbuilding sector is still in the process of figuring out what will be needed, said MacLaren said, who was at a skills development conference hosted by B.C.'s Industry Training Authority in Vancouver on Monday.

The first meeting of the shipbuilding workforce sector table was held on Wednesday. It reports back to the premier by the end of the June. Seaspan, which owns shipyards in Esquimalt and North Vancouver, won the right in October to negotiate contracts to build ships for the federal government.

Although firm numbers of workers required for federal shipbuilding are not yet known, the ballpark estimate is it will translate into 2,500 direct jobs and 1,500 indirect jobs, MacLaren said. Efforts are focused on finding out how many apprenticeships will open up.

When Seaspan's contract talks with the federal government conclude, further information about jobs requirements will be available, MacLaren said.

The strongest shipbuilding demand is expected in trades like welding, metal fabricating, plumbing, pipefitting, mechanics and electricians, he said. Training for shipwrights and marine fitters, something not taught in B.C. for years, will be coming onstream as well.

MacLaren said B.C. has "terribly high unemployment levels" among youth and hopes that training initiatives will tackle that issue. The shipbuilding sector and RTO are creating a foundation program to train underemployed or unemployed citizens.

B.C. Stats' labour force report for October said that B.C.'s youth, between 15 and 24 years old, had an unemployment rate of 12.8 per cent. For young men, the rate is 15.7 per cent.

The provincial funding program is targeting industry sectors to help them meet changing labour market and employment training needs in their regions. The money is coming out of the existing budget.

"Industry sectors are in a strong position to know exactly what skills their sectors need," Pat Bell, Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation, said in a release. "It is important that we give them the tools and funding to deliver on those training needs, so that we are better able to train the right people, for the right jobs, at the right time."

Bell's ministry is staging two teleconferences this month to kick off its labour market sector solutions program. The first will be held on Thursday, the next Dec. 14.

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