

# CFLC hosts 10 countries at ICESR

By Kristina Davis

Reservists may be twice the citizen, but employers are minus one employee when they are deployed.

This reality, of course, is not uniquely Canadian. And as the role of Reservists changes worldwide, with more frequent deployments, training and exercises, it could become even more challenging for them to negotiate time off from their civilian employers.

Enter the fourth International Conference on Employer Support for Reservists (ICESR) hosted by the Canadian Forces Liaison Council (CFLC). In all, 10 countries participated in the ICESR, held in Ottawa from May 31 to June 4, to discuss how to make Reservists readily available to respond to world security, overseas operations and disaster missions.

Key among the discussion was Reserve Force Employer Support Programs (RFESPs) intended to encourage employer support for Reservists to seek further training and even overseas deployments.

John Eaton, chair of the CFLC, says Canada took the lead more than 10 years ago and held the first ICESR. Since then, the conferences have become the arena to exchange new and fresh ideas to strengthen employer support.

In Canada, more than 4 400 employers have signed statements of support for their Reservists. It is an important figure. Of the 1 300 CF members currently deployed around the world, 208 are Reserve Force.

Yet, Mr. Eaton says there is one area the CFLC has to become more conversant in: educational institutions. In fact, according to Mr. Eaton, 40 percent of Canada's Reservists are students. "We want to make them a little more aware of what they can do to help young Canadians serve their country."

In November 2001, Major-General (Ret) Bob Hollingsworth, who himself balanced a very successful career as an airline pilot and a member of the Marine Corps Reserve, was appointed executive director of the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (NCESGR) by President George W. Bush. Just a few years earlier, in 1999, he retired from the Marine Corps after 38 years of service.

As executive director, Mr. Hollingsworth provides leadership and management for the programs and activities of

54 committees, one in each state, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands and literally thousands of volunteers. He also represents the National Chair within the Defense Department. In all, NCESGR looks after the interests of some 1.2 million Reservists.

In the US, they have identified 40 000 supportive employers and their program largely resembles that of Canada. They have no compensation programs for employers, and relies largely on employer's patriotism for support. "We can't do what we do without them," he says.

Leneen Forde, originally from Ottawa, but who eventually became the Governor of the State of Queensland after moving to

Australia, heads up the Defence Review Support Council (DRSC). In all, they work on behalf of 42 000 Reservists.

In Australia, employers can apply for compensation from the Defence Department. She says the program has been quite successful. Over the past three years, more than 3 000 employers have applied for compensation, with payments of a little more than \$32 million being paid out.

However, like many other countries, she says few employers initially knew about the DRSC. To increase their profile, they, like Canada and its ExecuTreks, take executives to see their Reservists' work first hand. "They come back with a completely different perspective," she says.

Group Captain John Ross from the UK, is the deputy director Employer Support Policy. He says conferences like ICESR are very important, and are even more so for countries just starting to build up their RFESPs.

In the UK, over the last two-and-a-half years alone, more than 10 000 Reservists were mobilized. He says they must maintain support from current employers, while also broadening their scope. To that end, mobilization on that scale had another effect: making employers more aware of the increased role of Reservists.

All in all, he says, Reserve Force support is in the national interest, and in need of employer's help.



MCPL/CPLC TIM JORDAN

MGen Herbert Petras, Chief of Reserve and Cadets, says a few words during the International Conference on Employer Support for Reservists held in Ottawa in early June. In all, 10 countries and 22 participants attended.

Au début du mois de juin, le Mgén Herbert Petras, chef – Réserves et cadets prononce quelques mots lors de la Conférence internationale sur le soutien des employeurs aux réservistes tenue à Ottawa. En tout, 22 participants représentaient dix pays.

## Most supportive employers honoured at CFLC event

By Kristina Davis

It seems there is more to Home Depot's slogan, "You can do it. We can help". Just ask Sergeant Sean Parker, a Reserve Force member with A Squadron, The British Columbia Dragoons, from Vernon, B.C.

Sgt Parker, assistant store manager at the Kelowna Home Depot, nominated the company as The Most Supportive Employer in Canada for not only their support to him as a Reservist, but also their continuing contribution to the military community at large.

Hosted by the Canadian Forces Liaison Council (CFLC), the award was handed out at a ceremony June 4 in Ottawa. In all, 13 Canadian employers and educational institutions were recognized for their support to the Reserve Force.

CFLC National Chair, John Eaton, praised the recipients saying they make a "real difference," not only to the CF, but also to the public they serve. "You offered this support of your own free will," says Mr. Eaton. "Likely, it cost you some inconvenience, extra work, or even additional costs to replace your Reservist employee. But you did it. Your goodwill made it possible for the Reservists to best serve both you and their country."

Home Depot Canada President Annette Verschuren says they were honoured to receive the award and to be nominated by one of their own employees. "I'm truly humbled by the award," she says. "And it will stimulate us to do more. We want to support our Reserves and do as much as we can to help our country."

Sgt Parker says his nomination was based not only on his personal experience with the company, but also what he saw Home Depot doing in the community. He points specifically to their support of the CF as they battled raging forest fires in B.C. in 2003.

From setting up special accounts for military purchases, to what he describes as the "non-stop" donations of water, Home Depot lent its support to Operation PEREGRINE. They also, he says, "cut me loose for three weeks to actually fight the fires." That is in addition to the time off he has been given to deploy to Bosnia.

"They are very supportive of Canadian interests nationally and internationally," he adds.

For more on the award winners, visit: [www.cflc.forces.gc.ca](http://www.cflc.forces.gc.ca).