

## PROACTIVE AND PROUD: BILL NELSON, NEW TLA PRESIDENT

By Robin Brunet

It's inevitable that any incoming TLA president is faced with a heap of responsibilities on his or her plate, and Bill Nelson is no exception. From contractor sustainability to creating a strategic plan, the 53-year old partner at Holbrook Dyson Logging Ltd. (HDL) in Campbell River expects 2020 to be an especially busy year.

And that suits him just fine. "I've always been the type of person who needs to work, and work hard," he says. "I'm not happy with leisure. In fact, if I take a vacation it typically takes me three days to relax, and then I start getting antsy."

While this work ethic will serve the TLA well as the association pursues its various mandates, it also benefits an award-winning logging company that is nearing 50 years of operation. "I became a partner of HDL in 1997 and have experienced a lot of industry ups and downs since then, and the downs have only strengthened my belief that contractors are viable entrepreneurs and should be treated as such," says Nelson. "They're the cornerstone of rural communities throughout BC, and I'm proud to advocate on their behalf."

Indeed, Nelson has never been shy about speaking out for the welfare of his colleagues, as media websites attest. For example, last October on CHEK News he weighed in on the impact of 3,000

forestry workers walking off the job on July 1 in the strike against Western Forest Products. "The long-term effects on contractors are pretty simple, there's going to be contractors going under," he said. "I mean, people should look around. How many businesses do you know that can completely shut down for three months, four months, six months, eight months? That's just not reasonable."

He was also candid about the strike's impact on HDL: "We haven't turned a wheel since July 1, 2019. We haven't been able to pay our guys obviously, we haven't had any income into the business, zero cash flow and all of our equipment is behind picket lines."

"Nobody's moved, nothing's happened and the people who are supposed to be negotiating aren't. They need to get back to the table and they need to find a solution to this."

Unsurprisingly, when *Truck LoggerBC* magazine interviewed Nelson for this profile in November, the labour dispute was foremost on his mind: "I hope it's over by the time the profile is published."

While Nelson's hope came true, his point in citing the dispute was "we really can't survive these ups and downs. At one point, trailers of food were dispatched to Port McNeill to feed people. A relatively simple labour dispute

turned into a community-wide crisis, and that should never have happened."

Nelson remembers a time not too long ago when the forest industry was widely regarded as a stalwart during economic downturns. Born and raised in Campbell River, Nelson was exposed to logging as a youth through his father Bill Sr., who worked as a manager for Norie Brothers Logging, and his Uncle who owned contract logging trucks. "I started working in the shop at Elk Bay when I was 13 and caught the bug, so to speak," he says. "My dad told me if I could work like a man I should be paid like one, and the money was great. In the 1980s when the recession hit, our industry treated me very well while lots of my friends who had gone into other sectors were struggling and had to take jobs like delivering pizzas to make ends meet."

But Nelson's parents preferred that their son attend university, and a 17-year-old Nelson dutifully enrolled at Simon Fraser University on a sports scholarship. "But after the first year of basic arts courses I returned to the bush, and soon after I decided to work towards a management position, because I liked the idea of presiding over logging operations and making them as efficient and productive as possible," he says.

In that regard, HDL has proven to be the ideal venue for Nelson. The company was incorporated in 1979 to provide log-harvesting services for Canadian Forest

Products' Englewood division on TFL 37. Since Western Forest Product's take-over of TFL 37 in 2006, HDL has become part of that company's Chain of Custody certification for sustainable forestry, striving for and achieving a competitive advantage and a high measure of profitability while maintaining high quality, efficient, and environmentally sound logging practices.

Nelson says, "I've had nine different partners since 1997; today there are three, plus myself. We preside over three different full-phase stump-to-dump operations, harvest on average about 400,000 cubic metres yearly, and do small business and timber sales."

Nelson's lifelong passion for work hasn't come at the expense of a fulfilling home life, however. He met his wife of 25 years, Wendy, at a wedding in which she was a bridesmaid and he was the best man. "After marrying we moved from Campbell River to Sayward to start a family, and today we have two teenage daughters, one of whom is outgoing and super independent, the other quiet and reserved," he says with unabashed pride.

Nelson laughs when asked if either of them might follow in their father's footsteps. "They've been fully exposed to forestry, but they don't like the idea of doing what I do, which is leave home at 4:30 in the morning and come back at seven at night," he says. "However, they're still hard workers, just like their parents."

As a father, Nelson is concerned about fostering the next generation of loggers, and he intends to promote this goal in his role as TLA president. "The lack of fresh skilled labour is a huge issue that must be addressed," he says. The average age of the employees in the industry is over 50 and there are going to be huge gaps in the workforce.

It should be noted that attracting youth to forestry is another thing that has earned Nelson media coverage: in 2017, as president of the Campbell River Forestry Education Association, he was credited for helping out with a then three-year-old forestry high school program at Campbell River's Carihi Secondary School, which had grown in popularity and is attracting as many females as males.

Nelson says, "The program, which is run by Jason Kerluck, is now five years old and has radically changed the mindset of the kids who have attended it. Now they understand that forestry is a good career and how important it is to our economy, and if they desire there is a place for them in it."

He adds, "It's huge when you can open a teenager's mind. It's inspiring. I want to see real education about our industry right across the board, so we can have conversations based on fact, not sentiment."

When asked to describe the philosophy he will bring to the TLA as president, Nelson, who is soft-spoken and chooses his words carefully, takes a few moments to gather his thoughts. "I want to be proactive, hence the work being undertaken to create a new strategic plan. I want to avoid overreacting to things, because quite frankly we do what we do very well and should be proud of our achievements."▲



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