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For immediate release

“BC Shipbuilding Group Ahead of the Skills Shortage Wave”

Vancouver, BC – Four years ago, a group of industry representatives started working on a long-term plan for addressing the skill requirements of B.C.’s shipbuilding and repair industry. This is a good case study of how an industry has the foresight to take the long view but also address shorter-term issues.

On October 19, 2011, federal government officials announced that an \$8 billion contract to build 7 non-combat ships, expected to create 4,000 jobs, has been awarded to Seaspan Marine Corporation, owner of Victoria Shipyards, Vancouver Shipyards, and Vancouver Drydock.

The Resource Training Organization (RTO), which oversees the development of apprenticeship training for the resource sector and is partially funded by the Industry Training Authority, worked with shipbuilding and repair industry leaders in the Fall of 2007 to conduct an initial review of training needs and establish an industry committee to do further work. This led to work that is now paying off and will be instrumental in the shipbuilding industry, ensuring it has the talent needed to build the non-combat ships, and then some.

Last year, this industry committee – the BC Shipbuilding & Repair Industry HR Committee – conducted a comprehensive industry-wide training needs assessment for the industry. Well before the bidding for the National Shipbuilding Procurement Strategy shipbuilding contracts began, the committee learned that the industry was already expecting a growth of 1,000 production workers by 2013, and the industry was starting to see skill shortages in certain trades and occupations. Now with the success of the winning BC bid for the federal contract to build non-combat ships on the West Coast, there will be 4,000 additional jobs and the “war for talent” begins.

In addition, with support of the BC Ministry of Jobs, Training and Innovation, the RTO-created committee initiated three other important projects:

- * Development of the first two new shipbuilding-specific trades programs, Marine Fitter and Shipwright. Individuals will start training in these programs in 2012. These are expected to be approved shortly by the Industry Training Authority which has expedited these priority programs.
- * Agreement among industry leaders to develop a long-term industry-wide human resource strategy to ensure employers, unions, training institutions and associations are all working towards the same goals as the job opportunities grow over the next several years.
- * Establishment of the new Industrial Marine Training and Applied Research Centre (IMTARC), an industry-based training resource. The new training centre is already starting to work on additional priority training programs needed by the industry which are not presently available. IMTARC will also coordinate all shipbuilding related trades training to ensure training needs are met without a duplication of efforts.

“As part of the B.C. Jobs Plan, our support for these projects will help to ensure we have a strong and skilled shipbuilding workforce and industry,” said Pat Bell, Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Innovation. “Most importantly, these industry initiatives will play a vital part in how we build on the tremendous opportunities resulting from the Seaspan shipbuilding contract and the thousands of jobs and economic spin-off benefits that will be created. ”

Long-time shipbuilding leader, George MacPherson, a member of the RTO Board and Chair of its IMTARC Oversight Committee, and head of the Marine Workers and Boilermakers Union, indicated that, “the combination of RTO working with the Shipbuilding & Repair HR Committee and the creation of IMTARC will play a strategic role in working with Seaspan, other companies, unions, training schools, and government to ensure the industry has the highly skilled workforce needed to sustain shipbuilding for the future.”

The Shipbuilding & Repair Industry HR Committee’s mandate was just extended 2 years in order for it to support the tremendous growth in jobs in BC’s marine sector. This work will include working closely with BC colleges and training institutes and other service providers to ensure labour supply and labour demand come together to avoid the “grey tsunami” and fill all the need for shipbuilding jobs with well-trained graduates and other job-seekers. “This is yet another example of industry stakeholders, including the provincial government under its “Job’s Strategy”, working together proactively to address long term human resource issues in a critical sector of BC’s economy before they become overwhelming or unmanageable,” said Doug MacLaren, CEO, RTO.

Long-term planning takes time, patience and vision. Taking action and seeing results are just as critical. The RTO, BC Government, and their shipbuilding and repair industry partners have demonstrated both in this success-story industry.

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For further information, contact:

Michelle Skelly, Manager of Communications
Resource Training Organization
604.455.0075 ext 223
Email: mskelly@rtobc.com