



BEST DEFENCE CONFERENCE

keeps growing

BY MARCELLO SUKHDEO

Over 400 attendees from industry and government gathered on November 5-6 in London, Ontario for the annual Best Defence Conference. This event, which was organized by Heather Pilot from PILOTHILL, is “one of Canada’s must-attend defence and advanced manufacturing events.”

Created with the aim of bringing together Canadian and international companies to learn of Canadian defence procurement and supply chain opportunities,

Best Defence 2018 hosted representatives from over 170 companies and organizations in an intimate forum setting. Networking between primes and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), B2B/B2G meetings and presentation sessions and panels all played an integral part of the conference.

The agenda, sprinkled with sessions throughout the two days, reflected the opportunities available for SMEs to partner with the bigger companies. This was amply underscored in the Land Project

Meet and Greet session, which had a focus on trucks. It provided an opportunity for suppliers to present their capabilities to Mack Defense, Oshkosh Defense, Navistar Defense and Mercedes-Benz for upcoming military truck projects in an informal speed-networking format.

“Having an agenda geared toward land projects, like trucks and engineering programs, presented real value to SMEs to meet and network with primes bidding on those projects,” said Pilot. “This added to our goal of providing a platform for stra-



Emcee Peter Studer, Associate at CFN Consultants speaking during the event.



Jana Lee Murray, President of WiDS speaking during the WiDS Speed Mentoring session.



Heather Pilot, President, Pilot Hill Ltd during her remarks.



The FedDev Ontario Pavilion in full swing



Frank Schweitzer from General Dynamics European Land Systems-Germany GmbH speaking with two attendees at their booth.



Troy Crosby, Chief of Staff (Materiel), DND during his presentation.



Barney Bangs, President/Owner at Tulmar Safety Systems Inc. making a point to two attendees.



Attendees getting lunch during the event.

tegic partnerships and market entry into Canada.”

Through its partnership with FedDev Ontario, the conference provided a designated “FedDev Pavilion” for attendees to connect one-on-one with primes and to meet with the FedDev team to learn about their programs. Pilot pointed out that the partnership with FedDev Ontario was a catalyst for companies that had not attended in the past to sign up this year. Given the success of this partnership, Pilot is looking forward to partnering with FedDev Ontario next year. “We recognize that we can work together to make it even better next year with more breakout rooms,” she added.

Another partnership that is growing Best Defence Conference is with WiDS (Women in Defence and Security), which held a speed mentoring session during the event. Pilot said that WiDS added a new element to the conference and that they are eager to return next year to further their speeding mentoring program.

Nicholas Marum, Director, Industry Relations, Analysis and Policy at DND, spoke about NATO Procurement Opportunities by highlighting the two leading agencies—NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCIA) and NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA)—that act on behalf of NATO in procurement. “These two agencies are the major entry points for Canadian companies that want to do business with NATO,” said Marum. “Together, they issue more than \$8 billion value of contracts annually, representing significant sales opportunities for the Canadian defence industry.”

He went on to add that there are many opportunities available for the Canadian industry to take advantage of, including ammunitions across air, land and naval domains, small arms, rockets, missiles, artillery and torpedoes. Over 33,000 contracts are issued per year by NSPA. but to take advantage of these opportunities, companies must register with the agency.

“Out of the 68,000 companies that are registered with NSPA, only 700 are Canadian, which works out to be about one per cent,” said Marum. “Clearly, companies have to register to take advantage of these opportunities.”

During his update on Strong, Secure, Engaged, Troy Crosby, Chief of Staff (Materiel) at DND, talked about the role of the materiel group and its responsibility for the acquisition and sustainment of all the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) equipment.

“Our work together is essential to ensuring the availability of the equipment the CAF needs to do their job at a moment’s call,” he said.

Innovation is playing an integral part in acquisition to equip the CAF, which draws from a model of relying “more heavily on academic and private sector research and development.” To get there, DND is making changes in how it innovates in working with industry to accelerate its access to the most innovative solutions that will keep its operations and mission successful in the coming years, as its needs evolve.

Crosby went on to provide an update on the major capital projects currently underway and those that are coming up. “By this time next year, we’ll have released the final request for proposal for the future fighter, which will be an important step towards the future of the CAF airpower,” he said. “We also have exciting future plans for joint capabilities and special operations forces, including contracts for chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive detection and related response capabilities.”

He said that there will be many other support service and life extension contracts. Recently, a draft invitation to qualify was released to engage companies for the future aircrew training for the Royal Canadian Air Force.

“The year 2019 will be a very busy time for us,” said Crosby. “I believe it will be the same for you, as you are the group that we turn to, to guarantee that we have the right equipment for the men and women of the CAF, that we receive it on time, and that we keep it for as long as necessary.”

Other sessions included presentations and panels on Autonomous Vehicle Technology, Supercluster Initiative for Advanced Manufacturing, Engineering Projects, Mini Canadian Armed Forces Outlooks, Technology Showcase, The Impact of Future Technology on Industry Capability, Dynamics of Gender and Canada’s Defence Sector, and a WiDS Speed Mentoring session.

“Best Defence keeps growing its reputation as a place to do business,” said Pilot. “We have received a lot of extremely positive comments on the conference, the talented speakers who shared their experience and insights, and the quality of the companies that exhibited and participated.”

The next Best Defence Conference will take place on November 5-6, 2019, at the London Convention Centre. ■