

Fallers from around Vancouver Island celebrate Ed Wilcock's 2017 Cary White Memorial Lifetime Achievement award.



# Honouring safety leaders in forestry

By Jackie Wong

Forestry luminaries Kerry Douglas and Ed Wilcock were each honoured with a lifetime achievement award at the 12th annual Vancouver Island Safety Conference. From continuously improving safety at the mill to emergency faller rescue, these guys have safety covered.

Ed Wilcock isn't the type who enjoys the spotlight. The owner of E & B Helicopters in Campbell River will do what he can to avoid it, including arranging for someone else to publicly accept the prestigious 2017 Cary White Memorial Lifetime Achievement award on his behalf.

So, Rob Moonen and Gerard Messier of the BC Forest Safety Council travelled from Nanaimo to Campbell River to quietly honour Wilcock himself. It turned out to be less than quiet, with many wanting to honour Wilcock for his work.

"That was probably one of the best [award] presentations that I've seen," Messier says. Messier, who works as the BC Forest Safety Council's manager of program development, recalls a sense of deep gratitude at the celebration.

All of E & B's employees were there. Steve Venus, who nominated Wilcock and owns the hand-falling business Blue Thunder Contracting, arranged for his fallers from across Vancouver Island to be there. They all turned up to show their appreciation for Wilcock's extraordinary dedication to keeping forest workers safe.

"Every one of my crew, every single person from Port Hardy to Courtenay, was standing there," Venus recalls with pride. "That should paint a picture in your mind of what we all think about him. There's a level of appreciation that you really can't put into words."

## Helicopter access crucial to saving injured fallers

Wilcock's formidable work ethic, his unwavering reliability, and his investment in establishing effective communication systems for foresters working in remote areas means E & B Helicopters has saved the lives of many hand fallers injured while working in forest areas unreachable by BC Emergency Health Services (EHS).

According to the BC Forest Safety Council, falling has the highest injury rate in the pulp, wood manufacturing,

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—Steve Venus, owner, Blue Thunder Contracting

and harvesting industries, with more than one-quarter of fallers experiencing a workplace injury. A revised Faller Training Program, designed by and for industry, is scheduled to launch at the end of 2018. In the meantime, fallers in the Vancouver Island region can be sure of the fact that Wilcock has their backs.

“We make our living in areas where EHS is not coming out,” Venus says. “We wouldn’t be working if we didn’t have that level of service and that safety blanket around us,” he adds.

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According to Venus, what makes Wilcock’s business particularly special is that the emergency response aspect isn’t part of his business model. While he runs a successful business providing charter services, pilot training, and helicopter sales and maintenance, he’s also providing emergency rescue when it’s needed — and not for profit.

## **A 27-year friendship**

Wilcock started E & B Helicopters with his wife Vicki in 1991, after years of working as a camp superintendent in the forest industry up and down B.C.’s coast. He met Venus when Venus was only 12 years old. Venus’s father was working as a general foreman for a company connected with one of Wilcock’s first helicopter clients.

Today, Venus and Wilcock work side by side; Blue Thunder Contracting is headquartered on the same property as E & B Helicopters, and Venus and Wilcock are in daily contact about the location of every member of Venus’s crew in the forest. Wilcock has installed repeater towers across north and central Vancouver Island so workers can radio in from remote areas when telephone access is impossible.

“He’s invested a lot of money and infrastructure into safety and communication,” Venus says, of the keys to Wilcock’s success. He has also been fastidious in establishing and maintaining the highest possible safety standards among his staff through rigorous training, mentorship, auditing, and constant communication.

Wilcock’s reputation is built on years-long, steadfast relationships. His approach illustrates the role personal relationships and leadership play in workplace safety excellence.

## **Leadership key to safety**

At the Vancouver Island Safety Conference, Al Johnson, WorkSafeBC’s vice-president of prevention services, emphasized the connections between collaboration, leadership, and workplace safety in his remarks to the 370-person delegation.

“Today, you can’t talk about health and safety without talking about safety leadership,” he said. “It is not a set of rules in a binder or a designated person, it is about people and groups working together.”

## **Honouring Kerry Douglas**

Effective mentorship and leadership are what earned Kerry Douglas, currently the safety manager of West Fraser Mills Ltd. in Quesnel, B.C., the 2017 Cary White Memorial Lifetime Achievement award in the wood manufacturing sector.



Rob Moonen and Ken Higginbotham from the BC Forest Safety Council present Kerry Douglas (centre) with his lifetime achievement award.

The award is especially significant for Douglas because he worked with Cary White while employed at WorkSafeBC as a safety officer in Prince George, where he investigated 30 fatal workplace accidents. From there, he became West Fraser Mills' first safety manager in 2004. Like Wilcock, Douglas is characteristically humble. "I didn't realize I'd been nominated and that I won the award!" he says.

Messier is quick to praise Douglas's rare gifts. "He's one of those guys that really understands safety, but really understands sawmilling operations as well — and sometimes those guys are few and far between," he says.

Douglas possesses a unique blend of operational and safety knowledge that gives his approach to workplace safety a practical edge powered by strategic, long-term thinking.

"What you're trying to do," Douglas explains, "is create a culture of safety. And changing a culture is always more difficult than just changing someone's mind."

## Safety doesn't just happen

He has been working methodically on this goal since he started at West Fraser Mills. While he admits the work is far from done — the company incurred an administrative penalty in both 2014 and 2015 — he has built West Fraser Mills' safety program from a "bits and pieces" beginning to one with the necessary safety systems in place for educating and training employees, ensuring their competency in their jobs, and effectively assessing workplace risks and hazards. "It's a systems process rather than an element-by-element process," he explains.

A strong safety system is made possible only by support from management and workplace leaders, Douglas continues. "A common misconception with safety is that it just sort of happens," he says.

He emphasizes the importance of thoughtful, intentional actions toward improving safety: "We need a system that we can manage and that can produce good quality documentation of good quality activities."

Douglas's advice to other employers looking to strengthen their workplace safety systems is "take it one bite at a time." This, combined with support from senior staff and collaboration with peers across the industry, is essential. Douglas is part of the British Columbia Forestry Manufacturing Advisory

Group, an industry group that received a 2013 Lieutenant Governor Safety Award for Excellence in Systems Safety.

"It's a really great example of companies working together, sharing information, not being secretive with an advantage they have when it comes to improving safety because they want everybody in the entire industry to be safer," says Messier. "Kerry was instrumental in getting that group going."

But Douglas would never boast about that. "That's probably characteristic of a lot of our award winners. They're people who have worked a lot in safety over their careers, but they do it for the right reasons. They're not there to get the pat on the back," Messier says. "They won't necessarily say it in so many words that it really means a lot to them. But you can just see it on their face." ☺

## Mark your calendars

The Vancouver Island Safety Conference is a free event supported by industry sponsorship and led by a steering committee made up of representatives from labour, industry, the BC Forest Safety Council, and WorkSafeBC. Mark your calendars for this year's conference on September 29, 2018.



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