

Oil company making a difference with presentations: Murray



Star photo by Geraldine Brophy

David Murray, president and CEO of Black Spruce Exploration Corp., spoke at the Rotary Club of Corner Brook luncheon Thursday, May 30, 2013.

CORNER BROOK The president and CEO of Black Spruce Exploration Corp. says his main priority in oil development on the west coast is to bring Newfoundlanders back home. On Thursday, David Murray continued the company's attempts to educate people amid local concerns and criticism over the controversial hydraulic fracturing technique proposed to be used to explore and develop oil.

"It's not the money," he said following a presentation to the Rotary Club of Corner Brook. "Having been away from my family for the last 15 years, working on and off a plane, I get why men and women need to be home with their children and be together and have that business opportunity here."

Murray was also in Lark Harbour Wednesday evening, where discussions about the project in nearby Little Port and hydraulic fracturing generated a heated discussion during a public information session in April. The meeting in the south shore of the Bay of Islands town Wednesday was attended by about 70 or 80 people, he said. He felt good about the presentation, and his ability to educate people and answer their questions or concerns.

"When residents heard that type of presentation, it was like, 'Thank goodness you came and explained this to us because we didn't understand this before,'" he said. "... We want people to be better informed. We want to be a good citizen, a part of the community, and have people understand what the business opportunity is here." Murray said people in western Newfoundland are unaware of the process, and relatively unaware of the oil and gas industry. In places like Western Canada — where he said hydraulic fracturing is commonplace — there is little opposition or concern for new technologies. The same can be true for areas in the United States like Texas and Oklahoma, he said. Similar to western Newfoundland, the president said he experienced opposition in Colorado 11 years ago. He said it's a case of being unaware of the industry as opposed to being against development.

“There are a lot of stereotypes associated with the industry, that aren’t accurate,” he said. “Our highest priority, as we said to the residents of that community (Lark Harbour) is safety. That means safety in the way we operate and the way we consider things for the environment.”

Murray said company officials want to work with residents, and are open to suggestions about how they can do things differently or better. He compared Newfoundland, in terms of oil and gas potential, to that of North Dakota. About 10 years ago that state had a population of just under a half-million people, which has now almost doubled. The unemployment rate dropped from 9.8 per cent to three per cent, he said. Murray said there is the same geological opportunity to create an industry on the west coast. They have entered into agreements with both Shoal Point Energy and Ptarmigan Resources. They are expecting to drill three wells — Shoal Point, Little Port and Sally’s Cove — with the likelihood of a fourth well depending on the results. The business will also have a local presence, with an office already established in Corner Brook and St. John’s, and plans to erect a warehouse later this year.

The first year (2013) will mainly be study and prove the oil is present. Year two (2014) is expected to double the number of wells to eight, possibly more, to establish how to get the oil out most economically. Once all that is in place, a specific, large development plan could happen in 2015.

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Published on May 31, 2013