

## **Atlantic Canada Industry Flies in Paris**

By James McLeod

**June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2009, St. John's (The Telegram)** – Atlantic Canada may not be known for its aerospace industry, but a delegation of companies at the Paris Air show this week is hoping to change that.

Shawn Skinner, minister of innovation trade and rural development, said in Paris he was very impressed with how local companies may not be large, but they are “well-connected and well-respected” in the industry.

Skinner was representing Atlantic Canada, where a number of defense and aerospace companies have formed an alliance, acknowledging that competing individuals, small provinces and companies cannot hope to make a mark on the global industry.

“We’re a blip on the screen to a lot of these guys”, Skinner said. “Some of these companies are like small countries almost.”

The global recession has put a dent in the aerospace industry, but things were mostly optimistic in Paris, according to Steven Taylor, CEO of Cathexis, a St. John's company that deals in Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology for oil and gas and aerospace.

“Ourselves, like a lot of other people, were concerned that the overall trade show attendance is down,” Taylor said. “Everyone is pretty upbeat, actually.”

RFID technology places a small chip in something which can then be read by a computer – akin to barcode – so that companies can attach electronic information to everything from tools to luggage. Taylor was in Paris to present a study his company did on the applications for RFID in aerospace.

“Up to 70 per cent of a field worker or maintenance person’s time can actually be spent in a combination of trying to find the assets and secondly trying to find the information about that particular asset,” he said, adding that adoption within the industry is “not a case of if, but when.”

Brian Thompson of Vector Atlantic, which services smaller airplane engines in P.E.I., said there’s an opportunity for local companies to make a mark as players in the market.

He said, for example, a precision machine shop can do work on a whole array of things, aircraft being just one. Recently, he said he’s seen St. John's IT companies making moves in the direction of aerospace.

Apart from supporting the Canadian companies, Skinner said he spent a lot of his time talking up the virtues of Goose Bay airport. He said he was especially interested in the possibility it might be used to test fly unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

“They need low-level broad spaces to do these. They’re doing it in other places in the world, but the airspace is very restricted,” he said. “A lot of companies didn’t realize we had these kinds of infrastructure assets here in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.”