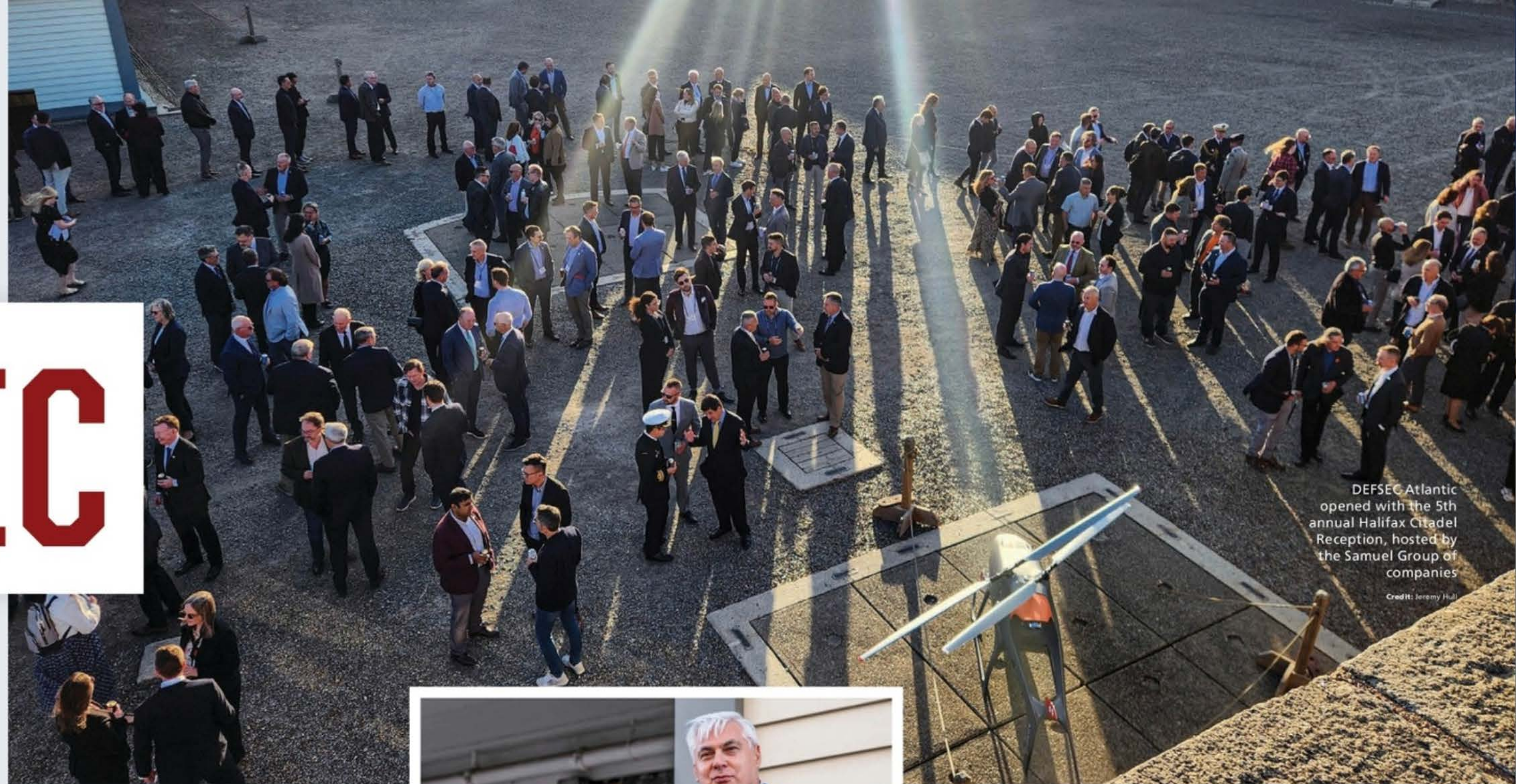


DEFSEC ATLANTIC



DEFSEC Atlantic opened with the 5th annual Halifax Citadel Reception, hosted by the Samuel Group of companies

Credit: Jeremy Hull

DEFSEC Atlantic 2025 stormed back into Halifax from September 30 to October 2, once again turning the city into the epicentre of Canada's East Coast defence and aerospace community. Military leaders, industry heavyweights, and innovators from across the country packed the show floor for Canada's second-largest defence & aerospace event. As DEFSEC's official media partner, CDR was there in full force — meeting with exhibitors, catching up with key players, and filming exclusive booth interviews you can now watch on CDR's YouTube page. On the ground, CDR's Halifax Correspondent, **Jeremy Hull**, tracked the latest developments shaping Atlantic Canada's defence industry — and what they mean for the country's broader aerospace and defence programs. Here's the story of DEFSEC 2025 — in pictures and words.

Change and opportunity have been on everyone's mind since Canada committed to increase military spending to 2% of GDP in June.

The conference opened with the 5th annual Halifax Citadel Reception, hosted by the Samuel Group of companies. Goran Pesic, founder and CEO of the Samuel Group of Companies, spoke about the reception and DEFSEC's dedicated charity, Homes for Heroes.

"This is simply seen as an appreciation event," Pesic said. The opening night reception has been a Samuel Group tradition for five years but this year he said they wanted to incorporate the volunteer sector.

"We're very honoured to be promoting and discussing Homes for Heroes Foundation," Pesic said to assembled representatives from participating companies and organizations.

"When we look at what we're going to do in the next 10 years and all the investments that are coming, we may want to



Credit: Jeremy Hull

direct some of those ITVS or Canadian added value ideas toward our veterans," he said.

The evening was a look toward Canada's military future with many nods to a history of service including a live fire performance by the famous 78th Highland Regiment at the Halifax Citadel National Historic Site.

Founded by the British in 1749, the sun setting over the stone walls of the citadel paved the way for a conference being held at the world-class Halifax Convention Centre, a modern facility that opened its doors in 2017.

Industry speakers at the reception included

"We're very honoured to be promoting and discussing Homes for Heroes Foundation," said Pesic



Credit: Jeremy Hull

Sean Kelly, Vice-President of GeoSpectrum Technologies and Jason Reid, the Vice President of Business Development at Davie.

Trevor Bergman, the President and Founder of AeroVision, the emerging technology partner at DEFSEC, dropped a hint of the innovations that would be on display at

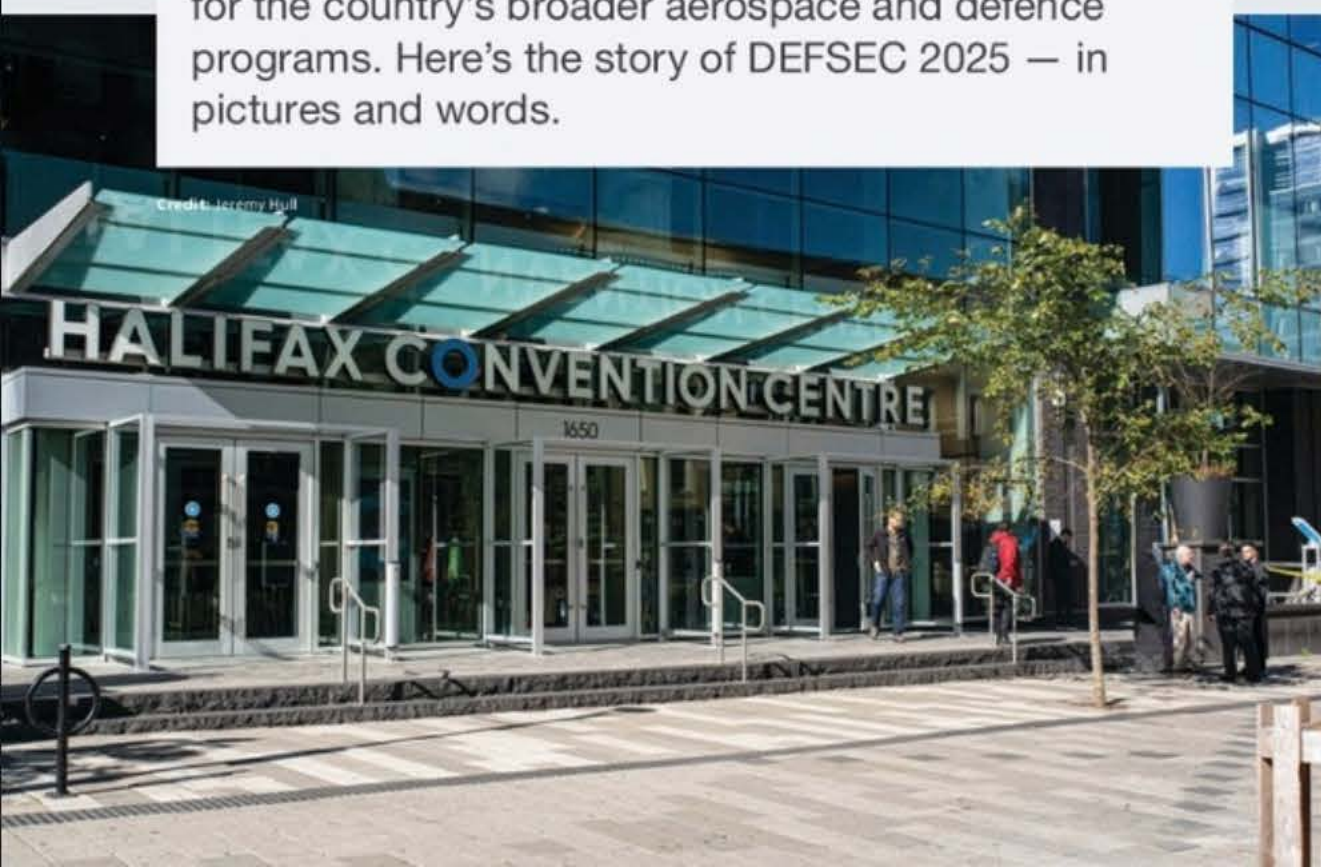
the convention by placing their HT-100 dual-use drone, "conveniently close to the bar" during the reception. Bergman welcomed anybody who wanted to talk business, a reminder why everyone is at DEFSEC before the evening's final speakers brought the conversation back to veteran's causes.

Dan McKinney, the defence industry lead for Amazon Web Services and Brad Field, the President and CEO of Homes for Heroes spoke on behalf of the 2,600 unhoused veterans reported by Statistics Canada and the ones who go unreported.

"Make no mistake, it is deeply connected to our national defence framework," Field said. "Because how we care for those who have served is just as important as how we prepare those who will serve."

Early speakers were appetizers for the main course. General (Ret'd) Walter Natynczyk closed the evening with a spirited call for support from the companies and organizations in attendance.

"My heart is with veterans," Natynczyk





CDR's Daniel Kitchen with Al Meinzing, President of Boeing Canada

said. The former Chief of Defence Staff, head of the Canadian Space Agency and Deputy Minister of Veteran's Affairs is now an advisor to Homes for Heroes.

"The fact that you're here and you're supporting Homes for Heroes, the message is, 'Canada cares.'" Natynczyk said.

CHANGE & OPPORTUNITY

The companies Natynczyk was speaking to were on display on the floor of the Halifax Convention Centre Wednesday morning showcasing new products, building relationships and attending discussion panels about Canada's defence industrial strategy.

Greg Wright, sales manager at Aerotec Engines, which has been operating in Nova Scotia for 28 years, said an event like DEFSEC at a venue like the Halifax Convention Centre puts local companies on the world stage.

"I think it's a great opportunity for any local business," Wright said. "I think it's great for the local economy."

Wright said there are over 2,000 delegates at DEFSEC experiencing the vibrant heart of downtown Halifax, bringing businesses to the shops and restaurants - on top of the deals and relationships being built and the contracts being inked inside the Convention Hall.

Those sentiments were reflected in the themes that dominated the panel discussions at DEFSEC: change and opportunity.

"It's an exciting time," said Brigadier-General Darryl Taylor, during a discussion about Canada's defence requirements and industrial priorities. "A land of opportunity. A land to invest, renew and modernize our equipment and there's a lot of that about to happen."

Taylor, who is the director general of the aerospace equipment management program,



CDR had the opportunity to speak with Chris Pogue, President of Defence & Space at Calian

said the commitment to be at 2% of GDP by March means 9.3 billion in additional spending. He said changes to defence industrial strategy need to reinforce Canada's national, sovereign interests.

"A lot of that is going to be aimed at readiness, supply chain resiliency and reconstitution of our forces," Taylor said. "Buy Canadian where we can and increase vision and strategy about what's going to be important for us in the future."

Taylor said after years of budget constraints they are getting pressure to deliver operational readiness for the modern battlefield as

Canada increases to 2% and beyond, on its way to 5% by 2035 in accordance with commitments made at the Hague. Those include agreements to strengthen transatlantic defence partnerships. "Those alliances have to be strong as we go forward," said Taylor.

A lot of defence plans are well coordinated, Taylor said, but he called for a national strategy policy for more efficient operational output.

DEFENCE INVESTMENT AGENCY ANNOUNCED ON DAY 2

That goal may have achieved a meaningful milestone when Prime Minister Mark Carney announced the creation of the new Defence Investment Agency on the last day of DEFSEC in a news release from the Prime Minister's office.

"Canada's defence procurement is currently fragmented across several departments, slow to consult industry, and too complicated to respond to rapidly evolving military needs - leaving the Canadian Armed Forces waiting years, sometimes decades for critical equipment," said the release.

The new agency will overhaul and streamline Canada's defence procurement, build domestic manufacturing and supply chains, and create new careers by providing the Canadian armed forces with the equipment they need, said the release.

Taylor said, perhaps selfishly, that he believes the country should focus on Royal Canadian Air Force assets but accountability is essential.

"We've announced over 60 billion dollars in the next 5 to 10 years to modernize and

renew," Taylor said. He talked about a \$2 billion envelope for Ukraine that includes \$220 million for drone capabilities as a case study in operational efficiency.

"There's a lot of lessons to be learned when you watch what's going on over there," he said. "We're taking some notes about how we should prepare."

Those preparations require the involvement of the Canadian defence industrial base, said Taylor.

The Director General of Defence Industrial Strategy, Randy Singh, who joined Taylor on the panel, said Canada's security is supported by the relationships forged at DEFSEC. "A competitive economy is part of defence," Singh said.

READINESS 2030

Among the policy projects driving the economic engine are Canada's recent announcement to participate in ReArm Europe/Readiness 2030.

That was the subject of discussion for a panel Wednesday that examined government and industry collaboration and procurement modernization by leveraging hubs like Atlantic Canada to support the country's goals of innovation and efficiency.

The panel was presented by Thales, the European defence company with the largest footprint in Canada, according to Cara Salci, Vice President of Growth, Industry and Corporate Affairs.

Dave Perry, the President and CEO of the Canadian Global Affairs Institute, led the discussion by saying it was the busiest DEFSEC he'd ever attended with the most European participants.

"ReArm Europe is a massive set of investments that the Europeans are making to bolster their armed defence," Perry said. He also noted that Prime Minister Carney has visited Europe every month and a half to diversify markets since being elected.

Salci said the government is asking for commitments and investment in Canada.

Colin Stephenson is Executive Director of DEFSEC Atlantic



On Day 1, DEFSEC held a panel discussion on preparing for ReArm Europe/Readiness 2030

She said they hope to share more capabilities with Europe moving forward.

"We feel exceptionally well positioned to support Canada's objectives, the Canadian Armed Forces objectives, as it relates to ReArm Europe and Readiness 2030," Salci said in an interview with CDR.

Another project behind much of the innovative activity on display at DEFSEC Atlantic was the Defence Innovative Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA) - the subject of the last discussion panel on Thursday - Day 2.

"The NATO allies recognized that we needed to spend more on defence but in the right way and in particular needed to invest in innovation and in particular into rapid adoption," said James Appathurai with NATO. Appathurai is the primary advisor on technological challenges, cyber defence and hybrid threats to the Secretary General. He said the other purpose of DIANA was to access innovative technologies from smaller contractors. "DIANA was created for allies to have the same mindset and access the same innovations," he said.

Organizers said the number of exhibitors at DEFSEC 2025 grew by more than 50% from 2024 in part because of initiatives dedicated to small and medium enterprises under the new budget initiatives.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

The complete list of panel discussions at DEFSEC Atlantic 2025 included the following.

DAY 1: • Operational Readiness Through Innovation: Naval Technologies from Atlantic Canada" presented by COVE; • Calian: Delivering Mission-Critical Training Solutions" presented by Calian; • Panel Discussion: National Defence Requirements and Priorities" presented by Department of

National Defence; • Preparing for ReArm Europe / Readiness 2030" presented by Thales Canada; • Mission ready: Supporting Canada's defence R&D needs" presented by Dalhousie University; • Unlocking Potential, AI Adoption in Government" presented by Cohere; • Driving Transformation: Scaling Capabilities in Defence Manufacturing" presented by Leonardo DRS; • Adaptive Learning: Pathways to Success" presented by Lockheed Martin Canada & RaceRocks 3D;

DAY 2: • Solving the Knowledge Crisis with Industrial A.I." presented by Arken Innovations; • Would you like to leverage the Government's buying power to accelerate your path to market?" presented by Innovative Solutions Canada; • Discussing DIANA at DEFSEC with managing Director James Appathurai" presented by NATO DIANA

NAVAL PRIORITIES

Jeffery Smith, an executive with Kongsberg Maritime - a sensor and robotics company and a critical supplier to the government of Canada - was among the panelists at the Readiness 2030 discussion. The company's Hugin Edge autonomous underwater vehicle was one of the more impressive pieces of hardware displayed at the conference and a reminder of the Atlantic region's traditional contributions to marine and naval defence.

"It carries all the sensors that you would find on a research vessel or military vessel that would be out searching for something," said Nicholas Burchill of Kongsberg Discovery. He said making contact with potential partners who can see the hardware is the most important part of trade shows like DEFSEC. "It differentiates what's a concept and what's a product," Burchill said. "It's just good to kind of close the loop and build relationships with your customers."



Credit: Jeremy Hull
During an interview with CDR, Tony March discussed the economic activity that will come with the purchase of new submarines

Burchill said dual-use technologies like the Hugin Edge have applications across industrial sectors but they follow the procurements. "Right now that means defence," he said.

Tony March is the CEO of Babcock Canada. Babcock has been sustaining submarines in Canada for 17 years, March told CDR. The company's recent exclusive partnership with Hanwha Ocean, one of the finalists in Canada's Patrol Submarine Project (CPSP), is the kind of partnership that's accelerated by the new environment.

"How to really best develop a Canadian solution and leverage that strong Canadian ecosystem of suppliers is really what we're looking to do," March said during an interview with CDR. He talked about the economic activity that will come with new submarines as the fleet grows from four ships to twelve and a new facility is built on the east coast to maintain them. "That drives interest in DEFSEC, interest in Atlantic Canada," March said.

CDR also had the opportunity to sit down with Rick Gerbrecht, President & CEO of TKMS Canada – the second finalist in the Canada's submarine project. The company had a joint Canadian-German team was present at the show. Rick wants to make sure that "The Canadian government, Navy and other agencies are aware of what the value proposition is for a proven and deployed NATO submarine provides to Canada now and for generations to come, because this program will be generational and will span several decades. It's not just delivery of submarines, it's infrastructure, in-service support, innovation, technology and new jobs," he told CDR.

Since being shortlisted, TKMS is now waiting for what Rick calls 'mid-term



Credit: Jeremy Hull
Kongsberg displayed its HUGIN autonomous underwater vehicle at DEFSEC 2025

guidance' from the government of Canada. In the meantime, the company has started a cross-Canada industry engagement sessions including, Calgary, Winnipeg, Halifax, Montreal, and soon Vancouver. If there is one message Rick wants to share with industry it's that, "just because you may be located in a land-locked province, doesn't mean you can't contribute to a Naval program."

LOOKING AHEAD

In addition to opportunities for SMEs, speakers and exhibitors talked about working with underrepresented groups at DEFSEC 2025.

"A mentor of mine once told me that tools you need for effective leadership often come from diverse sources," said Sean Kelly, during his opening night speech, which is why it's not an accident that DEFSEC 2025 did record attendance numbers.

Kelly said he was on a mission to find

purpose and community during the 26 years he served in the Royal Canadian Navy.

"Now that I've spent over a decade on the civilian side, my mission has changed," Kelly said. "Within my company, I've found a new community and my purpose is to strengthen our defensive capabilities and offerings to Canada and our NATO allies."

That is DEFSEC's mission, said Colin Stephenson, the Executive Director of DEFSEC Atlantic: to bring together companies and strengthen Canada and its allies. He said the 2025 conference was like, "riding a cresting wave."

"We hope it's going to keep going and we're really looking forward to being here for all of you in the future." ■

Jeremy Hull is CDR's Halifax Correspondent



Credit: Faith Farazi
ACADA is the presenting partner for DEFSEC Atlantic

WOMEN IN DEFENCE



Networking is a word that makes some people excited and others uncomfortable. For some, walking into a room full of strangers is energizing. For others, it feels intimidating and draining. No matter where you fall on that spectrum, I believe networking is one of the most powerful tools you can invest in for your career. It has been the single biggest factor in getting me where I am today.

MY PATH

I grew up in Oshawa and studied kinesiology at Wilfrid Laurier University before completing a master's degree in Human Kinetics at the University of Windsor. I started my career in human systems integration, supporting projects in public safety, defence, and the nuclear sector. After a number of years in technical consulting, I shifted to business development, building relationships with clients across the globe.

Over the past two decades, I've worked in defence, aerospace, marine, and healthcare. I spent 14 years with CAE, then moved into leadership roles with Babcock, including leading an international joint venture in an \$11B pursuit. Today, I serve as Vice President, Programs at ADGA Group where I lead program execution strategy across the company. I'm also a proud mom of three young kids, and like many of you reading this, I've had to learn how to balance a demanding career with family life.

HOW NETWORKING CHANGED MY LIFE

When I was 19, like many students in Oshawa, I wanted the "dream" summer job at General Motors. My dad worked there, but so did thousands of other parents.

The Power of Networking

BY JANA LEE MURRAY

What gave me an edge was a friend's dad who worked in the employment office. He knew me, believed in me, and gave my resume a second look. That small connection made a big difference.

Later, as I was wrapping up my master's in Windsor, I moved to Calgary for an internship. I didn't know anyone there, and when I heard about an ergonomics association pub night, while it didn't sound all that exciting, I figured it was at least a chance to meet people in my field and start building some connections, so I went.

One person I met that night was the manager of a consulting firm. Months later, that connection led me to my first full-time job and eventually my 14-year career at CAE. Looking back, I can say with certainty that if I hadn't shown up that night, my career path would have looked very different.

Fast forward to my time as President of Women in Defence and Security (WiDS). That role connected me with senior government leaders, industry executives, and a vibrant network of women and allies. When I felt ready for a change after 14 years in one company, I didn't go on LinkedIn or scour job boards. I reached out to my network. Within weeks, a conversation with an executive at Babcock led to a new senior management role. Without my network, that opportunity would never have happened.

WHAT NETWORKING REALLY IS

Networking isn't schmoozing. It's not working the room or collecting business cards. It's about building real, mutually beneficial relationships. It's asking questions, listening, and finding ways to support others.

Here are a few lessons I've learned along the way:

1. **Find your style.** If you're shy, you don't have to force yourself into big rooms. Small groups and one-on-one coffees work just as well
2. **Be open.** Great connections don't only happen at conferences. Some of my best conversations have been with the person seated next to me on an airplane
3. **Follow up.** Add people on LinkedIn, but don't stop there. Send a short, personal note to keep the relationship alive
4. **Give as much as you get.** A strong network is built on trust and reciprocity. Think about what value you can bring to others

WHY IT MATTERS

In today's world, where information is at everyone's fingertips, relationships are what make us stand out. Employers, clients, and partners notice when you're connected, authentic, and able to bring people together.

I see this every day at ADGA. Our strength as a Canadian defence and security company comes from our people and the networks we build with our clients, our partners, and within the communities we serve. It's core to how we deliver, how we innovate, and how we grow.

If there's one message I hope you take away, it's this: don't underestimate the power of showing up, asking questions, and making a connection. One conversation can change the course of your career. I know, because it changed mine.

Jana Lee Murray is Vice President, Programs at ADGA Group. The views expressed here are her own and do not necessarily reflect a CDR editorial position.