

Scientific world beat a path to Chalk River

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When Fred Blackstein stepped off the train in Deep River in 1961 armed with only a hunting rifle and a slide rule, he quickly found himself in the middle of one of the more exciting times at Atomic Energy of Canada Limited.

As a young engineer graduated from the University of Waterloo, Chalk River Labs was really an awe inspiring place, he told the people assembled Thursday evening at the Bennett/Mackenzie Room, in Deep River's JL Grey Centre.

The original nuclear research team at Chalk River, he said, was considered one of the "largest and most distinguished group of scientists ever assembled and focused on a single endeavour in the British Empire," and he was right in the middle of it.

Mr. Blackstein, who worked as an engineer at the lab from 1961 to 1985, said he had the opportunity to work alongside the greatest and most innovative minds of the age, something which AECL can still boast today.

"The scientific world did beat a path to Chalk River's door," he said, which for decades has remained at the forefront of both cutting-edge nuclear and environmental research.

Mr. Blackstein said the many contributions scientists working there have made to the world go beyond nuclear science, noting 30 some years ago, they were among the first to warn about the perils of acid rain and global warming, and whose work would become medical CAT and MRI scans among other medical breakthroughs.

"Most cancer patients owe their lives to the work done at Chalk River," he said, whether it was through research, the development of isotopes or the work on treatments such as the creation and use of the cobalt therapy unit.

Nuclear energy, which is the backbone of what AECL is all about, has contributed far more than people realize.

Holding up a fuel bundle, a retirement gift from his colleagues, Mr. Blackstein said whenever the talk gets to alternative fuel sources, "for me, this bundle says it all."

"These have saved thousands of thousands of lives to generate power by not burning coal, by not burning oil," which contribute to greenhouse gases, carcinogens and other pollutants.

The work on such fuel bundles, and the standards of excellence set by Chalk River Labs "to me sets the standards other energy sources will be judged tomorrow."