

York gets wild gift; a piece of Costa Rican rainforest

By DEREK CHEZZI

TORONTO (CUP) -- Environmental studies students at York University will soon be able to study a rainforest firsthand following a gift of Costa Rican land to the university by a Canadian researcher.

Dr. Woody Fisher, a medical researcher and co-founder of the Canadian Liver Foundation, donated 133 hectares of rainforest land to York last week.

Located near the village of San Isidro, Costa Rica, the land -- called Las Nubes -- has been virtually untouched by humans.

The \$100,000-valued piece of rainforest will be used by York to study sustainable land development.

Nearly \$26,000 in gifts and pledges have been raised for a fund supporting research at the site for the upcoming year. The money will be used to send students to the research site.

Nestled on the edge of a

forest that sits above the Los Cusingos Bird Sanctuary, Las Nubes is part of the largest undisturbed raw forest in Central America.

An agreement with Costa Rica's Tropical Science Centre will ensure the land and surrounding forest are protected from being used for cash crops and cattle grazing.

While the Las Nubes site is small with respect to the forest in which it is found, its location near the perimeter is crucial in protecting the wooded land on the other side from further depletion.

The physician bought the farmland after learning about the deforestation taking place in Costa Rica. He says the government wasn't moving fast enough to protect natural habitats.

"I wanted to see the land preserved. Now it's going to be used to promote education, research and international cooperation. It has matured into something more substantial than I ever dreamed."

Harris says student loans delays beemer purchases

By CARLA TONELLI

TORONTO (CUP) -- Ever since Ontario Premier Mike Harris commented that student debt "might put off the purchase of a BMW for a year," education stakeholders have been asking what figures the premier is working from.

Speaking at the Ontario Jobs and Investment Conference in St. Catharines, Ont., on Oct. 15, Harris said "the majority of (post-secondary) students do not have any debt at all."

He cited figures that contradict those from a 1998 Statistics Canada report, which stated the average national debt for students in Canada will be \$25,000 this year.

But Harris told more than 20 student groups that the average student debt in 1997 was \$12,100, adding high school students needn't be scared by reports of high student debt.

"I don't want to belittle this but I think the debt might put off the BMW for one more year and I don't think that should be an imperative for any young person that's accepted in any formal medical

school here in Ontario," Harris said.

A moment before he made that comment the premier stated medical school graduates sometimes owe as much as \$40,000 or \$50,000 in student loans.

Last week, opposition politicians hammered the Progressive Conservative leader for the remark, saying it shows he's out of touch with student reality.

"He has this bias that students are somehow high on the hog, but it's not right," said Liberal member of provincial parliament David Caplan.

"Setting off buying a BMW for one year -- that's insensitive and unacceptable. What really bothers me is this is so mean spirited."

The chairman of the Ontario component of the Canadian Federation of Students agrees.

"We know this government clearly hasn't done a lot of their homework," said Joel Harden, who says Ontario is the second most expensive province for tuition in Canada, after Nova Scotia.

The cost of many university programs in Ontario

skyrocketed this year after the province deregulated tuition.

"To indicate that deregulating is only affecting students by delaying their purchase of a BMW indicates nothing more than this premier is completely out of touch with the way real students live," Harden said.

Others were appalled by the premier's apparent departure from the common knowledge that student debt in Ontario is a significant problem.

"I believe Statistics Canada," said Howard Hampton, leader of the provincial New Democratic Party.

"The Harris government is notorious for manipulating figures to try and hide the truth of what is really happening," he added.

The BMW remark is not the first time Harris has come under fire for what some considered outrageous statements about Ontarios.

Last spring, he publicly apologized for saying that mothers receiving social assistance could handle a \$24 cut in funding because it was only "beer money."

"It takes a lot of nerve to make those statements," said Caplan. "I think he just doesn't care, quite frankly,"

Following a week of media coverage and public criticism, however, Harris stands by his statement.

"The premier is not insensitive to the needs of post-secondary students and this government is certainly not insensitive for the need for funding to colleges and universities," said Wallace Pigeon, a spokesman for Harris.

"He was describing a very specific graduate (demographic)," he added. He said the premier made the comment just after saying medical school graduates can expect a \$300,000 salary within three years of study.

The average cost of a BMW is \$50,000, according to one Toronto outlet.

Up to 16 000 Canadians die from air pollution each year

Suzuki Foundation says

By JAMIE WOODS

VANCOUVER (CUP) Up to 16,000 Canadians die prematurely from air pollution every year, a recent report by the David Suzuki Foundation says. But Ottawa's only response so far has been a lot of hot air, the group says.

Two weeks prior to the Joint Ministers' of Energy and Environment meeting last week in Halifax, the environmental foundation released its 50-page report detailing the growing impact of air pollution and climate change on Canadians' health.

Entitled Taking Our Breath Away, the report

projects a 50 per cent growth in particulate emissions, one of the most hazardous air pollutants, by 2020, and a rise of 20 per cent in greenhouse gases by the same year.

The report, which was co-authored by two epidemiologists and an air pollution expert, also indicated that Canada is the second highest per capita emitter of greenhouse gases in the world, and that Canadians use as much coal, gas, and oil per year as the 750 million people living in Africa.

Using federal government figures, the report estimates \$10 billion a year could be saved if smog is reduced in

Canada's major cities.

The study revealed a 28 per cent increase in hospitalization for asthma among boys between 1980 and 1990, and 18 per cent among girls during the same period.

While there's no conclusive evidence that air pollution causes asthma, it's beyond doubt that air pollution exacerbates the problem.

At last week's joint ministers' meeting, federal and provincial ministers signed the Canada-Wide Acid Rain Strategy, an agreement that commits governments after the year 2000 to establish targets for the reduction of sulphur dioxide emissions.

They also discussed reducing greenhouse gases through international emissions trading, where low polluting nations would be rewarded with cash from high polluting nations.

But the problem, says the Suzuki Foundation, is that Ottawa hasn't implemented any mechanisms to directly address the problem here in Canada.

International emissions trading are expected to top the agenda of the Conference of the Parties summit in Buenos Aires next month.

Canada is sending a delegation to the summit, which will run from Nov. 2 to Nov. 11.