

Canada's vermiculite mine in production in Cavendish

BY BOB HUGHES

Canada's only vermiculite mine, at 3024 County Road 507 in Cavendish, is up and running, producing high-quality concentrates from its custom-built mill.

That was the core of the May 3 report to Galway-Cavendish and Harvey council by Eric Moeller, president and chief executive officer of Regis Resources - Vermiculite Canada. He was joined at the meeting by chief operating officer Scott Rielly and executive vice-president Martin Shefsky.

Administered out of the new Buckhorn office, with local resident Heather Robertson as office manager, staffing is presently at 13, including the executives, with an annual payroll exceeding \$750,000. To-date investment, Moeller revealed, is more than \$8 million.

One of only three such North American operations - the others are in South Carolina and Virginia - the Cavendish mine has two 12 hour shifts, Mondays through Thursdays.

Unlike quarries, which

produce slab dimension stone and crushed rock, vermiculite is separated from the rock and sand by an air-screening process, with the larger size left over materials used to maintain the on-site roads and the smaller returned by conveyor to the mine site. Total production for 2005 will be 9,000 tons, Moeller said.

The concentrates are moved only by day in standard van trailers, and occasionally by flat bed trucks, to Montreal, where they are mixed with gypsum to produce fire-rated (resistance to breakdown in a fire) wall-board.

Much of the end-product is shipped to Metro Toronto, New England and the U.S. Mid-West, where used in the manufacture of brake pads and, especially, as garden and pottery soil (the white specks, Moeller explained to

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Vermiculite

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Harvey Ward Councillor Bev Matthews, are perlite; the silvery "little accordion" specks are vermiculite.) Vermiculite's use as insulation is minor by comparison.

However, with a weight of six to seven pounds per cubic foot, vermiculite is uneconomical to ship long distances which, Moeller said, should mean that Canada's total requirements are fully met from the Cavendish operation, replacing imports from South Africa (the world's largest producer), China and Zimbabwe.

To Reeve Tom Flynn's enquiry, Moeller said the mine's reserves are sufficient for 10 years. However, his experience in South Carolina tells him that the reserves in the claim areas north of the present site (whose legal status is being converted from claim to lease) should considerably extend the operation.

As well, he also squelched rumours that the company is interested in Galway-area properties.