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## University of Windsor opens Centre for English Language Development

Last week, the University of Windsor unveiled its new Centre for English Language and Development. The facility is located in a former Royal Canadian Legion building, which was sold to the university due to declining membership. **METRO NEWS SERVICES**

# Workology



## Soccer in Manitoba

Earlier this month, the University of Manitoba opened a new multi-field soccer complex. The larger playing field in the facility can be subdivided into smaller fields to accommodate different ages and abilities.

METRO NEWS SERVICES

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# Tree rings are great storytellers

## Odd Jobs

Diane Peters



**O**n a recent workday, Colin Laroque went down to the old mines near the Joggins Fossil Cliffs on the Bay of Fundy in Nova Scotia to check out some pieces of wood with a historian visiting from England.

He took some doweling-shaped samples of the wood, using a hand auger, put them under a microscope and counted the rings down to a thousandth of a millimetre.

"Trees have many ways of telling us about the past," he says. As a dendrochronologist — a job title that simply breaks down to the words "tree" and "time" —



As a dendrochronologist, Colin Laroque knows that in the Maritimes, most of the old-growth forests have been clear-cut, and discovering a tree more than 200 years old is a huge find.

Laroque, 43, knows how to tap into this information.

He'll take the pattern of those tree rings and compare it to other samples he and his students at Mount Allison University in Sackville, N.B., have taken in the area.

When he synchs up the patterns, he'll know the year the tree was cut down to make the wood for the mine or dock. And that, in

turn, will tell him whether it was made by the Acadians before 1739, or the British who came later and took over the mines.

Such detective work is common for Laroque, who is an associate professor and director of the Mount Allison Dendrochronology Laboratory. He and his team of undergraduate and graduate students also help people date the wood in their

## The Lowdown

**Job title:** Dendrochronologist

**Salary:** \$45,000 to \$100,000

**Education/training:** Graduate degree in geography under a dendrochronologist

**Best Part of the Job:** "I enjoy being outside. I'm out hunting down trees and camping and I get to see a lot of the country."

**Worst Part of the Job:** "Being in remote Labrador and wearing two bug jackets and trying to keep the bugs out while you're eating a sandwich."

homes to see if it was built by the Acadians — making it a lot more valuable.

Dendrochronologists do research, too — some of it very creative. One of Laroque's students is analyzing the heavy metals that have gotten into trees from the Sydney Tar Ponds over the years, while another is calculating how global warming will affect trees in the future.

A kid who loved the outdoors, Laroque grew up north of Saskatoon. He was studying physical geography at the University of Saskatchewan when a professor took him and a class out to look at a glacier. Laroque was not only fascinated by how important water was to his prairie homeland, but by the fact that the trees were the best way to track how the glacier had changed over the years.

He moved to Vancouver Island to do his master's and PhD at the University of Victoria, studying geography and dendrochronology, and then ended up at Mount Allison.

There are only about 20 dendrochronologists in Canada, and most of them work in the old virgin forests of British Columbia or Ontario, where there are trees as old as 900 years.

Diane Peters once hawked magic pens at the Canadian National Exhibition. She's now a writer and part-time journalism instructor.