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Rendez-vous du Savoir 2011

## Essential cooperation between universities and businesses

On October 5 and 6, I had the opportunity to attend the second edition of the Rendez-vous du Savoir (Knowledge Symposium). A number of major partners in Montréal, including Desjardins Group, met once again to highlight, through various activities and presentations, the importance of knowledge to our community and the economy. The second edition of the Rendez-vous du Savoir specifically showcased the contribution of universities to the growth of companies.

By Monique F. Leroux, Chair of the Board, President and CEO of Desjardins Group

At a time when the ability to innovate is a major key to success, we must encourage cooperation between universities and businesses. According to the Science, Technology and Innovation Council, which advises the federal government, innovation occurs when the combined forces of people, knowledge, and entrepreneurship are brought together. These three ingredients make it possible to design and manufacture new materials and products. They also enable the development of new processes, systems, and services and the improvement of existing ones. It is in our interest, therefore, to create conditions favourable to innovation.

### Fondation Desjardins scholarships

The Rendez-vous du Savoir was also an opportunity to pay tribute to a number of Fondation Desjardins scholarship winners. For the past 40 years, Desjardins has demonstrated its commitment to education largely through this private foundation, which is the biggest distributor of university scholarships in Québec. We are currently working to expand the foundation's sphere of activity and the financial means at its disposal.

Apart from its support for students, Desjardins has many other ties with the university community. For example, we

provide substantial funding for a number of study and research chairs at universities in Québec and Ontario.

Over the years, various training programs for caisse and Desjardins Group employees have been set up jointly with the university community. Professors and researchers are also regularly called on to help improve practices at Desjardins. Others participate in training and professional development sessions organized at all levels of Desjardins Group.

### New Desjardins initiatives in the field of education

In order to innovate and constantly improve how we carry out our educational mission, we have decided to set up an issue table with representatives from the universities. The issue table will allow us to reflect together on how knowledge and research can provide even greater support for the development of best practices in the caisses and at Desjardins Group. We would also like to discuss how the cooperative model can be studied and taught more extensively in certain university programs.

We also committed to receiving a minimum of 100 interns a year at Desjardins. Already in 2012, we will welcome over 250

interns who wish to perfect their training and gain experience.

“Innovation occurs when the combined forces of people, knowledge, and entrepreneurship are brought together.”

— Monique F. Leroux

The world has become a very complex place, and it is important to get to know and master it using all available resources. The globalized market and strong competition are driving our need to innovate. Enhancing ties and boosting the number of cooperative ventures with the university community has become a winning strategy for companies.

At Desjardins we consider education to be a key to sustainable prosperity, which is why we are currently the number of initiatives in this area and will continue to forge dynamic and long-lasting ties with universities. ■