



# News Release

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## County “Well-Elders” enjoy celebratory teas at NMCC and Houlton Higher Education Center and hear from national expert on elder care

**Aroostook County** - Four dozen senior citizens were acknowledged for the important role they are playing in the education and training of the region’s future nurses at two celebratory events held in Presque Isle and Houlton recently.

Afternoon teas held on the Northern Maine Community College campus and at the Houlton Higher Education Center brought together NMCC nursing students and faculty with well-elders that live throughout the County. The well-elder program has been a part of the nursing curriculum at NMCC for more than a decade. It pairs members of the first year nursing class with healthy senior citizens who volunteer to allow students into their homes throughout the semester.

“We cannot thank you enough for graciously allowing our students into your homes,” said Betty Kent-Conant, nursing and allied health department chair to the 75 seniors, student nurses and NMCC faculty gathered at the Presque Isle celebration and via videoconference technology to the more than two dozen individuals gathered in Houlton. “You have played an important role in helping to mold the future generation of nurses. It is so important to plant the seeds of knowledge so our students can sow those seeds. Like the sun, you are a welcome site. Thank you for helping our students bloom.”

To tie in with Kent-Conant’s remarks, the seniors gathered at both sites were each gifted with a packet of seeds and a card of thanks from the student they assisted this fall. Enclosed in the card was a bookmark in the shape of the NMCC logo with a personalized message of thanks to each senior.

In Presque Isle, the students were introduced by instructor Daryl Boucher, first year nursing coordinator and in Houlton, instructors Deborah Folsom and Deborah Sennett, who lead the southern Aroostook cohort, introduced their students. At both sites, the students called forward their well-elder to receive the gift.

When visiting their “well elders” NMCC student nurses took vital signs and reviewed medications, home safety and general health lifestyles. Students also gained valuable experience practicing their interview and listening skills.

The program was lauded at the tea by a nationally recognized expert on the health care needs of older adults who spoke with the groups gathered at both sites. Amy Cotton, a state and national speaker who has authored many continuing education publications on geriatric health issues, congratulated the nursing students, faculty and well-elders for participating in such a unique educational experience.

“This is a rarity for nursing programs across the country,” said Cotton. “The only exposure nursing students typically have with the elderly in their training programs is in nursing homes and hospitals. These are typically the sickest and frailest, which is only five percent of the population and creates a lot of misperceptions about aging. You are teaching these students the reality about aging. Thank you for that.”

As the featured guest speaker at the Well Elder Tea, Cotton discussed health topics in the area of gerontology. The director of operations and nurse practitioner at the Center for Healthy Aging in Bangor, Cotton developed the organization’s virtual health center model in 1997 and has an active clinical practice making house calls for homebound elder’s primary health care needs as well as providing dementia consultation.

“Pay attention to what these guests are doing – staying engaged, active, exercising, healthy diet, accessing healthcare regularly. Wellness isn’t just about the absence of disease, but attitude, activity and quality of life,” said Cotton.

A total of 31 students enrolled in the first year nursing class on the Presque Isle campus and an additional 16 students participating in the NMCC nursing program offered at a distance in Houlton were engaged in the well elder program this fall.

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*Southern Aroostook area residents participating in the Well-Elder program assisting Northern Maine Community College nursing students this fall recently gathered at the Houlton Higher Education Center for a celebratory tea where they were thanked by the students. Gathered at the celebration were (seated, left to right) Betty Scott of Hodgdon; Joyce Blake, Frances Bishop, Reita Briggs, Pauline Tracy, Lettie Ivey, Kathleen Parks, and Helen Taylor of Houlton; Margaret Siltz of Linneus; and James Sennett of New Limerick.*

*The elders are seated in front of the student they invited into their homes this semester. Students participating in the program include (standing, left to right) Denise Marquis of Millinocket; Jayme Bither of Linneus; Julie Tribou, Kim Fox, Miranda Wilmot and Leisha Murray of Houlton; Tammy Lindsay of Merrill; Kimberly Boulrier of Crystal; Michelle Gardiner of Linneus; and Derek Schriver of Woodstock, New Brunswick.*



*Central Aroostook area residents participating in the Well-Elder program assisting Northern Maine Community College nursing students this fall recently gathered on the NMCC campus for a celebratory tea where they were thanked by the students. Gathered at the celebration were (seated, left to right) Jacquelyn Martin of Limestone, and Bette Lou and Burton Tilley of Washburn. The elders are seated in front of the student they invited into their homes this semester. Students participating in the program include (standing, left to right) Genine Piro, Elizabeth Pelkey and Heather Groder.*



*Central Aroostook area residents participating in the Well-Elder program assisting Northern Maine Community College nursing students this fall recently gathered on the NMCC campus for a celebratory tea where they were thanked by the students. Gathered at the celebration were (seated, left to right) Rolinda Fowler and JoAnn Johnson of Easton; Paul Hamlin, Fred Lyford and Louis Shaw of Presque; and Reginald Ireland and Joan Ireland of Westfield. The elders are seated in front of the student they invited into their homes this semester. Students participating in the program include (standing, left to right) Martha Pelletier, Lindsey Mason, Glenn Capps, Tammy Leach, Lindsey Kinney, Becky Ford, and Janice Scott.*



*Among those participating in the Well-Elder program at Northern Maine Community College was Gladys Smalley (left) of Florenceville. With her is the student she invited into her home to this semester, Sarah Upton of Centerville.*