



News Release

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230 students graduate from Northern Maine Community College

Aroostook County - Words of wisdom from a long-time state leader and advocate of higher education and a fellow classmate who followed a dream derailed for more than three decades were imparted on the 230 members of the graduating class during commencement exercises at Northern Maine Community College on Saturday, May 15, in the College gymnasium.

Maine Governor John Elias Baldacci was originally scheduled to address NMCC's 47th graduating class, marking the seventh anniversary of his signing of the legislation that created the Maine Community College System. However, unforeseen circumstances prevented him from attending the event. In his stead, Representative John L. Martin was on hand to speak to the graduates, faculty, staff and guests.

Martin, a Democrat from Eagle Lake, has a long history of supporting higher education in the state. He was first elected to the House of Representatives in 1964, where he served an unprecedented ten terms as speaker of the house, from 1975 to 1994. We went on to serve four terms in the State Senate from 2000 to 2008, and during that time served as assistant majority leader, before being reelected to the Maine House in November of 2008. In addition to his legislative duties, Martin is an assistant professor of political science and government at the University of Maine at Fort Kent.

"As a life-long supporter of higher education, I was proud to be on the front line of the creation of the Maine Community College System with Governor Baldacci," said Martin. "Northern Maine Community College, along with its sister colleges across the state, provides a wonderful opportunity for affordable, quality education for the residents of Maine to put people to work or get them started on their educational journey."

Also speaking at commencement was NMCC's "Student of the Year," Robert Gagnon. The 57-year-old associate degree plumbing and heating program graduate, grandfather and former mill worker, accepted an early buyout from Fraser Papers when the St. John Valley facility downsized in the summer of 2007.

For Gagnon, attending college and earning a degree is a dream he not so long ago thought permanently derailed and unattainable. A 1970 graduate of Madawaska High School, he attended the University of Maine at Fort Kent for a semester, but left in early 1971 for a well-paying job at the Fraser mill.

“When I started this program, I never in a million years thought I would be selected student of the year. In high school, I was just an average student and my main goal was to graduate and possibly further my education or work at the Fraser Paper mill in Madawaska. But, things don’t always go as planned. This has been quite an undertaking for me, starting a new career at my age,” said Gagnon. “As we leave here today to begin new journeys, remember the most important lesson we’ve learned here – don’t let anyone discourage you from fulfilling your dreams. Most importantly, if you think to yourself that whatever you do, it doesn’t matter, think again—it does matter. I have followed my heart and have no regrets.”

NMCC President Timothy Crowley conferred 192 associate degrees and 51 certificates to members of the graduating class. In his remarks prior to presenting the awards, Crowley encouraged the students to become engaged citizens.

“As you leave NMCC today you are prepared to take the next important step toward your career. You are prepared to improve the quality of your life. You have a responsibility to take all that you have learned about yourself and your chosen field of study and help improve the lives of other as well,” said Crowley. “Be involved in your community. Participate in the organization or community groups that will help shape the future of our children, our community, state and country. If you believe that change is needed commit yourselves to being a positive change agent and do not doubt that you can make a difference.”

In addition to the graduates, Crowley also honored two members of the NMCC campus community. Betty Kent-Conant, who has served the College for three decades, first as a faculty member and later as department chair for nursing and allied health, was presented with faculty emerita status.

She is only the second individual to be presented with the honor in the five decades since NMCC was founded. Former NMCC President Durward Huffman was granted president emeritus status when he retired from the College in 2001.

Kent-Conant is a highly regarded educator and leader in the health care profession in Maine. At the state level, she was appointed by former Maine Governor Angus King to serve on the Maine State Board of Nursing in 1999 and reappointed to the board in 2003 by Governor John Baldacci. She also serves on the Associate Degree Nursing Council of Maine.

The President’s Award, which is presented annually during commencement exercises, was presented to Nancy Gagnon of Perham, a secretary in the College admissions office, who was lauded for her service to the campus.

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