



News Release

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November 25, 2009
NR09133

Perham family thankful for giving spirit of NMCC students and instructors

Aroostook County - In this season of thanks and giving, Kathleen Williams of Perham is most thankful for a caring group of students and instructors at Northern Maine Community College who have made it possible for her to no longer fear exiting and entering her own home.

A series of medical problems with her back and knees, which required multiple surgeries, left the single mother of two unable to navigate the concrete steps that led to the entryway of her Perham Road home. Over the past couple of years, she has taken numerous tumbles, some that have resulted in serious injuries, including one that badly damaged her rotator cuff.

“I feared going out of the house thinking I might get injured again. I had fallen on those steps more times than I can remember. The steps were spaced too far apart for me to safely go down with my knee and back problems and there was no railing on one side. I really needed something to hold onto on both sides to stabilize myself,” said Williams.

That fear was eased on the day before Thanksgiving, when a crew of NMCC students under the direction of veteran residential construction instructor Guy Jackson, showed up on her doorstep to remove the old steps and install new ones, built specific to code with a shorter distance between steps, and railings on both sides. The volunteer team came out on the first day of their Thanksgiving break.

It was a surprise that Williams’ son Robert, who feared for his mother’s safety, had been planning for some time. A student at Northern Maine Community College with a double major in computer-aided drafting and residential construction, he asked for the help of two of his instructors, Jan Greico, who teaches English and happens to be a neighbor, and Jackson.

“Jan knew about the situation with my mother and we both knew Guy Jackson was the person to approach. He came out to the house and we took measurements and it took off from there,” said Robert Williams.

Constructing the steps became a project of the 2009 graduating class of residential construction students. Jackson's curriculum includes a component that has students in the second year of the program building steps for community members. Material is purchased by the individuals who contract to have the steps built and students complete the work as a practical learning experience.

"The materials for this project were donated anonymously," said Jackson as he looked on proudly while his students put the finishing touches and latticework on the newly installed steps. "This is a good day. The students who worked on these steps gained valuable hands-on experience in a project that will be put to good use for many years to come, and the students out here today are learning the importance of the gift of giving – which is especially appropriate this time of year."

According to Jackson, materials for the project would have cost about \$600 and he estimates that the cost to the Williams family would have been about twice that to have the steps built factoring in labor. However, for all involved in the project the true value is priceless.

"It is nice that we could help someone in the community. I was always taught that you should use your gifts and abilities for a reason and it is important to use them to help others," said Gabe Cheney of Castle Hill, a first-year residential construction student. "This feels right."

For fellow construction freshman student Annie Cleveland of Presque Isle, helping get the steps in place was a family affair. Her father Reno Corriveau of Caribou, owner of Reno's and Sons Landscaping, donated his time and equipment to remove the old steps, which had been a stumbling block in getting the new steps placed on site.

"Had my daughter not been ill today, she would have been out here helping me," said Cleveland. "I was raised in an environment where doing something worthwhile to help others was valued. This is what it's all about – caring about someone else's needs other than your own"

Classmate Travis Pinette of Presque Isle agreed about the importance of giving back and joined Cleveland and Cheney, rescheduling a previous work commitment to lend a hand.

"I hope to make a career out of this, so I wanted to come out and get some hands-on experience. I also wanted to help people out. It feels good to lend a hand when others need help," said Pinette.

The giving spirit was most certainly not lost on the Williams family. As she watched the volunteers install her new steps, Kathleen Williams, who had just recently learned of the project, expressed her gratitude for all who made it possible.

“It’s wonderful that the students have done this and come out to put the new steps in. My son is always talking about how great the people are at NMCC and now I understand why,” said Williams. “Safety-wise this is a 100 percent improvement. I don’t have to fear going out of the house and getting injured again.”

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Kathleen Williams (atop her new steps) watches as the Northern Maine Community College students who volunteered their time on the eve of Thanksgiving to install porch steps built by 2009 graduates of the College attach the latticework to the front of the steps. Assisting in the community service project are (left to right) students Patrick Lupien of Presque Isle and Annie Cleveland of Presque Isle, Guy Jackson, NMCC residential construction instructor, students Travis Pinette of Presque Isle, and Gabe Cheney of Castle Hill who is attaching the latticework.