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Community invited to April 27 open house and barbecue to celebrate 33rd Sinawik Home at NMCC

Aroostook County - Bob Chavez and his family are inviting the Aroostook County community to come visit their new home and share a bite to eat. It's an open house with a twist, as the Chavez's soon-to-be-completed 1,300 square foot modular ranch-style home sits in two pieces inside the residential construction laboratory at Northern Maine Community College.

It is there where more than four dozen students and their instructors in five trade and technical occupations programs have spent the past six months making the family's home become reality, and at the same time getting a hands-on learning experience unlike any other.

For over three decades, the College and Sinawik (Kiwanis spelled backward), a non-profit organization founded by the Presque Isle civic organization, have partnered to build a home each year that is contracted by, and sold to, an Aroostook County family.

This year's home, however, holds special significance as Chavez, of Presque Isle, knows firsthand the quality workmanship that goes into the project. As a student in the College's residential construction program in the mid-1990's, he worked on building two of the homes. Fast forward 13 years and the student and builder has become the customer and soon to be new homeowner of Sinawik House number 33.

"I know the quality that comes from the College," said Chavez. "From the framing and insulation to the finish and interior work, every detail is taken care of and nothing is overlooked. I've looked at other modular home options and couldn't find anything that compares in quality."

With work on the 33rd home nearing completion, NMCC and Kiwanis Club are hosting a community open house celebration and barbecue on Tuesday, April 27, between 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. in the Mailman Trades Building, where the work of the students and the importance of the partnership between NMCC and Kiwanis on the home building project will be recognized.

“The Sinawik project is still as beneficial as it was when it began 33 years ago, and it is especially so this year with the large number of students we have in residential construction and the other building trades programs as well. The partnership with Kiwanis provides us with a large-scale project that students see through to completion and the end result is a home for a County family,” said Guy Jackson, NMCC’s residential construction instructor, who has worked on 29 of the homes and shepherded the work of more than 350 students on the various projects over his three decades at the College. “Each project is different from the one before. Not only does the home design change from year to year, but the students working on the project are different and bring new perspectives.”

The partnership between NMCC and Kiwanis was forged in 1976 to provide students in several trade programs at then Northern Maine Vocational Technical Institute with a “real-life” practical experience, and as a way for Kiwanis to raise scholarship funds to invest in the local community.

The annual event includes tours of the new home and an indoor barbecue, as well as the presentation of scholarships from Kiwanis to five students enrolled in the College programs that work on the structure.

“The Kiwanis Club of Presque Isle is very proud to be working with Northern Maine Community College once again on the Sinawik project. Over the years, our club has built a great rapport with members of the NMCC community. Because of the hard work and positive attitudes of NMCC's students, faculty and staff, the annual Sinawik project has become one of the premier collaborative projects in Aroostook County,” said A.J. Cloukey, president of the Kiwanis Club. “We look forward to co-hosting the annual open house and barbecue as a way to both showcase the wonderful work of the NMCC students, as well as to celebrate this most worthwhile partnership.”

The project begins anew each year before the previous Sinawik house has rolled out of the residential construction lab and is placed on the homeowner’s lot. Preliminary floor plans are developed by the College’s computer-aided drafting program and approved by the customer.

Once the plans are handed over, framing work on the walls, doors, windows and roof is completed by the first-year students in Jackson’s program. They then step away from the project and let students in the plumbing and heating program, instructed by Al St. Peter; the electrical construction and maintenance program, instructed by Todd Maynard; and the welding and metal fabrication program, instructed by Dennis Albert, do what is referred to as the “rough-in” work.

Once the plumbing and heating conduits are installed, the wiring laid and required ductwork is in, the structure is inspected. After the inspection the senior residential construction students come in and do the finish work, which is now in the finishing stages and has consisted of installing windows, doors and cabinets and completing the interior trim.

Sinawik 33 – the Chavez family home – features two bedrooms, two full baths, a kitchen/dining area and living room. A foundation for the raised ranch will be poured in the coming weeks at 297 Coffin Road in Washburn.

The public is invited and encouraged to visit the Sinawik open house at NMCC on Tuesday, April 27, between 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. For more information on the project or the open house, contact the college relations office at 768-2809.

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Northern Maine Community College residential construction instructor Guy Jackson (right) works with Scott MacCallum of Mapleton, a first year student in the program, to make sure the newly installed kitchen cabinets are straight in Sinawik house number 33, which is nearly completion in the residential construction lab at the College.