



News Release

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NMCC Wind Power Technology students experience their future careers through summer internships

Aroostook County - Eleven Northern Maine Community College wind power technology students got a glimpse into their future profession and the career opportunities that exist once they become the first in New England to earn associate degrees in the field next May.

After the summer working in paid internships on wind development projects for four different companies, the students have returned to the classroom to complete their final academic year in the NMCC program. Appreciative of the experience and looking forward to graduation in eight short months, the time spent working hands-on in the wind industry has the students excited about careers in alternative energy and prospects for employment in Maine and across the country.

“Before I began the internship I had a feeling that I was going in the right direction. Now I am certain that I’ve made the right decision. This is definitely the right career choice for me,” said student Ben Dutil of Winslow. “The internship has certainly opened doors for future employment opportunities. I absolutely feel that there is a place for the graduates of this program in the wind industry. I’m pretty excited. We are pioneers in the industry!”

Dutil, along with six other NMCC wind power technology students, worked for Larkin Enterprises on the Kibby Mountain wind power project in western Maine. Larkin is a Maine-based international corporation that offers field engineering, maintenance, commissioning, and supervision in the energy industry. They are one of the contractors working on the largest wind power development in New England, which will provide enough clean, renewable electricity for the equivalent of 50,000 average Maine homes.

Joining Dutil in working for Larkin on the Kibby project was classmate Justin Foran of Milo. Both students worked with electricians wiring the erected turbines and helping with such jobs as installing aviation lights and wind sensors and pulling transmission line cables.

“Larkin (Enterprises) comes in after the crew that puts up the towers has finished their work to pull cables and make connections. I learned a lot from the electricians we worked with. I thought it was really interesting and was impressed by the scale of the project. It was pretty amazing,” said Foran.

The wind farm is under construction along Kibby Mountain and Kibby Range in the Boundary Mountains of Maine. The Kibby Wind Power Project will be capable of producing 132 megawatts of electricity when fully operational in the coming months. In addition to 44 wind turbines, power collection lines and access roads, the project will include an electric transmission line to connect power generated by the turbines to the existing transmission grid.

Kibby Mountain is project owned by independent power producer TransCanada, which also hired an NMCC student intern. Jeffrey Cropley of Mars Hill was supposed to spend the summer shadowing the construction manager, but shortly after beginning the internship, his supervisor was so impressed with his knowledge of the turbine operation that he ended up taking on a key role for the company.

“After following the site inspector on the inspection of one tower, he had me complete the inspection of the next, while he watched to see how I did. After that, I was on my own. It was my responsibility to do inspections and issue mechanical completion certificates,” said Cropley. “I knew the turbines from class and actually had more knowledge than most of the crew working on the project, because my education was more specific to the wind industry. I definitely got to see what I learned in class applied on the construction site. It was awesome.”

Cropley worked with the team responsible for overseeing the contractors and overall construction of the wind farm. He completed the inspection of 16 of the 22 turbines erected in the current phase of the Kibby project. The thorough review had Cropley verifying everything was satisfactory from the concrete poured at the base of the tower to ensuring the nacelle, which sits atop the tower and houses the generators and transformers, was acceptable for TransCanada.

Before leaving the construction site to return to NMCC, Cropley was offered a position by the contractor that constructed the turbines for the Kibby project. The opportunity to work for Vestas upon graduation is Cropley’s for the taking. The job would take him to Utah where he would do work similar to what he did this summer, only for a natural gas power generation plant.

“It’s nice to know that I have options,” said Cropley. “I’m going to wait until closer to graduation to make my decision. As a single father of three, I’d actually like to work here in Maine. I absolutely feel that I will have a job in renewable energy. What you learn in this program is directly related to other energy production such as hydro, natural gas and oil. There are all kinds of opportunities out there just waiting for us to graduate.”

Future job placement for graduates of the program is one of the key areas that NMCC wind power technology instructor Wayne Kilcollins has been working on since he was hired by NMCC 21 months ago to get the first-of-its-kind program up and running. Nearly a dozen different companies who are involved in some aspect of growing the state's wind industry, and a number of others involved in wind outside of Maine, have been in regular contact with the College with interest in the training program.

"I am pleased that companies like Larkin have stepped up to assist in the training process of the NMCC wind technicians. These companies are looking forward to working with more of our students next summer. I also have companies that have called and written looking for information on our program and internship opportunities. Some of these companies are interested in speaking to our students about employment opportunities for next spring after graduation. The success of our program has been enhanced through the strong relationships we have fostered with our industry partners. They have provided great feedback on changes in the industry as well as the summer opportunities for interns," said Kilcollins.

A total of nine of the eleven NMCC wind power technology interns worked on Kibby Mountain this summer. In addition to Larkin, hiring seven of students and TransCanada employing Cropley, Vestas also took on an intern.

The two other NMCC student interns went to work for Maine-based construction company Cianbro. Matt Melcher of Bingham and Bradley Therrien of New Sweden worked with project managers and engineers on a 20-wind turbine project Cianbro is getting off the ground in western Maryland.

Melcher and Therrien both spent the first half of the summer in Portland and the other half in Maryland completing pre-construction work for the Roth Rock Wind Power Project. Activities they were engaged in included preparing materials for crews that will be constructing the turbines, namely safety and equipment check lists.

"I gained a lot of knowledge about the planning that goes into a wind project before they ever start putting a turbine up," said Melcher. "I couldn't think of a better way to prepare for my future career than the opportunity I was provided this summer. I'm now looking forward to what it will be like to be working on a site that is up and running."

Aside from Dutil, Foran, Cropley, Melcher and Therrien, other NMCC students completing summer internships included Parker Brown of Mapleton, Tim Dickey of Caribou, Justin Dionne of Madawaska, Lance Getchell of Milford, and Gary Johnson of Old Town, (Larkin Enterprises); and Brian Kingsbury of Houlton (Vestas).

"Working with these companies gave our students an opportunity to see the diversity in career paths that are available in the wind energy industry. The students were able to experience activities from initial planning stages through turbine commissioning," said Kilcollins. "Now that the students have returned to class, they are excited to share their experiences with the students that stayed behind to complete summer classes. Their enthusiasm and first-hand experience has been valuable in the classroom to add further depth to our discussions."

NMCC's efforts to establish and subsequently begin delivery of the first wind power technology program in New England have been lauded throughout Maine and New England. Established in 2008, the wind power technology program at NMCC is currently preparing the technicians needed to support the growth of the commercial, residential and community wind industry in Maine.

A report released by the Governor's Task Force on Wind Power Development in February 2008 recommended that Maine host 2 GW (gigawatts) of wind power by 2015 and 3 GW by 2020. In order to host 2 GW of power in 2015, modeling from the U.S. Department of Energy's Job and Economic Development Impact (JEDI) model indicates that at least 180 field technicians, administrators and managers will be needed.

Demand for the program has exceeded expectations. Today, the college has 36 students enrolled in the second year of the program and was required to cap the 2010 entering class at 18 students, despite the fact that more than 60 qualified students applied for entry into the program.

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Northern Maine Community College Wind Power Technology students (left to right) Matt Melcher of Bingham, Ben Dutil of Winslow, Jeffrey Cropley of Mars Hill and Justin Foran of Milo are four of the eleven NMCC students who completed summer internships in the wind industry this summer.