



News Release

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October 22, 2010
NR10097

94-year-old Ernest Charette of Fort Kent earns honorary high school diploma 75 years later at Northern Maine Construction Hall of Fame induction ceremony

Aroostook County - It was an evening of great honor and unexpected surprise that brought 94-year-old Ernest Charette of Fort Kent to the brink of tears last night at Northern Maine Community College's annual Northern Maine Construction Hall of Fame induction ceremony.

The St. John Valley nonagenarian, who was recognized for his many accomplishments in the construction field by being officially inducted into the Construction Hall of Fame, did not expect the second honor that was bestowed on him: an honorary high school diploma. Seventy-five years after he earned the credential, and an unfortunate twist of fate kept him from ever actually possessing the piece of paper, Charette was presented an honorary diploma from Fort Kent's Community High School at the NMCC event.

"I never expected this," said a visibly moved Charette, who, with a little prompting, shared the story with those gathered about his elusive high school diploma. It was a story he had frequently told his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

"There were about 15 of us taking courses at night with Mrs. Natalie Thibodeau to earn our high school diploma. We had completed all of our requirements and were going to be awarded the diplomas. But, Mrs. Thibodeau, who was from Fort Kent and had moved to Edmundston (New Brunswick) with her husband, died unexpectedly from a heart attack the night before we were to receive our diplomas – and we never got them," said Charette.

It was that story heard dozens of times by his daughter-in-law Paula Carson-Charette that motivated her to contact officials with Maine School Administrative District 27 in Fort Kent late this summer about the possibility of an honorary diploma. At the same time, Carson-Charette nominated her father-in-law for the Northern Maine Construction Hall of Fame, with the hopes that she could combine the two honors into one special evening. It wasn't until late the week before the induction ceremony that it appeared the honorary diploma awarding would be possible.

Ernest Charette is a well-known and highly-respected St. John Valley master craftsman, who worked more than seven decades in the building materials trade. He was born in Fort Kent in 1916, the 13th of 17 children of Pea and Catherine Charette.

In 1935, Charette began working for M.J. Pelletier, a building material and funeral business. He started in the wood working shop where he made door and window frames and caskets.

In 1946, after working for eleven years for M.J. Pelletier, he started Charette Building, Inc., a working shop and building materials store. A year later, he was married to the former Egline Voisine, and the couple spent the next three decades running the business and raising five children, all of whom remain in the St. John Valley.

Ernest Charette is credited with building a number of homes in the St. John Valley, as well as the bridge over Michaud Brook in Soldier Pond. He also designed and built the first and only private water system in Fort Kent that gravity fed water to a number of homes on Highland Avenue in Fort Kent.

Established in the fall of 2007 on the NMCC campus, the Northern Maine Construction Hall of Fame was created to recognize key individuals who have contributed both to the profession and have served as mentors to others entering the profession.

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Members of the Charette Family pose immediately after Ernest Charette was awarded his honorary high school diploma from Fort Kent's Community High School. The official photo of Ernest Charette that will hang in the Northern Maine Construction Hall of Fame at Northern Maine Community College can be seen in the background. Joining the more than 50 people in attendance at the celebration were Charette's children (left to right) Roland Charette, Sandra Beaulieu, Rachel Charette, Ernest and his wife Egline Charette, Gloria Daigle and Bob Charette.



Ernest Charette shares the story of how he had earned – but never received – his high school diploma in the 1930's and how much receiving an honorary degree means to him at age 94.