



# News Release

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## History surrounding selection of Star City white spruce as 1959 National Christmas Tree topic of December 7 presentation at NMCC

*Aroostook County* - It may have been 51 years ago, but for Presque Isle area residents celebrating the Star City's centennial, the Christmas of 1959 will always be remembered as the year that a 70 foot white spruce from the Parsons Road was selected as the national Christmas tree and officially lit by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

That historic event, the build up to the tree's selection and the events surrounding the tree lighting in December of 1959 will be the topic of a free presentation open to the public and led by Kim Smith of the Presque Isle Historical Society in the Edmunds Conference Center at Northern Maine Community on Tuesday, December 7, at 12:00 noon.

Smith will speak briefly about the history of the U.S. President lighting a national Christmas tree, which dates back to 1923, when Calvin Coolidge began the tradition. She will then talk specifically about the 1959 national Christmas tree, which came from the Alice Sprague farm on Parsons Road.

In addition to holding a special place in the hearts of people from Aroostook County, the national Christmas tree that year was unique in that it was the first from a private citizen and not from a national forest and it was the first ever used from east of the Mississippi River.

The December 7 presentation will mark the second consecutive year Smith has conducted an historical talk on a topic relating to the holiday season at NMCC. Last December, she led a session on Victorian-era Christmas customs.

Smith, Presque Isle's 2010 Citizen of the Year, has researched and written over twenty presentations of topics of interest on Presque Isle's History. She presented these topics on a weekly basis over a five-month period to the Seniors Achieving Greater Education (SAGE) program at the University of Maine at Presque Isle; and on a monthly basis as the "Brown Bag Lunch Lecture Series" for the Presque Isle Historical Society during the 2009 Sesquicentennial, which she chaired for the city.

She also researched, prepared, and implemented a “Guided Walking Tour of Historic Downtown Presque Isle”, a two-hour, two-mile tour given monthly and upon request. In addition, she served on the joint City/Historical Society Committee which wrote and implemented a "Self-Guided Walking Tour" that features 28 plaques around town with vignettes detailing the historical significance of each property as well as historic photos of the sites. She is currently working on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration committee at NMCC, and is leading the effort to develop an historic walking tour of the campus that will point to where former Presque Isle Army Air Base facilities were on and adjacent to the campus.

In 2007, Smith earned the Silver level award from the President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation for donating over 250 hours of her time to the Historical Society and the Gold Award in 2008 for donating over 500 hours of her time.

Smith is a published writer, having had articles appear in a national publication, a regional magazine, and a newspaper downstate.

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*Photo courtesy of the Presque Isle Historical Society*

*Thousands gathered for the 1959 lighting ceremony for the national Christmas tree in Washington, D.C. The 70 foot white spruce illuminated in this photo came from the Presque Isle farm of Alice Sprague. In the foreground of the photo (bottom right) are President Dwight D. Eisenhower and First Lady Mamie Eisenhower.*