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News Release

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NMCC selected as “Focus the Nation” campus; College to host only clean energy forum in the northeast

Aroostook County - The efforts of Northern Maine Community College to incorporate alternative energy into its curriculum and the work of a group of students will bring one of only 22 clean energy forums to be held nationwide to the campus later this winter. Focus the Nation, a national non-profit organization dedicated to climate change awareness, youth empowerment and the acceleration of a transition to a clean energy economy selected NMCC to host one of its events in Maine, and has engaged a team of students to coordinate the conference.

Information shared at the only Focus the Nation Clean Energy Forum to be held in the northeastern United States in early March, will identify roadblocks and solutions to moving the renewable energy industry forward in Maine and nationally. Findings at the “Maine Event”, as student organizers are calling their upcoming day-long session, will be used to help shape political dialogue around the issues impacting development.

NMCC was approached by Focus the Nation last fall about partnering with the Portland, Oregon-based non-profit as the Maine institution to host such an event because of the Presque Isle college’s development of the first wind power technology program in New England. Initial contact was made with Wayne Kilcollins, wind power technology instructor, who identified one of his students to work on the initiative. Kilcollins contacted the NMCC development and college relations office which identified a business technology student and intern both working in that department to form the student team to lead the initiative.

Those three core members and leaders were Benjamin Dutil, who will be among the first wind power technology graduates from NMCC this May; Gene Martin, a first-year student in the business administration program; and Natalie St. Pierre, who spent the fall semester interning both at NMCC and in Senator Susan Collins Caribou constituent services office. Dutil, Martin and St. Pierre grew the team to a total of six members, including two University of Maine at Presque Isle students. Together, they have spent the past four months meeting and working on organizing the statewide forum that will be held in the Edmunds Conference Center at NMCC on March 9.

“It was very impressive that NMCC was selected to be the college in Maine to launch this initiative,” said Dutil. “For me personally, this is an amazing opportunity. Not only am I gaining leadership and organizational skills in a very real way, I am taking part in something that will help shape and bring attention to an industry that I will soon be part of as a working professional.”

In preparation for the event the student planning team has held weekly meetings since October and participated in regular telephone conference calls organized by Focus the Nation along with student leaders who are planning similar events at colleges and universities throughout the country. One of those calls included a discussion with Lisa Jackson, the administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

“Our event and the report we will prepare afterwards will present the voice of Maine on issues concerning moving renewable energy forward in our state and country. This is a big deal and we want to look at the possibilities for economic growth, conservation and alternative energy sources,” said St. Pierre.

The importance of the event and the dialogue that will take place is underscored by the leaders the students have confirmed for the “Maine Event”. Former Maine Governor Angus King, a leading advocate for alternative energy and a principal with Independence Wind, LLC, an energy development company, will deliver the keynote address. U.S. Senator Susan Collins will also take part in the event via a videotaped message produced especially for participants.

A number of other key figures and leaders in Maine’s alternative energy industry have been invited and the students are working to confirm their participation. In addition, the students are approaching other individuals to serve on a panel for an interactive dialogue in the closing session of the conference.

“I really feel like we are doing something meaningful,” said Martin. “Maine is a leader in this industry and I see the opportunity for us to call attention to issues and raise awareness that may help advance it more.”

According to materials provided by the Focus the Nation organization to the Focus Maine student organizers, the forum is “first and foremost about bringing the community together for a productive discussion about the clean energy future that is relevant to the community and to identify immediate roadblocks and solutions that people can rally around, collaborate on and advocate for.”

Following the event, the Focus Maine student team will compile the information and forward an action plan to the Focus the Nation headquarters. The national organization will then review all feedback and customize a support system to help teams keep event participants engaged and updated.

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