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News Release

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NMCC leading the way in ensuring skills of graduates meet those needed for current and future Maine workforce

Aroostook County - Officials at Northern Maine Community College believe their efforts to create new program offerings and expand others to better meet the current and future workforce needs of the region and state can be used as a best practice. This in the wake of a report that shows a significant gap between the skills of Mainers and the skills needed for particular jobs and where those jobs are located.

The report, generated by the Maine Department of Labor using a newly acquired computer program designed to match worker skills with job openings, shows a mismatch between the career clusters where jobs are available and the skills of the state's workers. Results found more than 3,000 unemployed workers getting unemployment benefits who had the job skills being sought for just 300 jobs. The report also showed that there were about 4,500 health care professional and technical occupations posted on the Internet with about 600 workers on file with those kinds of skill sets.

"These figures are alarming, but do not come as a surprise," said NMCC President Timothy Crowley. "This challenge is one that we have faced here in northern Maine for many years and one that we at NMCC have spent a considerable amount of time and energy working collaboratively with the private business sector, economic development entities and educational partners to help mitigate regionally. Although there are areas where we still have some work to do, we have made significant progress in recent years and continually strive to ensure our academic program and continuing education offerings not only meet the current needs of the region, but anticipate where the region's economy might take off next."

Crowley points to the recent announcement that NMCC will develop the Northern Maine Center for Excellence in Alternative Energy Training and Education as a direct link to the work of the Mobilize Northern Maine effort, which includes focus on creating and sustaining an alternative energy industry cluster in the region. In the coming months, NMCC will establish the center and purchase needed equipment to train students enrolled in its wind power technology program with funds donated to the College by philanthropist Mary Smith of California in honor and memory of her late husband Rodney Smith. The private gift will allow NMCC to increase the number of entering students in the popular wind program from 18 to 36.

Aside from the alternative energy center for excellence and NMCC's development of the first wind power technology program in New England, the College introduced a precision metals manufacturing program in 2002, through an initial investment of federal funds championed by U.S. Senator Susan Collins. The program is experiencing record enrollment this year, and graduates are in great demand across the state as the metals manufacturing industry in Maine and in the northern region is growing.

Altogether, NMCC has introduced nine new degree and certificate programs in the past decade, including early childhood education, liberal studies and industrial mechanical maintenance, the latter of which was developed as a result of ongoing discussions with Louisiana Pacific in New Limerick to help retool their workforce.

To help meet regional workforce demands, and at the request of area healthcare providers, the College introduced three new programs in the allied health career field. Associate degree offerings in emergency medical services and medical assisting, and a certificate in medical coding have been added to the inventory of program offerings at NMCC in recent years.

In addition, using distance education technology, the College expanded its associate degree nursing program to sites in Washington County, southern Aroostook and the St. John Valley. A program in radiography, originating on the Eastern Maine Community College campus, was offered for two years to students in the region taking courses at NMCC to meet a need expressed by local hospitals several years ago.

Non-degree training programs in energy auditing and weatherization have just recently been added to the curriculum and are being administered through the continuing education division of the College.

“All of these efforts have been directed at meeting the workforce and other related needs of our region and the state. We communicate regularly with the business community in The County, both because they reach out to us and because of our outreach efforts with them. We also regularly engage over 200 professionals in various career fields on the advisory committees for each of our academic programs,” said Crowley.

The NMCC President points to the College's high number of graduates who find success in the state and region. Ninety-two percent of graduates work in Maine following graduation, and more than 50 percent live and work in Aroostook County in any given year. NMCC serves approximately 1,800 students annually through its credit and non-credit education and training programs.

NMCC has also proven itself a leader in developing and implementing collaborative agreements that benefit the growth and development of students. The College has more than 45 formal articulation agreements with high schools, universities and businesses that enhance the learning process and encourage efficient and quality learning experiences for students. Once such agreement, signed with Husson University in 2006, brought Husson's extended learning site in northern Maine to the NMCC campus and paved the way for expansion of the University's graduate degree programs in Aroostook County.

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