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News Release

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NMCC officially opens Northern Maine Center for Excellence in Alternative Energy Training and Education

Aroostook County - The advancement of educational opportunities in alternative energy in Maine took a huge leap forward with the recent opening of Northern Maine Community College's Northern Maine Center for Excellence in Alternative Energy Training and Education. The April 21st official opening and dedication ceremony drew more than 150 college and community officials, as well as interested members of the public.

Located a short distance from the NMCC campus on the Skyway Industrial Park in Presque Isle, the facility features both classroom and laboratory space for students in the building technology programs at the College. Newly purchased equipment in the center will provide for experiential learning opportunities in various alternative energy resources including wind, solar and biomass.

"The opening of the Northern Maine Center for Excellence in Alternative Energy Training and Education not only marks a significant milestone for NMCC, but it also serves as an important asset in the economic development of our region. The work of our faculty and staff, and support of Mrs. Smith, to ensure the creation of this outstanding center dovetails nicely with the work of Mobilize Maine to create a viable alternative energy industry here in northern Maine," said NMCC President Timothy Crowley. "This facility will have significant impact on our ability to help Aroostook County and the State of Maine build the infrastructure and workforce that are key to unlocking the future economic potential of the region."

Crowley addressed the crowd gathered at the ceremony preceding the official ribbon cutting. Also speaking was Congressman Michael Michaud and Mrs. Mary Smith, the California resident and Presque Isle native who earlier this year donated \$1.2 million to the NMCC Foundation to support the development of the center in honor of her husband Rodney Smith, a very successful Silicon Valley businessman and philanthropist who passed away in 2007.

Despite an impoverished youth in England and incredible odds, Rodney Smith achieved extraordinary success in the United States as a businessman and pioneer in the semi-conductor industry. After a successful 13 years at Fairchild Semiconductor, he was hired by the founders of the Altera Corporation to serve as the company's first CEO. Altera is the leading company in innovative custom logic solutions and invented the world's first reprogrammable logic device in 1984. Smith led the company to great success for two decades before retiring on January 1, 2001.

“Rodney believed in recognizing young people with potential and giving them a chance to succeed. He also believed in giving back to one’s community and protecting the environment. Rodney had a very tough childhood but he never felt sorry for himself and he never gave up. He faced the obstacles that confronted him and moved on with determination. The opportunity to get an education and to become highly skilled changed the path of Rodney’s life,” said Smith. “Rodney was an extraordinary man. His life shows that he believed in taking risks and supporting promising new ventures, which is why I believe that he would have supported the Center for Excellence. He also trusted me, and I believe in the junior college system. I have been interested in making a donation to NMCC for a long time. I can now very happily say that I have done it. I believe that the opportunities for success in life offered to the students at NMCC are similar to those opportunities offered to Rodney in the army’s Apprentices School; a chance to grow, to be trained in a technical field, and to develop the skills and discipline to lead a successful life.”

Smith’s gift and the work of the College to establish the center were both acknowledged by NMCC student Benjamin Dutil of Winslow, who will be among the first 14 students to earn a degree in wind power technology in New England from NMCC on May 14. Dutil, who was a key member of the student team organizing NMCC’s Focus the Nation Alternative Energy Forum in March, shared his life story with attendees and how that led him to enroll in the inaugural class of NMCC’s unique program in 2009.

“I feel it is my duty to stand before you today and share my success story. This is my way of repaying NMCC for all the wonderful experiences and knowledge they have provided me the past two years and to publicly thank and honor Mrs. Smith for her commitment to our school’s success,” said Dutil. “NMCC has poised itself as the leader in alternative energy training. Today marks an important day for many of us in this room and to those students who have yet to open these doors to the Center for Excellence in Alternative Energy Training and Education.”

The Smith donation is one of the largest private contributions ever given to a community college in Maine and the largest to date to an Aroostook County higher education institution. Over the past few months, the College has established the Center for Excellence in a 7,800 square foot building at 920 Skyway Street in Presque Isle that was renovated by the City of Presque Isle. The College has also purchased much of the needed equipment for the facility.

In addition to equipment purchased through the Smith gift, the Alternative Energy Center for Excellence also houses technology purchased through a \$225,000 grant received by NMCC last summer from the Efficiency Maine Trust. Those funds were designated to assist the College in the introduction of new classes and significant revisions to existing courses offered on the campus that will stress energy efficiency in construction and renovation practices.

NMCC has also redirected some resources it receives from the state to expand alternative energy education in the region. The College is leasing the facility for the center from the City of Presque Isle.

Following the ceremony, officials gathered in front of the center for an official ribbon cutting. An overhead door opened as the ribbon was cut to unveil the new laboratory space, featuring equipment to conduct hands-on study in various alternative energy sectors, including wind, solar and biomass. NMCC students demonstrated the equipment to those touring the new facility.

A final part of the ceremony was held in the main entrance of the center, where officials assisted Mrs. Smith in unveiling a memorial wall dedicated to Rodney Smith. The design features Smith's inspiring story and photos from his life. It was completed by Heidi Carter of Heidesign in Fort Kent, and metal letters spelling out Smith's name were created by NMCC precision metals manufacturing instructor Dean Duplessis.

In addition to serving as a learning laboratory and teaching facility for NMCC students, College officials intend for the center to serve as a place where area school children and community members visit to learn more about alternative energy and its potential in the region.

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Northern Maine Community College officials and community leaders join Mrs. Mary Smith (center) in the official ribbon cutting for the Northern Maine Center for Excellence in Alternative Energy Training and Education on Thursday, April 21.



Northern Maine Community College President Timothy Crowley (left) assists Mrs. Mary Smith (right) in unveiling the memorial wall in the Northern Maine Center for Excellence in Alternative Energy Training and Education dedicated in memory of her late husband Rodney Smith. Joining in the unveiling are Brian Hamel (hidden,) NMCC Foundation board chair, and Richard Engels, NMCC Foundation immediate past board chair.



Northern Maine Community College President Timothy Crowley presents Mrs. Mary Smith with a special book produced with photos and articles chronicling her late husband Rodney Smith's life. Copies of the book were also produced for the Northern Maine Center for Excellence in Alternative Energy Training and Education and the College library to help visitors to the facility and College learn more about Rodney Smith's inspirational life story.



Adrian Richardson, a NMCC wind power technology student from Bridgewater, demonstrates one of the new pieces of equipment in the Northern Maine Center for Excellence in Alternative Energy Training and Education to Presque Isle resident Carol MacPherson during the official opening event.



NMCC electrical construction and maintenance student Dave Cote of Caribou demonstrates some of the new technology in the Northern Maine Center for Excellence in Alternative Energy Training and Education to Mrs. Mary Smith and others in attendance at the opening event.