



May 6, 2011  
NR11057

# News Release

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## Former displaced mill workers ready for new careers as NMCC commencement nears

**Aroostook County** - The future looked pretty grim for 35-year-old Tanya Clark of Ashland in January 2009. That's when the mother of two learned that she and nearly 200 of her co-workers at Fraser Timber Inc. sawmills in Ashland and Masardis were being laid-off for an indefinite period of time.

Fast forward 28 months and Clark, who had worked as a licensed grader at the Masardis Mill, and more than a dozen of her former co-workers turned college students are preparing to start their brand new careers after earning associate degrees from Northern Maine Community College on May 14.

The 18 students are part of NMCC largest-ever graduating class and were among 40 displaced workers who started at the College in March of 2009. At that time, NMCC offered an entire special semester of course offerings tailored to laid-off workers. The classes were designed mainly for those in the forest products industry who had received furlough notices in the days before or weeks after the traditional start of the College's spring semester in January.

NMCC took the unprecedented step of starting an entire semester off the traditional schedule to directly assist many of the individuals who qualified for Federal Trade Adjustment Assistance through the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. From the time those impacted begin to draw down benefits, TAA offers up to 104 weeks, or two years, of occupational training and education assistance, with additional benefits provided if developmental courses are required.

"I don't really think I would have been able to go back to school, or might not have thought of going back had it not been for this opportunity," said Clark who will earn her degree in medical assisting. "Going back to school made me realize that I could return and not only be successful, but also really enjoy myself."

The college experience was also positive for 28-year-old Guthrey York of Ashland who worked in several positions in the seven years he was at the Fraser mill in Ashland. York's wife was expecting a child at the time of the lay-off notice and that, coupled with a less than positive previous attempt at attending college, made him all the more apprehensive.

“At first, I wasn’t sure about going back to school. I never really had been into school much. It took me out of my comfort zone. But, after the first month or so I really got into it,” said York. “This program gave me the chance to go back to school and build a solid foundation for the future.”

York will earn his degree in electrical construction and maintenance and is just a few courses shy of completing a degree in wind power technology. He already has an electrical maintenance position lined up at Naturally Potatoes in Mars Hill, which he secured after introducing himself to a hiring representative from the potato processing company at the NMCC Job Fair held on campus in early March.

For her part, Clark has been sending resumes to area healthcare employers for a position as a medical assistant. She recently interviewed for a job and feels very optimistic that an offer is forthcoming.

The success of the displaced workers is being celebrated both by the graduates themselves and the faculty and staff at the College who have watched the students succeed over the past two years. Many of the former mill workers have become top academic achievers in their respective programs.

“We are especially proud of these students’ academic accomplishments. They are true testament that when properly motivated and supported, people can do extraordinary things. All of these individuals came to us after having lost a long-term job, many with academic deficiencies and uncertainties, and the vast majority will successfully graduate with a college degree and a new vocation. We could not be prouder of all their accomplishments,” said Dr. William Egeler, NMCC dean of students.

The 18 students graduating this year will earn degrees in a wide array of subjects. From plumbing and heating and residential construction to business administration and accounting, the former mill workers will start new careers in professions they had only dreamed about a few years ago.

For some, like 33-year-old Albert Nadeau of Presque Isle and 42-year-old Richard Michaud of Houlton, who worked at Fraser in Masardis for over 20 years, the mill was once a place they thought they would collect a paycheck from until it came time to retire. Nadeau will earn an associate degree in accounting information systems and Michaud will earn a medical assisting degree.

“Had I not had this opportunity and funding assistance I probably would have stayed on unemployment and maybe have gone back to the mill when they called me back. I would have been left wondering if I was going to have a secure job,” said Michaud.

Like Michaud, many of the displaced workers did receive a call to go back to work at the mill at some point over the past two years. And, like Michaud, most stayed the course and continued to pursue their degree.

“They called me back in May of 2009. I didn’t go back,” said Michaud. “I don’t regret coming at all. I had a lot of support from colleagues, family and the NMCC family. I can definitely say this was the right decision for me.”

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*Former Fraser Timber Inc. sawmill workers study for their final exams recently in the Northern Maine Community College Library. The four were among the nearly 200 workers laid-off from mills in Ashland and Masardis in January 2009 and among 40 students who enrolled in courses at NMCC for a special semester in March of 2009. Among those graduating on May 14 are: (left to right) Albert Nadeau of Presque Isle, Pierre Gagne of Portage Lake, Tanya Clark of Ashland, and Richard Michaud of Houlton.*