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News Release

November 28
NR11127

NMCC and Presque Isle Historical Society to host Pearl Harbor Day presentation on history of Presque Isle Air Base

Aroostook County – The seventieth anniversary of “a date which will live in infamy” will be marked in Presque Isle with a look back on the Star City’s own brush with military history dating back to the Second World War.

In honor of Pearl Harbor Day on December 7, the Presque Isle Historical Society, in partnership with Northern Maine Community College, will mark not only that occasion, but as well the seventieth anniversary of the year the federal government appropriated the local airport to establish the Presque Isle Army Airfield. The presentation on the history of what became the Presque Isle Army Air Base on Wednesday, December 7, at 5:30 p.m. in the Edmunds Conference Center is free and open to the public.

“What could be more fitting on Pearl Harbor Day than to learn more about a local air base that played such a key role in World War II?” said Kim Smith, secretary/treasurer of the Presque Isle Historical and presenter for the planned talk. “Presque Isle regularly saw celebrities such as Bob Hope, Joan Blondell, and Frances Langford on the air field. We will talk about activity on the base and surrounding community during this time, as well as how the base was transformed after the war.”

The Air Base in Presque Isle was originally built in 1930 by the Civilian Conservation Corps as the Presque Isle Airport. After being taken over by the Army in 1941, the facility became a vital air transport installation and Presque Isle a busy war center. The mission of the Air Base at the time was the delivery of Lend-Lease aircraft to Great Britain and as an embarkation point for overseas movement of Army Air Forces personnel and equipment.

In July 1944, the mission of the Air Base was changed to be that of a port of debarkation and caring for casualties from the front in France. An extensive hospital facility sat where the residential area of the NMCC campus sits today.

The presentation on the history of the Presque Isle Army Air Base is the final in a series hosted through the past year by the Presque Isle Historical Society on key happenings that have shaped the history of the region. The sessions have been held on the Northern Maine Community College campus as part of the community activity surrounding the institution's 50th Anniversary.

Previous featured topics have included the historic Double Eagle II balloon launch and the Bloodless Aroostook War. Smith conducted a public presentation on the history of the campus that served as the unofficial kick-off to the series at NMCC in mid-April at a dinner event that also served as the annual meeting for the NMCC Alumni and Friends Organization.

Smith serves on the NMCC 50th Anniversary Steering Committee and has played a significant role in the hosting of activities surrounding the celebration, including the sock-hop themed 1960's kick-off event in January. She has researched and written over thirty presentations of topics of interest on Presque Isle's History.

For more information on the upcoming historical presentation, contact the NMCC college relations office at (207) 768-2809 or e-mail info@nmcc.edu.

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Photo courtesy: Presque Isle Historical Society

Hundreds of area residents attend an open house at the Presque Isle Army Air Base in 1945. The history of the local base is the topic of a "Pearl Harbor Day" presentation at NMCC on December 7.