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NMCC to host “FTN 2.0 Biomass and Beyond”

Speakers for March 7 alternative energy conference announced

Aroostook County – For the second year in a row the current status and future development of alternative energy in Maine takes center stage at a forum hosted by students at Northern Maine Community College. “FTN 2.0 Biomass and Beyond” will take place on the NMCC campus Wednesday, March 7.

The day-long conference will bring together stakeholders and those interested in all forms of alternative energy from across the state. It will focus on developments since a similar event held a year ago at NMCC and, as the title suggests, look at the emerging biomass energy industry that has advanced significantly over the past two years, particularly in northern Maine.

Several key leaders within the alternative energy sector will present at the event. Featured speakers include Dr. William Strauss, president and founder of FutureMetrics, LLC and director of Maine Energy Systems; and Gerard Chasse, president and chief operating officer of Bangor Hydro Electric Company.

Strauss, who will serve as keynote speaker at the conference, leads a consultancy that has become recognized as the leading domestic expert in the economics of the production and use of biomass fuels. FutureMetrics is also recognized for its expertise in quantifying the financial feasibility of renewable energy projects and the economic impacts of those projects in areas such as jobs, growth and tax revenues.

He also serves as managing partner of FutureEnergy Partners, LLC, which specializes in enabling inventors of cutting edge technology in the energy sector to move from idea to commercial product. He is the chief economist for the Biomass Thermal Energy Council in Washington, DC and the chief economist for the Maine Pellet Fuels Association. Strauss served as the chief economist on the Maine Governor’s Wood-to-Energy Task force in 2008-2009.

Strauss will share his findings on the economic impact and viability of biomass energy production, with special focus on Maine. He recently shared his insight and research at conferences in Europe and on the west coast of the United States.

The data he will provide to attendees at “FTN 2.0 Biomass and Beyond,” will be especially timely as there are currently over a dozen biomass boilers in operation, planned, or under construction within Aroostook County, including at NMCC, which will provide more than \$20 million dollars directly into the region’s economy. According to the Maine Department of Conservation, Maine Forest Service 78% of every dollar spent on oil leaves the state, while 100% of every dollar spent on biomass remains in the regional economy.

Chasse, who leads Bangor Hydro which is owned by Emera Inc., the Halifax-based energy services company that acquired Maine Public Service Company, will lead the day’s discussion with an update on the project that would connect the Maine Public Service system to the rest of the Maine and New England electric grid. The lack of that “connector” was identified by participants in last year’s Maine Focus the Nation Forum as the key roadblock to the development of substantial alternative energy generation in northern Maine.

Chasse will also speak on the changing energy landscape in Maine and his company’s efforts in the development of various forms of alternative energy. Operating as sister utilities, Bangor Hydro and Maine Public Service Company serve more than 150,000 customers in Northern and Eastern Maine.

The afternoon session will feature a panel discussion with four statewide advocates of alternative energy: Todd J. Griset, an attorney with the PretiFlaherty law firm’s energy and telecommunications group based in Portland; Andrew Plant with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, who has been researching liquid and solid biofuel for farmers; Thomas Wood, senior planner for the Maine Forest Service Department of Conservation, who is responsible for grants for biomass projects awarded in the state; and Robert Dorsey, president and CEO for Aroostook Partnership for Progress, which leads the Mobilize Northern Maine initiative. They will participate in an interactive dialogue with conference attendees.

The March 7 forum is being coordinated by a team of students under the guidance of Focus the Nation (FTN), the country’s leading clean energy youth empowerment organization. FTN again this year selected Northern Maine Community College as a national partner to raise awareness and move the country toward clean energy solutions. NMCC joins MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) as the only two schools in New England to carry the Focus the Nation banner in 2012.

Five student leaders on the NMCC campus are coordinating the project, engaging with FTN staff based in Portland, Oregon. The organizers are Gene Martin of Mapleton, a senior in NMCC’s business administration program; Nathan Woods of Rumford, a senior electrical construction and maintenance student; Jessica Ouellette of Caribou, a senior in the business administration program; Jeff Kiser of Plaster Rock, New Brunswick, a freshman in the emergency medical services program; and Natalie St. Pierre of Presque Isle, a graduate student taking courses through Husson University’s division of extended learning on the NMCC campus.

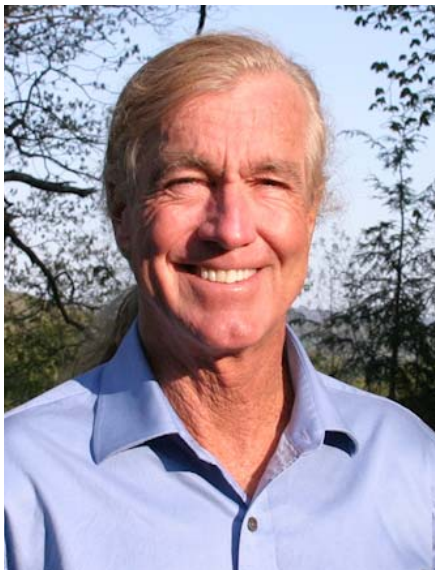
Last March, after being selected by FTN as their only partner college in the northeast, NMCC hosted one of 22 nationwide clean energy forums on its campus. The student-organized, day-long session called the “Maine Event” drew more than 100 participants from across the state.

“Since our Clean Energy Forum last March there has been significant development in the alternative energy industry in Aroostook County, especially in the area of biomass,” said St. Pierre. “As a result, this year’s forum will be centered more on sustainability and how biomass and other alternative energy can both support local industry growth while reducing dependence on foreign oil.”

The Focus The Nation theme for 2012 participating colleges is “Forums-to-Action: Energy Innovation.” The intent is to engage student leaders to “drive solution oriented clean energy collaborations between their campuses and communities” according to the FTN website.

For more information on “FTN 2.0 Biomass and Beyond” or to register for the March 7 conference on the NMCC campus, visit the Focus the Nation website at www.focusthenation.org and click on the icon by the state of Maine. Interested individuals can also learn more or register by calling the development and college relations office at NMCC at 207-768-2810.

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Dr. William Strauss



Gerard Chasse