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News Release

Contact:
Jason Parent
Development and
College Relations Office
33 Edgemont Drive
Presque Isle, ME 04769
Phone: (207) 768-2808
Fax: (207) 760-1101
jparent@nmcc.edu

NMCC receives \$5 million gift

*Donation to fund two significant projects that will have
“transformative impact” on campus community*

Aroostook County - A \$5 million private gift from a most generous Presque Isle native will have a “transformative impact” on the nation’s most northeastern community college. That word today from officials with Northern Maine Community College and the NMCC Foundation, who announced the historic contribution and outlined plans for significant projects the donation will make possible.

The gift comes from a staunch supporter of NMCC and the City of Presque Isle, Mary Barton Akeley Smith. Smith is the California resident, who last year supported the College with a \$1.2 million gift that greatly advanced the school’s alternative energy program offerings. She also made possible the expansion of the city’s Mark and Emily Turner Memorial Library with a \$1 million contribution.

“This is truly a pivotal moment in the 50 year history of Northern Maine Community College,” said Vicki Smith, NMCC Foundation board chair. “Words cannot express our profound gratitude to Mrs. Smith. Her impact on this campus, on higher education, and on this community cannot be overstated. The support she has shown and confidence she has entrusted to all of us as stewards of this fine institution is unparalleled.”

The funds donated by Mary Smith provide the lion’s share of the \$6 million needed to renovate and repurpose two existing facilities at NMCC. The 9,000 square foot building which now houses the college dining commons on the north end of campus will be transformed into the Rodney Smith Center for Fitness and Occupational Wellness in honor of the donor’s late husband. The 14,000 square foot facility that is now the college gymnasium and sits in the center of the campus will become the new Akeley Student Center in honor of Mary Smith’s parents and family.

Efforts to both raise the \$1 million to match the Smith gift and begin the design and other pre-construction work get underway this month according to NMCC President Timothy Crowley. NMCC and NMCC Foundation officials have both committed to seeking other private and grant funds. The intent is to complete both construction projects over the next year and a half.

“The work that will be undertaken on our campus as a result of this very generous gift by Mrs. Smith will have a transformative impact on our service to students and the community,” said NMCC President Timothy Crowley. “With this contribution, we can move forward with two key projects outlined in the College’s master plan (approved in 2005) that would not have otherwise been possible in these challenging economic times. We are pleased that Mrs. Smith shares our vision and commitment to the people of Aroostook County, and we are excited about having an opportunity to take a portion of our long range plan for NMCC and bring it to life.”

Crowley stressed the need for a new wellness center on campus to help ensure the future workforce of the region and state is physically able to perform the functions needed by employers. In addition to serving that function, the facility will be a gathering spot for students and community members, encouraging both social interaction and wellness activities from basic cardio fitness exercises to group exercise classes.

“Beyond being an extraordinarily large gift, this is an investment in our campus and in the Aroostook County community. It will have considerable economic impact in the short term as it will put folks to work but, more importantly, the significance of the long term impact is that it creates a healthier and more competitive workforce for The County,” said Crowley.

The Akeley Student Center, to be created in the space now occupied by the college gymnasium, will house the new Reed Dining Commons, a student lounge, college bookstore, space for student organizations, student counseling, continuing education, and campus safety and security. The campus master plan calls for a second story to be added to the facility, which will increase the usable square footage without increasing the building footprint. It provides for the relocation of the dining commons and student gathering spots to a more centralized area to reflect the changing demographics of the student population. NMCC’s average student is currently 28 years old. As the number of non-traditional students has grown, the need to relocate such space to serve both the residential population and the large number of commuter students is evident.

To ensure both facilities best meet the needs of intended users, the College has formed an advisory group to work with the architect designing the plans. The committee has representation from the NMCC student body, alumni, college employees and community members. Mary Smith has agreed to serve on the group and will travel from California to Presque Isle to take part in the first meeting later this month.

The wellness center will bear the name of Smith’s husband, who was a self-made man and philanthropist who achieved great success in Silicon Valley. Rodney Smith was a native of England, who, despite an impoverished youth and incredible odds, achieved extraordinary success in the United States as a businessman and pioneer in the semi-conductor industry.

The naming of the Akeley Student Center will reflect the contributions to the Aroostook County community by the Akeley family. Robert V. Akeley and Hope Greenlaw Akeley, parents of Mary Smith, both represented the best of the region’s famed work ethic throughout their careers.

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The gymnasium at Northern Maine Community College will be transformed into the Akeley Student Center in honor of Mary Barton Akeley Smith, a Presque Isle native who now resides in California and has gifted the NMCC campus with \$5 million.



The existing Reed Dining Commons at Northern Maine Community College will be moved into the new Akeley Student Center to make way for the Rodney Smith Fitness and Occupational Wellness Center.