



# News Release

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## **Breaking the Mold: Recognizing Students in Non-Traditional Programs at NMCC**

*Aroostook*— “What do I want to do with my life?” is a question that all students ask themselves. With a wide array of career paths to choose from, this can be a daunting decision to make. This dilemma is amplified by the social norms and gender stereotypes in our society that often influence career choice. Gender roles are instilled in children at a young age, when they are taught what is considered “appropriate” behavior based on being male or female. For example, most children are taught that girls play with dolls and boys play with trucks. It’s no wonder automobile mechanics are predominately male and a majority of healthcare workers are female. Automotive technology and nursing are examples of non-traditional careers, or careers in which less than 25% of the workforce is of one gender. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2011), men represent approximately 6% of employees in healthcare and social assistance careers, while only 8% of women have jobs in automotive repair and maintenance. Contrary to these statistics, several students are defying the norm and breaking the mold, pursuing careers in non-traditional fields.

Bryan Pelkey is a second-year nursing student at NMCC. Prior to entering the nursing program, Bryan was employed as an operator in the recycle plant at Great Northern Paper in East Millinocket for 27 years. Due to job instability and feeling unsatisfied with his job, Bryan knew he needed to expand his horizons and pursue a different career.

Bryan developed an interest in nursing after his daughter was diagnosed with cancer when she was only 12 years old. During her course of treatment, Bryan spent a significant amount of time in hospitals in Bangor and Boston, where he had the opportunity to talk to nurses and become familiar with what the profession entails. Bryan's experience caring for his daughter also sparked an interest in nursing. Several of his former co-workers at the paper mill became nurses, which also inspired Bryan.

While Bryan was laid off from his job in 2003 and again in 2011, he took college courses through Eastern Maine Community College at the Katahdin Regional Higher Education Center. In March of 2012, Bryan was accepted into the nursing program at NMCC. Bryan had also been accepted into the respiratory therapy program at Kennebec Valley Community College in Fairfield, ME, however, he chose nursing for more career opportunities. Bryan's daughter graduated from the nursing program at NMCC and spoke very highly of the program, and therefore influenced his decision to attend NMCC. Bryan admits that he felt some anxiety about going back to school. "I was a first-time college student. Learning the technology was all new to me. As an older student, I thought I would feel out of place. There were more older students at NMCC than I thought there would be. It's also nice that I'm not the only male student in nursing."

When Bryan first started the program, he had moments of self-doubt. "The program was more difficult than I thought it would be. I was questioning myself, wondering if I made the right choice. Now, things are coming together." Overall, Bryan has had a positive learning experience in the program. "I'm learning a lot every day." Although Bryan reports a sense of fairness and collaboration among his male and female peers, he recognizes the challenges of being a male in the field. "Depending on the procedure, some female patients refuse to have a male present in the room." Therefore, males can be less exposed to certain medical procedures.

Bryan enjoys helping others. “Patients are fascinating, not only getting to know them on a personal level, but also learning about the different illnesses that a person can have.” When Bryan graduates in May, he wants to work in a hospital. “I would like to work on the medical/surgical floor to gain more experience. Eventually, I would like to become an operating room nurse or work in the heart catheter lab.” Bryan also plans on continuing his education and earning his Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

According to Bryan, asking questions, recording class lectures, completing practice tests, and accessing the Academic Success Center on campus has helped him succeed in class. And what advice does Bryan have for males considering a career in nursing? “If you want to do something fulfilling and you enjoy helping people, consider nursing. Don’t be swayed by the stereotype that nursing is only for women. Job shadow in a hospital for more than a day to see if you like it. The medical field is a great field to get into.”

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