



Media Contact:

Jason Parent
NMCC Development and
College Relations Office
(207) 768-2808
jparent@nmcc.edu

News Release

May 1, 2007
NR07043

NMCC and Maine Quality Centers enter training partnership agreement with Louisiana Pacific's Houlton facility

Aroostook County - The growing workforce at Louisiana Pacific's Houlton facility will receive essential training through an agreement made official today by company representatives and the leaders of Northern Maine Community College and the Maine Quality Centers program.

The memorandum of understanding signed at a luncheon and press conference held at the Houlton Higher Education Center, with local, regional and state leaders present, calls for NMCC, in collaboration with the Maine Quality Centers, to provide education and training for as many as 45 LP employees over an eight month period, beginning in July. The contract work represents a joint initiative by the Aroostook County College and Maine Quality Centers program, representing an \$80,000 value toward the workforce development and expansion of the southern Aroostook facility.

"By joining hands with NMCC and the Maine Quality Centers, LP will be able to provide the highest quality training to our new hires. Their success will insure the viability of our facility for decades to come," said Skip Cleary, LP Houlton Plant Manager.

Specifically, the understanding forges a partnership between LP and NMCC, whereby the continuing education division of the College will facilitate training for company employees in various areas identified as critical to the company's growth. Examples of such training modules include sessions in forklift operation, aerial lift training, reverse osmosis water filtration, substation usage software, and other topics including safety practices, fire protection, and first aid/CPR.

Joining in the Houlton signing ceremony to congratulate LP, NMCC and the Maine Quality Centers was Maine Labor Commissioner Laura Fortman.

"Like many businesses competing in a global economy, Louisiana Pacific recognizes the importance of having a skilled workforce," said Maine Labor Commissioner Laura Fortman. "Using the resources of the CareerCenter, the company was able to find workers for the new jobs being created, and this partnership is helping those employees get the training they need to succeed in their new jobs."

The training and education partnership agreement comes nine months after LP broke ground on its Houlton Oriented Strand Lumber (OSL) facility, which is scheduled to begin production later this year.

OSL, an engineered wood product manufactured using strand technology, meets home construction demands for alternative engineered products in lumber applications. The southern Aroostook plant will be LP's first OSL manufacturing facility and will be one of the few producers of OSL in North America.

"We are pleased to be able to provide this education and training to Louisiana Pacific as they bring their new state-of-the-art facility on line. For many years NMCC has worked with businesses and organizations throughout northern Maine to meet the continuing education needs of regional employers. As an institution, we will always strive to meet the workforce development needs of the County. This new partnership with LP represents our expanded role as a key partner in the effort to attract new business ventures to the region," said NMCC President Timothy Crowley.

A key partner in NMCC workforce development efforts over the past decade has been the Maine Quality Centers program, an economic development initiative of the Maine Community College System. The Quality Centers provide job-specific workforce training for new and expanding businesses, and new employment and career advancement opportunities for Maine people. As is the case with the Louisiana Pacific project, customized training is provided at no cost to either the businesses or the trainees.

"We are pleased to assist NMCC in providing this training to an expanding business in Aroostook County. This project is an investment in the continued economic development of both the County's businesses and workforce," said James McGowan, state director of the Maine Quality Centers.

LP's Houlton facility opened in April 1982 and served as the flagship site for the company's Oriented Strand Board (OSB) manufacturing. According to LP officials, the \$100 million conversion from OSB to OSL will ensure Houlton plays a key role in LP's future.

The southern Aroostook facility employs more than 120 workers. It has been recognized nationally for excellence in safety as an Occupational Safety and Health Administration Voluntary Protection Program STAR site and in environmental performance as a member of the Environmental Protection Agency's exclusive Performance Track Program.

Headquartered in Nashville, Tennessee, LP is a leading supplier of building products, manufacturing innovative high-quality commodity and specialty products to retail, wholesale, homebuilding, and industrial customers. LP operates 29 mills across the U.S., Canada, and Chile, and employs more than 5,500.

Since the Maine Quality Centers program was established by the Maine Legislature in 1994, 198 expanding Maine businesses have been served, creating 10,729 new jobs statewide.

In Aroostook County, since the first joint NMCC/Maine Quality Centers program was initiated in 1997, 22 businesses have benefited from training partnership agreements, totaling an investment of more than \$1.7 million dollars in the region's economy and just over 1,100 new hires.

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