



# News Release

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## **NMCC to dedicate gazebo in memory of first woman elected to, and longest serving member of, Presque Isle City Council**

*Aroostook County* - The pioneering advocacy and philanthropic legacy of Jean Harding, the first woman elected to the Presque Isle City Council and the individual who remains the longest serving member of that body, will be remembered at an August 24 ceremony on the Northern Maine Community College campus.

Several state and local political leaders, family and friends of the late Jean Harding and her husband, Presque Isle attorney Floyd Harding, members of the NMCC campus community, and friends of the college will gather for the B. Jean Harding Gazebo dedication, on Friday, August 24, at 2:00 p.m.

As part of the celebration, Floyd Harding plans to announce a major gift to NMCC in his late wife's memory. The contribution will endow a substantial scholarship fund to benefit hundreds of students attending Northern Maine Community College.

The announcement will come at the end of a ceremony honoring the impressive civic and community contributions of Jean Harding through a number of tributes paid by former colleagues and friends.

Festivities will culminate with the official dedication of a newly built gazebo, which was constructed this spring by students and faculty in NMCC's residential construction program. The structure, which sits prominently by the main entrance in front of the College, was built to resemble a similar, but smaller gazebo, on the Hillside Street property in Presque Isle, where the Hardings together raised nine children and where Floyd Harding continues to reside.

The gazebo, and moreover, the plants and flowers that have been planted surrounding it on the NMCC campus – which mirror the landscaping designed by Jean Harding at the Harding residence – were intended to honor another passion of the community leader who passed away in November 2005 after a valiant battle with cancer.

“One of the greatest loves of Jean’s life was flowers. She so enjoyed the time she spent planting and caring for them,” said Floyd Harding. “The gazebo and surrounding flower garden are a most fitting tribute to Jean’s life and service to her community and to NMCC, a college which she so dearly loved and strongly supported. She was most proud of the accomplishments of the students attending the College and truly understood and appreciated the profound and positive difference the institution made in their lives. The gazebo, and scholarship fund we are establishing, will serve as lasting tributes to that legacy.”

Aside from the pride he will feel in honoring his wife of 42 years, the celebration will hold equal personal significance for Floyd Harding, who in the early 1960’s was among a key group of Presque Isle area residents who worked to establish what today is Northern Maine Community College on the site of the former Presque Isle Air Base.

“After it was announced the base would close in 1961, our group approached Maine’s then U.S. Senator Edmund Muskie who, in turn, spoke with President John Kennedy about turning over the former base property to the city for re-development. Once the transfer happened we went to work to obtain funding from the state legislature. It was an uphill battle, but in the end we got the money, and vocational education was born in Northern Maine,” said Floyd Harding.

In honor of Harding and the other “founding fathers” of the College, the B. Jean Harding Gazebo sits – as is noted on the marker that will be placed beside the structure – on the site of the former Presque Isle Air Base commander’s residence.

“The dedication ceremony for the Harding Gazebo and the announcement at the event by Mr. Harding will serve to both honor the past and signify a great and bright new future for the College and for higher education, and in particular access to higher education in Aroostook County,” said NMCC President Timothy Crowley. “It will underscore the significance of the valued support we receive from people like Floyd and Jean Harding and others from throughout Aroostook County and beyond, who see and appreciate the wonderful work of our faculty, students and staff.”

Jean Harding served a total of 18 years on the Presque Isle City Council in the 1970’s and 1980’s. During her tenure she worked tirelessly on numerous issues and committees, including as a staunch advocate for the city’s recreation department and in support of the Presque Isle Industrial Council in their efforts to secure new business for the community.

She also represented the city on various county and state committees, including serving on the Aroostook Finance Committee and working with the Maine Municipal Association on behalf of the City of Presque Isle.

Among the crowning achievements in her service as an elected official was to secure funding for the Presque Isle bike path during the Carter Administration. The bike path circles the city and runs in front of the NMCC campus, within 50 feet of the Gazebo that will be dedicated in her memory.

Aside from her work in city government and her advocacy on behalf of NMCC and its forerunners Northern Maine Technical College and Northern Maine Vocational Technical Institute, Jean Harding was actively engaged in numerous civic organizations and fundraising initiatives.

She worked side-by-side with Sister Mary O'Donnell to secure funds for the County's only homeless shelter, and with other community volunteers to establish the Central Aroostook Humane Society's animal shelter. In addition Harding worked to support the efforts of the Opportunity Training Center in the Star City.

Jean Harding also worked to raise funds for several groups, including the Maine Veteran's Home in Caribou and area cancer support organizations, and she was an instrumental force in raising funds to rebuild the Grant Memorial United Methodist Church in Presque Isle after it was destroyed by fire more than a decade ago.

"Jean was perhaps best known for her openness to the people she served. Most of her time was consumed listening to and talking with area residents, learning how she might help solve problems or address pressing issues," said Floyd Harding.

Amongst all of their civic and community involvement, the Hardings together raised nine children, who are all grown and include two attorneys, a CEO of a local regional transportation network, a nurse, plumber, U.S. Navy Veteran, and an educator.

Interested members of the public are welcome and encouraged to attend the Jean Harding Gazebo Dedication ceremony at NMCC on Friday, August 24, at 2:00 p.m. For more information, contact the development office at 768-2809.

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*Northern Maine Community College Residential Construction Instructor Guy Jackson puts the finishing touches on the ramp leading to the soon-to-be dedicated B. Jean Harding Gazebo on the NMCC campus. Jackson and his students constructed the gazebo this spring.*