



News Release

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B. Jean Harding Gazebo officially dedicated at NMCC

Aroostook County - The legacy of the first woman elected to the Presque Isle City Council, who remains the longest serving individual ever to hold the post, was remembered at Northern Maine Community College on August 24, as the institution officially dedicated a gazebo in honor and memory of B. Jean Harding.

State and local leaders, community members, as well as family and friends of Floyd and Jean Harding joined with NMCC faculty, staff and students to pay tribute to the woman who made her mark at the college and in her community.

“We are here today to celebrate the life and countless contributions of a woman who gave selflessly to her community, county, state and country. So many of us here today – certainly all of us at NMCC – owe a debt of gratitude to this staunch advocate, supporter and friend. The evidence of her drive and dedication, her very passion to help others better their lives, and her compassion for her fellow man, woman and all living things is very visible all around us,” said NMCC President Timothy Crowley.

Crowley’s comments were followed by other distinguished speakers, who included State Senator John Martin, who served as master of ceremonies; Maine State Chamber of Commerce President Dana Connors, a former Presque Isle City manager who worked closely with Jean Harding and who delivered the keynote address at the dedication ceremony; Daniel Donovan, Jean Harding’s son, who spoke on behalf of the family; and Floyd Harding himself.

A recurring theme in the presentations was the appropriateness of the structure that was constructed by the NMCC residential construction class of 2007, faculty member Guy Jackson and his lab assistant Nathan Gardiner. The physical location of the gazebo was also noted as particularly fitting.

“You needn’t look far in this city, or from this very spot, to find the beneficiaries of her (Jean Harding’s) decades of service and civic engagement. The bike path, which encircles Presque Isle and passes here just behind me; the Sister Mary O’Donnell Homeless Shelter and Central Aroostook Humane Society – around the corner; and this fine College, the shadow of which we sit this afternoon, are but a few examples of my mother’s passionate advocacy for the people of this area,” said Donovan in tribute to his mother.

The 12 foot wide octagonal shaped gazebo and surrounding landscaping were constructed and planted to resemble that on the Presque Isle Hillside Street property on which Jean Harding enjoyed spending time working and relaxing.

It is located by the main entrance of the community college campus on the site of the former residence of the commander of the Presque Isle Air Base, which served the nation's military needs during World War II and the early years of the Cold War. A marker by the gazebo that was unveiled at the end of the dedication ceremony and which encapsulates Jean Harding's achievements notes the placement as most appropriate as "Mrs. Harding's husband, Floyd Harding, was among the founders of this institution upon the closure of the base in 1961."

"It is fitting that this gazebo be dedicated in her honor, surrounded by flowers that she so loved and the opportunity for people to gather here and chat about nothing of importance except the importance of love and friendship. It is also fitting that this gazebo sit just yards away, and in view of the bike path she advocated for, and what became one of the jewels in her crown of nearly two decades of service as an elected official in this city," said Harding in his remarks.

In his remarks, Dana Connors spoke about how effective Jean was at being the 'voice of the people of Presque Isle.'

"I'm proud to be a part of this special moment that celebrates the life of a woman who showed so much love for the people she served. Jean was not only an inspiration in her dedicated service as an elected official and a community advocate, she was the most caring public servant I have ever had the pleasure to work with. She cared, with unparalleled passion, for the people of this area," said Connors.

In addition to honoring the life and legacy of Jean Harding through spoken tributes, the ceremony featured two musical selections, picked by Floyd Harding for their special significance to his late wife.

The first, "The Green, Green Grass of Home," was performed acoustically by Aimee Wilkins, a 2007 graduate of NMCC's accounting program, and her husband Bruce Wilkins just prior to the start of the ceremony. The second selection, "Amazing Grace," was performed as a vocal musical interlude by 2007 Aroostook Idol winner Annie Charles of Limestone, who was accompanied by the Wilkins.

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.

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.

Amongst all of her civic and community involvement, Jean Harding and her husband Floyd together raised nine children

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