



# News Release

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## **Former state legislator and County Treasurer James McBreairty establishes \$60,000 scholarship fund for local students to attend Northern Maine Community College**

**Aroostook County** - During his 12-year tenure representing Aroostook in the Maine Legislature in the 1970's and 1980's, James McBreairty and his wife Doris annually funded a one to two week visit to the state capitol for four area high school students. The purpose of the project was to provide the young people in his district with an up close and personal education on the workings of state government.

It was but one of many ways in which the long-time Perham residents gave to their community – particularly in areas that supported the pursuit of education. Family members recall numerous occasions when the McBreairty's privately and quietly provided financial assistance to area residents attending college.

The quiet passion became a formal legacy on October 19, when 92-year-old James McBreairty announced, at a reception in his honor at Northern Maine Community College, that he has established a \$60,000 scholarship fund through the *Campaign for the County's College* at NMCC that will provide three \$1,000 scholarships annually to first year students, one each from the communities of Perham, Wade and Washburn.

The Dickinson-McBreairty Memorial Scholarship fund is named in honor and memory of James and his late wife of 70 years Doris (Dickinson) McBreairty, who passed away in September of this year, as well as the couple's parents, Hampton and Sarah McBreairty and Harry and Leona Dickinson.

“When I ran for office, I never lost an election. The people gave that to me. When I retired from elected office I wanted to give something back. This is one of the ways that I have to give something back to the people who gave so much to me over my years,” said McBreairty. “We’ve always supported education.”

For the former lawmaker and veteran Aroostook County treasurer, establishing the scholarship is as much about giving back as it is a personal mission to ensure that individuals who want to empower themselves by obtaining an education are able to do so without any barriers. It is a cause that holds special and personal significance.

“When I was growing up, I faced many challenges when it came to attending school. I would begin classes each year in Woodland in the fall, where my parent’s worked on a large farm. In the winter, we would move to our home in Perham, where my parent’s owned a woodlot. I would complete my school year there each year,” said McBreairty.

It worked that way until the winter of 1928. The previous fall McBreairty had begun his school year in Woodland, as he had done since the family had moved to central Aroostook from Allagash in 1921. However, when the family moved back to Perham, the McBreairtys learned that the schoolhouse had burned down and the books were destroyed in the fire. As a result, the family was told schooling would be suspended for the remainder of the year.

“It set me back and forced me to repeat my eighth grade year, which delayed my entry into high school,” said McBreairty.

He persevered and entered Caribou High School as a freshman in the fall of 1930. To attend school required him to find boarding in Caribou. His parent’s provided wood from their lot in Perham to a Caribou family who would use it to heat their home in the winter months in exchange for providing James a place to live during the school year.

“That worked out until the end of my junior year when that family moved from the area, and I was without a place to stay while attending school. As a result, I ended up going to work and not finishing high school,” said McBreairty. “It is largely because of this, that Doris and I so strongly encouraged our own children and others to further their education, and why I have established this scholarship fund.”

In accepting the scholarship contribution on behalf of NMCC, College President Timothy Crowley thanked and praised the veteran lawmaker and County leader for assisting others in achieving their dreams.

“Over the years Aroostook County has benefited from having great public servants. Jim’s service to the County has been outstanding. His ability to work in the legislature, across party lines, has allowed hundreds of Aroostook County students to receive an education at NMCC,” said Crowley at the reception. “His generosity continues today with the establishment of the Dickinson-McBreairty Memorial Scholarship. This fund will provide support for students from Perham, Wade and Washburn. It will give students a chance to access higher education.”

The celebration and recognition event for McBreairty was held in an electronics laboratory, situated in a wing off of the College gymnasium, complete with students actively engaged in hands-on projects. The location holds special significance for the former two-term member of the Maine House of Representatives and four-term member of the State Senate.

In 1977, at the beginning of his second term in the House, McBreairty, at the urging of his friend Representative Carl Smith of Mars Hall, successfully pushed forward an amendment in the chamber to add, on behalf of Northern Maine Vocational Technical Institute, \$1.4 million to a \$2.3 million bond question. Before his addition, the initiative to go before voters statewide only provided for construction at three Vocational Technical Institutes in central and southern Maine. Later that year the \$3.7 million bond question was approved by voters and, as a result of the efforts of McBreairty, money was made available to construct what is today the electronics wing at NMCC.

“The building we are standing in today is a tribute to your hard work and advocacy for the people of Aroostook County, and specifically to the education community,” said Crowley. “It moved students from taking classes in military barracks that were ready to collapse to modern technology labs. Hundreds of students have benefited from this work.”

Prior to his legislative career, McBreairty’s desire to better educational opportunities for all inspired his more than two decades of service representing the Town of Perham on the local school board. During his tenure he was instrumental in building a new elementary school in the small community; forming SAD 45, which includes the communities of Perham, Wade and Washburn; as well as building Washburn District High School.

McBreairty’s oldest grandson, Michael McIntosh, who now serves as chairperson of the SAD 45 school board, spoke at the reception on behalf of the school district and the grandchildren of James and Doris McBreairty.

“It is particularly appropriate that he (James McBreairty) has chosen to establish a scholarship at NMCC. He has always believed in the value of hard work and the benefit of practical knowledge. On his farm he was forced to be self reliant. He can fix anything, weld anything, fabricate anything. He is a master welder, machinist, mechanic, carpenter and draftsman. He is a bookkeeper, a writer, and, in his later years, has become a skilled landscaper and an adept computer user,” said McIntosh. “He understands and values the skills promoted by NMCC and knows that just as no one would have predicted the impact he has had on our state, no one can predict which NMCC student will lead us in the future.”

Community leadership has long been a part of James McBreairty’s life. He has held nearly every municipal office in Perham, including selectman, treasurer and tax collector, all the while working side by side with Doris running a successful family farm for 30 years.

In 1974, the McBreairtys retired from the farm and James ran his first campaign for the House. He was successful in the election that fall and was re-elected to the seat two years later.

In 1978, he decided to run for State Senate, and was re-elected to that seat four times consecutively, until he retired from the legislature in 1986. All the while he was assisted by Doris in both campaigns and his constituent service work.

“He became a highly respected state representative and then state senator, admired by friend and foe alike, who came to understand that his word was his bond, that the people came first – before party or politics – and that he would fight to the finish for his constituents,” said oldest daughter Noreen McIntosh. “It’s hard for him to go anywhere these days without someone coming up to shake his hand and thank him for helping them in a time of need.”

His service to the people continued after his days in the legislature. When he returned from Augusta, he was elected to the office of Aroostook County Treasurer, a position he held for eight years. During this period of time, James McBreairty, while in his mid 70’s, pioneered the computerization of the County budget, a feat that might have been considered difficult for someone half his age.

In 1996, at the age of 81, he retired from the County position and from publicly elected office, having never lost an election.

James and Doris McBreairty's legacy extends far beyond his illustrious career as an elected official. One of Aroostook County's most lucrative winter sports and recreation industries, snowmobiling, was given a significant boost when the couple played an instrumental role in forming the first official snowmobile club in Maine – the Snow Drifters of Caribou. The couple, who remained avid snowmobilers well into their 80's, also were charter members of the Washburn Trailrunners Snowmobile Club.

After spending 63 years on the family farm in Perham, James and Doris McBreairty sold the property and moved to a new home in Washburn. On September 7, 2007, Doris McBreairty passed away at the age of 87.

Along with their many accomplishments in the public and civic service sectors, the couple proudly raised four children: Noreen (McBreairty) McIntosh of Washburn, Linda (McBreairty) Seward of Perham, Marvin McBreairty of Brewer, and Molly (McBreairty) Stevens of Eddington. The family has since expanded to include 13 grandchildren, 24 great-grandchildren, and eight great-great-grandchildren.

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