



News Release

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Construction on fourth decade of Sinawik homes begins; project is more relevant than ever before

Aroostook County - Not stopping for a moment to rest on their laurels, having completed construction earlier this year on the 30th Sinawik home, the faculty in the construction trade programs at Northern Maine Community College have begun work shepherding the next generation of students through the building process.

Floor joists, hammered together by first-year students in the large residential construction lab at the College, now form the footprint and base frame for a home that will soon rise above. And so begins the fourth decade of a project that has been lauded nationally for its positive community impact, renowned locally for its top quality craftsmanship, and recognized amongst those immediately involved as a most effective hands-on learning tool.

Sinawik (Kiwaniis spelled backward), the project under which each of the 30 homes have been built, is the result of a partnership between the Presque Isle Kiwanis Club and NMCC that began in 1976. The founders of the non-profit organization wanted it to provide benefits and enrichment to both the community and the College.

“The Presque Isle Kiwanis Club is pleased to be working in conjunction with the Northern Maine Community College for the construction of the 31st Sinawik house. A project such as this is truly win-win, as it allows the trade and technical occupations students at NMCC hands-on experience while they assist Kiwanis in helping meet the needs of the local community,” said Carolyn Dorsey, president of the Presque Isle Kiwanis Club.

Although it can be argued, that over time, the greatest beneficiaries have been those fortunate families from throughout Aroostook County who have had their Sinawik house constructed, it is without question the individuals who feel the greatest pride never reside in the homes.

“I think the students’ enthusiasm is just as high as when we started 30 years ago. Just yesterday some freshmen were saying how they couldn’t believe that the floor frame they were working on would be part of a house that a family would live in,” said Guy Jackson, residential construction instructor.

Jackson has the experience to back up his words. Sinawik number 31 is the 27th home he has had a hand in building.

“After all this time this is still the main focus of the program. Through tight budgets and many changes at the College over the years, Sinawik is still a priority,” said Jackson. “People say – ‘you’ve done this many times, it must be easier’ – but its not, each one is a challenge because you start fresh with a new group of students and a new set of plans.”

Those plans, for the 29th year, are the responsibility of Roger Crouse, NMCC computer-aided drafting instructor. Long before a hammer ever hits a nail, Crouse sits down with the new Sinawik family to begin the process of making their dream reality.

“The first contact for this year’s home was made early last spring,” said Crouse. “Preliminary floor plans were developed and approved by the customer in May. This fall a college work-study student in the computer-aided drafting program is developing working drawings for the residential construction students to use.”

Once the plans are handed over, framing work on the walls, doors, windows and roof will get underway and be completed by the first-year students in Jackson’s program. They will then step away from the project and let students in the plumbing and heating program, instructed by Al St. Peter; the electrical construction and maintenance program, instructed by Charles Kelley; and the metal fabrication program, instructed by Dennis Albert, come in to do what is referred to as the “rough-in” work.

Once the plumbing and heating conduits have been installed, the wiring laid and any required ductwork is in, the structure is inspected. Then it is time for the senior residential construction students to come in and do the finish work, which consists of installing windows, doors and cabinets and completing the interior trim. This work typically runs through the end of the academic year in May.

The various phases of work and the order in which they are completed has changed relatively little in three decades, but the same can not be said for the technique and tools used to complete the massive project.

“There have been many changes in construction materials and methods. The drawings have gone from using pencil and other drafting tools to computer-aided design,” said Crouse.

One area that has seen a great deal of change over the years is the increased emphasis on energy efficiency. That has particularly been the case over the past few years as energy costs have soared.

It is certainly true of the 1,248 square foot modular ranch-style home now under construction at NMCC. Among the features of the structure that will be placed in Castle Hill upon completion is radiant floor heating and a through-the-wall vented furnace.

“Radiant floor heating is more efficient than conventional hot-water baseboard heat. In addition extra care will be taken to seal all penetrations in air and vapor barriers. Window placement will be designed to take advantage of passive solar gain,” said Crouse.

“Working on the Sinawik home is more relevant for our students today than it has ever been – in large part because of the importance that is given to energy efficiency. As they enter the construction profession, they will find themselves working for customers who place energy conservation among the top priorities of their building projects,” said Jackson.

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Northern Maine Community College Residential Construction Instructor Guy Jackson (left) and Computer-Aided Drafting Instructor Roger Crouse review plans for Sinawik House #31 while students in Jackson’s program install floor boards on the floor frame of the structure. First-year students working on this part of the project include (left to right) Shawn Raymond of Windsor, Andrew Wark of Millinocket, Damien Tetlow of Caribou, Luke Ireland of Mapleton, Adam Colyer of Amity, Derek Clair of Presque Isle, and Ben Goupille of Perham.



NMCC Residential Construction Instructor Guy Jackson (far right) discusses the next phase of Sinawik Project #31 with his first year students who will frame the structure. Working on this year's home are (left to right) Nick Hadley of Waterville, Derek Demerchant of Presque Isle, Brian Nadeau of Connor, Preston Tracy of Woodland, Rocco Risbara of Scarborough, Scott Fletcher of Fort Kent, and Peter Albert of Presque Isle.