



# Maine Community College System

## NEWS RELEASE

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## **Maine's Community Colleges to Make \$6.2 Million Investment in Programs and Services to Rural Maine**

***\$3.5 million gift from the Bernard Osher Foundation helps launch MCCS rural initiative***

AUGUSTA, ME — The Maine Community College System (MCCS) today announced investments totaling \$6.2 million in programs and services it provides to rural Maine.

A \$3.5 million gift from the Bernard Osher Foundation will enable the MCCS to dramatically increase the number of community college scholarships available to rural Maine residents. In addition, gifts from the TD Banknorth Charitable Foundation (\$200,000) and the Betterment Fund (\$150,000) will help launch *Bring College to ME*, a program designed to deliver targeted community college degree programs on an intermittent basis to rural parts of the state.

Other investments will enable the community colleges to expand distance learning opportunities, increase rural high school students' access to the community colleges, assist students with the costs of child care, and provide more workforce training assistance to small rural businesses. No additional state funds are being requested to implement the initiative.

The investments are in response to a statewide listening tour of rural Maine that was conducted by MCCS President John Fitzsimmons between July and November of this year. Motivated by concerns about the growing gaps in educational attainment and income between urban and rural Maine, Fitzsimmons set out to determine how Maine's community colleges could better serve the workforce and economic development needs of the state's rural areas.

"Rural Maine is facing a significant workforce development challenge," he said in making the announcement. "We are making a commitment to be rural Maine's partner in building an educated and skilled workforce."

President Fitzsimmons provided details about the MCCS rural initiative at a press conference in Augusta today. He was joined by Governor Baldacci; Dennis King, chair of the MCCS Board of Trustees; Larry Wold, president of TD Banknorth in Maine; and Kris Doody, chief executive officer of Cary Medical Center in Caribou.

"I applaud the community colleges for focusing attention and resources on the specific needs of rural Maine," said Governor Baldacci. "Education is key to strengthening Maine's rural economy, and the community colleges are uniquely positioned to deliver programs and services that lead to a more highly skilled workforce and an improved quality of life."

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Nearly 400 individuals attended one of the 16 rural meetings convened by the M CCS during the summer and fall of 2007. Their input and recommendations—along with details about the M CCS response—are contained in a report released today by the community college system. The report is available on-line at <http://www.mccs.me.edu/about/ruralinitiative.html>.

Among the key recommendations contained in the report:

- Provide more financial assistance to address income challenges.
- Bring programs out to rural areas.
- Increase distance learning opportunities.
- Increase high school students' access to the community colleges.
- Expand workforce training services for small rural businesses.

In direct response to these recommendations, the M CCS will:

- **Establish a \$5 million endowed scholarship fund** to assist Maine people living in rural communities. Created by a \$3.5 million grant from the Bernard Osher Foundation, the fund will be used to award up to 300 scholarships each year to rural students studying at a Maine community college. The Osher gift will be matched by \$1.5 million in other funds, bringing the total of the endowed fund to \$5 million.
- **Expand an existing scholarship to include assistance with child care expenses** (\$150,000)
- **Establish *Bring College to ME* to deliver two-year degree programs on an intermittent basis to rural parts of the state.** Major gifts from the TD Banknorth Charitable Foundation (\$200,000) and the Betterment Fund (\$150,000), combined with a \$400,000 allocation from the M CCS will enable the System to launch *Bring College to ME* in the fall of 2008. Because of the critical demand for skilled health care workers in all parts of the state, the first five *Bring College to ME* degree programs will be health care related. By the fall of 2010, the M CCS expects to offer additional degree programs in other sectors, based on industry need and student demand.
- **Expand distance learning opportunities.** The M CCS will expand the services it provides to rural Maine through a \$245,000 expansion of its ITV system. The expansion will be funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, funds from the 2007 bond for higher education, and the colleges' own resources.
- **Increase high school students' access to the community colleges.** The M CCS will make an additional 250 college courses available to Maine high school juniors and seniors living in rural Maine, at a cost of about \$60,000.
- **Expand Maine Quality Centers workforce training to more small rural businesses.**

A native of Biddeford and resident of San Francisco, Bernard Osher has long been a benefactor of higher education in Maine. With this most recent gift, his support of the Maine Community College System totals nearly \$8 million.

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