



# News Release

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## **NMCC students' work benefits Literacy Volunteers of Aroostook**

***Aroostook County*** - An Aroostook County non-profit organization with a mission to help adults improve their literacy skills will start the New Year with additional tools to increase community awareness of the program thanks to the efforts of two Northern Maine Community College students.

Jo-Ellen Kelley of Limestone and Shannon Espling of Caribou have spent the past three months both examining how best to get the word out about the work of the Literacy Volunteers of Aroostook County and developing materials that will help the organization reach more area residents in need of its services.

The project is the result of a hands-on assignment for their NMCC marketing class instructed by College faculty member Pam Crawford.

"I encourage students to select project topics that have the potential to have a positive impact on area profit and non-profit organizations. It provides the students the opportunity to engage in real-life work that can ultimately make a difference," said Crawford. "In this particular case, the work of Jo-Ellen and Shannon will positively affect both Literacy Volunteers of Aroostook, as well as the individuals who learn about the organization and ultimately benefit from their services as a result of the awareness initiative developed by these two students."

Specifically, Kelley and Espling's work began with the development and conducting of a survey to gather valuable information on the level of awareness County residents had of LVOAC. The survey, which found that 68 percent of respondents were aware of the program, was compiled and presented to the organization's board.

The survey was followed by the production of an original audio CD developed by the duo and distributed to Maine Career Centers in Aroostook County located in Madawaska, Presque Isle and Houlton. The CD's are designed specifically for non-readers as a means of providing information about the program.

In addition to production of audio CD's, Kelley and Espling also got the word out about LVOAC by distributing brochures and bookmarks to libraries and adult education centers throughout the region. They also sent public service announcements to local radio stations and to several print publications.

For Kelley, the project held special significance as she is not only an NMCC student, but was hired in March of 2005 to start up Literacy Volunteers of Aroostook County, and has since worked part time as the executive director of the organization.

“The value of this project is that it taught me how to effectively use various advertising techniques. It also made me look at the organization not as an employee (or business owner and I sometimes do) but as a marketing firm trying to provide an effective marketing plan to increase the awareness of a service organization. I understand the importance of positioning and learned strategies on ways to create the perception you want the consumer to have about your service or organization,” said Kelley. “Through this hands-on assignment, I received practical experience and developed skills that I will continue to use in my professional life.”

For the team, the impact of their hands-on assignment hit home during the annual Presque Isle Holiday Light Parade, when both Kelley and Espling braved the near zero temperatures to help hand out more than 1,000 books to children along the route. Inside each book distributed was a bookmark detailing the services of LVOAC.

“The lights parade was the highlight. As cold as it was, it was fun handing out books to the kids and seeing the excitement in their faces and the appreciation shown by the parents,” said Espling. “As a result of this project I truly feel that we have accomplished a good deal more than a good grade in class. We have made people more aware of LVOAC. We even met a few people who needed these services and gave them information. Together, Jo-Ellen and I have come up with some fantastic ideas that we believe will make a world of difference to those who have difficulty reading.”

The work produced by Kelley and Espling was officially presented to an appreciative Literacy Volunteers of Aroostook Board of Directors on December 18.

“We rely on so many volunteers to complete our work. Volunteers like the students from NMCC who have come forward to provide much needed assistance in identifying literacy needs in Aroostook County. Every hour that the students contribute lessens the burden of the volunteers and staff that are already committed to improving Literacy in Aroostook,” said LVOAC Board Member Ken Hensler. “I think the most important thing that can be said about literacy in Aroostook County rests in the fact that 19% of our adult population is functioning at the lowest level of literacy. The Literacy Volunteers of Aroostook County program is committed to the reduction of that statistic through one-on-one or small group instruction. By empowering these people with the gift of literacy, we will enrich their lives and the lives of the people around them.”

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*Members of the Literacy Volunteers of Aroostook County Board of Directors were recently presented with a marketing plan developed by Northern Maine Community College students Jo-Ellen Kelley and Shannon Espling as part of an assignment for a marketing class taught by Instructor Pam Crawford at the College. Hearing the presentation were (left to right) Linda Richardson, secretary/treasurer; Dottie Martin, board member; Dan Richardson, president; Teri Morse, board member; Kelley; and Ken Hensler, board member.*