



News Release

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NMCC and Presque Isle Kiwanis invite community to April 29 barbecue and open house for newest and “greenest” Sinawik house

Aroostook County - Rowell and Sandy McHatten of Mapleton are asking the Aroostook County community to come visit their new retirement home and share a bite to eat. It's an open house with a twist, as the McHatten's soon-to-be-completed 1,248 square foot modular ranch-style home sits in two pieces inside the residential construction laboratory at Northern Maine Community College.

It is there where more than four dozen students and their instructors in five trade and technical occupations programs have spent the past six months making the dream home become reality, and at the same time getting a hands-on learning experience unlike any other.

For over three decades, the College and Sinawik (Kiwanis spelled backward), a non-profit organization founded by the Presque Isle civic organization, have partnered to build a home each year that is contracted by, and sold to, an Aroostook County family.

With work on the 31st home nearing completion, the College and Kiwanis Club are hosting a community open house celebration and barbecue on Tuesday, April 29, between 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. in the Mailman Trades Building, where the work of the students and the importance of the partnership between NMCC and Kiwanis on the home building project will be recognized.

“This project has been a win-win for both the College and Kiwanis Club,” said Guy Jackson, NMCC's residential construction instructor, who has been key to the project for the past 27 years. “Over the years, hundreds of students have had the opportunity to work directly on the construction of a house that is placed in the local community and becomes a home for an area family. It has been an excellent teaching tool and great source of pride for both our students and for us as faculty. We are looking forward to welcoming the community as they join us to celebrate the construction of the latest Sinawik Home.”

The partnership between NMCC and Kiwanis was forged in 1976 to provide students in several trade programs at then Northern Maine Vocational Technical Institute with a “real-life” practical experience, and as a way for Kiwanis to raise scholarship funds to invest in the local community.

The April 29 event will include tours of the new home and an indoor barbecue, as well as the presentation of scholarships from Kiwanis to five students enrolled in the College programs that work on the structure.

“Each year, the Presque Isle Kiwanis Club becomes so excited about the start of a new Sinawik house. We always wonder how the NMCC students will out do the magnificent work they did the previous year, but they always do! It is so gratifying to see the students gain the valuable hands on experience while at the same time giving back to the community,” said Carolyn Dorsey, president of the Presque Isle Kiwanis Club. It is a model that has been catching the eye of other Kiwanis clubs around the country and I am extremely proud that it is the Presque Isle Kiwanis Club and Northern Maine Community College leading the way.”

Although each of the Sinawik projects built by the NMCC students and faculty for the past three decades have been approximately the same size, due largely to the space available to construct them, each has been unique according to Roger Crouse, NMCC’s computer-aided drafting instructor, who has designed 29 of the 31 homes built by the College.

“The house plan is a unique example of how we are able to adapt the modular home design to meet the customer’s desires. In the case of Sinawik 31, a home office area provides space for the owner to set up a computer and desk for business and personal use. The bathroom incorporates a solar light tube as well as an easily accessible shower. Plans were also provided to the owner so that they will be able to add a breezeway and garage once the house is placed on the foundation,” said Crouse.

In fact, Sinawik number 31 will be the “greenest” home completed through the NMCC-Kiwanis partnership. Among the features of the structure is radiant floor heating and window placement which has been designed to take advantage of passive solar gain. As is always the case, extra care has been taken during construction to seal all penetrations in air and vapor barriers.

Constructing an energy efficient home was clearly the goal of owner Rowell McHatten who plans, once the foundation is laid and the structure placed on-site in Castle Hill, to install a state-of-the art heating system that will attach to solar panels he will place on the roof that will heat the water for his new home.

“We wanted to make sure our home was as energy efficient as possible and the NMCC faculty and students that have been working on the home have gone to great lengths to help make this happen,” said Rowell McHatten. “I’m very appreciative of the work they have done. It is top quality.”

Rowell's wife Sandy has also been impressed with the work of the NMCC students and faculty, who she says are "making her dream come true."

"I've never has a new house," said Sandy McHatten. "We've always been conservative. We've lived in a 100 year old house, in a home attached to a restaurant, and now live in an old farmhouse that we had considered renovating. This will be my retirement home, my honeymoon home and lifetime expectation."

It was Sandy McHatten, a 2003 graduate of NMCC's associate degree nursing program, who let her husband know about the Sinawik home building initiative. She had learned about unique project while attending the College after the couple moved to home to the County in 2000 to take care of Rowell's dad after living in Connecticut for 30 years, where they raised four girls.

"I don't understand why there isn't a long waiting list of people who want to have a home built through this project," said Rowell McHatten. "The students and faculty do an outstanding job and build top quality homes. The homeowners save a good amount of money. Finally, the proceeds support a worthwhile cause."

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

Once the plans were handed over, framing work on the walls, doors, windows and roof were completed by the first-year students in Jackson's program. They then stepped 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, do what is referred to as the "rough-in" work.

Once the plumbing and heating conduits were installed, the wiring laid and required ductwork was in, the structure was inspected. After the inspection the senior residential construction students came in and do the finish work, which is now in the finishing stages and has consisted of installing windows, doors and cabinets and completing the interior trim.

"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.

The public is invited and encouraged to visit the Sinawik open house at NMCC on Tuesday, April 29, between 11:30 and 1:30 p.m. For more information on the project or the open house, contact the college relations office at 768-2809.

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Northern Maine Community College residential construction instructor Guy Jackson (left) provides guidance to student Brandon Smith of Mapleton as he completes some of finish work around a window on Sinawik House 31.