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UMPI and NMCC to host joint community open house at Houlton Higher Education Center

HOULTON -- A unique higher education partnership in southern Aroostook that began seven years ago with the opening of the Houlton Higher Education Center will be celebrated at the facility with the local community later this month.

Northern Maine Community College and the University of Maine at Presque Isle are together planning an open house at the Military Street facility that will be held on Monday, April 28, between 4 and 6 p.m. Officials will mark seven years of academic excellence and showcase the new partnerships and projects underway at the Center during the event.

In the summer of 2001, education officials opened the UMPI Houlton Higher Education Center, and NMCC and UMPI became the first institutions in each of their respective state systems to collaborate in this one-of-a-kind off-campus learning center. Along with the two Aroostook County Colleges, the Higher Education Center houses University College, which offers distance learning courses through the University of Maine System; the adult education programs for both SAD 29 and SAD 70; the Carleton Project, a licensed, private alternative high school; the SAGE [Seniors Achieving Greater Education] program; TRiO Upward Bound, a program that prepares underserved high school students for college; and the southern Aroostook office for the Maine Centers for Women, Work and Community.

“The Houlton Center brings a wide variety of educational services under one roof, giving local residents a chance to prepare for college, earn their associate’s and bachelor’s degrees, take refresher courses, or take part in lifelong learning,” said UMPI President Donald Zillman. “We are so pleased at how the community has embraced this center as it has led to strong additions to the local professional workforce and helped to spur community and economic development.”

The Houlton Higher Education Center is housed in a 15,500-square-foot building that was formerly a Shop 'n Save grocery store donated to the University of Maine at Presque Isle by Hannaford Bros. to be used for educational purposes. Following a \$2 million renovation, completed with funding provided through the state Legislature, the center welcomed its first students in the fall of 2001.

“We have been able to provide educational and training opportunities for residents of southern Aroostook County through the higher education center over the past seven years,” said NMCC President Timothy Crowley. “The collaborative partnerships we have built and strengthened with the university, the adult education programs, Houlton Regional Hospital, and businesses throughout the region have been positively impacted by our ability to deliver programs through the center.”

The vision for the Houlton Higher Education Center first came about in 1999 as the result of a grassroots community effort to re-establish a formal home for higher education in the southern Aroostook town. Although both NMCC and UMPI had a presence in the community, Houlton was looking to fill a larger void left after Ricker College closed in 1979. The community group worked collaboratively with the University of Maine System, the then Maine Technical College System, and other educational entities to bring the center to fruition.

The public is invited to join in the open house celebration on Monday, April 28, between 4 and 6 p.m. Refreshments will be provided and guided tours of the facility offered. For more information, call 768-2809 or 768-9452.

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