



News Release

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NMCC holds gala event to recognize Floyd & Jean Harding

Aroostook County - A Presque Isle couple whose contributions to the city, surrounding region and state have had a profound impact on area residents were honored at a gala dinner at Northern Maine Community College on Saturday, August 26.

“He has had the respect of people far and wide, from the office of President to everyday people,” Governor John Baldacci told the group of more than 100 political leaders, family and friends who had gathered for the dinner honoring Floyd and the late Jean Harding.

Floyd Harding, an attorney who was elected to three terms in the Maine State Senate, beginning in 1964, served as both majority and minority leader in the chamber. He has long been known as a leader and activist in the Democratic Party, having served as chair of both the Presque Isle and Aroostook County Democratic Committees and as an active advisor and campaigner for numerous elected officials in the party.

Governor Baldacci went on to describe Jean Harding, to whom he referred as a second mother, as a “lady before her time.” According to the Governor, “She was a powerhouse on the City Council, which wasn’t an easy thing for a woman then.” Among the crowning achievements of her 18-year tenure on the Presque Isle City Council was her work to secure funds to construct the Presque Isle bike path during the Jimmy Carter administration. She was also deeply involved in efforts to secure funds for and to build the Presque Isle Homeless Shelter and was a driving force behind the establishment of the animal shelter in Presque Isle.

The Governor proclaimed Saturday, August 26 to be Floyd and Jean Harding Day throughout the State of Maine.

“Working individually or as a partnership, they [the Hardings] have brought us a history of service, preparing us for a better tomorrow,” said Dana Connors, president of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce. “Jean didn’t have to be asked to do something, she just did it...and if asked, she took it on with pride,” said Connors, who was the Presque Isle City Manager for 12 of the 18 years during which Jean served on the City Council.

Congressman Mike Michaud spoke to the group by phone, thanking Floyd and his family for all of their community service over the years. “You have set the example for everyone holding public office,” said Michaud.

Tim Crowley, president of Northern Maine Community College, recognized each of the “founders” of the college, a committee of ten of which Floyd Harding was one of the leaders. “They had a vision...they saw a need. College is important in economic development and in helping people to improve their lives, but, more than that, education is key for the citizens of this country for our children to have the future we want for them. Floyd and his colleagues knew that, and we know that.”

During his remarks, Floyd reminisced about how he, Joe Freeman, Ken Colbath and the other founders had worked with Senator Ed Muskie to persuade President John F. Kennedy to let the city of Presque Isle acquire the SNARK Missile Base in Presque Isle once it was closed. According to Harding, Kennedy promised to release whatever property they wanted for \$1 as long as they had a purpose for which the general public would benefit. They asked for the landing strips and surrounding land in order to establish a regional airport. They asked for the area including some large hangers and storage facilities in order to establish an industrial park. Lastly, they asked for the central part of the base, housing facilities such as the automotive repair building and the plumbing shop, to be turned over to the city to establish “vocational” education in Aroostook County.

After helping the City to obtain the property, Floyd and his colleagues then went to work to try to get funding for the college. As a result of the civic group’s efforts and those of area legislators, led by Representatives Harold Stewart and Senator E. Perrin Edmunds, a bill was passed in 1961 to establish the Northeastern Maine Vocational Institute, a forerunner of NMCC.

“Considering the role which Floyd Harding has played in the establishment of this institution and importance which Jean Harding placed on education, it is particularly appropriate that the newly established Floyd and Jean Harding Scholarship will help people in generations to come to obtain an education at NMCC,” said Crowley.

“Philanthropy is something I believe in,” said Floyd’s son, Dwight Harding. “This is why I am so proud of this scholarship. This act of philanthropy will change the lives of those who receive scholarship funds...and their children...and their children’s children. It is something worth doing, and I am glad he [my father] did this.”

Alan Harding, another of Floyd’s sons, described his father as a founder. He founded Harding Law Offices, as well as helping to found NMCC, the Presque Isle Kiwanis Club, and The Aroostook Medical Center’s current location. A founder, according to Alan, shows hope for the future. With the creation of the Floyd and Jean Harding Scholarship, his father “leaves us with the hope that people won’t be judged by their ability to pay, but by their ability to achieve.”

“I am so pleased with what Floyd and Jean are doing for the people of Aroostook County,” said Senator John Martin, who served as master of ceremonies for the evening’s event, regarding the establishment of the scholarship.

Representative Jeremy Fischer of Presque Isle presented a legislative sentiment to Floyd highlighting Jean's accomplishments. He noted that on February 1, 2006 there was a standing ovation in honor of Jean Harding in the Maine State Legislature.

"I have been so touched...I am so humbled and so grateful," Floyd Harding told the group regarding their comments and their presence at what also served as his 83rd birthday party.



Floyd Harding (left) is greeted by Governor John Baldacci during the gala held in Floyd and his late wife Jean's honor on Saturday, August 26, at Northern Maine Community College.