



News Release

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NMCC plans gala event to recognize Harding couple's contributions to Presque Isle and state

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

Several state and local political leaders, dozens of family members and many friends of Floyd and (the late) Jean Harding will gather for an evening being dubbed "A Lifetime and Legacy of Laughter, Love and Service: An Evening Honoring the Many Contributions of Floyd and Jean Harding". The celebration will pay tribute to the former State Senator and his late wife who was both the first woman elected to, and longest serving member in the history of, the Presque Isle City Council.

The celebration, coordinated and hosted by NMCC, is designed to not only recognize the many civic contributions of the duo, but also to recognize the efforts of Floyd Harding and nine other individuals, who are considered to be the founders of the College. Harding was among the driving forces and member of an ad hoc committee established to bring, what was referred to at the time as, vocational education to Aroostook County.

As a result of the civic group's efforts and those of area legislators, including 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.

"We owe the very existence of the College to these gentlemen," said NMCC President Timothy Crowley. "Generations of men and women from Aroostook County and beyond have bettered their lives and have been able to pursue their dreams because of the efforts of these visionaries. It is most appropriate that we honor their legacy."

Crowley will be among the speakers who will recognize the contributions of both Floyd and Jean Harding. The event will be emceed by State Senator John Martin, a long-time friend of the Harding family and former legislative colleague of Floyd Harding.

Others speaking at the gala include Dana Connors, the former Presque Isle city manager who now serves as President of the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, Representative Jeremy Fischer of Presque Isle, and Mrs. Linda Dunn, daughter of the Hardings, who will lead a tribute to her parents and invite her siblings to share their thoughts as well.

Invitations to be present and share their thoughts on the Hardings have been issued to Governor John Baldacci and Second District Congressman Michael Michaud, as well as several other notable Maine political leaders.

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.

A native of central Maine and one of twelve children, Harding grew up on a dairy farm before attending Colby College in Waterville in 1941, where he earned his first degree. In 1949, he graduated from Boston University Law School and subsequently passed the Maine and Massachusetts bar entry exams.

Between his years at Colby and Boston University, Harding served the United States Armed Forces during World War II in Europe. In the early days of the Battle of the Bulge, he was captured by the Germans and became a prisoner of war. During his internment, he was held in Dresden and was present during the fire bombings of the German city.

He first came to Aroostook County in 1950, after being hired by Clifford McIntire, assistant general manager of Maine Potato Growers, to work as the cooperative's credit manager and assistant general counsel.

After working for MPG for four years, he established a private law practice and began an active life of civic involvement and leadership.

In 1950, Harding became one of the charter members of the Presque Isle Kiwanis Club. He was elected president of the organization in 1957, and continues to be an active member today. He also served on the board of directors of the Presque Isle hospital for many years, including serving as its president from 1963 through 1964.

Another organization benefiting from his involvement is the Presque Isle Chamber of Commerce, of which Harding has been a member since starting his law practice, serving as president of in 1958. He has also been involved in raising funds for his church, Grant Memorial Methodist.

Floyd and Jean Harding were both instrumental in raising funds to rebuild Grant Memorial United Methodist Church after the Presque Isle worship center was destroyed by fire just over a decade ago.

It was but one of many philanthropic projects headed by Jean Harding, who was deeply involved in efforts, along with Sister Mary, to secure funds for and to build the Presque Isle Homeless Shelter, now Sister Mary O'Donnell Shelter for the Homeless. Jean Harding was also a driving force behind the establishment of the animal shelter in Presque Isle.

Harding saw the need for both facilities during her 18-year tenure on the Presque Isle City Council, where she was known for her advocacy and strong constituent service that went above and beyond the call of duty. Among the crowning achievements of her time on the council was her work to secure funds to construct the Presque Isle bike path during the Jimmy Carter administration.

Her service extended to the Presque Isle Industrial Council, where she worked tirelessly to assist in efforts to secure new business for the Star City. She also served as Presque Isle's spokesperson at meetings of the Maine Municipal Association and served on the Aroostook Finance Committee, to oversee the wise expenditure of taxpayer money.

Jean Harding was perhaps best known for her openness to the people she served. Most of her time was consumed listening to and talking with area residents, learning how she might help solve problems or address pressing issues.

Amongst all of their civic and community involvement, the Hardings together raised nine children, who are all grown and include two attorneys, a CEO of a local regional transportation network, a nurse, plumber, U.S. Navy Veteran, and an educator.

In addition to their very public service, Floyd and Jean Harding's contributions to family and friends will also be recognized at the NMCC gala event.

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