



News Release

Contact:
Jason Parent
Development and
College Relations Office
33 Edgemont Drive
Presque Isle, ME 04769
Phone: (207) 768-2808
Fax: (207) 760-1101
jparent@nmcc.edu

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NMCC and Presque Isle Kiwanis invite community to April 28 barbecue and open house

Aroostook County - Presque Isle's Kevin and Holly Tompkins and their two young children, six-year-old Avery and seven-month-old Sadie, are inviting the Aroostook County community to come visit their new home and share a bite to eat. It's an open house with a twist, as the Tompkin'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 family's 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.

This year's home, however, holds special significance for the Tompkins family – and Kevin Tompkins in particular. Taking ownership of a Sinawik House brings the soon-to-be new homeowner, who owns Tompkin's Plumbing and Heating, full circle. He is a 1994 graduate of Northern Maine Technical College (a forerunner of NMCC), and as a student worked on the 17th home built through the Sinawik project.

“It means a great deal to our family to be taking ownership of a Sinawik home, and it meant a great deal for me as a plumbing and heating student to work on building one 15 years ago. Work on that project and all that I learned at the College have helped me become a successful plumber and business owner,” said Tompkins. “I think it's a great project. I'm anxious for the house to be finished. It's well-built, well-designed and will make a great home for our family.”

With work on the 32nd home nearing completion, the College and Kiwanis Club are hosting a community open house celebration and barbecue on Tuesday, April 28, between 11:30 a.m. and 1:00 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 28 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 annual event includes 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 Janet Kelle, 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.”

The project begins anew each year before the previous Sinawik house has rolled out of the residential construction lab and is placed on the homeowner’s lot. Preliminary floor plans are developed by the College’s computer-aided drafting program and approved by the customer.

Once the plans are handed over, framing work on the walls, doors, windows and roof is completed by the first-year students in Jackson’s program. They then step 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 are installed, the wiring laid and required ductwork is in, the structure is inspected. After the inspection the senior residential construction students come 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.

“I’ve always been interested in construction and never done anything like this before. I came in here two years ago with no experience and I’ve learned it all from the ground up,” said residential construction senior student Brian Nadeau of Connor. “Working on this home, as well as last year’s home, has been a tremendous experience. Not only have I learned a great deal, but I have the satisfaction of knowing I have built a new home for a family.”

Sinawik 32 – the Tompkin’s family home – features three bedrooms, two full baths, a kitchen/dining area and living room. A foundation for the raised ranch will be poured in the coming weeks at 267 Houlton Road – just south of the turnoff to Aroostook State Park on U.S. Route 1. The family plans to add a two door garage and breezeway to attach the home and garage.

The public is invited and encouraged to visit the Sinawik open house at NMCC on Tuesday, April 28, between 11:30 a.m and 1:00 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 (front) provides guidance to student Brian Nadeau of Connor as he completes some finish work around a window on Sinawik House 32.