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For immediate release  
April 28, 2009

## Healthy Aroostook to host alcohol awareness events for students at NMCC, UMPI

PRESQUE ISLE – Healthy Aroostook, a project of the Aroostook County Action Program will present alcohol awareness events at the University of Maine at Presque Isle and Northern Maine Community College in May as part of a \$5,000 United Way of Aroostook grant it received to provide the area's college-age population with more information and resources concerning substance abuse.

“Let’s Party! An Alcohol Awareness Event” will be held on Tuesday, May 5 at UMPI’s Campus Center, and on Thursday, May 7 at NMCC, in the Edmunds and Christie Buildings. Both events will be held from 11:30 a.m. to 11 p.m. and will include a free lunch, an afternoon keynote speaker, mocktails in the evening, and an outdoor dance featuring a D.J. At each event, drawings will be held to give away five \$50 prizes, including the winner’s choice of a gas card or a certificate to the Aroostook Centre Mall or Wal-Mart. NMCC and UMPI students are welcome to attend activities at both institutions.

The event will provide students with engaging and informative activities just prior to graduation festivities while allowing organizers to inform area students about alcohol consumption, underage and binge drinking, operating under the influence, and the medical complications associated with alcoholism.

“Working in college health for the last eighteen years, I have seen many students who aren’t successful in their academic programs related to excessive alcohol consumption,” Linda Mastro, the nurse practitioner who runs the health centers at UMPI and NMCC, said. “Alcohol and extensive partying take valuable time away from their studies. Many students do not reach their potential due to alcohol use. Educating students on the choices that are made during their college experience is of great importance and this is what we are hoping to do with this program.”

According to Carol Bell, with Healthy Aroostook, statistics show that young adults 18-25 have the highest incidence rate of alcohol use in Maine. Forty-six percent of 18-25-year-olds in Maine reported binge drinking within the past month, which is higher than the national average of 42 percent, according to statistics from the National Survey of Drug Use and Health. Bell said that a troubling fact is that those who drink appear to be engaging in more risky behaviors by drinking large amounts of alcohol in a single episode.

“One of our concerns with binge drinking is the risk of alcohol poisoning,” Bell said. “Alcohol poisoning is more common than many people think. Students need to know the risks of heavy drinking and the signs of alcohol poisoning, and we hope they’ll come to these alcohol awareness events to learn more. The bottom line is: Do not be afraid to call 911 if you suspect your friend has had too much to drink. You could save your friend’s life.”

“Let’s Party!” activities will kick off with informational and interactive booths and displays from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Presenters will include Aroostook Substance Abuse Prevention [ASAP], Crown Ambulance, the Presque Isle Police Department, the Aroostook County Sheriff’s Department, the U.S. Border Patrol, and the Aroostook Mental Health Center, Life by Design, Vince and Larry the Crash Dummies, and the Convincer. Students will be given cards to be punched at each booth in order to be eligible for drawings.

From 11:30-12:30, a free lunch will be offered to all event participants and, at Noon, a featured speaker will give an address on alcohol poisoning and binge drinking. Events continue in the evening with “Mocktails at Monte Carlo” from 6 to 8 p.m. and D.J. music entertainment from 8 to 11 p.m.

This event is one part of Healthy Aroostook’s grant project, which is focused on understanding regional alcohol abuse issues among young people and providing resources and educational opportunities that best address the problem. Work includes conducting surveys to gauge college students’ perceptions of alcohol abuse among peers and strategies they think could help to impact the problem.

This information will be used to help in the creation of an action plan for addressing the region’s alcohol abuse issues and combating alcohol abuse on college campuses. Other efforts include creating a social marketing campaign around the information gathered on alcohol abuse as well as training NMCC and UMPI residence assistants and Health Services health center staff – the majority of their clients are in the 16-24-year-old range – to educate them on alcohol issues, statistics and laws.

“The United Way Grant has allowed us to concentrate on the two college campuses to address alcohol related problems,” Bell said. “Information will be provided by those who see the effects of alcohol every day. Students will be able to talk to local law enforcement and get the facts. They will also be able to talk to those who provide resources to address alcohol problems. We want this to be an event where students can come have fun, win some prizes and learn about alcohol abuse. Let the Party begin!”

For more information about this event or for specific activity locations, contact Mastro at 768-9586 or 768-2803.

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