



News Release

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NMCC turns to community to donate children's books to brighten holiday season

Aroostook County - Students and employees at Northern Maine Community College are turning to the community for assistance as they prepare for what has become both a signature service activity for the campus and a popular addition to one of Presque Isle's most anticipated events of the Holiday season.

With a goal of collecting more than 1,000 children's books to give away along the route, as part of NMCC's entry in the annual Star City Holiday Light Parade on December 5, the group leading the charge on campus is asking the community for help earlier this year. For the first time in the five years since NMCC has undertaken the initiative, the College last year put the word out to the community that it was accepting book donations to assist in their efforts. The notice went out just a week prior to the annual event and several community members reached out to the College to donate both new and used children's books, which provided books for more children along the route.

"It worked well for us last year to ask the community to join in our efforts to collect books for us to distribute to children at the parade. We collected and distributed more than 200 books that we would otherwise not have obtained," said Colleen Harmon, a business technology instructor at NMCC who launched the book collection project six years ago and has coordinated it along with others every year since. "We had many people tell us last year that with a little more notice they would have sorted through their children's books to pass along some of the ones they had outgrown, or looked in their attic or basement for that box of books they had put in storage for a garage sale that never happened. With more notice this year, we are hoping to collect more books to hand out."

In addition to giving community members ample time to gather any books they might want to donate to the cause, campus organizers are hoping the advance notice will prompt individuals who collect their in good condition used books or who purchase new books to donate them at upcoming events both at NMCC and in the community. Harmon, who participates as a vendor in fall arts and craft fairs in the area plans to have a box available to accept book donations at the events.

The coordinators of the book drive also hope that community members attending activities at the College in the coming weeks, including the October 24 Kinderfest fun day hosted by NMCC to benefit the Wintergreen Arts Center, will consider bringing book donations to drop off on campus while they visit.

The initiative, led by Harmon, evolved both as an idea to give-away something that had a connection to the nature of the College and what it offers the community, as well as providing area children with something from which they would benefit. Acting in the capacity of Santa's literary elves, the NMCC volunteers plan to hand out hundreds of books to kids of all ages enjoying the early December parade.

"Everyone should be able to read and everyone should be able to have books without worrying about it taking away from paying for fuel to heat the home or food for the table. With the current state of the economy, this is especially true," said Harmon. "Sharing a book is like sharing an adventure, and we want to make certain all children have the opportunity to enjoy an adventure."

Student Shannon Smart of New Sweden who has participated in the NMCC parade book distribution in the past will again this year. Smart is working with Harmon and additionally will take the lead on preparing NMCC's float for this year's parade, working collaboratively with the NMCC Student Senate and staff in the development and college relations office.

"I think everyone looks forward to it now," said Smart. "I really enjoyed taking part in the parade last year. Although it is usually a very cold night, all of us who participate are left with a very warm feeling inside as we see the joy on the children's faces along the parade route."

Individuals or organizations with children's books to donate to NMCC to be given out during the 2009 Holiday Light Parade should contact the development and college relations office at 768-2809 or drop off books at the information window in the main lobby of the Christie building at the College.

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Northern Maine Community College business technology instructor Colleen Harmon (left) distributes children's books to Holiday Light Parade-goers last year. The College is turning to the community for book donations this year as it begins collecting for the annual project.