

2003 Annual Report Executive Summary

Aroostook County EZ

The Aroostook County Empowerment Zone (ACEZ), through the continued work of the Northern Maine Empowerment Council and the staff at Northern Maine Development Commission, made significant progress toward achievement of the principles established with our Benchmarks. It should be noted that this was accomplished without any EZ funding for a second year under our designation.

Our Empowerment Summit, held January 23rd and 24th, 2003, created an exchange of ideas and the motivation to move beyond the existing mind set on rural economic initiatives. As a direct result of the summit, the major electric utility provider, Maine Public Service, became a “Private Sector Champion” and, together with Northern Maine Development Commission (NMDC), formed the Aroostook Partnership for Progress. This partnership will aggressively promote Business Retention/Expansion, Business Recruitment, Community Development and Public awareness to stem the tide of out-migration and improve the economic conditions in northern Maine.

Northern Maine Development Commission (NMDC) staff provided substantial community outreach to assist both the creation and retention of jobs through training for sound, fundamental business practices and product/service marketing. Twenty different training events were offered ranging from customer service to marketing to business plan development.

To further stimulate the visibility and accessibility of job opportunities in Aroostook County, NMDC has taken the initiative of creating a new “jobs” website. The Northern Maine Jobs website will provide the common connection for businesses to recruit new workers and for job seekers to look into the regional job market. There will be advanced search and notification capabilities for job seekers that will, after they register, alert them to job opportunities in the categories that they have selected. This effort provides yet another component for allowing both residents and non-residents of the area to understand what is available in the job market and to entice individuals to come and live in our area.

Finally, NMDC has completed a substantive improvement to our website (www.nmdc.org) and the Aroostook Empowerment Zone website (www.arostookez.org) that greatly improves the visibility and accessibility of program information. Our homepage now displays all of the programs and departments of the organization and more intuitively leads visitors to their areas of interest. Program information, related staffing and the Annual Report are all available and presented in a format that is much more easily understood. The links, both with internal context-sensitive text and through a separate page, are again, much more easily accessed for an improved flow of information to the viewer.