Maine Department of Economic and Community Development Press Release
4/2/2006

Governor Baldacci and University Officials Outline Vision to Expand Maine's Boatbuilding, Composites and Marine Industries

- Federal WIRED grant to help strengthen economy and create jobs -

ORONO, Maine– Maine's boatbuilding, composites and marine industries received a financial boost from the federal government, Governor Baldacci announced today as he outlined the positive economic impact the $15 million federal Workforce Innovation Regional Economic Development (WIRED) grant would have on the state.

"Maine's historic boatbuilding tradition continues to be a global leader and its inclusion of 21st century composites technology has revolutionized the industry," said Governor Baldacci. "With the WIRED grant, we will continue to grow composites and marine-related industries, create high-quality jobs, strengthen our economy and secure Maine's competitive edge."

Governor Baldacci formally announced the details of the WIRED grant today at the University of Maine's Advanced Engineered Wood Composites Center (AEWC), a research and development center that generates more than $5 million a year in grants and contracts. The University will receive $1.8 million from the grant and the AEWC Center will act as an R&D hub for the composites industry in developing advanced products for boatbuilding and other applications.

"We are fortunate to have some of the brightest and most creative minds in the country pursuing composites research and development right here at the Advanced Engineered Wood Composites Center," said University of Maine President Robert A. Kennedy. "We look forward to the positive impact the WIRED grant will have on the University and the state, and the opportunities it will create for Maine."

The North Star Alliance, a partnership formed by Governor Baldacci that includes the Department of Labor, the Department of Economic and Community Development and the University of Maine, will oversee the administration of the WIRED grant with input from the boatbuilding, composite and marine industries. The purpose of the grant is to create jobs, strengthen the state's economy and ensure Maine maintains its competitive edge in the boatbuilding, composite and marine sectors. Maine was one of only 13 national regions in 12 states to receive the competitive WIRED grant, which is awarded by the U.S. Department of Labor.

The grant will target Maine's coastal region with special attention given to the Midcoast area in anticipation of the closure of the Brunswick Naval Air Station.

Representatives from Maine Marine Trade Association, Maine Built Boats (MBB) and the Maine Composites Alliance also attended the event. Martin Grimnes, president of Harbor Technologies and founder of the Maine Composites Alliance, and Steve Von Vogt, chairman of MBB and president/CEO of Maine Marine Manufacturing, recently partnered their respective composites and boatbuilding groups in an effort to attract funding and create opportunities for new and existing businesses involved in composites manufacturing.

“By bringing together state, education, composite, marine trade and boatbuilding representatives under the North Star Alliance, and now with funding from the WIRED grant, Maine has created a support system that will allow the composite and boatbuilding industries to thrive and excel,” said Von Vogt.

The Advanced Engineered Wood Composites Center (AEWC) at the University of Maine was founded with four faculty in 1996 through a National Science Foundation’s Experimental Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR) proposal. Housed in a 48,000 square-foot2 facility, the AEWC Center currently includes 34 faculty and staff, and annually provides funding support for 100 graduate and undergraduate students from 15 different academic departments. Dr. Habib Dagher is the director of the AEWC Center.

The AEWC Center functions as an R&D center for more than 100 industrial clients from around the world, including Dow Chemical Co., Georgia-Pacific Corp., PPG Industries, the Weyerhaeuser Co., and Boise Cascade Corp., among others. For more information, visit www.aewc.umaine.edu.

Maine’s boatbuilding industry spans nearly 400 years and generates approximately $650 million annually. Maine Built Boats (MBB), a partnership between state and federal governments to promote Maine’s boatbuilding industry, plans to increase annual productivity to more than $1 billion over the next 10 years. Nearly 450 companies make up Maine’s boatbuilding industry, with products and services ranging from custom-made luxury yachts and workboats to interior design and navigational software. For more information on MBB, visit www.mainebuiltboats.com.

Photo: Dr. Habib Dagher, Director of the University of Maine's Advanced Engineered Wood Composites Center, on the mezzanine overlooking the center's structures lab.