



TWIN CITY TIMES

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(207) 795-5017 • Info@TwinCityTimes.com

FREE • Vol. XXV, No. 34

Your Hometown Newspaper Since 1999

Thursday, January 4, 2024 • FREE

The Laundress returns for Tarot 101 workshop



TAROT 101 WORKSHOP

Registration Required

February 6, 2024
From 5 to 6:30 pm

Please bring your own traditional 78-card deck and something to take notes with

Lewiston PUBLIC LIBRARY

LEWISTON, ME -- The Lewiston Public Library will host a Tarot 101 Workshop on Tuesday, February 6, 2024, from 5 to 6:30 pm in The Jeanne Couture Room. The Tarot 101 Workshop will feature the return of Kate Sheridan, a.k.a.

The Laundress. This workshop is free and open to both teens and adults. Registration is required and the link to sign up can be found on the Lewiston Public Library's website under events.

This event is for anyone who wants to learn more about tarot cards, using the classic Smith-Rider-Waite deck as a guide. The program will cover basic tarot theory, a brief history of tarot cards, and an introduction to all 78 cards and how they work together. The goal is to demystify the tarot to empower you to use the cards. Throughout the evening, you'll be invited to consider card images using both the information from the workshop and your own intuition. At the end of the evening, you'll be shown how to conduct areading for yourself or others, and you'll leave with practical next steps to do at home.

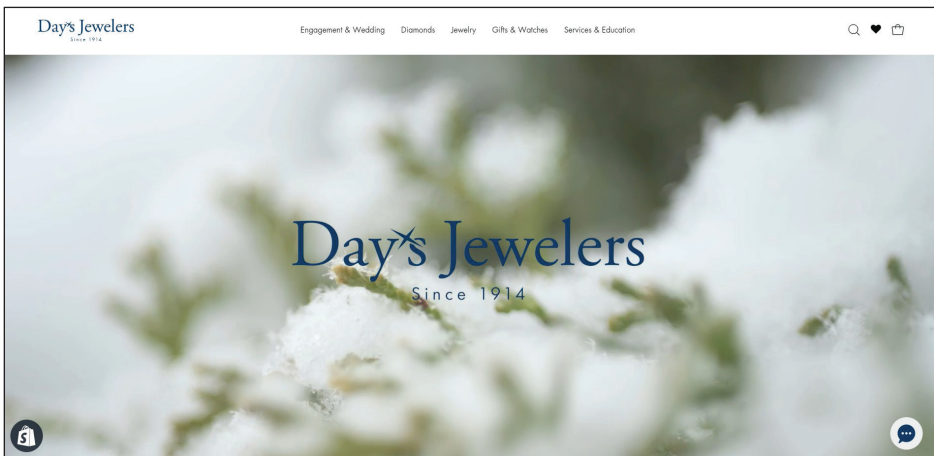
While some of the workshop material will certainly apply to Oracle cards, please note that this workshop is focused on the traditional 78-card tarot. Please bring your own 78-card deck and something to take

notes with you to the program. Only a few tarot decks will be available to borrow for the program.

Kate Sheridan, a.k.a. The Laundress, is a tarot reader and astrologer who believes that fortunes are created rather than told. Her style is down-to-earth and conversational, and she draws heavily on her previous life as a high school English teacher to ensure that her clients understand the logic behind the intuitive information she provides. After she left teaching in 2019, she turned her longtime interest in Western Astrology into an intensive study. She has been playing with tarot cards for 20 years, studying them seriously for nearly 10, and reading professionally since 2019.

The Lewiston Public Library is located downtown at 200 Lisbon Street at the corner of Pine Street and Lisbon Street. More information on Tuesday's program is available by contacting the Lewiston Public Library at 513-3135 or LPLReference@lewistonmaine.gov.

Day's Jewelers unveils website to elevate jewelry shopping



WATERVILLE, ME -- Day's Jewelers, a trusted name in the world of fine jewelry, is proud to announce the launch of their brand-new website, designed to transform the way their customers shop for jewelry online. With an elegant and user-friendly interface, enhanced features, and an extensive range of stunning jewelry collections, the new website promises to be a one-stop destination for Day's Jewelers customers, both new and established.

The redesigned website, accessible at www.daysjewelers.com, offers an immersive and personalized

shopping journey, reflecting Day's Jewelers' commitment to excellence in both jewelry craftsmanship and customer service.

Key features of the new Day's Jewelers website include:

Contemporary and Intuitive Design: The website showcases a modern, clean design that seamlessly blends aesthetics with user-friendliness, ensuring a hassle-free shopping experience for visitors.

Enhanced Search and Filtering Capabilities: Shoppers can effortlessly discover their perfect piece of jewelry

by utilizing an array of search filters, including type, metal, gemstone, price range, and more.

Product Location: Customers now have the convenience of tracking the physical location of an item within Day's Jeweler's eight stores.

Secure and Convenient Shopping: The website offers a secure and seamless shopping experience, complete with various payment options- including financing- to provide peace of mind to customers.

A Glimpse into the Future: Day's Jewelers tantalizes customers with a promise of even more exciting features and enhancements to be unveiled in 2024.

Joe Corey, President of Day's Jewelers, expresses his enthusiasm stating, "we are delighted to introduce our state-of-the-art website. Our primary

goal with this new website is to continuously enhance the guest experience by incorporating the latest features and technology. It's a momentous time for our company as we launch this robust website that will support our growth and build upon our 109-year-old legacy."

Day's Jewelers has been serving customers with an exquisite range of fine jewelry, engagement rings, and impeccable service since its inception in 1914. The new website is a testament to their mission to build a company that stands the test of time through their commitment of creating unforgettable moments with uniquely crafted jewelry.

Embark on a journey by visiting the new Day's Jewelers website at www.daysjewelers.com and discover a world of timeless elegance and meaningful jewelry.



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Newsmakers, Names & Faces

DHHS issues \$19M to Maine nursing facilities

AUGUSTA, ME — The Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) announced that it has issued \$19 million in one-time Medicaid (MaineCare) payments to Maine nursing facilities to support their continued recovery from the pandemic, particularly for direct care staff who tend to the health and wellbeing of residents.

The Department issued the payments, consistent with language in the biennial budget the Governor signed into law in July, to approximately 80 nursing facilities.

“This investment will help to keep vital staff employed at nursing facilities all across Maine—safeguarding the high-quality and consistent care that Maine people rely on,” said Governor Janet Mills. “My Administration will continue to work to strengthen Maine’s health care workforce and improve the availability of affordable long-term care for Maine people.”

“A clear body of research links the availability of consistent, well trained, hands-on staff to quality of life and care in nursing facilities,” said DHHS Commissioner Jeanne Lambrew. “These payments are designed to support those dedicated staff and reflect Governor Mills’ commitment to ensuring

that high-quality long-term care is affordable and accessible for Maine people.”

“We appreciate these targeted, temporary funds that will help address the extraordinarily high costs of labor that have caused unprecedented challenges for nursing homes,” said Angela Westhoff, President and CEO of the Maine Health Care Association. “These payments are an essential step in safeguarding the well-being of residents and ensuring more stability of Maine’s vital nursing homes. Looking toward our state’s future, we are optimistic about continuing our collaborative efforts with the Mills Administration and the Legislature to sustain access to care for Maine’s residents.”

A growing body of evidence links the delivery of high-quality care in nursing homes to adequate and consistent staffing. An article published in *The JAMA Network Open* in January 2023 showed that maintaining constant staffing day-to-day, especially with licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and certified nursing assistance (CNAs), is a marker of better quality in nursing homes.

Each qualifying nursing facility was eligible for a payment amount that was informed by their direct care costs in 2022.

This week’s pay-

ments follow \$50 million DHHS issued to long-term care facilities for pandemic recovery in two rounds of payments in April 2023 and August 2022. Those payments and the funding issued this week will facilitate pandemic recovery as the Department continues to work with stakeholders to reform how nursing homes are paid to reward quality and streamline payment administration.

These investments build on the Mills Administration’s historic financial and operational support for nursing facilities, which includes:

In June 2019, Governor Mills signed into law a biennial budget that dedicated \$25 million to provide a cost-of-living adjustment to nursing facilities. As a result, nursing facility rates increased, on average, by five percent for Fiscal Year 2020;

In March 2020, at the onset of the pandemic, the Mills Administration began \$9 million in temporary payment rate increases to nursing facilities for extra costs associated with COVID-19, including staffing above and beyond customary levels to maintain proper ratios and to monitor residents and screen visitors, supplies and PPE, such as face masks and gowns, beyond

the amounts typically purchased;

In November 2020, the Mills Administration announced that it would reimburse nursing facilities for their costs to conduct Federally-required surveillance testing using commercial laboratories;

In December 2020, the Mills Administration awarded \$5.1 million to health care facilities, most of which were nursing facilities, to cover expenses resulting from the pandemic;

In July 2021, Governor Mills signed the FY22-23 biennial budget that dedicated \$36.4 million in cost-of-living adjustments and rebasing funding for nursing facilities;

In August 2021, the Mills Administration awarded \$12.5 million to nursing and residential care facilities to help them cover expenses resulting from the pandemic;

In September 2021, the Mills Administration delivered \$123 million in one-time funding, including \$30 million in General Fund dollars authorized through the biennial budget signed into law by the Governor, for nursing facilities, residential care facilities, and adult family care homes to help address workforce issues by retaining current staff or hiring new staff;

In December 2021, the Mills Administration announced its plan to increase rates for long-term care facilities by \$4.5 million from January to June 2022, and add another \$7.6 million through the budget for supplemental wage adjustments for fiscal year 2022;

Effective July 1, 2022, payment rates increased to support paying direct care workers at least 125 percent of minimum wage, on top of rebasing rates which resulted in rates increasing, on average, by 20 percent over the prior year; and on January 1, 2023, rates increased further to support 125 percent of minimum wage;

In August 2022, the Mills Administration issued \$25 million in one-time funding for nursing facilities, residential care facilities, and adult family care homes to help address ongoing workforce issues and relatively low occupancy;

In April 2023, the Mills Administration issued \$25 million in one-time funding for nursing facilities, residential care facilities, and adult family care homes to help address ongoing workforce issues and relatively low occupancy;

In July 2023, payment rates were increased by a cost of living adjust-

ment of approximately 4.5 percent

Since January 2021, the Department has used over \$2 million in Federal funds to support emergency nurse and related staffing to nearly one-third of Maine long-term care facilities to support care for residents during the pandemic.

This is in addition to at least \$50 million in financial relief distributed directly by the Federal government to nursing facilities across Maine.

Recognizing the need to address the workforce challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Governor Mills included \$20 million in the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan to support health care workforce training. The Jobs Plan additionally supports marketing campaigns aimed at promoting health care careers in Maine and Healthcare Training for ME, a program to expand the availability of free and low-cost career training to help health care workers advance their careers, support workforce training needs of health care employers, and attract new workers to fast-growing fields. The Jobs Plan is also supporting the Caring for ME campaign to educate and encourage residents to become direct care providers.

Over \$3.5M for Maine environmental justice projects

BOSTON, MA — Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency announced over \$3.5 million to fund six projects across Maine that advance environmental justice as part of President Biden’s Investing in America agenda. The organizations, which EPA has selected through its Environmental

Justice Collaborative Problem Solving Cooperative Agreement and Environmental Justice Government-to-Government programs, will use the funds to ensure disadvantaged communities that have historically suffered from underinvestment have access to clean air and water and climate resilience solu-

tions in alignment with the Biden-Harris administration’s Justice40 Initiative.

Thanks to President Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act—the largest climate investment in U.S. history—this funding is a part of the largest investment ever announced under these two longstanding EPA programs. This is the

first in a series of environmental justice grant announcements the agency will announce before the end of the year.

“No President has invested more in environmental justice than President Biden, and under his leadership we’re removing longstanding barriers and meaningfully collab-

orating with communities to build a healthier future for all,” said EPA Administrator Michael S. Regan. “Together, these community-driven projects will improve the health, equity, and resilience of communities while setting a blueprint for local solutions that can be applied across the nation.”

“EPA strongly believes that historically disadvantaged and overburdened communities must have a place at the table as we work toward climate and environmental justice. Successful environmental justice programs are built with community collaboration, common goals,

See *Projects*, page 10



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Newsmakers, Names & Faces

Free civil legal support for those impacted by Lewiston shootings

AUGUSTA, ME - In a joint statement, Disability Rights Maine, the Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project, Pine Tree Legal Assistance, and Legal Services for the Elderly announced their ongoing partnership to address the civil legal needs of those impacted by the Lewiston shootings.

“Victims, families, and our communities have been profoundly impacted by the violence and trauma of this event,” said Kim Moody, Executive Director of Disability Rights Maine. “Civil legal challenges are already emerging for those most directly impacted, and more people will need support from trusted legal professionals in the weeks and months ahead.”

Organization representatives note that information victims and their families receive is frequently conflicting or confusing, resulting in significant potential legal and

financial risks or penalties.

“Victims are understandably overwhelmed, all while navigating a range of legal concerns,” said Maureen Boston, Director of Intake at Pine Tree Legal Assistance. “Our agencies are here to ensure that families receive accurate legal advice from qualified attorneys who are experts in civil legal fields - for free.”

The range of civil legal issues expected to develop related to Maine’s deadliest shooting include, but are not limited to:

Receipt of lump sum funds impact on public benefits

Eligibility for public benefits such as food stamps (SNAP); TANF; General Assistance

Social Security survivor benefits

Social Security overpayment

MaineCare or Medicare

Unemployment and employment questions

Consumer issues including debt collection, utility terminations, and student loans

Housing discrimination

Landlord/tenant issues

Homeownership including mortgage payment challenges

Income tax Probate/Trust/Estate Issues

Funeral expenses Physical and mental health medical expenses

“In a crisis, people turn to friends and family for advice. And - the reality is that in this kind of situation, civil legal expertise is necessary. These issues are case-specific and folks should really work through their questions with an attorney,” said Elizabeth Strout, Executive Director of the Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project. “We’re

here to answer questions and provide information on impacts they may not have considered.”

The organizations define people impacted by the Lewiston shootings as immediate family members of those who were killed, a person injured in the shooting and their immediate family, or a witness to the shootings.

“Even if you’re not sure what you’ll need help with - or if you’re not sure you qualify as an impacted person, please call any of us. There is no wrong door here,” said Jaye Martin, Executive Director of Legal Services for the Elderly. “Part of the services we provide is taking that guesswork out of the equation - and making it as easy as possible for folks to make informed decisions with advice and guidance from an attorney.”

An impacted person may call any organization

listed below. During the phone call, the impacted person will talk with an organization representative who will help them identify the legal issues they need to address. The organization representative will then connect the caller with the legal aid office best suited to help them. An attorney from that office will then provide services such as advice, brief assistance, and/or direct representation depending on the nature of the needs.

The organizations also underscored their hope that people would share this information as much as possible, noting that the number of people impacted by the Lewiston shooting is significant and far-reaching. If you or someone you know needs civil legal support, please contact any of the organizations below.

Disability Rights Maine

207-626-2774 (V/TTY)

207-805-7024 (VP) Mon - Fri, 8am - 5pm <https://www.drme.org/>

Legal Services for the Elderly

1-800-750-5353 Mon - Fri, 9am - 12pm and 1pm - 5pm www.mainelse.org

Maine Volunteer Lawyers Project

1-800-442-4293 Mon 1pm - 3:30pm Fri 9am - 12pm intake@vlp.org www.vlp.org

Pine Tree Legal Assistance

(207) 774-8211 Mon 12:00pm - 2:30pm

Tues 9:00am - 11:30am

Thurs 9:00am - 11:30am

www.ptla.org www.kidslegal.org www.statesidelegal.org

Elle Ferris joins Fontaine Family

SCARBOROUGH, ME (October 6, 2023) -- Fontaine Family – The Real Estate Leader is pleased to announce the addition of Elle Ferris to the team at their Scarborough location.



Elle grew up in Waterville, Maine where she attended Waterville Senior High School. She then continued her education at the University of Maine in Orono. With a track record of success in neighboring New Hampshire state, Elle is well-equipped to provide her Maine clients with un-

paralleled service and expertise in the ever-evolving real estate market. Elle is a proud member of several local organizations, including the Strafford County Board of Realtors, the Maine Association of Realtors, the Oyster River Girls

Lacrosse Boosters, and the Community Gardens of Durham. Through her affiliations, Elle demonstrates her dedication to giving back and making a positive impact on the communities she serves.

While Elle excels in helping her clients find their dream homes, she is also dedicated to her family of five, complete with husband Frederick, three daughters, two rescue dogs, and one feline companion. With a passion for Lacrosse and Basketball, a

love for travel, and a strong connection to the great outdoors, the Ferris family epitomizes the perfect blend of work, play, and family bonding.

Elle comes to Fontaine as an Associate Broker licensed in Maine and New Hampshire and years

of experience, making her a trusted partner in your real estate journey along with the support of the Fontaine Team. Whether you’re seeking expert guidance in the Southern Maine & Seacoast NH real estate market or looking to connect with a communi-

ty-minded individual, Elle is a Realtor® who brings experience, dedication, and a heart for community to every endeavor. Elle will be working out of the Scarborough location and can be reached at (603)674-1118 or elle@fontaine-team.com.

Skelton Taintor & Abbott named Tier 1 Law Firm

LEWISTON, ME – Skelton Taintor & Abbott has been named a Tier 1 Metropolitan “Best Law Firms” for Litigation-Real Estate, Family Law, Worker’s Compensation Law-Claimants and Litigation-Construction, by U.S. News – Best Lawyers® in 2024. Tier 1 rankings are determined through a combination of impressive


feedback from peers and clients as well as information provided in response to the “Law Firm Survey” conducted by Best Lawyers.

Skelton Taintor & Abbott has received the prestigious Tier 1 ranking each year since 2010. This ranking follows 4 lawyers in the firm being recognized in The Best Lawyers

in America©. Since 1853, Skelton Taintor & Abbott has provided a full range of high-quality legal services to the individuals, companies, and municipalities of Maine. The firm’s main office is located in Lewiston.


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Seniors Not Acting Their Age

A Camden Hills Traverse

One of the finest hikes in the Camden Hills is a traverse of Maiden Cliff and Mount Megunticook. The expedition encompasses three of the most scenic locations in Maine: Maiden Cliff, a towering escarpment on Scenic Trail, and Ocean Overlook.

I try to arrange a Camden Hills adventure each fall. When I suggested a Maiden Cliff/Mount Megunticook traverse to my longtime hiking friend, John Stokinger, he enthusiastically agreed. This particular hike evokes nostalgic memories for both of us as we completed the trek with our young families about forty years ago. At the time, our four kids were in the five to ten years age bracket. Now, they're middle-aged and we're old. Time marches on.

The excursion presented medical implications for me. I've recently experienced some left knee discomfit and have an upcoming appointment with a knee specialist. Since hiking, particularly winter-mountain hiking, is an important part of my life, I want to provide the doctor with detailed information on how the knee reacts to a challenging mountain hike.

John and I met in the parking lot at Camden Hills State Park headquarters off Route One in Camden on a cold windy but sunny late fall day. Although there was no snow accumulation and only occasional ice, we otherwise experienced winter-like weather throughout the outing. Stocking caps, mitts, and layers of clothing were essential.

We left a vehicle in the parking lot and drove about six miles to Maiden Cliff Trailhead on Route 52. A Maiden Cliff loop hike is one of the most popular in the Camden Hills. Surprisingly, no other vehicles were in the parking area.

We began our trek on the predominantly dry Maiden Cliff Trail in a mixed hardwood and conifer forest. The streams and brooks were unusually high throughout the hike and caution was required during crossings to avoid wet footwear. Shortly before reaching Scenic Trail, we noted the path had been rerouted. This was the first of several trail improvements encountered during the expedition.

After a half-mile, we turned left at the Scenic Trail junction and climbed

steeply onto the shoulder of a high prominence on the western end of the Mount Megunticook massif. From there, it was easy hiking with sporadic views of Megunticook Lake to Maiden Cliff where an immense white cross identifies the location where twelve-year old Lenora French fell to her death in 1864. Despite the tragic event, this is a magical place that provides a fabulous view of Megunticook Lake and the Camden Hills beyond.

Progressing northeasterly on Scenic Trail, we found another rerouted section. The new route is a marked improvement over the former one which was badly eroded. Scrambling steeply up a series of ledges and boulders, we arrived at an overlook with more spectacular views of Megunticook Lake.

Persisting up a sloping ledge, we reached the summit of the western high point where a cairn is located. I call this site Maiden Cliff Mountain as it is separated from Mount Megunticook by a fairly deep saddle. Just beyond, while skirting the rim of an elongated cliff, we experienced remarkable expansive vistas of the surrounding area.

After dropping down steeply, we left Scenic Trail and proceeded on rugged rolling terrain on Ridge Trail towards the top of Mount Megunticook. The serpentine passage descends to a stream crossing and passes Jack Williams and Zeke's Trails before arriving at the forested summit marked by a gigantic cairn.

From the top, Ridge Trail begins a gradual decline. In another rerouted section, we met the only other hiker encountered during our trek. Angling west, we emerged onto the majestic cliffs of Ocean Overlook. Despite harsh wind chills, we lingered on the vertical escarpment to enjoy outstanding views of Camden Harbor and western Penobscot Bay.

We continued steeply



An immense white cross marks the top of Maiden Cliff



An elongated cliff on Scenic Trail provides expansive vistas of the surrounding area



Outstanding views of Camden Harbor and western Penobscot Bay can be seen from Ocean Overlook

down precipitous ledges to Adam's Lookout Trail on the left. This short path provides occasional glimpses of Penobscot Bay before joining Mount Megunticook Trail. After descending Adam's Lookout Trail, we followed Mount

Megunticook Trail steadily downhill and through the park campground to our shuttle vehicle completing one of Maine's finest most scenic treks.

The verdict on my knee is less than ideal. More senior medical care

seems likely.

My book *Maine Al Fresco: The Fifty Finest Outdoor Adventures in Maine* narrates eight more mountain hikes around the state.

Ron Chase resides in Topsham. His latest book, "Maine Al Fresco: The Fifty Finest Outdoor Adventures in Maine" is available at www.northcountrypress.com/maine-al-fresco or in bookstores and through online retailers. His previous books are "The Great Mars Hill Bank Robbery" and "Mountains for Mortals - New England." Visit his website at www.ronchaseoutdoors.com or he can be reached at ronchaseoutdoors@comcast.net

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Helping children with special needs enjoy the holidays

Submitted by the Episcopal Center for Children

CHEVY CHASE, DC - The holidays are upon us, and while there's loads of merry-making and fun to be had – the changes and sensations of the season can add stress to the lives of children with special needs and their families. The Episcopal Center for Children (ECC), a non-profit organization serving children with special needs ages 5-14 in the greater Washington, DC area, offers the following tips to help.

“Children with special needs enjoy the holidays but they are especially sensitive to the changes in routines that the holidays bring,” said Stephanie Nash, LICSW, president and CEO of ECC. “Making a plan, thinking about your child’s needs, and adjusting your expectations can help you create a positive holiday experience for the entire family.”

Tip #1 – Make a plan for the holidays and share it with your family. Create a schedule for your family’s holiday activities and post it for your child to see. You may find it helpful to use pictures to help a young child. Talk about the schedule with your child, so he or she can anticipate



what will happen.

Tip #2 – Remind your family about holiday plans. Review the schedule. Discuss the schedule with others in your home, so they understand what is going on and how they can best support your child with special needs (and everyone else in the family), so everyone can have a fun holiday.

Tip #3 – For holiday gatherings, give your child a job and a plan. Ask your child to help collect coats, give out treats, or greet arrivals. Rehearse the plan. Give your child a schedule or plan for a festive occasion so he or she knows what to anticipate and

when things will happen.

Tip #4 – Maintain routines as much as possible. There may be special activities for the holidays, but try to keep your child’s schedule as close to “normal” as possible. Routines are key for helping children coping with special needs, and it’s especially important for children to stick to regular medication and sleep schedules as much as possible.

Tip #5 - If your child is sensitive to unfamiliar smells, help manage them. Cinnamon is a common holiday fragrance. One way to help a child experience this smell minimally (and gauge reaction

to it), is to add cinnamon to play compound before an event. Ask guests visiting your home to not wear heavy perfumes if your child is sensitive to them and think about other smells like evergreens.

Tip #6 – Eat healthy foods and consider how new or special foods impact your child. During the holidays there are all sorts of fun foods and treats to enjoy. Some children are more affected than others by dietary changes. Pay attention to your child’s moods and how diet and situational changes may be impacting him or her. If you are at an event, bring along food that is familiar

to your child if you think it may be needed.

Tip #7 – Take breaks when needed. Sometimes children need a break from the hubbub of holiday activities and busyness. Fill a bag or backpack with a few favorite toys, games or activities. If you see your child is getting stressed, get out the bag and find a quiet spot to play.

Tip #8 – Do not allow presents to be a hindrance to enjoyment. Toy packaging today can frustrate children and parents alike. Children who have trouble with fine motor skills may find unwrapping some gifts frustrating. You can adjust packages to their comfort level by loosening ribbons and paper, or pre-cutting fasteners. Ask others who give your child gifts to be aware of his or her needs when it comes to wrapping presents. Some children find it disorienting to unwrap things that are new and unfamiliar to them. If that is the case for your child, wrap a few favorite toys for your child to unwrap.

Tip #9 – Get your child into the spirit of the season through gift giving. Gift giving provides an opportunity to practice social skills. Help your child make a gift for someone else, and practice how

to give the gift to that person. Let your child experience the joy of giving.

Tip #10 – Give your child the gift of your attention. Holidays can be busy for grown-ups and children. Make sure you spend a few minutes of quality time with your child every day. Give your full attention. Practice active listening, where you listen to what your child is saying and then repeat it back to them to demonstrate that you are listening. Focus on offering connection and support.

About the Episcopal Center for Children

The Episcopal Center for Children (ECC) is a nondenominational, non-profit organization that has been dedicated to serving the needs of children and their families for the past 125 years. In June 2019, the ECC suspended operation for its K-8 therapeutic school for children with emotional challenges from the greater Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area. The Board of Directors continues to be committed to its longstanding mission of serving children in determining plans for the ECC’s future. ECC currently offers an After School Enrichment Program and is working toward reopening its therapeutic school.

SIREN Act to support rural EMS throughout Maine

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Dick Durbin (D-IL) applauded Senate’s unanimous passage of their bipartisan SIREN Reauthorization Act. The legislation would extend funding for five additional years for Supporting and Improving Rural EMS Needs (SIREN) grants to rural fire and EMS agencies nationwide. Administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA),

this funding supports EMS agencies in training and recruiting staff, conducting certification courses, and purchasing equipment, including naloxone to address the opioid epidemic.

“It is vital that Americans who live in rural parts of Maine and across the country have access to lifesaving emergency medical services, which is why I have long advocated for funding to support access to quality rural health care,” said Senator Collins. “With the Senate passage

of this legislation, we are supporting rural EMS agencies, this bipartisan legislation would help to alleviate staffing shortages, upgrade training and equipment, and ultimately boost response times when seconds count. This program has made a real difference for recruiting and retaining EMS personnel in Maine’s rural communities.”

“In Illinois, rural EMS agencies are a lifeline for their communities. These first responders

are on the front lines, and we must ensure that they have the proper staffing, training, and equipment to address the emergency in front of them,” said Senator Durbin. “I worked in 2018 to pass the bipartisan SIREN Act to meet the needs of rural EMS agencies as they care for their communities. And today, I’m pleased that the United States Senate has recognized the importance of this successful program by advancing the SIREN Reauthorization Act. I’m

grateful for Senator Collins’ partnership in making certain that rural EMS agencies continue to have access to the funding they depend on. I urge the House of Representatives to quickly take up and pass this legislation so it can be signed into law.”

The SIREN Act was initially signed into law in 2018 as part of the Farm Bill. Since then, Senators Collins and Durbin have led the appropriations effort to grow the program from \$5 million annually

to \$10.5 million this year, resulting in a total of nearly \$30 million in grants nationwide. Funding through this program has supported several EMS agencies across the State of Maine, including those serving Aroostook, Franklin, and Waldo counties.

A decline in primary care and hospital service availability, workforce shortages exacerbated by the pandemic, great distances between health care facilities, and low insurance rates are some of the challenges facing rural communities. See SIREN, page 12

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Arts & Entertainment

Lewiston Farmers Market, ReTreeUS to plant orchard

LEWISTON, ME -- The Lewiston Farmers Market and ReTreeUS teamed up to plant a community orchard of Asian pear and peach trees at the market location on Oxford Street in October. An average of 400 customers visit the farmers market weekly and these trees will be an enduring part of the experience by producing approximately 9,000 servings of fruit annually. The fruit from these trees will be provided at no cost for those in need in the community. These fruit-bearing additions to the landscape will complement the market's overarching goal of nourishing the community with locally grown food while fostering an opportunity for food production knowledge. This planting was ReTreeUS' 90th school and community orchard planting since

2012.

"We are really excited about this project that will enhance a great community gathering place in the heart of Lewiston, providing inspiration, education and sustenance for generations of community members", said Richard Hodges, ReTreeUS Founder and Program Manager.

"The Lewiston Farmers Market is happy to be working with the City of Lewiston and community partners including ReTreeUS for the improvement of the Market space in support of a healthy community", said Joshua Nagine, Lewiston Farmers Market Board Member.

"The St. Mary's Nutrition Center is excited to partner with ReTreeUS and the Lewiston Farmer's Market", said Katie Collins, Youth Engagement



Coordinator at St. Mary's Nutrition Center. "This fall, the Nutrition Center's Fall Gardener program is deepening the knowledge and skills for young people in the community around gardening, harvesting, and local food systems. Partnering on this project is a wonderful opportunity to continue to connect young people to the increasing vibrancy of the Lewiston food community and the concrete ways they can contribute to its growth. We are excited to watch this project continue to un-

fold over the years."

The City of Lewiston is an ongoing partner of the Lewiston Farmers Market and the City's support continues with this project. This is the second project that ReTreeUS has worked closely on with Lewiston City Arborist Steve Murch and Public Works, building on the success of the Teisha's Orchard project, a 50-tree orchard located on a city park planted and maintained with students at Lewiston High School and Next STEP. "These projects are making a good impact", said Steve Murch, Lewiston City Arborist.

This project is part of a community-wide, cross-sector, collaboration-building process in Lewiston and Auburn supported by Elmina B. Sewall Foundation in partnership with other members of the Lewiston-Au-

burn Funders Group.

ReTreeUS is a member of the national Giving Grove affiliate network, which helps launch and sustain community orcharding programs nationwide. Representatives of The Giving Grove and Yes! Apples, which supports The Giving Grove through 1% for the Planet, will be on hand to help plant the trees.

"Through our 1% for the Planet membership, we've partnered with The Giving Grove for over two years now, and while we've supported their growth in many ways, this is the first time our team has been able to get into the field", said Tenley Fitzgerald, Yes! Apples Vice President of Marketing. Yes! Apples 2023 donation to The Giving Grove is funding 50% of this planting, in addition to

supporting all 17 plantings this fall throughout New England. "As growers and distributors of fresh apples nationwide, we understand the importance of providing access to fresh fruit to communities, especially in communities that need various procurement options. We are thrilled to help bring their newest orchard to life and to aid in bringing fresh fruits to the Lewiston-Auburn area."

For more information about ReTreeUS and its commitment to empowering people to grow their own food and become environmental stewards, visit retree.us.

Giving Grove's vision is thousands of sustainable community orchards nationwide, creating local food systems that nourish people and the planet. Learn more at www.givinggrove.org.

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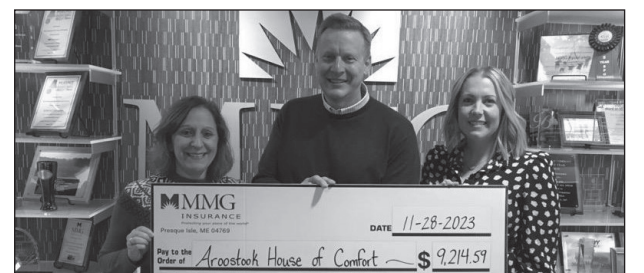
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MMG Insurance supports the Aroostook House of Comfort

In recognition of the Aroostook House of Comfort's five-year anniversary, MMG Insurance donated more than \$9,000 toward outside maintenance projects that improved the grounds at the hospice facility.

"We are so fortunate to have the Aroostook House of Comfort serving our friends and family during a difficult time," said Matt McHatten, President and CEO of MMG Insurance. "Given the anniversary of the organization, we were very pleased to partner with both a donation and the work of members of the MMG team to improve the gazebo area. It's an important part of the facility that provides a place to gather and reflect for the patients and their loved ones."

Since 2018, more than 800 patients have received inpatient end-of-life care at the Aroostook House of Comfort. Those patients' families and caregiving teams



L-R: Terri Ouellette, Aroostook House of Comfort board member and MMG accounting department manager; Matt McHatten, President and CEO of MMG; Abbey Clair, Executive Director of the Aroostook Hospice Foundation

have found support there as well. While located in Presque Isle, Maine, patients come to the facility from across Aroostook County and the state.

MMG Insurance's recent donation paid for the gazebo to be repainted and for landscaping to be done, beautifying the outside area.

In tandem with the donation, MMG Insurance's interns spent time at the Aroostook House of Comfort during the summer, volunteering their labor to help keep the facility looking its best. Interns Graham Berry, Rossalyn Buck, Amelia Ivey, and Amanda Winslow paint-

ed lamp posts, tended the facility's garden, and washed windows.

Abbey Clair, Executive Director of the Aroostook Hospice Foundation, which owns the Aroostook House of Comfort, noted that partnerships with companies like MMG are invaluable to the organization and those it serves.

"Community involvement plays a pivotal role in sustaining the mission of the Aroostook House of Comfort," Clair said. "We are grateful for MMG's support, as it allows us to make a meaningful difference to those who need our services and their families."

King: VA must protect veterans from prescription opioid abuse

WASHINGTON, D.C. — U.S. Senator Angus King, a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, is calling on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to step up its efforts to protect veterans from prescription opioid abuse. In a letter from King and his committee colleagues to VA Secretary Denis McDonough, the Senators are urging the department to take swift action following reports that found a majority of non-VA health care providers are not meeting the VA prescription opioid safety standards.

A recent report from the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) found third-party administrators have failed to provide adequate oversight of whether Veterans Community Care Network health care providers were completing and certifying VA's Opioid Safety Initiative (OSI) training.

The OIG also found approximately 14,700 of 18,200 non-VA providers in the Community Care Network who prescribed opioids to veterans in fiscal year 2021 had not completed VA's OSI training and did not certify their mandated review of VA's guidelines. Lapses

in oversight have resulted in the over prescription of opioids from both the VA and Community Care Network providers — increasing veterans' risk of sedation and overdose.

"We write today to discuss our concerns with the Department of Veterans Affairs' oversight of non-VA providers who prescribe opioids to veterans," the Senators wrote in a letter to VA Secretary Denis McDonough. "In Fiscal Year 2022, the Department spent more than \$27 billion in the community for health care services for veterans. VA must ensure the

dollars it spends result in high-quality, safe care for veterans."

"It is clear VA and its contracted third-party administrators failed to do their due diligence in ensuring the health and safety of the veterans in their care...As stated many times before, we feel if there is an issue at one location, it will likely occur elsewhere. The Department must work not only to address the shortcomings outlined in these OIG reports but also to ensure lessons learned are implemented system-wide," the Senators continued.

"It is the responsi-

bility of VA to ensure the veterans in its care, or that of its community partners, are being provided high-quality care. We urge VA to act to ensure our nation's veterans are not put at risk when seeking care in the community...VA can outsource the work — but it cannot outsource the responsibility for taking care of our veterans," the Senators concluded.

Representing a state with one of the highest rates of veterans per capita, Senator King is a staunch advocate for America's servicemembers and veterans. A mem-

ber of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, he works to ensure American veterans receive their earned benefits and that the VA is properly implementing various programs such as the PACT Act, the State Veterans Homes Domiciliary Care Flexibility Act, and the John Scott Hannon Act. Earlier this year, King introduced bipartisan legislation to support veterans with mental traumas, as well as celebrated President Biden signing his legislation into law, which increases benefits for veterans and military families.

Maine ranked 10th nationally in United Health Foundation report

MAINE -- In December, the United Health Foundation released their America's Health Rankings 2023 Annual Report, which highlights improvements, challenges, and disparities in the health and well-being of Americans across all 50 states.

Nationally, this year's report shows that eight chronic conditions

have reached the highest prevalence in the report's history. These include arthritis, asthma, cancer, cardiovascular diseases (CVDs), chronic kidney disease (CKD), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), depression and diabetes.

Maine was ranked No. 10 and experiences the following strengths and challenges, according to

this report:

A 10% increase in dental care providers from 57.6 to 63.1 per 100,000 population between September 2022 and September 2023.

A high prevalence of high school completion with 94.6% of adults ages 25 and older with at least a high school diploma or equivalent; the state ranked 2nd in the nation in

this measure.

A 30% increase in chronic kidney disease from 3.3% to 4.3% of adults between 2020 and 2022.

A 20% increase in drug deaths from 37.6 to 45.2 deaths per 100,000 population between 2020 and 2021.

You can access

the state summary here: <https://www.americashealthrankings.org/learn/reports/2023-annual-report/state-summaries-maine>

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Raising the spirits of members of the African Catholic community



LEWISTON, ME—Once a month, Christa Bella makes a more than 200-mile trip from Boston, Massachusetts, to the Basilica of Ss. Peter & Paul in Lewiston for the celebration of Mass.

“This just reminds me of home,” she says. “There is an atmosphere there.”

What draws Bella to the basilica each month is a Mass celebrated with members of Maine’s African community. The Mass is celebrated in Kirundi, the primary language of Burundi, and features the Choir Notre Dame de la Paix, which sings in three languages: French, Kirundi, and Kinyarwanda, which is spoken in Rwanda. Bella, who arrived in Boston from Burundi in 2017 to attend college, says she hasn’t been able to find anything similar where she now lives.

“I haven’t had a chance to be with a Catholic Burundian community in Boston, so I come here once a month, and hopefully, I can continue to keep coming,” she says.

Having a Mass for members of the African immigrant community has been Dancile Nshimirimana’s dream since she began serving as an outreach coordinator with Prince of Peace Parish in Lewiston three years ago. Nshimirimana, who is originally from Burundi, says she became concerned because she was seeing families drift away from the Catholic faith due to the language barrier.

“It was one of my priorities because when we first moved up here, I knew some people who were very active in the Catholic community back home, but once they got here, coming

to the English Mass where they didn’t understand anything and were just sitting there, they preferred to go to a Protestant church because they had people who could preach in a language they could understand,” she says.

Nshimirimana says she also knew children were missing out on the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, and first Communion and that some adults were no longer going to confession.

“Even if they just came to church to pray, not understanding everything, they were not going to confession,” she says.

When Nshimirimana learned that a member of the Rwandan community had arranged for a priest friend from Boston to come here to celebrate his wedding liturgy in his native language, she approached

the priest about coming up again. He agreed, and after the details were worked out with the parish and the diocese, he began celebrating Mass monthly.

“He didn’t have a car. He had to take a bus, and I would go pick him up from the bus station either here or in Portland. I or one of the members of our community would go pick him up,” she says.

The priest, Father Angelo Nisengwe, was pursuing graduate studies at Boston College. When they were completed, he connected Nshimirimana with another priest studying at the college, Father Jean Bosco Niyokwizere, who, fortunately, did have a car. When he graduated this past May, Father Felix Barutwanayo, SJ, took over.

“They expressed the need, and so, we collaborated with the parish priest here, and since we are available, we can serve once in a while,” says Father Barutwanayo.

The priests, who have also traveled to Maine to celebrate funeral Masses and for a day of recollection, say they are happy to do it because it benefits the community.

“Some of them don’t yet know English. Of course, they are learning, but even if they learn, doing liturgy in your own language adds the feeling, the effectiveness of the practice and helps them to grow spiritually,” says Father Barutwanayo. “Some might struggle integrating into a new parish and into a new environment, so I think they need accompaniment to integrate themselves and, also, to continue with their faith practice.”

“To have our own Mass in our own language, we can pray better, and we can connect more with our community, with our roots. Every time you are outside your country, you have a



longing for your country, so when you go somewhere where they speak your language, you are happy,” says Linda Ndizera.

“It is so beautiful to see when new people come, and they find out there is a Mass in Kirundi. They are so happy that they can join in,” says Nshimirimana.

The Mass regularly draws people not only from the Lewiston-Auburn area but also from the greater Portland area and, of course, Bella, who not only attends the Mass but participates in the choir.

“I used to sing in a choir back home,” she says. “I was in choir for 12 years, and I came here, and I heard them singing in Kirundi, and I said, ‘I have to be back among them.’”

When the Masses first started being celebrated, Nshimirimana says she would just gather together anybody who wanted to sing, but eventually, they became organized enough to form the Choir Notre Dame de la Paix. It celebrated its first anniversary in July.

“It’s important for us to have people committed to participating in the choir so they can help other people to pray. Singing in Mass helps people to pray well and to feel a part of the Mass,” she says.

“It was important to give people from our country hope and let them see

that what they did in their country, they can do here. Then, we can involve other people here. Then, we can say where we are now, this is home,” says Gloria Ndayishimiye, who helped start the choir with Nshimirimana and who returned from Arizona, where she now lives, for the celebration of the choir’s anniversary. “It is amazing to see how many people are now singing. It’s exciting.”

The choir has grown to 27 members, nearly all from Burundi or Rwanda.

“I like praying when I am singing, instead of just saying some words. When I’m singing, I’m really feeling like I am talking to God,” says Belise Ndikumagenge, the choir director.

“Whoever sings, prays twice, and it’s even better when you are singing in your own language because there are such deep roots to that. It goes straight to the heart,” says Ndizera. “It is important to me because I identify more when I am singing in my own language.”

Reflecting the tradition of their home countries, more parts of the Mass are sung than you would normally find at churches in Maine.

“The Mass is still the same, but in parts of the Mass where we do sing, they don’t sing at all here, or they only sing something shorter,” says Nshimirimana.

See Spirits, next page



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Spirits

Continued from previous page
na. “When we sing, we sing longer. That helps people to pray, and that’s what we were used to back home.”

Far from lamenting the resulting increase in the length of the Mass, the congregation joyously joins in the celebration, rising from their seats to sing with arms raised, swaying to the music.

“I’m happy to attend this Mass because it is an occasion to be with people from our community,” says Jean Luc Havyarimana, a parishioner originally from Burundi, who now lives in Auburn.

Along with their uplifting voices, the choir members stand out at the Mass thanks to their bright blue robes, which were given to them by Pauline Griesbach, who leads the basilica’s children’s choir. The robes were donated to her, but they were adult-

size, so the Choir Notre Dame de la Paix members became the fortunate recipients.

Nshimirimana says it worked out perfectly because blue is Mary’s color, and the choir is named for her. Nshimirimana is now looking for a way to acquire African drums and a guitar so the choir can be accompanied by instrumentation.

“Once we get the instruments and get more prepared, maybe we can set up a date for a concert for everyone to come,” she says.

The choir has sung for students at Saint Dominic Academy in Auburn.

“We’re hoping to do that maybe once every three months for them because they enjoyed it,” she says.

Nshimirimana says having the Mass and choir have helped to invigorate the African Catholic com-

munity. She says while she used to make all the preparations for the Mass herself, now others have stepped forward.

“Now that we have people available, I’m confident the Mass could happen even if I have to work,” says Nshimirimana, who is a nurse in addition to serving at the parish.

The Mass has also helped community members form a closer bond with the parish. More attend the Masses celebrated in English, and three serve as readers at them. In addition, two children are altar servers, and several sing in the children’s choir.

“The beautiful thing is they’re not only participating in the African community; they are also involved in the parish activities,” says Nshimirimana. “It is beautiful.”

She says she would love to be able to have the Masses celebrated more



often, something community members say they would welcome.

“I wish we could have a Mass every Sunday,” says Edgard Muto-ni, a member of the choir. “We’re really, really grateful. We enjoy the Mass. It’s really important for us.”



Industry veteran joins Day’s Jewelers Board of Directors

WATERVILLE, ME — Day’s Jewelers is thrilled to announce the newest addition to their esteemed Board of Directors - Charles Stanley. With over two decades of experience at De Beers, including his role as President of De Beers Brands in North America, Charles brings a wealth of expertise and a proven track record of success to his new role with Day’s.

Charles Stanley began his career with the De Beers Group, the largest producer and distributor of diamonds in the world, in 1994, serving as the

company’s marketing director. In 2003, Stanley transitioned to Harry Winston under the title of Vice President of merchandising and operations. Stanley returned to De Beers in 2010, heading and growing the De Beers Forevermark business in North America, until his retirement in early 2023.

The heartbeat of Day’s Jewelers is diamonds, and Stanley’s profound history within the diamond industry renders him an excellent addition to the Day’s Jewelers Board of Directors. “Charles Stanley’s ap-

pointment to our Board of Directors marks a pivotal moment for Day’s Jewelers,” said Joe Corey, President of Day’s Jewelers. “His exceptional leadership and deep understanding of the industry will undoubtedly propel us forward as we continue to innovate and provide exceptional experience for our customers.”

Along with Stanley, the Board of Directors consists of Jeff and Kathy Corey, Ann Arnold, and Erin Moran. The Board is responsible for providing guidance to executive leadership and contribut-

ing to the formulation of long-term strategic initiatives. “I am delighted to be joining Day’s Jewelers Board of Directors, whom I have known through the business relationship I developed while working with De Beers. I greatly respect the company’s values and its commitment to natural diamonds, and I am looking forward to bringing my experience to bear to further help Day’s Jewelers grow as they evolve the company under their new ESOP owner-

ship.”

Charles Stanley’s influence extends beyond the corporate realm, as he has also been an influential figure in various diamond and jewelry trade associations. His commitment to driving positive change within the industry and his dedication to advancing ethical practices align perfectly with Day’s Jewelers’ values.

With Charles Stanley’s appointment, Day’s Jewelers is poised to further solidify its position as

the diamond destination of New England, as well as trailblazer in the jewelry industry, delivering unparalleled quality and exceptional customer experiences.

Send all items for What’s Going On to the Editor. Deadline is Friday by five.

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New videos help Mainers assess, manage electricity consumption

AUGUSTA, ME—Efficiency Maine today announced it has added two instructional videos to the resources that support its initiative to loan out electricity monitors through participating libraries. The aim of the videos is to help consumers learn how to monitor and measure their electricity usage with the goal of reducing their electricity bill. Maine residents can now access the updated electricity monitor webpage, which features these new items, as well as includes updated monitor instruction sheets.

The initiative is a part of the quasi-state agency's growing collection of Do-It-Yourself (DIY) tips, tools, rebates, and weatherization resources. The mon-

itor campaign is designed to encourage consumers to understand and manage their electricity consumption by giving residents tools that can show them how much electricity they consume on a monthly and yearly basis.

"There are plenty of smaller, low-cost steps Mainers can take to reduce their energy use, increase their comfort, and lower their energy bills," said Michael Stoddard, executive director of Efficiency Maine. "The monitors can help identify which appliances are using the most electricity. Armed with that information, some consumers may make decisions about how and when they use them."

Starting in 2008, Efficiency Maine has supplied



electricity monitor kits to most of Maine's libraries interested in loaning them to their patrons. New monitors and an education campaign were relaunched in August 2021. Each kit includes an electricity monitor, a 25-page home energy efficiency tips booklet, paper instructions on how to use the electricity monitor, and educational activity worksheets for families and children. A new blog on the Efficiency Maine website contains a more detailed

description of the electricity monitors instructions and how they can help residents.

"We're pleased to partner with Efficiency Maine to help Mainers make informed decisions about how to cut energy costs," said Lori Fisher, Maine State Librarian. "Providing the monitor along with information on how to use it and other resources about energy efficiency is one way local libraries contribute to their

communities. I hope everyone takes advantage of this program."

"Library guests have appreciated the opportunity to take home the electricity monitors provided by Efficiency Maine," said Andrea DeBiase, library director at Carrabassett Valley Public Library. "They are always surprised by the results and sometimes come back to borrow the monitor kit a second time!"

Patrons can borrow a monitor free of charge from participating Maine libraries. If there is no library in town, consumers can visit the Maine State Library's website to request materials via postal mail.

More information about the electricity monitor loaner initiative can be

found at <https://www.energymaine.com/at-home/electricity-monitor-loaners/>.

Using an electricity monitor is only one way homeowners and tenants can evaluate their energy use and identify possible ways to help manage their bills. Efficiency Maine offers residents incentives of up to \$9,200 for insulation upgrades to increase their home's energy efficiency. It also has produced a downloadable Winter Energy-Saving Tips flier that describes useful do-it-yourself heating and weatherization steps and best practices on how to help homeowners seal their homes against drafts and use existing heating systems more efficiently.

DAR Scholarship accepting applications

WASHINGTON – Undergraduate and graduate students studying music with ambitions for future careers can take time over the holiday break to apply for the DAR Marian Anderson Legacy Scholarship. Sponsored by the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), the scholarship provides a one-time \$5,000 award to one student annually who is pursuing undergraduate or

graduate study in music.

Marian Anderson (1897-1993) was a groundbreaking African American contralto and an inspiration for civil rights. "This scholarship pays tribute to Marian Anderson's life, and the Daughters of the American Revolution seeks to honor her legacy through today's aspiring musicians. Her legacy lives on in others who aim for excellence in musical studies, are commit-

ted to their communities, and willing to stand up for what is right," said Pamela Wright, DAR President General.

Applicants should be accepted or currently enrolled in an accredited university or college in the United States and have a concentration in music in their course of study. Music performance, composition, theory, or education are all areas that students may be

specialized in to qualify for the scholarship. They should have a minimum grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale or the equivalent GPA on the scale used by the institution is required.

In honor of Ms. Anderson's commitment to the community throughout her life and her willingness to share her incredible talent with the world, applicants are asked to write a person-

al statement describing their humanitarian or volunteer contributions on behalf of their community and/or country.

To recognize the city Marian Anderson called home, preference will be given to students from the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania metropolitan area, even if they are not pursuing music studies in the Philadelphia area. This scholarship is not automatically renewed.

However, recipients may re-apply for consideration each year for up to four consecutive years.

The scholarship is supported by the Daughters of the American Revolution's Marian Anderson Legacy Fund. Learn more about the relationship between Marian Anderson and the DAR, and the organization's on-going efforts to honor her memory at www.dar.org/MarianAnderson.

Projects

Continued from page 2

and community empowerment," said EPA New England Regional Administrator David Cash. "Across New England, these selectees are poised to catalyze lasting change and make a profound difference, bringing cleaner air and water to their communities, combatting climate change, creating green jobs, and improving environmental health. We eagerly anticipate the enduring impact the grants in Maine will have in our region, advancing our common goal of environmental justice."

"Mainers from the coast to the mountains are already experiencing the impacts of climate change. As the Gulf of Maine warms and more frequent extreme weather events affect our fisheries, farmers, and businesses,

federal investments are critical to not only mitigating the climate crisis but making our communities more resilient to its impacts," said Congresswoman Chellie Pingree (D-Maine). "From strengthening working waterfronts and developing a clean energy workforce to improving environmental public health and advancing environmental justice, these significant investments made possible by the historic Inflation Reduction Act will go a long way in helping our overburdened communities and will also help Maine achieve our climate goals."

"Keeping Maine's environment healthy not only benefits our great outdoors, but also strengthens our local communities and businesses," said Congress-

man Golden (ME-02). "This set of EPA grants will boost severe weather resilience, reduce pollution, and improve food security for families all across the Second District."

The grants announced today deliver on President Biden's commitment to advance equity and justice throughout the United States. The two grant programs directly advance the President's transformational Justice40 initiative to deliver 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain federal investments to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution.

The Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem Solving (EJCPS) Program

EPA's EJCPS pro-

gram provides financial assistance to eligible organizations working to address local environmental or public health issues in their communities. The program builds upon President Biden's Executive Orders 13985 and 14008, creating a designation of funds exclusively for small nonprofit organizations, which are defined as having 5 or fewer full-time employees, thus ensuring that grant resources reach organizations of lower capacity that historically struggle to receive federal funding. Eleven of the organizations selected for EJCPS this year are small nonprofit organizations, receiving over \$1.6 million in total.

EPA EJCPS grant selections in Maine:

Gulf of Maine Research Institute in Portland, Maine has

been selected to receive \$500,000 for building capacity for disadvantaged working waterfront communities to engage constructively in offshore wind development in the Gulf of Maine.

United Charitable has been selected to receive \$500,000 for supporting the ReTreeUS project in Auburn, Maine to work with 11 partner organizations to develop 8 food forests, providing benefits such as improvement of public and environmental health, while serving communities with high rates of food insecurity.

Maine People's Resource Center in Bangor, Maine has been selected to receive \$500,000 for a community-led program to invest in the workforce development necessary to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and other air pollutants through clean energy projects.

Center for an Ecology-Based Economy in the Western Maine Foothills Region has been selected to receive \$150,000 for increasing community resilience across municipalities, schools, and public land through education, planning and technical assistance.

Environmental Justice Government-to-Government (EJG2G)

EPA's EJG2G provides funding at the state, local, territorial, and Tribal level to support government activities in partnership with community-based organizations that lead to measurable environmental or public health impacts in communities disproportionately burdened by environmental harms.

EPA EJG2G grant selections within Maine's boundaries:

The Penobscot Indian Nation has been selected to receive \$1,000,000 for installing a minimum of 150 heat pumps in Tribal housing units and private housing units occupied by Tribal citizens with the greatest need – elderly, veterans, and families with young children.

Greater Portland Council of Governments has been selected to receive \$886,014 for assisting communities in creating and implementing action steps to respond to climate change with a special focus on addressing energy insecurity and climate adaptation for underserved, disadvantaged, and rural populations in Cumberland and York Counties in Maine.

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Prepare for the winter season with these tips

PORTLAND, ME – Consolidated Communications, Inc. (NASDAQ: CNSL), a leading broadband and business communications provider, is ready for the upcoming winter season, taking steps to prepare response plans and other protocols in the event of severe weather in its service areas.

“Winter storms are a yearly occurrence in our community, and when severe weather impacts our customers, ensuring the reliability of services for our customers is our top priority”, said Ryan Whitlock, senior vice president, operations at

Consolidated. “We continually monitor weather patterns and have rigorous emergency response protocols for a variety of potential challenges. Our teams stand ready to respond when needed. Connectivity is vital for our customers and our communities, and we’re ready for winter weather.”

Consolidated encourages customers and local residents to prepare as well, including:

Plan to stay warm, by winterizing your home making sure you can heat your home safely before winter; stay indoors if temperatures could cause

frostbite and hypothermia.

Pay attention to weather reports and storm updates; research and sign up for local emergency warning systems.

Stock up on emergency supplies including bottled water, non-perishable food, a battery-powered radio, flashlight, batteries and a first aid kit.

Review information from local resources, including Maine Emergency Management Agency.

Early season storms, when wet and heavy snowfall can cause damage to trees, typically have the potential to cause the most disruption to service. In

the event of severe impacts from winter storms, Consolidated is prepared to address customer needs while ensuring their safety and the safety of its employees. Consolidated teams prepare for the potential storms and severe weather that can impact service reliability and dependability, including by:

Ensuring all back-up power supplies and generators are fully operational;

Ensuring availability of fuel for both fleet and emergency generators during and after a storm;

Taking inventory of supplies, including copper and fiber cables, needed

for plant and network restoration and supplementing where necessary;

Increasing staffing in areas projected to be impacted;

Placing emergency network supplies throughout company facilities; and

Double-checking all safety equipment and supplies that are in place.

During a storm or severe weather event, commercial power outages may interrupt Internet and network services, which are dependent on electricity. As electric service providers begin restoring power, they typically prioritize emergency

responders and hospitals ahead of other customers. The company encourages customers to be prepared for interruptions in Internet service that may be related to commercial power availability.

Recent upgrades to fiber-optic infrastructure in some areas will also be of great benefit amid cold and wet conditions. Fiber-optic cables are more resilient to rain and snow than copper cables since they transmit light signals instead of electrical signals. This resiliency is just one of the benefits that fiber optic infrastructure can provide to a community.

SIREN

Continued from page 5
ance reimbursement for transport and emergency treatment have all strained rural EMS agencies. At

the same time, EMS agencies today are tasked with ever-greater responsibilities—preparing for natural and manmade disasters and bioterror threats, support-

ing the chronic and emergency care needs of an aging population, and responding on the front lines of the opioid epidemic. These first responders are

often the only health care providers in their area and face difficulty in personnel recruitment and retention, and securing expensive equipment.

The *SIREN Reauthorization Act* is endorsed by the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians, International Association of Fire Fighters,

International Association of Fire Chiefs, National Rural Health Association, National Volunteer Fire Council, and National Fire Protection Association.

Hannah Clark joins Fontaine Family team

Fontaine Family - The Real Estate Leader is thrilled to announce Hannah Clark as the newest addition to their growing Auburn team. As a seasoned associate broker in the real estate industry, Hannah is making waves in the Maine real estate market with her passion for helping clients find their dream homes. Born and raised in the picturesque town of New Gloucester, ME, Hannah’s journey is characterized by hard work, dedication, and a commitment to community.

Hannah’s roots in Southern Maine run deep, having graduated from Grey-New Gloucester High School before furthering her education at Central Maine Community College (CMCC), where she earned her Associate’s Degree. Her diverse professional background includes valuable experience at a marina in Freeport and a real estate investment firm, shaping her into the well-rounded and knowledgeable real estate professional she is today.

Beyond the world of



real estate, Hannah finds joy in various hobbies and activities. An avid gardener, she cultivates her passion for plants and nature, creating vibrant and welcoming spaces. At home, Hannah is a loving owner to three dogs and two horses, adding a touch of animal companionship to her life.

In her spare time, Hannah dedicates herself to the family farm, Royal River Orchard, in New Gloucester. Her hands-on involvement showcases her commitment to pre-

serving local agriculture and maintaining a strong connection to her community.

What sets Hannah apart is not only her professional expertise but also her compassionate heart. In honor of her son, Jackson, Hannah is an active member of the MPS Society and the Cure Sanfilippo Foundation. By participating in these organizations, she advocates for awareness, research, and support for those affected by Sanfilippo Syndrome, demonstrating her

dedication to making a positive impact beyond the realm of real estate.

Hannah’s multifaceted background and community engagement make her a standout professional in the Maine real estate landscape. Whether you’re buying or selling, Hannah Clark is the trusted partner you need for a seamless and fulfilling real estate experience, with the support of the Fontaine Team. Contact Hannah today at hannahclark@fontaine-team.com or (207) 713-4496.

Holly A. Lupu joins Skelton Taintor & Abbott

LEWISTON, ME – The law firm of Skelton Taintor & Abbott, of Lewiston announces that Holly A. Lupu has joined the firm as an Associate Attorney. Ms. Lupu graduated from the University

of Maine School of Law (J.D., 2023) and the University of Maine, Orono (B.A., Psychology, 2018). She was admitted to practice in all Maine state courts October 18, 2023. Ms. Lupu intends to focus

on real estate law, business and corporate law, and estate planning.

“We are honored to have Holly join our firm. Her wealth of knowledge and energetic personality will benefit all our

clients,” said Daniel A. D’Auteuil, Jr. Shareholder at Skelton Taintor & Abbott.

Ms. Lupu was a Legal Intern for the Volunteer Lawyers Project (2019) and Penobscot Community Health Care (2021). Most recently, she was also a Legal Intern with MaineHealth (2022). Additionally, Ms. Lupu served as President of the University of Maine

School of Law’s Business Law Association, is a CALI Award Recipient for Small Business & Entrepreneurship and is the 2023 Corporate/Business Law Award Recipient from the University of Maine School of Law. Skelton Taintor & Abbott is a full-service trial and general practice law firm representing clients throughout Maine.

With the addition of

Attorney Lupu, the firm consists of 13 attorneys practicing in virtually all fields of law and in both federal and state courts.

Send all items for What’s Going On to the Editor. Deadline is Friday by five.



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Calendar

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Jan 3, 24, 31
AUBURN -- Anime & Manga Club from 4 PM - 5 PM - Teen Space, Auburn Public Library

Join us in the Teen Space to watch anime, read manga and share your fanart with fellow fans. While we have plenty of manga in the stacks, feel free to bring some of your own to share with the group!

Jan 6, Feb 3, Mar 2, Apr 6, May 4
WESTBROOK -- Prides Corner Community Church, 235 Pride St. Bean Supper \$10 per person: Two kinds of baked beans, mac and cheese, ham, coleslaw, bread and brownie. Eat in at 5:00PM or Take Out from 4:30-5:30PM. Call 207-415-9260 to reserve your individual meal today.

Jan 6
GORHAM -- Public Bean Supper at White Rock Community Clubhouse, 34 Wilson Road, Gorham Saturday, January 6, 4:00-5:30pm

Eat in or take out! Homemade baked kidney & navy beans, coleslaw, potato salad, macaroni & cheese, biscuits, hot dogs and dessert. \$10 adults, \$5 under 12 Follow us on Facebook for updates: facebook.com/whiterockcommunityclub

Jan 9
LEWISTON -- LPL TO HOST A TRIVIA

NIGHT

The Lewiston Public Library will host a Disney-themed trivia night on Tuesday, January 9, 2024, from 4:30 to 5:30pm in Callahan Hall. Teams can consist of one to five people. This program is free and open to the public. Pre-registration is encouraged but not required. To pre-register your team please visit The Lewiston Public Library's website's event page. 513-3135; www.LPLonline.org

Jan 9, 16, 23
AUBURN -- from 4 PM - 5 PM - Teen Space, Auburn Public Library

Whether it be crocheting, drawing, origami or something else entirely, The Teen Space Craft Club serves as a time to work on any arts and crafts related projects, share advice and learn something new. Crafters of any experience are welcome!

Jan 17
AUBURN -- Dungeons & Dragons from 3 PM - 5 PM - Teen Space, Auburn Public Library

Come to the Teen Space for a D&D adventure in a fantasy world! Open to beginners and experienced players alike. Come with a character sheet (level 1-3)

or use one that we provide.

Jan 20, 21

LEWISTON, TOPSHAM -- "Song & Dance Music from Around the World" Saturday, Jan. 20, 2024, 7:00 p.m. - Franco Center, Lewiston; Sunday, Jan. 21, 2024, 2:30 p.m. - Orion Performing Arts Center, Topsham

Libertango - Astor Piazzolla

Huapango - José Pablo Moncayo

Old American Songs - Aaron Copland (with Philip Lima, Baritone)

Thunder and Lightning Polka - Johann Strauss, Jr.

Three Songs from Des Knaben Wunderhorn (The Boy's Magic Horn) - Gustav Mahler (with Philip Lima, Baritone)

Symphonic Dances from West Side Story - Leonard Bernstein

Tickets are \$25 in advance for adults; \$30 at the door. All concerts are free for students 18 and under or college students with identification.

A limited number of free tickets for parents accompanying children under 18 are available - call 481-0970 for more details

For more information visit MidcoastSymphony.org, call 207-315-1712, or e-mail info@midcoast-symphony.org

Jan 25
LEWISTON -- THROWBACK THURSDAY MOVIE MATINEE

Our fifth event is Thursday, January 25, 2024, from 4 to 6 p.m. in Callahan Hall and will feature a movie open to all age groups. Come enjoy the sequel to the 90s classic that got us all quacking on ice and rooting for Team USA. Some snacks will be provided but patrons are welcome to bring their favorite movie treats along with them. 513-3135; www.LPLonline.org

Jan 26
AUBURN -- Thinking in the Box: Let's Make Comics! from 3 PM - 4 PM - Teen Space, Auburn Public Library

Have you ever wanted to make your own comic? If you're unsure what to write, not sure how to produce your comic or if you're interested in how comics are made, stop by the Teen Space and get some ideas!

Jan 27
GRAY -- First Congregational Church of Gray Saturday Night Church Supper on Saturday January 27, 2024 @ 5:00 at the Parish House, 5 Brown Street, Gray. Handicapped Accessible

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gled-sized and are \$10.00 each. Please pay at the door. The Menu includes: Variety of Casseroles, & Salads, Baked Pea Beans, Red Hot Dogs, Breads, Assortment of Desserts & Beverages

Feb 5
LEWISTON -- TAROT 101 WORKSHOP AT LPL

The Lewiston Public Library will host a Tarot 101 Workshop on Tuesday, February 6, 2024, from 5 to 6:30 pm in The Jeanne Couture Room. The Tarot 101 Workshop will feature the return of Kate Sheridan, a.k.a The Laundress. This workshop is free and open to both teens and adults. Registration is required and the link to sign up can be found on the Lewiston Public Library's website under events.

Please bring your own 78-card deck and something to take notes with you to the program. 513-3135; www.LPLonline.org

line.org

Mar 23, 24

LEWISTON, TOPSHAM -- "A New Artistic Mélange" - Emily Isaacson, Guest Conductor Saturday, Mar. 23, 2024, 7:00 p.m. - Franco Center, Lewiston; Sunday, Mar. 24, 2024, 2:30 p.m. - Orion Performing Arts Center, Topsham

May 18, 19

LEWISTON, TOPSHAM -- "Cityscape, Seascape, Soundscape" Saturday, May 18, 2024, 7:00 p.m. - Franco Center, Lewiston ; Sunday, May 19, 2024, 2:30 p.m. - Orion Performing Arts Center, Topsham

Send all items for What's Going On to the Editor. Deadline is Friday by five.



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SENIOR TRIPS

APRIL 11 – 19, 2024 – THE FRENCH RIVIERA – Trip includes 9 days, 7 Breakfasts, 2 Lunches and 3 dinners. Lodging for 7 nights in the same hotel. Highlights are Nice, Food Tour & Tasting, Nice Flower Market, Monaco, Monte Carlo, Grasse, Cannes, Saint-Honorat Island & Wine Tasting, Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild, St. Paul de Vence and much more.

MAY 11 – 19, 2024 – BILTMORE ESTATE & ASHEVILLE, NC - Trip includes 8 nights lodging including 4 nights in the Asheville area, 8 breakfasts and 6 dinners and a guided tour of the Asheville, North Carolina area. We will have a full day visit to the spectacular Biltmore Estate, America's largest privately owned home. We will visit the Biltmore Village that connects the estates present and past and provides a place for dining, shopping and historical exhibits. We will also visit the Antler Village and winery. We will tour the Blue Ridge Parkway with a guide and stops along the way. A \$75.00 deposit per person is due

when signing up. Price is \$1,245.00 pp double occupancy which includes all entrance fees, meal tips and bus driver tip.

JUNE 15 – 23, 2024 - WESTERN CANADA'S ROCKIES, LAKES & WINE COUNTRY - This trip includes 9 days and 8 breakfasts, 2 lunches and 3 dinners. Highlights of this trip are Calgary, Albertan BBQ, Banff, Bow Falls, Lake Louise, Revelstoke Railway Museum, Okanagan Valley, Vineyard Dinner and Wine Tasting, Stanley Park, Granville Island and much more. Call Claire or Cindy for more information.

OCTOBER 6 – 14, 2024 - NOVA SCOTIA, PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND & NEW BRUNSWICK – Trip includes 8 nights lodging, 8 breakfasts, 1 lunch, and 6 dinners. You will have a guided tour of Acadia National Park, Halifax, Peggy's Cove & Lunenburg. We will visit King's Landing Historical Settlement and have a guided tour of Prince Edward Island including Anne of Green Gable's Home. We will have admission to the Hopewell Rocks and you will visit the Waterside Town of Saint John, New Brunswick and much

more. A \$75.00 deposit is due when signing up. Price is \$1,639.00 per person double occupancy and this includes all entrance fees, meal tips and bus driver tip.

If interested in any of these trips or upcoming trips, please contact Claire Bilodeau at 784-0302 or 576-8604 or Cindy Boyd at 345-9569. If we are not available, please leave a message and we will call you as soon as we can.

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South Paris businessman helps to knock out cancer



(L to R): Diane Madden, executive director, Cancer Resource Center of Western Maine; John Emerson, Owner, Oxford County Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram.

SOUTH PARIS, ME -- The Cancer Resource Center of Western Maine (CRCofWM) recently received a donation of \$7,462 from John Emerson, owner of Oxford County Chrysler Dodge Jeep Ram of South Paris. In Spring 2023, John participated in Haymakers for Hope, a 501(c)(3) charity that gives everyday men and women the chance to fight back against cancer and raise money and awareness by training for, and competing in charity boxing events. John designated the CRCofWM as the beneficiary of the money he raised through participating in Haymakers for Hope. The CRCofWM is very grateful for his efforts to support cancer patients in western Maine.

Rumford Hospital nurse is recipient of DAISY Award



Brooke LeBlanc, RN, surrounded by team members at Rumford Hospital

RUMFORD, ME --- Brooke LeBlanc, RN, who works in the Emergency Department at Rumford Hospital, is the recipient of the DAISY Award. The DAISY Award

is part of an international recognition program that rewards and celebrates the extraordinary compassionate, skillful care nurses give daily. Brooke, who lives

in Carthage, was nominated by fellow nurse Denise Harvey, RN.

“We recently had a patient who required some extra TLC,” Harvey said. Brooke LeBlanc went above and beyond to make sure that not only were the patient’s needs met, but that she had the emotional support and continuity that her complicated situation needed. She stayed many hours longer than her shift to provide additional support through the patient’s ER visit. Brooke is a skilled and compassionate nurse who we are lucky to have at Rumford Hospital.”

Stay warm this holiday season

Op-ed by Sen Peggy Rotundo

The holiday season is finally upon us. While I enjoy the festive lights, good cheer and time with my family as much as anyone, I like to bring attention to those who may be struggling to heat their homes this winter and suggest some resources.

The first program I’d like to highlight is the Low-Income Assistance Program (LIAP). This program helps Mainers struggling to pay their electric bills stay warm and safe. As Chair of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, I was proud to include \$15 million in additional funding in the current biennial budget. This increase expanded eligibility criteria and meant that an additional 46,000 Mainers could receive much-needed financial support this winter.

Maine’s Department of Health and Human Services is currently sending letters to 67,000 eligible Mainers letting them know financial assistance is available and providing instructions on how to access these benefits. If you receive this notification and would like to receive the assistance, just present the notice to your utility company to initiate automatic LIAP benefits. If you haven’t received a letter, but still need financial assistance, I encourage you to visit their website to check your eligibility. You can follow this link, appengine.egov.com/apps/me/mpuc-authorization, or simply type Maine Public Utilities Commission into your internet browser search bar. You can also

call (207) 287-3831 for help.

The Governor’s Energy Office published its 2023 Winter Heating Guide in an effort to make sure all Mainers can get information about heating assistance and lower their energy bills. Within the guide, you can find tips and links to various assistance programs, as well as energy-saving strategies. You can find the guide here: maine.gov/energy/winter-heating-resources.

Keep in mind that Community Concepts serves as our local community action agency and plays a vital role in administering the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP). This program aids homeowners and renters with their heating expenses, including emergency fuel delivery. To learn more and start your application, visit ccmaine.org or call 795-4065.

If you need emergency assistance, General Assistance is available in each municipality in Maine and helps residents who do not have enough money to cover their basic living costs. Please call Lewiston City Hall at 513-3130 for more information.

MaineHousing also runs several programs to help homeowners heat their homes. Their Heat Pump Program helps eligible Mainers pay for and install heat pumps. Their Central Heating Improvement Program provides funding to repair or replace central heating systems for low-income households. MaineHousing has great resources on their website at mainehousing.org, or

you can call them at (800) 452-4668 or (207) 626-4600. Efficiency Maine also offers programs to help people pay for heat through rebates and incentives, such as their Residential Energy Efficiency Rebates and Incentives. All of this information is included in the Winter Heating Guide, which you can find at maine.gov/energy/winter-heating-resources. EfficiencyMaine’s website also has general tips on how to make your home more energy efficient and thus less expensive to heat at efficiencymaine.com/at-home/energy-money-savings-tips. For more localized information, you can contact your town office, or call or text 211.

For older Mainers, Seniors Plus has provided tips for staying safe and warm this winter. These include keeping blankets around the house; avoiding icy walkways; attaching grippers to the bottoms of your shoes; staying hydrated to reduce the risk of hypothermia; following the instructions for your space heaters to ensure safety; having a go-to bag for when the power goes out and pre-arranging for shoveling and plowing services. For more information, or to find resources, please call Seniors Plus at 1-800-427-1241 or email info@seniorsplus.org.

If you have any questions about the items in this column, please reach out to me directly at Peggy.Rotundo@legislature.maine.gov or (207) 287-1515. I wish you all a safe and peaceful holiday season, and I look forward to serving you in 2024!

Send all items for Names & Faces to the editor. Deadline is Friday by five pm.

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