



Contradance in Lewiston is back in February

LEWISTON, ME — The regular third-Friday contradance is back this coming Friday February 21 at Trinity Commons, beginning at 7:30.



Hannah Chamberlain will be the caller, with the Twitchell Hill Fiddleheads providing



music. A workshop for beginning dancers will begin at 7.

Admission is a

sliding scale for adults, suggested 15.-25., 5. for teens and children 12 and under free.

Optimist Clubs offer essay contest scholarships

MAINE — The Lewiston-Auburn Optimist Club, the Tri-Town Optimist Club, and the Gray-New Gloucester Optimist Club are each sponsoring an essay contest on the topic "How my Acts of Service Help Me Understand what my Community Means to Me". Each Club winner will win \$100 and advance to the District contest, where the \$2,500 scholarship will be awarded. Contest essays are due to the Optimist Club by Feb. 10th, 2026. For an application and set of rules, contact any Optimist Club member, call (207) 783 5269 or email gwmathews91@gmail.com. To learn more about

our Optimist Clubs please visit our national website at www.optimist.org.

This year's Topic is "How My Acts of Service help me Understand what my Community means to me."

The guidelines require that contestants be under the age of 19 as of October 1, 2026 and attending school in the United States, Canada, or the Caribbean. The winner of the club contest will advance to the NY-NENG District contest to compete for a \$2,500 college scholarship. The District-level scholarships are funded by the Optimist International Foundation. Contest rules and qualifications are list-

ed on the application form. Essays are due in to the Optimist Club by February 10th 2026. You may also visit our national website at www.optimist.org for additional information..

The winner of the local Optimist Club Essay Contest must complete the Club application and meet the attached requirements before the essay is submitted to the NY-NENG District for final judging. The local club winner will receive a \$100 prize.

For additional information, or to receive a copy of the rules and regulations, please contact any member of the Tri-Town Optimist Club or email gwmathews91@gmail.com..

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Auburn Republican Caucus

Saturday, January 31st

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Registration starts at 1:00PM
Everyone must sign in before the meeting starts.

Called by Kryston Chapman

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**January Special Section
National Human Trafficking Awareness Month**
page 9 - 10

NSB donates \$2K to Pine Tree Camp



Pictured (L to R): Lin Dehetre, Market Manager VP for NSB; Breeze Kidder, Donor and Events Manager for Pine Tree Society; Heidi Brooks, Customer Relations Representative for NSB; Shelley Zielinski, Director of Adult Support Services for Pine Tree Society.

Norway Savings Bank

cooking, snowshoeing, sledding, and so much more. The Ride-In provides summer tuition for campers in need.

"The Pine Tree Camp was established in 1946 and every year, hundreds of Maine children and adults get to experience this special place that aims to better the lives of participants and their families through respect, inclusion, and care," said Dan Walsh, President and CEO of Norway Savings Bank.

"We are thrilled whenever we can offer support to this transformative program and the positive difference it makes."

"Every dollar raised supports Pine Tree Camp's Open Door Policy: no

camper is ever turned away due to financial hardship," said Breeze Kidder, Donor and Events Manager for Pine Tree Society. "Campers gain confidence, friendships, and a sense of belonging that lasts far beyond their time at camp. This sponsorship helps ensure these opportunities remain accessible to all and keeps the magic of Pine Tree Camp alive for generations to come."

To learn more about Pine Tree Camp, visit www.pinetreesociety.org/camp-home/. To discover the many programs, services, and opportunities provided by the Pine Tree Society, visit www.pinetreesociety.org or call 207-443-3341.

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Newsmakers, Names & Faces

Upcoming meeting: 100+ Women Who Care Southern Maine

MAINE – The next 100+ Women Who Care Southern Maine meeting will be held on Monday, February 2, 2026, at The Elks Lodge on Congress Street in Portland. Doors will open at 5:45 pm for networking, socializing, and appetizers, followed by the meeting at 6:30 pm. Guests are welcome to attend and learn more about the group.

Founded in November 2014, 100+ Women Who Care Southern Maine is a growing community of over 500 women who raise funds for local nonprofits. Together, the group has raised over \$789,203 for 99 nonprofits supporting a wide variety of causes, including veterans, teens, seniors, children with disabilities, domestic abuse survivors, animal welfare, teens, and more.

Members commit to donating \$50 each quar-



(from left): Betsy Ballard, Nanna's House volunteer; Beth Fournier, Executive Director of Nanna's House; and Deb Bergeron, founder of 100+ Women Who Care Southern Maine. Photo by Diane Campbell

ter to a nonprofit selected at each meeting. Three nominated organizations present 5-minute pitches, followed by a 5-minute Q&A, and members vote to determine which nonprofit will receive the pooled donations. Nanna's

House, the November 2025 recipient, will present what they've accomplished with the assistance of the donations totaling over \$26,000.

For more details, visit: www.100womenwhocaresouthernmaine.com.

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

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Outdoor industry leaders work to advance Maine's outdoor economy

PORTLAND, ME – Maine's outdoor recreation industry will convene January 21-23 for the fourth annual Maine Outdoor Economy Summit in Portland, bringing together those with a role in shaping Maine's outdoors, including business leaders, policymakers, non-profit partners and educators. The three-day Summit focuses on collaboration, innovation and the future of Maine's outdoor economy.

Presented by the Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation and Maine Outdoor Brands, the Summit serves as the state's premier gathering for advancing outdoor recreation as a key driver of economic growth, workforce development and community vitality. Attendees can expect timely discussions, practical takeaways and opportunities to connect across the many sectors that shape Maine's outdoor industry.

This year's Summit begins on Wednesday, January 21, with excursions including an open house at Kindling Collective, a Casco Bay cold plunge with Two Maine Mermaids, and an ice safety training with Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and the Maine Warden Service. The day will conclude with an update on implementation of the Maine Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap, followed by the Outdoor Industry Celebration and Awards, and the Maine Outdoor Film Festival. Throughout the Summit, Maine GearShare will be offering free gear repair, Utah State University's Outdoor Archives will curate a Maine exhibit and Maine Outdoor Brands will showcase products from local makers.

Thursday will feature keynote speakers, interac-



tive breakout sessions and facilitated conversations addressing emerging challenges and opportunities in Maine's outdoor sector.

This year's keynote lineup will bring together national and local experts to explore economic trends, inclusive access, innovation and land stewardship in outdoor recreation. Speakers include Robin Thurston, CEO of Outside Interactive; Kelly Davis, director of research at the Outdoor Industry Association, on outdoor market trends; Amanda Rector, Maine state economist, on statewide economic forecasts; and Juan Vargas, account director at Miles Partnership on demographic forces shaping the industry.

The Summit concludes Friday, January 23, with a "Founder's Friday" plenary session featuring stories from founders of Maine outdoor companies and organizations including Christi Elliott, founder of Maine Women Hunters and James Merrill, founder of Opolis and Stoked Plastics, followed by additional breakout sessions and a fireside chat on securing America's parks, recreation and conservation future featuring Carrie Besnette Hauser, president and CEO of Trust for Public Land, before closing remarks and prizes.

"What excites me most about this year's Summit is the mix of meaningful connections and practical learning," said Jeff McCabe, director of the Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation. "The networking that happens is

incredibly powerful, and just as important, attendees will walk away with ideas, tools and examples they can take back to their organizations and put into action right away. That kind of immediate, on-the-ground impact is what helps move the Maine Outdoor Recreation Economy Roadmap from vision to action."

Maine's outdoor economy stands out nationally as one of the top in the country, generating \$3.4 billion in value and supporting nearly 30,000 jobs, according to the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA).

The three-day agenda offers more than a dozen breakout sessions ranging in topics, including:

Recreation for Rural Communities: Leveraging Recreation for Economic Growth and Community Vitality

Building Inclusive Pathways: Addressing What's Missing in Maine's Outdoor Economy

Cross-Border Opportunities: Navigating Trade Barriers and Realities for Maine Brands

Building Career Pathways: Strategies for Growing the Outdoor Workforce

Land and Access Returned to Penobscot Nation Across Two Important Projects

"After a challenging year marked by economic uncertainty, federal funding cuts and new tariff pressures, this Summit comes at a critical moment for Maine's outdoor industry," said Jenny Kordick, executive director of Maine Outdoor Brands. "It provides an essential opportunity for businesses, partners and policymakers to come together, share insights and help navigate the year ahead, all while continuing to strengthen the collaboration and innovation that underpin Maine's outdoor economy. We move farther and faster when we work together, and the Summit creates the space for the industry to convene, connect and collaborate."

The Maine Outdoor Economy Summit is part of the ongoing collaboration between the Maine Office of Outdoor Recreation and Maine Outdoor Brands to strengthen Maine's outdoor recreation economy and support the businesses, workers and communities that depend on it.

Additional details, including the full agenda, speakers and registration information can be found at moesummit.com.

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Newsmakers, Names & Faces

YWCA announces 2026 Women of Achievement Award honorees

LEWISTON, ME — YWCA Central Maine invites the community to support its mission of empowering women and promoting equity for all by attending the 2026 Women of Achievement Brunch on Saturday, March 8, 2026. This YWCA signature celebration honors four exceptional leaders while raising critical funds to sustain YWCA programs that uplift women, children, and families across Central Maine.

The 2026 Women of Achievement honorees are:

Ayesha Hall, recipient of the Marcia Baxter Social Justice Award. With a professional background in school psychology and a current role as Director of Strategic Partnerships at the Maine Department of Education, Ayesha brings both strategic insight and deep compassion to everything she touches. Whether advancing statewide education initiatives, nurturing local partnerships, or uplifting marginalized communities, Ayesha's leadership is marked by courage, humility, and fierce love. Her service embodies the values of the Marcia Baxter Social Justice Award—courage, commitment, leadership, and humility—and she continues to be a force for justice throughout Maine and beyond.

Yun Garrison, recipient of the Lee Young Leadership Award for excellence in professional, community, civic, or artistic leadership. As an assistant professor of psychology at Bates College and a community-engaged psychologist, Dr. Garrison co-developed the "5Rs Framework of Post-Traumatic Growth", a groundbreaking contribution to the field of psychology that honors the lived wisdom of immigrant and refugee communities which has since evolved into a nationally exhibited art installation and will soon debut as a podcast series, blending storytelling, psychology, and cultural restoration, making her work accessible to both hearts and minds.



Joan Macri, recipient of the Tonie Ramsey Service Award for exceptional, long-term commitment to improving communities and the lives of others through service. As a high school teacher and coach, community board member and leader, volunteer and advocate on many fronts, Joan's service has been life-transforming for thousands of people for over 40 years.



Marty McIntyre, recipient of the Priscilla Gendron Legacy Award for extraordinary investment in public enrichment through philanthropic giving and fundraising. Marty served as Executive Director of Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Services for 34 years before retiring. She went on to found 100+ Women Who Care Androscoggin in order to raise collective funds for local nonprofits.



These awards recognize individuals whose lives and leadership reflect the core values of the YWCA—equity, opportunity, and empowerment. By celebrating their achievements, the Women of Achievement event also shines a light on the ongoing work of the YWCA to remove barriers and create pathways for women to thrive.



Proceeds from the March 8 event directly support YWCA Central Maine programs, including early childhood education and out-of-school care, aquatics programs and swimming lessons, and the MS Wellness Program—services that strengthen families, promote wellness, and expand access to opportunity for women of all ages.

"Supporting Women of Achievement is about more than honoring individuals," said Melanie LaMore, CEO of YWCA Central Maine. "It is a powerful way for our community to stand with the YWCA's mission and invest in programs that empower women today and for generations to come."

Community members, businesses, and advocates are encouraged to

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Central Maine Healthcare seeing significant spike in flu cases

LEWISTON, ME — Central Maine Healthcare (CMH) is reporting a significant increase in the number of influenza and influenza-like illnesses in patients the healthcare system is treating.

The increase has led to increased Emergency Department volumes, hospital admissions and outpatient visits.

"It's important for those in the communities we serve to stay vigilant by getting vaccinated and practicing good hygiene,"

said Dr. Erin Clark, medical director of CMMC's Emergency Department. "Simple things can help a lot. Wash your hands. Stay home if you feel sick. If you haven't gotten your flu shot this year, it's not too late to get it at your doctor's office or local pharmacy. Together, we can help reduce the spread and protect our most vulnerable populations."

The Maine CDC reports widespread flu cases with increased hospitalizations throughout the state. The surge of flu cases is

happening in Maine earlier this year than last year, according to the CDC.

The Maine CDC recommends these guidelines for those who aren't feeling well:

Stay home if you are sick.

Cover coughs and sneezes.

Wash your hands often.

Wear a mask around others if you don't feel well.

Stay up to date on vaccines.

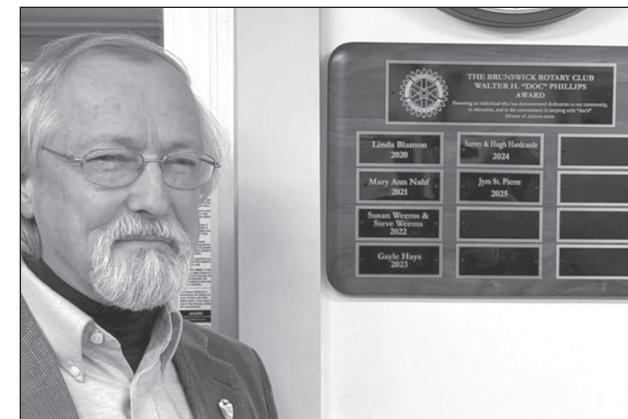
Local conservationist honored

BRUNSWICK, ME — Conservationist Jym St. Pierre has been named the sixth recipient of the Brunswick Rotary Club's annual Walter H. "Doc" Phillips Memorial Award, named for a long-time Harpswell volunteer.

The club presented the award during a ceremony recently at the Harpswell Town Office. Doc Phillips, who died in 2019, was a Rotarian whose many volunteer activities included serving on the Harpswell Conservation Commission and the Harpswell Heritage Land Trust boards. The Rotary Club established the award in 2020 to honor those who share his devotion to public service, environmental stewardship and local heritage.

In December, St. Pierre was also honored by the Maine Legislature for 50 years of advocacy for wildlands and wildlife.

St. Pierre, a native of Auburn, now lives in



Jym St. Pierre stands beside a plaque recognizing him as the sixth recipient of the Brunswick Rotary Club's annual Walter H. "Doc" Phillips Memorial Award on Thursday, Oct. 16, at the Harpswell Town Office. A longtime environmentalist, St. Pierre has spent nearly five decades working to protect Maine's natural landscapes. (Courtesy of Meredith Herzog)

Brunswick. He has spent nearly five decades protecting Maine's natural landscapes. Since 1995, he has served as Maine Director of RESTORE: The North Woods. He previously worked with the Maine Department of Conservation, Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, and the Northern Forest Alliance.

St. Pierre also helped found the Kennebec Land Trust and Maine Conservation Voters. He continues to serve on the board of directors of Friends of Baxter State Park. Meanwhile, he also posts timely conservation news clips and links each day on the Maine Environmental News website [<http://maineenvironews.com/>].

We want to hear from you!
Please submit your letter to the editor by 5pm on Friday for next weeks edition.

Email: editor@twincitytimes.com

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Seniors Not Acting Their Age

Slip Sliding Away on Spectacular Cadillac Mountain

Acadia National Park on Mount Desert Island is a popular place for members of the Penobscot Paddle & Chowder Society to recreate. So, when my wife, Nancy, and I planned to attend a mid-December Friday night concert in the area, we decided to stay over and organize mountain hikes on Saturday and Sunday. We were in luck as three members agreed to join us for a climb of Cadillac Mountain on Saturday.

At an elevation of 1,532 feet, exceptional Cadillac Mountain is the tallest peak along the eastern seaboard of the United States. Arguably the most scenic mountain on the coast of Maine, three major trails lead to the summit. The Cadillac Mountain Road provides the option to drive to the top but is closed to vehicle traffic in winter.

North Ridge Trail was the choice for our trek. As the name implies, this route ascends the north side of the mountain and provides a moderate climb while offering marvelous views on the way to the top. Due to winter road closures, hikers must begin outside of the park at a gated entrance near Route 233 in Bar Harbor in order to access North Ridge Trail.

Five of us met at the entrance on a cool, cloudy morning with modest winds out of the south-

west. We walked a short distance on the paved road to the trailhead for Kebo Brook Trail on the left where we donned micro spikes to negotiate the icy path.

Completing the short trek on Kebo, we crossed the Park Loop Road and began our ascent of North Ridge Trail. Initially, the trail was moderately steep in a sparse predominantly conifer forest with extensive ice and hard-packed snow. Micro spikes were essential.

After traversing a wooded knoll, the forested terrain diminished and snow and ice-covered open ledges followed for much of the remainder of the ascent. Magnificent views of outer Frenchman Bay and the picturesque Porcupine Islands could be seen behind us and the barren shoulder of the summit area was visible above.

Persisting steeply uphill, we encountered two descending hikers who reported moderate winds on the summit. We met perhaps a dozen climbers during our journey. Near the midway point, we passed the Cadillac Mountain Road on our right and again farther up the trail.

The views of the Porcupine Islands and the ragged eastern Maine shoreline continued almost unabated as we progressed upward. On a lofty, snow-covered ledge,

we could see the top of a communications tower located at the summit and knew we were nearing our destination.

Soon after, we entered the parking lot and walked easily to the summit path. Our final climb was rewarded with breathtaking vistas of surrounding mountains and the jagged coastline below.

While taking advantage of the remarkable views, an alternative return itinerary was discussed. After careful examination of our maps, we decided to travel back on the longer but presumably more forgiving and equally scenic Cadillac Mountain Road.

Descending the road was initially fairly easy with a couple of inches of crusty snowpack. Unfortunately, conditions began to vary as we dropped farther down. A combination of ice, hard-packed snow, and sometimes bare pavement were encountered. The diverse conditions resulted in indecision regarding footwear. Some removed spikes while others continued with them despite the sections of dry pavement. Those without spikes experienced falls – there was no ideal choice.

When confronted with an extended sector of dry pavement, everyone discarded spikes. Then, more ice and snow appeared. Reluctant to keep changing in and out of spikes, most continued without them and more falls occurred. By the time we joined the Park Loop Road at the bottom of Cadillac Mountain Road, everyone had fallen at least once.

The Loop Road presented yet another obstacle, glare ice. Everyone added spikes for this treacherous stretch. We carefully maneuvered



Views on the North Ridge Trail are spectacular

on the slick surface for about a mile before finally reaching dry pavement.

After a long slippery descent, we were able to finish the trip walking easily on the bare surface. For us a lesson was learned: what had appeared to be a safer hiking alternative turned out to be more hazardous.

My book, *Maine Al Fresco: The Fifty Finest Outdoor Adventures in Maine* narrates several challenging winter climbs in Baxter State Park including ascents of Mount Coe and South Brother Mountain during the Mother of All Storms.

The author of *The Great Mars Hill Bank Robbery* and *Mountains for Mortals – New England*, Ron Chase resides in Topsham. His latest book, *Maine Al Fresco: The Fifty Finest Outdoor Adventures in Maine* is available at North Country Press and through online retailers. Visit his website at www.ronchaseoutdoors.com or he can be reached at ronchaseoutdoors@comcast.net.



Hikers approach the summit of Cadillac Mountain



Two hikers begin the descent of Cadillac Mountain Road

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Amtrak Downeaster celebrates 25 years with January Fare Sale

PORTRALD, ME — The Northern New England Passenger Rail Authority (NNEPRA) plans to celebrate the Silver Anniversary of the Amtrak Downeaster throughout 2026, marking 25 years of connecting Maine and Massachusetts by rail. Since its first trip in December 2001, the Downeaster has welcomed more than 10.5 million passengers, and has become an essential transportation option throughout northern New England.

The year-long celebration begins with a \$26 round-trip Fare Sale available on most Downeaster trains throughout January 2026. "If you already love the Downeaster, or if you haven't ridden yet, these \$26 round-trip fares make January the perfect time to

experience the comfort and convenience of train travel," said Natalie Bogart, NNEPRA Deputy Director.

"Now's your chance to celebrate 25 years of service and start a new travel tradition."

January 2026 Fare Sale Details:

- \$26 round-trip (\$13 one-way) value fares are available for travel between Brunswick, Maine and Boston, Massachusetts, and all stations in between

• Travel must occur January 1–31, 2026

• Tickets must be purchased at least three days in advance of travel at AmtrakDowneaster.com, Amtrak.com as well as on the Amtrak Mobile App, or at an Amtrak Ticketing Kiosk. Tickets may also be purchased by calling

1-800-USA-Rail or from the ticket agent at Portland Station.

• Use promotion code V530 when booking

• The sale is available on all Downeaster weekday trains except Train 680 and Train 686 and on all weekend trains except Train 692 and Train 696.

The Amtrak Downeaster makes five daily round trips between Brunswick, ME and Boston North Station.

For 25 years, the Amtrak Downeaster has offered a safe and stress-free alternative to driving—complete with roomy seating, free Wi-Fi, onboard cafe and beautiful views. The service is popular among riders commuting to work or college, visiting family, or attending special events.

25 years of WinterKids to Air on Maine Public Television

WESTBROOK, ME — WinterKids is proud to announce that For the Joy of Winter: 25 Years of WinterKids will air on Maine Public Television as part of the Maine Public Film Series on Thursday, January 22 at 9:00 p.m., with encore showings on January 23 at 1:00 a.m., January 24 at 2:00 p.m., and January 25 at 4:00 p.m.

The documentary follows WinterKids' 25-year journey from a small grassroots idea to a statewide movement helping 16,000 children (annually) discov-

er the joy and lifelong benefits of outdoor winter activity. What began as one simple vision has grown into a vibrant community of thousands, all connected by a shared love of learning, playing, and growing outside together.

"We're thrilled to have For the Joy of Winter featured in the Maine Public Film Series," said Courtney Holub, Executive Director of WinterKids.

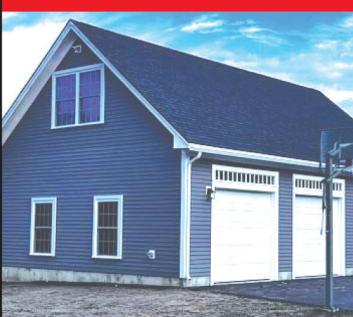
"This recognition shines a light on 25 years of WinterKids helping

children move, learn, and explore outdoors. Creating this film has given us the chance to reintroduce WinterKids; in viewing this you really understand the magnitude of the work we do, and why. We're an education, recreation, and health organization creating thousands of positive childhood experiences each year."

For the Joy of Winter celebrates a quarter century of building healthy habits, confidence, and connection to Maine's winter landscape.

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Maine writers invited to statewide poetry contest with cash awards

MAINE — The Maine Poets Society is inviting poets statewide to submit their original work to the Maine Prize Poem contest, open to both experienced and novice writers. There are two categories: one for poets who have been previously published and one for those who have not, with prize awards of \$150 and \$75 respectively. Entries must be postmarked between January 15 and March 31, 2026. Maine residents both full-time and seasonal are eligible to enter.

The judge of the contest for poets who have previously published their work will be Meghan Sterling, poet laureate of Gardiner, Maine. Sterling is author of four full length poetry collections and winner of Lily Poetry Review's Paul Nemser Book Prize. Officers of the society will judge the other category.

"We're thrilled to reintroduce this inspiring contest after a one-year hiatus," said Jenny Doughty, president of Maine Poets Society. "The 2026 contest is special because the winners will be honored in our society's ninetieth anniversary year."

Entries that are short-listed will be announced via email and on the Maine Poets Society's Facebook page. The prizes will be presented and the winning poets hon-

ored at the Maine Writers and Publishers Alliance annual gala in the spring.

Winner of the 2024 Maine Poem Prize for previously published poets was Janie Gendron for her poem "Daily Report." Winner of the 2024 prize for previously unpublished poets was M. Hrynick for the poem "Plowing Before a Storm."

"In order to reach as many participants as possible, we're providing each of Maine's public libraries with information about the contest and guidelines," Doughty said. "We hope they'll help spread the word within their communities."

Topic and form are left open, but there is a 50-line limit. All entries must follow the guidelines to be considered. Find complete contest guidelines on the Maine Poets Society Facebook page.

Maine Prize Poem 2026 Guidelines and Submission Process:

Guidelines

- Open to all Maine residents, including seasonal, except for Maine Poets Society board members.

- Entries must be postmarked between January 15th and March 31st, 2026.

- There is a \$6 entry fee for the \$150 prize poem contest, and a \$3.00 entry fee for the \$75 contest for previously unpub-

lished poets.

- You may enter up to 4 poems. Each poem requires a separate entry fee.

- Previously published poems are not eligible. Publication in a newsletter or an online workshop does not count for this purpose.

- Submissions simultaneously submitted elsewhere, and those generated using AI, are not eligible.

- Topic and form are left open, but there is a 50-line limit, not counting title, epigraph, and stanza breaks. Entries exceeding this will be disqualified.

- Please send two copies of your poem, one identified with your name, mailing address, email address and telephone number and which contest you are entering (previously published or not previously published) and one with no additional information, to MPS President Jenny Doughty, 31 Rustic Lane, Portland, ME 04103.

- If your entry will be postmarked out of state, please enclose a letter verifying your address when resident in Maine.

- Mark your envelope CONTEST.

- Enclose a check payable to Maine Poets Society, with 'Contest entry' on the memo line.

- Entries will not be returned, so please retain a copy.

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ily members who can read silently are welcome. Drop in anytime between 3-4:15pm to read with us!

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reading, and no required discussion! Bring a book (or borrow one from us) and read whatever you would like while sitting in one of our cozy chairs in the Eleanor Conant Room.

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Free arts programs provided for youth with Waterville Creates

WATERVILLE, ME

– In less than four years, arts nonprofit Waterville Creates has provided in excess of \$250,000-worth of free arts experiences for children and teens through its Youth Arts Access Fund, or YAAF.

Anyone aged 18 or under can activate YAAF to cover some or all of the price of admission to any of Waterville Creates' programs, no questions asked, no proof of need necessary. For an \$8 movie ticket at the Maine Film Center or a \$250 registration for a weeklong theatre camp at the Waterville Opera House, or anything in between, YAAF works the same.

Since its launch in March 2022, the program has blossomed into a cornerstone of the Waterville nonprofit's work and mission.

Identifying the Need
In 2022, Waterville Creates—like its namesake city—was in a period of transition. The arts nonprofit's programming through the Waterville Opera House, Maine Film Center, and the soon-to-be-renamed Ticonic Gallery + Studios (then Common Street Arts) was rebounding post-COVID. The coming months would see a revitalized Maine In-

ternational Film Festival, major performers grace the stage at the Opera House, expanded clay studio programming and gallery exhibitions, and—the biggest change of all—a new home for all these entities in the Paul J. Schupf Art Center, opening December 2022 in downtown Waterville.

That kind of growth opens lots of exciting avenues for a small nonprofit like Waterville Creates, but it was always important to the organization's leaders to ensure that growth and change did not mean losing sight of their core mission and values.

That mission, first and foremost, is embodied on a slogan emblazoned across WC's website and print materials: arts experiences for all. The art was

a given, but the “for all” is a little trickier. Waterville Creates President + CEO Shannon Haines was well versed in the benefits of arts education for youth, but also keenly aware of the obstacles that existed in her community.

“Numerous studies have concluded that young people who participate in the arts experience a wide range of positive outcomes,” Haines said, “From improved physical and emotional well-being and feelings of belonging to increased civic engagement and greater academic success—but we also know that not all youth have equal access to arts opportunities.”

The Impact

With the local economy still reeling from lockdown, Haines and her team wanted to make sure that the cost of a ticket never posed a barrier of entry to any youth. This felt especially vital in a city where over a quarter of the population lived in poverty and where the median household income is 35% below the Maine state median, per the U.S. Census Bureau.

And so, in March 2022, Waterville Creates established the Youth Arts Access Fund. Since then, and especially since Schupf Arts opened at the end of 2022, YAAF has grown wildly popular. Waterville Creates offers around 700 YAAF-eligible programs per year, with the number of offerings steadily increasing year over year.

See Youth Arts page 8



Myths and Magic

Family-friendly selections to warm up your winter



**Saturday
January 17, 2026**

7:00PM • Franco Center, Lewiston

Mozart.....*The Magic Flute* Overture
Sibelius.....*The Swan of Tuonela*
Dun....*Passacaglia: Secret of Wind and Birds*
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Prevent a winter blood shortage: Give blood or platelets now



PORTRALD, ME — The American Red Cross is teetering on a blood shortage this winter, which could lead to a disruption in lifesaving care. Donors are urged to make an appointment to give blood or platelets now.

The Red Cross blood supply is under pressure following a busy holiday season when winter weather and packed schedules made it even tougher to ensure hospitals have the blood products needed for critical care. Without immediate action, doctors may have to make difficult decisions about which patients receive blood transfusions and who will need to wait. Donors with types O, A negative and B negative blood are especially needed now.

Don't wait — make an appointment to give blood or platelets now by visiting RedCrossBlood.org, downloading the Red Cross Blood Donor App or calling 1-800-RED CROSS.

For the seventh year, the Red Cross and the National Football League (NFL) are partnering in January for National Blood Donor Month to urge individuals to kick off 2026 with a blood donation. As a thank-you to donors for helping address the need for blood during the critical post-holiday time, those who come to give Jan. 1-25, 2026, will be automatically entered for a chance to win an exciting Super Bowl LX giveaway. The winner and guest will get to enjoy Super Bowl

LX in Santa Clara, California, access to day-of in-stadium pregame activities, tickets to the official Super Bowl Experience, round-trip airfare, three-night hotel accommodations (Feb. 6-9, 2026), plus a \$1,000 gift card for expenses. For full details, visit RedCrossBlood.org/SuperBowl.

Join a lifesaving team. The Red Cross and Pro Football Champion and blood donor Saquon Barkley are teaming up to remind donors that the best offense against a winter blood shortage is making and keeping blood donation appointments. The blood supply can drop quickly — now's the time to get in the game and give blood or platelets.

"I gave blood once in college and that was the only time I had ever been asked to give, until the Red Cross reached out this fall," said Barkley. "It was a no-brainer for me to give again. It only takes about an hour and once you realize in that short amount of time how much help it can bring — it's a beautiful thing."

Upcoming blood donation opportunities:
Androscoggin
Lewiston
1/15/2026: 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., SeniorsPlus, 8 Falcon Rd

1/19/2026: 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., CMMC, 12 High Street, Lower Level

1/27/2026: 10 a.m. - 3 p.m., Fortin & Pinette Funeral Home, 305 Alfred A Plourde Pkwy

Cumberland

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

AARP News You Can Use — January 2026

By Joyce Bucciantini, AARP Maine Community Outreach Volunteer

Happy New Year 2026! Along with the new year, many people make New Year Resolutions. People often resolve to eat better or exercise more; we may or may not stick with these resolutions for very long. However, we can all make a resolution to be better prepared for tax season; a yearly task that we all must do, but few enjoy.

Organizing our information and completing our tax forms ourselves can be a daunting task. This year, there are changes in how tips and over-time can be taxed, and there is an additional tax deduction for qualifying tax payers over the age of 65. It can be hard to keep track of these changes and how they might impact our individual tax returns.

However, here's the good news. The AARP Foundation offers free Tax-Aide preparation clinics in 47 locations in Maine. Last year 240 Tax-Aide volunteers filed 13,671 Federal returns helping Maine taxpayers receive \$10.4 million in Federal refunds.

AARP Foundation Tax-Aide is managed through the AARP



in mid-January. The phone number to call for tax-aide information is 1-888-227-7669.

Tax-Aide appointments are available from February 1 through April 15. Since appointment times can fill up quickly, it is a good idea to go ahead and make your appointment early in the tax season. Then you can get back to your New Year's resolutions or just get outside to enjoy the beauty of the Maine winter.

Remember to check out the AARP Maine web page to find an AARP coffee gathering or other events taking place near you. Happy holidays to all!

Joyce Bucciantini is a retired middle school educator. She currently coordinates Delta Kappa Gamma's Read to Me program, is a tutor with Literacy Volunteers-Androscoggin, and is an active AARP Maine volunteer. She enjoys her gardens, being outdoors and traveling.

Escape holiday debt hangover, get your budget back on track

PHOENIX, AZ

The most wonderful time of the year often doubles as the most costly. Between travel, decor, gifting and gathering — plus the added cultural pressure to make it all "picture perfect" — holiday expenses can add up fast and leave you scrambling come January.

"Even the most fiscally responsible households aren't immune to seasonal expenses stretching their budgets thin in the new year," said Manny Salazar, CEO of Take Charge America, national nonprofit credit counseling and debt management agency. "A deliberate reset in early 2026 can help families regain control and confidence after a financially hectic few months."

Salazar outlines practical steps to create steady momentum after the holiday rush:

Assess the true scope of spending. Closely examine statements across every account and total the balances. A complete view of what you owe shapes a realistic plan that neither overestimates nor underestimates December's impact.

Trim non-essential expenses. Scale back on

subscriptions, dining out, personal maintenance and other conveniences. Shopping more intentionally helps open up cash flow without derailing daily routines.

Consider a balance transfer. Transferring a balance from a high-interest credit card to one with lower interest can accelerate payoff, applying more of your payments toward principal. Many card issuers offer 0% interest on balance transfers for 12 to 18 months — an effective solution, as long as you stop adding new charges. Remember to factor in the transfer fee; usually a percentage of the balance being transferred.

Temporarily pause savings. If saving for a car, home, travel or luxuries, hold on new deposits until you catch up on debt. You can consider pausing or reducing emergency fund contributions if you already have a cushion, then revisit once you've caught up.

Consult with experts. Professional guidance can give you much-needed clarity after a season of overspending. Schedule a free credit counseling session with a nonprofit

agency to get a customized budget and see if you qualify for a debt management plan.

Take on a side hustle. Extra income shortens the repayment timeline. Consider flexible options through rideshare, food delivery or other gig work to generate additional cash.

Budget for seasonal spending. Create distinct buckets for gifts, travel and festivities throughout the year. The more structure you build now, the less post-holiday headache you'll encounter later.

For more financial guidance on climbing out of debt, visit Take Charge America's Education Center.

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WHA Rotating Art Gallery features new winter artworks

LEWISTON, ME — The Woman's Hospital Association (WHA) Rotating Art Gallery at Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston is proud to display the photographs of Lindsey White and paintings of Connie McVey during the months of January and February.

White is a registered nurse who has worked on the Special Delivery Unit at Central Maine Medical Center over the last 20+ years. When she isn't working with new parents welcoming their children into the world, she is the proud mother of two daughters ages 13 and 17. In spite of her busy schedule, she spends time with her camera whenever she can. The subjects of her work vary but she enjoys focusing on the beauty of Maine whether it's a pretty landscape, snowflakes, frozen bubbles or some night images of the moon or Aurora Borealis.

McVey worked for 36 years creating illustrations and graphic images commercially. Her retirement allowed her to follow her dreams of pursuing BFA from the University of Southern Maine. "My



'Snowflake 2-9-21' by Lindsey White



'Things Found in Grammie's Attic' by Connie McVey

paintings, drawings are conduits that depict my visual and emotional viewing of the world." Presently working at her Pond Lily Art Studio, she has exhibited her work at the Main St. Art Gallery and the Matolcsy Arts Center in Norway, the Greenwood

Gallery in Auburn and at many local art fairs.

The works on display may be purchased through the WHA Gift Shop located adjacent to the main lobby at Central Maine Medical Center. A percentage of sale proceeds benefits patients of CMMC.

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

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Youth Arts

Continued from page 6
year. Young visitors to 93 Main Street have activated these funds over 6,000

times to a total of more than \$250,000, an average of \$1,300 a month in 2025.

"We see YAAF in action every day—teens meeting at the art center to see a classic film, young makers finding their creative voices in After School Art Club, families who are now able to invite grandparents to join them for a musical at the Opera House because YAAF makes it more affordable," said Haines. "It is a total delight to see the ways that YAAF expands opportunities for our community to enjoy shared experiences in the arts."

YAAF usage is especially popular at the Waterville Opera House, where families can use it to help cover tickets to theatrical productions like The Nerd and Once Upon a Mattress, concerts and comedy acts, and theatre camps. General attendance soared at the Opera House in 2025 as the WOH team presented four theatrical productions and over 50 concerts, comedy, and variety acts.

"I'm incredibly proud of our ability to provide this resource," said WOH Executive Director Michelle Sweet. "There are few things that make my heart happier than to see families share the incredible gift of experiencing live performances at our historic venue together without stressing the family budget. It is impossible to have an appreciation of the arts if they are not accessible to you. I'm thrilled to be growing the next generation of arts enthusiasts with the Youth Arts Access Fund."

Community Support

YAAF, described by Maine Arts Commission Chair Bob Keyes as presenting "a national model" for youth access to arts, represents a major cornerstone of Waterville Cre-



ates' mission and values, and one that the community particularly believes in. As one local teen put it following an event at Waterville Creates, "The Youth Arts Access Fund has been a huge help, and I just think it boosts community."

The Waterville Creates community has rallied around this initiative to make sure younger audiences can continue to attend their favorite programs without obstacle. The fund has no formal budget or endowment: it is entirely supported by donations and corporate sponsorships, as well as a portion of all WC ticket sales.

Special note is due to major support from the Colby Center for the Arts and Humanities, the T-Mobile Foundation, Dirigo Wealth Management, One River CPAs, Waterville Area Women's Club, Northern Light Inland Hospital, Central Maine Power, First National Bank, GoNet Speed, and Skowhegan Savings Bank. In 2024, all proceeds from two David Byrne appearances with his nonprofit Reasons to Be

"YAAF is one of the initiatives that I am personally most proud of because it removes cost as barrier," Haines said. "It is a clear and measurable demonstration of Waterville Creates' commitment to our mission of arts experiences for all."

Learn more about the Youth Arts Access Fund at watervillecreates.org/yAAF.

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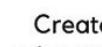
Special section: National Human Trafficking Awareness Month

MECASA supports survivors of trafficking, assault

In collaboration with Maine's sexual assault support centers, last year MECASA staff:



Facilitated 44 trainings for 733 center staff and community partners on topics ranging from new laws impacting survivors to telling trauma-informed stories.



Created 59 materials and resources to raise awareness, educate partners, and advocate for policy improvements.



Provided over 4,910 hours of technical assistance to center staff & facilitated 465 peer sharing events to connect advocates through their shared work.

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Special section: National Human Trafficking Awareness Month

Stand For The 50, raise awareness this month

Contributed by Hope for Justice

January 2026 is National Human Trafficking Prevention Month, as decreed by presidential proclamation.

About the month

January is also known as Human Trafficking Awareness Month. It is a key time for us all as individuals to educate ourselves about human trafficking and crucially to learn to spot the signs of trafficking. It is also a time for us to take these messages to our workplaces, our churches, our schools, our representatives and everywhere else.

At Hope for Justice, we investigate cases of human trafficking and work closely with law enforcement to rescue victims and ensure evidence is gathered against perpetrators to see them brought to justice. Our team of investigators is drawn from some of the most respected and prestigious law enforcement agencies in the country, such as the FBI and NCIS.

National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month, January 2026, culminates in the annual observation of National Freedom Day on February 1, 2026.

What can you do?

Become part of a community of amazing volunteers, make a life-changing donation, learn about the issue, or download resources. Awareness leads to action!

Stay informed

Share awareness

Spot the signs of trafficking

Change lives and make a donation

One other thing you can do this January: support the launch of the new movie Still Hope, based on the real stories of trafficking survivors. It is released nationwide on February 5th 2026 and Hope for Justice is proud to partner with such an important film.



Tickets can be pre-booked at the Still Hope website.

Create the For The 50 symbol and share it on social media. This is a symbol to show you're standing up for the 50 million people who have been trafficked into modern slavery around the world. We're encouraging you to share the image with the hashtag #ForThe50

one to take a photo and share this on social media. This is a symbol to show you're standing up for the 50 million people who have been trafficked into modern slavery around the world. We're encouraging you to share the image with the hashtag #ForThe50

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Large events like the Super Bowl, that bring thousands of people together, are the perfect opportunity to raise awareness of human trafficking, a crime that comes in many forms, including sex trafficking, forced labor, and domestic servitude resulting from fraud, coercion, or threats of violence. You can even play a role in stopping this crime, whether you're in the host

city, attending the game, or just watching at home.

Victims of human trafficking are often hidden in plain sight. Learn the signs and how to report suspected trafficking.

Forced or coerced commercial sex work is still human trafficking. This is true even if prostitution is legal in the city or state where it occurs.

Forced labor can currently happen anywhere. This includes hotels, lodgings, and entertainment industries.

Transportation workers can often be the first line of defense. Ride-share and taxi drivers are uniquely positioned to notice things that others don't.

We're all on the same team when it comes to tackling human trafficking. Spread the word using #TacklingTrafficking on social media and explore the resources at <https://www.dhs.gov/blue-campaign/tacklingtrafficking> to learn more about what you can do to help stop it.

Trafficking Survivors Relief Act unanimously passes U.S. Senate

Contributed by Hope for Justice

By Rosalyn Roden

An integral piece of legislation that will give trafficking survivors a pathway to clear federal criminal convictions has unanimously passed the U.S. Senate.

The passage of the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act (TSRA) through Congress is a huge victory in the effort to ensure survivors of human trafficking can rebuild their lives. The legislation also unanimously passed the House earlier this month, with the official signing from President Donald Trump pending.

Hope for Justice has been advocating for this legislation in Washington and working with lawmakers. This has included endorsement, signing letters in support of the TSRA, coordinating non-profits to back the bill, calling on the House and the Senate to consider and pass the bill, and raising awareness.

The Trafficking Survivors Relief Act was first introduced by Senator Gillibrand alongside a bipartisan group of colleagues in 2016. She has reintroduced it in every subsequent Congress, most recently with Senator Hyde-Smith in July this year.

Sarah Butler, our United States Program Director, said: "We are very excited to see this legislation on the brink of becoming law after many years of hard work to get it to this stage. It is imperative that we support survivors rather than criminalizing them for offences they were forced to commit under duress.

We need to ensure survivors are given the best possible chance of rebuilding their lives, free from unfair and unjust criminal convictions that hold them back."

Many trafficking survivors are forced or coerced into committing crimes by their traffickers, which can leave them with a criminal record that significantly reduces their

chances of accessing employment, education, housing and other services, and escaping trafficking.

This Act will ensure that survivors of human trafficking will have non-violent criminal convictions or arrest records expunged if they resulted directly from their trafficking.

In addition, the Trafficking Survivors Relief Act would also:

Allow for an individual's status as a victim of trafficking to be a mitigating factor for courts to consider when imposing a prison sentence for violent crimes.

Require U.S. Attorneys to submit a report one year after enactment detailing the number of motions filed under the law.

Ensure that grant funding provided by the Office for Victims of Crime and the Office on Violence Against Women can be used for legal representation for post-conviction relief activities.

TRAFFICKING VS. SMUGGLING

Human Trafficking involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act, or in which the person performing the commercial sex act is under 18 years of age.

Human Smuggling is defined as the importation of people into the United States involving deliberate evasion of immigration laws. This offense includes bringing illegal aliens into the United States as well as the unlawful transportation and harboring of aliens already in the United States.

These are *not* interchangeable terms

Smuggling is transportation-based and is a crime against a border

Trafficking is exploitation-based and is a crime against a person

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Jan 15

LEWISTON – Lewiston Public Library's Genre Roulette Book Club samples genres by focusing on one genre for three months at a time: join for one season or come to them all! This winter, the book club will be focusing on Romance across three sub-genres. We will meet monthly in the Couture Room from 5:30 to 6:30pm on the following Thursdays: January 15th, February 19th, and March 19th.

The first selection is a historical romance. On January 15th, we'll meet to discuss The Queer Principles of Kit Webb by Cat Sebastian. Lord Holland begins taking lessons in thievery from Kit Webb in order to reclaim a family heirloom and falls in love along the way.

This book club is recommended for ages 18+. If you need help locating a copy of any of these titles, please contact our Lending Services Department at 513-3134 or visit the lending desk on the library's first floor.

Jan 16 & 17

SOUTH PORTLAND – Women In Harmony at South Portland High School, 637 Highland Avenue, South Portland on Friday, January 16, 2026 at 7:30pm and Saturday, January 17, 2026 at 3:00pm. This winter, we present a formidable choral program entitled "I Have a Voice."

Jan 17, 18, 26

LEWISTON, TOPSHAM – "Myths and Magic," Rohan Smith, Conductor, Saturday, January 17, 2026 - 7:00 p.m. - Franco Center in Lewiston and Sunday, January 18, 2026 - 2:30 p.m. -

Calendar

Send your submissions to the Editor. More online.

Orion Performing Arts Center in Topsham. Tickets: \$27 in advance; \$30 at the door. www.midcoastsymphony.org or 481-0790

More with Midcoast Sunday, January 26, 2025 - 1:15 p.m. Open Rehearsal with Music Director Rohan Smith -- Orion Performing Arts Center in Topsham - sit on stage

Jan 17

LEWISTON – Join us for a Dinosaur Workshop hosted by Mad Science at the Lewiston Public Library on Saturday, January 17th at 11AM in Callahan Hall. In this Dinosaur Workshop kids will examine fossil casts and explore the differences in the teeth of herbivorous and carnivorous dinosaurs. Every paleontologist-in-training will then get to dig in and experience a mini dinosaur excavation and make a cast of a dinosaur tooth to take home. This workshop has 20 spots available for kids and registration is required. To register, call the Children's Department at 513-3133 or email LPLKids@lewiston-maine.gov. This workshop is free and open to the public.

Jan 20

SCARBOROUGH – Mira Ptacin, Maine Author & Memoirist, at Scarborough Public Library, 6pm, will read from her memoir, "Poor Your Soul," and talk about her inspirations and the writing process. Q&A and book signing to follow. Books will be available for purchase from Kelly's Books to Go.

Jan 22

NEW GLOUCESTER – Free artist event at Unity Environmental University. Each event highlights a Maine-based artist with a pop-up exhibition, lecture, and catered reception. Matt Russ: Moments of Clarity at 5:00 pm, 70 Farm View Dr, New Gloucester, ME

04260. **Jan 22**

VIRTUAL – University of Maine Cooperative Extension 4-H will offer an online club for youth ages 9–18 about the basics of farm animal care on Thursdays, 4–5:15 p.m., January 22–February 12, 2026.

Jan 22

SCARBOROUGH – 5:30-6:30pm French Discussion Group at Scarborough Public Library

Jan 22

SCARBOROUGH – Board Game Night at Scarborough Public Library 5-7:30pm. Pizza included, sponsored by The Enclave of Scarborough! (You can also bring your own dinner if pizza doesn't work for you.)

Jan 24

LEWISTON – Join us at the Lewiston Public Library for Painting Class: Let It Snow! in the 2nd floor Idea Lab on Saturday, January 24 at 11am. Recommended for children ages 7 – 14 years old. Come learn how to paint a snowy scene with step-by-step instruction by local artist, Nicole Ann. Get creative by painting a winter sunset using acrylic paints on canvas panels. All materials are provided. This program is free, open to the public, and no registration is required.

Jan 24

LEWISTON – Members of Lewiston's delegation to the State Legislature will hold constituent office hours at the Lewiston Public Library on Saturday, January 24, from 10:30 a.m. until noon to provide local residents a chance to meet with their elected officials and discuss legislative and state government matters.

Jan 24

SCARBOROUGH – Paper Pop-Up Art Workshop, with artist Allison Villani at Scarborough Public Library 1-3pm.

Registration required: scarboroughlibrary.libcal.com/event/15666171

Jan 26

LEWISTON – Join the Androscoggin Historical Society, Auburn Public Library, and Lewiston Public Library as we partner to explore fiction with a historical twist. We will be meeting on the last Monday of each month from 5:30 – 6:30pm to discuss a historical fiction novel. Our next meeting will take place on January 26th @ 5:30pm, at the Lewiston Public Library, located at 200 Lisbon St., Lewiston, ME 04240. We will be reading Stories from the Old Squire's Farm (chapters 1-17) by C.A. Stephens.

Jan 27, Feb 5

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AUBURN – The Auburn Public Library is offering events in partnership with the 2026 Camden Conference:

Film screening & discussion: "Erdogan: The Making of a Sultan", Tuesday, January 27th, 4-5:30 PM (Registration required - books provided).

PM (Registration required) Book discussion: "Notes on a Foreign Country: An American Abroad in a Post-American World" by Suzy Hansen, Thursday, February 5th, 4-5 PM (Registration required - books provided).

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Fashion News

Tias Prom Project

Dedicated to providing dresses & confidence to young women

The Tatiana Morrell Foundation was created to honor the incredible spirit of Tatiana Morrell – a young woman whose light, kindness, and heart continue to inspire us every day. One of the ways we carry her legacy forward is through something truly special: collecting prom dresses for students who may not have the means to purchase one. Tatiana believed deeply in making others feel seen, valued, and beautiful – and this mission reflects that love.

Through every dress given, every smile shared, and every moment of confidence created – Tatiana's spirit lives on. Thank you for being part of this journey with us. 



The Story Behind Our Mission:
To better understand our mission, you must understand our reasoning:
Tia lived with a heart led by kindness and intuition. When she noticed a new student struggling, she stepped in to make a difference—providing her with a beautiful dress and arranging for her mother to do her hair and makeup. That simple act of love gave the girl, who never imagined attending such an event, the night of her life.

Tia believed every young woman should feel confident, radiant, and celebrated during life's special moments. In her honor, we are dedicated to continuing that mission—ensuring that no girl misses out on the magic of prom, homecoming, or a school dance because of financial hardship.

How to Donate?

DM for pickup
Drop-Off Locations:
• 8 Turning Leaf Drive, Windham, ME
• 781 Edes Falls Rd, Harrison, ME
• 780 Broadway St, South Portland, ME

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