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DECH Focusing on Nursing Changes, Telemedicine System, Appointing Board

by Ruth Leubecker

Describing planned nursing upgrades, increased patient census and multi-site distance learning, Doug Jones, DECH CEO, addressed the Committee to Save Our Hospital on Friday.

Jones effectively stifled rumors that the hospital would be eliminating its licensed practical nurses by explaining that incentives were being provided for LPNs to become registered nurses, if they so desired. "There are four LPNs at DECH," he said. "We haven't decided on what the incentives will be at this point, but they will be offered incentives to become RNs. Three are going on and one has decided not to." Jones did say that when these four nurses retire, or otherwise leave, those positions will be eliminated.

Committee members emphasized the importance of trying harder to rebuild trust in the hospital. Several said they often hear people now say they would go the Machias hospital in an emergency, but not otherwise. Jones said the inpatient count

presently is seven.

"We are much improved," said the CEO. "When I first got there and I walked around the hospital people kept their heads down. Now they call my attention to things that should be changed."

The need for specific specialists at DECH is a recurrent subject. "We probably need two full-time urologists," Jones agreed, "but there are only 5,000 in the country. Considering those numbers, it's difficult to attract them here. I'll bet in 10 years there won't be a single urologist in either Washington or Hancock County. It's the hardest specialty to recruit."

In other breaking news, Jones announced that Axiom will be installing a telemedicine system at the hospital. He estimated that under the proposed program the training to become a registered nurse would cost about \$12,500.

Axiom CEO Susan Corbett predicts the groundbreaking system will happen within the year, largely through a grant

for distance-learning for nurses. "We've been working with Maine Telemedicine Services, and there have been two rounds of funding already," said Corbett on Friday. "We need a lot of band width for videoconferencing, and we've lobbied hard for this rural grant for the Machias area."

The reason it's been tough lobbying is because the sustainable broadband adaption grant is federal, and the feds believe that all of Maine is rural. "But this is very progressive for Washington County and we're optimistic," says Corbett. "There's a lot to be excited about. We have a pre-entry program with Washington Academy and Machias High School. And a tie-in between UMM and DECH, with the nursing instructors out of Lewiston."

Described as six "remote sites," the nursing program locations will be Machias and Norway connected in the first year, Millinocket and Dover-Foxcroft in the second year, and Skowhegan and Pittsfield in the third
See DECH, page 26.



Andrea Perry with Coach Chris Burke.

NHS photo

Andrea Perry Scores 1,000th Point

Reaching her goal of 1,000 points in her high school basketball career became a reality for Andrea Perry of Narraguagus High School on January 30th at an away game at Calais High School.

Going into this game, Andrea needed only five more points to reach this goal. With just one minute to go in the first quarter, Andrea hit the final shot

to give her the 1,000 points. The game was stopped and Randy Morrison, Calais Athletic Director, recognized Andrea and presented her with the game ball.

She is the third girl in school history to reach this milestone. Other girls with honors include Janice Moore and Gladys Ganiel. Her brother, Blake Chase, also reached this goal during the 08-09 basketball season. ■

Fitzgerald is New County Manager

by Nancy Oden

Speculation ended last Thursday at the Washington County Commissioners' meeting as Machias Town Manager Betsy Fitzgerald was named the new county manager. She succeeds Linda Pagels-Wentworth, who left to take the Baileyville Town Manager position, which is much closer to her Calais home.

The county manager position was advertised as paying \$49,000 to start, although Commission Chair Chris Gardner said details of Fitzgerald's employment haven't yet been released. Pagels-Wentworth was making in excess of \$63,000 when she resigned.

Fitzgerald will work directly for the county commissioners and with the county clerk, Gail Popham.

Chairman Gardner said they had seen some good, qualified people, but he felt it important to have someone local. This was understood to mean someone who could be in the office regularly, since Pagels-Wentworth was often unable to make the trip from Calais to Machias.

Fitzgerald is well-known lo-

cally as Machias Town Manager, she attended school at Washington Academy, and is from the area.

When asked what her ideas were for Washington County, Ms. Fitzgerald said, "I'm tired of the poor, old Washington County image in Augusta, so I'm telling them to get out of the way." Fitzgerald also said she plans to "listen to the people who already work for the county."

Fitzgerald said she wants to "make this work for the people so that people benefit from county government." As has been said by others, she reiterated that "Washington County is not the end; we're the beginning," and that "we've been looking in the wrong direction."

Attempts to get specific thoughts or plans from Ms. Fitzgerald were unsuccessful.

Both Fitzgerald and Pagels-Wentworth say they will work together to make the transition smooth. Fitzgerald will continue working with the Town of Machias as its manager until the town finds a capable replacement. ■

Striking Differences Mark School Aid Rural Districts Reel Under Devastating Slashes

by Ruth Leubecker

Maine's schools — some consolidated, some not, most at all points in between — continue to wrestle with state mandates that are now law.

Preliminary state subsidy amounts are disastrous to much of Maine, particularly the state's rural areas. For some Washington County towns significantly crippled with or without aid cuts, a louder school death knell is being heard.

"These subsidy amounts are

devastating to rural areas," said Supt. Scott Porter is a recent message to area school board members. "For example, Lubec (MSAD 19) received \$601,908 last year, but will receive only \$29,107 next year. Machiasport has lost \$261,294, Cutler, \$204,677, and Jonesboro, \$114,872. Districts that had large increases in valuation, as well as a student enrollment decline, will experience huge losses."

With Monday a holiday and Tuesday a furlough day, any of-

ficial word on the progress of a controversial amendment is apt to be waylaid. The bill is LD 570, proposed legislation governing the consolidation of school administrative units. The amendment seeks to eliminate penalties levied on those schools that failed to conform to the letter of the law by consolidating. The amendment would do this by exempting a central office that serves eight or more towns, OR any two of the following: a school union, an SAD (school administrative district) or a CSD (consolidated school district).

East Machias, the only municipal school district in Washington County, has achieved impressive savings and sharing, minus consolidation. "East Machias' student census is up about 20% and that saved us," says Bucket Davis, East Machias selectman. "Next Tuesday we'll meet with leadership on both
See School Aid, page 27.

RMG "Hats for Haiti" Raises \$1,434



RMG students don "Hats for Haiti." RMG photo

Whoever thought that a bunch of hats could be worth \$1,434?

A few students at the Rose M. Gaffney School thought so last month.

The day after the earthquake in Haiti, two students approached Shannon Micklus, the JMG Project Reach specialist,

and asked what they could do to help. Principal Mitchell Look approved their idea of "Hats For Haiti," days when staff and students were charged \$1 for wearing hats to school.

The first day, Jan. 14, the project raised \$263. When area businesses were asked to take part in the second day on Jan. 22, much more money was raised. Bar Harbor Bank and Trust (with just five employees wearing hats) raised \$65. Machias Savings Bank raised \$776, and R.H. Foster raised \$130.

In the end, the entire total of \$1,434 raised through the students' idea has been dedicated to Help Haiti Now, an organization that was in Haiti before the earthquake that works for clean water, medicine and education for villages there. ■

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