

# Machias Valley News Observer



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Global Warming hits Washington County. (See Polar Bear Dip story on page 12)

WCCC Photo

## Maine Fiber Touts Plan for Expanding Open Access Rural Broadband Network

by Ruth Leubecker

Answering questions and facing the issues and arguments accompanying the expansion of rural broadband in Maine is nothing new for Dwight Allison, CEO of Maine Fiber Company.

“Maine Fiber was created to roll out the Three Ring Binder project,” says Allison of his fledgling Portland company. “The project was designed to not only benefit individual consumers, but government institutions, towns, libraries, and the entire University of Maine system. The Three Ring Binder is a middle-mile project with open access. It is non-discriminatory, and will deliver high-speed broadband access and economic opportunity to the areas in Maine that have been waiting and deserve it the most.”

Maine Fiber Company, Inc, two months old and 30 investors strong, was formed to leverage \$25 million in federal stimulus funds. “We had to come up with \$7 million, and we did,” says Allison. “There were six other projects in six other states similar to this one. I don’t know what we did, or how we’re different, but we made it.”

The Three Ring Binder purports to connect what it labels the Northern, Southern and Down East rings of the state. It refers to 1,100 miles of either 144- or 288-strand fiberoptic cable providing dark-fiber broadband service throughout Maine. When the project is completed more than 100 rural Maine communities with 110,000 households, 600 anchor institutions and 39 government facilities will be

served that are not served today.

“This means that providers like Axiom can give broadband to customers cheaper,” says Susan Corbett, Axiom CEO. “Axiom is a key player in creating a superior broadband structure in the state, but one company is not going to do it all. We have to work together, and my goal is to get everyone to the table to do that.”

Maine Fiber Company, described as a dark-fiber provider, is not without its critics. Allison says of his independently owned and operated company, “We don’t want to become a telecom carrier. I only want to run a wire. Sometimes people get irate because it’s not running through their town, but it’s not intended to. You don’t want I-95 running into every town. This is the same See *Broadband*, page 26. . . . .

## Forum Explores Strategies for Helping Needy

by Ruth Leubecker

How do we get people to understand the needs of Washington County as they relate to food and fuel?

That was the question once more debated and fine-tuned at a community forum last week at the Centre Street Congregational Church.

“We continue trying to find solutions and strategies for those people most in need,” said Wendy Harrington of the Maine Sea Coast Mission. “Many of them remain cold and hungry despite our best efforts. We’ve worked very hard to put resources in place in our county. And it’s still See *Forum*, page 27. . . . .

## Group Seeks to Rebuild Trust in Hospital, Till New Ground in Cultivating Return of Area Docs

by Ruth Leubecker

Rebuilding trust in Down East Community Hospital emerges at every turn as the prevalent necessary next hurdle to clear at the Machias facility.

“We need to find out what people are thinking, what’s keeping them away,” said Janet O’Neal at last week’s Committee to Save Our Hospital meeting. “I’m suggesting a face-to-face survey. Wherever we are, just ask people if they use the hospital, or would, if they needed to. If they say no, then we ask why. It would be that simple. We don’t need names or anything else. We just need to learn this information.”

“We need something tangible to happen, and that should be

our doctors coming back,” said Frank Green. “But what can we do?”

While hospital leadership – CEO Doug Jones and Michele Hood, EMHS receiver, at a public meeting – constantly describes the need for physicians, the plain truth is that 12 -16 area doctors once affiliated with the hospital have never been contacted since DECH administration has changed. Yet recruitment efforts out of the area court doctors not inclined to stay while those in the area have proven they’re here for the long haul.

“The hospital has come 180 degrees, but we don’t understand this,” said one man attending the See *Trust*, page 28. . . . .

Don't forget to set your clocks ahead this weekend. Daylight Savings Time starts March 14th!

### Index

Arts & Entertainment . . .	8, 9
Church Services . . . . .	21
Classifieds . . . . .	27
Community . . . . .	16, 17
Coming Events . . . . .	20, 21
Help Wanted . . . . .	26, 27
Legals . . . . .	25
Letters to Editor . . . . .	6
Obituaries . . . . .	24
Op Ed . . . . .	7
Real Estate . . . . .	19, 27
Sports . . . . .	22, 23
Town Notices . . . . .	25



Machias students playing in the State House rotunda.

Photo by Laurie Cobb

## Machias Students Play at State House

On Thursday, March 4th, three band students from Machias Memorial High School and 14 from the Rose M. Gaffney School combined their talents to perform a patriotic tribute in the fourth floor rotunda underneath the beautiful dome of the State House. Students were then escorted into the balcony of the Gallery and started off the legislative session with a rousing rendition of the *Star Spangled Banner*, led by Instrumental Music Director, Bonnie Atkinson.

Following the performance, students spent the rest of the morning touring the State of Maine Museum. A special thank

you to Katherine Cassidy for recommending the Machias Schools Instrumental Program for performance, and also to the very supportive parents of the Machias Music Department who attended and helped.

Participating students were: Tyler Cobb, Crysta Contard, Cheyenne Dickerson, Tate Dolley, Brandon Guerra, Lucia Helder, Magenta Johnson, Bridgette Koch, Emily Lobley, Patrick Massaad, Katie Morse, Justin Paddock, Nicholas Robicheau, Ciara Schoppee, Reese Snider, Jennifer Weaver, and Kate Whitney. ■