

# MeASBO

The official publication of the Maine Association of School Business Officials  
Winter 2011-12

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## President

Kathy Warren, Business Man.  
MSAD #8  
22 Arcola Lane  
Vinalhaven, ME 04863  
Tel. 863-2588  
kwarren@vinalhavenschool.org



## 1st Vice President

Sue Lambert, Finance Dir.  
MSAD #49  
8 School St.  
Fairfield, ME 04937  
Tel.453-4200, ext. 4  
slambert@msad49.org



## 2nd Vice President

Dean Flanagin, Business Man.  
Lewiston School Dept.  
36 Oak St.  
Lewiston, ME 04240  
Tel.795-4100, ext. 261  
dflanagin@lewistonpublicschools.org



## Treasurer

Sherrie Small, Fin. Coord.  
MSAD #61  
900 Portland Rd.  
Bridgton, ME 04863  
Tel. 647-3048, ext. 523  
sweese@sad61.k12.me.us

## Immediate Past President

Herb Hopkins, Bus. Man.  
Yarmouth School Dept.  
101 McCartney St.  
Yarmouth, ME 04096  
Tel. 846-5586  
herb\_hopkins@yarmouth.k12.me.us

## Tri-State Committee

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## Secretary

Adam Hanson, bus. office  
supervisor  
Auburn School Department  
P.O. Box 800  
Auburn, ME 04212  
T. 784-6431, ext. 1425

## MSMA Liaison

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**May 4** — United Technologies Center,  
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## Tri-State Conference

**May 16-18** — Downtown Holiday Inn,  
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# INSIDE MeASBO

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Ruth's Reusable Resources provides millions of dollars of equipment and supplies each year to more than 200 Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts schools — the most of any similar organization in the country.

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## President's Message

# MeASBO's interactive website goes live!

<http://www.measbo.org/>

Welcome to the new MEASBO website.

We are very excited to be launching the new website this winter.

Your Executive Committee has been working for a couple of years to finalize a more interactive site that would give us all a chance to share our thoughts, ideas and problems centrally.

We are thrilled to be able to transport our problem-solving roundtables to cyber space.

If you have not already joined,

please go to [www.measbo.org](http://www.measbo.org) and log in.

Sue Lambert, our invaluable webmaster, will sign you up and you will be ready to go! There are some preset discussion areas and more can be established.

Please make sure to let us know how you would like to use the site and we will do our best to customize it to fit the needs of our members.

Please join me in thanking our Executive Committee and especially Herb Hopkins, Sue Lambert and site creator Darek Leslie for all their hard work over the last couple of years.



*Kathy Warren*

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## Member Profile

# For Lisbon's Catherine Messmer, it's a numbers game — and that's good

By Mark Leslie

**C**atherine Messmer is proof positive: It's in the genes.

As sure as Ken Griffey Jr. can trace his grand baseball skills to his father, Ken Sr., Messmer can trace her mathematics talents to her dad, the late John Brace, an internationally respected mathematician who was a professor at the University of Maryland.

Messmer, school business manager for the Lisbon School Department, may not enjoy certain parts of her job ("Insurance I dislike; it's Greek to me. Negotiations I hate.") Ditto, workers compensation and OSHA, but over the last few years she has learned quite a bit in regards to workers compensation and OSHA and it's not quite as bad as it was.

But most of the job — all that revolves around mathematics — is a treat for Messmer. The good people of Lisbon can thank her father.

"Cathy's involvement in funding and finances is crucial to our success," says Lisbon Superintendent Richard Green, who has been in his current position for three years, following five years as principal at Lisbon's Philip W. Sugg Middle School. "I always knew how important her job was, but she does a lot of other things, too: handling personnel, human resources and supervising the central office.

"She's active in her professional organization, so she's on top of the latest information. She's professionally driven and works hard to make sure the information we have is correct and accurate because it changes all the time. And she is always on top



*Catherine Messmer, left, discusses a Lisbon School Department budget item with Conni Wilson, accounts payable coordinator.*

or ahead of those changes."

### The Inner Drive

"People think I'm crazy but I love working with the numbers," Messmer says.

It would seem no surprise that Messmer earned a bachelor of science degree in 1987 from the University of New Hampshire's Whittemore School of Business, that she worked for two CPA firms in New Hampshire after graduation, then moved on to the accounting department of Durham (N.H.) Bank. Nor was it a surprise when she first joined a school department, in Northwood, N.H., to process payroll and accounts payable.

"One thing I learned long ago is that

numbers don't talk back," Messmer says. "They're black and white. Two plus two really does equal four. I missed out on a job with WBLM, the rock radio station of Maine, because I told them that I didn't like working with people, that I much preferred numbers."

Her father was instrumental in her career, not just for his genes but his outlook.

"I learned from my father that math is universal. Even though my father could only speak English, he traveled around Europe and could talk to everyone — the Germans, the Yugoslavians, the Italians — about math."

So John Brace's forté is also his daughter's strength. When he was on sabbatical in England working at the University of Cambridge, he and his wife traveled through Europe taking the youngest of their five children with them. Messmer embraced the richness of the different cultures.

But her foundation, from an early age, has remained mathematics.

"I can't explain it," she says, "but the bottom line is, I love working with numbers. I enjoy meeting with the superintendent every month to review the finances to see how we're doing, making sure everything is running efficiently. I like overseeing all that."

That strength correlates naturally with her comfort with computers, working extensively with Excel and accounting softwares to oversee Lisbon's budget, payroll and accounts payable.

"I try to use software to its maximum to make us more efficient," Messmer says. "I'm very frugal and don't like to waste money. I also don't like to see people wasting time, spinning their wheels. That's very frustrating to me."

"I've brought those efficiencies to the job. Every year I try to do more with our accounting software. When I first started here, we did all our teacher contracts on Word documents. Every year we had to type in their names and information. The last couple of years we have created our teacher contracts through our accounting software. Most of it is electronic and it takes half the time it used to."

At the time of her interview, Messmer was in the throes of doing the



*Catherine Messmer is often busy on the phone with Lisbon School Department budget work.*

school department's budget, "preparing a lot of reports that analyze what we spend and where we spend it."

Too much?

No, it's what Messmer thrives on.

This is her ninth year in the process.

When LL Bean transferred her husband, David, to Freeport, where he works in allocations, Messmer got a job at Thrifty Rent-a-Car for a year then, in 1997, landed a job in payroll for the Lisbon School Department. Five years later, she was promoted to her current position.

At that point Lisbon and Durham were together in School Union #30. When Gov. John Baldacci announced his school consolidation program, Durham merged with Freeport and Pownal, while Lisbon negotiated with SAD #75 in Topsham.

Durham-Freeport-Pownal was approved as RSU #5.

The town of Lisbon approved the consolidation with SAD #75, but SAD #75's members turned Lisbon down.

"But because we had done our due diligence and tried to consolidate, we were considered a doughnut hole and did not have to," Messmer says.

So Lisbon was approved as a stand-alone unit that encompasses 1,300 students and some 300 teachers and staff at Lisbon High School, Lisbon Community School and Philip W. Sugg Middle School.

"Consolidation is an excellent idea. You just have to go about it the right way and I don't think they did," Messmer says. "What's frustrating for me is that the people who followed the law and consolidated were supposed to get benefits through subsidy and those who did not consolidate were supposed to pay penalties. None of that happened, and that is not fair for all the school districts that consolidated like they were supposed to."

Messmer hails from Maryland, where the school departments are run by county.

"We had one superintendent per county. So when you look at Maine versus Maryland, there are big differences," she says.

Asked if Maine should borrow anything from Maryland's model, Messmer says, "There is good and bad in both. There is a certain point where there are efficiencies in the larger units, but you get too big and lose those efficiencies, so I'm not sure Maryland's model is any better than Maine's."

One thing she *is* positive about, she says, is that Unions and AOSs are *not* an efficient form of school government.

Because unions like her old #30 have to deal with a school committee for each town and a school committee for the union itself, the business departments have to create state reports for each entity separately.

"We had to do everything three times, whereas in an SAD you do everything once, she says, "And AOSs are set up like unions. Everything has to be separated out."



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### Cutting Costs

Like her colleagues across Maine, Messmer is devoted to wringing every penny out of every dollar in the budget, and this includes a couple of recent moves.

The natural gas pipeline runs through Lisbon and the School Department took advantage of that last year by changing over from heating fuel. New boilers were installed in the middle school and a new burner in the high school.

"That will save us at least \$40,000 every year," Messmer says.

She is also maximizing the financial impact of her accounting software in various ways, such as:

- The department got away from paper time-sheets and recently installed electronic time clock system wherein the 100 people who are support staff can either clock in through a clock at the front door or go on to a web site on their computer.

- Her office is working to have the time-sheets uploaded directly to the payroll software.

"By next year we'll have it ready," she promises.

- The purchase orders are all electronic, sent electronically from the secretary to the principal and then to Messmer for approval.

"The only paperwork is sending invoices in for payment," she says.

Meanwhile, Messmer says MEDMS (the Maine Education Data Management System), implemented over the last couple of years, is a godsend time-wise, which translates into savings.

"Going to the MEDMS upload has been a huge benefit," she says. "It took weeks every summer to do the EFM 45 report and now it takes me half a day because you update the information quarterly and they just have to check to make sure you have all the accounts right."

"Come June 30, if you have been updating quarterly, it should be very easy to upload the information. Usually you only have to fix a handful or errors."

"They've been able to get rid of other year-end reports by doing it

this way."

Asked about a call by some to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education, Messmer says, "All the public schools in the country have to have the same guidelines so a student in California should be at the same education level as a student in Maine. Therefore, even though we could do with less bureaucracy, you need somebody to oversee the whole thing."

Does it need to be as big as it is?

"Probably not," she says. "Government does not run efficiently."

### Onward and Upward

Messmer does wish the Maine Department of Education would follow through on one idea.

"They had talked about providing the accounting software to the schools, but have not done that," she says. "Meanwhile, in Lisbon alone we spent thousands of dollars for the software and every year another \$9,000 to keep it up to date."

And while a perfect world would not have the aggravation of No Child Left Behind, "there is always something new coming down the pike that you have to deal with," Messmer says.

One major help in dealing with those

new challenges, she says, is the Maine Association of School Business Officials (MeASBO).

Messmer serves on MeASBO's Executive, Tri-State and Certification committees and says, "I think it's a great way to network and develop professionally because if we get the right speakers it's amazing what you learn. I find it very valuable."

"It's always good to keep learning and keep yourself fresh," Messmer says.

### While at Home

When not improving accounting software, analyzing budgets and dealing with the other nuances of her job, Messmer enjoys traveling, reading, crocheting, counted cross-stitching and playing video games as well as dancing. She enjoys dancing so much that she goes to Zumba classes every week and has signed up to perform in Lisbon High School's Dancing with the Staff fundraiser this spring.

She and husband David have two children, Samantha and Brian, both students at Mt. Ararat High School in Topsham. •••



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# Outsourcing: Food service worth investigating



*A Flik Independent School Dining chef implements the Japanese Noodles Traveling Flavors experience to students.*

By Mark Leslie

**K**ids gotta eat. But they don't all have to eat from the same menu, or be served by the same playbook. Maine school systems are living evidence.

There is the Downeast school, Whiting Village School in the Machias AOS, that outsources its food service to Frank's Dockside Restaurant in Lubec.

There is the island school, Long Island School in Casco Bay, whose food source is East End Catering in Portland.

There is the school on North Haven Island that received a waiver from the Department of Education (DOE) so that all its the students brown-bag their lunches from home; and sometimes the parents come in with salads and treats.

There are the many private schools, like Thornton Academy in Saco, Maine Central Institute in Pittsfield and the Maine School of Science and Math in Limestone, that contract out to food-service companies to

manage the entire program.

There is the Limestone school that is part of RSU #39 but contracts its food service through the Maine School of Science and Math which, in turn, contracts to Flik Independent School Dining. Students in both systems physically use the same cafeteria in the RSU #39 high school.

And, of course, there are the great majority of schools — those who self-operate the entire food operation.

But during the budget process, many school districts everywhere at least investigate the feasibility of outsourcing food service.

"Sometimes everyone thinks it's a silver bullet," said Walter Beesley, who manages the Maine DOE's Child Nutrition Program. "Every year people start looking at it. But there is no trend in that direction. It's doable for a food-management company. But if you have the right people in your kitchen you should be able to do the same."

Asked about the advantages of contracting outside firms to handle food services, Beesley said: "You're hiring a

professional organization. They have people on staff to do promotional ideas, to do training. They have systems in place, cost controls in place.”

The negatives?

“Existing school staff could be affected. They meet the minimum food requirements of federal standards; no extras. You lose the personal touch. The food-service company may not purchase locally. And they’re there to make money, so if they can do it, why can’t the school? Usually it’s because of labor.”

### The Money Factor

Indeed, some schools are breaking even or turning a profit in their food program.

“The food-service program is almost self-sufficient. It brings in revenue and is run as a separate enterprise,” said School Business Manager Deb Holland of Maine SAD #52 in Turner.

“Our food service breaks even,” said Lewiston School Department Business Manager Dean Flanagin. “I qualify that in that they don’t pay for electricity and natural gas. They pay for all their food and labor, including the director. And if they want improvements, they pay for them.”

“Actually the last couple of years we’ve generated a profit and our fund balance has grown so that we could probably lower our local dependence again,” said Alan Kochis, the Bangor School Department’s director of business services.

Kochis said that three or four years ago local taxpayers

were picking up \$150,000 of the food-service costs.

“I sat down with the food services director and we visited school departments that had better service than we did. We picked their brains about the 6-12 age group. Their menus had more kids participating and healthier meals. Now we’re turning a profit.”

In the case of Whiting Village School, Machias AOS Business Manager Carolyn Willey said the reason for outsourcing is “they are so far from the AOS.”

Initially the Cutler School Department cooked the food and trucked it the 20 miles to Whiting. That got to be too expensive for Cutler because of the costs of the vehicle and driver.

Whiting went out to bid, two years ago choosing a store with a lunch counter across the street and last year switching to Frank’s Dockside Restaurant.

“The principal says the meals have been extremely good,” Willey said.

The cost?

“Overall,” she said, “they spend about as much as the other schools with cafeterias. It is a savings over the previous system.”

At 16-student Long Island School, Superintendent Alton “Bump” Hadley III outsources food, but only because he has to. The school has no kitchen facilities.

“The quality is good. The service is good. But it does not save you money,” he said.

The catering service ships the meals to the island in the morning and, if it’s a hot meal it’s heated up at lunch time.



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“It’s quite costly compared to having your own food service professionals,” said Hadley, who said his school on Chebeague Island “provides a much wider range of food and

**“ You can’t have a cookie-cutter operation.” — Ray Mulligan, president of Flik**

we do it in-house. The per-pupil cost of a meal is less. Here we get one option and if a youngster chooses the alternative it is usually just a sandwich.”

Long Island’s per-meal cost is \$4.25 and the student pays \$2.50.

Chebeague Island’s food service for 22 students breaks even, Hadley said.

#### In, Then Out

Retired SAD #44 business manager Bruce Powell tells of outsourcing food service to a professional company for two years around 2002-2004, then deciding to return to an in-house operation.

“At the end of two years it was just too expensive,” Powell said. “The management fee and the variety of food they wanted us to buy to serve their program appeared to be too expensive. So we went back to

having our own manager.

“In a nutshell we learned something, we benefited from that knowledge — ways to better present our product, to keep students happier with a different and expanded variety — but it did turn out to be more costly than we could afford.”

Powell could not recall the difference in cost between the two options.

#### An Expanding Market

Meanwhile, private schools, universities and other establishments are more and more turning to professional food-service companies.

DOE’s Beesley said some schools “have looked at hospitals to share food-service companies.” An intriguing idea.

Private schools are a different matter altogether.

“It’s very difficult in rural schools to recruit staff to deal with all sorts of federal programs, school lunch being one of them,” said Michael Lambert, chief operating officer at the Maine School of Science and Math. “This is what they (Flik) do for a living. Let them do what they do best and we do what we do best.”

Explaining that his students live on campus and attend classes on a much different schedule than public schools, including holidays, Lambert said, “We have a lot more flexibility with a contractor than with our employees. Our students are here 24/7, so it’s seven days a week, school or not. Meals have to be on the table three times a day, including Satur-

days and Sundays.”

At private Thornton Academy, Business Manager Paul Kelly said contracting food service saves him a management headache.

“There are advantages and disadvantages to having your own employees,” Kelly said. “In this case we don’t have to worry about menus and that sort of thing. The downside is, you don’t have any control over what they pay people and their benefit program.”

Since Thornton added a boarding program three years ago, making dining a 24/7 operation, he said, “I’m not sure it’s a savings. My observation is that I could probably do it cheaper if I were doing it myself.

“Is it worth the headache? If I were saving \$100,000 it would be worth the headache. If a few thousand dollars, probably not.”

Also a Flik school, Thornton treats their employees “like our own,” Kelly said. “If we have a bunch of events on campus all at once, we give them a break. We might take the kids to a pizza party so [Flik employees] don’t have to work Sunday evening — that sort of thing.”

#### On Their Own Behalf

Ray Mulligan, president of 40-year-old Flik Independent School Dining, based in Rye Brook, N.Y., assuaged concerns that national food services like his are boilerplate operations.

“You can’t have a cookie-cutter operation,” Mulligan said. “We have 140 school clients and 140 individual contracts... You can’t ask for the gold-star service with pauper’s pockets. You have to match up the program with the reality and then put the best program on the table.

“We present solutions to schools based on what their community needs are,” he added. “All foods are prepared fresh. We don’t use frozen veggies or meats. And we buy local and sustainable whenever possible.”

Mulligan’s message to school officials, he said, is: “Your business is the business of education. My business is the business of food service.



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One of Flik's competitors, Sodexo Education Services of Weatogue, Conn., also serves independent schools and colleges in Maine.

First explaining that Sodexo probably would not contract with a district with fewer than 1,000 students, Sodexo's Phil Bornstein cited the following advantages of outsourcing:

- A guaranteed return to the district. Sodexo typically guarantees that the district food service department breaks even.

"If the district loses money, we take it out of our fees. It's guaranteed," he said.

- The potential for lower costs through the firm's purchasing power.

- The company's management of staff through training, providing a good menu that's easy to produce and giving them the proper tools to be successful.

- Nutritional standards.

"Sodexo," Bornstein said, "is one of the national and world leaders in maintaining high nutritional standards. Having those standards is good, but getting the kids to eat is more important. You can have the most organic food in the world, but you have to get the kids to eat it."

"There is a huge groundswell about 'let's feed the kids lentils.' You can put it on the menu but they won't eat it. You're making the problem worse. We have a dialogue with parents, students and the administration and customize a plan for where they are now and where they want to move to and how to get there."

- Marketing and menus separated by elementary school, middle school and high school.

- Registered dieticians on staff who are available within the company's various districts.

- Food and employee safety.

"The kitchen is a dangerous place," Bornstein said. "We make sure employee have the best equipment and cooking utensils as well as proper clothing which is a key to keeping them safe."

- Third-party food-safety audits performed unannounced, evaluating the food service department and the kitchen.

- Food-service companies have tremendous equipment purchasing power and expertise.

"If a district has a central kitchen and decides to replace the kitchen, we have experts who can say, 'Based on your size and student population, this is what you need,'" Bornstein said.

#### Staffing Concerns

With school districts often opposed, and many times obli-

Some schools have looked at hospitals to share food-service companies.  
— Walter Beesley  
DOE Child Nutrition Program

gated, to replacing current employees because of outsourcing, Bornstein called that a misperception.

"People think we'll come in and fire all the people on staff. But we basically do what the district asks us to do in the RFP process," he said. "A school district can even have their staff remain on their payroll and we'll take care of the management."

"My frustration is the perception and it's hard to break it."

The employment can also be a blend, Bornstein noted, "with some working for the school and others for the company."

"The employees can stay on district payroll," he said. "As they retire, the company would hire their replacements and put them on the company payroll."

So, is outsourcing food service a growing trend?

In his microcosm, Mulligan of Flik said: "As a reaction to the economy, everybody's trying to trim their budgets and maximize their operations. For our company we had a large growth spurt last year of over 12 percent." ...



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## MEA opposition muddies the waters of school health insurance in Maine

By Mark Leslie

**W**hen the Maine state Legislature last year passed L.D. 1326, “An Act To Allow School Administrative Units To Seek Less Expensive Health Insurance Alternatives,” school officials statewide anticipated quick, and possibly large, savings on their health costs, which total \$400 million annually.

The law would allow school districts to obtain the claims information they need from the Maine Education Association (MEA) Benefits Trust and Anthem in order to solicit competitive bids for their health insurance.

School districts pay anywhere from 75 to 100 percent of premiums for teachers and other eligible school employees. And the Falmouth and Cape Elizabeth school systems both believe their annual savings would have surpassed \$300,000 had they been able to go to the marketplace for comparable health-care benefits.

But 14 days after the law took effect last Sept. 28, the MEA Benefits Trust filed a lawsuit to try to prevent the law’s implementation. The Trust claims the data is “confidential and a trade secret of the Trust.”

The Trust is fully insured by Anthem, which holds all of the contested data, and enjoys a monopoly in the school health insurance business, insuring 99 percent of eligible school employees in Maine.

Meanwhile, Legislators also wanted more transparency in the MEA Benefit Trust’s finances. Hearings revealed that

the Trust had built up an \$87 million internal fund by 2010 and also was paying the MEA teachers union \$901,796 in annual administrative service fees.

“It is fairly lucrative for them (MEA Benefit Trust), so it’s not surprising they are challenging a law that would take that money away,” said Attorney Melissa Hewey of Drummond Woodsum, who is representing the Maine School Board Association as an intervener in the case.

The Trust’s suit, brought against Maine Superintendent of Insurance Eric Cioppa because his department enforces the law, now sits in federal district court in Portland awaiting hearing. The suit has several parts, chief among them to prevent the state and school districts from requiring Anthem, upon request, to release claims data for individual school districts getting their insurance through MEA Benefits Trust.

In the legislative hearings, legislators agreed school districts have a legal right to claims data — information they have been blocked from getting for the last 18 years.

While Cioppa is represented by the state Attorney General’s Office, interveners on his behalf include the Maine School Boards Association (MSBA), the Bangor and Augusta school departments, SAD #60 in North Berwick and RSU #23 in Old Orchard Beach.

“This legislation was too important to school systems for MSBA not to get involved,” said Dale Douglass, executive director of the Maine School Boards Association (MSBA).

Hewey said many other schools were interested in intervening as well but “the court’s view is that if we can have just a

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few representatives makes sense.”

“There are some very complicated legal issues that have required us all to use up a lot of paper to persuade the court of our positions,” said Christopher Taintor of the Portland law firm Norman, Hanson & DeTroy, who is representing MEA Benefit Trust in the case. “Now it’s up to the court to decide what to do.”

Speaking in late January, Taintor said: “I don’t think it will languish forever. There are two steps in this process. Probably it will first be heard by a magistrate judge. If it is, whatever decision the magistrate judge makes can be appealed to the district court judge before there’s any final decision.”

The District Court judge in charge of the case is George Singal, while John Rich is the magistrate judge dealing with it.

“The reality is,” Taintor said, “school employees in Maine have a very well-operated system now. It is extraordinarily unlikely that anyone will actually, as opposed to hypothetically, benefit from the enforcement of LD 1326. It will effectively destroy the Trust as it currently exists.

“A lot of people in other parts of the state — the people in Portland and some of the bedroom communities outside Portland — might potentially benefit in the short term. But in the long term it’s virtually certain that everyone would lose and even in the short term it’s virtually certain that teachers who are already underpaid in the Northern and Eastern and rural parts of the state will pay more for their health insurance if this law goes into effect.”

Alan Kochis, director of business services for the Bangor School Department, spoke for many when he said, “The issue is: Without the data, no one knows.”

“The Trust is very close-lipped and the school districts have wondered, if they were to seek bids on their own would they in fact receive lower quotes,” Kochis said. “The last couple years haven’t been so bad, but we’ve had years of double-digit increases in premiums. The Pen-

quis School Superintendents Association covers a large area up here. What if all its 25 schools wanted to band together and go to bid with Sigma?”

In a position paper on its web site, entitled “Something wicked this way comes,” the MEA told members: “If you currently have a contract in place, do nothing — even if management promises great savings and benefits. Don’t be fooled by their snake oil sales pitch. There are great risks in switching insurance plans and every school unit that leaves the Trust increases the harm to our statewide pool.”

It continues: “If management tries to enact a unilateral change in your health plans, resist. This is a mandatory subject of negotiations and changes can not be made in an existing contract without your agreement.”

Indeed, Douglass and the MSBA recognize this, saying: “Getting competitive bids, however, would just be the start of a very deliberative process. If school districts name the MEA Benefits Trust or Anthem in their teacher contract, changing insurers would have to be negotiated.” •••



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## The Job



Ruth Libby, center, enjoys a laugh with Janice Pecoraro-DuGuay, left, and Rosanne Stiles while stocking a shipment of books. Pecoraro-DuGuay has been volunteering for several years, while Stiles, Ruth's sister, has been with 3R's since its inception.

# Saving Schools Millions

*Ruth's Reusables making a huge impact from Kittery to The County*

By Mark Leslie

**W**hen Ruth Libby started storing supplies for Scarborough schools in her basement 18 years ago, she never dreamed that one day she would operate the largest organization of this sort in America, supplying more than \$2 million in materials just since school started last fall to more than 200 schools in Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts and more than 50 non-profit organizations.

When Kevin Healey, then a UNUM vice president who handled charitable giving, gave her a start-up grant of \$26,000 16 years ago, he asked, "Do you realize how big this could get?" Libby recalls, "I said, 'Oh, yeah,' but I was totally lying. I had no idea. I just didn't. It's a big snowballing thing, bigger than I ever, ever would have imagined."

In an age when schools are scrambling to save every dollar possible, a visit to Ruth's Reusable Resources (3R's) at 39 Blueberry Lane in Portland can be like Christmas.

Schools wishing to join Ruth's Reusable Resources should contact Ruth Libby or Office Manager Mary Nablo at 883-8407, or e-mail to [info@ruths.org](mailto:info@ruths.org).

On Ruth's opening day this school year, people were lined up out of the parking lot and down Blueberry Lane. On any Saturday the building is packed with educators shopping for their schools.

The cost? Member schools or districts pay an annual fee of \$3 per student. After that, with the exception of computers which cost \$5 to \$100, they pay nothing for their supplies.

The result? Witness:

- C.K. Burns School in Saco, this year alone, has taken \$81,000 worth of supplies. The cost to the school, at \$3 per student: \$1,950.

- Last year the Scarborough School Department spent about \$10,000 in membership dues and got product "worth well over \$100,000, so the investment is really well worth-

while ... an awesome resource for us," says Business Office Manager Kate Bolton.

- During this year's 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Furniture Giveaway Day, 80 principals each shopped for a half hour and together received \$244,071 in furniture.

- From February 2008 to January 2012 Portland High School has paid approximately \$15,000 in membership fees and received \$276,754 worth of supplies and furniture.

"I'm one of their frequent flyers," says a smiling Kathie Marquis-Girard, assistant principal at Portland High School. "The savings is incredible, doubling, tripling, quadrupling the student membership fee... We can put that savings toward textbooks and other curriculum needs. So Ruth's helps in any ways."

- Members from schools from Kittery in York County to SAD #44 in Bethel in Oxford County, Hodgdon in Aroostook County and Sullivan in Washington County travel as much as four, five or even six hours to Ruth's.

"That is how bad off schools are and how badly they need this stuff that they're traveling such a distance to get here," Libby said.

"Wherever you can go and get relief like that, you need to take advantage of it," says Dr. Ken Smith, superintendent of Millinocket schools, who was first involved with 3R's while at Bingham. "They are extremely helpful and well organized. Maine School Management honored them last fall for their generosity."

Smith says that last year Millinocket received \$25,000 in goods — from teaching supplies to books to tables and chairs. "And some of that furniture is very expensive — things you wouldn't be able to buy for a school system," he says.

RSU #1 in Bath reports that in the school year 2010-11, it got \$87,598 worth of materials from 3R's.

The laundry list of what is stocked on the shelves of Ruth's 28,000-square-foot warehouse is lengthy and impressive.

Classroom supplies include white, chalk and bulletin boards, student and teacher desks and chairs, and cabinets to store expensive equipment.

Office supplies range from pens, pencils, in-and-out trays,

paper clips, staples, scissors, tape dispensers and punchers to filing cabinets, copiers and computers — computers being the only things that have a price tag on them.

Art supplies vary from paint and paint brushes to cloth, high-end paper, poster board, egg cartons and what Libby calls "hands-on learning items like foam, wood, metals, plastics, Styrofoam, cardboard..."

Janitorial and paper products include reams of paper, business cards, overhead transparencies, labels, craft and construction paper and card-stock paper.

**“ We received worth well over \$100,000, so the investment is really well worthwhile ... an awesome resource for us.”**  
— Kate Bolton, Business Office Manager  
Scarborough School Department

Used and new books encompass classics to textbooks and everything in between. "Last year we went through more than 40,000 books," Libby says. "Every school that cleans out, we get their textbooks. Those books are making the rounds around the state."

Portland High School's Marquis-Girard says Libby will keep her eye out to fulfill specific requests.

"I called Ruth and said we needed chairs for our conference area," Marquis-Girard recalls. "She knew that and we were able to pick up 10 chairs. That's a huge savings and makes the room more functional."

"This week we got four 6-foot folding tables that would cost \$150 to 250 apiece and they're in great condition."

Though most of what Ruth's stocks is new, she says the treasure is often used things.

"When a teacher retires and takes all their stuff off the walls, that is like gold to new teachers who are just starting," Libby says. "They have nothing in the classroom, and when

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they're able to come here and get all of those laminated posters and charts and all the things that fit right into their curriculum, they're in Heaven. It's like Christmas all year around."

Sally Mitchell of Portland's Ocean Avenue School speaks for many colleagues. "A K-5 art teacher, she says, "I couldn't do my projects without Ruth's. It's awesome."

"One teacher was here last week and said, 'I'm so excited about getting this,'" Ruth recalls. "I said, 'That's exactly what I want you to take back to the classroom — that excitement, so the students are as excited about learning by using the things that you got."

"That's what I work for, so that the kids don't ever have to be without, or upset because they have no paper and pencil."

Indeed, others are doing similar work around the country, Libby says, adding that 3R's is one of about two dozen comparable resource centers, most of which are affiliated with Kids in Need Foundation, headquartered in Dayton, Ohio, and Minneapolis.

"We're not the biggest in the size of the building, but we are the biggest in

the amount of stuff," she says.

### From a Humble Start to Many Hands

From individuals to corporations, people around Portland to the far reaches of the country have rallied around 3R's. But it was a humble start.

When Libby's oldest son, Seth, now 29, was in 1st or 2nd grade, the art teacher sent the children home a note: "Please send in cereal boxes, egg trays, etc. for us to use in class."

"My mother worked at UNUM," Libby says. "She also took the same note to her family in Waterville and they started saving stuff and sending it down."

"When I started collecting, it was in my cellar. We were there for six months. Then one of the Scarborough teachers who was coming in asked the School Department if they had any space anywhere and they offered the space at Oak Hill School."

Libby filled up that room quickly.

"Things were coming in from word of mouth faster than we could keep up with — and it still does," she says. "If you were at UNUM and moved to Anthem, you told people at Anthem. Then a person at Anthem takes a job at IDEXX and IDEXX gets involved."

A year and a half after moving into Oak Hill School, Libby wrote to UNUM, telling the company what she was doing and that, "Yes, I'd love to have your computers and copiers, but I'd really like to have all the little stuff people leave behind: pencils and pens and clips and binders."

Healey called about a year later and invited her to take whatever she wanted from UNUM's untold number of pallets filled with office supplies left by employees who had retired or moved on.

Talk about treasure. The biggest find was scores of 1- and 1-1/2-inch, white, three-ring binders, with clear fronts that, Libby says, "every teacher wants."

UNUM then gave a \$26,000 start-up grant to pay Libby a salary and cover some of the expenses of picking up donations.

Also at that time Scarborough was closing its Bessey School and offered it to Libby to use, both rent- and expense-free, including telephone service.

"They gave me the first floor and gymnasium and when I left 11 years later, we had stuff in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors and the attic. We also had 17 trailer trucks full in Scarborough and South Portland and 2,000 square feet in self-storage," she says.

In 2006 Scarborough informed Libby that the Bessey School was being renovated into senior housing. We had a few years to find a new home. After searching for 1-1/2 years for an affordable space, we asked UNUM if they would sell 3R's a building they had for sale for over a year. More than \$1 million of the sale price was an in-kind donation."

And this warehouse is open to members on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

"You go in on a Saturday and it's packed. It's hard to get around," says Marquis-Girard. "You meet educators from all over. And Ruth and her people are so helpful and accommodating."

### The Cost and the Supporters

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"We spend \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year in shipping," Libby says. "During the three years of the worst economy, a lot of stuff was coming in. We paid \$30,000 to \$35,000 per year."

And 3R's still owes \$400,000 on its building and needs to hire more than its two full-time employees (she and her husband, Tom) and two part-time employees (her brother, Richard DeVeau, and office manager Mary Nablo) to keep up with the goods coming in.

But Libby has gone a long way meeting that financial need through both grants and volunteer help from UNUM and other large corporations.

"The first year Ruth and Tom came over, we filled the back of his pickup truck," says Susan Austin, who handles UNUM's community relations.

"Now we send over truckloads of things we get. Each year it gets bigger and bigger."

Libby says the largest grant she has received was \$235,000 from the Maine Department of Education as a downpayment to purchase the building.

The Betterment Foundation and Sam L. Cohen Foundation gave grants of \$15,000 each the Davenport Trust donated another \$8,000 to redo 3R's front entrance, which had become dangerous.

Other grants have come from the Davenport Trust Fund, Virginia Hodgkins Somers, Peter and Julie Borish Family Foundation, the Spinnaker Trust, Morton-Kelly Charitable Trust, Narragansett Number One Foundation, The Lybra Foundation and the Maine Community Foundation.

"With all the budget cuts in education, they're a fantastic resource," says Barry Sturgeon, a trustee for Davenport Trust which has supported 3R's for several years giving it charitable grants and helping RSU #1 with its 3R's membership cost as well. "We feel when we give the school system the grant, it makes the money go so much further."

"It's great to see so many people working together," Sturgeon adds, recalling the dedication of the new facilities which featured a partnership

between business, non-profits, the government and foundations.

"One of our biggest problems in writing grants is that people don't understand what we do until they come in here," Libby says. "Once they get here, they're floored."

While UNUM and William Arthur, a fine stationery maker in Kennebunk, provided plenty of material early on, perhaps 3R's greatest affiliation in keeping the warehouse shelves full since then has been that with Kids in Need, a nonprofit organization that solicits corporations and businesses that make school products.

"They have seconds, closeouts, discontinued..." Libby says. "These are the things that can sit in the warehouse for a year and these companies don't know what to do with. We get offers from corporations around the country: Jo-Ann Fabric & Craft Stores, Office Max, Office Depot, Staples, the pencil-maker Dixon Ticonderoga Co., Elmers Glue, 3M, Target and others."

Within the last three years Target has donated seven tractor-trailer trucks of one-subject notebooks.

And once a year 3R's receives furniture in boxes from catalog companies, office supply/janitorial supplies, and some art suppliers. When these companies do inventory cleanouts, they donate to Kids in Need which contacts its two dozen resource-center members.

Meanwhile, other high-profile businesses have sponsored 3R's collections.

WCSH-TV in Portland put on a weeklong promotion last year leading up to a weekend collection at three Reny's stores.

The Portland SeaDogs and Red Claws have both sponsored collection drives, and IDEXX, UNUM, Anthem and other companies have helped with specific projects.

Indeed, companies and numerous individuals have targeted 3R's with volunteer help.

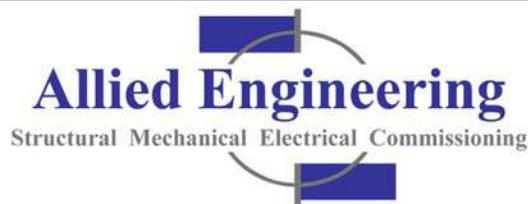
"There are so many people, so many kids who come in to volunteer, it's awesome because of the amount of work they get done and the amount of work we have for them to do," Libby says.

"Special-needs adults and students come in all week long volunteering. Last Monday we had 12 to 15 people from Maine Medical Center. They put away seven or eight pellets of stuff, which was huge. It was their holiday volunteering effort. Last week TD Bank had a group in here on Wednesday and I had a phone call from UNUM asking if they could send 13 people Thursday.

"They get so much done we just can't do ourselves. There's just not enough of us here."

#### Special Projects

While keeping her regular work-



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load running, Libby has stretched beyond the norm.

For eight years, Libby's colleagues have searched for Maine schools that have a high percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch, then target those schools for a backpack program that has touched thousands of students.

"We started with 50 students for Caswell in northern Aroostook County, and it has just blossomed from there," Libby says. This school year 3,150 backpacks were filled. Next year she hopes to surpass 5,000.

All students in the chosen schools receive a backpack stuffed with filler paper, one-subject paper, glue, glue stick, pens, erasers, three-ring binders, pocket folders, markers, crayons, colored pencils, eraser caps, what-have-you.

Most of the backpacks, Libby says, come from Staples, Office Depot and Clever Crazes, a group of people in Cincinnati, Ohio, who formed to help the underprivileged. Some of the Staples backpacks were leather sling bags worth \$80 to \$90 and made for businesspeople but 3R's used them for high school students, while most of the others are made for younger students.

When Libby has fallen short of backpacks, UNUM, School Dudes and Brian Gilbert Associates of Cumberland Center have helped fill the need.

Besides the normal school-supply routes, backpack materials are bought with funds from the Maine Community Fund, Virginia Hodgkins Somer Foundation and from drives sponsored by UNUM, Anthem, IDEXX and a number of smaller

companies throughout July and August.

During a four-week period, a group of 40 to 50 volunteers unpacks, sorts and bundles.

This year, Austin says, UNUM provided 108 employee volunteers on one day and another 80 the next day to fill the backpacks.

"When that's all done and labeled, the principals come here and pick them up," Libby says.

#### What's Next

"There needs to be satellite stores," Libby says. "There is enough stuff thrown away each day to take care of Maine not to mention what is tossed in New Hampshire and Massachusetts. There are a few small sites in Massachusetts, but nothing like what we need."

Beyond that, Libby wants to begin an endowment campaign this winter "so by the time we reach our 20<sup>th</sup> year we can raise \$400,000 to pay off the building."

Besides that, 3R's wants to expand further.

The next dream? Providing all schools with "kids' school toolboxes instead of filled backpacks," little boxes students can color and design, filled with enough supplies to last at least six months. The supplies would never go home to get lost or put through the washer, she says.

#### What Drives You?

Asked what keeps her going, Libby replies soberly, "Prayer. Once you get past the physical exhaustion, the mental fatigue, I love what I do."

"It's good to say, 'I don't want kids to go without. That's true. I was one of seven kids with one parent and I know what that's like. But at the same time this is not the profession I wrote in my high school yearbook. When I stop long enough to think about it, it is something I was asked by God to do. I don't have any other explanation.'"

Libby says prayer has helped numerous times.

"I know the times when we didn't have any money, when our membership money ran out years back, and again two years ago when I did a lot of praying. He always answers."

"Last year we badly needed money and the Town of Gorham decided to pay \$8,000 in April. They've never paid in April."

"One day an insurance company called to tell me the company was making \$1,000 donations in honor of each of three retiring board members."

"I know I'm doing this for a bigger reason than just to make sure kids never have to go without. Some days are rough. Some are amazing."

What of the impact 3R's is making?

"We don't have the time to stop and look at ourselves from outside. From what we hear and what the teachers say, the thank-you cards we receive — if I stopped long enough to pay attention to all that, I'd fall apart."

Marquis-Girard shares her perspective: "Ruth's perseverance has enabled the program to grow. I've experienced it firsthand. It takes one person to make a difference, and she and Tom are doing that." •••

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## Drought to end: Six construction projects OK'd

By Mark Leslie

**A** six-year drought in state-funded school renovation and construction projects in Maine is about to come to an end.

Two projects each in Sanford and Newport and others in Corinth (RSU #64) and Fryeburg (RSU #72) have been approved by the State Board of Education.

Seventy-one schools have applied for funding and Education Commissioner Stephen Bowen submitted the final list, based on a process evaluating needs, determining solutions, designing and building.

Scott Brown of the Department of Education said, "We haven't specifically laid out any schedules or timelines. We'll start at the top of that list and be the most aggressive with them. I expect we'll have something to report this spring or summer.

"The important thing is that there is an indication and commitment that the process will begin."

"At least we've got a stick in the ground," said Superintendent William Braun of RSU #19 in Newport, who had been unsuccessful in the previous three rounds of funding.

Five to seven years may pass before any of the projects is in the ground and open.

These projects will be bonded on a schedule that will keep the state below its \$116 million debt ceiling.

"Though we're on the list and are all very excited, I don't know what the state can confirm money-wise," said Maddy Bassett, business manager at RSU #72 in Fryeburg.

The projects involved could total well over the \$100 million. They include:

- In Sanford — Sanford High School & Regional Technical Center has about 20 portable classrooms, according to Business Manager Michael Kucsma, who added: "We're doing the best we can, trying to build a house but missing a couple tools in the toolbox to deliver some of our programs."

Sanford students are traveling to Noble High School for culinary arts, Marshwood High School for health education, and have no place to go for a proposed public safety offering.

Meanwhile, Sanford's Emerson School for grades 1 to 3 is a turn-of-the-century building with high ceilings, big windows, an antiquated heating system and an ancient plumbing system, Kucsma said.

Mentioning another outdated primary school that is 13<sup>th</sup> on the state's priority list, he said city officials would like to see a new primary school built to house students from both schools.

No costs are available since it has not yet been determined whether Sanford needs can be met by renovation or new con-

struction. But Kucsma said if a new high school and technology center are built, the price could be in the \$75 million to \$85 million range.

- In Newport — Superintendent Braun said both Nokomis Regional High School and Newport Elementary School "are slated for replacement or renovation, depending on which way the state wants to go."

The three-building Newport Elementary, at which students have to walk outdoors to get to the library, cafeteria or gymnasium, is beyond repair, Braun said, and will be "a construction project of one kind or another."

There are questions about the future use of Nokomis High School.

"Depending on population and the board and the direction people want to go, we could re-use the high school for a middle school and build a new high school," Braun said. "And rather than build a new elementary school, we could use our present middle school as an elementary building.

"It all depends on what kind of plan the state's willing to approve."

Nearby Hampden, whose student population is similar both at the high school and in the district, built a new high school to the tune of around \$50 million.

- In Fryeburg, the 1960s-era Charles A. Snow School is simply far too small to squeeze in 200 students, according to Bassett.

"If not a new school, we'll have to do an expensive renovation," she said, adding that officials hope to build a school on the same property as Molly Ockett Middle School.

Her estimate for a new school: \$16 million to \$18 million.

- In Corinth, Superintendent Daniel Higgins said RSU #64 submitted seven projects — one for each of its buildings — but the one that made it to the top of the approved list was Morison Memorial School.

Built in 1951, Morison is a grade 3-5 school for 200 students that has no cafeteria, gymnasium, dedicated music or art rooms, and uses four portable classroom units. It is located close to the high school and middle school, so students walk to their physical education classes.

Since all five elementary schools in RSU #64's five towns need renovation work, it is possible one school would be built to solve all the problems.

But Higgins said any determination like that will have to wait until RSU #64 representatives meet with Brown and other state officials.

"It's more a question of not *if* it will happen but *when*," Higgins said.

Brown could not address the amount of money being

*Continued on page 23*

## Maine hosting big 20th anniversary session of Tri-State ASBO Conference

By Mark Leslie

PORTLAND — From the halls of Congress and the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C. to the Maine state capitol, high-powered speakers will address a memorable 20<sup>th</sup> conference of the Tri-State Association of School Business Officials (ASBO) here, May 16-18.

Among those taking the podium at the Downtown Holiday Inn will be U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Education Massie Ritsch, Senator Olympia Snowe and Maine Commissioner of Education Stephen Bowen.

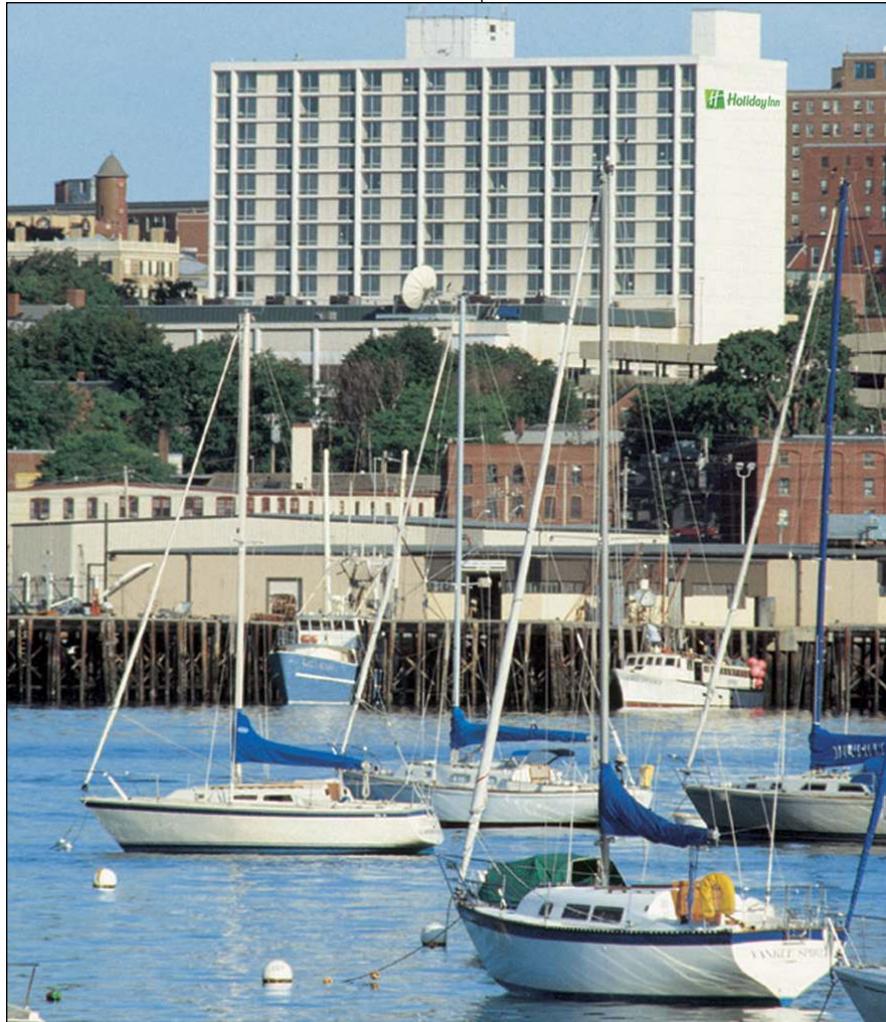
And when the high politicians leave the stage, ASBO members from Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont will be treated to nuts-and-bolts workshops and inside financial advice from a cadre of experts as well as a healthy dose of humor and guidance from nationally known motivational speakers.

“We have a number of impressive speakers,” said Tri-State Committee member Jude Cyr, business manager of the Auburn School Department. “I think we’ll even draw attendees from the Maine Superintendents Association.”

“We’re having a lot of fun organizing it,” said Tri-State Committee Chairman Kris Pottle, business manager at SAD #9 in Farmington, who is planning a special, secret event to celebrate 20 years of the organization’s growth and outreach.

Sixty-three school business officials attended the first Tri-State Conference in 1993, including one from Maine. The numbers now are closer to 200.

“Our task over the last 20 years has increased,” Cyr said. “It started as a one-day event. Since the mid-1990s we’ve been offering it as a three-day



*Downtown Holiday Inn, which looms in the background of Portland Harbor, will host Tri-State ASBO’s 20th anniversary conference.*

conference. It’s an opportunity for professional development, for people to network and share experiences and at the same time have a little fun because people in this line of work don’t get much of that.”

Cyr said the Tri-State Committee has been “listening to past attendees, not necessarily offering more but extending certain components of the workshop conference so they can get more out of a topic. Instead of six concurrent workshops, we’ve lim-

ited it to three and none of them are repeats.”

The conclave is a Wednesday-through-Friday event, with Ritsch, Snowe and Bowen appearing at the opening ceremony Thursday, May 17.

Following an 8:30 a.m. welcoming Thursday, when Portland Superintendent James Morse, Bowen and Snowe address attendees, Ritsch will speak on “The Importance of School Lead-

ership in Fixing No Child Left Behind.”

The Deputy Assistant Secretary for External Affairs & Outreach, Ritsch is the former communications director at the Center for Responsive Politics and vice president at Sugarman Communications Group.

The Princeton University graduate has more than a decade of government, nonprofit and private-sector experience in media relations, public affairs, issues management and policy development.

Snowe has served Maine in Washington since 1978 when she was elected to represent the state’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Congressional District. In 1994 she was elected to fill the Senate seat vacated by the retiring George Mitchell. Since then, her re-elections have been by wide margins.

Before joining the DOE last year, Bowen directed the Center for Education Excellence at the Maine Heritage Policy Center, a Portland-based public policy think tank. In his 3-1/2 years there, he researched and wrote dozens of policy briefs on issues from school consolidation and school funding to online learning and charter schools. He authored numerous op-eds, columns, and blog posts on education-related issues, and regularly presented the findings of his research to policymakers and the public.

A social studies teacher in Virginia middle and high schools for 10 years, he taught in Camden before joining the Center. In 2002, he was elected to the first of two terms in the Maine House of Representatives, representing Camden and Rock-

port. During that time, he served on the Marine Resources and State and Local Government committees, and the Select Committee on Regionalization and Community Cooperation. He served on the state Legislature’s Appropriations Committee during his second term in the House.

#### **A Nitty-Gritty Wednesday**

A wide range of critical topics will fill a day of workshops on Wednesday, May 16.

- *Federal Guidelines on School Nutrition* will be addressed by Walter Beesley, Cheri White and Laurie Colgan, the heads of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont’s DOE Child Nutrition Programs, respectively.

- Labor relations consultant Roger P. Kelley and attorney Matthew H. Upton, both with the Portland law firm Drummond Woodsum, will speak on *Bargaining During Troubled Times and Its Impact on Settlements*.

Upton has been representing schools, cities and towns for nearly 20 years, specializing in employment matters, labor relations, general school law, and municipal law. He has successfully defended cases in the U.S. First Circuit Court of Appeals, U.S. District Court for New Hampshire, New Hampshire Supreme Court, New Hampshire Superior Court and the New Hampshire Department of Education.

Kelley is a non-lawyer labor relations/conflict management consultant and has served as co-chair of Drummond Woodsum’s public sector labor and employment group. He



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Jeff Havens' motivational speech on May 18 promises to keep the audience alert and inspired.

has represented many public and private sector clients in negotiations, grievances, arbitrations, and labor board proceedings.

- In the talk *Cloud Computing, Productivity 2.0 and Taming Technology To Manage Your Life*, David Trask will explore and use different ideas, programs, applications, web sites and more to help people become more informed about designing their ideal workflow and help manage time.

The technology director and teacher at Vassalboro Community School, Trask was the 2007 Maine Technology Educator of the Year and the 2008 recipient of the National Center for Open Source in Education Award. He has presented at conferences nationally and internationally, touting the message of effective use of technology in the classroom, office, and our daily lives.

- Jon Sorenson, managing partner for Competitive Energy Services, an independent energy-services firm, will steer listeners through the complex deregulated energy markets in his talk, *Energy Markets, Procurement, Green and Sustainability Strategic Planning*.

Sorenson leads a team that manages more energy than any other third-party entity in New England. He serves on the

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board of directors of the New England Canadian Business Council and co-chairs the NECBC Energy Conference.

- Peter Robinson of the Auburn School Department will address *Ipad Applications: All You Wanted To Know & More*.

- Connie Hyslop will speak on three topics — *Excel: Creating Charts and Working with Macros*; *Using Microsoft Excel Lists and Databases*; and *An Overview of Microsoft Office 2007/2010*.

Hyslop is president of Hyslop and Associates and has been teaching computer applications for more than 25 years. She operates a computer training school in Laconia, N.H.

- The team of Steve Plodzick and Sheryl Pratt will speak twice — on *Is It Audit Time Already?* and *They Want To Do What with Student Activities?*

Plodzick is a founder of Plodzick & Sanderson, which audits more than 150 New Hampshire governmental entities annually. A director and officer of the firm, he has served on a number of committees to advance governmental accounting in New Hampshire.

Pratt has been a governmental auditor with Plodzick & Sanderson since 1991 and a director and officer of the firm since 2005. She has performed audits for school districts, cities, federal grant programs and other entities.

Thursday's late-morning session will feature Eric R. Herlan of Drummond Woodsum speaking on *Special Education Regulations*, while in the early-afternoon Daniel J. Rose of Drummond Woodsum will address *Social Networking: Privacy and Developments in Employment Law: What You Don't Know Can Hurt You*.

Since joining Drummond Woodsum in 1988, Herlan's practice has concentrated in school law with an emphasis on special education issues. He has represented school districts in Maine and New Hampshire in special education hearings and related court litigation.

Rose is co-chair of Drummond Woodsum's Labor and Employment Group and was listed in the 2009 *Best Lawyers in America* for employment and labor law.

The exhibit hall will then open to vendor exhibits from 2:30 to 5 p.m., with a reception and cash bar.

That evening, Arizona ASBO President Brian Mee will speak at the annual banquet.

The curtain will close on the evening with comedian Birdie Googins, "the Marden's lady," lightening up the room.

#### Ending with a Blast

Expecting to hold colleagues to the final horn, the Tri-State Committee is bringing in Dwayna Covey at 9 a.m. Friday, followed by Jeff Havens at 10:30.

Covey holds a master's degree in education and is a graduate of the Institute for Professional Empowerment Coaching and a member of the International Coach Federation. She has spent the last several years helping youth and adults tap into their passion and potential, bringing out their inner "hokey" power to break through fears and limiting beliefs. Her private coaching practice, New Season Coaching, is based in Orange County, Vt.

A graduate of Vanderbilt University, Havens combines his

passions for teaching and comedy into entertaining presentations. Besides speaking to corporations and organizations around the country, he has authored *Uncrapify Your Life!*, *How To Get Fired!*, *Unleash Your Inner Tyrant!* and *Becoming a More Annoy-*

## Draught to end

*Continued from page 17*

released for the projects, saying, “We need to work with those districts concerning their needs, the possible solutions, and what those solutions would cost. We’ll plug that information into the debt ceiling.”

But while no cost estimates have been made for the six approved projects, the DOE believes it can address those needs without increasing annual payments for construction debt beyond what is already committed.

Brown said that with the new LePage Administration, the DOE will revise the process in some ways before initiating timelines. “We want to sharpen that up and be prepared before taking the final proposals to the state School Board,” he said.

According to a DOE release, over the past three construction cycles, approximately two-thirds of the projects have been additions and renovations; one-third have required construction of new buildings. Sometimes age, condition, safety and other concerns make renovation impractical and/or prohibitively expensive. Sometimes the solution for a school on the Approved Projects List may address the needs of a school with a lower placement on the priority list.

“For example,” the release explained, “a new elementary school in one town might also solve a smaller, yet still significant need in a neighboring community.”

As the nature and anticipated costs of the first six projects become clearer, the DOE intends to then assess when and if additional projects on the list can be approved to move forward.

Information about the DOE’s school construction program can be found at: <http://www.maine.gov/education/const/mcip/home.htm>. — •••

*ing You!*

Havens is a regular guest on Fox Business News and has been featured in *Business Week*, the *Wall Street Journal*, CNBC, AOL, and dozens of other regional and national media outlets.

### Entertainment Value

Besides learning and networking, the conference is also spiced up this year with a spouses’ program that includes a Duck Boat Excursion and a visit to Portland’s Victorian Mansion, and performances by the Portsmouth Brass Ensemble, the Mt.

Ararat Jazz Band and the Mt. Blue Middle School Show Choir.

After the conference, a golf tournament will be held Friday afternoon and Tri-State ASBO is reserving the picnic area at Portland’s Hadlock Field for members and guests to watch a Portland SeaDogs AA baseball game.

“We wanted to do something special for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary and I think we’ve put together a package to draw a lot of people here,” Cyr said. “There are a lot of options enticing and still informative.” •••



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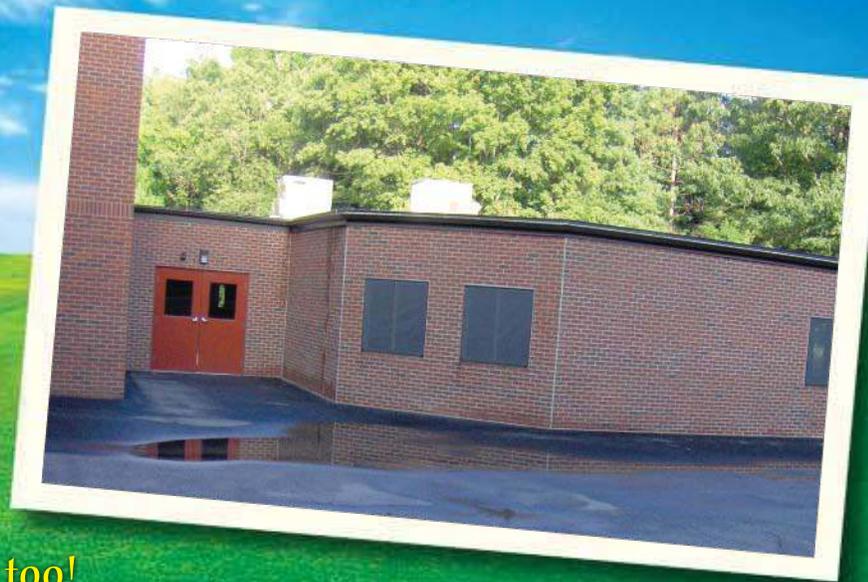
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