



The Midcoast Inquirer

SPRING 2026

The Newsletter of Midcoast Senior College

The Art of Commemorating a Beloved Bridge



Artworks chosen for the Frank J. Wood Bridge exhibit showed impressive diversity in styles, media, and messaging.

Human beings have long tapped into the power of art to express who they are, catalyze conversations about important topics, drive change, and build community. And throughout the ages, artists themselves have drawn inspiration from a wide array of sources—from nature to significant events to dreams, and everything in between.

Such has been the case with the recent replacing of the Frank J. Wood Bridge, which spans the Androscoggin River and connects Brunswick and Topsham. Opened in 1932, the three-span, through-truss bridge was named after a Topsham farmer who successfully petitioned the

state to move the structure's location slightly upstream from the preceding bridge (which was deemed unsafe). Wood's proposed alternative alignment eliminated a number of problems inherent in the older bridge, including a dangerous curve on the Topsham side.

Fast-forward to 2015 and then 2021: Inspections revealed speedier-than-expected deterioration in the bridge's deck and superstructure, causing the Maine Department of Transportation (DOT) to steadily reduce the structural load on the bridge. The MaineDOT proposed removing the bridge and building a new

one slightly upstream, closer to Pejepscot Falls. The new structure would have bicycle lanes, pedestrian sidewalks, a viewing area, and public parks on both sides.

The proposal sparked controversy, including a lawsuit filed by the Friends of the Frank J. Wood Bridge, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Historic Bridge Foundation. Plaintiffs argued that the bridge was eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and that removing it would negatively affect a nearby fish ladder. However, the MaineDOT ultimately received approval to

Continued on page 2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

The Art of Commemorating a Beloved Bridge	1
President's Letter	2
Board News	3
Mark Your Calendar	4
Senior Scribblers	4
Inquiry in Action	5
Reader's Corner	6
Faculty Focus	7
Sponsor Spotlight	8
MSC Thanks Our Volunteers and Sponsors	8

(MSC) is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization founded in 2000.

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The Art of Commemorating a Beloved Bridge

Continued from page 1

replace the bridge. The new structure was completed and opened to two-way traffic in December 2025—becoming the eighth bridge to occupy the location since 1796.

The decision to remove and replace the aging bridge, which many saw as an iconic and beloved symbol of the Brunswick/Topsham connection, sparked intense emotion within many people living in the area. Perhaps this isn't surprising: A bridge can serve as a metaphor for connection in many different contexts—for example, linking a geographical location's past and future, and connecting communities across time and space.

As a way to honor the bridge's legacy and the surrounding area, Brunswick Public Art (BPA) offered to host a non-juried art exhibition at Curtis Memorial Library featuring local artists' works based on this theme. "Many people felt that their voices weren't heard in the controversy over replacing the old bridge," explains Mike Branca, a BPA board member. The exhibit aimed to create a forum where community members could express

their feelings about the bridge through art. BPA invited artists to submit entries in any media. Submissions could be abstract interpretations, works addressing the bridge site's history and/or future, and works expressing artists' emotions regarding the old bridge and their experiences with and perceptions of it.

BPA members had distributed flyers explaining the exhibit's plan and purpose in downtown areas. "People loved the idea," Branca says, and artists responded with enthusiasm. The exhibit, which ran during January 2026, featured roughly 45 different artists (one of them just seven years old) and 50-plus works.

Has the exhibit fulfilled its purpose? Decidedly yes. As Branca puts it, "Art promotes healing, conversation, and community, and the exhibit gave people an opportunity to see how important art can be in our lives." Ultimately, Branca explains, "painful emotions associated with the removal of the old bridge were channeled into the creating of art, and into a celebration of the old bridge, the falls,

and the surrounding area."

There's more to come. BPA is planning an even bigger project: a sculpture that will use repurposed steel from the old bridge, to be placed near the entrance to the new bridge. BPA received initial conceptual visions, and recently announced that Laura Haddad, who graduated from Bowdoin College, has been selected to design the new sculpture. The sculpture will be constructed by Tom Drugan, who earned his master's degree in landscape architecture from Harvard University. The project will be fully funded through private fundraising by BPA. Upon completion, the sculpture will become a permanent public asset owned by the town of Brunswick.

The flourishing of artistic activity centered on bidding farewell to an iconic structure in our community demonstrates the deeply felt, human need for art. Perhaps even more essential, it speaks to art's power to bring people together in shared experience. ■

Lauren Keller Johnson

President's Letter

Dear MSC Members,

This is my final letter as president of Midcoast Senior College, as the esteemed Susan Goran will step into the role on July 1. I have enjoyed serving as vice president and then president, and have one more year of service on MSC's board.

The most heartening thing I have learned over the past five years is that the MSC learning community is impressively healthy. By all measures, we have grown and become stronger: Membership has increased, as has the number of faculty and courses. We are also privileged to have a strong group of volunteers, committees, and board members.

Having just celebrated our 25th Anniversary, we are poised to experience a fantastic future. Our finances are stable, and many of you have committed to serving as ambassadors—letting others know about MSC and why you enjoy our offerings. All of this has strengthened us and fueled our growth, and I encourage you to continue to

recruit members, instructors, volunteers, and committee members. This is how we thrive.

Of course, I must also mention the importance of monetary contributions to MSC. Our board tries to maintain affordable membership and tuition fees. Together, however, these cover only 50 percent of our budget. Our sponsors provide essential additional support, but it's our Annual Fund that keeps us afloat—contributions to the fund account for about 35 percent of our yearly budget.

Together, we all keep the light of lifelong learning shining on Maine's Midcoast. I look forward to passing the torch on. And as a lifelong learner myself, I eagerly anticipate continuing to take as well as teach courses at MSC.

Thanks for all you do for MSC,

Bruce Hauptli
President, MSC



Our Mission

The Midcoast Inquirer articulates the academic spirit and educational mission of Midcoast Senior College. To that end, we announce course offerings, lectures, and special events, and provide a literary forum of essays, reviews, interviews, and commentaries written by faculty and students.

Join a Committee!

Participating in a committee is a great way to meet other members of the MSC community, contribute your skills and energy, and make MSC the best it can be! To learn more about our committees, select the Support button at <https://midcoastseniorcollege.org/>, and scroll down to Volunteer.

MSC Board of Directors

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Development: Bruce Hauptli
Events: Freda Bernotavicz
Executive: Bruce Hauptli
Finance: Kevin Hart
Nominating: Bruce Hauptli

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Summer and Winter Wisdom: David Clark (chair), Craig Snapp, Reg Elwell, Stu Gillespie, Mort Achter
Newsletter: Lauren Keller Johnson (editor)

Ad-hoc Committees

Technology working group: Clare Durst, Judy Fiterman, Harry Hopcroft, Bob Jordan, Craig Snapp, David Vogt
Administrative: William VanderWolk, Janet Kehl, Laurie Spurr, Ellen Whiting
25th Anniversary: Freda Bernotavicz, Janet Kehl, Nora Bishop (chairs), Susan Goran, Bruce Hauptli, Donna Marshall, Bonnie Studdiford

Employees

Executive Director: Donna Marshall

Board News

Midcoast Senior College thanks outgoing president Bruce Hauptli for his service...

MSC members and faculty extend our deepest thanks to Bruce for giving so generously of his time, dedication, and skills during his time as president, and as vice president before that. His passion for supporting lifelong learning and for helping Midcoast Senior College excel in fulfilling its mission has been unwavering. Under his leadership, MSC has continued to thrive, and has enjoyed impressive growth in vital metrics such as membership, sponsorship support, and volunteering. We're grateful to know that Bruce will continue to contribute to and participate in this very special community! ■

...And welcomes incoming president Susan Goran

Incoming MSC president Susan Flewelling Goran brings a rich and diverse background to the role, along with many years of dedication to ongoing learning and a deep love for Maine. In case you don't already know Susan, she enjoyed a typical 'county' childhood as one of three children raised in a town of just 230 residents in Aroostook County, Maine. As a child, she picked potatoes in the fall and enjoyed summers at the family camp on Madawaska Lake. After graduation, Susan traveled to Boston ("almost like going to a foreign country") to attend NE Baptist School of Nursing. She fell in love with the city and enhanced her knowledge and clinical ability for the next eight years while working with critically ill patients and their families. One morning while she was commuting on the notorious Southeast Expressway, a trailer truck rolled over onto her car while she was exiting the highway. When she was able to return to work, Susan discovered she was no longer enamored with big-city life, and she moved to Portland, Maine.

For the next 45 years, Susan thoroughly enjoyed a career rich in opportunities for ongoing learning while expanding her professional contributions in the field of nursing. She worked in a variety of roles, including manager, clinical specialist, educator, and director. Each role offered chances to improve the patient/family experience for individuals experiencing critical illnesses. She earned her graduate degree in Nursing, MSN, at the University of Southern Maine in 1993. She also became active in the American Association of Critical Care Nurses, including serving on the AACN's National Board of Directors.

Susan has published numerous manuscripts in peer-reviewed journals, nine book chapters, and the textbook *Telehealth: Care Beyond Touch*. A popular speaker on the regional, national, and international stages, she relishes the challenge of making complex physiological concepts understandable to promote improved patient outcomes.

Susan retired in December 2017 and became an adjunct faculty member for the School of Nursing at the University of New England. During that period, she taught her first course for Midcoast Senior College, "Advance Directives." She loves teaching adults who are eager to learn and willing to share their own experiences. Since then, she has taught a variety of additional courses and has served on MSC's Board of Directors.

Susan remains committed to championing learning among older adults and providing a safe and enjoyable social environment to enhance well-being. She lives in Freeport with John, her husband of 39 years, and near her sister and 95-year-old mother. She looks forward to serving as President of MSC for the next two years! ■



We're Moving!

Midcoast Senior College is moving to 14 Middle Street, in Brunswick—a new space that will include offices as well as an area for small classes, board and committee meetings, and workshops. The space is next to our existing office and is currently being remodeled. Stay tuned for more details!



Mark Your Calendar

MSC Spring Term II

MSC's Spring Term I is well under way. Spring Term II starts the week of April 6, and registration for classes began in early March. Learn more about each course and find registration information at www.midcoastseniorcollege.org. You may also call our office at (207) 725-4900.

Class	Faculty
Buddhism in the U.S.	Steven Piker
Dorothy L. Sayers: The Holy Mysteries	Alden Flanders
King Lear	George Young
MSC Singers: A Spring Fling	Stuart Gillespie
Brain Repair	Don Stein
Humor: Not Just a Laughing Matter	Susan F. Goran
How Revolutionary Was the Revolution?	Scott Andrews
The Intelligence of Plants	Barbara Snapp
Writerly Brunswick	Larissa Picard
The Romantic Era	Morton Achter, John Haile, Michele Lettiere, David Spurr, Laurie Spurr, and William VanderWolk (a continuation of a course that began in Spring Term I; registration has closed)

Summer Wisdom

Free and open to the public! Tuesdays at 1:00-2:15 P.M., at Brunswick United Methodist Church, 320 Church Road, in Brunswick. This new location offers more parking, more seating, and excellent acoustics. Sessions will also be recorded! All events are in-person. Seating is limited; reservations not accepted. You may arrive up to 15 minutes before the program begins to get your seat.

Date	Presentation	Presenter
May 5	Foreign Policy (FARO) — Or, Larry's Laws of Unintended Consequences in International Interventions	Ambassador Larry Butler
May 12	Mary Heuston: A Black Freedom Story in Bath-Brunswick Maine 1850	Dr. Eben Miller
May 19	All Stories Lead Back to Lewiston: Personal Narrative Through Storytelling	Cheryl Hamilton
May 26	The New, New Imperial Presidency	Dr. Andrew Rudalevige

MSC thanks Brunswick United Methodist Church for welcoming us and the larger community to use this space. And we greatly appreciate Thornton Oaks Retirement Community's support of Summer Wisdom.



Additional Event

To learn more, visit www.midcoastseniorcollege.org.

Date	Event	Location
June 11, 12 p.m.	MSC Members' Annual Meeting and Luncheon	Moulton Union, 6 Campus Road S, Brunswick



Senior Scribblers: Aspiring Writers Wanted

Do you enjoy inventing stories, playing with language, and trying out new writing techniques? If so, consider joining MSC's thriving Senior Scribblers writing group. A prompt is suggested for each assignment, and group members draft stories of up to 1,000 words. Prompts might range anywhere from "Write a story that consists only of dialogue" to quirky phrases (such as "garden party," "computer glitch," and "revenge"). Writers read their stories aloud during class. Writer typically draft their own unique responses to the prompts—which adds to the fun and helps group members learn from each other. You may visit the group to see how it works, but ultimately you must be a member of a senior college. To learn more, contact Harry at harry.techmanage@gmail.com or (207) 841-8324.



Inquiry in Action

The MSC Community Discusses Ken Burns' Documentary: *The American Revolution*

The year 2026 is the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. And it's an opportunity for conversations throughout the country about why the colonists separated from England and established the government they did. Through a connection with Lawyers Defending American Democracy (LDAD), Midcoast Senior College used the Ken Burns series *The American Revolution* as a starting point for conversations in the local community about what the Revolution meant, whether the people really do rule, and whether the law is still king. All MSC members were encouraged to watch the series when it aired on MPBN during the week of November 16.

The series vividly depicted the war's cruelty and costs and the roles played not just by soldiers, generals, and militia but also by backwoods pioneers, women, Native Americans, and enslaved people. As one historian in the series stated, these disparate groups were brought together by a sense of possibility worth fighting for.

MSC then organized a panel discussion to explore the issues in greater depth. More than 50 people attended the event on that chilly December afternoon. The panel comprised historians and lawyers and was chaired by Kelly Matzen, a retired attorney. (See biographies below.) Each panel member gave a short presentation related to the series. Topics included the Revolution's British and colonial antecedents; the transition from colonial resistance to unpopular acts of Parliament to a struggle for full independence; the war's effect on the homefront and the domestic production and personnel needed to support the conflict; and, finally, the lofty aspirations of the Declaration of Independence through to the writing of the Constitution and the ways in which those aspirations have fared over the years.

Audience members were very engaged,

raised a lot of thought-provoking questions, and respectfully explored some uncomfortable issues. The panel discussion and PBS series enabled participants to view current events through the lens of the Founders' aspirations. Similar panel discussions are being planned through chapters of Indivisible in Midcoast Maine, providing a forum to learn about the roots of democracy at an especially critical time in our nation's history.

Meet the panel members

Kelly Matzen (panel chair) is retired, having practiced with the Auburn firm of Trafton, Matzen, Belleau, & Frenette. He has served on many municipal and state boards, including the Auburn City Council (as Councilor at Large), the Maine State Housing Authority, the Finance Authority of Maine (as Chair), and as Founding Chair of the Maine Housing Investment Fund (now the Northern New England Housing Investment Fund). He has also served on MSC's board.

Niles Schore practiced poverty law for 35 years, mostly in Pennsylvania, where he founded the Elderly Law Project in Philadelphia and was staff lawyer for a statewide health law project. He also practiced with a poverty law program in Georgia. In the Pennsylvania Senate, he was privileged to work for Senator Roxanne Jones and was also the Democratic Counsel and Executive Director for the Public Health & Welfare Committee. Before retiring to Maine in 2010, he spent seven years as a senior manager and a policy official in the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare.

Doug Bennett is a graduate of Haverford College (BA) and Yale University (PhD). He taught political philosophy and public policy at Temple University, and at Haverford, Swarthmore,

and Reed Colleges. Before retiring in 2011, Doug served as a professor of politics and president of Earlham College for 14 years.

Kevin Hart has been a long-time student and observer of the Supreme Court, beginning as an undergraduate political science major at Allegheny College. He covered the U.S. Supreme Court as a newsletter journalist and taught Health Law for five years in the Master of Public Health program at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry. With a law degree from Syracuse University, he is now a retired lawyer, having been admitted to the bars in Pennsylvania, New York, and the U.S. Supreme Court. Kevin is a member of the MSC Board.

Strother Roberts is an Associate Professor of History at Bowdoin College. He is a historian of the environment and economy of early modern North America whose research focuses on the indigenous and Euro-American communities of New England, from the age of encounters through the era of the Early Republic. He is author of *Colonial Ecology, Atlantic Economy: Transforming Nature in Early New England*. He had already participated in a Maine Public program on the PBS series. ■

Freda Bertonavicz and Kelly Matzen

Were you unable to attend the panel discussion on *The American Revolution*? If so, fear not—you can view the recording of the event, as well as listen to the podcast version of the discussion, on MSC's website: <https://midcoastseniorcollege.org/project/the-american-revolution-msc-panel-and-discussion-of-ken-burns-documentary-series/>. The webpage also offers PBS discussion questions and LDAD resource materials, for those seeking even more details.

Reader's Corner

The More Things Change...

I became interested in history the day my father brought me to the history shelves of the children's section in our local library, where he strongly suggested I should find my next read. So along with literature, I began a life-long reading of history. I often noticed how each complements the other, especially how history explains the reality of past being prologue, how it points out our frequent failures to learn its lessons, and how some ensuing historical tragedies later become historical farces where monsters are replaced by buffoons.

This Christmas I received Stephen Greenblatt's *Dark Renaissance*, a discussion of the life and times of Christopher Marlowe, contemporary of William Shakespeare. This book is a distant mirror of our times. It has everything: the class struggles, the political tensions between diametrically opposed political/religious camps, the vicious repression of those with unorthodox political and religious views, and even the internecine warfare of spy vs spy.

Son of a Canterbury cobbler, Marlowe grew up among Huguenot refugees. From them he must have heard stories of their horrific persecutions, particularly the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Being singled out for his quick intelligence, he moved from grammar school to Cambridge. There he received its classical education, steeped especially in the rigors of Latin and Greek grammar. Translating English into Latin, and taking the Latin translation into Greek, were typical exercises designed to sharpen students' intellectual skills.

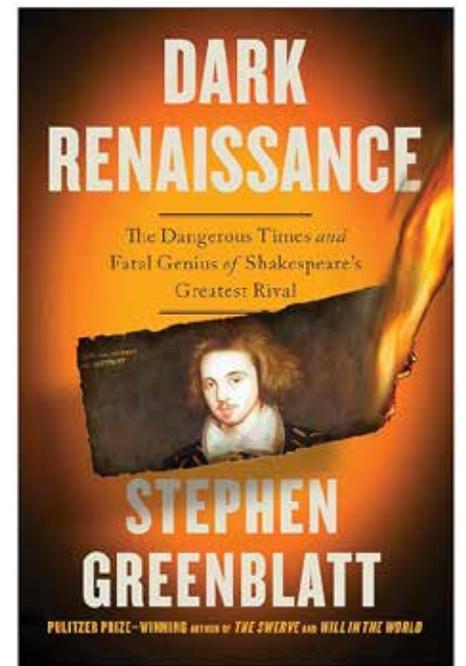
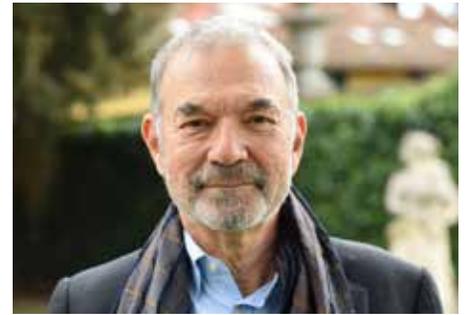
Marlowe also read—books that weren't exactly on the Scholastic hit parade, thanks to the reforms of Erasmus, while the latter was living at Cambridge. Scholars were awakening to Aristotle, Plato, Hesiod,

Ovid, and other great “pagans.” Some were (secretly) making textual examinations of the Bible. Undergraduates were reading Machiavelli's *The Prince*, officially banned. These endeavors could prove life-threatening if reported to the authorities. In that world, reading or writing documents pondering the divinity of Jesus might get one put into a torture chamber, as happened to playwright Thomas Kyd, author of *The Spanish Tragedy*, a precursor to *Hamlet*. Greenblatt sums up this political landscape with the comment that Elizabethan England was much like today's North Korea.

Marlowe earned his Master's degree (ordered by the Privy Council for service to her Majesty!) even though he did not reside long enough at Cambridge. Eager to become a player among players, he embarked on a career infiltrating Roman Catholic groups bent on assassinating Elizabeth and restoring a Catholic to her throne.

Was Marlowe a double or even triple agent—spying on Catholics, or reporting on religious dissidents to Catholics, or doing both and reporting back to his original spymasters? Dangerous games, dangerous times: He was mortally stabbed at a safehouse where his possible debriefing went awry.

But before his mysterious death, Marlowe the spy was also Marlowe the playwright. He left legacies that examine men of lowly origins lusting for power: *The Jew of Malta*, *Tamburlaine (Parts I and II)*, and *Doctor Faustus*. In literature, he could explore and present unorthodox ideas—as long as he placed them in settings and in characters living somewhere else, as in central Asia, Malta, or a German city. Fiction, where the truth can be discussed, has long been the place where dissent can



Author, Stephen Greenblatt (top); Cover of “Dark Renaissance” (bottom)

be expressed, especially if disguised as entertainment.

However, Marlowe paid a price—whether for his art or his skulduggery. His murder satisfied someone important.

I highly recommend this very readable account of the life and times of Shakespeare's fellow playwright. Though we are living in the 21st century, we might see connections between Marlowe's era and ours. Most important: We could draw on those connections and avoid repeating tragedies that threaten to define our own times. ■

Leona Dufour



Faculty Focus

Meet Darby Dyar

The Midcoast Inquirer met with Darby Dyar, who taught the course “All About Mars” for MSC’s Fall Term II. Darby is an Emeritus Professor of Astronomy at Mount Holyoke College and is currently employed by NASA to work on meteorites, lunar samples, and a mission to Venus. I spoke with Darby to learn more about her work and teaching experiences. Below are excerpts from our conversation, edited for length and clarity.

Lauren Keller Johnson



Lauren Keller Johnson: When did you first become interested in Mars, and what piqued that interest?

Darby Dyar: It was a report that came out in the 1990s saying that microbial life had been found in a meteorite that had come from Mars. I’m a geologist by training, so the report caught my attention. I’d been working on lunar samples since 1985, when I completed my PhD, but once I started working on Martian meteorites, it ultimately led to my building a part of *Curiosity*, the rover that’s exploring the Gale crater and Mount Sharp on Mars.

LKJ: So you’ve continued using your geology training.

DD: Yes—I’d really wanted to be a field geologist, but I ended up doing geology related to other planets.

LKJ: What do you find most intriguing about Mars, and why does the planet hold such fascination in our culture?

DD: I’m very interested in its chemistry and mineralogy. Among other peculiarities, Mars has more sulfur-rich minerals than Earth does. As far as the larger culture, I think that Mars appeals to humans’ instincts to continually expand our ecological niche, so we’ve looked to relatively nearby bodies, like the moon and Mars, for that possibility. If we ever have to evacuate Earth for some reason—maybe an asteroid collision threatening our planet—we imagine possibly heading to Mars.

Also, the meteorite got people thinking that Mars might be one place in our solar system that could support life. That idea appeals because we want to think we’re not



Curiosity is exploring Gale Crater and Mount Sharp on Mars as part of NASA’s Mars Science Laboratory mission. Launched in 2011 and landed the following year, the car-sized rover continues to operate more than a decade after its original two-year mission.

alone in the universe. But it turned out that there were no microbes in that meteorite. In reality, the environment on Mars isn’t conducive to supporting human life, though we’re still looking. Scientists now think that Venus is the most likely place for life to have developed near Earth!

LKJ: What inspired you to offer your course on Mars for Midcoast Senior College?

DD: I’d relocated to the area about a year before, and Jaki Ellis, who’s a friend on my rowing team and an MSC Curriculum Committee member, kept hinting that I should offer a course. As a newcomer to the area, I thought that teaching for MSC would be a way to get involved in the community.

LKJ: What did you find most enjoyable about teaching the course?

DD: The students had very diverse backgrounds in biology, law, medicine,

other sciences, and engineering, and some had grandkids who were fascinated by Mars. Their intellectual curiosity was awesome! Only a few had any background in the course content, but no one was afraid to ask questions. That’s a great situation for any teacher!

LKJ: Will you teach again for MSC?

DD: I’d like to do a course about Venus, one about the moon, and other places in our solar system – it’s really up to what students would like. I’m also thinking about one on the geology of Midcoast Maine—a little more terrestrial geology. Years ago, I was very involved in rock mapping for the Sebago area.

LKJ: Great news that we can look forward to more courses from you! Thank you, Darby, for taking the time to speak with me.

DD: Thank you! ■

Sponsor Spotlight

Now You're Cooking

Like Midcoast Senior College, Now You're Cooking has also been celebrating its 25th anniversary. Located on Front Street in Bath, the store provides quality cookware, gadgets, wine, gourmet foods, and cooking classes. Mike and Betsy Fear launched the business in 2000, and figured they'd try it for 10 years. But they decided to keep going when 2010 rolled around. "I just kept having too much fun," says Mike.



Visitors discover how to make ravioli at Now You're Cooking...



... and learn how to eat a lobster.

Mike retired in April 2025, and the business is now run by Betsy and Mike's daughter-in-law, Heather Fear, and long-time business manager Vanessa Mayer. Heather and Vanessa were added as co-owners in February 2023 and now run the business full time. As Vanessa puts it, "We want 'Now You're Cooking' to be a place where our community is proud and excited to shop, and where customers who are making their first visit can't wait to tell their friends." ■

MSC Thanks Our Volunteers...

Volunteers play a vital role in enabling MSC to operate—and we're profoundly grateful for your help! If you haven't volunteered for MSC before and you think you might like to give it a try, contact us at info@midcoastseniorcollege.org or (207) 725-4900 for more information. There's a wealth of opportunities to make a difference through volunteering!

...And Our Sponsors

As a non-profit organization, Midcoast Senior College also relies on the support of its members, donors, and community sponsors to help fund its operating costs. Thanks to them, we can continue delivering the courses and learning opportunities so crucial to our community. Sponsorship represents a significant portion of our budget, and we're deeply grateful for the ongoing support from our sponsors.

Please contact us at msoffice@midcoastseniorcollege.org to join us as a sponsor.

