

Fall 2015

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Dr. Susan J. Hunter**

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UMaine leadership

Dr. Susan J. Hunter reflects on the role of the flagship university today, her presidency, and the importance of public higher education to change lives.



Dr. Susan J. Hunter '50H is in her second year as the 20th and first woman president of the University of Maine. She has been a member of the UMaine community for nearly three decades, and is a staunch believer in the power of education to change lives. Her longevity on campus makes her intimately familiar with UMaine and the state it serves. This fall, President Hunter is leading the state's flagship university into the fifth year of its strategic plan and the second half of its 150th anniversary celebration. *MAINE Alumni Magazine* asked President Hunter to share her vision for UMaine, the importance of public higher education, and the role of the state's land and sea grant university today.



The annual President's Dinner on the Mall is a traditional event of Fall Welcome Weekend.

At a UMaine Signature Programs event in Belfast, Maine this summer, more than 100 alumni and friends gathered to celebrate the university's innovation and economic development advances in the College of Engineering, and in advanced materials for energy and infrastructure. Among those attending were Bob Davee '59 (far left) and his grandson, Jake, a UMaine civil engineering major.

Photos courtesy of the University of Maine; photo bottom left by Bernie Littlefield, BEL Portraits

What is your vision for UMaine?

We are Maine's land and sea grant institution, which means we have a responsibility to be affordable and accessible, and a mission to provide education, research and economic development, and community service statewide. We engage in teaching that engages students by utilizing current practice, grounded in how people best learn — a process that results in growth of both student and teacher. We conduct research and scholarship that are critically evaluated within the disciplines and, in many fields, attract substantial external funding. UMaine conducts outreach that is connected to and supportive of the people and enterprises of the state of Maine. In doing all this, we insert students in real-world enterprises to inform their academic work and provide incredible growth opportunities.

I believe that, in many cases, it is in those engagement opportunities that passion is discovered. This is a wonderful university and we all have critical roles to play to contribute to the future of Maine.

What is UMaine's role in Maine's economic development?

At the University of Maine, we partner with enterprises across the state so it can reach its potential, and we've been doing that from the very beginning. A commitment that's part of our DNA as a land grant university.

In 1866, the year after the founding of Maine's land grant, Gov. Joshua Chamberlain told the legislature in his annual address that the university would — by design — benefit the state's prosperity, and would educate

President Hunter in a weekly Cabinet meeting with UMaine Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Jeffrey Hecker '86 Ph.D., '44H and other members of the administration.

Members of the UMaine community regularly see President Hunter on campus, whether walking the Mall with colleagues, such as Dean of Libraries Joyce Rumery, or in the New Balance Student Recreation Center, where she works with a personal trainer, UMaine student Sergey Terrio. Whether on campus or elsewhere in Maine, President Hunter is widely recognized, with people often stopping her for a chat or to ask a question. Or take a selfie, as UMaine senior David Patrick did. One of President Hunter's favorite campus activities is walking through the Memorial Union. There, she says, "I get the pulse of campus. People are always saying 'hello', and I'm available to anyone. I think that's very important. People stop to talk and ask me questions. It's grounding for me and important accessibility for members of the UMaine community."

*Most-asked question?
"People ask if I like being President, and that's a resounding 'Yes.'"*



Maine's youths "not out of their proper sphere, but into it." UMaine's economic development work started before the turn of the century with "scientific agricultural investigations," and moved into Maine's other natural resources-based industries, including forestry, pulp and paper, and fisheries.

We continue to support those industries vital to Maine's identity and so many more. Today, UMaine's leadership role in the state's economic development focuses on how we can best help prepare Maine for the 21st century. In partnership with entrepreneurs, businesses, and industries statewide, we facilitate technology transfer, patenting, licensing, and commercialization activities. The University of Maine is constantly innovating to turn knowledge into solutions because, as it has for 150 years, the state turns to us for answers.

What are some of the achievements of UMaine's five-year strategic plan?

UMaine's strategic plan is our operating scheme, our compass. And while work continues in this, year five, we have already realized a number of achievements. A major goal was to define UMaine's principal strengths — Signature and Emerging Areas of Excellence. We identified the areas of signature distinction underlying UMaine's leadership in meeting the state's greatest needs — forestry and the environment, marine sciences, STEM education, climate change, advanced materials for infrastructure and energy, and the colleges of engineering and honors.

Paying particular attention to these areas of distinction enhances the national competitiveness of the university, and

will inform institutional fundraising goals and strategies going forward. It allows us to enhance the depth and breadth of our collaborative faculty.

These areas align with the major fields of UMaine's research expenditures, which in FY14 totaled more than \$100 million. The Signature Areas are those in which UMaine has achieved national and international distinction, and have played significant roles in our history.

Also defining our future will be the Emerging Areas of Excellence with the potential to reach the next level of excellence — aging research, data science and engineering, sustainability solutions and technology, finance education, humanities research and education on the Northeastern Americas, and the Graduate School of Biomedical Science and Engineering.



Tell us about the One University plan.

As described by the Chancellor and the University of Maine System Board of Trustees, One University is an organizing framework and a vision for seven differentiated campuses operating as one fully integrated university, singularly focused on student success and responsive service to the state of Maine. In this model that's still under development, UMaine has a leadership role as Maine's land grant, research, and graduate education university, with a statewide mission.

What is your message to alumni?

Alumni can be wonderful advocates, talking about their UMaine experiences and the impact of education on their lives. They can help convince more people to pursue an education, because we can't have a modern economy without educated people.

That advocacy also involves alumni knowing their alma mater. It's impossible to know every facet, but I want alumni to know just how extraordinary our faculty are, with their passion for teaching and depth of scholarship. I want them to know the scale, scope, and depth of the excellence here. No matter what your snapshot of UMaine, there are a thousand more to discover.

About UMaine's 20th President

To find out more about the 20th president of the University of Maine, we went to three of the many people who know her well — mentor G. Bruce Wiersma '64, retired dean of UMaine's College of Natural Sciences, Forestry, and Agriculture, and Dr. Hunter's children, Dr. Christine Lambert and Griff Lambert:

What leadership qualities did you see in Dr. Hunter early on?

GBW — She is intelligent, intuitive, friendly, open to ideas, tough, demanding, kind. All those are important, but alone don't make for a good manager or leader. People have to trust and respect you. They have to believe that you will do what is best for the organization and not what is best for you alone. This is Sue Hunter. People recognize that in her and respect her for it.

Best advice she ever gave you?

CL — When I finished high school, my mom told me to go after my goal of medical school, and she and my dad would support me however they could. That idea of always reaching for what you want to do and achieve in life drives me, as I know it does my mom.

GL — The best advice my mom ever gave me was the example she set for how to be successful. She never stops. If she's not working or taking care of business at home, she's staying active. She's always focused on something, which keeps her motivated and constantly achieving new things.

How does she continue to inspire you?

CL — As a young woman in science, I am so lucky to have my mom. Watching her career evolve has been incredibly rewarding and instructive, and shows me what is possible with hard work and a passion to serve your community.

Anything else we should know?

GL — It may not always work, but it doesn't hurt trying to bribe her with chocolate.

