

Silver TRACKS

University of Maine Retirees Newsletter

Spring 2026

Message from the Chair, President's Council of Retired Employees

Last year's keynote by Dr. Lenard Kaye, "Staying Engaged as We Age: It's Just Plain Old Good Medicine" were words of wisdom for our age group. Evidence indicates that being engaged increases our emotional and physical health. Opportunities are available for us to stay engaged, if we look around.

Garden clubs, UM Rec Center, YMCA, and hiking clubs are examples of exercise opportunities. Possible fees are even subsidized by our health insurance as well as by UMaine as described in the 2025 and 2026 Silver Tracks Newsletters (see umaine.edu/retirees for past editions).

Dr. Kaye has found that helping others helps us—emotionally and physically. Churches, food banks, the Red Cross, and many other organizations depend upon volunteers to conduct their services. Let us not forget that there are over 20 organizations available at the Retiree Homecoming that can use our service. We can talk to them about possibilities beginning at 9 a.m. on June 4th.

Looking forward to seeing you on June 4th. We have another engaging program.

Tom Sandford

Associate Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering Emeritus

Retiree Homecoming

Thursday, June 4, 2026

Wells Conference Center, UMaine Campus

9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Featuring Speaker David Hart, Director of the Center for Sustainability Solutions.

See pg. 5 for more.

Projected tours include:

- New Athletic Facilities: Track & Field Facility, Soccer Complex, Alford Arena
- Page Farm and Home Museum
- Versant Power Astronomy Center: The Universe Through All Senses
- Bog Boardwalk

Retirees will receive a postcard or email with registration information when available (You may also visit umaine.edu/retirees).



Above: Torres del Paine National Park, Chile, by Dana Humphrey. Article on pg. 3.

JOIN US



A Note from UMaine President Ferrini-Mundy

Greetings from Orono! Our spring semester is in full swing and it is wonderful to be surrounded by the energy of a vibrant learning community like ours. As you may remember, there is renewed energy on campus this time of year, as we bounce back from the holiday break and we start looking towards the upcoming commencement exercises on the horizon. It is the perfect moment to share a few updates from the University of Maine.

Over the past year, UMaine has been faced with significant operational challenges due to changes in federal funding and policy; both have disrupted

key programs and pushed our community to reimagine how we meet the moment. Our university-wide strategic re-envisioning process is underway and will help set the course for a dynamic and sustainable future for the University of Maine. It is a bold rethinking of our role and organization but it leverages our great foundational strengths—strengths that you helped foster during your time at the university.

We also continue to face budgetary and demographic challenges but, in both instances, I am so proud of the ways in which Black Bear resilience, creativity, and innovation have galvanized to help us navigate these times.

Despite the turbulence, we have much to celebrate.

All around campus, you can see the progress taking shape through new construction and renovations. Recent highlights include the completion of major renovations to the Harold Alfond Sports Arena and

Shawn Walsh Hockey Center. The project was made possible by a transformational \$320 million commitment from the Harold Alfond Foundation to the University of Maine System, which includes a \$170 million investment in UMaine Athletics to fund the Athletic Facilities Master Plan as part of UMS TRANSFORMS. The new facilities are spectacular and I hope you have the chance to experience them soon if you haven't yet.

We are making steady progress on the construction of a new facility designed to advance pioneering research and education in advanced manufacturing, as well as develop the engineering and computing workforce. The 50,000-square-foot GEM building will house the Factory of the Future and incorporate digital manufacturing technologies and fully adaptive, immersive learning spaces for students both here and across the University of Maine System (UMS).

At UMaine, our research, teaching, and public engagement are driving academic and economic growth across the state, all while fostering a campus where students feel supported and safe. This fall we launched the

Downeast Nursing track, a program that allows UMaine Machias students residing on campus or in the region to earn a four-year nursing degree from the University of Maine at Augusta while conducting nearly all of their studies on the Machias campus or online. This innovative program is designed to meet the needs of our students and they will earn two fully accredited four-year degrees simultaneously: a bachelor of nursing degree from UMA and a bachelor of college studies degree from UMaine Machias. The current cohort is at capacity and we look forward to continued growth in the future.

The higher education landscape continues to shift around us, as do the challenges we face as an institution, but your continued support helps us grow, innovate, and stay true to our mission of academic excellence and student success. Thank you for being such an important part of our community and for proudly sharing your Black Bear spirit wherever you go.

Joan Ferrini-Mundy
President, University of Maine and University of Maine at Machias
Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation, University of Maine System

President's Council of Retired Employees

- Thomas Sandford, Chair
- Rick Borgman, Vice Chair
- Richard Judd, Secretary
- Louis Bassano
- Gail Dyer-Martin
- Michael Eckardt
- Cindy Eves-Thomas
- Rich Kent
- Jen Perry
- Claire Strickland
- Althea Tibbetts
- Taylor Defa
- Sarah McPartland-Good
- Jeffery Mills
- Tom Peaco

Mission Statement: The Council will enhance communication between the University of Maine and the community of retired employees. The Council will encourage active involvement of retirees in the life of the University. The Council will provide advice to the University's President on matters of importance to retirees and the community in general.





Retiree Spotlight: Dana Humphrey Hiking and Photographing the World.

*Note: Dana Humphrey is
College of Engineering,
Dean Emeritus.*

*Above: Dana at Completion
of Appalachian Trail.*

It's been over three years since I retired from UMaine and I'm having a blast. My retirement mantra is to do as much as I can now because who knows what the future holds. I say this with an eye toward both the inevitable physical decline and the increasingly unstable world that we live in. The mindset of "I'll put it off to tomorrow" only works until you reach the day when there are no more tomorrows.

For me, the foundation of life is being physically active. This was true when I was working and it's even more true now. I hike, backpack, and cycle. One of my long-term dreams was to backpack the entire Appalachian Trail. I did what's called

a "section hike" over 12 seasons. Eleven of those were squeezed in during Julys while I was Dean of Engineering. A few times I thought I was going to pass out due to the heat and humidity in New York and New Jersey. I completed the final 275-miles (Hot Springs, NC, to Springer Mt., GA) on October 19, 2023. It was so great to hike in the fall because of the cooler temperatures and beautiful foliage. The trail brings you to magical vistas and through beautiful forests that most people never see. In total, I hiked 2,183 miles over 151 days with a cumulative elevation gain of 520,000 ft (nearly 100 miles of climbing!) while carrying a 40-lb pack. Some people probably think I was a little crazy, but I was in heaven.

I do miss the personal connections that I built up during my 36 years at UMaine. For me, these have been largely replaced by my new Maine Appalachian Trail Club friends. This is my major volunteer activity. I'm on their Board of Directors, an Assistant Campsite Manager, and co-leading an effort to replace all the old privies. An incredibly dedicated group of volunteers has already replaced 30 and we only have 12 left to go! Not only does this satisfy this engineer's need to build things, it keeps me outside, physically active, and with great people.

Staying mentally active is also critical. I had no plan for this, but an unexpected

opportunity landed on my doorstep two weeks after I retired. I got a phone call from Dr. Kristen Sobolik, Chancellor of the University of Missouri—St Louis (UMSL). Many of you will remember Dr. Sobolik as a UMaine faculty member in anthropology and an administrator in our College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. She wanted to know if I was interested in being a consultant to help them start a new School of Engineering. This has turned into: budget and personnel planning; working with architects and engineers to design a \$15 million lab and office renovation; and serving on, and in some cases chairing, the search committees for their new director and three program coordinators. This is exactly what I did as a dean at UMaine. I was so gratified to see them admit their first incoming class of engineers in Fall 2025.

This brings me to my new passion: landscape and wildlife photography. This challenges me physically and mentally, as well as provides the motivation to travel the world. In 2025, I was on the road for 3 months with major trips to The Outer Banks, Patagonia, Svalbard (1,100 miles northeast of Iceland), Bisti Badlands (NW New Mexico), Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota where I did a 144-mile backpacking trip, and New Zealand. My furthest point north was latitude 82.4°N in the arctic icecap, and as far south as 52°S in Patagonia. I took over 3,000 images in 2025, of which maybe 30 were really good. The main reason for so many images is that I typically shoot 4 frames per second when photographing wildlife and when I'm on a moving boat. The mental

(Continued on pg. 4)



Above: Tusks Crossed, Walruses, Svalbard by Dana Humphrey.

(Continued from pg. 3)

challenge of photography is trying to compose impactful images and then to edit them to bring out all their beauty. I have been so fortunate to have had great instructors who have helped me to see more clearly. There is so much to learn in photography. Even

if I'm fortunate enough to live to 100, I'll only have scratched the surface.

You can follow my travels on my Facebook page (facebook.com/danahumphrey2) and see more of my photographs at danahumphreyphotography.com.



Above: Polar Bear, Svalbard by Dana Humphrey



Mary Bird is 2025's Barbara Hikel Award Recipient

The Barbara Hikel Award is given annually by the University President to a University of Maine retiree who, after retirement, provides extraordinary voluntary service to the University of Maine. Last spring the President announced Mary Bird as the 2025 recipient of the Hikel Award.

Since Mary Bird retired in 2009, she has provided continuous leadership in activities related to Science, Education, and Outreach. Her leadership and efforts in recognition of the legacy of Edith Marion Patch and the restoration of Patch's historic Braeside home on College Avenue, now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, have made a significant impact on the University and local community. Edith Patch was the first woman scientist employed by the University of Maine. Mary was an early member of the Friends of Edith Marion Patch and served as Chair or Vice Chair for many years. Additionally, Mary has been an active volunteer at the Page Farm (multi-year winner of the Hugh Murphy Volunteer award). And in cooperation with her spouse James 'Jim' Bird, the 2024 Hikel Awardee, Mary has

devoted many hours in fundraising and other activities for the Orono Bog Boardwalk.

Mary Bird is an excellent choice for the 2025 Barbara Hikel Retiree Award.



David Hart is the 2026 Retiree Homecoming Keynote Speaker

David Hart is the Director of the Center for Sustainability Solutions

and Professor of Biology & Ecology. He will speak about UMaine's Leadership in Aligning Research with Societal Needs.

David Hart became embroiled at the age of 17 in a controversial proposal regarding the environmental and economic future of a coastal California watershed, which sparked his lifelong quest to strengthen the role of science in society. Since then, he has conducted extensive environmental research, advised government, industry, and NGOs, and developed innovative programs addressing challenges that require a dual focus on improving human well-being and protecting the environment (i.e. sustainability challenges).

Dr. Hart's keynote at the Retiree Homecoming is eagerly anticipated.

Retiree Homecoming 2025: How'd We Do?

A review of the evaluations from last year's Retiree Homecoming indicate a high level of satisfaction with the quality of organization tables, speaker (Dr. Len Kaye), luncheon, and overall program quality. Comments include "Nice Job!" and "Excellent!"

Respondents were a bit less supportive about receiving the Silver Tracks newsletter electronically, but still well supported. Some pointed out that an electronic newsletter is eco-friendly; clearly it is expensive to print and mail the newsletter. We appreciate your suggestions for future retiree trips and potential workshops.

ANNOUNCEMENTS



Retiree Outing

Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens
Boothbay, ME
May 21, 2026

Meet at the University of Maine in Orono at 8 a.m. to carpool, or at the Gardens at 10:15 a.m. Purchase tickets individually (seniors \$21 if purchased online) at mainegardens.org

This is a walking tour. For more information and to indicate your participation contact Tom Sandford at sandford@maine.edu or (207) 942-0598.

UMaine Resource for Retirement Inquiries

Tammie Perez, Senior Benefits Specialist, is the University of Maine System Retiree Benefits Liaison and is available to answer general retirement questions and advocate for retirees if they have issues. She can be reached at (207) 973-3373 and at benefits@maine.edu.

UMaine Rec Center Access

For the 2026 calendar year, retirees from UMaine can receive a free membership to the UMaine Rec Center if they are not covered by Silver Sneakers or Renew Active. Spouses and partners may be added to that membership for \$125. This will probably change in 2027 for retirees without Silver Sneakers or Active Renew who will likely be charged a nominal fee.

Retirees also receive member rates on equipment rentals, programs and classes offered by Campus Recreation, including Fit Over 50, Senior Yoga and more. For more information, go to its website at umaine.edu/campusrecreation

Geezers with Sneakers Getting Coffee

Orono Public Library
Orono, ME
Mondays and Fridays

Join fellow active senior men and women for walking, talking, and coffee—or perhaps, just join for coffee! Monday and Friday mornings. Walks begin and end at the Orono Public Library. Meet at 9:20 a.m., walks begin at 9:30 for 1/2 hour. Coffee hour (complimentary) begins at 10:00 a.m.

For more information contact harlan.onsurd@maine.edu



Harold “Brownie” Brown Scholarship Recipient for 2026 is Isaac Webber

Isaac Webber received his undergraduate degree from UMaine in Mechanical Engineering, and now is pursuing a graduate degree in composite materials and advanced manufacturing.

Isaac played the trumpet in the Screamin’ Black Bears Pep Band for four years. He was part of a UMaine team that participated in an international competition sponsored by The American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics (AIAA), designing, building, and flying mission-tailored electric radio-controlled aircraft. He is currently interning at a defense contractor.

Isaac feels that UMaine is his home, and is grateful for the scholarship support. “Better yet, this scholarship is in memory

of my late grandmother who worked in our admissions office for over 25 years. My family and I are so happy to see her contribution to UMaine be celebrated in this manner.” Isaac Webber’s grandmother, Donna Oakes, passed away in 2009. Isaac tells us many in his family graduated from UMaine—parents, cousins, aunts, and uncles.

The Brown Scholarship goes to a student who is a relative of a UMaine retiree. The endowed scholarship fund has grown over the years, thanks to the generosity

of many retirees. Your gifts can be sent to the University of Maine Foundation or made online by visiting our.umaine.edu/retirees.



Isaac Webber and his grandmother, Donna Oakes.

President's Council of Retired Employees
 Two Alumni Place
 Orono, ME 04469-5792



Retiree Writes New Book for Young Adults

Professor Emeritus Richard Kent has a new novel for young adults (ages 13+) titled *Sing On, Maine United!* The

novel shares the story of a team of fifteen-year-old Maine players touring England in 1989. Award-winning Maine author Lynne Plourde writes: “Maine kids taking their Maine spirit, talents, humor, kindness, and resourcefulness to England in 1989, I was hooked. Well-developed characters, tragedies and triumphs, laugh-out-loud teen humor, and the engaging journey of how a divided team becomes a *united* team.”

During the 1980s and 1990s, Coach Rich Kent led 30 State of Maine select soccer teams to England with fellow coaches and chaperones. The boys’ and girls’ teams from Maine toured in and out

of London, practiced in public parks, attended professional matches, and played games against English school teams. These trips, with a total of 500 players over 13 years, lay the groundwork for Kent’s novel.



Above: “After a mud bowl–1984” State of Maine team members who played for Richard Kent in England

L-R, Doug Watt, Mark Weston, Darin Chism, Jeff Parola. (Kent Photo)

At UMaine, Kent directed the Maine Writing Project, a site of the National Writing Project. He founded and directed the online graduate writing program within the College of Education and Human Development. Kent’s latest book is his 25th.

Retirees: Stay In Touch

Please update your contact information with the Foundation by contacting them at (207) 581-5100

or

umainefoundationcorp@maine.edu