



Don't buy a car that you can't touch

BY RUSS VAN ARSDALE
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Northeast CONTACT wishes to give a major thank you to all the financial professionals who keep consumers safe. Our thanks go especially to one bank official in the Ellsworth area.

The official was concerned when a customer wanted to make a sizeable withdrawal with plans to wire

CONSUMER FORUM

money for an antique car. What aroused the official's suspicion was the money's destination: London, England.

Scammers typically operate from bases overseas, and money that's wired away never comes back. The official had heard of such schemes and gently urged the customer not to buy a vehicle sight unseen and definitely not to wire money to an unknown party. That advice probably prevented a \$14,500 payment for a car that almost certainly doesn't exist.

The customer had seen an ad in a local newspaper. Detective Dorothy Small of the Ellsworth Police Department said identical ads appeared in Rolling Thunder Express and Penobscot Bay Press.

The latter online publication is now running a scam alert on its classified page, noting that the ad that ran in its Jan. 14 and 21 papers "was submitted under false pretenses and is a scam." The publisher went on to apologize "for falling victim" — even though the ad appeared to meet policy guidelines — and urged readers not to respond.

The look-alike ads are no coincidence. Scammers find appealing phrases ("1970 Chevrolet Chevelle 454, manual four-speed, red with black stripes") and cut and paste in publications everywhere.

One online vintage car dealer has tips to avoid being scammed, including a nearly identical ad to those that appeared in Maine, at http://nwcarnet.com/Helpful_Tips_About_Internet_Scams.html. Search a key phrase from the ad and find all kinds of "late husbands" and their treasured cars for sale, over several years.

The gist of all such ads is the same: you'll be getting the deal of a lifetime. In fact, you'll get nothing.

Small noticed that photos of the car "for sale" had been taken on different road surfaces, a tipoff that the pictures had been lifted from various Internet sources. Payment was to be made via Pay Safe, which is headquartered in Nevada ... so instructions to wire funds to England were another red flag.

"If you can't put your hand on the vehicle that you're going to buy, then don't buy it," Small said.

That probably echoed the urging of our bank teller, who was likely one of more than 300 front-line bank and credit union employees who have undergone training in what's called SeniorSafe.

The program is a partnership of Maine's financial community and state government, all allied through the Maine Council for Elder Abuse Prevention. Training enables key employees to spot potential cases of fraud and, in many cases, stop them cold. Partner agencies help with training and promoting what Maine Securities Administrator Judith Shaw called a "no wrong door" approach to referrals in testimony before a U.S. Senate committee last year.

A spokesman for Shaw's department told me it's hoped SeniorSafe will grow and further expand protections against financial fraud. You can find a brochure on the program at the Maine Bankers Association website, mainebankers.com/seniorafe.

Consumer Forum is a collaboration of the Bangor Daily News and Northeast CONTACT, Maine's all-volunteer, nonprofit consumer organization. For assistance with consumer-related issues, including consumer fraud and identity theft, or for information, write Consumer Forum, P.O. Box 486, Brewer, ME 04412, visit <http://necontact.wordpress.com> or email contacexdir@live.com.

Exploration is her business

Bike, kayak rental shop coming to downtown Bangor



GABOR DEGRE | BDN

Jamie McDonough's new business Explore Bangor will rent kayaks, bikes, cross-country skis and more, and provide guided tours and other activities for people who want to explore the area.

BY NICK MCCREA
BDN STAFF

A business setting up shop in downtown Bangor will rent bikes, kayaks, paddle boards and skis to help locals and visitors explore the community in new ways.

Jamie McDonough hopes to open Explore Bangor about mid-March in the storefront at 25 Hammond St. next to Giacomo's.

"I'm targeting people who say they haven't ridden a bike since they were kids," McDonough said during an interview Thursday.

The first floor will serve as a retail space, selling accessories that people might need for their adventures, socks from McDonough's family's business

based in North Carolina, candy and more. The store also will have information about attractions and suggestions of where people can go and what they can do while they're out and about. Upstairs will be storage for the modes of transportation.

McDonough's business will organize guided tours of the area. For example, groups might paddle up the Kenduskeag Stream canals or along Bangor's waterfront down to the Hampden Marina for a picnic. Tours will be arranged at times when the tides are best for paddling.

Those who rent bicycles might ride around town, along the Kenduskeag Stream trail, or on the Bangor waterfront and across the bridge to Brewer's waterfront path.

"It will be around the same cost as going to a movie, but it will be a more enriching experience," McDonough said.

McDonough hopes the rentals will be popular not just for tourists visiting Bangor, but also for locals who don't have bikes or kayaks of their own who want to get out and get active.

Explore Bangor also is working with the city in hopes of building a kayak and canoe storage facility on the waterfront.

Tanya Emery, Bangor's economic development director, said Friday that the discussion is in the early stages, but that a proposal for a public boat storage building could be brought before the City Council once Explore Bangor is up and running.

"I think it will be a really good fit, and I think it's the right time for something like this," Emery said.

McDonough and her family moved to Bangor from South Carolina in 2013 after her husband, Robert, who is director of research and development for Johnson Outdoors Watercraft, was transferred to Maine. She has two sons, one a sophomore at Bangor High School and the other in the eighth grade.

The family has always been active cyclists and paddlers. Robert McDonough was a professional kayaker, according to his wife.

"This is our passion, this is what we do," she said.

Follow Nick McCrear on Twitter at @nmcrcr213.

Warmer winter affects sales of cold weather gear in Maine

BY JEN LYNDY
BDN STAFF

HOULTON — Christa Nicholson, a Caribou resident who just returned to Maine two years ago after living with her family in the southern part of the United States, said Thursday that after holding off for one winter, she and her husband finally decided in October to invest in a snowblower and "heavy" winter jackets from L.L. Bean.

"We expected that we would need them pretty much all winter long," she said. "I didn't expect that my husband would have only used the snowblower two or three times by now and that he is basically walking around in a couple of heavy sweatshirts a lot of the time."

According to the National Weather Service in Caribou, the combined December-January time period was the warmest on record in both the Caribou and Bangor areas by more than 2 degrees. And the weather pattern isn't just impacting snowfall. Business owners in Aroostook County and other parts of the state said this week that the warmer weather has also caused sales of colder weather clothing to drop.

"This weather certainly hasn't helped," Joe Sleeper, the owner/operator of Sleepers of Maine, which has locations in Caribou, Bangor, Ellsworth and Waterville. "Our store employees are more inclined to bring out spring wear. It has had an impact from retail right on down to our vendors."

Sleeper said that even his marketing people are impacted, as they want him to more vigorously pitch some of the winter brands of clothing that the stores sell, such as Carhartt, Columbia Sportswear and the North Face.

"But how do you do that at the Bangor Mall store when Bangor got torrential rain yesterday?" he said Thursday. "How do you market winter items when it is 50 degrees outside?"

At Marden's in Houlton, Assis-



SLEEPERS OF MAINE

Fleece-lined pants and jeans are marked down at Sleepers in Caribou. Business owners in Aroostook County and other parts of the state said this week that the warmer weather and lack of snow this season has affected the sales of winter clothing and equipment.

tant Manager Brian Crane also said that there is more stock on the shelves than usual.

"We have lots of sweatshirts because we overstocked them, but we are not going through them like we normally do," he said. "Our selection also hasn't been as big this year, and people have not been buying as much."

He said that spring fashion should start arriving at the store by March.

"That is about the time we start switching out the product," he said.

At Mojo in Presque Isle, a store that sells summer and winter outdoor equipment and apparel, owner Mark Fullen said that youth cross country gear has sold the best this season.

"The youth on the cross country ski teams practice no matter what," he said.

Other than that, he said, sales of adult gear, including skis and snowshoes, are down.

David Heidrich, spokesman for Maine Revenue Services in Augusta, said Friday that the agency's officials have been hearing "basically the same statements" from business owners statewide, but that it was too early in the season to produce sales tax figures that might support the anecdotal observations.

"There is no data available yet," he said. "But we are hearing statewide that sales of winterwear is down."

Curtis Picard, executive director of the Maine Retail Association, also said that he has been hearing the same stories from business owners.

"While we do not have any data on this yet, the reality is it has been a warm winter and sales on winter gear are down," he said Friday. "We missed the holiday shopping window, and retailers are soon to get spring fashion choices in. Hopefully, they will be able to make up some of the losses by those sales."

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Camden group announces name change

CAMDEN — Members of the Camden Downtown Business Group have voted to change the organization's name to the Camden Area Business Group.

The name change better reflects the organization's focus on regional economic development activities.

"For over 30 years, the CDBG has been promoting Camden as an exciting place to live, work, and shop year-round. Our new name is more reflective of our members and all that the Camden area has to offer," said Erick Anderson, president of the organization, in the group's news release.

As a member-based organization, the biggest portion of dues goes to marketing efforts to promote Camden as a premiere, year-round tourist destination. The group's marketing efforts include the website www.CamdenMaineExperience.com, Facebook page CamdenMaineExperience, and a long-term public relations program.

The group works with members of the business community and the town of Camden to encourage cooperation and leadership, creating a positive downtown image and strengthening and expanding the economic base of Camden for residents and businesses alike.

All businesses in Camden and the adjacent towns of Lincolnville, Hope and Rockport are invited to join the Camden Area Business Group. The group meets monthly on the third Thursday at the Lord Camden Inn. For information or to join the Camden Area Business Group, email join@CamdenMaineExperience.com or visit www.CamdenMaineExperience.com.