



MICKY BEDELL | BDN

Campground host Armon Duford, 68, of Lamoine State Park stands in front of his RV at the park. In exchange for a free campsite for the whole season, Duford stacks brush, patches the gravel roadways, helps travelers set up their campsites, cleans the shower-house, mows the grass, offers advice on local activities — pretty much whatever needs to be done.

## 'The face of the park'

### Parks looking for resident 'campground hosts'

BY MEG HASKELL  
BDN STAFF

At 68, Armon Duford has hit on a lifestyle that suits him to a tee. The former Pownal resident, retired from his long career as an elementary school custodian, now spends his summers on the coast of Maine and his winters near Tampa Bay. He socializes casually with people from all over the world, spends a lot of time in the great outdoors and tinkers to his heart's content.

Duford, like thousands of other retirees across the country, is a volunteer campground host. In exchange for a free campsite at Lamoine State Park for the whole season, he stacks brush, patches the gravel roadways, helps travelers set up their campsites, cleans the shower-house, mows the grass, offers advice on local activities — pretty much whatever needs to be done.

"I know all about everything because I've done everything," he said, justifiably proud of his jack-of-all-trades status.

In the fall, when the weather turns chilly, Duford will hitch up his fifth-wheel camper to his vintage pickup truck and head south, visiting with family and friends on his way to Little Manatee River State Park in Florida, where he'll spend the winter in much the same way.

It's a lifestyle that's growing in popularity with the aging of the baby boom generation, according to Matt McGuire, coordinator of the statewide volunteer campground host program

for the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands. Not all of them are year-rounders like Duford; many return to their homes after a season of camping. But they share a passion for the outdoor life and the opportunity to serve.

"We see a lot of retirees — baby boomers who are active and like to be outdoors," he said. From late April through mid-October, volunteer hosts keep Maine's state park campgrounds running smoothly.

"They are a big asset for us," McGuire said. "At this point, we really couldn't do without them."

**Watch the video**  
bangordailynews.com

#### Campground hosts: 'The face of the park'

Most states have a volunteer host program, encouraging campers from within their borders and across the country to contribute their labor in exchange for an extended stay in a beautiful spot. The National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service also have volunteer campground host programs.

Of the 36 state parks administered by the Maine Bureau of Parks and Lands, 12 provide camping facilities. All of these accept and actively seek volunteer hosts. (This does not include Baxter State Park, which is administered separately and does not offer a volunteer host program.) Hosts are generally expected to stay the entire



MICKY BEDELL | BDN

Campground host Armon Duford of Lamoine State Park moves logs from a recently sawed tree into a park truck to turn into firewood.

camping season, though some parks have more flexibility than others.

The total number of positions available fluctuates from park to park and season to season, McGuire said. Popular Sebago Lake State Park in southern Maine, which boasts more than 250 individual campsites and several group sites, typically recruits 10 hosts, he said. Most smaller parks have space for two to four hosts.

"They handle a lot of routine maintenance and cleaning tasks, but they also are the face of the park," McGuire said. "They answer a lot of questions, conduct nature programs and help resolve small problems. So if they're sociable and like people, that's an important asset."

Typically, individual hosts are expected to work about 20 hours per week, or 30 hours for a couple, he said, but agreements vary from park to park.

Maine parks welcome individuals and couples as campground hosts, McGuire said, and children and well-behaved pets are welcome, except at Sebago

Lake State Park, which does not allow pets at all. While hosts interact routinely with other campers, including resolving minor complaints and disputes, any serious problems are handled by park managers or other paid staff. Training is provided in first aid, hazardous materials, customer service, local history and natural features.

"Applications trickle in all winter," McGuire said, but several Maine parks still have open host positions for the coming season. Lamoine State Park, Camden Hills State Park and Sebago Lake State Park usually fill positions easily, he said. The toughest to fill is at tiny Warren Island State Park in Penobscot Bay, which can only be reached by private boat and is uncomfortably remote for some volunteers.

#### Filling an essential role

Lamoine State Park provides sites for three volunteer hosts, said park manager Charlene "Sunshine" Hood. Unlike most sites at Lamoine, they include

See Hosts, Page C2

## Pushing past old self-doubt with song

We're not exactly the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, nor yet The Manhattan Transfer. But the Bangor Community Chorus, which just closed out its 48th season on a high note, fills a special place in the area's music culture, and in my heart.

Singing in a choral group is just about brand-new for me. Up until very recently, the last time I did it was in junior high, when I was a member of the youth choir at a church in northern Virginia. The experience left a big impression; right here and now, some 45 years later, I



MEG HASKELL

could sing for you all the verses of "The Spacious Firmament," "Praise Ye the Lord," "Now April Has Come" or "The Pigtail" without missing a syllable or a note. Just ask me.

My parents and I moved further south at the end of my eighth-grade year. It was decades before I sang in a chorus again. Oh, I sang — the latest Monkees songs in the mirror, show tunes in the car and Joni Mitchell's plaintive melodies in the echoing, tiled stairwell of my college dorm. I sang with my kids when they were little and nonjudgmental. I sang in the congregation at church; it was the main reason I went to church. But as much as I loved music and song, I could never bring myself to join a structured choral group.

Who knows why? Maybe it was because I never learned to read music — a longtime regret. Or because, once or twice, someone in my life made an unkind remark about my voice. Or because I generally didn't trust that I had what it took to be fabulous — the "excellence" bar was set pretty high in my family, the support for "pretty good" alarmingly low.

It wasn't until 2012, after my 30-year marriage ended in divorce, that the idea of joining a choral group crept into my thinking. I had taken a new job, moved away from Bangor and relocated to the midcoast. I wanted to meet people and contribute to the cultural life of my new community. I wanted to tap into my dormant creative spirit, have some fun and stop worrying about being fabulous. I just wanted to sing.

Eventually, I found my way to the Acadia Choral Society in Ellsworth. They were just beginning rehearsals for a winter holiday program and assured me I was welcome to join, despite my lack of experience. The next Tuesday evening, there I was, nervously shuffling my sheet music and making shy conversation with the other altos. And though the program included Benjamin Britten's startlingly dissonant "A Ceremony of Carols" and other compositions that challenged me at every note, I managed to learn it well enough to perform it — if not excellently, then adequately — at St. Saviour's Episcopal Church in Bar Harbor. After that initial holiday performance, I sang two more programs in Bar Harbor. Each time, I learned more, relaxed more and enjoyed it more.

When I returned to the Bangor Daily News late last summer, I shopped around a little and settled in with the Bangor Community Chorus, a quirky, inclusive group with deep roots in community theater. No audition is required, just the love of music and song. There are some younger members, but I'd say the average age is pushing 60. The oldest singer, longtime Bangor resident Lloyd George, is 82, and a founding member.

Our talented young director and accompanist, Douglas Beck, cajoles us cheerfully beyond our comfort zones in every direction, whether we're singing familiar Christmas arrangements, edgy choral pieces or popular tunes. As a result of the hard work and fun we share together, we are consistently pretty good and frequently excellent. We are always looking for new members.

Our most recent program, "All That Jazz," wrapped up last Saturday and included standards from Dave Brubeck, Louis Armstrong and Cole Porter, a sizzling

See Haskell, Page C2

## Take better care of your loved one with dementia

Savvy Caregiver offers free 6-week class for family

BY MEG HASKELL  
BDN STAFF

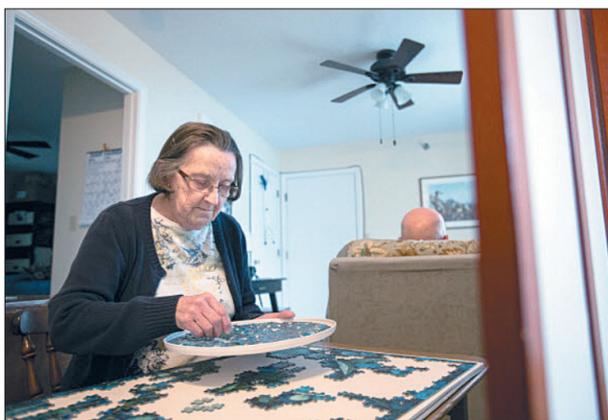
BANGOR — When Florence Churchill's husband, Dale, was forced to stop driving a couple of years ago because his progressive dementia was affecting his judgment, memory and physical responses, she realized things were only going to get more complicated.

**Watch the video**  
bangordailynews.com

She was right. She was quickly overwhelmed with seeking power of attorney designation, navigating insurance regulations, assuming more daily household responsibilities and anticipating their future needs as individuals and a couple.

"I knew I needed help," the 77-year-old Bangor resident said. Fortunately, her doctor suggested personal counseling, and fortunately the counselor recommended she contact the Eastern Area Agency on Aging to see what kinds of support services might be available.

Soon after, Churchill enrolled in a Savvy Caregiver class, a free, six-week training program for family members and friends who are caring for people with dementia. Developed at Emory University in Atlanta in 2002 and endorsed by the Alzheimer's Association, the Savvy Caregiver program aims to educate family caregivers about the predictable phases of dementia and memory loss. It equips them to care more effectively for their loved ones while tending to their own health and



MICKY BEDELL | BDN

Florence Churchill works on a puzzle at her Bangor home. Churchill learned to stave off "caregiver burnout" at Savvy Caregiver courses by caring for herself.

stress. EAAA offers the evidence-based program several times a year at different locations its four-county service area. The next class is enrolling now and will start Wednesday, May 4 at Dirigo Pines in Orono. It is scheduled from 4 to 6 p.m. for six consecutive Wednesdays.

"The most important thing to

understand is that this person you're caring for is not going to change, so you have to change," said Josephine Cirrinone, family caregiver specialist at EAAA and the instructor of the Savvy Caregiver classes. "In our class, you learn how important it is to let that person be where they're at.

See Savvy, Page C2