



GABOR DEGRE | BDN

Cliff Severance's vacation house in Carroll Plantation. Severance who lives in Virginia started building the getaway home in 2006 near his hometown of Springfield.

## 'It's a sanctuary'

### Domed dream home in rural Maine nears completion

BY NICK SAMBIDES JR.  
BDN STAFF

Cliff Severance is an electrical engineer whose career takes him across the country each year. Legally speaking, he lives in Virginia. But deep in the woods of northeastern Penobscot County is the place he considers his real home — if only for getaways.

With curved walls looming over and around him, large diamond-shaped windows offer views of Bog Brook, the trees and the blue sky. The two airy geodesic domes of his residence are the home of his heart, he says.

"The scene outside those windows changes every day. It's like having a sort of mosaic in your living room," Severance said during a telephone interview from Kailua, Hawaii, where he is building flight simulators for the U.S. Marine Corps. "The sun is different, the water is different, the sky — all of those things change. You never know what you are going to see when you look out."

The 61-year-old Severance has been building the home on 150 acres overlooking Bog

Brook during vacations since June 2006. With its 46-foot diameter built atop a one-story foundation and a cupola atop the primary dome, Severance's vacation home is massive — 4,100 square feet among two 1,600-square-foot basement and first floors, a 900-square-foot third floor and a small cupola atop the primary dome. It has a second dome, 29 feet in diameter, that is its garage.

With its garage and lowest floor incomplete, the home is about 80 percent built. But what is finished is finished very well, indeed.

Given the futuristic nature of geodesic domes, you'd expect the house to have an almost science-fiction feel to it, but the absence of the typical rectangular walls and ceilings and use of natural materials throughout creates the opposite impact. The front doorway section of the home is sandwiched between the two domes like a box between two large balls. The front doorway leads to the main floor, which contains the kitchen, dining and living room, bathroom and front door.

The bathroom and front door areas are like typical dwellings, with a rectangular ceiling and



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Cliff Severance's vacation house in Carroll Plantation. The building features two geodesic domes and is nearly finished.

walls overhead. The dome's impact is most keenly felt in the observatory-like dome area that comprises the dining and living room areas. The flooring is a combination of ceramic and slate tiles. The bathroom floor has river stone flooring. All the countertops are granite or quartz. Sheetrock walls provide splashes of color, privacy and definition to the space.

The interior of the dome is tongue-and-groove cedar interspersed with diamond- and triangular-shaped windows and re-

cessed lighting. The colors are muted wood, brown, tan and white tones. Add it all up, and it has a prevailing nature-feel, with the curved ceiling seeming more like the sky itself than a roof.

The upstairs floor and cupola are horizontally recessed to cover about two-thirds the living room space, with banisters lining the open upstairs floor and staircase, giving anyone who doesn't like heights an almost vertiginous feeling.

See Dome, Page C2

## Get a taste of northern Maine fiddleheads

BY JULIA BAYLY  
BDN STAFF

It's that time of year again, when foragers take to the Maine woods in search of one of the season's first wild edibles.

Few things say or taste like spring more than a freshly picked Maine fiddlehead, and thanks to two northern Maine entrepreneurs, the edible young coiled frond of the ostrich fern and the people who pick them are about to get a big marketing boost.

"We want to create a stable and food-safe system around this forage crop that no one has done before," Troy Haines, Mapleton farmer and fiddlehead seller, said.

Every year Haines buys thousands of pounds of fresh-picked fiddleheads from local foragers and then sells them to Van Buren-based food processor Northern Girl, where they are packaged and then distributed by Crown O'Maine Organic Cooperative to restaurants and retail stores, including Hannaford supermarkets and Whole Foods, throughout New England.



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Fiddleheads grow in David Yarborough's yard in Stillwater.

This season, Haines is working with Marada Cook of Northern Girl and Crown O'Maine to revolutionize their entire fiddlehead gathering process from the forest to the consumer.

"We are trying to elevate our market presence," Cook said. "We are looking to really 'brand' the Aroostook County fiddlehead."

A big part of that branding, according to Cook and Haines, is making sure the consumer knows not only where their fiddleheads came from but that they have been gathered in a sustainable manner.

A University of Maine Cooperative Extension study has shown harvesting no more than half of the available fiddleheads allows the plant to maintain a sustainable and healthy population.

"From our perspective, everything about fiddlehead picking See Ferns, Page C2

## Midcoast kids turn food scraps into good soil

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS  
BDN STAFF

Ask a middle school kid to lug a bucket of leftover food scraped off lunch trays to the compost bins outside, and you might expect to be met with the infamous adolescent stare of disgust.

But at least at the Troy Howard Middle School in Belfast, you'd be wrong.

"We actually enjoy doing this," sixth-grader Allaura Dunham, 12, of Belfast said recently while using a spade to spread a layer of leaves onto the remains of a lunch of pulled-pork sliders and apples. "It's awesome, and it's really fun. I do this every day."

For Allaura and the other students at the middle school, composting is no occasional afterthought. According to David Wessels, who runs the 16-year-old Troy Howard Middle School Garden Project and greenhouse program, rotating crews of students work together to compost all the food waste from the cafeteria. Over the school year and the summer, food scraps combined with leaves collected by the city of Belfast turn into nutrient-rich soil the students put on the extensive gardens in the fall. The soil is used to grow vegetables that are served in the cafeteria, closing the composting circle in a way Wessels said is very effective — and instructive.

"Some kids are more into it than others," he said. "They do think the food scraps are somewhat gross. But when they see the



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Troy Howard Middle School Garden Project coordinator David Wessels shovels leaves on the compost pile as sixth-graders Izzy DeGraff and Aloaura Dunham check the temperature of the heap at the school's garden recently. The Garden Project started in 2000 and enables students to plant, take care of and harvest the vegetables. Most of the vegetables they grow are used for meals in the school cafeteria. The food scraps are composted and end up back in the soil.

scraps transformed into beautiful soil and then into the food we eat, it brings home the magic of composting and the whole process."

The lion's share of the composting and gardening work at the middle school is done by the students who belong to the Ecology Academy, one of three in-school academies — the other two are In-

novation and International. Allaura and the other students in the Ecology Academy will spend all three years at the middle school using the garden as a dynamic classroom. Additionally, academic subjects such as science, math and language arts also have a strong focus on the garden and ecology.

Principal Bruce Bailey said the

garden program has been good for the students and the school.

"It's a great opportunity for our kids to develop teamwork and build responsibility as they do the different jobs they have in the garden program," he said. "And the compost program really allows kids to see what's being thrown

See Compost, Page C2

## Midcoast muralists for hire, will travel

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS  
BDN STAFF

CAMDEN — Long ago, in the early days of New England, itinerant painters would pack up paint and brushes and travel from town to town on horseback or their own two feet, searching for customers who would hire them to decorate their walls.

Nowadays, Allegra Kuhn and Peter Walls, the artists behind the new Stockton Springs-based business, Two Itinerant Artists, have switched out the horse for a Honda CR-V that is spacious enough to fit the ladders, paint cans and other tools of their trade. Despite the change of transportation, the duo are happily reviving the old traveling artist tradition around Maine and New England, painting everything from delicate birch trees to celestial ceiling murals to elegant faux furniture finishes.

"I fell in love with the process," See Murals, Page C3