



Diagnosing the value of blanket medical tests

BY RUSS VAN ARSDALE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NORTHEAST CONTACT

On May 17 and 18, a business called Life Line Screening will visit the Bangor area.

The firm offers a package of five screenings it says can help consumers avoid cardiovascular disease. The screenings are intended to detect plaque buildup in carotid arteries, abdominal aortic aneurysms and other signs of cardiovascular irregularities.

Life Line Screening offers the five screenings for \$149, cash or credit cards accepted. The business does not accept Medicare and does not do private insurance billings.

The brochure advertising the screenings recently in the Bangor Daily News had this statement regarding cancellations: “A full refund is issued if you call to cancel at least 2 days prior to your appointment. If less than 2 days’ notice is given, we will issue a Gift Card for the full amount to be used by you, or anyone you choose, to purchase future screening services.”

The Maine Medical Association has taken a close look at the screenings offered by Life Line Screening during prior visits. Maine Medical Association Executive Vice President Gordon Smith told me that the company does business in conjunction with a physician who is licensed in Maine (although that doctor need not live here).

Smith also said he knows of no problem with the technology of the screenings. He said the tests may offer some consumers peace of mind, should their results come back negative.

Life Line Screening says it will report results within 21 days; it urges those who’ve been screened to take the results to their family doctors for any follow-up tests or other procedures.

Smith and others in the medical community contend that consultation with the family physician should take place before the screening, to make sure the tests are really needed.

Smith said physicians are concerned about “mass testing,” screenings that are offered without regard to people’s medical histories or individual situations. Smith said he worried about “tests that end up with more false positives than real positives, and patients receiving treatment that’s at best unnecessary and at worst harmful.”

Screenings can show irregularities that may or may not be harmful to someone’s health.

Follow-up testing — especially among older patients — can create different levels of risk depending on the patient’s status; the worry and uncertainty that go along with further testing take a toll as well.

Smith told me that Life Line Screening does not accept Medicare because Medicare doesn’t pay for the screenings the firm offers. Smith said Medicare’s reasoning appears to be that the screenings “haven’t been identified as being valuable screening tests for patients, generally.” Testing an individual based on a physician’s advice is one thing; Smith said random testing usually accomplishes very little.

Many consumer advocates sound off about individual choice, and informed choice is great. Smith advises people who don’t have a family physician to do their own research online (researchers at your local library can help).

In the 2007 book “Overtreated,” Shannon Brownlee contended that a lot of medical care is unnecessary and therefore wastes resources better spent on those who need care. Our advice is to be proactive but, in making any serious health decision, consult your physician first.

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 contactexdir@live.com.

Paper mill closures inspire book

BY DARREN FISHELL
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — Researchers were puzzled when they found most of a group of people laid off in 2011 from Verso’s Bucksport mill considered the job loss “generally good” for them and their families.

Those findings are part of a book published this year called “Surviving Job Loss: Papermakers in Maine and Minnesota,” in which writers Kenneth Root and

Rosmarie Park explore how downsizing in the paper industry, in general, plays out for U.S. paper mill employees.

Maine versus Minnesota

The book focuses on layoffs at Verso’s Bucksport and Sartell, Minnesota, mills in 2011, then Sartell’s later closure in 2012.

The results of their survey revealed a wide discrepancy in sentiment about job loss between employees at the closing Sartell mill and those in Bucksport, where the

workforce was being cut by about 151 from a total of about 700 employees.

The mills were in far different circumstances at the time, with the Sartell mill prompted to close by a fatal explosion on site in 2012. Those surveys reflect not only that difference but how millworkers of different ages perceive their job prospects after the cutbacks.

At the time, the now shuttered Bucksport mill’s prospects looked better, and many employees took

the company’s offer of early retirement, which was not offered in Sartell.

“While Bucksport workers were aware of difficulties in the paper industry, they might have thought the industry difficulties would bypass them, if for no other reason than that Verso had recently committed \$40 million in modernization and expansion at their mill,” they wrote. “In essence, while their mill was safe, they were out of a job. No company,”

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NICK MCCREA | BDN

The historic building at 31 Main St., which is getting an overhaul as a developer creates a pair of new luxury apartments and a storefront so Specialty Sweets can expand, can be seen on Friday in downtown Bangor.

Developing downtown

Bangor building to feature candy shop, apartments

BY NICK MCCREA
BDN STAFF

A popular Bangor candy shop is expanding to a historic downtown building, where a familiar developer is working to breathe new life into the 165-year-old structure.

Specialty Sweets makes and sells candy of all sorts at its Springer Drive location next to Christmas Tree Shops near the Bangor Mall. Its owners, Wade and Eliza Butler, plan to open a second location at 31 Main St. by late August or early September.

Eliza Butler said their busy season tends to be around holidays, but they see an opportunity to draw new customers from downtown events.

“There’s the art walk, folk festival, parades, and there’s just so much going on around here that we could be a part of,” she said.

Production will continue to be based at the Springer Drive store, but with the new challenge of making enough product to supply two stores.

“This will be strictly retail sales of our products,” Wade Butler said during an in-



NICK MCCREA | BDN

Louie Morrison shows the progress on a pair of luxury apartments in the works on Friday at 31 Main St. in downtown Bangor. The large door pictured, on the fourth floor, appears to lead to the building next door. It has been long sealed shut.

terview Friday inside 31 Main St. The second floor will be an events space, available for rent for parties, meetings and other occasions. The Butlers will have indoor seating and hope to have seats on the sidewalk in the summer so customers can eat gelato outside.

In March, Telford Holdings purchased the building from its previous owner, Paul Cook, for \$300,000. Telford Holdings is owned by Telford Allen III, whose family launched Telford Aviation in 1982 before selling the company in 2009.

Allen and Telford Holdings manager Louie Morrison were behind the redevelopment of one of downtown Bangor’s most iconic buildings, the long-vacant former Merchants Bank building on Broad Street. Today, the curved building houses five luxury apartments and Evenrood’s restaurant.

Most recently, 31 Main St. was home to Maine Asset Management, which only used the first two floors. Before that, the building was home to Maine Times Magazine.

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Gas prices rise, but feds project 12-year summertime low

BY DARREN FISHELL
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — Gas prices in Maine rose slightly in the past week, but federal energy officials project summertime prices will be at their lowest since 2004.

For the year, the head of the U.S. Energy Information Administration, Adam Sieminski, said last week the average household will save about \$900 for 2016, compared with 2014.

From April to September, the administration projected prices would average about \$2.21, which is higher than its previous forecast but 42 cents lower than last summer.

In Maine, the price hit an average of \$2.30 per gallon last week, a slight increase as the national

price rose nearly 2 cents to \$2.22. The state price is about 36 cents lower than a year ago, according to the price tracking site GasBuddy.

Will Speer, a petroleum analyst with GasBuddy, said in a news release that demand through the summer driving season, starting Memorial Day weekend, likely will remain high.

“Gasoline demand that has already been strong this year will undoubtedly see a huge seasonal increase in demand,” Speer said. “This paired with crude prices that continue to show signs of strength are going to keep further pressure on gas prices this summer.”

As of Sunday, Maine’s average was slightly higher than Vermont, at \$2.27, and New Hampshire’s, at \$2.17.



BDN FILE

Steve Douglass fills his tank with gas at Sam’s Club in Bangor last year.