



Portland's new food economy celebrated

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — It's like lattes rising from the ashes. German pil-sner brewed in an old scrapyard. The smell of fresh bagels and distilled spirits wafting over the train tracks. East Bayside has come a long way from its scrappy beginnings.

Built on the wreckage from Portland's great fire of 1866, this industrial chic neighborhood is touted this week with a daylong symposium, focusing on its phoenix-like transformation from brownfield to food hub. Co-sponsored by the Greater Portland Council of Governments, Phoenix Fare on Thursday, Sept. 17, focuses on the area's main economic driver: food and drink.

"Food represents a large part of our economy," said Caroline Paras, economic and community planner for the Greater Portland Council of Governments, who plays a large role in the event.

From a movie screening at the Merrill Auditorium, to a food tour of East Bayside, to backyard soil testing at a community garden, Phoenix Fare showcases what is right with this swath of the city.

In March, Portland was selected for a \$200,000 Brownfields Area-Wide Planning grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for East Bayside. Those funds, arriving this fall, will fund a two-year study to further revitalize this area bounded by Washington Avenue, Marginal Way, Cumberland Avenue and Franklin Street.

"The businesses themselves are the true stars of our food ecosystem," said Paras, whose documentary "Scaling Local" focuses on Portland-area food manufacturers and will be shown Thursday morning at the Merrill Auditorium.

Last year the White House designated Greater Portland one of 12 "Manufacturing Communities" in the country, and Paras was inspired to learn more.

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Goodbye to 'Conversations with Maine'

Editor's Note: Bangor Daily News columnist Robin Clifford Wood has decided that it's time to move on from her column, *Conversations with Maine*. Robin has taken us into the lives and homes of Mainers for five years, showing us the connections between people, their communities and their passions. As she enters this next chapter of her writing, we wish her the best and hope she continues to tell the interesting stories she discovers so that we can all be a little more connected.

After five years and 173 columns, I have decided to retire *Conversations With Maine*. Back in 2010 I wondered if I'd eventually run out of people to write about, but I soon discovered that I had unlimited material. Everyone has a story to tell, and every story has something to offer — inspiration, illumination, entertainment, or all three. As I say goodbye, I'd like to sum up the best of what I've learned from the people of Maine.

First: there is no age limit on infectious enthusiasm. Whether you're an 8-year-old historian throwing a 100-year commemoration party for the Titanic, or a 98-year-old beachcomber who makes bookmarks and seaweed pudding, loving what you do infuses energy into everyone you meet.

Second: there are no geographic boundaries on living a rich life. I spoke at length with Mainers who have barely ventured beyond their hometowns. Another had tallied up 105 journeys around the

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ROBIN CLIFFORD WOOD
CONVERSATIONS WITH MAINE

Some Mainers farm organically but pass on certification

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

BELFAST — Farmer Lucian Smith of the Smith Family Farm in Bar Harbor has had a lot on his mind this summer.

He's worried about the drought conditions that have made it hard to gather the hay that his small herd of lovingly tended dairy cows rely on for winter fodder. He's concerned about the competition that has crept up from afar, including the 1,000-cow certified organic dairy farms in western states such as Colorado that undercut his prices at the grocery store.

But he's not worried about keeping painstaking records to make sure his farm's organic certification is kept up to date. That's because he decided a few years ago to let the certification lapse, and he hasn't looked back.

"We are too small and local for certification to make sense for us," Smith said. "We believe in the trust of our customers, and we didn't want to be in the same category as the commodity organic, which was widely available."

Although sometimes Maine — the home of the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Associa-

tion and the Common Ground Country Fair — can seem like ground zero for all things certified organic, as it happens Smith joined a vocal minority when he chose to eschew the organic certification process.

Eliot Coleman, the celebrated organic farming pioneer who runs Four Season Farm in Harborside with his wife, Barbara Damrosch, is another farmer who believes the process of getting organic certification is a waste of time.

Coleman said that when the United States Department of Agriculture started to regulate the word "organic" in 2001 and began requiring farms to get and keep organic certification in order to market themselves that way, it signaled the beginning of the end of the word for him.

"Organic" has already been chewed and digested," he said. "I've been an organic farmer since I started. But ever since the USDA co-opted the word and therefore was able to define it in whatever image they wanted to define it, I decided to not be part of that system. Any time you put the fox in charge of the henhouse, you're going to have problems."



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Eliot Coleman is the co-owner of Four Season Farm in Brooksville. Coleman started the farm in 1969 and is a longtime follower and proponent of organic farming practices. He believes that the USDA's regulation of what constitutes organic practices has been devaluing the word "organic" and he did not apply for the organic certification.

Long-standing debate

Mary Yurlina, the organic certification director at MOFGA, said the debate over the word "organic" has been hashed out for decades, with no end in sight. She said that one way to look at the reason that spurred USDA regulation of the term is by considering other words used to market food, words such as "healthy" and "natural."

"Those words don't have a standard associated with them," she said.

Otherwise said, such claims on packaging that are intended to make consumers feel good or reassured about buying the items don't actually mean anything. But the phrase "certified organic" does. After the idea of organics

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ABOUT A BARN



TROY R. BENNETT | BDN

The structure housing the Celebration Barn Theater in South Paris was built in 1902 and used to stable racehorses. Since 1972, it has been the home of an immersive physical theater school founded by Tony Montanaro.

A rustic kind of theatrics History takes center stage at Celebration Barn in South Paris

BY KATHLEEN PIERCE
BDN STAFF

Hanging from the wooden rafters are masks of monkeys, jesters, birds and sages. Nearby a rack of colorful women's dresses await their next scene. In former horse stalls props like fishbowls, canes and capes are stashed behind curtains.

Most barns harbor stories and secrets, and exude a particular character. At Celebration Barn Theater these attributes take on a center stage magic.

For the last 43 years, the former race horse stable has been home to Maine's internationally known immersive physical theater training and performance space.

Since its 1972 inception by world-class mime artist Tony Montanaro, multitudes of students have traveled to the hidden barn in Oxford County for the solace and inspiration of improv under the 1902 rafters. In its earliest stages the deal was simple: Come to Maine and help rebuild the dilapidated barn in exchange for classes by the master.

Floors were laid by past performers, toolmarks from the barn's 1900 builders still dent the rafters, but in its flaws lay its charm.

"The history here is a big thing," Thom Wall, a Cirque du Soleil juggler fresh from a gig on a cruise ship in Alaska, said. To the full-time entertainer from Vermont, the theater set in a stunning apple orchard "is different from a performing arts center where they have bleached floors and fluorescent lights. Here the focal point is the work."

The scuffed floors and shopworn wooden walls attest to the warmth and creativity of all who've passed through here.

"Dancing with the Stars" host Tom Bergeron and energetic harp player Deborah



TROY R. BENNETT | BDN

Henson-Conant, are just two Celebration Barn successes. "We've had performers in everything from the circus to TV to musicals," artistic director Amanda Huotari said. "It's a real laboratory for people to come and focus."

Huotari, who grew up down the road and purchased the nonprofit theater in 2007, started taking classes here at 13. On a tour of the three-story barn last week, she put its spell into perspective.

"For the artists to come here and create, it takes away all the pretension," she said, as natural light streamed in and a screen door slammed. "It really is a barn. Not a theater built to look like a barn."

Inside the 40 foot by 100 foot barn students come for a week, or longer. They stay in dorms — simple bunk rooms — built into the barn's eaves. The stage, one flight below, is where the action is.

This summer the barn welcomed students

from seven countries and audiences from across the state. "We are celebrating happiness in the performance," Huotari said. "Our constant reinvention is not static. We are empowering performers to come and create their own path."

Unlike when Montanaro found it, the barn exudes strength.

There's a shiny new roof and the cupola has been restored. New siding, heating and cooling units have been added in the last five years.

And there's more to come. Next year Huotari will launch a campaign to prep the barn for year-round programming.

"This barn is here to stay," she said. "Renovations will allow for us to extend the season of performances, workshops and residencies and attract even greater number of artists and audiences to western Maine."