

Poland Spring looking to tap new sites

BY KATHRYN SKELTON
SUN JOURNAL

RUMFORD — On the banks of the Ellis River, there's a little bubbling spring, a tennis-ball-size churn of water surrounded by a ring of small river rocks, with a bucolic name. North Spring A.

On a sunny Friday last month, Mark Dubois scaled the overgrown alder thicket next to the river bank, bent down and drank from it.

Clean, cold, straight from the ground.

"It should taste like Poland Spring water," Dubois quipped.

Does it?

He laughed, nodded.

"It does."

And, some day soon, it just might be.

It's been six years since Poland Spring, the No. 1-selling bottled spring water in the U.S., and its parent Nestle Waters North America tapped a new site in Maine.

The company, which has grown over 10 years from bottling 636 million gallons of

water in Maine to 875 million, wants a new source for more.

Enter Rumford.

Dubois is overseeing Poland Spring's preliminary testing of the site, which is owned and used by the Rumford Water District to provide water to townspeople. He's a geologist and Maine native, with the company for more than 10 years. It's his job to explore and explain the science.

Could they get enough water that fits the Poland Spring taste for an investment here to make sense?

Simultaneously, it's his job to feel out the town: What can Poland Spring offer Rumford to win residents over to a massive draw on the water supply?

The multimillion-dollar project would trigger hiring six more drivers and bring exactly one job to town, post-construction, along with as-yet-unknown truck traffic and as-yet-unknown funds that might cover the water district's looming bill as it upgrades 100-year-old water pipes.

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ANDREE KEHN | SUN JOURNAL

Poland Spring natural resource manager and geologist Mark Dubois sips directly from North Spring A on the banks of the Ellis River in Rumford.



ABIGAIL CURTIS | BDN

Susanne Ward (right), owner of Rock City Coffee Roasters and Rock City Cafe, is looking forward to transitioning the company's business model to that of an employee-owned cooperative. Kevin Malmstrom, the head coffee roaster, will be one of the owners when the transition is completed by the end of this year or the beginning of 2017.

From baristas to owners

Entrepreneur to sign company over to employees

BY ABIGAIL CURTIS
BDN STAFF

Susanne Ward, owner of Rock City Coffee Roasters and Rock City Cafe in downtown Rockland, describes herself as something of an accidental businesswoman.

But what she and her late husband started 24 years ago as a small used bookstore and coffee shop in Rockland — a then-struggling city that had many shuttered storefronts — has survived, thrived and grown. Now she runs a bustling cafe that acts as a community hub and a separate roasting facility and store that is redolent with the rich aroma of coffee beans. Her businesses employ an aver-

age of 25 employees year-round, and more than half of them are full time.

All of that is why Ward, 65, wants to be very careful about how she plans for the future and why she is on track to transition the business model from single ownership to being an employee-owned cooperative. In a few months, she said, she'll be one of about a dozen employee-owners — and that's just what she wants to be.

"I'm really looking forward to that," she said. "My crew, the average age is probably 35 years old. That's a fabulous age for an entrepreneur. They all have energy. They're all committed to Rockland. It's a great, great time. They are the future.

And for me, I've been doing this so long. It's easier for me to get stuck in a mindset. I try to stay very open now. And I try to treat them like they are co-owners. I want them to have that sense of ownership."

Challenge for businesses

When the ink is finally dry on the legal paperwork for the new corporation and the deal is done, the two Rock City coffee businesses will join a growing number of Maine companies that have moved to an employee-owned model. They are as diverse as GAC Chemical in Searsport, which switched last year to an employee stock ownership plan, or ESOP, and the Stonington Workers Co-op, the

40-member largest worker-owned cooperative in the state, which runs three businesses: Burnt Cove Market, V&S Variety and Pharmacy and The Galley Grocery.

Turning ownership of companies to employees is one way to ensure a business remains intact, according to Rob Brown of the Cooperative Development Institute. That is critical in Maine, a rural state with the oldest population in the country.

"If we care about preserving business in small towns, we have to figure out the succession challenge," he said. "We're the oldest work force in the nation. It's a real challenge."
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Protect yourself from the Yahoo hackers

BY RUSS VAN ARSDALE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NORTHEAST CONTACT

At this writing, the full impact of the massive Yahoo data breach announced Sept. 22 was not known. However, it appears that hundreds of millions of consumers have had private information exposed in what's believed to be the biggest data breach to date.

Yahoo said hackers had stolen information from at least 500 million users' accounts, including names, addresses, phone numbers, dates of birth and encrypted passwords. Yahoo said the breach took place in 2014. Technology reporters had written earlier that stolen data from millions of accounts were being sold on the dark web.

This latest breach comes at a time when cybercrime is booming. For years, crooks have opened phony accounts to buy all sorts of things using other people's good credit records. The thieves don't pay their bills, and the law-abiding consumers are left to dispute the charges. It can cost time and money to straighten out a credit report following such an incident.

All of this leaves millions of consumers with another reason to review their credit reports. William Lund, superintendent of Maine's Bureau of Consumer Credit Protection or BCCP, said recently all consumers should look for signs of trouble and act quickly.

"A single phone call for an alleged debt that's not yours should be looked into since it may be the tip of a larger iceberg. Start by checking your credit reports," Lund said.

Federal law says that each of the major reporting agencies — Equifax, Experian and TransUnion — is required to provide every consumer with a free credit report once per year. Consumers can call each company's toll-free phone number to request a free report.

To start the process online, go to the truly free website AnnualCreditReport.com. Don't deal with online websites that promise "free" reports; you might be pressured into buying a credit report, credit monitoring or other services.

Anyone with concerns about her or his credit should pick one of the three reporting agencies and ask for a free report right away. In four months, ask another agency; four months after that, ask the third agency. Rinse and repeat forever.

If your credit report shows accounts were opened that you did not authorize, you may be a victim of identity theft. In fact, accounts may have been opened in the name of any family member. You can freeze your account, meaning no one else can open an account in your name. Get help from Maine's BCCP by calling toll-free 800-332-8529.

Privacy experts say too many of us use too few passwords. A breach that reveals a password securing one account may put other
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Hibachi restaurant plans to open in Bangor

BY NICK MCCREA
BDN STAFF

BANGOR — Another restaurant has signed on to fill the last vacant space in Bangor's Stillwater Crossing development.

Vinny Maietta, president of South Portland-based V&E Enterprises Inc., which built Stillwater Crossing, said last week that he has signed a lease with the owners of Portland's Kon Asian Bistro to start a new hibachi-style restaurant at the development.

Stillwater Crossing is currently home to Buffalo Wild Wings, Hobby Lobby and Elevation Burger. Left unfilled is an 8,000-square-foot space that shares a building with Elevation Burger, which opened its doors in April. Kon Asian Bistro, located on Brighton Ave-



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nue in Portland, offers sushi, lunch specials and entrees, but a large chunk of their business comes from the group hibachi tables.

Hibachi restaurants seat a group of people around a large grill, where the chef cooks rice and proteins for the diner, typically putting on a show of spinning spatulas, tossing eggs and lighting fires while they cook.

Attempts to reach the owners of Kon Asian Bistro were not successful Monday. It's unclear when the restaurant might be ready to open. Much work still needs to be done in the building, which is still an empty shell. Kon's parent company also operates

about a dozen other similar establishments throughout New England, Maietta said.

Bangor already has one hibachi restaurant, Kobe Ninja House, located about a mile down Stillwater Avenue near the Walmart.

Maietta said last week that he was pleased to find a tenant for the space, which he's been trying to fill since 2014. He said several large national retailers "kicked the tires," but never moved forward with signing a deal.

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