



AMBIT ENERGY
The Dallas-based Ambit Energy uses independent contractors and direct sales techniques to sell retail electricity supply, a strategy new to Maine and one that differs from other providers, as depicted in this slide from a recruitment video.

Energy

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logging \$1 million in earnings, consultants get a yellow blazer. After \$5 million, it's the "coveted Purple Jacket." Then onto royal blue, and at \$20 million, a "custom-tailored black-and-platinum jacket marking them as the epitome of the Ambit spirit."

One selected consultant each year receives the company's unimaginatively-named Crystal Sphere Award. Twice per year, a group of higher-level consultants is taken on a trip to a five-star resort.

The extent of Ambit's sales network in Maine remains unclear. Ambit disclosed that information

last year under a regulatory inquiry, but it redacted it from its public filings.

The company did not respond to an emailed request for comment.

It also is unclear how much its network of consultants affects its bottom line, both through revenue generated from sign-up costs and monthly fees and in savings from not having full-time sales staff that would qualify for benefits.

Ambit began operating in Maine in February 2015 and by year's end had sold about 28,000 megawatt-hours of electricity. That's a small part of the total market for competitive electricity, equalling about 3 percent of sales reported by the state's largest competitive supplier, Electricity Maine.

Preliminary figures

show the company had the lowest average electricity rates in Maine in 2015 compared with other competitive suppliers, based on reports to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

An analysis in Connecticut listed Ambit as one of nine companies in 2015 that saved customers money, in aggregate, when compared with the standard offer price.

But the company's billing practices have come under scrutiny in other states, where at least three proposed class action lawsuits take issue with the "budget billing" program that it also offers in Maine.

The system bills customers based on an average of their historical usage for the past year and their current electricity rate, ac-

cording to Ambit's website and one lawsuit filed in federal court in New York.

The lawsuit alleges that when monthly use exceeds that average rate, customers carry a "hidden" balance that then prompts an additional "settlement fee" from the company.

The company has argued that the dispute should not be handled in federal court but before New York regulators, who have shown some of the strongest interest in restricting the direct sale of electricity to residential customers.

Ambit caught the attention of Maine regulators one year ago, after allegations that one consultant was signing up customers without the proper consent.

Ambit said it showed that consultant the door.

Tissue

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to its sister pulp-making facility, and it generates its own electricity with dams it owns in the adjacent St. Croix River.

It is less than 40 miles away from the marine shipping terminal in Eastport, which helps to keep trucking costs lower than mills further away from the coast. And, a few years ago, IGIC spent \$15 million to convert the mill from using oil to cheaper natural gas.

"That has helped us considerably with our energy costs, which are still very high," Scott Beal, the company's spokesman, said at the time.

State, federal and local officials have praised IGIC's investments in the mill, made under CEO Arvind "A.K." Agarwal, that have made it more competitive and created more jobs. In gratitude to Agarwal's investment in the mill, Baileyville officials decided to dedicate the town's 2015 annual report to him.

Despite their enthusiasm, some officials, especially Gov. Paul LePage and U.S. Rep. Bruce Poliquin, have raised concerns about what they say is the continuing high cost of electricity in the state and the impact it has on doing business in Maine.

More specifically, LePage and Poliquin have said that the mill's dams should be able to be relicensed

without facing additional regulations from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission which, according to Poliquin, could add approximately \$1 million a year to the mill's expenses.

"You don't have growth and you don't have jobs unless you have investment," Poliquin said at an opening ceremony at the mill earlier this week. "Those of us who have run businesses know that for that investment to take place, you need to be able to compete. You need to be able to keep your costs low."

The economic challenges that the mill's owners have faced over the decades has been apparent in both the mill's employment levels and in the streets of Woodland, the village just west of the mill that sprang up with the mill's founding 110 years ago. Last week, there were only a handful of small businesses in the village with their lights on and doors open, but dozens of "house for sale" signs in the yards, often more than one on each block.

"This town only exists because of the mill," Bronson said. "It's the only reason [the town] is here."

The town's population was only a couple hundred in 1900, he said. By 1910, after the mill had been built and started operating, it was more than 1,000.

With a current estimated population between 1,400 and 1,500, Baileyville at one point had twice as many residents as it does now, according to Bronson.

He said the mill employed 1,000 people decades ago, with many of them living in Woodland in houses built specifically for mill workers by St. Croix Paper, the first entity to start producing paper products at the site in 1906.

By the early 1990s, when the mill was owned and operated by Georgia-Pacific and manufactured both pulp and paper, it employed nearly 700 people. By 2001, when Montreal-based Domtar acquired the mill from Georgia-Pacific, it has 500 employees.

Six years later, when Domtar ceased paper production at the site, it laid off 150 employees, reducing the workforce to about 300 people. After that, temporary work stoppages initiated by Domtar at the mill at times reduced its workforce to "near-zero," according to Bronson.

IGIC bought the mill from Domtar in 2010 for \$64 million.

But the mill's recent good fortune has yet to become readily apparent in the surrounding neighborhood where many of the houses became neglected, some even derelict, over the past 20 years.

According to Bronson, an informal survey conducted by the town in 2014 indicated that roughly a quarter of the houses in the central village were vacant.

"This village got, and you can still see it, to a terrible physical condition overall," Bronson said.

The town acquired a lot

of the neglected houses through nonpayment of taxes, he added, and demolished more than a dozen of them in 2014 and 2015. Others, he said, it resold.

"We've been selling them for next to nothing — shockingly low," the town manager said.

According to online real estate listings for Baileyville, there currently are at least a couple of houses in the central village that can be bought for as little as \$22,000.

Linda Fell, 49, has owned and operated a pizza parlor directly across Second Avenue from the mill since 1993. She said that, for many years, local residents were scared that the mill would be shut down altogether, in keeping with the trend of mills elsewhere in Maine.

"It was pretty scary. Everybody didn't know what to do," Fell said. "We all depend on the mill. Fifty percent of my income is from the mill [workers]."

Since the arrival of IGIC in town six years ago, she said, area residents have become more hopeful and feel like the local economy has been more stable.

"We're all excited," Fell said.

More than that, she added, in the past two years construction work at the mill has helped to boost business at her pizza parlor, enabling her to double her workforce.

"I hired two more people," Fell said.

Planning grant awarded for projects

BANGOR — Eastern Maine Development Corp. has been awarded a planning grant from the State of Maine ConnectME Authority to launch a pilot project in four communities or partnership of communities supporting the expansion of digital capacity in eastern Maine.

EMDC will select four communities or a partnership of communities representing one application for a county that is well-positioned to begin the digital planning process, building the necessary "template" to identify next steps and expand the model to other communities.

The final plan will include digital planning that incorporates infrastructure and the current capacity of digital literacy/training, gaps, and solutions to address the gaps.

Each community will be awarded up to \$10,000. A match of up to \$5,000 is required.

For information, call Vicki Rusbult at 942-6389 or email vrusbult@emdc.org.

Class to focus on starting a business

ROCKPORT — West Bay Rotary Club of Camden and Five Town CSD Adult Education will present its fall class in entrepreneurship for people who are interested in starting their own businesses. Classes will be held 6-8 p.m. Wednesdays, Sept. 28-Oct. 26, at Camden Hills Regional High School, 25 Keelson Drive.

Topics will include the legal aspects of starting a business, financing a startup, accounting and tax issues, writing business plans, sales and marketing and managing a business, plus a discussion of traits commonly found in successful entrepreneurs.

Class speakers and panel discussion members will be West Bay Rotary members who own or have owned their own businesses. A staff member from the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development also will make a presentation outlining services available to new entrepreneurs.

To sign up, call CHRHS

Adult Ed Department at 236-7800, ext. 275, or register online at fivetowns.maineadulted.org. The fee for the class is \$30.

Bank employees help fight hunger

CAMDEN — Employees from Camden National Bank delivered donations, totaling close to \$9,000, to 29 food pantries throughout the state of Maine through July.

Employees raised the funds through the bank's employee-run community outreach program, the Community Spirit of Giving. The money will help provide meals and support to the more than 208,000 individuals in Maine who turn to food pantries and meal service programs for food assistance every year.

Camden National's Community Spirit of Giving program's goal is to make an impact in local communities by providing assistance to underprivileged children and families through work with local food pantries, as well as schools and community leaders, to help prevent hunger, according to the press release.

According to recent numbers provided by the Good Shepherd Food Bank of Maine, the program's donation will provide 34,800 meals to those facing food insecurity in the state. In addition, as food needs rise for children during the summer months, the funds can be used to support the 85,000 kids in Maine who receive free or reduced lunch and help ensure that they have enough to eat throughout summer vacation.

Complementing Camden National Bank's philanthropic efforts, the CSOG program was founded in 1991 by employees who wanted to create their own grass-roots effort to support local communities and people in need. Over the course of a year, employees create numerous fundraising events, ranging from raffles and bake sales to yard sales and other community events.

Proceeds from these activities benefit the program and are used to support the needs of food banks and local food pantries throughout the state.

On the Job

The Maine Development Foundation announced **Anne Ball** has been hired as interim program director for Maine Downtown Center. Ball has served as a consultant for MDC since 2012 and has been heavily involved in the success of the Healthy M a i n e Streets Program, Grants to Green, and M a k i n g Headway in Your Community. In her interim position, Ball will lead the MDC program through 2016, working with stakeholders to finalize strategic and operational planning for MDC. She will help identify and build the capacity necessary to deliver critical day-to-day work and grants initiatives at the Center. Ball is the former project director of Grants to Green Maine, a partnership of Maine Development Foundation's Maine Downtown Center, Efficient-



cy Maine and the Maine Community Foundation. In recent years, she was project director for a CDC Grant known as Healthy Maine Streets and worked in the state on other multi-sector projects, including serving as the cultural and heritage tourism coordinator for DECD for six years. Ball has served as a consultant to many organizations in Maine including Maine Preservation, Maine Humanities Council, Maine State Museum and private architecture firms and communities. Ball replaces Lorain Francis, the former senior program manager for the Maine Development Foundation and Maine Downtown Center, who left the organization in June.

To submit items for On the Job, visit bangordailynews.com. Fill out the "News and Photos" form under the "Post News" button at the top of the home page and click "Publish" at the bottom when finished. Questions? Call Community Editor Julie Harris at 990-8285.

Forum

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less blatant trickery than before.

However, many still use an official-looking American eagle symbol on letterhead and envelopes, even though they have no link to any U.S. government agency. And most will proclaim this mailing is a "final notice." If only that were true.

You may want to revisit the Edmunds website for a look at third-party warranty scams at edmunds.com/auto-warranty/third-party-extended-warranty-scams.html.

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.word](http://necontact.wordpress.com)press.com or email contact@live.com.

BATTLE OF THE BANDS

A Rockin' Evening to Support Healthcare for Local Kids

Acadia Hospital FOUNDATION EMHS FOUNDATION

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 23
7 to 11 pm
Cross Insurance Center, Bangor

Vote for Your Favorite Band!
The Allison Ames Band • Motor Booty Affair
Dance the Night Away!
Appetizers • Cash Bar

Tickets: \$30 per person
Available at the door or online (credit card) at
www.emhsfoundation.org
For more information call 207.973.5055

To benefit Child and Adolescent Services at Acadia Hospital

blueberry

EASTERN MAINE MEDICAL CENTER AUXILIARY

EMHS MEMBER

Twelfth Annual Kitchen Tour

October 1, 12-4 PM

Please join us!

Help us support EMMC's **Remarkable Begins With You** campaign by touring six beautiful kitchens in the greater Bangor area. Get ideas for designing and decorating, enjoy good food, drink, and samples from fine vendors who will be present in the kitchens.

Tickets \$25 in Advance • \$30 Day of Tour

Available after Labor Day online and at the EMMC Gift Shop, Patrick's Fine Gifts, Rebecca's Gift Shop, Miller Drug (Westgate) and Anthony John's Day Spa

Sponsors to date include...

Gold Designers: Hammond Lumber Company • ANM Properties
Silver Designers: Libby Brothers, Inc • Atlantic Designs • Katahdin Trust Company • Bangor Daily News • Bangor Metro
Advocates: Bangor Savings Bank • Joel Holcomb Photography • Chapel Hill Floral

Proceeds will benefit the new EMMC Neonatal Intensive Care Unit made possible by EMMC's **Remarkable Begins With You** campaign.

www.emmcauxiliary.org

The award winning kitchen featured in this ad was designed by Hammond Lumber Company and is one of the six beautiful kitchens included on this year's tour.