

# Lewiston’s FISC Solutions sold, hiring anticipated

BY DARREN FISHELL  
BDN STAFF

PORTLAND — A Wisconsin software firm has purchased the Lewiston-based financial services company FISC Solutions in a deal the Lewiston firm’s leader said has the potential to double the 75-employee company’s headcount in the next two years.

“They are a much larger company and they are going to move business our way because we do things they don’t do. We have the potential to double or more than double our workforce,” Jerry Blodgett, FISC’s president and chief executive officer, said in a phone interview Thursday.

Blodgett said the purchase was a “multimillion-dollar deal,” but said he could not disclose the exact sale price to Wausau Financial Systems Inc. of Wisconsin.

Wausau is a subsidiary of the publicly traded Deluxe Corp. out of Minnesota, a \$1.7 billion company that prints bank checks under a variety of brands and offers other financial services.

Blodgett said FISC’s leaders began notifying its customers of the acquisition Thursday, after telling employees Wednesday.

The Bangor Daily News is a customer of FISC, which also provides back-office payment processing services for various utilities, banks and other com-

“They are a much larger company and they are going to move business our way because we do things they don’t do. We have the potential to double or more than double our workforce.”

JERRY BLODGETT, FISC PRESIDENT AND CEO

panies in Maine.

Blodgett was one of a core group of managers who bought the company last year from the firm that was jointly owned by Androscoggin Bank and Norway Savings Bank.

The company has long been a customer of Wausau, using some of its industry-specific software for processing payments.

Blodgett said he’s known Wausau’s president for roughly 25 years and closed the deal earlier to extend Wausau’s reach into another segment of the payment processing market.

“They are in the business of writing software and selling it to large companies, but as time goes on they want to be able to sell that software and sell the results of that software,” Blodgett said.

Blodgett said he sees the potential to increase the company’s workforce in Lewiston as it gains access to a bigger sales force in parts of the country that are too far afield for its current footprint.

“That opens up our market space tremendously and that to me is the exciting part of this,” Blodgett said. “That’s what drives the growth because we can process [payments] wherever they come from.”

That’s a barrier now with utilities or other banks around the country that need payment processors nearby that can convert paper records into an electronic format then for processing.

“The reason we wouldn’t be competitive for processing a utility payment out of California would be the amount of time it would be for the mail to get that to us to process,” Blodgett said. “As part of a larger company, we could have sites around the country.”

Blodgett said new hires would come on board as the company gains new clients, not at one time. Blodgett said the company looks to hire a new employee for about every two new clients.

Blodgett said the company already has space in its office at 168 Lisbon St. in Lewiston to accommodate any new hiring.

He said FISC will operate as a division of Wausau, for which he will take on the new title of senior vice president of customer relations.

FISC’s owners said in their memo to customers that because they currently use Wausau’s software, they don’t expect any disruptions to payment processing with the change.

## Pineland

Continued from Page C1

Pineland owns about 900 acres in St. Agatha currently in potato production, Denekas said, adding that the bulk of the spuds used in Mars Hill are purchased from farmers around central Aroostook County.

“It’s hard to say the total land base involved,” he said. “But I would guess we buy nearly 10 percent of the potato crop in Aroostook County.”

Nothing pairs with a good, Maine potato like a nice steak or roast, so in 1995, Pineland Beef was born.

“We started it as an alternative for our dairy farmers,” Denekas said. “We wanted to provide an outlet for farmers that have the farms, fields and barns for cattle [because] in Maine we have some of the best grass in the country for grazing despite our short growing season.”

Today, Pineland Beef purchases 30,000 head of cattle raised specifically for the company by farmers from around the state and other parts of New England.

“The niche we wanted was antibiotic-free and hormone-free cattle,” Denekas said. “People are more concerned about where their food comes from.”

Many of the purchased cattle end up traveling to Fort Fairfield where they are “finished” on a diet of Aroostook County barley and oats before being shipped to Pennsylvania for slaughter and processing.

“You will see our beef in restaurants in Las Vegas, Philadelphia and Los Angeles,” he said.

On the retail consumer side of things, Denekas said one of Pineland’s largest beef customers is Whole Foods, which carries the products in its stores from Maine to Virginia and west to Ohio.

Every bit of the cow is used either for human

grade food, pet food or leather, Denekas said.

Then there is Pineland Cheese, produced in a 13,000 square-foot creamery on the Pineland Farms New Gloucester campus.

Cheddar, feta, jack and baby Swiss cheeses are shipped out daily nationwide, Denekas said.

“We are making 800,000 pounds of cheese a year,” he said.

To make all that cheese, Pineland purchases 8 million pounds of milk annually from Maine dairy farmers.

“It is Maine cheese made from Maine milk from Maine cows,” Denekas said.

Eventually, beef, potatoes and cheese may come together in products such as prepared frozen shepherd’s pie, he said.

“We are always looking at value-added products,” Denekas said. “We look for new ways to present new versions of our existing products.”

The potential is huge, said Bill Haggett, CEO at Pineland Farms Potato Company and Pineland Farms Natural Meats.

“I’ve grown up in Maine and have been aware of the importance of potatoes grown in Aroostook County to the economy of the state,” he said. “When I got involved [with Pineland], I realized it was a tremendous opportunity to add value to a crop that is tied closely to the state of Maine [and] adding value to what’s grown in Aroostook County just seems to make a lot of sense.”

In addition to the beef on the hoof, Haggett said, Pineland also ships out cow manure from the Fort Fairfield cows to be used for compost and buys locally raised barley and oats to feed the cows.

“You really get an economic multiplier effect from having all that cattle in northern Maine,” he said. “There is a lot of spinoff.”

Denekas said Pineland directly employs close to



COURTESY OF PINELAND FARMS

A skier explores some of the trails at Pineland Farms in New Gloucester. In addition to miles of recreational trails, the facility houses a working farm and several business enterprises.

330 people among the potato, beef and cheese operations but also counts the close to 1,000 employees working at the 45 tenants from dentists to accountants housed on the New Gloucester campus when talking about economic impacts.

Much of what Pineland does, he said, is thanks to investments made by Libra, though the foundation has not done any in-depth, specific analysis of the economic impacts of those investments.

“One thing we do know for sure are those employment numbers,” Denekas said. “But as for other numbers, we have never studied the economic dollars and cents impacts.”

However, he did say Libra has made \$100 million in investments into Pineland and its related projects over the last 15 years.

“That is pretty significant,” he said.

“We try to figure out the right way to invest our assets in areas we are interested in,” Denekas said. “It happens we are interested

in the state of Maine and local food companies.”

While the Pineland Farm in New Gloucester operates as a nonprofit, Denekas stresses that the food operations are for-profit businesses.

In addition, he said Pineland voluntarily pays property taxes on its tax exempt, nonprofit real estate.

“We felt it is appropriate to do that,” Denekas said. “We make a point to pay our fair share.”

## Husson to host community talk about substance abuse efforts

BANGOR — Local substance abuse, particularly to prescription and nonprescription opiate drugs, is of great concern to the community. From substance use prevention to treatment and recovery, the community is working toward a healthier eastern Maine.

Eighty people representing 15 different coalitions addressing substance use will gather to recognize the work that has been accomplished to date and look ahead to what can be achieved in the future. The free community gathering “Building a Healthier Community through Partnership: Substance Use Disorder – What Was, What Is, What Could Be” will be held 8-11:30 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 8, at Husson University, Dyke Center for Family Business. The session is open to the public is sponsored by the Community Health Leadership Board and the City of Bangor Public Health Department.

The CHLB is an unprecedented new collaborative of health care and service organizations, that came together last year to address

pressing local health concerns. The CHLB is initially focused on measurably reducing the impact of substance use, specifically opiate use, in our community. The CHLB is composed of chief executive officers and other leaders from Eastern Maine Medical Center, St. Joseph Hospital, Penobscot Community Health Care, Acadia Hospital, Eastern Maine Healthcare Systems, Community Health and Counseling Services, Penquis, Eastern Area Agency on Aging, and the City of Bangor. The CHLB will be in attendance at the beginning of the Dec. 8 Community Gathering.

Groups giving mini-presentations on their work at the Community Gathering include: Penobscot Linking Partnership, Healthy Maine Partnership, Drug Free Communities, Bangor Area Recovery Network, Maine Health Access Foundation, Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion and others.

The CHLB’s first initiatives are as follows. Representatives from working groups for these initiatives will also give presentations

at the Community Gathering.

Launch a public awareness campaign that educates and decreases the stigma of opiate use disorder, treatment and recovery.

Develop and implement a community-wide opioid and narcotic prescribing protocol.

Assess feasibility for and work toward providing community based non-medical (social) detox services.

Increase access to substance use disorder treatment in rural areas

Penobscot Community Health Care received grant funding from the Maine Health Access Foundation to support the CHLB. The CHLB is an independent board convened to address pressing community health concerns. For more information regarding the CHLB, contact Patty Hamilton patty.hamilton@bangormaine.gov or 207-992-4550 or Doug Michael at dmichael@emhs.org or 207-973-6602.

To register for the Dec. 8 Community Gathering, email sara.yasner@bangormaine.gov.

# For everything that comes Next

Get to know everything new, fun and important to you about growing wiser and older in Maine

Next  
Every weekend in the  
Bangor Daily News