

Student helps state understand migrant farm workforce

BY ANTHONY BRINO
BDN STAFF

Maine’s agricultural economy has long relied on seasonal workers from here and away, and some now call the state home, if only for part of the year.

Treva deMaynadier, a college student from central Maine, spent last summer meeting some of the estimated 2,700 migrant and seasonal farm workers who come to the state each year to harvest blueberries, broccoli and other crops.

As an intern with the Maine Department of Labor, deMaynadier surveyed migrant workers in Down East Maine during the summer blueberry harvest and in Aroostook County during the broccoli season from April to October.

Migrant workers account for about 60 percent of hired farm help in Maine, according to the Labor Department, and they help sustain rural agricultural economies doing work that can’t be mechanized but that many don’t want to do, such as picking broccoli and cauliflower.

“Their desire to improve

the lives of their families provides motivation to travel great distances and make sacrifices to find work,” wrote deMaynadier, a graduate of Waterville Senior High School now studying at Oberlin College in Ohio who participated in the internship through the Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center.

DeMaynadier met workers from Canada, Mexico, Honduras, Haiti, the U.S. and elsewhere, some of whom usually spend half the year in Maine with their children, who attend local schools and learn English. In the first of 52 conversations, deMaynadier met a 32-year-old woman in Caribou originally from Texas who has come to The County for the broccoli harvest since she was a child with her family. She now comes to Maine with her partner and their three children from April through October, and she considers Texas and Maine to be her family’s permanent home.

“She says she likes working for this farmer,” deMaynadier wrote. “She likes Maine, and as long as there is work here she will continue to come.” Back in



BDN FILE
Migrant worker Baraquiel Herrera of Mexico talks about his job thinning trees in the Aroostook County plantation of Oxbow in 2002.

Texas, the family has usually lived half the year without working, relying on unemployment benefits, though she said her partner is now able to work in the winter as a commercial truck driver.

Maine farms have used seasonal laborers for de-

acades, and started hiring migrant workers particularly from Mexico and central America in the 1990s.

Despite so many hours of hard work, some have liked the area well enough to stay. About 600 Latino residents have settled in Hancock and Washington coun-

ties since 2000 and helped found the community integration group Mano en Mano.

In 2015, 1,560 migrant workers originally were hired for the Down East blueberry harvest and 297 were hired for the broccoli season in Aroostook Coun-

ty, according to the labor department. Others worked in wreath-making, packing and the potato and apple harvests.

At another camp housing broccoli workers last summer, deMaynadier met a woman originally from Mexico who’s been working there for more than a decade, along with her husband and son. While she and her husband usually left The County in October to vacation in her native Mexico and then work in Florida, their son has remained in Presque Isle, staying with a local family and going to school. He recently graduated high school but wasn’t sure what to do with his future, deMaynadier found.

“Her son wants to continue in school and she says she wants him to stay in Maine and go to a community college, but he wants to travel with her and her husband and work in the fields,” deMaynadier wrote. “She is hoping that after a year of work he will change his mind and go back to school. ‘El es muy joven’ (he’s too young),” she says, “He doesn’t know what is good for him.”

Slow sales force pellet maker to cut back

BY ANTHONY BRINO
BDN STAFF

ASHLAND — Amid warmer weather, cheaper oil and higher U.S. exchange rates, Ashland-based Northeast Pellets has curtailed production in an effort to stay open long-term.

Northeast Pellets decreased its pellet production by half effective immediately, Matthew Bell, founder and president, said in a media release Monday.

Sales have been weak this season because of the warm weather, Bell said, but the “real blow” was when one of the mill’s largest local customers, representing 15 percent of output, switched to a Canadian supplier. The customer is the University of Maine at Fort Kent. The company continues to supply the University of Maine at Presque Isle and Northern



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Northeast Pellets’ Ashland mill after the reconstruction in 2011.

Maine Community College, he said.

Bell emphasized that the mill is not shutting down, but reducing production “to avoid closure.”

After developing the business idea for the pellet plant as a student at Husson University, Bell and his father built Northeast Pellets as the state’s first wood pellet manufacturer, and production started in 2006. Three other wood pellet plants have opened up in Maine since then.

Until recently, Northeast Pellets was operating 24 hours per day, five days per week, and over the past 16 months, the company invested almost

\$500,000 in the mill’s capacity and efficiency to try to meet the demand experienced last winter — when retailers were selling out of the fuel amid frigid cold.

Now, Bell said, Northeast Pellets’ operations have been set at three days a week, with reductions in hours for 13 full-time employees.

“We partnered with many interests in the area to create this transition and aid local businesses, but now find our operations at risk in this difficult market,” he said. “We ask our employees for their patience as we try to sort through this market situation.”

Camden-based wireless provider says it hit Internet expansion goal

STAFF REPORTS

PORTLAND — The Camden-based wireless Internet provider Redzone Wireless said it reached its goal to offer connections to 25 percent of households in Maine by year’s end.

The company most recently added service in Ellsworth and Cape Elizabeth, adding to its service to eight other municipalities and islands in Casco Bay to reach about 137,500 households.

Beside its newest areas, Redzone launched service

this year in Westbrook, Bath, Camden, Rockland, Augusta, Manchester, Portland, Waterville and Auburn.

The company has not released subscriber information, but the company’s vice president, Michael Forcillo, said in a news release that customer demand “is increasing dramatically as we expand our coverage area.”

The company has a 30-year lease with the University of Maine System for wireless spectrum set aside for educational in-

stitutions. It uses cell towers to deliver Internet using radio technology similar to that serving smartphones.

The company has said it seeks eventually to reach 90 percent of the homes and businesses in Maine.

It has gotten help from various state agencies, securing a Pine Tree Development Zone designation in its move from Rockland to Camden and loan insurance from the Finance Authority of Maine for a \$4 million loan from Camden National Bank.

Applications sought for Maine Top Gun

PORTLAND — Applications are open for the 2016 Top Gun Maine Class. Maine entrepreneurs will compete for a limited number of seats in Orono, Rockland and Portland by submitting a written application, slide deck and completed business model canvas.

The process also will entail a panel interview, which includes pitching to a committee of advisers, mentors and business professionals.

New in 2016 is “PreFlight,” a series of workshops available to all Maine entrepreneurs but focused on the components of preparing a successful Top Gun application. One-on-one mentoring sessions will be available.

PreFlight sessions are set for:

— 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 5, at the Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce office, 20 South St., Bangor

— 5-6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 6, at WBRC, 44 Central St., Bangor.

— 7:30-9 a.m. Tuesday, Jan. 12, at the Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce office, 20 South St., Bangor

— Noon-1:30 p.m. Wednesday, Jan. 13, at the Target Technology Center, 20 Godfrey Drive, Orono.

The Top Gun program is made possible by Maine Center for Entrepreneurial Development, the University of Maine and the Maine Technology Institute, with support from Camden National Bank as well as many local business sponsors, program advisers and mentors.

For information about the Top Gun Maine program or the Maine Center for Entrepreneurial Development, visit mced.biz.

On The Job

Cheryl Ahearn joined St. Germain Collins in Westbrook as accounting manager. Ahearn has provided business accounting consulting services for more than 30 years. Ahearn will oversee all accounting functions at St. Germain Collins, including accounts payable, accounts receivable, payroll compilation, budgeting, forecasting and financial reporting. She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in accounting from the University of Southern Maine and resides in Gorham.



Ahearn

Justin M. Freeman, certified public accountant, has joined BBSC CPAs in Brewer as a senior accountant, bringing seven years of experience in public accounting to the firm. He earned his Bachelor of Science in accounting in 2008, and his Master of Science in accounting in 2009, both from the University of Maine. Freeman’s client base includes individuals, corporations, partnerships and nonprofit groups. He is involved with clients in industries including retail, construction and service.



Freeman

Mark Stasium has joined Camden National Bank in Portland as senior vice president, commercial real estate lending officer. Stasium will report to Steve Lawrence, se-

nior vice president and director of the

Commercial Real Estate Group. Stasium was a senior loan officer in commercial lending at TD Bank. Stasium is a graduate of Bucknell University in Pennsylvania and received his Master of Business Administration from the University of Southern Maine.



Stasium

He lives with his family in Portland. He enjoys golf, skiing and Portland High School athletics, and has been a coach in Portland youth sports since his children were in grade school.

Acadia Hospital in Bangor has hired child and adolescent psychiatrist Dr. **Mark Robert Allen** as the hospital’s medical director for pediatric inpatient services. Allen earned his undergraduate degree in neuroscience from Washington and Lee University, where he graduated cum laude; and his medical degree from the University of Texas Health Science Center. His postgraduate training included a fellowship in child and adolescent psychiatry at New York Presbyterian, The University Hospital of Columbia and Cornell. Allen completed his residency in adult psychiatry at the University of Texas Health Science Center.

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