

## Downtown Bangor Adopt-a-Garden returns for third colorful year

BY EMILY BURNHAM  
OF THE WEEKLY STAFF

There are still plots available for the third annual Downtown Bangor Adopt a Garden project, and gardeners both seasoned and beginner-level are welcome to sign up to plant.

The event, set for the morning of Saturday, May 14 throughout downtown Bangor, is the brainchild of Jamie Ballinger, a Bangor resident who moved to the area ten years ago, in 2006. Back then, the downtown boom was just beginning, and the community-minded Ballinger wanted to get involved.

"At that time there wasn't much going in downtown, but you could tell it had potential and just needed a nudge," Ballinger said. "I got involved in some of the groups who were focused on growing and improving downtown. I wanted to do something to contribute to the walkability of the city that was low cost

and high impact and would result in getting more people to walk around downtown. I thought, 'Why couldn't we just stick flowers in all those unused spaces downtown?'"

Now in its third year, the Adopt-A-Garden program estimates that 125 small plots will be adopted by volunteers who will plant and care for them, though more plots can be opened if demand increases.

"In the first year, we adopted close to 30 spots. The second year just over 100," Ballinger said.

Adoptees include individuals, families, businesses, teachers and students, community groups and clubs. The adoptees are assigned a spot. They buy the plants, plant them and care for them. The City provides support with mulch and watering. Gardeners can get creative — while some plots feature simple displays of annual flowers, other include ornamental greens,

more unusual flowers and even, in some cases, art themes or vegetables. A "Very Hungry Caterpillar"-themed garden in one of the Kenduskeag Stream parkways was planted last year.

Ballinger believes the whole project allows people to have a sense of ownership and involvement in the overall look and feel and downtown, and in turn spruces up the area for those coming from out of town, contributing to an overall visual vitality.

"It gives people a sense of pride and ownership. It gets people downtown and involved and talking to each other," Ballinger said.

Prior to the "Big Dig" day on May 14, a Downtown Cleanup Day is set for Saturday, April 30. To sign up to help clean up the downtown area before the gardens go in, or to inquire about remaining adoptable garden plots, call the Downtown Bangor Partnership at 992-4234.

## WLBZ weatherman Steve McKay leaving TV for full-time ministry



ASHLEY L. CONTI/BDN

After 22 years as a meteorologist at Channel 2, Steve McKay is retiring to spend more time in ministry.

BY NOK-NOI RICKER  
OF THE BDN STAFF

A longtime meteorologist for WLBZ-TV Channel 2 has decided to give up his television job to follow his spiritual calling.

Steven W. Smith, who is better known as weatherman Steve McKay, announced Wednesday that he is leaving the station where he has worked since 1994 to work as a full-time minister. He received his master of arts degree from Bangor Theological Seminary in a ceremony at First United Methodist Church on Essex Street in May 2009. Last year he enrolled in a doctorate of ministry program at Duke University, which "has only sharpened my interest in church leadership," he said in a Wednesday statement about his decision to leave TV.

Smith, 55, said it "was a tough decision, but it was an easy decision as well." "I'm leaving something I love for something I love," he said.

For the last eight years he has been a pastor in his hometown at the Orono United Methodist Church and is entering his third

year leading the Alton United Methodist Church. He started his work at two United Methodist congregations in Washington County.

"For the last several years I have been balancing both my television and church duties, but now feel the time is right to make a transition to devote more of my time and energy to the Orono and Alton United Methodist Churches," Smith said. "This is a tough decision; I am very grateful for these many years at WLBZ 2, yet am also thankful to be able to pursue this opportunity to spend more time in ministry."

"My last night telling the weather story on News Center will be Sunday, April 17. Many thanks for the evenings we have shared while watching Maine weather together!"

The entire community will miss Steve McKay, according to Judy Horan, president and general manager of the Bangor station, who hired him 22 years ago.

"He's just been a terrific employee, a great colleague," she said Wednesday, shortly after the announcement was posted

online. The way Steve McKay acts on camera -- friendly, generous, thoughtful -- is how he is off camera, Horan said.

"We'll really miss him," she said. "I think it's going to be a sentiment shared by everyone."

The message posted by the retiring meteorologist invites people to "leave your 'Bye, Steve!'" or go to Steve's Facebook page and do it there.

McKay, whose forecasts appeared in the Bangor Daily News for several years, will be featured on the channel's "207" show at 7 p.m. Thursday, and a send-off is planned for Friday's 6 p.m. evening news.

"We'll be doing a special goodbye," Horan said.

The meteorologist position at the station will be filled, she said.



## 22nd annual HOPE Festival set for UMaine April 23

Creativity -- storytelling, art, poetry, puppets, sculpture, film -- will be popping at the 22nd HOPE Festival, set for 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday, April 23, at the Student Recreation and Fitness Center at University of Maine, along with an Organizational Fair of more than 50 tables sponsored by progressive groups in Eastern Maine.

Crafts, youth hockey, juggler Zachary Field and Adventure Yoga are on tap for the Children's Area. Children will be entertained with a puppet show by Turtle Dance Totems, featuring figureheads, sea junk puppets and sea junk boats. Fields Pond Audubon Center will guide kids in making books with illustrations. The Maine Discovery Museum has plans for children to make "hope bottle necklaces," with messages and images placed in tiny glass bottles worn around the neck. Nature Based Education will engage children in art projects

made with natural materials, and Windover Arts Center will help youngsters make their own brightly colored hats.

Adults will have plenty of creative opportunities as well. They can help create a sculpture with artist Wally Warren, by attaching found and recycled objects to a six-foot frame in front of the Fitness Center. University of Maine art professor Constant Albertson and her students will give a short illustrated presentation of their community art service project, "Weaving a Story," and festival-goers will have the opportunity to help build a weaving themselves.

Documentary films on quinoa farmers in Bolivia and on Islamophobia, poetry readings by Antonia Carroll and Jim Mello, and a performance by Out and Allied Youth, an LGBT theater group, will be among the offerings. Fast Food Prints of Portland will be on hand, cre-

ating T-shirts and posters on the spot with social change art selected by festival goers. The Maine Solar Energy Association will also be back again, showing people how to build their own solar cell phone chargers.

As usual, there will be food available to purchase, including locally sourced ice cream, salads and pastries, bread, sandwiches, and Fair Trade coffee.

The HOPE Festival is sponsored by the Peace and Justice Center of Eastern Maine and the Peace and Reconciliation Studies program at UMaine. The Fitness Center is located at 22 Hilltop Road on the University of Maine Campus in Orono.

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