

Maine Troop Greeters welcome 1.5 millionth soldier to Bangor

Maine Troop Greeters reached a new milestone last week, having greeted 1.5 million troops since the group's inception in 2003. The group welcomes troops either going overseas or returning from duty at Bangor International Airport.

"Our mission is to express the nation's gratitude and appreciation to the troops, for those going overseas for a safe return and for those returning, for a joyful homecoming and to make their [hopefully brief] stay in Bangor as comfortable as possible. The fact that the volunteer greeters have been able to do that for 1.5 million troops is very meaningful to us," said Deb Milner, chairwoman of the Maine Troop Greeters Board of Directors.

Troop Greeters extend a warm welcome and a thank you, no matter the time of day or night. They also offer the troops a free cell phone to call a loved one, a snack and a handshake to let them know they are appreciated.

"[BIA] is proud to serve as a point of entry and departure for our Troops. The Maine Troop Greeters' volunteer efforts to welcome and express the country's appreciation for their service is a unique and heartwarming expression of gratitude. It is a great representation of the Bangor region and state of Maine and we are proud to have them here," said BIA director Tony Caruso in the press release. "This milestone is so meaningful because it emphasizes the dedication and many hours of service by the Maine Troop Greeters. We thank them for their unceasing service to our troops."

The Maine Troop Greeters is a non-profit, volunteer group of veterans and friends, men and women, supporting our troops who arrive at Bangor International Airport. For information about the Maine Troop Greeters visit themainetroopgreeters.org.

UMaine NOAA researchers awarded half-million in grants

The Maine Sea Grant College Program has awarded funds to University of Maine faculty for three new research projects representing more than \$500,000 in investment from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and matching sources.

Hamish Greig, an assistant professor of stream ecology in the UMaine School of Biology and Ecology, plans to study the fate of Atlantic salmon, an endangered fish that is designated as one of eight "Species in the Spotlight" by the U.S. government.

Stephen Coghlan, an associate professor of freshwater fisheries at UMaine, and Joseph Zydlewski of the UMaine-United States Geological Survey Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit are co-investigators on the two-year project that focuses on how habitat variation influences competitive interactions among salmon, native brook trout, and non-native smallmouth bass in Maine streams, which are getting warmer as a result of global climate change.

Alice R. Kelley, Joseph Kelley, Daniel Belknap and Brian Robinson of UMaine's School of Earth and Climate Sciences and the Climate Change Institute will investigate the development of a noninvasive, rapid method of assessing coastal archaeological sites. Kelley and her team will work with Arthur Spiess of Maine Historic Preservation Commission to see if their findings can guide decisions about which areas to excavate and/or protect.

Richard Wahle of the School of Marine Sciences will continue to study the larval or juvenile "settlement" phase of the American lobster. Wahle builds on his earlier Sea Grant research, which developed the American Lobster Settlement Index as a predictive tool for informing decisions about lobster fishery management. Wahle is working with both regulatory and industry partners, including fishermen Curtis Brown of Portland, Matt Parkhurst of Boothbay and Norbert Lemieux of Cutler.

All three research projects will be presented at the Maine Sea Grant Biennial Research Symposium on April 14 at the University of Maine Buchanan Alumni House. More information about the research and symposium is on the Maine Sea Grant website.

Bangor leaders hold forum on stopping drug addiction

BY DAWN GAGNON
OF THE BDN STAFF

A lack of detox and treatment options for people struggling with heroin and opiate addiction, an array of financial and other barriers to their ability to recover and a need for approaches to addiction that are better than jail were just a few of the topics brought up Wednesday night during a session aimed at coming up with ways to help the community wean itself off drugs that are beginning to result in record numbers of overdose deaths.

The more than two-hour Opiate and Heroin Forum and Listening Session drew more than 100 people to the University of Maine at Augusta's Bangor campus.

A panel of four leaders in the effort to curb drug addiction and its consequences outlined the problem as each saw it.

"It's very obvious that we have to band together," said Patty Hamilton, the city's health director, noting that Bangor, a regional service hub, has been dealing with the addiction problem for years.

Four out of five of those who become addicted do so through the use of legal prescriptions, Hamilton noted.

Dr. Noah Nesin of Penob-

scot Community Health Care said medical professionals are in large part to blame for the current situation because they continue to overprescribe painkillers, particularly oxycodone, which he believes led to the region's heroin problem.

In 2014, he said, 80 million opioid pills were prescribed in Maine, a state with a population of 1.3 million. That, he said, is "madness."

Bangor police Chief Mark Hathaway was clearly frustrated by the lack of detox options in the area, and many in attendance felt the same.

"We have a treatment option problem -- that is without question," he said. While police departments in other parts of the country have been able to develop programs through which those with addiction can access treatment, his officers can't largely because such programs don't exist here.

Hathaway is hoping lawmakers will approve a bill that includes funding for a 10-bed detox facility in Bangor. While that is not enough to solve the problem, it would be a step in the right direction, he said.

Robert Fickett, who is in recovery after a 12-year addiction to opiates, credits the Bangor Area Recovery

Network with helping him overcome it.

He noted that the stigma around addiction remains a problem.

"The pathway to addiction doesn't start in a dirty back room," he said. "It starts in doctor's offices, dentist chairs, emergency rooms and Grandma's medicine cabinet."

"I think there are solutions we can offer people besides a jail cell," he continued.

When asked later what he thought might do the most good, Fickett said, "Empathy. Just empathy." Instead of judge people with addictions, the community should treat them like they would their own family and friends.

"If people had given up on me, I'd be dead today," he said.

Wednesday's discussion was sponsored by the city's Public Health and Community Services, Maine Community Foundation, Maine Health Access Foundation, Maine Medical Association and the Maine Opioid Collaborative.

The ideas generated at the forum will be shared with Maine Opioid Collaborative task forces to help inform their recommendations for federal, state and local actions to address the heroin and opiate epidemic

Maine is experiencing.

The Maine Opioid Collaborative was created last year to work on prevention and harm reduction, increasing treatment and looking at ways law enforcement can address the state's drug problem. Its leaders include Thomas Delahanty, U.S. attorney for the District of Maine; Maine Attorney General Janet Mills; and Maine Commissioner of Public Safety John Morris.

There is another heroin forum planned in Bangor at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 4, at the Cross Insurance Center, which will be attended by U.S. Sen. Angus King. The forum, sponsored by the One Life Project of the Bangor Daily News, will be "world cafe" style, with questions about the opiate problem in Maine at each table for people to answer before moving on to another table and another set of questions.



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