

# New Hampden Academy principal aims to be a 'good listener'

BY DAWN GAGNON  
OF THE BDN STAFF

Hampden Academy's new principal said that despite her nearly 20 years of experience in education, she is at the start of a new learning curve.

"I need to see what's working here first," she said. "This is my first year here, and my job really is to be a good listener." Leigh Larson said Wednesday during an interview at her office.

Hampden Academy serves RSU 22 students from the towns of Hampden, Winterport, Newburgh and Frankfort.

Larson and her fiancé, a retired U.S. Air Force lieutenant colonel, arrived in Maine on July 2 after a cross-country drive from their former home near Anchorage, Alaska. Larson officially assumed her new position on Aug. 1.

Larson said she and her fiancé decided to move to Maine in December and that she began looking for job postings shortly thereafter.

"We'd been talking about it for awhile," she said, noting that her fiancé's parents live in Levant and that he has a brother in the Bangor area. The couple resides in Hermon.

Larson said Wednesday that she has an indirect connection to Maine. Her

older brother was born here while her father was stationed at the former Brunswick Naval Air Base.

"People here are very friendly, very kind. I don't think I ever met a stranger," she said.

"I feel so fortunate to be here with the staff we have. They're all great people, which is critical" as the school district continues to work toward improving the delivery of education to local students.

Larson is an avid outdoorswoman, counting fishing, hunting and road and mountain biking as among her favorite activities. And after having lived most of her life in Alaska, Larson notes that she is well prepared for Maine winters, which in some years have been harsher than those in Alaska.

"Last winter, I only had to take out my snow shovel once," Larson said.

Larson succeeds Ruey Yehle, who had been the high school's principal since 2002 and who also has served as curriculum coordinator during her nearly four-decade career in education. Yehle stayed on through the end of August to help with the transition before retiring.

According to an article announcing Larson's hire

in a recent issue of Link-22, the school unit's newsletter, Larson earned her bachelor's and master's in education from Dothan campus of Troy State College, now Troy University, in Alabama.

For four years before being tapped to serve as Hampden Academy principal, Larson was principal at Wasilla Middle School, which is part of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District, located north of Anchorage.

One difference between RSU 22 and her former school district is that faculty and administrators from various schools are able to meet weekly, something that did not happen often in Matanuska-Susitna, which is comprised of 46 schools spread out through a roughly 25,000-square-mile area.

Before that, she was assistant principal at the middle school for one year and assistant principal of Palmer High School for three years.

She also taught fourth grade and high school world history in Bainbridge, Georgia.

Larson's annual salary will be \$108,000, RSU 22 Superintendent Rick Lyons said earlier. She has signed a two-year contract.

# Scratchpad announces companies in pilot startup initiative

The Scratchpad Accelerator, a pilot program of the University of Maine in collaboration with the Maine Technology Institute, has selected four companies to participate in a seed accelerator, the first of its kind in Maine.

CourseStorm of Orono; Double Blue Analytics of Orono and Brunswick; Tip Whip, LLC of Old Town; and L&K Manufacturing of Bangor will receive up to \$25,000 from MTL. The companies will work from Scratchpad's location in downtown Bangor for three months to focus on growing their businesses.

Startups face a lot of unknowns and many fail before they find the right answers. With full-time support and access to industry experts and mentors, Scratchpad Accelerator will help each company uncover answers to critical questions about their businesses, including their most appropriate customer base and business models, and how to pitch to investors. Scratchpad Accelerator guides entrepreneurs through the early stages of business development to help them improve their chances of success.

"We are thrilled to be a part of Scratchpad," says Spencer Wood, founder and CEO of Tip Whip,

LLC. "We believe our company is poised for tremendous growth, but we need help to get there. At Scratchpad, a team of people will help guide us through critical business decisions. With their help, Tip Whip will become a well-known name on college campuses throughout the United States."

In addition to programming and mentors, Scratchpad will provide office space and coordinate more than 15 events from weekly founder dinners to a final Demo Day where entrepreneurs will pitch to an audience of potential investors, supporters and partners.

"We provide the environment startups need to explore, pivot and grow quickly," says Jason Harkins, Scratchpad's managing director and associate professor of entrepreneurship at the Maine Business School. "The support participants receive in the program include funding, education, office space, networking opportunities, mentors and more. It's our job to clear away obstacles and help companies get clarity. It's all about helping the entrepreneurs find the right answers and quickly apply lessons learned."

Mentorship is a criti-

cal component of the accelerator, and Scratchpad is developing a strong statewide mentor network with help from the Maine Center for Entrepreneurial Development; Jess Knox of Maine Accelerates Growth; the Bangor Target Area Development Corp. and others. Anyone interested in a mentor role is encouraged to fill out a Mentor Profile on the Scratchpad website.

Scratchpad's Founding Sponsor is Bangor Savings Bank Foundation. The Bangor Target Area Development Corp. is a Master Craftsman Sponsor. The team is looking for additional sponsors interested in making a financial contribution to support entrepreneurs and help Scratchpad reach its funding goal of \$19,500. Email [lisa@scratchpadaccelerator.com](mailto:lisa@scratchpadaccelerator.com) to discuss sponsorship opportunities.



## Bangor in running for international police-firefighter games

There are police and firefighter musters, and then there are the Can-Am Police-Fire Games.

Eastern Maine residents might get a first-hand look at them in 2020 if Bangor and surrounding municipalities can prevail over three other finalists hoping to be the host for the event. If the games are held in Bangor, between 1,500 and 2,000 participants from Canada and

America, and their families, are expected to descend upon the Queen City for a week of competition.

Officials from the games are in Bangor for the next four days scouting potential event sites and assessing the ability of the Bangor area to host the competition. Brewer, Hampden, Hermon, Old Town and University of Maine in Orono would assist in hosting the games, according to local officials.

The Greater Bangor Convention and Visitors Bureau held a news conference Saturday on the waterfront to draw

attention to the city's bid and, in a reference to the games' motto, to declare that the Bangor area is "fit for duty" to host the event.

City Councilor Josh Plourde said the city has experience hosting similar events that draw thousands of people to Bangor, including the American Folk Festival, the Waterfront Concerts series, and the Senior League World Series.

"Eastern Maine is a special place with great people," he said. "The 2020 Can-Am Police-Fire Games is something we are hoping to see here in this region."

Bangor police Chief Mark Hathaway and fire Chief Tom Higgins also were on hand to express support for the city's bid. Both said their departments and other first responder departments in the area have been working with the visitors bureau to be selected for the 2020 event.

"We are engaged. We're ready," Hathaway said.

Bill Merrylees, detective superintendent with the London Police Service in London, Ontario, is CEO of the games and is part of the delegation visiting Bangor - which, destinationwise, he called "one of the

best-kept secrets in the U.S."

Merrylees said Saturday that the games, which first started in 1977, include traditional events such as running, swimming, and tennis but also first-responder specific competitions, including some called Toughest Competitor Alive and Toughest Firefighter Alive.

There are events that test police and rescue dogs and skills used by police tactical teams, he added. Events are split between genders and age categories, he said, and a handful of competitors from Europe, Australia and New Zealand are expected to attend.

"But it's not about the competition," Merrylees said. "It's important to be fit and it's important to have camaraderie with each other."

Lubbock, Texas; Lake of the Ozarks, Missouri; and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, also are in the running to host the 2020 games. Lake of the Ozarks already has been selected to host the 2018 games, and so would host the event back-to-back if selected for the 2020 event.

Thunder Bay, Ontario will host the games next summer from July 16 through 24.

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