

Summer Residents Association

Fall 2013

A Publication of the Summer
Residents of the Town Mount Desert

NOTES FROM THE PRESIDENT

As I sit at my desk with a good 6" of snow outside my window, I am reminded that Maine seems like a dream right now. It's a dream I'll awaken to in another six months. Meanwhile, no long winter nap for me right now.

There has been much activity in our Northeast Harbor community in 2013. As you know, you and your SRA Board helped to fund and coordinate a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) from the Urban Land Institute (ULI) back in 2012. The goal was to help in the revitalization of the Village of Northeast Harbor as a year-round community and to create a model for other communities in the Town of Mount Desert.

Using the final report from the ULI-TAP as a road map, a Steering Committee was formed a year ago to work in partnership with the Township to implement many of the ULI-TAP recommendations. One of the first efforts of the Steering Committee was to enable the hiring an economic development consultant. The funding for this position was shared equally between the Town and the Summer Residents Association. The Committee was

fortunate to find and hire Jackie Hewett for this work, and since August, she has been working hard to pinpoint and prioritize these opportunities related to the revitalization of Northeast Harbor. Her report is included later in this Newsletter.

One of the most visible areas you will notice next year is the improved wayfaring signage in and around Northeast Harbor. The Town of Mt. Desert has funded \$25,000 in their current budget for this initial Phase I signage project, and a layout option for one of these signs is shown on the page three of this newsletter. These multiple wayfaring signs are badly needed, and they will help direct motorists to Main St., the Marina, to Parking and information, and other venues. It is expected that this signage will become a model for other towns and villages in the Mt. Desert Community in the future.

The Steering Committee is now prioritizing another signage effort (referred to as Phase II) to help direct foot traffic in Northeast Harbor to and from the marina and to help identify and locate the many Main St. merchants. The SRA has agreed to participate in the funding for this effort in partnership with the Main Street merchants and the local Chamber of Commerce. As this Newsletter is being written, we are

optimistic that this Phase II signage effort will be fully funded and in place prior to the Town's Annual Meeting in May.

I am also impressed by the bold initiative taken by summer residents John and Johanna Boynton over the last year. They genuinely care about

SRA Board of Directors

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SRA Mission Statement

The mission of the Summer Residents Association of the Town of Mount Desert is to provide an effective means of communication between the summer residents and the Town leadership on issues that concern the current and future well-being of the Town. The Steering committee (Board of Directors) seeks to represent and to keep them informed of, and involved in, the Town planning process on current and future issues.

The Summer Residents Association seeks to be the timely and constructive voice of the summer residents with Town government working closely with Town leaders to preserve and protect the unique character, culture, environment and quality of life in the Town of Mount Desert.

enabling improvements on Main St. in Northeast Harbor, and you can read about their exciting new plans later in this newsletter.

Lastly, I am so pleased and impressed by the energy, thoughtfulness and contributing efforts of our SRA Board and, in turn, the SRA Board appreciates the support of both the summer and winter residents of Mt. Desert in working together to improve our community. To this end, your membership and contributions help all of us work for a better Town. I feel we are making great strides in revitalizing in our beloved community, which will also, in time, help all the communities on Mt. Desert Island.

The TMD Economic Development Steering Committee

This committee has played a very important role in advancing revitalization strategies in the Town of Mount Desert over the course of the last year. Sitting on this committee are Kathe McCoy and Ham Clark from the SRA, Sam Shaw and Matt Hart, representing the merchants and the Chamber of Commerce, Martha Dudman from the TMD Selectboard, and Town Manager Durlin Lunt. They oversee the work of the Town's consultant, Jackie Hewett, and they ensure that the current revitalization efforts are aligned with the six overall recommendations from the ULI-TAP, as shown below.

- 1. Assist Business Development**
- 2. Secure Funding and Support**
- 3. Capitalize on Marina**
- 4. Make Main Street More Inviting**
- 5. Improve Marketing Efforts**
- 6. Bring People Together**

This committee has also been instrumental in enabling funding for priority projects thus far, and they will work with the Board of Selectmen to obtain additional funding in the 2014 Town budget so that this economic development work can continue into the next fiscal year. It is anticipated that the SRA will again share in matching funding for Jackie Hewett's work through 2014, with formal approval from the SRA Board to be voted on next spring.

Progress Report from Jackie Hewett

I send greetings to the SRA members from the Economic Development Office. This fall has been a very busy and productive time for me. I have met with most of the business owners in the village of Northeast Harbor and with a number of community leaders. These visits have clarified many of the issues related to the economic health of the village and has more fully defined a path forward.

Some of the key economic development initiatives we are working on now and expect to roll out prior to the summer of 2014 include the following:

- New pedestrian signage focused on orienting both marina patrons and tourists. These orientation kiosks will provide directions to the village center and identify the shops and services available there. This program will also provide a clear pathway from the harbor to Main Street and improve signage at the Information Center. We have yet to raise the full amount of funding necessary to complete this project, but the SRA has made a commitment to share in the overall costs.

- A revised Sign Ordinance, which will permit the signs identified above as well as temporary event signage and historical markers. Final approval for these revisions must be approved at a special Town meeting, which we hope to schedule for early 2014.

- A weekly outdoor movie series on the Village Green. This series would run from early July through Labor Day.

- A new town committee focused on creating and hosting events, which will increase the visibility of the town's villages and help support the business community. The make-up of this committee will include a cross-section of both summer and year-round residents.

- Technology improvements, as reflected in an enhanced Chamber web site and better utilization of social media, to better market activities in the Town.

There is still a lot to do to secure the economic future of the village, but the effort has begun and there is real excitement along Main Street. I look forward to the coming months.

An Update from SRA Members John and Johanna Boynton

If you attended the SRA Annual meeting last August, you heard about an exciting project we are launching. As the fifth anniversary of the NEH fires approached, we concluded that "the market" would never rebuild the four vacant Main Street lots because building costs are too high and the season too short to generate an economic return to an investor. So, we purchased the former Wingspread Gal-

lery lot (145 Main Street) and the building that was home to Small's Drugstore and soda fountain (123 Main Street) to see if we could catalyze a new model for community revitalization and rebuild Main Street in the process. We hoped to reverse the steady decline in year round population and services by revitalizing Main Street with new businesses and residential housing.

Our current plan is to renovate 123 Main Street over the winter. The first floor will likely house an Internet café showcasing the original soda fountain, and the second floor will offer shared office space to consultants, entrepreneurs, and non-profit leaders who would benefit from shared infrastructure like Internet, copiers, telephones, and meeting space. 123 Main Street will be a place for the community and business people to gather much of the year.

Down the street at the Wingspread lot, we imagine a 3-story building with a retail use on the first floor and housing on the second and third floors. This winter, we are looking for people interested in operating a retail business that contributes to the vitality of Main Street on a year-round basis. Suggestions so far include a restaurant, a bookshop, a needlepoint store, and a

holistic health center. You can mail John at jb@bradfordmill.com if you have ideas or would like to help in these revitalization efforts for the community.

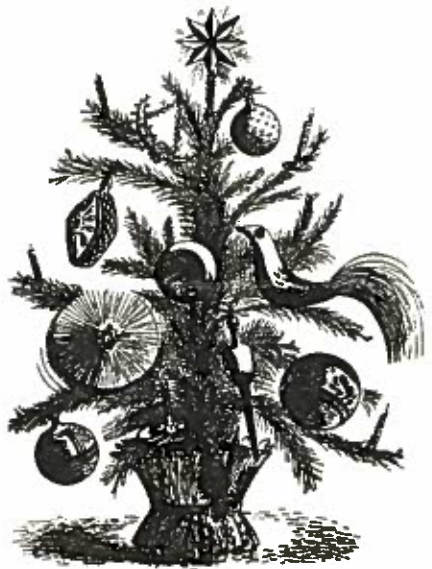
Other Town News:

There have undoubtedly been numerous developments in our community since last summer, and here is a summary of a few of the more noteworthy ones.

- The Maine Coast Exchange, run by Diana Brochendorff, will be moving to Main St. in Seal Harbor this winter. The new location will be the site of the former Village Market convenience store.
- Year round resident Bob Young has purchased the building across from the Neighborhood House that previously housed Jack Ledbetter's studio. He wants to continue to rent this space in the future, and it appears that both The Romantic Room and The Star Gallery will occupy this space next summer.
- At least one current MDI restaurant owner is actively looking at potential space in Northeast Harbor to open a new venue, but nothing has been formally announced as of now.

• There have been discussions with the Marina Commission and Jackie Hewett about how to better and more fully utilize the new Town buildings down at the harbor. These talks have included reconfiguring space for historical displays from either the Great Harbor Maritime Museum or the MDI Historical Society.

• This year was a successful one for the two new catering businesses in Town – Tasteful Tides and Milk and Honey. The renovated Watermark Restaurant also seemed to be a buzz of activity through the Columbus Day holiday weekend.



Thank you all for your support to the Summer Residents Association. Your Board is excited about the progress we are making in partnership with the Township toward revitalization of our community, and we will report back to you on further developments next spring. We wish everyone a Happy Holiday Season!

