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Maine Memo — August 12

1 message

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Wed, Aug 12, 2020 at 8:46 AM



MAINE MEMO



From Joan Ferrini-Mundy

President of the University of Maine and the University of Maine at Machias

This strange summer is simultaneously flying by and plodding along, as the usual summer activities of a university are intertwined with all of the new activities, decisions, and planning efforts that we are undertaking to prepare for the safest return possible of students for the Aug. 31 beginning of classes. Most of our communication in recent weeks has centered on apprising you of those decisions and planning updates, and that will continue. You can see the latest updates at umaine.edu/return, and the University of Maine System Together for Maine website at maine.edu/together, including explanation of the UMS COVID-19 Testing Program, the expansion we announced yesterday, and much more.

Today I'd like to highlight for you some of the usual summer activities of the University of Maine and the University of Maine at Machias. Higher education is certainly reshaped and transformed by the contexts of the day, but fundamental to the institutions is continuing learning and the continuing progress it brings.

As of Aug. 1, the campus has been gradually opening back up. Faculty and staff are here, working remotely and in their offices and buildings, both on campus and statewide, to keep the institution going and to be ready; see umaine.edu/return/open-on-site. If you need to visit a campus office or facility in person, best to check their schedule before you go. The registrar, the bursar, student financial aid, the library, the counseling center, the child care center are providing the usual summer work that happens in August.

Most significant is that, despite the fears and challenges we face with this pandemic, being back on-site more each day, after being essentially fully remote for nearly five months, provides a sense of returning to normal, or at least one sort of normal. We are a university and as such we are a social institution, depending on people being together, working collaboratively, and learning with and from one another. And, although we have done, and will continue to do, our very best to meet everyone where they are and continue with flexibilities in response to whatever this pandemic brings, I can say that we have our anchor — a vibrant, on-site enterprise, continually making progress — back.

The grounds look beautiful, cared for with such excellence by our facilities and grounds staffs. Waterfront construction at the Darling Marine Center continues to stay on schedule this summer. The concrete was poured for the new pump house and demolition of the old pier is nearly complete. This project, which also includes upgrades to the flowing seawater laboratory, should be complete in early 2021. And, in Orono, crews from Sargent Corporation have been

hard at work clearing earth to make way for the foundation work to begin on the new Ferland Engineering Education and Design Center. Currently, the site has been excavated to its lowest points and a small area of bedrock is being removed. In Machias we have welcomed Scott Mulcahy as the new director of facilities and he is leading classroom preparations.

Our outreach and state-level activity continues. That includes Maine Sea Grant, which is part of a multidisciplinary team working to help coastal communities strategize and develop adaptive responses to coastal erosion, storm events, landslides and other hazards. The team will develop a scenario planning exercise that will allow participating coastal communities to identify and address vulnerabilities. This work will be funded by the Maine Coastal Communities Grant Program.

Our faculty continue to receive patents (e.g., Doug Bousfield, co-inventor along with former Process Development Center director Michael Bilodeau of a recently issued patent for composite building products made with cellulose nanofibers). Another recent example of UMaine innovation comes from our alumni, who continue to launch startups, including Marin Skincare, a skincare brand using lobster glycoprotein. It is the first brand to be developed by Dermarus, a company founded at UMaine by biomedical engineering graduate students Patrick Breeding and Amber Boutiette. Breeding and Boutiette both studied Innovation Engineering and incubated Dermarus at the Foster Center for Innovation. [A story is online.](#)

Plans for the fall semester are moving along in a new, dynamic, routine. The Department of History has announced a slate of speakers for its fall 2020 symposium series. Delivered via Zoom, the fall series will feature lectures by Marla Miller (UMass Amherst) on “(Mis)remembering Early American Women’s Labor,” Khuram Iqbal (National Defense University, Islamabad) on the evolution of terrorism in Pakistan, and Tina Loo (University of British Columbia) on “Forced Relocation and Making a Good Life in Postwar Canada.” And there is much, much more in store to keep our intellectual life exciting.

And our research enterprise is thriving. The University of Maine set a new record in fiscal year 2020 by generating \$104.2 million in external grants and contracts from federal, state and private sources, much of which supports faculty, staff and students involved in nationally competitive research that is very important to Maine and beyond. This extraordinary increase stems from the university’s strategic pursuit of growth in research during this period of time, and its talented community of faculty, staff, and students, in conjunction with its centers and institutes, and the proper research development and administration resources implemented to achieve and maintain growth in research. Last week we announced a major milestone for UMaine and Maine — New England Aqua Ventus that will invest \$100 million in the development of the floating offshore wind project led by Habib Dagher in the Advanced Structures and Composites Center.

All Student Life offices are now open and planning is underway to welcome students back. That includes a new virtual Engineering Job Fair Oct. 21, and exciting programs in the Memorial Union, the residence halls, and the Rec Center and Maine Bound.

So, our work continues and our dedicated faculty, staff are eager to reconnect with all of our students — those who will be here with us in Orono or Machias, and others who are part of the UMaine family engaging online or remotely. We are ready to work as a community to support each other as we move through the complexities of COVID-19. We are doing our best to ensure health and well-being, and we ask for your participation and support to make our campus safe, productive, and exciting.

I hope all are safe and healthy, and that you are enjoying some rest, relaxation, and the warmth of the sun as the semester’s beginning draws ever closer.

With warm wishes.