

April is the cruelest month

Said a cranky scribe, who obviously never visited Maine.

This month crocuses pop, boats lose their shrink wrap and hotels and restaurants experience a preseason reservation surge.

As chefs anticipate first spring crops, we too are getting ready.

Our CEO Steve Hewins visited non-violent offenders this week at the Maine Correctional Center in Windham, kicking off our new initiative to ease the labor shortage.

An untapped labor pool of incarcerated men and women provides candidates for careers in hospitality and comes with benefits to members. See piece below.

Thanks for joining us in Portland last month for the MERA Awards Banquet and Maine Restaurant and Lodging Expo. Who stopped by the Expo and shook hands on the floor? (see video below).

At month's end, MERA travels to Rhode Island with Maine's ProStart teams. Look for a Facebook Live video from the national competition action!

Enjoy a cold brew and the April Newsletter.

Kathleen Pierce
Director of Member Experience

First time innkeepers: Middle Street Inn





Jude Smith and Chuck Spliedt are the owners of Bath's newest inn.

Jude worked for Red Bull as director of finance. Chuck for the National Aquarium in Maryland. What led the pair to ditch it all to run an inn in Maine?

They had long daydreamed about innkeeping.

"Where? We kept coming back to Maine," said Chuck, seated in his sun-filled living room on a mid-March morning.

The couple opened Middle Street Inn, a modern, four-room bed and breakfast in a Greek Revival house in late September 2017.

But it wasn't a straight shot to get here.

Starting in 2015, from Belfast to Kennebunk, they looked at 15 inns. When they found Bath, they knew. "We chose Bath because it met all the criteria of what we want out of life."

Nautical heritage. A vibrant downtown. Friendly neighbors.

That no inn matched their vision didn't faze them. They created one.

Their real estate agent, [John McCarthy with Legacy Properties](#), suggested a single family, 1943 beauty set back on Middle Street.

Rooms were reconfigured, baths added, floors leveled. In the kitchen, they stepped up their breakfast game. "It helped to have a slow start. We tried to incorporate everything we liked about places where we stayed," said Chuck, whose created a breezy, tasteful inn to appeal to all travelers.

So far innkeeping has "exceeded our expectations," said Jude.

As they enter their first summer, bookings are coming in from Italy and Germany. And downtown Bath welcomes new restaurants such as the [Bath Brewing Company](#), a new MERA member.

The only thing they miss about Greater Baltimore? Family, an early spring and the dry cleaners. "I am not missing the commute," said Chuck.

[MiddleStreetInn.com](#)

ICYMI: MERA Awards Banquet in Portland



Stripers Waterside Restaruant chefs in app action at the awards pre party.





Steve Hewins awards Troy Mains of the Harraseeket Inn chef of the year.



The Goldenrod clan celebrate their lifetime achievement award.

Photos by [DB Maine Photography](#)

Sen. Angus King visits the Maine Restaurant and Lodging EXPO

Senator King was in Portland last week, heard about our Expo and called to see if we could let him in for a last minute visit.

King spent nearly an hour working the Cross Insurance Area floor, meeting trade show participants, vendors and taking selfies. The strong proponent of HospitalityMaine, knew about our merger and talked about the industry in a Facebook Live interview.





"This is a great part of Maine's business community and also our social and cultural industries," said King, between stops to greet exhibitors at the Cross Insurance Arena March 28.

On Maine hospitality, King is bullish. "It's a growing segment, we've had a series of good years. I am very optimistic about it."

Though the lack of an ample skilled workforce is chronic, King is doing his part to address Maine's labor shortage. "Young people realize there is a great opportunity here in a great growing business," he said, fresh from a meeting at a local vocational tech culinary high school.

"Something like 85 percent of the people that visit Maine want to come back. We've got to get them here in the first place."

What are the 5 factors that lead to employee turnover?

Angela Roman Aspito of EightyAte Consulting lays it all out at our April 11 seminar in Hallowell.

The former COO of a top Chicago hospitality group, and Illinois Restaurant Association board member, leads a discussion on employee retention. Not too late to sign up!

"We will break it all down and talk about fact virus fiction. How we can evolve in our business to create an environment for inter-generational employees," she said.



Attendees leave with an action plan. Time, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., includes lunch. Tickets are \$69. To sign up email jennifer@maineinns.com



Merger committee updates

The associations are on target for a June 30th merger launch. Our new name - **Hospitality Maine** - was announced at the MERA Awards banquet in front of 320 guests. Our five merger committees, lead by a cross-section of board members from both associations as well as interested members, are diligently and democratically directing the unification.

Here's a progress report.

* **Governance Committee:** drafted the first set of bylaws, currently being reviewed by our lawyers.

* **Education and Workforce Development Committee:** combining education and scholarship efforts from both associations. Outlining the new organization's longterm hospitality workforce initiative.

* **Marketing and Events Committee:** On the verge of reviewing proposals for a new logo, website and marketing campaign. Planning the 2018 Maine Hospitality Summit and integrating both association's events.

* **Government Affairs Committee:** joined forces in addressing legislation at the local, state, and federal levels.

* **Finance and Administration Committee:** tackling the membership dues structure and the alignment of both sets of association financials.



The National Restaurant Association

Food Show is May 19 to 23 in Chicago.

Travel to the Windy City for a taste of trends to come.

Last year 66,000 attendees covered more than 695,000 square feet of exhibit space.

If you are a restaurant and lodging member of MERA, you are invited.

To score your free passes email Jacqui

Legislative Lowdown

Greg Dugal's bi-weekly e-report puts you in the know.

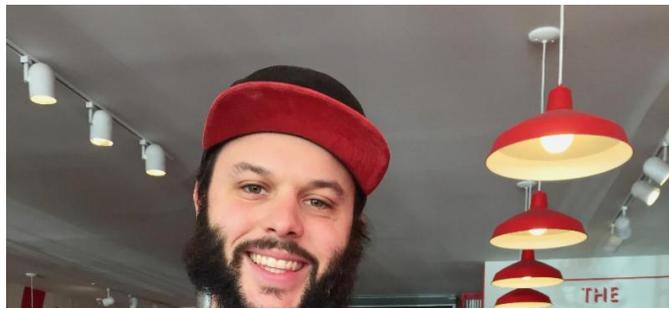


April edition highlights:

- * Cap on H2B Visas
- * Portland paid sick leave hearing set for May
- * Camden to strengthen its short term rental ordinance

Read all about it [Maine Hospitality Legislative Report](#)

Membership Meter ... See who joined us in the last month





Baxter Key, co-owner of The Highroller Lobster Co. in Portland

Please Welcome

Coffee By Design

The Brunswick Inn

The Highroller Lobster Co.

The Odd Duck

Scattoloni Bakery

Bath Brewing Company

Maine Foodie Tours

Flip Creperie

PitStop Fuels

Black Elephant Hostel

Gridiron Restaurant

Hewins on the road





WINDHAM, April 3 - Our CEO Steve Hewins addresses inmates at the Maine Correctional Center.

These non-violent offenders, male and female, are taking a certification course administered through MERA and MEIA, the Maine Department of Labor and the Maine Career Centers. The goal? To have them ready to enter the hospitality workforce to help alleviate the pressures on staffing, primarily entry level positions like housekeepers, kitchen help, maintenance, and servers.

The program includes bonding and a tax credit from the Federal government for our members who want to hire these individuals that complete the course. It's an early initiative in our overall longterm plan to address Maine's worker shortage. More information about this program is on the way, including details on free bonding for the certificate holders and up to \$9,600 in Federal tax credits.

MediaWatch

Inns on the move

In mid-March, Clint and Susan Condon [purchased the Belfast Bay Inn](#) from Eddie and Judy Hemmingsen for \$1.8 million. The Boston couple don't plan to muss with the deluxe downtown formula. Last year the Hemmingsens [purchased Bar Harbor's landmark Ullikana Inn](#) for \$2.15 million, according to MaineBiz.

Maine senators plead for federal relief for more foreign workers this summer. The Press Heard reports that Sen. Angus King and Susan Collins are [urging the Trump administration to raise the limit on foreign workers](#). Hospitality operators are redoubling their efforts to find local help.

Foodie corner

Move over corn dogs. The Portland Press Herald's food critic sampled [the Highroller Lobster Co.'s fried lobby pops](#) and dubbed these streets eats sublime. "It tastes like an Alice-in-Wonderland version of a state fair snack," the writer declared.

IndustryTrends

It was a bad spring for coffee lovers. Or is the cup half full? First a [California judge proclaims coffee should come with a cancer warning](#). Local coffee roasters downplayed that java is dangerous. "We feel very strongly that there is no health concern. Numerous studies by the World Health Organization on coffee have shown that, not only is it not bad for your health, it's actually good for your health," Coffee By Design's [Mary Allen Lindmann told the Potrland Press Herald](#).

She is right. Cheerful news surfaced in the UK that a few cups a day is [good for the blood](#). We will keep our intake steady as we monitor this one.

Getting bad reviews on TripAdvisor? Now you can [take out an ad](#). Paying to get listed higher is something new for the online travel site according to Skift.

EVENTS

Kegs & Eggs

What: Putting Portland on the food map with Steve Hewins, David Turin, Steve DiMillo, Josh Berry and Michelle Corry.

When: April 19, 4 to 6 p.m.

Where: Holiday Inn by the Bay, Portland

Tickets: [Click here](#) (Members receive a discount with the code foodie)

Hospitality for Habitat

What: Inns raise money for Habitat for Humanity during the shoulder season.

When: April 16 to May 24

For more info: [Click here](#)

MERA and MEIA Scholarship dinner

What: Celebration of 2018 scholars

When: June 11

Where: 16 Bay View, Camden

ServSafe Classes

May 15 in Westbrook

May 22 in Augusta

June 12 in Westbrook

June 19 in Augusta



| send feedback, tips, and suggestions to kathleen@mainerestaurant.com |

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