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w/pictures and sidebar awards story/pics

Agency on Aging marks 50th anniversary, elects new board president, directors

MARS HILL, Maine -- More than 150 participants recently converged on the Legacy Ranch for Aroostook Agency on Aging's annual business meeting and a celebration of the organization's 50-year history.

Rev. Dr. Ken Phelps, board president, opened the Oct. 5 meeting, acknowledged the Agency's directors and management team, accepted the report of the nominating committee, and explained the voting process and amendments to the organization's bylaws, transitioning from two-year to three-year board terms.

At the conclusion of the business meeting, Phelps confirmed voting results electing Roger Lagasse of Fort Kent, George Dionne of Grand Isle and Don Raymond of New Canada to represent the north; Alva King of Limestone, Dr. Dottie Martin of Fort Fairfield and Linda Nadeau of Wade in the central region; and Mary Harbison of Linneus and Keith Mackenzie of Island Falls for the south.

Officers elected to serve through 2024 include: Barbara Robertson of New Limerick as president; Dr. David Jones of Presque Isle as vice president; Mary Anne Buck of Mapleton as secretary; and Dr. Durward Huffman of Fort Fairfield as treasurer.

Rev. Phelps acknowledged outgoing board member Martha Grant of Presque Isle who stepped down after seven years of service and honored board member Stephen Poitras of Fort Fairfield, who passed away in August, with a moment of silence.

He thanked board members for the trust and confidence they have shown over the past 37 years and introduced Barbara Robertson, who succeeds him in the leadership role. "Barb is an intelligent, caring person with natural leadership skills," Rev. Phelps said, adding, "She is an excellent communicator."

Joy Barresi Saucier, the Agency's executive director, reported accomplishments over the past year. "It not only has been a year of celebration; this has also been a year of service, growth, and innovation. In the past year, we have served on average over 1,600 individuals each month; these services range from simple responses for information, to education/counseling/support on a variety of topics, to critical in-home support."

According to Barresi Saucier, the Agency piloted a new State program called Respite for ME, which provides small grants to individual family caregivers who are working day in and day out to keep their

loved one safely at home; received federal funding to build a new Memory Center for Aroostook; and, in a separate award, establish community Access Points for aging in 20 partner communities.

“We brought new programs to our communities including the nationally-recognized Civic Academy and a nationally-funded vaccination outreach effort. We launched a new brand with a stone cairn symbolizing the many resources available at the Agency that help people find their way as they age. We advocated at the State and Federal levels for additional funding to support several of our most life-saving programs, including respite care, nutrition, and case management. And, finally, we have been celebrating a half-century birthday with community events and employee festivities,” Barresi Saucier said.

Noting that there are still challenges, Barresi Saucier said Aroostook’s small population, vast geography, and harsh winter weather make it difficult for older persons and those with disabilities to access the services they need. Over the next year, the Agency will establish “access points” throughout northern Maine in 20 partner communities. These sites will provide residents with access to information and resources, whether it be in person or through technology, she said.

Another challenge relates to memory loss. Alzheimer’s Disease is now listed as the county’s fifth leading cause of death, and communities are seeing higher rates of dementia. “Later this fall, we are opening a new Memory Center in Presque Isle. This center creates the hub and spoke model of service for our entire county: access to early treatment, wrap around services, and resources for families. It will also offer a day respite program especially designed to meet the needs of those with dementia,” Barresi Saucier explained.

The last challenge Barresi Saucier mentioned relates to limited available resources. Many programs do not serve all individuals in need and some are forced to create waiting lists. “We must continue to advocate for additional funding from governmental sources as well as private individuals and foundations,” she said.

To this end, the Agency has developed a stand-alone philanthropic foundation with the sole purpose of developing additional annual operating funds and a permanent endowment fund. “We have just received our first donation in the form of a permanent donor-advised fund, and we hope others will follow,” Barresi Saucier added.

Barresi Saucier thanked those in attendance for their good work and encouraged their continued advocacy for the older people of Aroostook.

Phelps and Barresi Saucier presented service awards to 22 employees, recognizing more than 108 years of combined service to older adults and caregivers in northern Maine. They include, for 25 years of service, Laurie Fisher; 15 years, Nancy McBreairty; and 10 years, Barbara Deschaine and Gladys Lunn.

Four employees who retired during the past year were acknowledged and welcomed to the Agency Alumni Group. They included: Carol Fitzherbert, Money Minders coordinator, 15 years; Sandra McHatten and Rosemary York, personal support specialists, 8 years; and Christine McPherson, RSVP coordinator, 7 years.

Throughout the day individuals brought to life Moments of Reflection in celebration of the Agency’s 50th Anniversary. Rev. Phelps looked back to 1973 and recalled Secretariat in the winner’s circle and 59 cent Oreo cookies. Mary Anne Buck, who shared a poem “That’s where Aroostook begins”, spoke of strong, independent people who take pride in their work and their generosity towards their neighbors.

Letters of sentiment were shared by local representatives for Sens. Susan Collins and Angus King, noting the long history of commitment, quality, and compassion for older adults in Northern Maine.

Elizabeth Gattine, coordinator for Maine’s Cabinet on Aging, spoke to the group about strong community connections with trusted partners, neighbors helping neighbors live richer fuller lives.

Longtime Agency on Aging Executive Director Stephen Farnham was unable to attend the Annual Meeting, but shared memories of his 43-year career through two videos. In the first, he recalled the early days of advocating for older adults and a monumental legislative achievement that created in-home services for those who preferred to live in their own homes. His second video described the impact of Agency staff who worked side by side with residents during the Fort Fairfield and Fort Kent floods to apply for relief funds.

In his reflection of the Agency’s mission, Don Raymond recalls that his mother was the “go-to” person as she organized the Frenchville Meals on Wheels program. He said, “It’s natural for me to give back to my community and be part of the Aroostook Agency on Aging Board because of her.”

Rev. Phelps transferred the gavel to incoming president Barbara Robertson, who accepted the responsibility of president, then thanked him for his commitment to community and 27 years of service to the Agency. A framed John Holub print depicting the old Presque Isle Firehouse was presented to him with wishes written on the back from Agency leadership.

Rotary U.S. Assistant Governor Coordinator of District 7790 Floyd Rockholt and Past District Governor Virginia Joles welcomed Rev. Phelps into the Rotary International’s Paul Harris Fellowship, the highest recognition of extraordinary service to community and doing good works in the world.

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AnnualMeeting1.jpg



The Board President’s gavel changed hands recently when Rev. Dr. Ken Phelps of Presque Isle, who has presided over the Aroostook Agency on Aging for nearly 30 years, introduced the new president, Barbara Robertson of New Limerick. They are shown here after the Oct. 5 Annual Meeting with a framed print given to Rev. Phelps as a token of appreciation. (Photo courtesy of Terry Sandusky)



Members of the Aroostook Agency on Aging's Board of Directors who attended the Oct. 5 Annual Meeting in Mars Hill were, from left, front row: Don Raymond of New Canada, Mary Anne Buck of Mapleton, Pat McCain of Ludlow, Barb Robertson of New Limerick, Dr. Dottie Martin of Ft. Fairfield, and Executive Director Joy Barresi Saucier. Back row: Roger Lagasse of Ft. Kent, Rev. Dr. Ken Phelps of Presque Isle, Keith Mackenzie of Island Falls, Rob Meinders of Benedicta, Dr. Durward Huffman of Ft. Fairfield, Dr. David Jones of Castle Hill, and Kathie Davis of Presque Isle. (Absent for the photo were Andrew Birden, George Dionne, Linda Nadeau, Walter Elliott, Alva King, and Mary Harbison. (Photo courtesy of Terry Sandusky)

AnnualMeeting2.jpg



More than 150 people from St. Agatha to Augusts traveled to Mars Hill to attend the recent Annual Meeting of the Aroostook Agency on Aging where they helped celebrate the past 50 years and looked forward to the next five decades. (Photo courtesy of Terry Sandusky)

AnnualMeeting3.jpg

About Aroostook Agency on Aging

The mission of the Aroostook Agency on Aging is to improve the quality of life and promote the well-being of older people in our communities. For more than 50 years, the agency has served as a resource, helping people to access information and services, while also advocating to assure the rights we all value are respected.

This Agency complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of physical or mental disability, race, color, creed, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, ancestry, or national origin in admission to, access to, or operation of its services, programs, or activities.

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