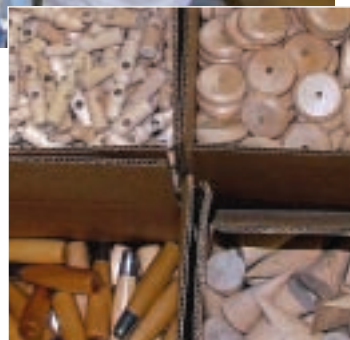




They say competition brings out the best...and you'll find proof at Maine Wood Turning in New Vineyard. Nestled in northeastern Franklin County, this family business is navigating the tricky twists and turns of global competition—and finding new ways to succeed.



Since its founding in 1971, Maine Wood Turning has grown from its home in an old mill building into a booming business boasting a 20,000 square-foot production facility and a state-of-the-art 33,000 square-foot sawmill. Under President Doug Fletcher and his brother, VP Jody Fletcher, the company has become one of the country's leading makers of specialty turned wood products. With more than 2,000 customers, a newly expanded product line, and a knack for innovation, the company employs 50 people and sells its tool handles, furniture and toy parts, knobs, dowels and craft items to retailers and resellers across the U.S.

A Family Affair

Doug Fletcher traces his company's success to its roots as a family business, and to a unique ability to meet the demands of the market.

"My dad and uncle started the business, and my brother and I basically started working here right out of high school. I think what makes us unique is our

ability to come up with our own equipment and processes to do complex things for our customers."

Call it Yankee ingenuity, technological innovation, or just good old-fashioned hard work. Whatever name you give it, Fletcher says it has played a vital role in his firm's success.

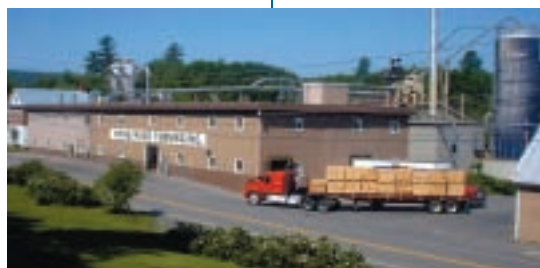
"We haven't just gone to machine manufacturers for our equipment. We've looked at it ourselves and said, 'You know, we need a machine that's able to put out this kind of production making this kind of product.' For instance, we've bought lathes that were manufactured in the 40's and 50's and redesigned them to do what we need. Being able to do that ourselves has been paramount in our survival."

Adapting & Growing

Innovation is just one part of the company's recipe for success, Fletcher says. In a market dominated by low-priced imports, Maine Wood Turning has also used strategic business acquisitions to seize opportunities.

Earlier this year, the firm purchased the Lutz File & Tool company, a former customer that resold file handles to the retail market. Fletcher says the purchase added 3 jobs to his payroll, and gave Maine Wood Turning direct access to 1,400 new customers whom it now serves as a direct supplier.

In another recent move to diversify its products and expand market penetration, Maine Wood Turning added a line of moulding equipment for the manufacture of flat wood handles. "Another manufacturer had been doing that line," Doug Fletcher explains, "and we bought the equipment along with the customer base. That's been great, because one of the most difficult things is finding customers out there that are interested in buying what you can make."



The final piece of the puzzle? Fletcher says it's the quality level of the company's employees. "I have to say work ethic really is important for us. I mean, when you're competing against companies that are trying to sell product into your market for 30% or 40% less than what you have to have in order to survive, you've got to have a good work group. And we do."

Be part of a business community with a vision.

Give us a call at **207.778.5887** or visit us at **www.GreaterFranklin.com**



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Welcome to our Summer issue!

In this issue you'll read about new jobs at Maine businesses, new educational programs in our area, new financing opportunities for local businesses, and more.

One exciting program is the new Franklin Dirigo-Choice Incentive Program. If you own a business in greater



Franklin County, you can save 20% on health coverage thanks to this limited-time program from the Franklin Community Health Network. But you need to sign up before the end of this year. To learn more, see page 2.

We're also excited about our new home at Church Street Commons! If you're in Farmington, stop by and see us.

Together with Coastal Enterprises Inc. and the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments/Department of Economic and Community Development, we've created a one-stop resource that can really help your business grow.

Read on—and until next issue, enjoy everything our great part of Maine has to offer!

Alison A. Hagerstrom
Executive Director

Working on the Weekend

Eustis' Stratton Lumber Adds Jobs and Boosts Production



Saturday cookouts in the town of Eustis/Stratton may be short a few people this summer—but that's good news for the new employees of Stratton Lumber. As part of a dynamic ongoing growth plan, the Franklin County company has added 25 new jobs and moved to a 7-day-a-week production schedule to dramatically boost production and sales.

Stratton Lumber is a state-of-the-art saw and planer mill that supplies residential and industrial markets across the eastern U.S. Over the last four years, the company has invested more than \$6.5 million in equipment and infrastructure, and new investments are in the works. General Manager Stu Miller says the new jobs are a major step in the company's overall strategy.

No Down Time

The new job growth at Stratton has been a positive for everyone, Miller notes—both company and employees alike. "We've significantly improved our fringe benefit package, and we're now becoming an employer of choice. With the expansion of our sawmill operation and our 7-day operation schedule, we now have a very flexible schedule which has people working about half the year, so that gives them more time off."

The 7-day schedule is a departure from traditional mill procedure, says Miller, but one that made sense for Stratton. "I think there's only one other mill located in the Canadian Maritimes that's running 7 days a week besides us. The traditional way is to go 2 shifts 5 days a week. We opted to increase our output by 50%, and going to the 7-day operation is a very effective way to do that."

Miller says the new schedule works well for many of the firm's employees with families. "Every other weekend you have a 3-day weekend, but on the alternate weekend you have to work 3 days. It's more predictable for our team members, so they can make plans with their families and they know what weekends they have off in advance."

Stratton Lumber continued on page 2



Increasing Efficiency

With U.S. housing starts at record levels, mills in the U.S. and Canada have boosted their capacity to meet demand, Stu Miller says. And that places a premium on efficiency.

"Right now we have to be very efficient in order to compete effectively. It's essential for our long-term success that we are the low-cost producer of every single size of lumber that we make."

Miller says the company is continually looking at ways to grow. "Improving our yields is one way, but we're also looking at different ways to increase production. For example, we've just ordered a new lumber drying kiln, and that's another \$1.1 million investment."



The Secret of Success

As Stratton Lumber demonstrates, Maine's wood products industry is far from down and out. For companies that invest in technology and human resources, the future holds promise. And in Franklin County, Stu Miller says his company has found the resources it needs to thrive.

"I think this is a great place to live and work," Miller says. "I really see growth ahead for us over the next 2 to 3 years. I would like to be in a position to increase our current labor force from about 75 people, and I think we will as we grow."

New Plan Cuts Premiums for Area Businesses

Franklin DirigoChoice Offers 20% Savings on Health Coverage

In the business world, everyone knows health insurance costs are rising. But now, businesses in greater Franklin County can save 20% on their health coverage, thanks to a new program that's helping area businesses and their employees stay healthy.

The Franklin DirigoChoice Incentive Program, launched by the Franklin Community Health Network (FCHN) and the non-profit Greater Franklin Development Council, is designed to help Franklin County employers who want to purchase Maine's DirigoChoice health insurance. The program, funded by a \$375,000 grant from FCHN, offers 20% savings on employer premiums on the first year of coverage, and 10% savings in year two.

A Healthy Bottom Line

Leah Binder, Vice President of FCHN, says businesses that provide health insurance tend to attract better quality employees and have a healthier bottom line. And even companies with just 1 or 2 employees can save money under the new program, she adds.

Unlike other health insurance plans, DirigoChoice subsidizes costs for lower-income enrollees based on household income. It covers most health care services, including preventive services. And with the new incentive program, DirigoChoice makes even more sense for businesses in greater Franklin County.

Limited Enrollment Period

To save on insurance with the new program, businesses need to sign up for DirigoChoice, then fill out an application for premium reimbursements. But the enrollment period ends on December 31, 2005, so the time to act is now, while these limited-time funds are still available.

To find out more, call today . . . and help your business get healthy!

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Web: www.dirigohealth.maine.gov • www.GreaterFranklin.com

Dirigo Health Agency: 1.888.243.8731 • (207.474.4891 TTY)

Franklin Health Access: 207.779.2772

One-Stop Shopping

Franklin County Area Development Groups Share a New Home

It's been a few years since the sound of printing presses rumbled through the Knowlton-McLeary building on Church Street in Farmington. Now, the historic property has found a new voice as home to some of greater Franklin County's leading economic and community development groups...and the site of an exciting new local history and cultural center.

The building's new tenants include F-o-r-t-u-n-e Personnel Consultants, Greater Franklin Development Corporation, Coastal Enterprises Inc., and the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments/Maine Department of Economic and Community Development. Another new tenant, Mountain Counties Heritage, Inc., is creating a heritage discovery center with displays about the region and a showcase of locally made products. And the Church Street facility also houses a "tech-



nology cluster" of some of the area's cutting-edge technology and new media firms, including the Quebec-Labrador Foundation/Atlantic Center for the Environment, and Insyt New Media, who just recently completed a quarter of a million dollar website and touch screen kiosk project for a Denver-based startup ".com" company.

The Church Street Commons concept allows businesses and entrepreneurs to access many services at a single location instead of traveling to different offices to meet with development professionals. The development groups at Church Street Commons offer assistance in everything from helping businesses get started, to finding properties for relocation, to taking advantage of programs and incentives at the local, state and federal levels.

For both visitors and residents, the heritage discovery center will offer a new look at the history and cultural heritage of the Franklin County area.

Come visit Church Street Commons when you're in Farmington, and see what's new in town this fall!

Getting Better All the Time

Group Brings New Energy to Livermore Falls

Phil Poirier says some people in Livermore Falls might call him a "noodge." But he doesn't mind. To Poirier, it means people are getting the message of grassroots development that he and the other members of the Livermore Falls Betterment Group (LFBG) are spreading.

LFBG is revitalizing Livermore Falls' historic downtown with volunteerism, creativity, and some strategic fundraising. Poirier says the seeds for the group's formation were sown in a 2002 town plan that identified a need for community-based economic development, and explains that the group's work really took off when a series of community forums was held in 2004 that identified local strengths and created new ideas.



One project that came out of the process is the Gazebo Market, an open-air marketplace of food, crafts, music and special events. "The downtown Gazebo is the cultural symbol of Livermore Falls," Poirier says, "and the market provides a social connection, a community focal point for the area." It's also a symbol of the group's overall mission, he adds. "We hope the market will become a fulcrum that points the way to economic diversity and sustainable development in the community."

Other LFBG projects include the Riverwalk, a bike/walk path being funded through town and matching state

funding; riverbank cleanup work; and roadside improvements and landscaping work.

Phil Poirier says LFBG's success comes from the community itself. "People like Bruce Adams and Kenny Jacques, our President and VP, have been so important in this process. They were pounding the drums of economic development long before anyone was willing to listen. Now people are starting to hear the beat!"

New Small Business Loans Now Available

For many small businesses, cash flow can be one of biggest barriers to success. Now, thanks to a new Revolving Loan Fund in Wilton, small businesses in Wilton can get easier access to the capital they need.



The new fund offers loans of \$2,500 to \$35,000 to complement bank and other private and public financing sources. The program was created through a grant from the USDA Rural Development's Business Enterprise Grant program and the Town of Wilton's Opportunity Fund.

To apply for a loan or for more information, contact the town of Wilton at 207/645-4961 or call the Androscoggin Valley Council of Governments at 207/783-9186.

Community College Courses Come to Franklin County

Starting next month, Central Maine Community College will offer afternoon and evening courses at both Mt. Abram High School in Salem and Mt. Blue High School in Farmington.

Four courses will be held at Mount Blue High School: Small Business Management, College Writing, Intermediate Algebra, and Introduction to Psychology. At Mt. Abram, three courses will be offered: College Writing, Intermediate Algebra, and Introduction to Psychology.

Courses start the first week of September. For more information or to register, call 800/891-2002, ext. 292. Or visit CMCC's website at www.cmcc.edu and click on "Course Offerings."

BIZ UPDATE > New Shoes in Wilton

The Nichols/Bass Business & Technology Center in Wilton has a new tenant: New England Orthotic & Diabetic Shoe Co. The company, which makes specialized shoes and inserts for people with podiatric problems, will add up to 20 new jobs at the site by the end of next year.