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THE MAGAZINE OF THE MAINE BETTER
TRANSPORTATION ASSOCIATION

Maria Fuentes

A Transportation Pillar

A Weekend with Family & Friends

2025 MBTA Convention
at the Samoset



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A Year of Change and Reflection

By Erik Wiberg, President,
Maine Better Transportation Association

AS WE close out the fall season and shift toward work ahead this winter, it is important to recognize the organizational transition that occurred earlier this year. In August, Maria Fuentes retired after 35 years as Executive Director of the Maine Better Transportation Association. Her departure marks a significant change. The structure, consistency, and reliability of MBTA were enhanced under her leadership, and many of the routines and expectations we consider standard practice today are the result of her stewardship.

Under Maria's leadership, MBTA became a trusted voice in Maine's transportation policy discussions. Her institutional knowledge spanned decades, and she consistently provided context that helped avoid repeating past mistakes. Legislators could depend on her for background and clarification, and she offered it selflessly, thereby enhancing MBTA's standing. She kept relationships across political lines, across administrations, and across agencies. That level of trust in the Maine Better Transportation Association was earned through listening, understanding diverse perspectives, honest assessments, and trustworthiness.

Maria also understood the power of connection. She made it a point to get to know new member representatives personally and connect them with others ("I see someone over there I think you'd like to know; follow me!" or "I see someone who should know what you do."). Maria



Maria treated membership engagement as a core operational duty, not an optional one. She made it a point to know new members, connect them with others, and bring them into the fold quickly."

encouraged members to contribute through a committee or on the board, as volunteers at events, in legislative affairs, and to share their knowledge and energy. Her efforts helped build a strong membership base and a culture of engagement that are central to MBTA today.

The strength of this organization lies in its members and its mission — advancing Maine's transportation future. By the time you read this, MBTA will have hosted one of the most successful Transportation



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Conferences, with over 850 registrants in attendance. Our regional meetings offer opportunities for all members to engage and learn about transportation issues, challenges, and innovations. Attendance at our events is as strong as ever. The golf tournament, as always, brought together a wide range of industry professionals and supported our Infrastructure Fund.

Our focus moving forward remains simple: highlight the work our members do across the state, support strong relationships in Augusta and beyond including with MaineDOT, and continue the events and communications that keep our industry informed. The Maine Better Transportation Association will continue to lead and support transportation policy.

To our members: your engagement drives this organization. Share your projects, your challenges, and your ideas. Together, we will ensure MBTA continues to lead — not just for today, but for the future of Maine's transportation network.

As Maine faces new transportation challenges — from aging infrastructure to sustainability and workforce needs — the role of MBTA has never been more critical. Our strength lies in our members and our ability to advocate, connect, and lead. Together, we will continue shaping policies, fostering innovation, and ensuring a safe, modern transportation system that supports Maine's economy and quality of life. 📍



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ON RAMP

A digest of recent transportation news



MaineDOT Showcases Winter Storm Readiness Ahead of 2025–2026 Winter Season

AS THE WINTER season nears, the Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) is enhancing its preparedness through coordinated operations, well-maintained equipment, and trained personnel to ensure safe travel throughout Maine.

“Maine winters are a part of who we are, and our transportation system has to meet the needs of Mainers: by supporting our economy and accommodating emergency vehicles,” said Dale Doughty, Acting Commissioner of MaineDOT. “Our crews take great pride in the essential work they do, and Maine people can count on them to respond quickly, reliably, and safely.”

Every storm calls for meticulous coordination, collaboration, and dedication. These efforts are carried out by nearly 850 Snowfighters (Transportation Workers trained to drive plow trucks) who brave holiday shifts and overnight duties to keep Maine communities safe.

MaineDOT maintains approximately 8,800 lane miles of roadway across the state. Its fleet of 430 plow trucks logged more than 2.3 million plowed miles last winter—the equivalent of circling the globe 92 times. To support these



operations, MaineDOT has secured a substantial supply of rock salt, with a five-year annual average usage of 125,000 tons.

“We’ve made targeted investments in both equipment and technology to improve how we respond to winter storms,” said Kyle Hall, Director of Maintenance and Operations at MaineDOT. “Using real-time forecasting, advanced deicing materials, and new plow trucks with advanced materials delivery systems, our goal is to clear roads as efficiently and safely as possible.”

A key component of MaineDOT’s

anti-icing strategy is the use of salt brine, which is a solution of water and dissolved sodium chloride. This proactive treatment is applied to roads and bridges before a storm hits, helping to prevent snow and ice from bonding to the pavement. On average, just under 1 million gallons of salt brine are used every year. In some cases, molasses is added to the brine mixture to enhance adhesion and reduce scatter. During active storms, salt brine is also sprayed onto rock salt to improve its effectiveness in breaking down ice buildup.

Even before a winter storm approaches, MaineDOT crews monitor forecasts, ready equipment, and prepare for activation. As the storm approaches, mechanics inspect every truck by checking cutting edges, loading salt and brine, and testing radios and hydraulics to ensure the fleet is ready. When snow begins to fall, Snowfighters work around the clock in challenging conditions to keep roads clear and safe. Once the storm passes, crews continue cleanup and treatment, preparing for the next system already on the horizon.

“A storm can hit at any hour, and when that call comes, day or night, we answer it,” said MaineDOT Snowfighter Dustee Larose. “We leave our families, no matter the time, to make sure every truck is ready and every road is safe. The work is tough, and the shifts are long, but keeping people moving is what drives us.”

MaineDOT’s Snowfighters have stepped up time and again on holidays, sacrificing time with family to keep Maine’s roads safe. On Christmas over the past decade, 1,514 employees put in 11,818 hours. On Thanksgiving, 1,706 employees worked 14,319 hours. On New Year’s, 2,007 employees logged 14,319 hours to keep Maine moving.

MaineDOT’s winter readiness program reflects its commitment to safety, efficiency, and innovation. Winter readiness plays a vital role in sustaining Maine’s tourism economy by allowing visitors to travel safely and enjoy the entire state from Kittery to Fort Kent. With a seasoned team of snowfighters, a well-maintained fleet, and proven anti-icing techniques, the department stands ready to tackle whatever winter brings. 📍



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A portrait of Maria Fuentes, a woman with shoulder-length brown hair and bangs, wearing black-rimmed glasses, a black top, and a silver chain-link necklace. She is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with a building and some greenery.

MBTA Marks
the Retirement of

Maria Fuentes

By Betty Adams

AFTER 35 years advocating for transportation as executive director of the Maine Better Transportation Association, Maria Fuentes retired in August and took with her the well-wishes and gratitude of hundreds of people that she befriended during that time.

They were from association members, directors and presidents as well as members of Congress, state legislators, Transportation Committee members, Maine Department of Transportation commissioners and so many others she met during her tenure.

Then she and her husband, Jeffrey Romano, embarked on her next transportation adventure: a road trip across the United States.

Fuentes, who holds a public relations/marketing degree from Boston University and a master of business from the University of Maine, began as executive director of the association in July 1990 and spent the next 35 years working with the officers and board members as they successfully steered the organization which now boasts almost 700 members.

She serves in other organizations as well. A co-founder of the Maine chapter of the WTS (Women's

PHOTOS: MBTA

Transportation Seminar), she's currently a board member and sponsorship chair, and she's co-chair of the Transportation Investment Advocates Council, board member and secretary of the Hallowell Food Pantry, and board member and treasurer of the Capital Area New Mainers Project.

This is all in addition to introducing people to others whom she knows share common interests.

FOLLOWING IS PRAISE for Fuentes from some of the people who worked with her during those decades at MBTA:

Mark Barnes, project manager at Shaw Brothers, was the 1990-1991 MBTA president and a member of the three-person search committee that interviewed Fuentes for the executive director's post more than three decades ago.

"We went through a hiring process and chose Maria at the end of the day," he said. "We've been extremely pleased ever since. We hired her and there wasn't one of us at the time that ever looked back. We got lucky is what we did. Maria was a great choice for us and she's done such a nice job promoting the Maine Better Transportation Association throughout the years."

He recalled those early years: "I was pretty young at the time, 30 or 31. I think I might have been one of the youngest presidents MBTA had had, and Maria did such a good job of helping me get through that as well. I remember she and I worked very hard on some speeches and what we were going to say at the annual meetings. She was just a wonderful person. For 30 years she never changed one bit. She was good out of the box and stayed good until the end. I really hate to see her go."

Barnes talked of one of Fuentes' many outstanding characteristics: "She always found a way to make everyone, no matter who it was, feel very important and that all by itself made her such a special person for the MBTA. I've told a lot of people over the years that I've been involved in hiring an awful lot of folks in 30-35-40 years in my world, and there hasn't been a whole lot of them as good as Maria Fuentes. She's a special person. I had a tremendous relationship with her for a lot of years and I am going to miss her dearly."

Stephen S. Sawyer Jr. had the pleasure of working with Fuentes twice as president of the association in 2002-2003 and again in 2015-2016. A member since 1993, Sawyer received the 2019 Lifetime Achievement



Left: Executive Director Maria Fuentes, circa 1990.



Award from MBTA. He retired four years ago as senior vice president of transportation services at Sebago Technics.

"There are tons of stories that could be told by a number of people," Sawyer said about Fuentes. "She impacted so many people. She worked 24/7 and gave her all every single day. Our organization was so thankful to have her." He added, "Every year on the board we'd have these conversations: 'We can't afford to lose her. How much can we afford to pay her this year?' She had a great ability to work with people on the legislative side and the administrative side. She knew how to work the system, and it was just magical. We were all thrilled she was representing us."

He recalled a board member at one point noting that Fuentes would retire someday and

mentioning they would need to find someone to train as a successor. "I was praying to God it didn't happen on my watch," Sawyer said. "And I made it through twice."

Deborah Dunlap Avasthi, vice president, treasury services officer of Androscoggin Bank, serves on the MBTA board and was president 2010-2011 (following in the footsteps of her father, Stephen F. Dunlap, 1976-1978, and grandfather, Malcolm B. Dunlap, 1957-1958).

Avasthi said Fuentes was supportive of all those in the president's role, preparing remarks, and adding last-minute highlights to recognize a legislator or a new member. "She was always very organized when it came to the events," Avasthi said. "She had done it for many years. She had that rhythm, she knew what was next. For somebody who is coming in rotating through the role of president, just to have that experience was always reassuring and helpful."

Dana Connors was commissioner of the Maine Department of Transportation when Fuentes first stepped into the MBTA executive director role in 1990. He spoke of her value to the state on behalf of the commissioners over her time with MBTA and described himself as one of her fans:

"She was a remarkable leader in the transportation industry. As executive director of



Opposite: Maria with past MaineDOT commissioners David Bernhardt, Dana Connors, and Bruce Van Note

Maine Better Transportation Association, she stood out in terms of her skill but also she accomplished a lot. Her style was such that she built some very strong relationships. She wasn't shy about presenting her position relevant to issues, but she did it very professionally. Whenever you needed some support, if you asked her for it, she was always there. And if you didn't feel like you should, she would call you and see if there was a way she could support you. I never saw her seeking attention or credit. In fact, she did everything to avoid getting credit, passing it on even when she deserved it. She supported every one of the commissioners that followed me and was always there."

Connors remarked, "Everybody in the association world needs to have a Maria Fuentes as an executive director or president or CEO, whatever that leadership position is called."

And he added, "When it came to transportation, she was the go-to person, whether that was us or the people on a committee or contractors or others. If they had questions or needed support for an effort that involved transportation, they got it. Maria always had her finger on the pulse of Maine transportation and through her network of contacts was able to ensure that we were always on the forefront of timely issues – whatever they were."

Michelle Ibarguen, vice president, talent development at Cross Insurance, was MBTA president 2024-2025 and active on the search committee which spent about a year seeking someone to fill the executive director's role after Fuentes announced her plans to retire.

"One of her incredible strengths was her ability to make our new members feel very welcome and a part of the association," Ibarguen said. "She seemed to know everyone by name. Typically she knew family members, whether it was their spouse, their children. And if you told her you were traveling somewhere, she always remembered and the next time she saw you would ask you questions about it. She just really connected with each and every one of the members. She was always interested and engaged in what you were doing with your family."

Ibarguen said Fuentes was a strong role model and helped pave the way for women in transportation and related fields, adding, "There were not many women in the late '80s-early '90s when I first came into the industry." Ibarguen said she was impressed by Fuentes' accomplishments and her ability to lead an organization like the Maine Better Transportation Association, which was founded in 1939 as the Maine Good Roads Association. Ibarguen calculated that Fuentes was executive director for 40% of the organization's existence.

Ibarguen said the search committee had to decide on a strategy, on qualifications and "really what her job description was because it was so broad and vast I don't think any of us really understood everything she was doing."

Paul Bradbury, director of the Portland International Jetport, is an MBTA board member who served as association president 2019-2020, and his term ended shortly after the pandemic began.

He said Fuentes showed how nimble and creative she was when in-person meetings shifted to virtual. "She recognized that we can all work really hard and be passionate about transportation and projects, but also when we get together, there's a lot of fun going on," he said. Some of her ideas included mailing packets with fun items to people scheduled to be at the virtual meetings. "She knows the value of keeping people engaged; the membership makes the value, and you've got to keep that membership engaged. It's not like you can go on a multi-year hiatus and be successful."

Cindy VanDenBossche, MBTA office manager, listed some of those items: "We had flash cards, crazy glasses,



little Wicked Whoopie pies and virtual toasts and used the Chat button for interaction. In the fall, we did a pirate-themed “Welcome Aboard, Mateys” Virtual Auction and Scholarship meeting. We sent everyone who registered an eye patch, a piece of paper with instructions to create a pirate’s hat, and had flash cards again.”

Bradbury also talked of the many relationships Fuentes formed within the transportation world: “She is unbelievable in the long-term relationships she’s built with industry, with legislators across the state in support of transportation, and all the individual board members. It’s just unbelievable how great she is at building those relationships and nurturing them over time because she’s so reliable and trustworthy.”

“Maria led and would always put the leadership in front, making sure we had all the information and everything we needed to know to be successful. Right up to the last minute, if we had a meeting, she’s doing a tracking of who’s going to be there and who’s not from our state delegation. She’s updating because it’s so important to recognize the individuals in these meetings. I’d try to print it off early, but invariably she’d have the final, last minute list of who actually showed up because they’re all welcoming people at the front door and making sure that we never missed a person to recognize at the meetings.

“At MBTA meetings, we always have nametags because only Maria knows everybody’s name,” Bradbury said, “and she’ll remember stuff from years ago, and it’s so impressive and it’s been so helpful. She just makes these events, and the amount of logistics – everything from the annual transportation conference to all of our events – seem easy all the time. She can reach out to people so quickly because of her connections and relationships. It all looks seamless. Behind the scenes I know she’s working all of these elements to make sure it comes together perfectly. That’s Maria, and she puts the leadership up for success. She leads from behind so often at the big events.”

Herb R. Sargent, MBTA president 2000-2001, who retired as CEO of Sargent in July 2025, also praised Fuentes’ work in the State House and with MaineDOT officials. “Maria was always really, really great with the members she took into meetings with legislators and policymakers,” he said. “She knew them well and took the time to prepare us (me) in order to help alleviate the stress/anxiety many of us feel. Most of the members are rarely exposed to these larger figures like governors, commissioners, and lead legislators, but Maria always had a way of easing that. She was great at introducing the members to these leaders in a way that built mutual comfort and respect, regardless of either side’s political leanings.”

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Top: MBTA staff Hannah Heady, Cindy VanDenBossche, volunteer Shannon Walton (Cross Insurance), Jennifer Tomberlin and Maria toasting Maria's last golf tournament, July 2025.

Above: Maria's family—daughter Sabrina Freeman, son Anthony and husband, Jeff Romano.

State Sen. Brad Farrin, a Republican who represents parts of Kennebec, Penobscot and Somerset counties and who has served on the Legislature's Transportation Committee for a total of 10 years, spoke about Fuentes as well.

"It didn't matter whether she was sitting in the committee room or not, she was always tuned in. Something would happen in the committee, and I would get a text message. Maria would have a question for me or a comment, and I'd look out in the audience and see if she was

there. She was always involved whether she was traveling somewhere or had another commitment.

"Maria has that institutional knowledge. We see so many bills come up again. A third of the Legislature turns over every two years. Everybody comes running in, and they've got all the best, bright, new ideas. Maria was the keeper of the files and would say, 'We talked about that in the 117th and the 121st.'"

He added, "We had a bill last session regarding the pilot boats in Portland harbor, and she brought those folks into us and introduced them. Whether it was rail, bridges, multimodal, the ferry service, airports, she had her thumb on all of those things representing the MBTA. Look at the membership: It's engineers, contractors and it's not just a single point of transportation. It's everything."

Farrin said he was able to learn from Fuentes. "One of the things I took away from Maria is 'Transportation is about policy, it's not about politics.'" He then expanded on that, saying: "I didn't know what Maria's political affiliation is because it didn't matter; it was about policy. Her impact goes beyond just the Transportation Committee as well. 'She made me a better legislator.'"

Erin Sullivan, chief administrative officer for the Maine Turnpike Authority, who is on the MBTA board as well as the immediate past president of the Maine Chapter of the

Women's Transportation Seminar, noted that Fuentes had a major impact in all of those organizations as well as on Sullivan herself.

With regard to Fuentes's work on turnpike issues, Sullivan said, "She has been an unwavering advocate for transportation and always willing to attend public meetings and make points on the opposite side in favor of transportation. A lot of time when there's any sort of a public meeting, who we hear from is the opponents. But Maria has always been willing to put herself out there to try to shed light on the importance of transportation when we need it – the widening and all those things that are critical to the turnpike. She was there as an advocate, working towards building a coalition of supporters. She's done that throughout her career.

"Sitting in committee is going to feel strange to not have Maria there. She's been someone you can kind of count on to give you the lay of the land if you haven't been in the building for a day or two. She's got her finger on the pulse. And personally she's always been someone who wants to connect everyone. She never wants it to be about her. It's always who she can link up together. I don't think I've ever been at a meeting where she hasn't tried to introduce me to somebody new."

Sullivan noted that Fuentes was a founding member of the Maine Chapter-WTS, which was formed in 2012, and remains on the board.

"WTS is an international organization dedicated to shaping the future of transportation for the public good through the global advancement of women," according to its website.


"She has stayed committed for every year that we've been a chapter," Sullivan said. "One of our other past presidents, Katie Hews, had pointed out that Maria intentionally did not move up in the ranks on the board. She wanted to remain behind the scenes and let others get the opportunity. She worked her magic behind the scenes." The chapter now has about 175 members.

Fuentes has been the chair of the group's Sponsorship Committee, which Sullivan noted has increased from about \$10,000 in 2020 to almost \$40,000 in 2025. "She has had a monumental impact on what we're able to do as a chapter through her devotion to getting these sponsorships that allow us to do member development – sending them to trainings that the international puts on, attending conferences, providing members with benefits such as headshots and trying to do some unique things for our members. Without having such strong sponsorship, we wouldn't be able to do as much of that. Being a group of volunteers, it's not our full-time job, so that really has taken a lot of the burden off. Hopefully somebody's ready to take over those reins. They're not going to be easy shoes to fill."

And Sullivan added a personal note: "What a tremendous impact she's had on my career in transportation, she's always been someone I knew I had in my corner, and I think she's been that for so many people. To know her is to love her." 📍



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Briefs from the MaineDOT newsroom



MaineDOT Awards \$2 Million to Boost Transit Statewide

PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION across Maine is getting a major lift. The Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) has awarded \$2 million in state funding for 2026 to strengthen and expand transit service from Aroostook County to York County. The funding supports 17 projects led by 10 agencies, all aimed at improving access, modernizing systems, and advancing goals outlined in MaineDOT's 2023 State Transit Plan.

The projects include everything from new hybrid vehicles and electric bus chargers to microtransit pilots, real-time tracking, and expanded workforce transportation. Bangor Community Connector will upgrade bike racks and add mobile fare payment options, Western Maine agencies will expand local service with vans and hybrid SUVs, and York County Community Action (YCCA) will bring trip-planning technology to its on-demand service. Several agencies will also launch new mobility pilots designed to better serve rural and underserved riders.

MaineDOT says that the goal is to make transit more accessible for people who don't have reliable transportation. "These awards help expand opportunities and address transportation needs throughout our state," said Acting Commissioner Dale Doughty.

Transit leaders echoed that message, noting the benefits for riders who rely on public transportation to access jobs, services, and community life. Don Libby of Regional Transportation Program (RTP) called the awards "a chance to better serve towns that have been underserved for far too long," while YCCA said the investment will make transit more visible, user-friendly, and connected across the region.

Altogether, the selected projects are designed to expand service, support workforce needs, and move Maine's transit network toward cleaner, more sustainable vehicles. 📍



Augusta's Western Avenue Bridge Replacement

DRIVERS IN Augusta should expect ongoing lane shifts and detours on Western Avenue through the end of the year as MaineDOT continues major work on the bridge over I-95. All traffic will remain routed over a temporary bridge at Exit 109, where the roadway has been narrowed to two lanes, one eastbound and one westbound. A third lane on the bridge is reserved for vehicles exiting westbound from I-95.

In addition to the long-term lane changes, westbound drivers will no longer be able to turn left onto Whitten Road. Instead, those heading toward Whitten Road will need to use the southbound interstate on-ramp to access a new connector that loops back to the roadway. This change will stay in place while crews remove the aging bridge and build its replacement.

These adjustments are part of a major infrastructure project to replace the 68-year-old Western Avenue bridge, which has deteriorated beyond its useful life. The new structure will improve safety for drivers by increasing clearance over I-95 to reduce the risk of over-height vehicle strikes. The project also includes approximately 1,350 feet of new and reconstructed sidewalks along Western Avenue and Whitten Road, significantly improving access for pedestrians traveling through this busy corridor.

Reed & Reed is leading the \$30 million replacement effort, which will continue into next year. As construction progresses, the temporary bridge and traffic restrictions will remain key to keeping vehicles moving while crews work overhead. Motorists should expect changing traffic patterns, reduced speeds, and construction activity throughout the area well into 2026. 📍





Greater Portland Metro to Launch New Transit Service in Scarborough

PUBLIC TRANSIT is expanding in southern Maine, thanks to a new partnership between Greater Portland Metro, the Maine Turnpike Authority (MTA), MaineDOT, and the Town of Scarborough. The effort will create a new bus service connecting Scarborough and Portland along the busy U.S. Route 1 corridor, the first project of its kind in the state.

The initiative builds on \$1.3 million in federal funding awarded through Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS), paired with local support from Scarborough and a recently approved \$3.5 million commitment from the MTA. Together, these investments will help Metro plan and launch service that links Scarborough residents with workplaces, medical centers, shopping areas, and more.

Local leaders call the partnership a model for improving mobility and reducing congestion. “We’re excited to serve the Scarborough community and give more people a reliable, affordable alternative to driving,” said Metro Executive Director Glenn Fenton.

Route design, schedules, and service details will be developed over the coming months. Metro plans to seek public input as planning continues, with service anticipated to run seven days a week. 📍



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A Weekend with Family and Friends

MBTA members gather for a break in the busy fall season for networking and fun

BRIGHT AND early on Friday, September 19th, MBTA supporters and golfers alike arrived to kick off the 2025 Convention Weekend at Samoset Resort. It was a gorgeous day with a full field vying to take the top prize. For those not golfing, a Mixology class was held in the clubhouse dining area. Much like he has in years past, Golf Chair Joe Rollins of Dirigo Materials not only helped organize the event but also announced and gave out prizes during the barbecue lunch that followed.

Later that evening, a larger crowd kicked off the event in the ballroom, with an opening reception sponsored by Grand sponsor Ranger Corporation, followed by the traditional lobster bake. MBTA Vice President and Chair of the Events Committee Jason Griffiths took to the mic and welcomed everyone gathered.

V.P. Griffiths proceeded to thank the many sponsors of the event, donors of auction items, and everyone who worked to plan the weekend activities. Again this year, the evening's big fundraiser came in the form of two auctions – one silent and one live – where members bid against each other for a great cause. MBTA staff worked diligently to conduct the silent auction through an online platform, so MBTA supporters that could not make it were also able to bid on items. Throughout the evening, participants were

reacting to alerts on their phone saying that they had been outbid. The friendly competition absolutely benefitted the overall cause and made for an eventful evening!

This year, the live auction was conducted by auctioneer Carol Achterhof, who has been an auctioneer, cataloger, and branding specialist for the Thomaston Place Auction Galleries, Inc. for the last 20 years. Carol kept the room lively and captivated, with a highlight of the live auction being a new game, Heads or Tails. The whole room began standing but as the game progressed more and more people sat down until only two remained. Ultimately, a young man named Cameron Carey took the prize home!

The auctions raise money for the MBTA Infrastructure Development Fund. Year after year, multiple groups attempt to swipe 40% of the sales tax of new and used vehicles, as well as auto parts sales tax into other endeavors. Luckily, with the steadfast work of those representing the transportation industry, MaineDOT, and even Governor Mills, this funding has been secured since the law passed giving the Transportation Fund this slice of the pie. Unfortunately, the sticky fingers of others will not cease unless these funds are able to be protected. The money raised by these auctions help the entire industry fight these battles when they arise

and MBTA will continue to fight for stable and predictable transportation funding at the state and federal levels.

In total, almost 300 members, family and friends attended this year's fall networking event, and thanks to the generosity of auction donors, sponsors, and attendees that more than \$28,000 was raised for the Infrastructure Fund.

As the night was winding down, a small but mighty crew stayed for the Cribbage tournament, with Shannon Walton from Cross Insurance claiming a decisive victory.

The next morning, the luck of good weather remained steadfast, as conventioners filled the *Schooner Appledore* and headed out to cruise Camden Harbor. Folks enjoyed snacks, drinks, and each other's company as the schooner sailing delivered wonderful, clear views of the bay.

After a rousing inaugural year last year, the cornhole tournament proved to be a fan favorite of the weekend, chaired by Sargent's Doug Morrison. Competitive juices ran high as this boisterous group whittled themselves down to the winners, Tony Grande of VHB and Marc Caldwell of Cianbro. It is safe to say the cornhole tournament will be a staple for years to come!

Many thanks to our conventioners, sponsors, donors and planning committee for a great networking weekend! 📍

PHOTOS: MBTA



OPPOSITE PAGE: MBTA members ready to cruise

Top left: MBTA Executive Director Jake Lachance with Heads/Tails winner Cameron Carey

Top right: Tony Grande and Mike O'Brien in the cornhole tournament.

Middle: Grand Sponsor Ranger Construction

Above left: N.S. Giles' golf team

Above right: Cornhole: 2nd place team Mike O'Brien, Gallagher; Matt Carey, Northeast Paving; Winning team Marc Caldwell, Cianbro; Tony Grande, VHB

Bottom: 2025 Cornhole participants

MBTA 2025 CONVENTION 2025 GOLF TOURNAMENT

Top Net Team: BET Transport. **Score:** 54
Irv Smith, Bill Atwell, Bruce Manzer,
Tom Heitsch

Top Gross Team: NS Giles. **Score:** 59
Jackson Gilmore, Marvin Compton, Chris
Levesque, Norman Nichols

Top Mixed Team: Skowhegan Savings
Bank. **Score:** 52 (Net). Tara Russell, Mike
Pietroski, Grant Russell, Mike Griswold

Closest to Pin

Women: Caitlyn Abbott,
Sebago Technics, 11'

Men: Wayne Chadborne,
Haley & Aldrich, 9'

Longest Drive

Women: Jeanne Lund, Westfield Insurance

Men: Trent Cullinan, Sargent

2025 Cribbage Tournament

Top team: Shannon Walton,
Cross Insurance

Second: Shawn Dennett, Crum & Forster

2025 Cornhole Tournament

Top team: Tony Grande (VHB) and Marc
Caldwell (Cianbro)

Second: Mike O'Brien (Gallagher) and
Matt Carey (Northeast Paving)

2025 Auction Door Prizes

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Justin Lewis, Copiam

\$150 L.L. Bean Gift Card - Heads/Tails,
Cameron Carey, Northeast Paving

\$100 L.L. Bean Gift Card - Door Prize,
David Bellefleur, Ranger

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Industries

Golf Chair: Joe B. Rollins, Dirigo Materials

Cornhole Chair: Doug Morrison, Sargent

Committee Members: Erik Wiberg, R.W.
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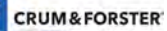
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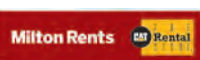
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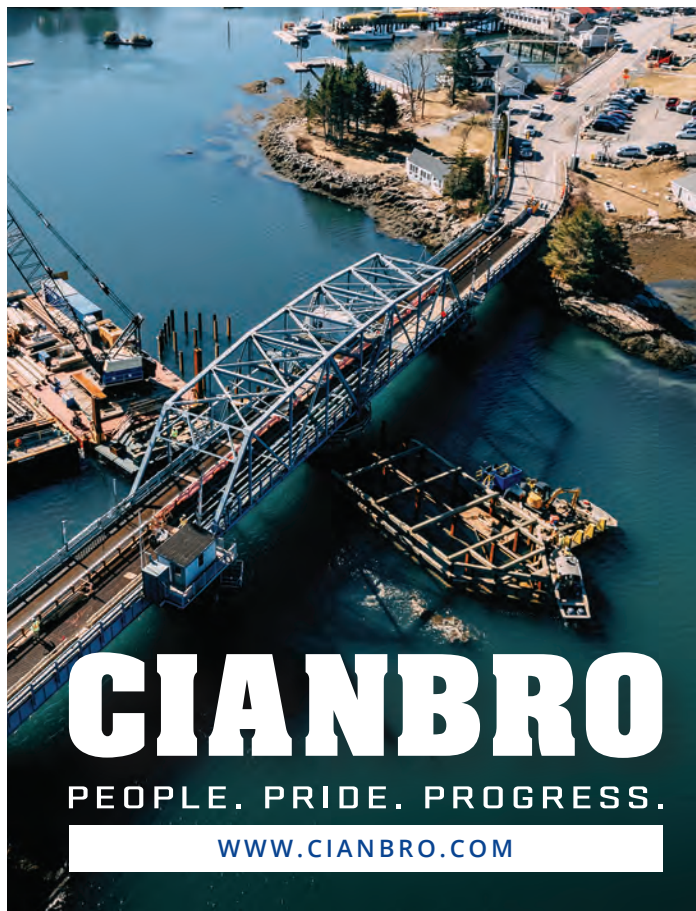
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Building Wellbeing for ME

A Day of Inspiration and Connection at the 2025 Mental Health Summit



Top: Attendees with vendors.

Middle: Jake Lachance gives welcome.

Bottom: Attendees listen to presentation.

OPPOSITE

Top: Devin Curit, Dayton Sand & Gravel

Bottom: L-R: Margo Walsh, Jill Rivas, Kyle O'Connell

THE 2025 “Building Wellbeing for ME” Mental Health Summit at Camp Manitou in Oakland brought together leaders, employers, and advocates from across Maine to share stories of resilience, discuss mental health in the workplace, and strengthen the state’s collective commitment to supporting employee wellbeing. Without generous sponsors, this event would not have been possible. Special thanks to Wellness Workdays, Reed & Reed, Dayton Sand & Gravel, Cianbro, Pike Industries, SoulBeing, and Sebago Technics.

Morning Kickoff: Setting the Tone

The day began in the Camp Manitou Dining Hall with breakfast and networking, giving attendees a chance to connect with exhibitors and one another before the formal program began. The event was emceed by **Kelly Flagg**, Executive Director of AGC Maine, who welcomed attendees and acknowledged the importance of continued mental health advocacy in Maine’s workforce.

Opening the summit, **Rich Jones**, Chief Clinical Officer at BuildWell Health, shared his personal and professional journey in behavioral health and long-term recovery. His remarks emphasized the importance of compassion and innovation in building systems

that truly serve those struggling with mental health and substance use challenges.

Stories of Strength and Recovery

Following the opening, **Jessica Solaguren**, a medical professional in long-term recovery, shared a deeply personal story of her own journey through recovery. Her honesty and vulnerability served as a reminder that recovery is possible and that empathy must be at the heart of mental health conversations.

Next, **Carolyn Delaney**, founder of Journey Enterprises, highlighted how storytelling and visibility through publications like *Journey Magazine* can help destigmatize addiction and bring recovery into the mainstream.

After a short break, attendees returned to hear from **Devin Curit**, Safety Director at Dayton Sand & Gravel, who reflected on the intersections of safety, family, and mental health. Curit’s remarks truly moved the room, as he gave personal stories about how he has helped those closest to him deal with struggles involving mental health and depression.

Leadership & Shared Experience

Next up was a presentation by **Col. Bo Balcavage**, a retired U.S. Army officer, who offered lessons in leadership and resilience drawn from decades of service and community

involvement. His talk emphasized purpose, mentorship, and the critical importance of supporting one another through challenges, some of which are more apparent than others.

Rounding off the morning was the **Employer Panel on Workplace Wellness**, moderated by **Margo Walsh**, founder and CEO of MaineWorks. Panelists **Jill Rivas** of Crooker Construction and **Kyle O'Connell** of N.S. Giles Foundations shared practical approaches for integrating mental health awareness into organizational culture. From creating open communication channels to offering employee assistance programs and peer training, their insights gave attendees tangible strategies to bring back to their workplaces.

Afternoon Reflections and Closing

After a networking lunch among exhibitors, the day closed with **Chris Guild**, Director of Training and Client Accounts at Wellness Workdays. Guild's presentation emphasized behavior change, trauma awareness, and evidence-based communication methods that can make mental health support more effective across industries. His expertise left attendees with actionable tools to continue

promoting wellness beyond the summit.

As the formal agenda concluded, participants were encouraged to stay for informal discussions — continuing the conversations sparked throughout the day in smaller, supportive groups around the scenic Camp Manitou grounds.

Gratitude and Acknowledgements

The success of the Mental Health Summit was made possible through the generous support of event sponsors, whose commitment to workplace wellness ensures that discussions like these continue to grow. Special thanks were extended to **BuildWell Health, Wellness Workdays, MaineWorks, AGC Maine, Sargent, Turner**, and all exhibitors who contributed their time, resources, and expertise to make the event a reality. 📍



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A Little Bit of This, A Little Bit of That

MBTA Members tour three Brunswick area sites that showcase the variety and expansiveness of infrastructure projects

MBT A MEMBERS and associates gathered at TechPlace on the grounds of Brunswick Landing for the 2025 annual MBTA PDH Tour.

The program opened at 8:00 a.m. with coffee, pastries, and brief remarks from the MBTA President Erik Wiberg, setting the tone for a practical overview of road, bridge, and redevelopment efforts and thanking the event sponsors. Special thanks to Diamond Level Sponsor Sargent; Gold Level Sponsors Cross Surety, Stantec, and VHB; Silver Level Sponsor Northeast Paving; and Breakfast Sponsor Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority (MRRA).

Reed & Reed's Darryl Coombs and Dustin Littlefield started off with an update on the Frank J. Wood Bridge project between Topsham and Brunswick, highlighting current progress and remaining phases. Sargent's Glenn Adams followed with a look at the Bowdoin quarry operation, outlining its role in supplying materials for regional work. The mic was then passed to Dan Stevenson, Executive Director at MRRA, who talked about the collaborative effort it takes to revitalize an area like the Brunswick Landing.

Continuing the presentation about the Brunswick Landing was Base Closure Manager David Barney who walked attendees through the property transfer and regulatory requirements tied to the former Navy Superfund site, stressing the long-term sequencing behind redevelopment. MRRA Utilities Director Woodie Bartley expanded on that theme, detailing the condition of existing infrastructure and the upgrades needed to support growth, with a particular emphasis on road safety and connections to Cook's Corner.

Crooker Construction's Rick Powers offered a practical view of on-site road and utility reconstruction at Brunswick Landing, including municipal permitting steps. Tom Farrell, Brunswick's Parks and Recreation Director, rounded out the presentations with an overview of local trail systems, partnerships, and ongoing work to improve non-motorized connectivity.

A brief Q&A wrapped the session before participants boarded a campus bus tour led by Jake Levesque, who showed participants

the different ecosystems on the grounds. The integration of housing, airport, businesses, walking paths, roadways, sewer, contamination, and linking to the surrounding ecosystem was apparent in how Brunswick Landing continues to develop.

The group then made their way to the newly acquired Sargent quarry in Bowdoin. There, participants were able to eat lunch and learn about the different types of aggregate that the quarry provides. The face of the quarry is impressive, dwarfing the equipment below. The acquisition of this quarry gives Sargent better access to the Brunswick/Topsham/Greater 295 corridor area.

Finally, the group made their way to the new Frank J. Wood Bridge connecting Brunswick and Topsham. Participants of the tour got an exclusive walk on the new structure, as it bows to the West of the old bridge. A temporary structure was built to accommodate the equipment needed to build the new bridge and take down the previous one. Tour goers were able to walk on that temporary structure to gain a unique view from below.

Thank you to all PDH Tour participants and hosts for making the 2025 tour a success. This year was a great example of a variety of projects that all come together to showcase how vast the transportation and infrastructure impact is in a given area. 📍

FMI: The MBTA hosts several events throughout the year to inform members and community and state leaders on transportation issues. To learn more, visit [MBTAonline.org](https://www.mbtanet.org).

PHOTOS: MBTA



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Maria Fuentes:

Making Maine Better One Conversation at a Time

By Bruce Van Note



HAVING RECENTLY ended my tenure as Commissioner of the Maine Department of Transportation after state service dating back to 1994, it's natural to reflect on accomplishments and how they happened. It's easier to see the big picture when you're not in the middle of it focusing on the challenge of the day.

From this perspective, it is clear that transportation in Maine has seen some advancements in recent decades. Although the predictability and sustainability of funding is still a huge challenge, state roads and bridges now receive attention at more rational intervals. All transportation modes – whether by

road, air, sea, rail, or trails – have improved. Funding sources have diversified; that is good for Maine. At its essence, transportation is about movement – specially the movement of people or goods. The opposite of movement is stagnation. No one wants to be stuck, whether it's in the mud, in the snow, on a plane, or even in a career or a relationship. Although destinations vary, movement towards them makes life better.

Even more clear to me is that the primary reason for this advancement is not my efforts or those of any one Commissioner or individual. We moved forward because the people of Maine know intuitively, sometimes perhaps even subconsciously, that transportation is fundamental to their daily safety, economic opportunity, and quality of life.

And why do they know that? One big reason is **Maria Fuentes**.

Maria was at the Maine Better Transportation Association before I started my state career. She has seen Commissioners come and go. From administration to administration, Maria made sure transportation was on the mind of every policy-maker. She spearheaded huge growth of participation at the annual transportation conference in Maine every year in early December. National speakers would marvel at the magnitude of the event, especially in a low population state like Maine. As budgets and bonds were proposed and disposed, Maria was there making sure transportation was the foundational consideration it deserved to be.

As important as what she did, is how she did it. She is friendly and fair. But don't mistake that for being content with idle conversation. If someone didn't answer her policy question, she'd often respond by saying that's interesting, but then politely ask again. Maria is also honest and trustworthy. She disagrees without being disagreeable. In sum, she was very good at her job. Contrary to the old Maine yarn, you can get there from here, in large part due to her efforts.

Moving beyond her work, Maria is an even better person. She truly cares about people. That basic humanity is a trait we can all use more of today. I am fortunate to call her a friend.

In closing, it is an honor to have been asked to recognize Maria on the occasion of her retirement. It is even more fun because I know her humility will make her blush and shake her head when she reads or hears this. But when she gets the chance to step back and see the big picture, when no one is looking, I hope she smiles and acknowledges to herself that her efforts kept Maine moving, and made the State we love a better place.



MARIA, YOUR thirty-five years of service to Maine Better Transportation Association have been amazing and we are now dedicating an issue of *Maine Trails* to you!

You've always been in the background putting members first, but it is time for you to be in the forefront and accept our heartfelt praise.

Thank you for leading MBTA. You have made us all better by following your lead. You leave your time at the State house with respect from both sides of the aisle which, as we all know, is not an easy task. Your advocacy for Better Transportation in the State of Maine has benefited all Maine residents. Your knowledge of association members, and political processes in Maine and Washington has greatly benefited MBTA. I am so grateful to have been able to work with you and learn from someone with such passion and knowledge of the industry.

Thank you for building this great team and we endeavor to carry on your legacy.

Best wishes for a great retirement! —Alan Gould,
Account Manager, White Cap | A.H. Harris



TO KNOW Maria Fuentes is to receive a genuine gift—a treasure beyond measure. Many people cross our paths, but only a few leave an imprint that lasts a lifetime.

Maria entered my life years ago through

our connection with MBTA, and from our very first meeting, she became a companion, a partner, and a bright presence. Over time, we've built a bond rooted in a shared commitment to strengthening Maine's future through our work and protection of individuals in the construction industry.

I will always cherish the memories we made together—from selling MBTA scholarship tickets to attending conferences near and far. One of my favorites will forever be our trip to San Francisco for a conference, when Maria and Tom Howard joined my family and a few others for dinner at the Hard Rock Café, a spot my wife and daughters were excited to visit. When Maria stepped away to use the restroom, we told the waitress it was her birthday. The look on her face when, in the middle of March (nowhere near her actual birthday of May 24th), the entire restaurant burst into song to celebrate her “unbirthday” was unforgettable. Her embarrassment, our laughter, and the joy of that moment created the perfect ending to a memorable conference—something we still laugh about to this day.

Maria's warm heart embraces people from near and far. Her laughter fills every room. Her leadership never wavers. The legacy she leaves within MBTA is profound, and it will continue shaping the organization for years to come. Wishing Maria a healthy, happy retirement—may this next chapter bring her all the joy she has so fully earned. —Bruce Hubbard

MARIA FUENTES is the epitome of what this industry wants in a friend, advocate, and partner – an open mind, a drive to move forward and an open heart. When I joined MBTA as a younger man, I quickly came to appreciate Maria. Her passion for the transportation industry – all modes – and the membership – the ACTUAL people of the membership – stood out to me early and often. Over the years, Maria became a friend, a trusted person for advice, and a clear leader in being a voice for our industry within the layers and complexity of government. Her ability to bring people together and have a vision for the future is equally matched by her quick wit, intelligence, grace, and kindness...qualities the world certainly needs and benefits from, not just our dear old State of Maine.



For her entire career, Maria advocated for a better transportation network, better connections for people, and a better State of Maine. She worked tirelessly and did so while “Leading from the Back”, never making herself the center of attention or desiring the spotlight for credit. While the work is still not done, she advanced us tremendously as a State and people through her efforts, and united us all in a common goal. I will forever be grateful for our paths crossing and her friendship – both professionally and personally! Maria deserves a long, happy, and healthy retirement!

— Eric G. Ritchie,
President & CEO, Sargent



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What can I say...

To someone who has given so much, for so long, to so many

Who has carefully molded the MBTA into one of the strongest advocacy associations in the state

To an individual who gently and effectively created partnerships, and strategically navigated challenges while leading this organization for nearly 35 years

What can I say...

To someone who has taught me so much

And who has meant so much to me and to so many others

To an individual who is recognized across the state of Maine as a leader, a connector, a mediator, a facilitator, and a very good friend

What I can say is...

I'm really going to miss you, that smile, and your uplifting personality

Thank You for everything you have done for me, and for everyone else

I wish you all the best in your retirement and hope you are blessed with a happy, healthy and "growing" family to enjoy it with!!

Thank You Maria!!!

—Tony Grande, Director of Transportation Engineering, VHB



MARIA,
I just want to personally thank

you for all your years of leadership and devotion to supporting the Maine transportation system and its mission to improve continually. It is amazing to see the diverse network of relationships you have built throughout the State of Maine and beyond its borders. These relationships encompass elected officials, members, key stakeholders within the state of Maine, owners, and other key organizations outside of our membership. Your presence and impact will truly be missed, and we have a very challenging position to fully encompass your impact.

You also always do an amazing job welcoming people in and making them feel part of the organization through your thoughtful conversations with folks and engaging with them. You do this so effortlessly and with such warmth and compassion. The entire organization recognizes your ability to find common ground, organize some amazing events where everyone has fun, and also understand when it's time to just roll up your sleeves and get some work done.

Lastly, thank you for all of our conversations, helping me navigate the board of directors since I have taken over the seat from Jim Hanley, and for providing a positive and engaging experience.

I am hoping retirement has found you well, and I hope to catch up with you sometime soon to hear all about your travels and amazing journeys.

— Jason Griffiths,
Area Manager, Pike Industries



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SINCE 1990 the State of Maine has observed Maria Fuentes managing the public and legislative awareness of transportation and its needs in Maine. As the Executive Director of Maine Better Transportation Association (MBTA), Maria has lead (in her ever present humble style) the evolutionary process of transportation change in Maine.

One critical example of Maria's role is, for years MBTA has positively influenced the transportation funding amounts and methods in both the Maine Legislature and the Federal Government. Another example of her leadership is how MBTA has been relevant in the transportation discussions. Since about 1991 the perspective and expectation of what transportation in Maine should and will be, has been questioned and discussed in the public and legislative arenas. Maria or appropriate members of MBTA have consistently been at the table of those discussions, clearly making sure that the State is preserving transportation's vital infrastructure, while also growing with the new transportation demands and opportunities that continue to evolve.

Not only has Maria been a great leader in the world of transportation, she is truly a wonderful family member and friend. Her tireless hours of work would often be followed by many more hours of being with family, and friends (just getting together with them, and/

Maria has created and maintained positive relationships with all those agencies, organizations associated with transportation. Her ability to befriend those who often are questioning the status quo of transportation and funding priorities has made this evolution so much better. Her efforts of managing the Maine Transportation Conference and other events for over 30 years continues to play a part in sustaining a healthy transportation system.

If you look back, you'll see that through these MBTA efforts Maria has brought people together learning about the latest transportation subjects. These educational efforts also brought everyone together by making these events fun. No matter what your politics, company or mode of transportation association was, these events were meant to create a respectful environment for all who attended. Because of the respect from all involved throughout the the years, the result has been civil discussion at all the arenas. This discussion has lead to reasonable and thoughtful growth and change in Maine's transportation system.

Not only has Maria been a great leader in the world of transportation, she is truly a wonderful family member and friend. Her tireless hours of work would often be followed by many more hours of being with family, and friends (just getting together with them, and/

or being with them through whatever was happening in their life.). This does not include volunteer hours and organizations which are too numerous to cover.

My first day working (I was transitioning from being a toll collector to the management staff), at the Maine Turnpike Authority was spent in Augusta attending a public hearing at the Elks Club for the "Stop the Widening" referendum in 1991. Hundreds of people attended the hearing. I got to meet lots of people, both those in favor of stopping the widening and those who opposed the referendum and wanted a wider turnpike (It was a confusing referendum question). One of the people there was the relatively new Executive Director of MBTA (Maria Fuentes). It was amazing witnessing Maria's coordination and arranging of speakers to present testimony in favor of the turnpike and it's widening.

Little did I know that day was the beginning of a friendship that has lasted all these years. I have personally witnessed all of the effort I have mentioned because of my years of association with Maria. The State of Maine is a far better place because of Maria's years of caring, especially our transportation system! I am honored to consider myself one of "Maria's Besties", (even if the term Bestie wasn't around in 1991.) — *Conrad Welzel, retired; former MBTA Board Member*

MARIA FUENTES and MBTA have been synonymous over the last thirty plus years. She has led the Association to be the preeminent source of information on transportation-related subjects. Maria is a well-respected voice on transportation issues who is sought out by Legislators, MaineDOT Commissioners, MTA Directors, and Association members for her valued opinion.



Maria has led the Association to a solid financial position with her commitment to the Association, its members, and events. The Infrastructure Fund and Educational Foundation both have impressive fund balances which are the result of her stewardship in promoting and maintaining the Associations' focus on these important endeavors.

Maria has the ability to make everyone feel as part of the MBTA "family" and members have enjoyed a personal connection with her.

I had the pleasure of working with and seeing what Maria has been able to accomplish at MBTA over these past many years. I consider her a friend and wish her the best in retirement. — *Timothy Folster, retired; MBTA Board Member*

WHEN MARIA FUENTES announced her retirement last year, it was hard to imagine the day would come when we wouldn't find her smiling face in the Transportation committee room in the State House. Going into this session, it feels appropriate to reflect on the amazing work Maria helped champion for the transportation industry.

In our time as chairs, Maria has shown up day after day, always with a bright, warm presence, to help inform the work of our committee. She not only represented the MBTA well, but she was quick to consider what was in the best interest of Mainers and focused on how her work could improve all of our lives. She was thoughtful, knowledgeable, and eager to help, maintaining a calm and well-informed place in our committee. Maria didn't hesitate to speak up, frequently provide testimony, and stop us in the halls when an industry concern came up.

Maria earned the respect of our institution with her decades of dedication and service and it's with joy we wish her a happy retirement.

*Sincerely,
Sen. Tim Nangle and Rep. Lydia Crafts
Chairs of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation*





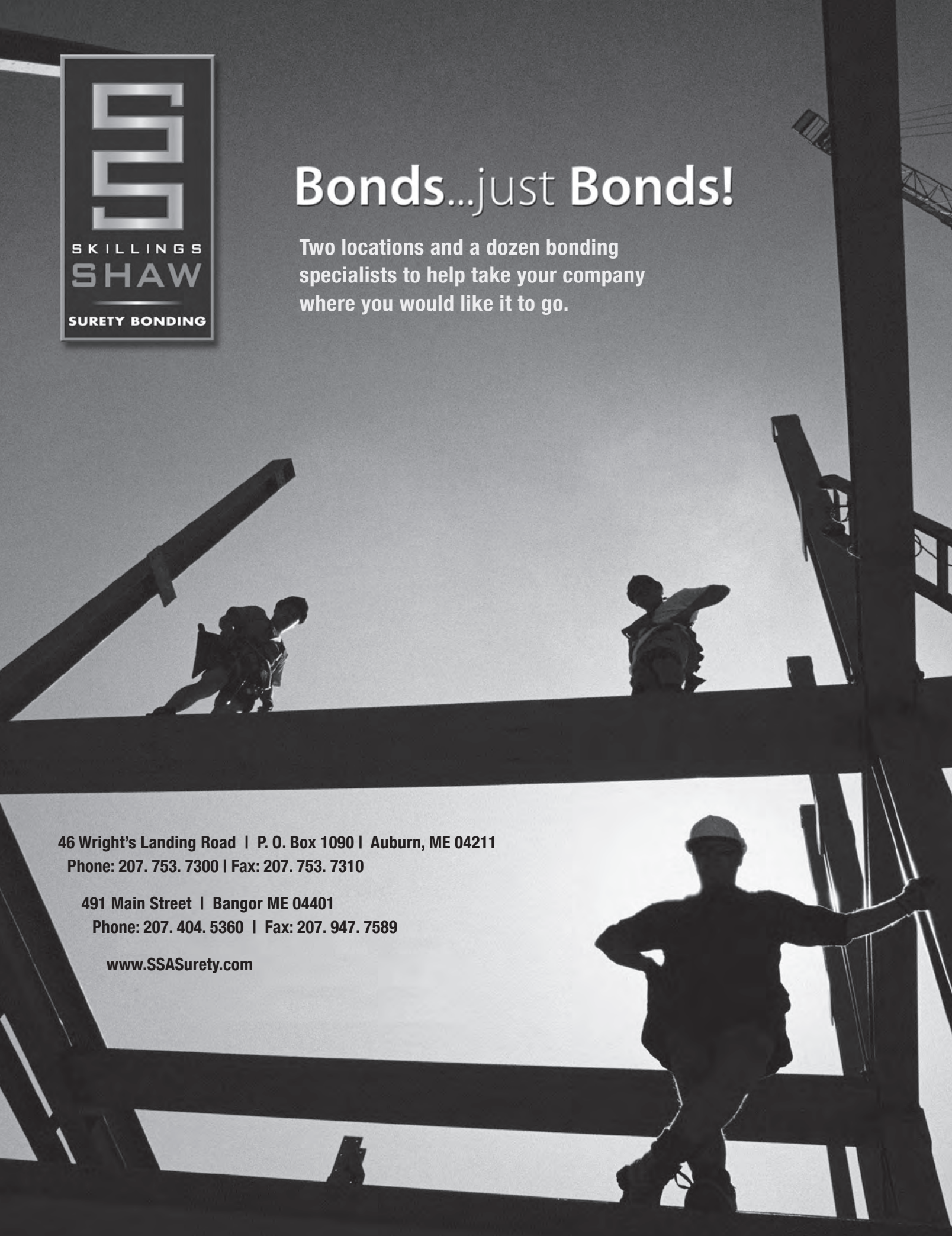
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legislature are even more so. While all of this is true, my thoughts of Maria are a little different.

I first encountered Maria at the opening of a park-and-ride lot at the Gray interchange of the Maine Turnpike around 1990. I had to ask someone who she was as she was one of the dignitaries and I was not. I was told she was the new Executive Director of the Maine Better Transportation Association. I was later introduced to Maria, and a 35-year friendship began.

HNTB and I became a member of MBTA and a while later I was on the Board of Directors. Among Maria's greatest virtues is her ability to connect with people. I'm happy to say I was one of those people. It wasn't long before I realized that every time I thought I was helping Maria, she was actually helping me. She introduced me to people I would have never met, involved me in ways that benefited the state, transportation and yes, me. I couldn't help but notice that she did the same for many others. We were Maria's army and she always watched out for the troops.

Perhaps most impressive was her ability to do all these things, meet all these objectives, be a key piece of the fabric of the transportation network and balance a personal life with her true loves, Jeff, Anthony and Sabrina. Every discussion I ever had with Maria began hearing about her family's endeavors. This is the Maria I know.

—Roland Lavalley, Vice President,
HNTB Corporation

MY WIFE and I first met Maria at a UM fundraising event held at Key Bank in downtown Augusta 39 years ago.

Over the years, we have had many opportunities to work with her on the Maine Transportation Conference. Her leadership has been very inspiring to me as I followed her up the leadership chain to the position of Chair. Her laid back, calm attitude yet firm leadership always came through to get the team to the best possible solution to the problems we

came across to get to conference day! She leads by example by participating in many aspects of the conference such as membership on the Policy subcommittee; participating in the University talks when student presenters were less and less; and also coming up to the university to help the students with their practice sessions to get ready for the actual conference presentations.

Maria was quick to utilize unexpected opportunities for the greater good. Maria found out that my wife had a degree and experience in Speech Communication and brought her into the Conference team to help out with student paper presentations. She also made sure that my wife was present at the conference to see the papers actually being presented live. She was able to also use her connections from MBTA to salt the audience with legislators. This was really shown when Senator Susan Collins sent a tribute video to Maria's retirement party.

I enjoyed many late night discussions over the years about what was going on and Maria's take on them while setting up the Civic Center on the night before the Conference. Then it always continued across Civic Center Drive at Longhorn where we held the "Pre-Conference Banquet".

Thank you for this opportunity to share our experiences with Maria; and thank you, Maria, for these great times!!!

— George Macdougall, PE, Contracts Engineer, Maine DOT
1989, 1990, 2024, 2025 Maine Transportation Conference Co-Chair

— Donalyn (Donny) Macdougall, English/Speech
Communications teacher, Cony HS, Retired



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Southport Swing Bridge Wins Top ACEC Prize in Maine



Above: Representatives from VHB and project partners attended the awards. From left to right: Andrew Blaisdell (GZA), Jason Stetson (MaineDOT), Robert Blunt (VHB), Carl Ayers (VHB), and Alan Fisher (Cianbro).

VHB WON the Grand Conceptor Award for the Southport Swing Bridge project earlier this fall at the American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) of Maine's Engineering Excellence Awards (EEA). The Grand Conceptor Award is the highest prize for the state's EEA competition, awarded to just one project. VHB project team members Robert Blunt and Carl Ayers were among those in attendance to receive the award.

VHB was the structural engineer and prime consultant on this Maine Department of Transportation (MaineDOT) project, supported by Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. (mechanical engineer), Total Control Systems (electrical engineer), GZA GeoEnvironmental, Inc. (geotechnical engineer), and Substructure (hydrographic surveyor). The bridge rehabilitation was constructed by Cianbro Corporation.

Located in Southport and Boothbay Harbor, Maine, the Southport Swing Bridge project restored vitality to a treasured historic landmark that is integral to local industry and a crucial link to the mainland for Southport Island residents. Originally constructed in 1939, the Southport Swing Bridge is one of the few remaining historic swing bridges still in operation in New England, but years of wear and aging mechanical and electrical systems had diminished the bridge's functionality,

causing public concern. VHB and the project team delivered a context-sensitive, cost-effective solution to rehabilitate the bridge that addressed ongoing maintenance challenges while preserving the bridge's iconic truss and timber-framed aesthetic.

The success of the rehabilitation relied on close, cross-disciplinary collaboration to create a fully integrated design addressing the bridge's intricate and interdependent mechanical, electrical, and structural systems. The team leveraged an innovative contractor input during the design process, advanced reality capture and 3D modeling technologies, skilled in-water craftsmanship to restore the historic truss and timber-framed fender system, and extensive coordination with the community to meet MaineDOT's compressed schedule and minimize impacts on marine and roadway traffic.

Today, the Southport Swing Bridge features significantly enhanced swing functionality, improved reliability, and the ability to support all Maine legal loads, strengthening economic opportunity and reducing truck emissions. With reduced long-term maintenance needs, the bridge offers sustainability and cost benefits for the client. Fully restored, future-ready, and still exuding historic coastal charm, the bridge is now prepared to serve the community and support the regional economy for decades to come. 📍



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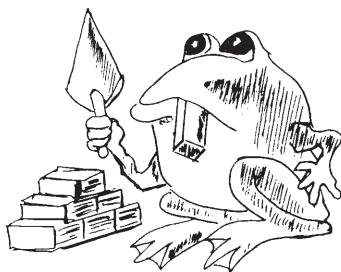
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SARGENT

Sargent Corp. acquired long-standing Maine company E.L. Vining

WE'RE EXCITED to share that MBTA member Sargent has acquired E.L. Vining & Son, Inc. of Farmington. The acquisition was completed on October 31, 2025, and supports Sargent's long-term growth as the company approaches its 100th anniversary in 2026.

E.L. Vining & Son, founded in 1956, is known for its quality work, integrity, and community commitment. Their expertise in DOT, site-work, utility, and landfill projects aligns well with Sargent's core services, making this a natural and strategic fit.

"This acquisition brings together two Maine-based companies that share a deep respect for people, craftsmanship, and community," said Eric Ritchie, President & CEO of

Sargent Corporation. "E.L. Vining & Son's culture mirrors our own, rooted in doing the right thing, honing our craft, and investing in people and winning in the field. We're excited to welcome their talented team of professionals into employee-ownership and continue serving the communities of Western and Central Maine with even greater resources."

As part of the transition, the Farmington office will become Sargent's Western Maine hub, and roughly 40 Vining employees will join the Sargent team as employee-owners through Sargent's ESOP. All current projects will continue uninterrupted, and the acquisition brings additional equipment and aggregate resources across Maine.

Congratulations to Sargent and welcome to the Vining team! 📍

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Fifty Years After the Edmund Fitzgerald

Remembering a Great Lakes Disaster

NOVEMBER 10, 2025, marked the 50th anniversary of the sinking of the *S.S. Edmund Fitzgerald* on Lake Superior. The ship went down with all 29 crew members aboard during a severe storm, becoming one of the most well-known shipwrecks in Great Lakes history.

THE SHIP

The *Edmund Fitzgerald* was launched on June 8, 1958, from the Great Lakes Engineering Works in River Rouge, Michigan. It was the largest ship on the Great Lakes at the time—729 feet long and weighing more than 13,000 gross tons.

On November 9, 1975, the *Fitzgerald*, under the command of Captain Ernest McSorley, left Superior, Wisconsin, with 26,116 tons of taconite bound for Zug Island, Detroit. She was followed by another freighter, the *Arthur M. Anderson*, captained by Bernie Cooper.

THE FINAL VOYAGE

By the evening of November 9, gale warnings were issued and later upgraded to storm warnings as wind speeds increased. McSorley and Cooper chose a northerly route along the Canadian shore to stay as sheltered as possible.

By the afternoon of November 10, the storm

intensified. Winds were recorded at 50 to 70 knots, and waves reached 18 to 25 feet. At 3:30 p.m., McSorley radioed the *Anderson* to report that the *Fitzgerald* had sustained some damage and was taking on water but was continuing toward Whitefish Bay.

At 7:10 p.m., the *Anderson's* first mate, Morgan Clark, contacted the *Fitzgerald* one last time. When asked how they were doing, McSorley replied, "We are holding our own." Minutes later, the *Fitzgerald* disappeared from radar. No distress signal was ever sent.

THE SEARCH

On November 14, a U.S. Navy aircraft detected the wreck 17 miles north-northwest of Whitefish Point. Sonar scans showed two main sections of the ship resting on the lake bottom at a depth of about 535 feet. In May 1976, the U.S. Navy confirmed the location, photographing the ship's name clearly visible on the stern.

INVESTIGATIONS AND THEORIES

The U.S. Coast Guard's 1977 report concluded that the most likely cause of the sinking was flooding in the cargo hold due to ineffective hatch closures that allowed large waves to wash over the deck. The Lake Carriers' Association disputed this conclusion, suggesting



the ship may have struck the Six Fathom Shoal near Caribou Island, causing structural damage.

Later expeditions conducted by the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society found evidence suggesting the vessel may have plunged bow-first into a large wave, breaking apart as it sank. However, no single cause has ever been proven.

MEMORIAL AND LEGACY

In July 1995, the ship's 200-pound bronze bell was recovered in a joint expedition involving the Great Lakes Shipwreck Historical Society, the Canadian Navy, and other partners. The bell now sits on display at the Great Lakes Shipwreck Museum at Whitefish Point as a memorial to the crew. Each year on November 10, the bell is tolled 29 times—once for each crew member.

The story of the *Edmund Fitzgerald* gained national attention after Canadian musician Gordon Lightfoot released his song "The Wreck of the Edmund Fitzgerald" in 1976. Five decades later, the *Edmund Fitzgerald* continues to be a subject of study, discussion, and remembrance. The loss led to safety changes in Great Lakes shipping, including improved weather reporting, stronger ship design standards, and revised cargo hatch requirements. 📍



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