

Anti-hazing policies under microscope



RUSS DILLINGHAM/SUN JOURNAL
The front of Lisbon High School on Route 196. Lisbon forfeited its games the past two weeks as a hazing investigation continues.

Many athletic directors across Maine taking additional steps to ensure safe behavior, but hazing incidents are still alleged

By DREW BONIFANT
PORTLAND PRESS HERALD

Like many high school athletic directors, Rich Buzzell at Marshwood takes steps each year to educate student-athletes and coaches on the dangers of hazing.

Athletes sign that they've read the student handbook. Parents are brought in to discuss school rules. Last fall, Buzzell — who is in his 22nd year — brought in

"The No. 1 creed for all of us is to make sure the kids are in a safe environment. That's the No. 1 thing. If we're not doing that, we're not doing our jobs."

Rich Buzzell, athletic director, Marshwood

a speaker to talk to his student-athletes about what constitutes a good teammate.

"There are probably a lot of ADs in the state that were pretty nervous after the Brunswick situation,"

he said. "When that came to light, we really probably paid even closer attention to how we were doing things, and making sure our people were properly schooled in the area of 'Hey, let's cut out anything that could even be misconstrued as hazing.'

"The No. 1 creed for all of us is to make sure the kids are in a safe environment."

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SPORTS:

Leavitt senior Jade Haylock makes history Saturday afternoon at the Class B golf championships **PAGE D1**



FACETIME:

Tetiana Cherednichenko — 25-year-old left Ukraine first for Italy and then for Maine as the war in her home country continued to escalate. Now, she works with English learners in the Lewiston area as she awaits an end to the war **PAGE B3**

PERSPECTIVE:

Wrestling over Columbus' legacy has long, fraught history in Latin America **PAGE C8**



MAINE:

Lewiston-Auburn softball tourney draws community support for Oct. 25 families **PAGE C1**

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RUSS DILLINGHAM/SUN JOURNAL
Jim Schmidt pushes his plane out of the way after filling it with fuel at the Auburn-Lewiston Municipal Airport after flying a client from Bar Harbor to Boston. Schmidt says he flies patient trips one or two times a week.

PALS SkyHope offers a lifeline for medical patients across Maine

Airlift service would not be possible without selfless pilots

By CHRISTOPHER WHELOCK
SUN JOURNAL

AUBURN — The vast expanses and remoteness of parts of Maine are what make it so attractive to many people. But those same characteristics can also become a huge roadblock to getting very sick people the life-saving treatment and specialty care offered in large cities.

Starting in the 1980s, non-profit organizations formed in different parts of the country to offer a solution for people who need specialized medical care but can't get to it or can't afford to fly there on commercial or chartered flights. Some are immunocompromised and cannot risk flying on a commercial plane.

Patient AirLift Services, or PALS SkyHope, is a non-profit organization serving Maine and beyond, primarily on the East Coast. It was formed in 2010 by a group of pilots, including Auburn-based pilot Jim Platz, who started working with other airlift organizations like Angel Flight back in 1996. He continues to work with Make-A-Wish Foundation, Maine Audubon and other organizations.

"The need was still there — a far greater need in Maine than other services could provide," Platz said Monday. "Also, the direction of the organizations differed from what the pilots here felt was needed."

Platz explains that there is a high concentration of pilots in the greater Boston, New York and Philadelphia areas to draw from, and those cities host



RUSS DILLINGHAM/SUN JOURNAL
Pilot Jim Schmidt taxis to refuel recently at the Auburn-Lewiston Municipal Airport after flying a patient from Bar Harbor to Boston. His home base is the A-L airport. Schmidt has been flying PALS missions for 12 years.



ANDREE KEHN/SUN JOURNAL
Jim Platz is a co-founder of PALS and has been involved with flying patients voluntarily since 1996, logging more than 5,000 flights.



SUBMITTED PHOTO
Pilot Jim Schmidt, left, flew a patient, who asked to be identified as Lynn, on a recent airlift flight from Bar Harbor to Hanscom Field in Bedford, Mass.

some of the best and most specialized cancer hospitals, including Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and Massachusetts General in Boston, Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City and the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, New York.

Pilots volunteer their time, the use of their aircraft and all flight-related costs like fuel and landing fees to ferry children,

adults and veterans to their destination for surgery, chemotherapy, dialysis or other care

See PALS SkyHope Page A6

OUTAGES IN MAINE

Winds knock out power to 80,000

CMP customers across Androscoggin, Franklin, Oxford counties impacted

By JOE CHARPENTIER
SUN JOURNAL

Maine experienced its first mass power outage of the 2024 fall season as more than 80,000 Central Maine Power customers throughout the state woke up to no power early Saturday morning.

CMP spokesperson Jonathan Breed said Saturday morning that crews were prepared to begin work as soon as the first outages were reported around 6 a.m.

"The company began tracking and preparing for a possible wind event mid-week, going as far as to hold back from sending crews to support Hurricane Milton recovery efforts in Florida," Breed said in a morning news release. "Line crews and tree care crews were placed on double coverage on Friday evening and began working to respond to outages before 6 a.m. on Saturday morning."

Breed said CMP crews were joined by crews from sister companies in New York and Connecticut and contractors from Canada.

"For safety, line crews are prohibited from raising bucket trucks when wind speeds are greater than 30 miles per hour," Breed said

Androscoggin County had 1,915 customers offline as of 6:20 p.m. Saturday. About 276 Auburn and 321 Lewiston customers were without power. Greene had 237 without power, followed by Leeds with 194, Livermore Falls with 233, and Minot with 242.

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MAINE MAPLE
Fall Fest
October 12th-13th, 2024
mainemapleproducers.com
SEE PAGE A5

Woman fired gun after crashing her car, was fatally shot by Okla. police

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Oklahoma police fatally shot a woman who was firing a gun and threatening officers with the weapon following a vehicle crash, authori-

ties said. The woman was a suspect in an earlier shooting, said police Capt. Valerie Littlejohn. Seven officers who ar-

rived at the scene of the crash tried to make contact with her but opened fire when she threatened them, Littlejohn said.

“We don’t know if she was shooting at anyone or just shooting them (bullets) off in the air or into the ground,” Littlejohn said.

HAZING

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That’s the No. 1 thing. If we’re not doing that, we’re not doing our jobs.”

Still, incidents happen. The latest involves the Lisbon High football team, whose season is on hold in the wake of police and internal hazing investigations. Seven players were removed from the program, and the team has forfeited two games, putting the rest of its season in jeopardy.

That follows a hazing incident involving the Brunswick football team three years ago, which made national headlines, and resulted in the firing of the head coach and the cancellation of the season.

Several athletic directors contacted by the Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram this week point to a variety of anti-hazing measures they say help educate coaches, staff and students.

But some hazing experts, like University of Maine professor Elizabeth Allan, the founder of the research group StopHazing, say more can be done.

“Schools are doing more than ever before to educate about it,” she said, “but we still have a long way to go. ... It’s easy to say ‘Oh, that’s not a problem here at our school.’ However, the research shows that it’s far more pervasive than people typically think.”

Policies in place

The Maine Principals’ Association does not have an anti-hazing policy, instead leaving it to the schools to shape their own. The MPA does require coaches to view the National Federation of State High School Associations’ “Protecting the Students from Abuse” video. Furthermore, state law requires school boards to have an anti-hazing policy.

At Gorham, hazing prohibitions are included in the school committee policy, student handbook and an athletic code of conduct that student-athletes are required to sign. Athletic Director Tim Spear said he also holds check-ins with his coaches before each season, and hazing is always a pressing subject.

“That is definitely one of the topics we hit on, and make sure everybody is clear that it’s not something that’s permitted here or anywhere in our programs,” he said. “We also try to meet with our captains of our athletic programs. It’s one of those pieces that’s important to talk about.”

At Messalonskee in Oakland, which implemented its hazing policy in 2009, athletes and coaches are given a sheet that defines hazing and explains how it hurts the bond of a team. They must sign the sheet to acknowledge they understand the ramifications. Athletic Director Chad Foye said that practice was in place when he arrived in 2018.

“I think coaches are more cognizant of it,” he said. “As time has gone on and these events occur, people want to make sure it doesn’t happen here, or it doesn’t happen everywhere. ... You don’t want it to happen where you work. You don’t want it to happen on your teams and you don’t want it to be part of your culture.”

Messalonskee senior captain Drake Brunelle said hazing investigations are wake-up calls.

“(They’ve) got to be,” he said. “I’ve heard many stories of places, maybe not now, but in the past. A program gets killed immediately. I think everybody is taking notice of that. ... We’ve seen what’s happened with Lisbon and Brunswick in the past. We take that very seriously. You’ve got to be accepting of the young guys. You don’t want — as a senior, especially — you don’t

want a program to get shut down for two years and that be your legacy.”

Administrators know more than a policy is needed. Biddeford Athletic Director Dennis Walton developed a PowerPoint presentation on the school’s code of conduct, which includes sections defining hazing. He played it for the entire school last year. He’s also made it available to his coaches to show players before their seasons.

“We all have policy. But if you ask any high school athlete how familiar they are with policy, they’re probably going to tell you they’re not very much so,” Walton said. “(But) you’d be hard-pressed if you were to ask a student-athlete here about the code of conduct that they wouldn’t be familiar with it. ... That’s where I would say it’s more effectively covered.”

Steps to take

Allan, the UMaine professor and founder of StopHazing, published a national study of hazing in college in 2008. It showed that 47% of students experienced a form of hazing in high school.

She said steps schools could take include communicating the policy, including what constitutes hazing and how it will be enforced; making sure coaches are trained and educated on what to look for; training people on how to intervene with a situation they see unfolding and letting kids know how they can feel safe while alerting supervisors; and stressing how school spirit can exist without hazing.

In 2019, a Marquette Sports Law Review study mentioned that of 61,258 college athletes surveyed, 12% said they were hazed, but 80% said they experienced hazing rituals as part of their team initiation. According to Hank Nuwer, who has authored two books on hazing and also tracks deaths caused by hazing rituals, there have been over 100 fatalities since 2000.

Allan said while hazing’s physical dangers are publicized, the mental toll can be just as damaging.

“There’s the emotional and psychological trauma that can happen with hazing, sometimes leaving lifelong scars,” she said. “(The) PTSD, anxiety, stress, depression that manifest sometimes years later because of the trauma experienced from hazing.”

“And those are impacts on an individual. It’s important to remember that there are these ripple effects where the families are impacted, and friends as well as the group and the team. We’ve seen how seasons can be canceled, people can be fired.”

Dr. Lisa Stephen, a psychologist and professional coach specializing in helping parents prepare for the risks and challenges of college years, said hazing can cover a broad range of acts and seems, on the surface, to be innocuous.

“These seemingly benign ... acts have far-reaching effects and long-lasting effects into your future,” she said. “It’s one thing to be asked to carry the water bottles out. It’s another thing to be degraded, humiliated, ashamed, trapped, mortified, frightened in that seemingly benign act.”

“Hazing is always, always, always dangerous and harmful. There’s no such thing as a hazing act that produces positive effects, makes you more of a team player, all of that.”

Dr. Jason Meriwether, whose book “Hazing in College Athletics: Combating Destructive Practices and Hidden Harms” is coming out soon, said sports hazing stems from power dynamics, a desire to continue traditions and a lack of awareness that what they’re doing is harmful.

“(They think) ‘this is my tradition, and it’s (worth) the risk,’ until it goes wrong. Or, ‘nothing’s going to go wrong because it happened to me,’” he said. “You think it’s just good fun, boys will be boys, it’s what you do to earn your place on the team. ... Well, didn’t you earn your spot when you worked out all through middle school and went to AAU camps, and you trained and you watched video? Didn’t you earn your spot when you went through conditioning and training and tryouts and made the team?”

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Moving forward

Jason Fuller, the Lewiston athletic director, doesn’t need a reminder on how to approach hazing.

“I’ve been an AD for 20 years, and this is something we’ve talked about for 20 years,” he said. “It’s something that I take a lot of pride to address because I just don’t understand it. I don’t understand the need to haze someone. ... We’re supposed to be a community that is working together, and hazing does nothing to enforce those values.”

Fuller talks about hazing in preseason meetings with coaches (“It’s a priority for us,” he said), and goes over supervising the locker room and how seemingly mundane actions like making one class carry water bottles or pads is still a form of hazing.

Fuller also said that in an effort to break down the power dynamic that fuels hazing, several Lewiston teams use a captains council that gives freshmen and sophomores a say in picking the captains. Those captains then meet with coaches regularly.

“We want to make sure our kids know they’re equals,” he said. “We want to allow every class to have a voice.”

Educating the players is as important as educating the coaches. At South Portland, coaches are required to take the NFHS Bullying, Hazing and Inappropriate Behavior course, but the school also does training for captains each season that includes a section on hazing, and a social worker and school resource officer sit in on the training to clear up gray areas.

“I think that when they had the incident at Brunswick, it was kind of brought back to light and made more of an emphasis in the state of Maine,” South Portland AD Todd Livingston said. “Still, there’s fear that for all the steps schools take to prevent hazing, one bad choice could still happen.”

“At the end of the day, high school-age student-athletes make poor decisions,” Livingston said. “Despite all the education that you provide them, those types of things are still going to happen, unfortunately.”

Administrators know how serious the subject has become. It’s why Keith Ryan, the athletic director at Oxford Hills, meets with coaches every preseason to go over the code of conduct and proper supervision of their athletes.

“It’s got to be a priority because it’s putting these programs in jeopardy of existing,” he said. “It puts an unfortunate tag on their school system. ... We want to give kids independence, but at the same time they still need the structure and they still need the guidance.”

There’s hope that the Lisbon incident can provide another learning opportunity.

“Unfortunately it’s just another example that I get to point to,” Ryan said. “Programs need to be monitoring themselves. Coaches need to be aware, and not be thinking ‘it’s not going to happen here because I don’t want it to.’”

Central Maine sports writer Dave Dyer contributed to this report.



RUSS DILLINGHAM/SUN JOURNAL

Pilot Jim Schmidt lands recently at the Auburn-Lewiston Municipal Airport after flying a patient from Bar Harbor to Boston for medical treatment. His home base is the A-L airport.

PALS

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for life-threatening or rare diseases.

Since its inception in 2010, PALS has flown over 33,000 flights, with 11,000 of them in and out of Maine, helping thousands of patients get the care to extend or save their lives.

Grateful patients, selfless pilots

Jim Schmidt runs a successful insurance business in Yarmouth and has been a pilot for more than 20 years. His plane is based at the Auburn-Lewiston Municipal Airport and he has been volunteering for flights with PALS and other nonprofit organizations for 12 years, averaging one to two flights per week.

“That’s the best, most rewarding thing I do,” he said after returning from a trip from Bar Harbor to Hanscom Field in Bedford, Massachusetts, and back to Auburn.

“This woman I flew this morning, she said it would have been a six-hour car ride — with no traffic — going from Bar Harbor to Boston. It was an hour and a half in this airplane,” he added, referring to his blue and white Cessna.

Lynn is the patient Schmidt flew to Boston. She asked that we only use her first name for personal reasons. Lynn said in a phone interview Monday that she has used PALS flights four times in the past few months. She has a recurrent form of cancer that’s very aggressive and needs to go to Dana-Farber Cancer Institute for treatment.

Facing a six-hour drive each way after undergoing chemotherapy would cause her undue stress. Her tone changes considerably as she talks about her experience with PALS, calling it tremendous.

“The PALS service is a lifeline for me... it’s a game changer. To try and fly commercially or hire a charter would be too expensive for me to pay for,” Lynn explains. “The service is fantastic — the team is incredibly organized, and the pilots are incredibly kind.”

The sentiment is echoed by another patient, Bill Gallant, who lives in Rumford and has to fly to Connecticut for his treatment. “I can’t put into words the appreciation I feel for the pilots and staff. I

have had the pleasure of flying seven or eight times with them.”

“There seems to be this positive energy that exists during these flights,” Schmidt offered. “It starts even before the flight. It starts when I make the call to someone to say, my name is Jim and I’m your PALS pilot for next Tuesday ... and they are almost like immediately very friendly,” he adds. “They don’t know who I am usually when I’m calling, so, when they learn who it is, they are friendly and grateful. And it’s a nice connection even over the telephone.”

Not all pilots fly the entire trip with patients, who sometimes stay overnight or longer for treatment. Sometimes the distance is too great, and they team up with other pilots or organizations to share the route. On some PALS missions, pilots meet up at the Auburn-Lewiston airport and transfer patients from one plane to another to complete the flight. That’s especially true for flights that originate in Frenchville, Caribou or Presque Isle.

“It feels like you have helped someone in a direct way and it’s a direct way of giving back,” Platz said, as he explained how it feels after completing a PALS flight. “It’s a satisfying way to help reduce or get rid of the barriers to getting medical care.”

Platz has been involved with volunteer patient flights long enough to have flown the son of one of his former patients years later. He said he started by flying a neighbor who was seeking specialty care in Chicago and Philadelphia. Soon after he saw a brochure from an organization that offered patient flights, and he got involved. Since then, he’s flown over 5,000 volunteer flights.

In the end, it’s all about the patients, who made it clear that their experience with PALS helped them cope with their medical condition. “Reducing the stress of having to travel and arrange everything is a big help,” Lynn told the Sun Journal, “and it has changed my treatment and has made a huge difference.”

How patient airlift services works

Donna Collins is the executive director for PALS SkyHope and says they have a pool of about 1,500 pilots, 300 of whom are actively flying

PALS missions. They maintain a small, dedicated staff who handle all the logistics of connecting people in need with pilots. It’s why they are always trying to recruit new pilots.

“We need the pool to constantly have resources available,” Collins explained, “for the unique needs of new geographies.” Demand has grown every year and is coming from all up and down the East Coast, which means more flights.

“We can’t even meet the demands,” Collins said when asked if it has increased or decreased in recent years. “Actually demand is much greater.”

Surprisingly, not enough people in healthcare or social services are aware of the services PALS SkyHope and other organizations offer. That’s why they have to recruit not only pilots, but patients.

“I have spoken to many people in the healthcare system about this service and they can’t believe it exists,” said Gallant, the patient from Rumford. He’s been using PALS for almost three years, flying from Auburn to North Windham, Connecticut, where he meets his daughter, who drives him to the University of Connecticut Health Center in Farmington, Connecticut.

The service is free — there is no cost to the patient. Most patients must demonstrate a financial need for the service, but everything can be handled online and on the phone. Patients are expected to arrange their own ground transportation, but PALS will even help arrange and pay for transportation at either end of the trip, if there is a need.

There is a screening process for patients and pilots alike. Patients must be medically stable to travel, be mobile and be able to fly in a small aircraft and not have a communicable disease.

Pilots must also meet certain requirements of flight time and certification, which are listed on the PALS website.

“I don’t get the same feeling doing anything else,” Schmidt said with pride in his voice. “There’s few things my wife and I have done from a volunteer perspective that are similar and come pretty close, but this is pretty unique.”

For more information or to get involved with PALS, go online to www.palservices.org or call 631-694-PALS.

POWER

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For much of the day, Lisbon stood out as the most affected municipality in the county, with nearly a quarter of customers, just over 1,100, without power as of 3:30 p.m. By 6:20, 226 were still in the dark.

Franklin County had nearly 6,500 customers offline around the same time Saturday. Wilton stood out with over half of all customers, just over 1,100, losing power. All 207 Madrid customers were in the dark. Other notable outages included Avon with 187; Carrabassett Valley, 204; Chesterville, 684; Farmington, 628; Freeman, 136; Industry, 490; Jay, 502; New Sharon, 423; Phillips, 401; Salem, 194; Strong, 138; Temple, 227; and Weld, 561.

In Oxford County, Waterford had



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A utility pole hangs in the middle of Bradman Street on Saturday morning in Auburn. A tree branch broke off in front of Temple Shalom, causing the cancellation of Yom Kippur services.

just under half of all customers, some 692, without power; as well as Bethel, 172; Byron, 100; Dixfield, 144; Lovell, 155; Norway, 218; and Stoneham, 309.