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Island Times, Mar 2005

Mary Lou Wendell

David Tyler

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Ocean Gateway bids too high, now what?

BY DAVID TYLER

State and city officials are scrambling to salvage the Ocean Gateway project after the lowest bid came in 37 percent over budget.

"We've missed estimates before, but this is extreme," said Paul Pottle, project manager for the state's Department of Transportation. "We used the request for proposals for the project. The idea was also to help calve out a cold Maine winter with a colorful celebration.

(More photos on page 6.)

Celebrating diversity
Islander Oscar Mokeme led a cross-town parade to celebrate diversity in Portland on March 6. Mokeme, director of the Museum of African Culture, worked together with artist Jeff McCroght to create the giant puppets for the project. The idea was also to help calve out a cold Maine winter with a colorful celebration.

(More photos on page 6.)

By MayLou Wendell

Oscar Mokeme livened up what could have been another cold-wintery day in Portland with a celebration and parade that was right out of Africa.

The idea behind the procession Obo-Do-Diko, meaning the Land of the Brave, was to celebrate the diversity of Portland with a cultural tradition that originates in Mokeme's native West Africa. The project was hosted by Mokeme's Museum of African Culture and funded by a grant from the Maine Humanities Council and the Maine Arts Commission. Prior to the parade, Mokeme and his project partner, Jeff McCroght, organized free workshops for Portland residents to create the giant puppets used in the parade with the help of experienced local artists.

The parade combined giant puppetry, movement and music created collaboratively during the workshops. Mokeme led the parade wearing a traditional Nigerien spirit mask.

"It was incredible to see lots of people come out into thecold and enjoy it," said Mokeme, who lives on Peaks Island with his wife and two sons. "I was happy to see the response of the community.

April 10 Parade

If you missed the recent parade, don't despair. Another one is scheduled for April 10.

Partial list of activities:

- Start: Tommy's Park at 2 p.m.
- Run down Congress Street to the Eastern Prom.
- Free puppet-making workshops at the Maine College of Art at 2-9.
- Call the Museum of African Culture at 877-7188 for more information.

Mokeme's museum is sponsoring a similar celebration this April. That procession, Errone, meaning the ram, is a celebration of spring.

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Two councilors unhappy with revaluation vote

BY DAVID TYLER

Two Portland city councilors are still angry about the city of Portland's new property valuation, which is now going to be enacted after being postponed for a year.

Tax bills with the new values will be mailed out in August, and will be due in September. The new values will be phased in over two years. The Assessor's Department will mail out a letter on March 25 to homeowners who will their new value and the potential tax impact on their homes.

City Councilor Will Goodrich, representing District 1, which includes Cliff, Great and Little Diamond and Peaks islands, said that the valuation itself was poorly done. The city hired the Cola Layer Trumble Company to do the citywide revaluation, which was completed last year. "It looks like we come out and fight this," Goodrich said. "We've been doing evaluation, page 11.

Proposed cuts to Chebeague school anger islanders

BY DAVID TYLER

About 60 to 70 residents of Chebeague Island went to a budget hearing held March 7 by the SAD 51 school board to urge members to keep the Chebeague Island School intact.

As part of this year's school budget, SAD 51 officials proposed remerging the fourth and fifth grade classes from the Chebeague Island School and requiring them to attend a mainland school.

School officials have said the proposal would make it easier for Chebeague students to make the transition to mainland schools by introducing them to larger classes at an earlier age.

Right now island students leave after fifth grade to attend sixth grade at the Greely Memorial School in Cumberland. School Superintendent Robert Hanson has also said in published accounts that the plan would save the school district the $48,000 cost of a second teacher on Chebeague.

Hanson could not be reached to comment on the proposal.

There are currently two teachers at the island school who run two multi-age classrooms. The island has 23 students for this academic year.

Chebeague Island residents were shocked and angry about the idea. "It didn't seem to make any sense," said Gordon Murphy, who has a son, Ryan, 6, in the first grade and a daughter, Natalie, 8, in the third grade. "It looked like a thinly veiled ploy to close the island school."

Inside

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In Brief

Machigonne out for three weeks

The main car ferry to Peaks Island, the Machigonne, will be out of service starting on March 20 while it undergoes its biannual dock inspection. The ferry is expected to be back in service on April 16 providing that the weather allows painting of the vessel to be finished. Large freight shipments, especially building materials, should be done before or after these dates.

Housing forms sent

Application forms for the new senior housing complex on Peaks Island will be mailed out on March 15, according to Julia Wilcock, director of program development for the Volunteers of America, Northern New England, the agency doing the project. There are 11 senior housing units in the new facility, which is scheduled to be finished by May 15.

Applications for the new senior housing complex will soon be available.

Applications will not be called right away, the said, since it will take time to process the forms. She could not say how long this process would take.

The formal opening of the new senior housing and health center complex will not take place until later in the summer, Wilcock said, although residents will be moving in before then.

Sewer study underway

The city has hired the engineering firm Woodward & Curran to do a preliminary feasibility study on an extension of the sewer lines on Island Avenue, which would include Windy Way, 1st and 3rd streets and parts of Seashore Avenue, according to Tom Fortier, the city’s island/neighborhood administrator.

The study area includes Windy Way and parts of Seashore Avenue. In order to do a sewer study, the city needs to receive a petition from at least 75 percent of the homeowners in that neighborhood.

This sewer expansion would add close to 75 homes if it went through, Fortier said. If the city goes forward with the sewer, it would cost homeowners $2,000 to hook up. There will be meetings held on this issue in the summer, he said. “Public sewers are a lot more friendly than a septic system to the fragile environment of the island,” Fortier said.

Gravel pit committee appointed

A permanent committee to study potential uses of the former island gravel pit has been appointed, according to Joe Kane, president of the Peaks Island Neighborhood Association (PINA).

The members of the new committee are: Brad Buckholster, Barbara Hopkins, Dana Leath, Walter Schmieder, Michelle Baum Tranes and Gwenn Taylor. The new committee will meet on March 21 to talk with the Junior League of Portland. That organization has offered to provide volunteer help to improve the site.

Leath is the liaison with the Junior League, Kane said.

The 5.8-acre city-owned gravel pit, which is no longer used for Department of Public Works, could be restored and dedicated to community uses. The city has committed $25,000 toward learning and seeding of the gravel pit, according to Tom Fortier, island/neighborhood administrator. The parcel is zoned for open space and recreation.

At a January PINA meeting, suggestions for the Junior League project included natural restoration, creating a community garden or creating a community park. Kane suggested that a contest be held to come up with a new name for the area, so if no one needs to be called the gravel pit. He also said a friendly competition could be held to come up with a design for a new entrance to the gravel pit.

“Are there a lot of talented people who live on the island,” Kane said.

Bathroom construction to start

Groundbreaking for the new public bathroom located at intersection of Island Avenue and Welch Street could happen as early as April, according to Tom Fortier, the city’s island/neighborhood administrator.

After considerable work, the price tag for the new bathroom has been reduced to $50,000. A pre-cast concrete building will be used and the electrical and plumbing work will be done by the city, rather than contracted out to a private company, Fortier said.

Island architect Will Winkelman, who designed the new bathroom, has gone above and beyond in his work on the project, according to Fortier.

Odyssey of the Mind

A group of students at the Peaks Island Elementary School completed their project on April 2 in the state competition of Odyssey of the Mind, an international creative problem-solving program for students of all ages.

The seven students from Peaks Island working on the project are in the third and fourth grades. Their coach is Michele Baum Tranes, the Island Institute fellow for Peaks.

Tranes said she got the idea to get the Peaks kids interested in Odyssey of the Mind after she heard the school’s principal, Barbara Hopkins, mention the competition. To her knowledge, the kids from the Island school have never participated before.

The assignment the kids chose is called, please see BRIEFS, page 3

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Students at the Peaks Island Elementary School learn a lesson in working together as they try to unscramble themselves. The goal is to wind up with their hands by their sides without letting go of each other. The group is working together to enter the state's Odyssey of the Mind competition April 2. Michele Baum Tranes, their coach, looks on. Students participating in the competition are Ohi Mokeeme, 9, Nathaniel Chalfant, 9, Jack Carroll, 8, Rini West, 9, Mike Proia, 9, and (not pictured) Hallie Alex and Sam Cassis.

By Mary Lou Wendell

Vote on Riverwalk garage
City Council action on a proposal to build a new parking garage near the Ocean Gateway project has been postponed. On Feb. 23, the council approved a first reading of a proposal by Riverwalk LLC, led by Fred Fersley, owner of Shipyard Dressing Company, and developer Drew Swenson.

Riverwalk would build a garage on land surrounded by Fure, Hancock, and Middle Streets. The garage could be as large as 1,100 spaces and include 10,000 square feet of retail development. The city would lease 310 spaces from this garage for five years to replace parking for island residents lost to the

By Mary Lou Wendell

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**Island Views**

**A star is born**

BY MARY LOU WENDELL

Dainius Bukauskas, 9, had never been to an acting class. But when he heard that auditions were coming up for the play Charlotte's Web at the Children's Theatre of Maine in Portland, he knew right away that he had to go for it. So Bukauskas, who lives with his family on Peaks Island, prepared a song - it was a sea shanty - and choreographed a dance to go with it, according to his mother, Laima Skruopala. When they showed up for the audition, there were a lot of kids there, Skruopala said. But he went right in and performed with confidence. Even his little sister got in on the act. Noni followed him right in and also sang a song.

They both wound up getting parts. Bukauskas is in Kindergarten at the Peaks Island School, got the part of one of nine spiders. She only has to perform for every third show, according to her brother. Dainius landed a much bigger role, that of Avery, who is Fern's brother. Fern is the girl who befriends Wilbur the pig, who in turn becomes fast friends with Charlotte the spider.

Dainius, who attends the Maine River program at Hall School in Portland, was very excited about it all, despite the hard work that was involved in performing, sometimes from morning till night. "This is my first real play," Dainius said. "I think it's cool. I'm in a play." Next year, Dainius plans to audition for every show he can, he said.

The show runs through March 13. For more info, check www.childrenstheatre.biz.

**Letters to the Editor**

PINa is not representative

The Peaks Island Neighborhood Association - that means the voting committee about eight people, plus maybe four others - recently approved the Peaks Island Neighborhood Plan. No quorum was required, and approving the plan went very smoothly. At my request, a word mentioning the Peaks Island Elementary School was hastily added, and another comment was accepted that took note of the recreational needs of families with young children. Luckily for the thousand islanders who didn't attend this meeting, there are lots of excellent suggestions in our community plan, and I hope the City of Portland will take these good suggestions to heart.

But for too many islanders, participating in PINA feels difficult. No one likes to be told they have one minute to speak, or two minutes, and then thank you, now shut up, especially since Central Command at PINA takes as many minutes to speak as they like. It's not efficient when PINA requests feedback on the Neighborhood Plan, and then treats feedback as though it's a disease. Robert's Rules of Order might be okay if everyone followed them, and evening meetings might be nice if anyone wanted to attend them. Maybe a community like Peaks Island deserves a more cooperative, motivating, consensus-building structure for engaging citizens, and involving more people in community leadership.

I'm assuming here that you want to live in a democracy, not a dictatorship, but not everybody does. In Central America, people were polled and asked if they'd prefer democracy or a dictatorship with a good economy. The majority of people said they'd take money over freedom. It's the same thing here. We want money and convenience more than self-government. But the problem lies in our community leaders. Let's treat feedback as if it's a treasure, not a disease.

**New island babies**

Elinore Ross Foster was born to Christina and Rustry Foster on Dec. 16, 2004. She weighed 7 lbs. 3 oz. and was born at Mercy Hospital.

Jamison Michael Senon Jr. was born to Amy and Jameson Senon on Dec. 7, 2004. He weighed 9 lbs. 1 oz. and was born at Maine Medical Center.

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This island life

BY GEORGE ROSO

We hear it all the time: what are the winters like up there in Maine? I tell them it's unbelievably windy, icy—it's just unbearable. And that seems to be what they wish to hear. Well, the winter that I'm just wind-blowing down has, so far, fallen right in line with all the other smart-ass predictions. It was a real tongue-to-the-cold-pump-handle kind of winter. One horrendous night, just off the boat, we washed up looking like a polar bear with the teeth and gums of a pike force-blowing and into a curtain of snowflakes, as hard as an ice chip, whipping parallel to the ground from left to right. Or right to left if you're coming down Welch. A perfect example of the kind of Maine winter older husbands talked about while huddled around the coffee pot at the general store. An old-fashioned winter calling for an old-fashioned, just at bedtime. The stretch of arctic weather turned die-hard batteries into whimpering stones. Snow plows begged not to be pressed into service with a dismissive clicking sound, then nasty silence. Doors stuck and locks froze. Rubber gaiters squashed. Our body parts yearned for warmth. Even some teens yielded and covered their heads. In spite of this hardship, we do, in some twisted way, love it. And we do tend to put a positive spin on winter's woes. We felt good about the prospects of a historic freezing-over of the harbor, a new ice cap, and covered the heads of our children. Despite the sheer beauty of the smooth cover of drifts softening the island's hard edges. The crunch underfoot and the snarl of country skies. Pure cleaning Maine air. I'll have to ask my Winkelman and Buchanans, architect.
Celebrating diversity, West African style, continued from page 1
The PINA Steering Committee also voted to accept and act on the recommendations of the temporary "Gravel Pit" committee, which was formed at the January 18th PINA general meeting to recommend community-wide recreational uses for the old gravel pit. This committee was also asked to recommend how best to use the offer of project assistance made by the Junior League of Portland.

In accordance with the recommendations of the temporary "Gravel Pit" Committee's report, PINA has created a special sub-committee with the responsibility for ongoing and future oversight, planning, approval of uses, and rule making for the recreational use of the old gravel pit site for the Peaks Island community. This new committee will also be responsible for working with the Portland DPW on recommended changes to the DPW Gravel Pit Closure Plan and for developing project plans in conjunction with the Junior League, making use of a list of project proposals in the report. The report also suggested that a process be developed to choose a name for the site and, possibly, to design an entranceway.

Initial members of the new, special sub-committee, which is expected to meet the first week of March, are Brad Burkholder, Maureen Dawson, Barbara Hopkin, Walter Schneller, Gene Taylor, Michele Tranco, Janet Yast, and Dana Leahy, who is also the liaison with the Junior League.

The report of the temporary committee is on the PINA website. Click on 'Headlines' on the main page of the web site at www.PINainfo.org to find the report and the Neighborhood Plan.

-Joe Kane, president of PINA

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The city originally planned to pay $1 million for Ocean Gateway. But another $1 million was requested from the city, which was approved in January. The rest of the funds are coming from the state and federal governments.

According to Portte, the state DOT hired a professional construction estimator, the Maine company Conestoga, to double-check estimates done by the project’s design firm, Woodward & Curran. For the marine design part of the project, the Alaska-based firm, Penetarch Northrop 607 Torge was hired.

Because of the work the estimator did, state and city officials increased the estimate for the project, and asked Portland for more money, said Portte. "And still, at this point we have not received that last little bit of all those people are evaluating their work."

Peter Vigue, president of Clalnbo Corp. said that several global trends are increasing the cost of construction projects in almost every category of expenses. Higher energy costs impact all companies producing goods and materials used in construction. Because of tremendous demand from cruise ships, the price of steel doubled during a six-month stretch in 2003, he said. And the price of plywood has doubled over the past two years.

The increased costs include the cost of insurance and federally required bonds to cover the building of a project if problems occur. "These bid results are reflective of much of that, although I’m not saying that it is the only reason," Vigue said. "It’s a national issue right now not only for public works, but for private projects."

"But there is this idea about how to still complete Ocean Gateway for less money. "I believe the general scope of the project can be achieved and the integrity of the design not compromised," he said.

However, Van Note said it is prohibited by federal law for the state to negotiate with the low bidder on a project before that bid has been awarded. "So we have to decide whether or not to give the contract in the way that people were thinking that would go forward that would get the benefit of that kind of information, as well as information from other bidders," Van Note said.

WATSON, from page 1
at quartermaster school at Fort Lee, Virginia.

On March 4, the family welcomed Michael, who came home to Portland after serving in Iraq for four months. They went to the Army at 1:30 p.m. to wait for her son’s arrival, along with Michael’s wife, Kim. and their two sons, 11 and Cooper. They were joined by Marie’s daughter, Jennifer, 40, an operations agent at Casco Bay Lines; Sean, who lives in Rhode Island; her other daughter, Joanna, 36, who is a teacher in Scarborough; James; and several of Michael’s friends from Peaks Island.

It was a long afternoon.

The unit, which drove from Fort Drum, in northern New York, was supposed to arrive in Portland at 2 p.m. They didn’t enter the army yard until after 5 p.m. Marie said. When she first saw him, she said, "You're home! You're safe!" But waiting was a little difficult, "He wasn’t going to be able to get safe until he got home in Portland," she said.

Michael appreciated the homecoming celebration in the army yard. He’s been gone since February. 2004. The 133rd Battalion left Maine last year for two months of training at Fort Drum, then back to Germany. Until then, they stayed in their home in northern Maine, according to Portte. While they were there, Michael helped run the headquarters portion of the deployment. They were supposed to be home by the end of May, but there were delays due to military orders.

While in Iraq, Michael helped run the headquarters portion of the deployment. He’s been gone since February, 2004. The 133rd Battalion left Maine last year for two months of training at Fort Drum, then back to Germany. Until then, they stayed in their home in northern Maine, according to Portte. While they were there, Michael helped run the headquarters portion of the deployment. They were supposed to be home by the end of May, but there were delays due to military orders.

"It was huge. and ornate, but it had a lot of wood," said Peter O’Donnell, an at-large councilor. "I just don’t know where the money goes.

"I say we’re going to have to look at scaling back the project," Portte said. "But I don’t want to compromise a project that has taken so long to come up with."
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Spring Forward

Across
1. Others beat trip abroad
2. Supermodel Helethe
3. Ring
4. End of seasonal saying
5. Spatial planner

41. Part 2
44. Light substance (pl.)
48. Global Environment
50. Muslim holy war
56. Boeing born between 1986 and 1992

32. The Global Calendar
33. Stumblebum
35. B & B, perhaps

10. Part 3 of A 1
14. Pass with flying colors
15. Monopoly price
19. '11uee when applied to friends

21. Illtipped from Dmm Under
25. Beginning or seasonal saying
27. Sardonic
30. Falls
31. Stringdevice
36. God's
37. Four-time Olympic gold medalist in gymnastics
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39. __ Delight
42. Christmas gifts
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45. 1RSp nzles over
46. US Senate Murray
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8. He's portrayed in

11. Demonstration
16. Property found, no address given:
17. Island A\ve nue.
18. Language
19. Property found, no address given
20. Island A\ve nue.
22. Food complaint, no address given.
23. Animal complaint, Island Avenue.
24. Vehicle complaint, no address given.
25. Animal complaint, Island Avenue.
26. Property found, no address given
27. Serving paperwork, Central Avenue.
28. EMS run, no address given.
29. Parking complaint, no address given.
30. Animal complaint, Island Avenue.
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Island Police Log

Feb. 2: Assist citizen, Central Avenue; EMS call, Island Avenue.
Feb. 3: Hang up calls, Woods Road; 911 hang up calls, New Island Avenue; EMS service, no address given.
Feb. 4: Animal complaint, no address given; alarm/burglary, no address given; general disturbance, Island Avenue.
Feb. 5: Animal complaint, City Point Road.
Feb. 7: Assist citizen, Adams Street; EMS call, no address given.
Feb. 8: Property found, no address given; motor vehicle stop, no address given;
Feb. 9: Parking complaint, no address given; general disturbance, Welch Street.
Feb. 10: Broken-down motor vehicle, Island Avenue.
Feb. 12: Vehicle complaint, Island Avenue.
Feb. 14: Suspicious activity, no address given.
Feb. 16: Accident, report only, Upper A Street.
Feb. 17: Animal complaint, Trefethen Avenue; check wellbeing, Lumber Street.
Feb. 18: Animal complaint, no address given;
Feb. 21: Audible alarm, Island Avenue; EMS alarm sounding Island Avenue.
Feb. 23: Animal complaint, Island Avenue.
Feb. 24: Investigation, no address given; assist citizen, Central Avenue; EMS alarm sounding Island Avenue.
Feb. 28: Motor vehicle theft, Whitehead Street.
Feb. 29: Serving paperwork, Central Avenue; EMS call, no address given.
Feb. 28: EMS call, Sterling Avenue.

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For information, call 766-0951
March is aptly named for Mars, the Roman god of war, as warm and cool air masses collide above us and produce the storms which gave rise to the saying that "March comes in like a lion and out like a lamb."

Some reported that it also refers to the constellations Leo the Lion and Ariad the ram, which are visible in the night sky to the south-east and south-west in the early evening. Ariad is small and dim and difficult to find under the best of circumstances, which

COMMUNITY NOTES, from Celeste, Greek independence

Go to the flower show on Thur., March 24, celebrate Greek Independence Day at 3 p.m. at the Community Center, where there will be slides of Greece, music and dancing.

Exercise at the Community Center

There is a free, low-impact exercise program on Monday and Thursday mornings, from 9:30-10:30 a.m. at the Community Center. The program includes stretching, weights (which are provided), low-impact aerobics and education exercises. The emphasis is doing what is comfortable. Space is limited; call Denise at 766-2970 for availability.

Go to the flower show

On Fri., March 11, there will be a trip to the Portland Flower Show, which this year has returned to its original home at the Portland Company Complex on Fore Street. The trip is sponsored by the Peaks and Recreation Department.

Illustration by Jamie Hooper

Star Gazing

BY MICHAEL RICHARDS

March is aptly named for Mars, the Roman god of war, as warm and cool air masses collide above us and produce the storms which gave rise to the saying that "March comes in like a lion and out like a lamb."

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are not with the sun and city lights reducing the contrast, but Leo is bright enough to be seen in the dark sky in the east, over the ocean. Leo's alpha-star Regulus sits near the celestial equator and serves as a check object for astronomers as they adjust the settings on their telescopes.

Above Regulus, a lion's head is formed by several stars, and to the right of these stars outline its body in recline. The vernal equinox occurs on the 20th this month, at 7:33 a.m. At that moment, the sun crosses the equator to its slow northward march, and the lion will "equal night" everywhere on Earth, heralding the spring in the northern hemisphere and the fall in the southern hemisphere.

A gamma-ray burst swept over Earth on Dec. 27 and is being touted now as the strongest ever detected. The burst is from outside our solar system in the history of astronomy. Gamma-ray bursts are the biggest releases of energy in the universe, but this one was 100 times more powerful than any previously recorded.

It came from a neutron star in Sagittarius and the star, although only 12 miles across, is incredibly dense and creates a gravitational field a quadrillion times more powerful than Earth's. Astrophysicists believe this particular "star" quaked and fell, then settled, releasing energy by releasing equal to what our Sun produces in 250,000 years.

Fortunately, it is located on the far side of our galaxy, so the energy took 50,000 years to get here and Earth's gravitational field (also unusually powerful for such a small planet) slowed its journey. In the end, it exploded twice, then over the next 7 minutes it dissipated in waves peaking every 30 seconds, equal to the star's rotation period.

Closer to home, planets big and small pass through our skies behind the stars. As we approach the ferry before dawn, mighty Jupiter is the bright white "star" you see hanging low in the east, then the moon, which is full by this time, rises over the ocean in the east.

As dark, thin Mercury passes over Portland early in the month, and then drops out of sight by month's end. As darkness settles in, Saturn will be the bright yellow "star" in the west, perfectly placed for a look in your telescope before bedtime.

That, and perhaps, is closest to Earth this month, increasing its pull on the world's oceans.

As the new moon nowtoday, combines its pull with that of the sun, and peri- perigee so near, the tides will run higher and lower than normal. Highest tide this month is at 10:06 a.m. today and lowest is at 5:05 p.m., adding up to 12.3 foot change so currents will run out fast this afternoon. If the wind blows hard on shore this morning, we will have high tide and low tide again on Commercial Street before noon.

March 11: Mercury reaches greatest elongation from the sun tomorrow, and it will be 90 minutes after the sun. If the clouds part sometime in the next few days, we'll have the best view of Mercury this year. Tonight, after you get home at 5:35 p.m. boat, lock, and reach the gem gallery for the sale. The crescent moon sits just to the left of Mercury, which should help you find it.

As the moon PEAK island rises in the sky at sunset, dividing the pull between sun and moon, quieting the tides.

March 12: Moon out of the sky all day, but its greater distance from Earth combines with the recent quarter moon to moderate the tides for the day. Highest tide this time is at 5:51 p.m. and low at 11:43 p.m., barely 5 feet.

March 19: The waning gibbous moon is just below to the left of Pollux in Gemini, the most visible bright star. Some ask if you have a yummy night for getting the scope out?

March 20: Spring equinox this morning, the moon rises directly east and sets directly west.

March 21: Auroreologists delight: Saturn is at quadrature, stepping in its retrograde motion and starting its proper motion eastward.

March 22: Full moon rises at 5:37 p.m. over the island, fighting the way for those headed home on the last boats tonight. The moon sits just above Jupiter tonight, but by tomorrow, it will have dropped just below it.

March 29: Last quarter moon is at 6:07 p.m., so those on your back deck of the 6:14 p.m. boat to town and 4:53 p.m. boat to the mainland may need to put on your shades!

History docs

Portland's History Docs Celebrate their 10th anniversary with a documentary about the late Mayor Bill Hall is recruiting for the Portland History Docs Program, a ten-week training program for Portland residents to become volunteer guides at area museums. As program manager, Hall is putting together a new volunteer collection program. About 350 people, including several Peaks Islanders, have already signed up. Call or email Michele Tranes at 766-3014 or ammi123410@nlaxind.state.or.us for more information.

Noontime history lectures

The Maine Historical Society will present a series of community history lectures free of charge on historic sites in the state. The first lecture is "The Maine Historical Society at 200," presented by the Maine Historical Society at 493 Congress Street on Tuesday from noon to 1 p.m. Call 774-5561 for more information. Check out the website, www.mainehistory.org. The first few lectures are as follows: March 22: "Living and Working Over 200 Years: The Maine" at The Maine Woods Museum; March 29: "Hollis Center Woodland Preservation: WCSH 11 anchor/ reporter Bill Green for tales from the Maine Woods" at the Maine Woods Museum; April 5: "First Coast Side: Inaugural Involvement of the Maine Historical Society on the island" at Calli Michele Tranes, 766-3014, for more information.

Community lecture series

The second installment in the Community Lecture Series 2005, "Peaks Island and the World - Living and Working Over 200 Years," will be held at the Community Center. It will be led by a group of Peaks Island residents, whose combined experiences cover five centuries! They will be telling their stories about growing up, living, working, or participating in the Peck's Cove overyears. We will also be creating a list and map that shows Peaks Island's connections with the rest of the world. Help us make the map as complete as possible! Call Cynthia Cole at 766-5500 if you have questions or suggestions about this series.

Upcoming Lectures will be as follows, April 14: "Art. Atlantis" speaking about groundhogs, March 24: "Fires Burning: Married to the Military" by Fires Burning: Married to the Military, April 30: "Fires Burning: Married to the Military - Part 2" by Fires Burning: Married to the Military, May 14: "Fires Burning: Married to the Military - Part 3" by Fires Burning: Married to the Military.

Concluding April 21. Volunteers for this series will receive training lectures on area histories, spring and architecture and training on good stories, such as Brown's Island, and will be paired with the remaining volunteers. The training will be held at the Island House Museum, Victoria Mansion, Waterville, on Mon., May 2. Call 774-5561 for more information. Check out the website, www.mainehistory.org.

Use the taxi

It has been noted by several taxi drivers that community members are not taking full advantage of the free, community taxi service. Many uninvited drivers have worked for entire days and received only one or two calls. Island residents are encouraged to call a day ahead to schedule trips, but people can call on the day of the trip, as well. The taxi is an island service, serving Peaks Island residents in dozens of 10 years and it is under-used.

Houpport book party

There will be a book-release party to celebrate the publication of the book about the crew are stranded at sea. The book is titled "Home," and the crew on board. Little of the shipwreck and few victims were ever recovered, and even the mystery of the actual wreck of the S.S. Portland, one of New England's greatest maritime mysteries.

On Nov. 26, 1898, the 219-foot, paddle wheel-powered ship, on route from Boston to Portland, was caught in a storm known as the Portland Gale. Struggling through the night with raging seas and 80-90 mile-per-hour winds, the Portland's crew lost their ship and their lives. The wreck of the S.S. Portland, one of New England's greatest maritime mysteries.

Thank you to all island knitters who contributed their handwork to the Peaks Island Children's Workshop's first annual Knitwear Sale. And many thanks to all of those who purchased their wonderful work, and to Jane Newkirk for decorating her time and space at the Gem Gallery for the sale.

This community support makes a big difference in the lives of Peaks Island children and families.
The City Council has the power to enact a valuation without a vote from the City Council. "It's just to make things work smoother, that it's nice to have the blessing of the City Council," said Todd Reynolds, a principal financial officer in the Assessor's Department. But that power meant that the council can take action on the matter at a workshop and not a formal council meeting.

A valuation is not supposed to lead to an increase in taxes, because the city lowers the actual tax rate to compensate for a rise in values. But values on many island homes skyrocketed so much that even a lower tax rate will still result in a higher bill for some islanders.

Gorham said he knows of a woman who lives on Peaks Island who only receives $7,200 annually from social security. "Her taxes will go up to $5,900; that leaves her with $1,300 a year to live on," Gorham said, "I gave this example to my fellow councilors and I may have well been talking to a wall."

"A lot of people who live on these islands live on a fixed income and their values have gone up 200 or 300 or 400 percent," he said. Gorham said he refused to vote for a valuation "when it puts these people in jeopardy. It's not right for people to be forced out of their homes because they can't pay their property taxes. It is just not right."

The method to be used to figure the two-year phase in of values is complicated. "We are still trying to determine and calculate the phase-in values," Beelyn said. Portland is the only municipality in the state doing phasing in new values over two years, he said.

The last valuation of Portland property was done in 1991. In the future, the Assessor's Department plans to re-adjust home and property values every one-to-two years. "We want to keep on top of the values, so there isn't such a huge impact," Beelyn said.

The Assessor's Department only handles the values of a homeowner's property, not the total tax bill. The tax rate and tax amount is not a function of our department, and is not in our control," he said.

At the Feb. 28 meeting, Assessor Richard Blackburn distributed information about how the new state tax reform bill will help homeowners. The homestead exemption has increased from $7,000 of value to $13,000 of value. The maximum household income for those who can take part in the circuit breaker program has increased from $7,500 to $10,000 and the maximum in rebase has gone up from $1,000 to $2,000.

Blackburn outlined how the new state bill would impact an "average" home with a value of $121,668. As part of the phase-in of values, that home goes up to $174,834 for this September's tax bill. The home increases in value to $228,000 in the following year.

According to Blackburn, if this homeowner had an annual income of $27,000, his or her net taxes would be $2,132 right now, $1,902 in the first year of the phase-in, and $1,701 in the final year of the phase-in. The total tax decrease by the second year would be 20 percent.

If this owner with the "average" home earned $57,000, their current taxes would be $3,132 now, $2,684 in the first year and $2,279 in the second year. The total tax decrease in the second year would be 12 percent.

If this homeowner earned $75,000, their taxes would be $3,132 now, $3,148 in the first year and $3,267 in the second year, an increase in the second year of 4 percent.

But Donnell said that the tax reform bill was not enough. He said Portland legislators are extremely helpful with city issues, but that the Legislature as a whole does not understand the challenges Portland faces with municipal funding. The city only received $300,000 extra funding, which is not real tax relief, he said.

He does not like to hear the argument that Augusta requires the city to revalue property to stay at 70 percent of market rate. "When they start listening to us, and understanding our problems, maybe we'll do that," he said, about revaluations. "Until then, we should not put this kind of burden on our taxpayers."

AUOCISCO, from page 12
He was also the captain of the Sabbono and the Gunter.

For passengers, there were other benefits to the AUOCISCO. In the days before indoor plumbing on the islands, passengers stand in line for the entire trip to get into the heated, modern toilets on the AUOCISCO, according to Capt. Legere.

In 1914, the U.S. Army chartered the AUOCISCO for the Quartermaster Corps, according to Frappier, but still used the crew from the Casco Bay Lines crew. In 1942, the vessel was transferred to the U.S. Navy which put its own crew on board, and renamed the ferry the U.S.S. Green Island. The AUOCISCO was returned to Casco Bay Lines in December, 1945 and continued to run until 1953. The vessel was stripped and scarfed off from Island Ledge, according to Capt. Legere.

In 1953, Casco Bay Lines purchased the 58 foot AUOCISCO from Casco Bay Lines as a bare hull, according to Capt. Legere. Workers sold old theater seating to make the benches in the AUOCISCO II and built wooden decks on the vessel.

The AUOCISCO II operated until 1967 and was replaced by the Island Holiday, which is the boat the AUOCISCO III will replace, completing "a full circle," according to Capt. Legere.

"This new boat will be the most elegant boat of the fleet by far," he said, "she will be taking over as queen of the fleet."

SEEKING ISLAND WRITERS

The Island Times is looking to expand our coverage of the Casco Bay islands, and we need your help! We are seeking writers who live on Chebeague, Cliff, Long, and Great Diamond islands. Our goal is to recruit one writer from each island. That correspondent will write a monthly column about what's happening on their island, and also contribute feature and news stories to the Island Times. Previous writing experience is helpful, but not essential. Interested? Please call or e-mail the publishers: Mary Louise Wendell, 676-0951, belltimes@maine.rr.com; David Tyler, 772-4348, dtyler16@adelphia.net.

We look forward to hearing from you!
A century of Aucociscos

BY DAVID TYLER
Steamship trips, for which the boats were wooden and the steam engine was silent, all that passengers heard was the hiss of steam and the ringing of bells that captained were used to communicate with their engineers. "It's a nice, pleasant hissing sound, there's no cutting," said Edward Legere, who worked as a mate on the first Aucocisco, in the summers of 1947-49. "That's one of the reasons I liked the steamboats so much, the steam was quiet and restful."

At the end of March, islanders will be reminded of those days of steamships when the newest Casco Bay Lines vessel, the Aucocisco III, made its maiden voyage to Portland Harbor after traveling from Sitton Shipyard in Alabama, where it was built.

The name Aucocisco has similar lines to the first vessel in Casco Bay which bore that name, "She's a very pretty boat, she looks a lot like the old steamers," said Capt. Larry Legere, a member of the Casco Bay Lines technical team who has worked for the past two years to bring the new vessel into service. Capt. Legere is Edward Legere's son.

On March 4, Aucocisco II successfully performed its first sea trials. After the ferry arrived in Portland, Casco Bay Lines personnel remained on the ship, which is scheduled to start service in May, according to Capt. Legere. The new boat is 110 feet long, 31 feet wide, and can carry up to 200 passengers.

The first Aucocisco was built by the Portland Shipbuilding Company at the Dyer Yard in South Portland, where it was launched on May 1, 1897, according to the book "Steamboating Yesterday on Casco Bay," written by Capt. William J. Frappier. The steam engine was constructed at the Portland Company on Fore Street. The vessel's published length was 107 feet, 8 inches, it was 24 feet, 9 inches wide, and could carry up to 500 passengers, according to Frappier.

The name Aucocisco comes from the Native American term for Casco Bay, which means "resting place," according to Capt. Legere, who is also the historian for Casco Bay Lines.

For its first voyage in June, 1897, Aucocisco took an F.A.C. party out for a picnic on Hope Island. The steamship was built for the Harpswell Steamboat Company. In 1907, that line combined with the Casco Bay Lines in 1907 to form the Casco Bay and Harpswell Steamboat Company. The company went bankrupt in 1918, but was acquired by Casco Bay Lines in the winter of 1918-19, according to Legere.

The Aucocisco was part of an era of steamships in Casco Bay which ran from the early 19th century until 1961, when the former Casco Bay Lines ferry, Sellers left the bay for Mystic Seaport Museum in Connecticut (where it is still in operation). Casco Bay was the last place in the country where steamships still ran on a regular basis. Many of the bay's famous steamers, including the Aucocisco, still operated into the 1960s. The boats became an integral part of island life, and many still remember the wooden vessels.

In his book, Frappier describes his first memory of a steamship, when he was just 4 years old. It was the summer of 1946, and Frappier's family spent summers on Bailey's Island. He went to Mackerricher Cove to watch the arrival of the Aucocisco. "Docks crowded with people, flags flying, an occasional cloud of black smoke rising from a tall silver, black-capped smokestack; the Aucocisco steamed gracefully around the entrance buoy and into the cove," Frappier wrote.

A "hollering greaser of white steam erupted from around that stack, and second later the boat's whistle blew, blowing her approach for miles around. Hooting majestically over us at high water, with boat deck and pilot house well above our heads, the steamer held us spellbound."

The steamers were coal-powered, and a fog of smoke rolled across the harbor, "There's no two ways about it, the old steamers were labor-intensive," Frappier said. A typical steamship was manned by a captain, at least three deckhands, an engineer and one or two firemen, who shoveled coal into the engine, according to Capt. Legere.

It took up an hour in the morning to start the fire in the boiler and build up enough steam to get the vessel running. Some engineers actually lived on board the boats, Capt. Legere said.

Without radios or intercoms, captains communicated orders to the engine room using a system of bells. As a steamboat approached a landing, one bell was the signal to show the engineer down, one more bell was the signal to stop engines, and two bells was the signal for reverse, once the boat was near the dock, according to Edward Legere.

Community Notes

Two new preschool playgroups

Come play! There is an open gym at the Peaks Island School for preschoolers starting Thursday, March 10, from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. The gym will be available twice a week on Thursdays at the time already mentioned and on Friday mornings from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Make sure your child wears shoes appropriate for a gym. Children must be accompanied by an adult. For more information call Mary Lou at 786-0951.

For children ages 3 and under there is a playgroup in the Community Room starting on Tuesday, from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The group is co-sponsored by the Portland Department of Parks and Recreation. Children must be accompanied by an adult. Parent donations of up to $5 will be appreciated. The playgroup will run from March 8 to April 12. For more information, call Denise at 786-2970.

Family art

Family Art Adventure Workshops will be held at the Greater Portland YMCA for the next three Saturdays, ending April. The workshops run from 10 a.m. to noon and cost $3 per family, YMCA family members, classes are free. For more information, call Jane Garcia at 874-4111, ext. 233.

March into May

Everyone is invited to participate in this 10-week program co-sponsored by Portland Parks and Recreation and the Community Room. The program is designed to bring families together in a fun and educational setting, according to the Parks and Recreation. Parents can participate in the fun and educational setting, according to the Parks and Recreation.

Open mike night

The monthly open mike night will be held on Fri., March 11 at 7 p.m. at the Brackett Memorial United Methodist Church. Sign up for the 10-minute time slots starts at 6:45 p.m. with performances starting at 7 p.m. Both performers and listeners are invited. Call Bill Hindler at 786-2686 for more information.

Upcoming movies

Upcoming movies are shown, free of charge, Saturday evenings at the Community Room, and are sponsored by the Friends of the Peaks Island Library. Patrons are welcome to bring food and drink, but children must be accompanied by an adult. The schedule is as follows:

March 12: "Vaking Ned Devine," at 6:30 p.m. at the Community Room. March 19: "Mulan IV," at 6:30 p.m. and "Jumanj

Starting a community garden

For those interested in starting a community garden, there will be a meeting on March 16, at 7 p.m. at the Community Room. For those unable to attend the meeting, call Michelle Evans at 786-3014. Organizers need to know how many people are interested, because the project cannot happen without community support.

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Emergency training continues

The training of island residents to become members of the Community Emergency Response Team continues. The training will be held on Thursday, March 17, from 6:30-9:30 p.m. at the Community Room. Information from past sessions will be reviewed to allow new people to catch up.

Celebrating St. Patrick's Day

Celebrate the holiday on Peaks Island. On Thurs., March 17, meet at 10:45 a.m. at the Peaks Cafe for coffee and more pre-registration for the cafe by Wed., March 16. At 1 p.m. meet at the Community Room for an Irish sing-a-long.

Easter services on the island

The Easter service at the Brackett Memorial Church will be offered in the morning.