

Union 60 & MSAD 12 News  
March 2009

Wow, what an active winter we have all had in the Moosehead Lake Region! Basketball seasons are all wrapped up with a great deal of success from all our various teams. Player awards, coaches' awards at local, and at state levels have been accepted, and the communities of Greenville, Shirley, Beaver Cove, Jackman, and Moose River should all be proud as our children represented us extremely well.

Now, the third quarter has ended, spring has begun (at least on the calendar), and we are all beginning to turn our attention towards the last quarter of the school year – the sprint to the finish line sort to speak! Seniors are looking forward to the end of one chapter of their lives and the beginning of another.

Speaking of seniors, just another indication of our EXCELLENT SCHOOLS at BOTH Forest Hills High School and Greenville High School – 100% of GHS seniors have been accepted to attend post secondary education and a whopping 91% at FHHS having been accepted to attend college in the fall of 2009 with one student choosing Navy as his career. What a testament to our communities and to our schools that our children are so well prepared at the end of their K-12 careers to be able to make the choice to attend college or not, instead of that choice already having been made for them. It reminds me of the many visitors that we have to our schools and the common comment that is made upon their leaving us – WHAT GREAT KIDS WE HAVE! There just isn't any other way to say it, we do have great kids. It is because of our communities and their partnerships with the schools that we consistently get these accolades.

Of course, all of this is good to keep in mind as we move forward into school budget approval timelines during these difficult economic times. Please know that all of the board members who serve on the school boards for both Union 60 and MSAD 12 know and understand the difficult economic times we are living in. They are working diligently to produce the best possible budgets for approval that attempt to balance the needs of our taxpayers with the needs of our children. I believe we will be able to do this successfully this spring in a manner that doesn't jeopardize the quality educational programs we are able to offer, nor the support of our local taxpayers within the community. Stay tuned, as we get closer to May and June regarding when budget meetings will be held so that you can be sure to get out and express your opinions.

Speaking of expressing opinions, APRIL FOOL'S DAY will be a great chance to do so this year! I am inviting anyone that can make it to Augusta on April 1, 2009, wearing their school colors (Blue/White for Greenville and Orange and Black for Forest Hills) in an effort to express our opinions on LD 467 "An Act to Exempt MSAD 12, Union 60, and Union 37 (Rangeley) from School District Reorganization due to their Geographic Isolation." This is special legislation sponsored by Sen. Peter Mills and co-sponsored by Rep. Pete Johnson (Greenville), Sen. Doug Smith (Dover-Foxcroft), and Rep. Wright Pinkham (Somerset) that would allow Greenville, Forest Hills, and Rangeley to be exempted from School Reorganization due to our "onshore island" status under the same conditions and rules as island schools have already been exempted. It would allow us to remain pretty much the same as we are now, without having to be penalized due to not reorganizing with other units.

Remember, School Union 60 and MSAD 12 went through the reorganization process and were unable to find any cost savings to taxpayers and no educational benefits for our children. As a result, our communities voted NOT to reorganize. This bill would allow us not to be penalized, and to continue in our efforts of collaborating with other units in ways that make sense to reduce REAL COSTS to taxpayers.

I would encourage as many people as possible to get out to Augusta. You can even make a day of it if you wish, as the School Reorganization Repeal bill will be heard later on that day starting at 1:00 p.m.

Carvans of interested parties may meet on Wednesday morning at Four Seasons Restaurant at 6:15 a.m. in Jackman or at 6:00 a.m. at the Greenville High School Parking lot. Public testimony will begin at 9:00 a.m. in Augusta at the Burton Cross Building (right next to the State House). I would strongly encourage all those that can, to attend.

These are trying times for us all for sure. Every community is feeling the "pinch" of these economic times; even little Shirley, Maine. On April 7, 2009 at 7:00 p.m. at the Shirley Town Hall, the Shirley School Committee and Shirley Selectmen are co-sponsoring a public hearing that we had all hoped would never have to happen. The public hearing topic will be the proposed closure of Shirley Elementary School, (possibly) effective July 1, 2009. This closure is not being sought for the purposes of saving money. Instead, the focus will be on the educational needs of the children of Shirley with a dwindling population of students. Currently, there are just two students at Shirley Elementary School with no new enrollments expected for next year. Due to this extremely small enrollment, the Shirley School Committee is considering closing Shirley Elementary School and would like to hear from the public prior to making a decision either to close or to keep the school open for next year.

In closing, I would like to draw everyone's attention to the events occurring halfway across our country in North Dakota. Over the past week or two we have all watched as the communities in North Dakota have banded together to try to stem the tide of the ever increasing Red River. It has been amazing to watch the footage of this area's citizens standing side by side filling sandbags and doing whatever it takes to save their towns. It has been inspiring to see. I bring this up not because we have any swelling rivers here in Northern Maine, but because the people of North Dakota are showing us just what can be done when people band together around a common cause. For them, it is saving their towns from a raging river. For us, it may be saving our towns from this economic crisis. Whatever the problems we are facing, one thing is for sure... we can only face them together. I hope to see you all in Augusta on Wednesday, April 1, 2009!