



Where the Workers Are

BY *Allen Lessels*

ILLUSTRATION BY *Adam Whittier*

Brian and Michele Frenkiewich got their first taste of the area, and New London in particular, in the late 1990s during their undergraduate college years at Colby-Sawyer College. They got to know the surroundings a little better when they returned here to work for a few years a short time later.

They left again when Brian went off to medical school in southern Maine, but they weren't done with the lakes and mountains, villages and towns of the Kearsarge region.

Not by a long shot.

"My wife thought when we left here that we'd want to come back to the area at some point," Brian says.

Last summer, they were living outside of Bangor, Maine, where he had done his medical training, and he was commuting 25 minutes to work.

"We saw a job posting for New London Hospital and gave it a go," Brian says. "It was the kind of position I was looking for — a small community hospital in the small community you lived in. I'd be working and be a physician in the town and not be commuting. I'd be able to see my patients out and about and we could take part in the community. It

was what we really wanted and something we had been missing." >>>>>

Frenkiewich landed the job and they moved back to New London in August.

He lives a mile and a half from his job at the hospital. And he's not too far from his other post either, on the medical staff at Colby-Sawyer College as team physician.

"It's pretty much the perfect fit," Brian says.

Frenkiewich covers both ends of Main Street in New London with his jobs and works for what have been two of the largest employers in the Kearsarge area for a century and more. Between them, New London Hospital and Colby-Sawyer employ more than 900 people.

The hospital itself, which dates to 1918, checks in with just over 600 employees. The college got its start in 1837 and lists 331 workers.

"The thing that makes this area different, I think, is that we have a college and a hospital," says New London selectman Janet Kidder, whose husband's family has lived in the area for generations. "We have resources that you don't have in a lot of rural areas and they make the quality of life so much more appealing and interesting. We're really, really lucky to have those major employers, not just because people can get jobs, but because they make the quality of life a good one."

Home base

To get a feel for where people work in the Kearsarge region, to get an inkling of where they're headed when they back out of their driveways in Sutton and Warner and Danbury and Grantham early on a summer morning, it takes more than looking at the biggest employers, the places such as New London Hospital and Colby-Sawyer and Sturm Ruger in Newport, too.

There's a work-at-home element to it. Statistics are difficult to

come by, but it's clear in these days of telecommuting that more and more people are putting in at least part of their work week from home offices.

"There are so many more opportunities to do things at home on the computer," Kidder says. "It's made it easier for people to be able to live here."

Interstate 89 for decades has guided workers to Concord and Manchester and points south. Some observers have little doubt that there has been a bit of a sea change, and more and more the caravan of drivers hitting I-89 each day heads north for the ever-expanding Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, Dartmouth College and the Upper Valley overall.

New Hampshire Employment Security cites an American Community Survey (2007-2011) that breaks down how many workers in town work in the community in

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which they reside, how many commute to another New Hampshire community, and how many commute to out-of-state jobs. The survey says that in New London, 62.1 percent of the workers stay in the community. The number rises to 67.8 in Danbury, 70.8 in Andover, 76.8 in Warner and 77.3 in Newport.

There are those, like Brian Frenkiewich, who are able to work very close to where they live.

Perhaps they are a little more than his mile and a half from work, but are not as far as half an hour and they don't need to jump on a major highway to reach their place of employment.

Perhaps they do travel a little further to work at Colby-Sawyer. Or maybe they check in each day at Proctor Academy in Andover, which employs 180 people, including full and part-timers, for a school population of 360 in grades nine through twelve.

People work for the towns and the school districts; they work in AlliOops!, the flower and gift shop, and the other retail stores that line the main drag in New London; and in the inns and restaurants throughout the region.

Maybe they are among the hundreds who work at providing play for thousands at the Lake Sunapee Country Club in New London or Country Club of New Hampshire in Sutton, or at any number of other golf courses in the area. Or at the Twin Lake Village resort with its own golf course and celebrating 117 years in business on the shores of Little Lake Sunapee in the summer of 2014 (see sidebar).

Tourism

Hundreds more work at Mount Sunapee Resort in Newbury or Ragged Mountain in Danbury, both of which are busiest by far in the winter and stretch their seasons out with summer activities as well

— Sunapee with its Adventure Park and Ragged with golf — and look to stretch them further yet.

“There’s certainly a lot of employment involved with tourism, some of it seasonally driven,” says Jennifer Tockman, executive director of the Lake Sunapee Region Chamber of Commerce. “Sunapee has its new Adventure Park, which brings it almost year-round. Ragged has its golf. The more stuff they have to do, the

more people they have to hire.”

Mount Sunapee has about 700 employees — full time, part-time and volunteer — in the winter and collected more than 600 applications for jobs last fall.

“About 70 to 75 percent of our people return every year, which is good,” says Mount Sunapee spokesman Bruce McCloy. “A lot of people live in the area. We find we’re a great complement for a lot who work in

construction or landscaping or whatever in the summer and then come here in the winter.”

Sunapee’s employee numbers have grown with the Adventure Park and its aerial challenge tour and Segway rides, its disc golf and miniature golf. The resort employs 32 people full time, year-round. In the past, it employed 50 people in the summer and that number has tripled in the past two years with >>>>

Twin Lake Village: A Surprisingly Big Employer

Twin Lake Village, the rustic resort with its reminder-of-another-time cottages along the shores of Little Lake Sunapee, has employed an assortment of New London-area folks in the summers through its century-plus years of existence.

There was a time — a fun time — when many young employees came from out of state, recalls Laurie Jacques.

“We used to house a lot of the employees, a lot of them from New York, here,” says Jacques, a member of the Kidder family who has owned and run Twin Lake Village through five generations, so far. “It changed a lot in the 1980s as we started hiring more local kids and they mixed with the kids who lived here. You know the movie *Dirty Dancing*? We had that kind of party scene behind doors. We have wonderful memories of it, those of us who lived and worked here as 16, 17, 18 year olds. We worked hard and played hard.”

Twin Lake Village has evolved through the years. Its summer season has condensed and the resort now employs about 65 people during a 10-week span. The season eases up as the end of August nears



and has closed up the last three seasons with a destination wedding on Labor Day weekend.

A housekeeping crew starts getting things ready at the end of April and outdoors crews prep the grounds early as well.

Once the season is in full swing and the resort is “comfortably full,” Jacques has a kitchen crew of about a dozen and a wait staff nearly doubles that providing three meals a day to the 150 to 160 guests who come to eat.

The housekeeping staff numbers about 10 and a handful of workers assist her husband, Ken, the superintendent of the golf course, Jacques says. There is a call for babysitters and bellhops and assorted other positions around the resort.

Twin Lake Village celebrates its

117th season this summer.

“In the late 1800s my great, great grandfather, the first Henry Kidder, had an idea when he saw what was happening all around on the big lakes,” Jacques says. “There were these big, grand hotels and he saw this farm was for sale and purchased it. People came through on the trek from Hanover to Concord and we had these people staying overnight and they’d say, ‘Can we come back next year?’ That was the beginning of it all.”

They’ve been coming back ever since to the serenity, the lake and the view, and the throwback escape from the hubbub of the rest of the world, coming back to reconnect the same weeks each summer with friends they’ve made on the shores of Little Lake Sunapee.

“We can fill the middle eight weeks of the summer very easily,” Jacques says. “I don’t know what the number is for sure, but I’d say a good guesstimate would be that 85 percent of the people are the same. Some weeks in the summer we have room for no new people coming in.”

— Allen Lessels

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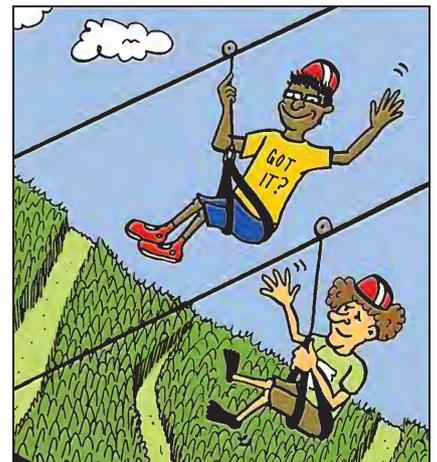
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the Adventure Park.

Ragged employs 60 people full time and another 100 part-time in the winter and plans to add to its summer numbers with an upcoming renovation of its golf course and the addition of other amenities, according to spokesperson Stacy Lopes.

Proctor Academy has its recreational side, too, with its fields and the Blackwater Ski Area across

“There’s certainly a lot of employment involved with tourism, some of it seasonally driven,” says Jennifer Tockman, executive director of the Lake Sunapee Region Chamber of Commerce.



Route 4 from the main part of campus where some of the top ski jumpers in the country got their start.

“We have quite a team working there,” says Proctor spokesperson Chuck Will. “They operate the area and make snow and groom it. When you look at the coaching staff, too, we make a huge commitment to it.”

Proctor employees tend to stay around for a while.

“People come down from New

London, from Georges Mills, to some extent from Warner and other towns,” Will says. “One thing that pops to mind is the longevity of people here. A lot of people have been here a long time.”

Will is Exhibit A. He went to an independent school in Massachusetts and was in a graduate program in education at the University of New Hampshire when he sent out some resumes.

“The first person I heard from was the head of the school at Proctor,” Will says.

He came to Andover for a tour and interview, and liked what he heard and saw about the philosophy of teaching the whole child and doing it in a less formal way than many independent schools.

Will signed on. He’s retiring at the end of June in 2014 — after 38 years. He’s held an assortment of jobs from teaching to posts in the development and communications office and, since 1998, has produced the wildly popular Chuck’s Corner blog.

Stay a while

Longevity is a theme at other major employers in the area as well.

Kate Seamans grew up in New London and went away to college and worked in Boston for more than half a dozen years. She even commuted into Boston from New London for three years.

She’s been at Colby-Sawyer, where she’s the senior director of communications, since 2007 and loves the way everyone at the school rallies around the mission of making decisions in the best interests of the students. She lives two miles away from work in North Sutton.

“It’s been fantastic,” she says. “I remember the first time I walked across campus to a meeting and knew the name of everyone I passed. I was thinking, ‘OK, this is a good thing to be a part of.’” >>>>

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Karen Zurheide and Brian Frenkiewich feel the same way.

Zurheide is the vice president of community relations and development at New London Hospital. She grew up in northern New Hampshire and has lived and worked in California, Texas, Oklahoma and Connecticut.

“I feel spoiled to be able to have a professional job in a small New Hampshire town,” she says.

Zurheide breaks the numbers down. Of New London Hospital’s 606 employees, 38 work at the Newport Health Center. Eighteen of its employees have worked for New London Hospital for more than 30 years.

Frenkiewich, the physician and team doctor, may someday be among that crowd.

“We knew a little about the area when we were at Colby-Sawyer and when we worked here, but I don’t think we realized the extent of how nice it is,” he says. “We did a lot of homework before we took this position. We looked at several other places and visited the schools ahead of time. We have five young kids and we’re going to be here for a while. We really tried to find a place for the long term.”

He’s pretty sure they have. 

Allen Lessels is a sportswriter for the New Hampshire Union Leader and also does freelance writing out of his home in Contoocook, N.H.

Adam Whittier is a Sunapee-based freelance cartoonist. He is a graduate of the Center for Cartoon Studies, and has done numerous illustrations for print and online. His most recent books are Phoenix: the Ford Pinto Story and Snake Rapunzel. You can visit him at www.adamwhittier.com