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Bath synagogue reflects on Maine's Jewish history before 100-year celebration

BY KATHLEEN O'BRIEN Times Record staff

As Bath's Beth Israel synagogue prepares to celebrate its centennial, the congregation is reflecting on how far the Jewish community in Maine has come in the past 100 years.

On Sunday, the Beth Israel community will reenact its opening by marching with the Torahs from the intersection of Centre and Washington streets to the synagogue. The celebration is open to the public.

Jews have been living in Maine for 200 years, according to the Maine Jewish History Museum in Portland. The first Jewish family arrived in Bath in 1886. By the early 1900s, the city's Jewish population grew to include a wave of settlers, many of whom came to work as peddlers.

The Beth Israel synagogue was founded on Jan. 29, 1922, by eastern European immigrants, most of whom had fled persecution.

"They were so proud

to be Americans — they carried an American flag in their parade," said Marilyn Weinberg, a member of the Beth Israel congregation. "There was anti-Semitism out there, but they were welcomed by the Bath community."

Though Jews in Bath were generally accepted by the community, life for Jews in Maine and across the nation was far from perfect, said David Freidenreich, chairperson of the Jewish studies department at Colby College and associate director of the Center for Small Town Jewish Life.

About 100 years ago, the U.S. restricted immigration, which "transformed the American-Jewish landscape," said Freidenreich.

"The Jews who founded Beth Israel were all immigrants, and suddenly, there were no immigrants joining them," Freidenreich said. "Those immigrants proceeded to Americanize and integrate into the community and benefit

Please see HISTORY on A10

Bath businesses report little pushback over mask mandate



KATHLEEN O'BRIEN / THE TIMES RECORD

Two shoppers walk down Front Street in Bath while wearing masks on Wednesday, Jan. 26. Bath's mask mandate for indoor public spaces went into effect on Monday, Jan. 24.

Most customers have been compliant since city's rule went into effect Monday

BY KATHLEEN O'BRIEN Times Record staff

Bath business owners say most of their customers are complying with the city's indoor masking mandate that went into effect Monday to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

Ruth Van Kamben, manager at Loyal Biscuit Co., said most customers at the pet supply store are "enthusiastic" about the mask requirement, but not everyone has been compliant.

"This morning we had one customer refuse to wear one and just pulled their scarf up over their nose," said Van Kamben. "It's a tough line to walk because you want people to wear one and we provide masks at the door."

Van Kamben said she reminds unmasked customers they can order products online or over the phone, but if they're already in line to check out, "we just try to get them out as soon as possible."

Van Kamben said she's glad the mandate is in place because it takes the responsibility out of her hands, but "it caused some anxiety knowing it was coming and we'd have to enforce it."

Bath city councilors voted unanimously to enact the emergency mandate during a special meeting on Jan. 19 to help quell the spread of COVID-19. The rule went into effect on Jan. 24 and will last 60 days, but councilors agreed to

re-evaluate the rule and how the pandemic has progressed after 30 days.

Bath's mandate, like policies from Portland, Brunswick, Freeport and South Portland, requires everyone age 2 and older wear a face covering over their nose and mouth in public spaces, regardless of vaccination status.

Examples of public spaces include stores, public transportation and restaurants except when people are actively eating and drinking in an "isolated location such as a table or booth" away from others, regardless of vaccination status. People need to put their mask on when they're finished eating or drinking and when they move from their table or booth.

Rowan Wagner, who co-owns J.R. Maxwell with Edwin Rogers, said he feels "indifferent" about the mandate because "it's what has to be done."

Wager's customers, on the other hand, have had mixed feelings. Most customers have worn one without issue, he said, though some have been confused about when they need to wear one and when they can remove it.

In the restaurant's downstairs bar, however, some customers haven't been pleased about the indoor mask rule, though it hasn't escalated to any sort of altercation.

"In the downstairs bar, people have been a little

Please see MASKS on A7

Bowdoinham rallies to help residents displaced by blaze

Clothing and other goods collected; cause of fire still under investigation

BY PAYAL GANGISHETTI Times Record staff

Members of the Bowdoinham community and beyond are helping tenants who lost everything in a fire that destroyed their apartment building Tuesday.

At least 10 people have been displaced after fire ripped through the six-unit building at 15 Main St. in the heart of Bowdoinham.

Maine House District 55 Rep. Seth Berry said the state has resources available to help these families.

"I posted a list of resources and certain nonprofit and community programs that are available on the town's Facebook page," said Berry. "The state and the community itself stand ready to help, and many have reached out with offers of assistance."

Berry said the gift

shop at the former recycling barn, a community-led resource with donated items such as clothing, dishes, cookware and household goods, has been made available. He also started a fundraising campaign online through GoFundMe, which, as of Thursday afternoon, had raised \$1,175 out of a \$12,000 goal.

A member of the Red Cross said they are working with six adults to offer assistance.

The fire broke out sometime before 1 p.m. Tuesday, drawing crews from Bowdoinham, Bowdoin, Topsham, Brunswick, Dresden, Gardiner and Lisbon. No injuries were reported. The cause is unknown and under investigation.

Bowdoinham Historical Society Treasurer Betsy Steen said on

Please see FIRE on A7

COVID-19 hospitalizations continue to decline, led by drop in ICU patients

BY JOE LAWLOR Portland Press Herald

The number of people hospitalized with COVID-19 across the state declined for the fourth straight day, dropping from 427 on Monday to 400 on Thursday as the omicron wave appears to be ebbing in Maine.

But at least some Maine hospitals are still struggling to care for the high numbers of patients and staffing shortages caused by the highly contagious variant. The Mills administration announced Thursday that a federal COVID-19 Surge Response Team will assist at Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston.

Intensive care patients in all Maine hospitals decreased from 88 on Wednesday to 84 on Thursday. The number of COVID-19 ICU patients has declined 37% from a peak of 133 patients on Dec. 19, with a marked drop-off in the last week. The number of ICU patients hovered around 105 to 110 patients from early January through last week.

Overall hospitalizations have declined 8% statewide since the peak of 436 patients hospitalized for COVID-19 on Jan. 13. The experience is different at individual hospitals, however, with some seeing bigger declines while others

have not seen any easing.

At Maine Medical Center in Portland, COVID-19 patients dropped from 97 on Jan. 21 to 65 on Thursday. It's a hopeful sign, but many challenges remain, said Dr. Joel Botler, chief medical officer at Maine Med.

"The trends are all pointing in the right direction," Botler said. "We are definitely in a better place than we were."

However, Botler said with 2,000 people waiting for elective surgery, such as knee and hip replacements, it is going to take awhile, even after omicron recedes, to get through the backlog of patients needing care. And there's still bottle-

necks in discharging patients to nursing homes and rehabilitation facilities, leading patients to stay longer at the hospital. The average length-of-stay for a patient at Maine Med is currently 8.2 days, much higher than 5.5 days before the pandemic started in March 2020.

"The length-of-stay is messing up our operations and our ability to get new patients into the hospital to get the care they need," Botler said.

At CMMC in Lewiston, COVID-19 patients declined from 32 on Jan. 20 to 24 on Wednesday. At Northern Light Health, which includes Eastern

Please see COVID-19 on A10



Tomorrow's weather

Scattered snow. High 17. See Page A10.



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Tri-state Lotteries

Wednesday

- Powerball: 4-11-38-49-69 (16)
Megabucks: 5-15-27-36-39 (6)
Lotto America: 1-8-22-23-29 (2)
Lucky For Life: 10-11-15-18-22 (3)
Evening Pick 3: 3-2-4
Evening Pick 4: 9-6-4-1

Gimme 5: 1-6-23-27-31

Thursday

- Day Pick 3: 9-6-7
Day Pick 4: 1-7-7-7
For evening Pick 3, Pick 4 and Gimme 5 results, visit mainelottery.com.

Today's Headlines

- Sports: With Foligno out, forward Hall returns to top power-play for Bruins B1
Local: Maine Forest Service launches Browntail Moth Awareness Month A2

- Maine: Report suggests police should plan for mental health crises A3
Nation: Biden: Ready for 'long overdue' pick of Black female justice A8

- Graphic novel about Holocaust banned in Tenn. school district A9
Witness: 3 officers at Floyd killing had a duty to intervene B3
Ticket: Get out and play with these winter activities C1



5-Day Forecast for Mid-coast Region

Table with 5 columns: Tonight, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday. Includes weather icons and temperature forecasts.

Regional Forecast

Boston: Cloudy skies tonight with a 55% chance of scattered snow, lows in the mid-10s. Southeast wind 5 to 17 mph. Montreal: Partly cloudy skies tonight with lows in the single digits below zero. North wind 6 mph. White Mountains: Mostly cloudy skies tonight with lows in the single digits. Light winds.

Friday's highs

Table listing high temperatures for various locations: Brunswick (30°F), Bath (31°F), Lisbon (30°F), Freeport (31°F), Harpswell (31°F), Topsham (31°F), Bowdoin (30°F), Bowdoinham (30°F), Phippsburg (31°F).

Local Almanac

Reported from Wiscasset Airport. Temperature: High 23°, Low -9R°, Normal high 30°, Normal low 10°. Precipitation: Yesterday 0.00", Month to date 2.26". Heating Degree Days: Yesterday 56, Normal 42.

Sun and Moon

Table for Sun and Moon phases: Sunrise, Sunset, Moonrise, Moonset for Saturday and Sunday. Includes moon phase icons.

Tides

Table of tide data for Wiscasset, Fort Popham, Brunswick-Topsham Bridge, Richmond, Harpswell Harbor, Middle Bay, and South Freeport.

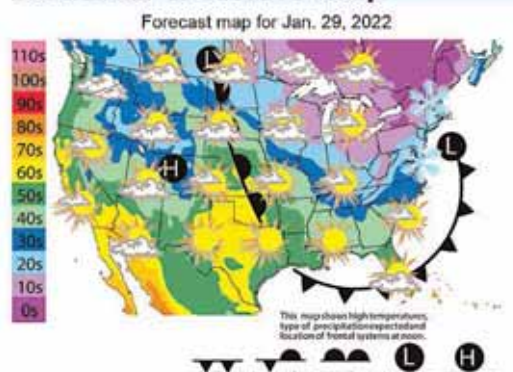
Local Map



National Cities

Table of weather forecasts for major national cities including Atlanta, Dallas, Denver, Grand Rapids, Honolulu, Houston, Kansas City, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, Nashville, New Orleans, New York, Orlando, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Raleigh, St. Louis, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, Tampa, and Washington, DC.

National Weather Map



National Weather Summary

The Northeast will see partly to mostly cloudy skies with isolated snow, highest temperature of 36 in Nantucket, Mass. The Southeast will experience mostly clear skies with the highest temperature of 65 in Key West, Fla.

Marine Forecast

Rockland to Kennebunkport. Tonight: N winds 10 to 15 kt, increasing to 15 to 20 kt. Tomorrow: N winds 25 to 30 kt with gusts up to 50 kt.

Regional Cities

Table of weather forecasts for regional cities: Albany, Augusta, Boston, Buffalo, Burlington, Concord, Danbury, Hartford, Montpelier, New Haven, New London, New York, Portland, Providence, Springfield.

History

From Page A1

from previous generations of Jewish immigrants, but there were no later generations of immigrants coming to carry on that tradition. American-Jewish life, including that in Maine, was shaped by that absence. Jews in Maine faced anti-Semitism locally for decades, Freidenreich said.

viduals that hold anti-Semitic ideals and Jews still experience discrimination, but they don't experience it in the way they did 50 or 100 years ago," said Freidenreich. "Part of that is because Jews have Americanized. They're now part of the mainstream rather than seen as outsiders."

to Damariscotta. Freidenreich said he believes the Jewish community in Maine is continuing to grow, though precise numbers are unknown. "They're not moving because they're Jewish, but because they find Maine attractive like many people find Maine attractive," said Freidenreich.

standoff at a Houston synagogue — could happen here. "The challenge now, more than ever, is we're now part of a wider information sharing that didn't exist even 10 years ago," said Weinberg. "We now have to deal with the fact that there's information out there on the web that's inflammatory and inaccurate, but some people believe it."

also hires security for larger holiday events that are open to the public, Weinberg said. Unfortunately, hate crimes committed against Jews elsewhere have hindered Beth Israel's willingness to welcome strangers to its services, Weinberg said. "One of the tenants of Judaism is to welcome the stranger, but now we're wondering how to do this," said Weinberg.

doesn't keep people away from services, but we have to be more aware of people and visitors." Still, Freidenreich said the Jewish community in Maine should celebrate how far the state has come in accepting Jews, and their successful integration into the larger Maine population. This is exemplified by the children of mixed families within Beth Israel's Hebrew school.

COVID-19

From Page A1

Maine Medical Center in Bangor and Mercy Hospital in Portland, there were nearly the same number of COVID-19 patients on Wednesday (116), as the previous week (114). MaineGeneral Medical Center in Augusta on Thursday reported 27 COVID-19 patients, compared with 27 a week ago. Steven Michaud, president of the Maine Hospital Association, said conditions are improving, but hospitals still have a long way to go to get back to operations close to pre-pandemic times.

transmissibility of omicron leads to skyrocketing hospitalizations before the wave crests and starts to recede. Even with the recent decline, overall hospitalizations are still far higher than during previous pandemic surges and, combined with staff shortages because of infections and exposures, hospitals continue to rely on the support of federal medical teams and Maine Army National Guard members. An additional 20-person U.S. Department of Defense military medical personnel crew — which will include doctors, nurses and respiratory technicians — will come to Maine to help staff at CMMC care for COVID-19 patients, the governor announced. The crew follows a team of four clinicians from the Federal Emergency Management Agency who had been helping to administer vaccines but are leaving on Thursday.

lance crew to be stationed at Cary Medical Center in Caribou that also will assist other hospitals in Aroostook County. The ambulance crews that were extended for 30 days were scheduled to leave on Thursday, and include crews at Maine Medical Center in Portland, Southern Maine Health Care in Biddeford, Franklin Memorial Hospital in Farmington, Mid Coast Hospital in Brunswick, CMMC in Lewiston, MaineGeneral Medical Center in Augusta, Eastern Maine Medical Center in Bangor and St. Joseph Hospital in Bangor. The ambulance teams "are assisting Maine emergency medical services crews with non-emergency transportation of patients among facilities to match patients with open beds and ensure they are treated in the facility that best meets their health care needs," Mills administration said in a news release. Meanwhile, Maine reported 12 additional deaths from COVID-19 on Thursday and 1,526 new cases as the state deals with a massive backlog of positive tests that have yet to be processed, making the daily case counts an unreliable metric to

track current pandemic conditions. Since the pandemic began, Maine has reported 171,524 cases of COVID-19 and 1,728 deaths. Maine has a backlog of 56,000 positive tests that have yet to be processed, which means checked for duplicates, vaccination and hospitalization status and other tasks. The state is moving to an automated system to relieve the backlog, although Dr. Nirav Shah, director of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said on Wednesday that it will take some time to switch to the system. He didn't have an estimate of how long it would take. People who test positive will continue to be notified about the test in the same way they have always been. That has not been affected by the backlog. Shah said that because omicron is so easily transmissible — often before investigations can begin — the case investigations have become far less useful, leading the Maine CDC and many other states to conclude that a more automated system would be more suitable. The sheer volume of cases still left to process has overwhelmed the

state's current capacity to process the tests in the same way they had during most of the last two years, he said. The Mills administration also announced on Wednesday that they will be expanding wastewater testing for COVID-19 to 23 sites across the state, as Shah said wastewater testing is currently a superior way to assess current pandemic conditions than case counts.

"It's designed to show what's going on in my community, how is that changing and what does that mean going forward," Shah said. Portland and Yarmouth are two communities in Maine that currently test for COVID-19 in their wastewater, and they have been tracking sharp declines in virus prevalence in their wastewater systems compared to early January.

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