

# HealthMatters

A Journal of Wellness and Good Health Care

Expanding

**Access** to High-Quality  
**Health Care**





# HealthMatters

HealthMatters is published as a service for the people of the Kennebec Valley region. Information is written by MaineGeneral's Marketing and Communications staff.

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## Message from the CEO

Drawing closer to my one-year anniversary as President and CEO of MaineGeneral Health, my appreciation for the dedicated team assembled here has only grown.

In the medical center, cancer center, outpatient practices, long-term care facilities, home care and hospice team and in the community, more than 4,700 MaineGeneral employees are focused on giving their best to provide high-quality, patient-centered care to every community member, every time.

We know that access to the right care, at the right time, in the right place is so important. This *HealthMatters* issue focuses on what we're doing to increase access to care.

Despite national health care system financial challenges, we've been able to remain responsive to our community's needs. This includes:

- Better coordination of care for breast cancer patients
- Enhancing orthopaedic services both in expert personnel and wrap-around navigation for patients
- Increasing access for surgeries in Waterville and Augusta
- Expanding opportunities to have virtual visits, helping more people access primary and specialty appointments
- Growing the Harold Alfond Center for Cancer Care to meet the needs of our community now and into the future

We're also doing more events in the community. This includes adding healthy living classes and events across the region through the Peter Alfond Prevention & Healthy Living Center. We have upcoming medical presentations and screenings led by our dedicated medical staff. You'll also find MaineGeneral staff supporting other nonprofits and the local business community – showing their personal and professional commitment to impacting the health and welfare of the Kennebec Valley.

Finally, I want to thank those I've been able to meet for their generosity – whether in MaineGeneral's facilities or out in the community. You've welcomed me to the Kennebec Valley and given me valuable feedback to help focus our efforts to better meet your needs. I look forward to many years ahead working collaboratively with residents of our 88 communities.



Nathan Howell  
President & CEO  
MaineGeneral Health





# Expanding Cancer Care

for the  
Present  
and  
Future



For many people living in Central Maine and beyond, the work to expand the Harold Alfond Center for Cancer Care (HACCC) to meet growing needs is deeply personal.

From the woman who has dedicated 39 years at MaineGeneral to providing the best cancer care to patients while also having her father and sister receive those services.

To the vice president of the general contractor heading up the project whose parents were patients.

And, finally, to the hundreds of individuals, families and businesses that already have made donations to ensure a greatly needed 28,000-square-foot expansion and facility renovation is completed for the present and future.

For everyone who has battled cancer or supported a loved one's journey, the project happening on Old Belgrade Road in Augusta is both exciting and emotional.

## Inspired by a personal connection

"I've always been passionate in my 39 years of working with and supporting patients with cancer, but your level of empathy becomes so much greater when you really understand what patients are dealing with," says Debbie Bowden, administrative director for Oncology Services at MaineGeneral, whose father was a patient and whose sister is now receiving treatment.

"This expansion will help us continue to provide excellent care to a continually increasing number of patients, and we'll be better able to help them manage and enhance quality of life for themselves."

Joe Lajoie understands this.

A third-generation co-owner of Lajoie Brothers, the Augusta-based general contractor for the \$36 million project, Lajoie saw the type of care the center provides when his parents, now survivors, received treatment.





Additionally, many of Lajoie Brothers' 70 employees have been affected by cancer indirectly or, in some cases, directly.

"The compassion at the HACCC is far greater than any other facility we've been to. They understand what cancer means in the lives of patients and they show it every day in their care," he says. "You see it in the smiles on patients' faces and in the warm, caring staff."

Lajoie says his company wanted to bid on the project because of what the center has meant to the community since it opened in 2007.

"Everyone is affected by cancer at some point. Some of our team members had family treated there or have been patients themselves," he says.



This project is very tangible for folks. In fact, we had a few who started working on it and decided they couldn't continue because cancer was still too fresh. We understand what this expansion means for the community.

Joe Lajoie

## Revisiting an appeal to the community

Financial gifts, ranging from small, one-time gifts from individuals to a \$7 million total contribution from the Harold Alfond Foundation and significant gifts from other foundations and businesses, led to a highly successful capital campaign that helped fund the HACCC's original construction.

Seventeen years and tens of thousands of patient visits later, the need for the community's financial support of the center's expansion is critical.

In October, MaineGeneral launched its latest capital campaign – Honoring a Legacy, Shaping the Future – to raise the funds needed to expand and renovate the center.

As with the previous campaign, the community is responding with gifts to meet the campaign goal.

While the initial response has been strong – and greatly appreciated – a greater level of support is needed.

Learn more in the accompanying article about how you can help support the project or visit [give.mainegeneral.org/cancer-care-expansion/give-today](https://give.mainegeneral.org/cancer-care-expansion/give-today).

## Looking to the future

As a 19-year-old nursing student in college, Debbie Bowden felt a calling to work in the oncology field.

During her professional career, she has been intricately involved in the growth of MaineGeneral's cancer care services, from two smaller units in Augusta and Waterville to the design, construction and opening of the renowned center the HACCC has become.

Now working closely on the expansion project with MaineGeneral Construction Project Manager Mark Roberts, Senior Architect & Project Manager Matthew Ranger of SMRT Architects and Engineers, the Lajoie Brothers team and others, she views its eventual completion as a wonderful culmination of her professional life's work.

"Traditional medical treatment for cancer has expanded to include a holistic piece, where patients want to know how to stay well during treatment and afterward. The last part of my career will be devoted to merging those services," she says. "This project is very exciting and it will serve our community well for a long time." 🌿

## *Honoring a Legacy, Shaping the Future*

This community, including people like you, gave generously to build the Harold Alfond Center for Cancer Care as it stands today. Expanding the cancer center will help ensure we can continue to provide high-quality, patient-centered care for future generations.

Naming recognition opportunities are available beginning with a capital gift of \$500. Capital gifts of \$1,000 or more may be spread across 1, 3 or 5 years.

Capital gifts of \$15,000 or more are recognized inside the Harold Alfond Center for Cancer Care.

Capital gifts of \$500 - \$15,000 are recognized on the exterior's grounds.

A personal conversation with the Office of Philanthropy will help us match your generosity with an opportunity: call **207-626-1809** and ask to speak with Sarah Kalagher or Nicole McSweeney.



Motorists driving past the Harold Alfond Center for Cancer Care (HACCC) since October have seen – and heard – the start of tremendous progress toward a \$36 million addition to and renovation of the center.

First was the arrival of the construction trailer to serve as the base of operations. Next came heavy equipment and construction vehicles to prepare for extensive earth-moving that dramatically changed the landscape near the center.

Then it was the repetitive sound of steel pilings driven into the ground to support the new structure, followed by trucks that poured concrete footings and, later, the foundation for a 24,000-square-foot addition that's part of an overall increase of 28,000 square feet to the facility.

And, throughout this work – and the part that remains – patients have received chemotherapy and radiation treatments and other services without pause.

It hasn't always been easy, with wayfinding and parking challenges to address, but the overall consensus from staff, contractors and patients is that great gains are being made.

"We had a good winter from a construction standpoint and are on track for scheduled completion in May 2026," says MaineGeneral Construction Project Manager Mark Roberts. "The new addition will be done in May 2025 and then we'll renovate the original building through May 2026."

### The next phases

While the initial substructure work was vitally important, it may have been hard for passersby to see how much had been completed.

That changed in March with construction of the elevator shaft, followed in early April by the start of steel construction. Steel work will continue for several months with the addition's roof starting in early



June and continuing through July. Happening concurrently will be the installation of decking and concrete floors between the addition's terrace and first-floor levels.

"Once we started going vertical with the steel work, people really took notice," says Joe Lajoie, vice president and co-owner of Lajoie Brothers, the project's general contractor.

Work on the new drive-through canopy for patient drop-off will happen from August through October, along with the installation of mechanical equipment, flooring and an electrical conduit for the new space.

Roberts says the addition's interior work is scheduled to start in early August once the roof is finished.

One of the systems that will be installed is a new heating, ventilation and cooling (HVAC) system for the addition; another is a new electrical room that will tie into the existing Information Technology rooms.

Lajoie notes that progress on the expansion will be very noticeable in the months ahead.

"Everything will really start to shine this fall and we'll turn over the construction phase of the project in May 2025," he says. "Then all of the outside work – the landscaping, parking lots and more – will be done."



Mark Roberts

Regarding landscaping, stonework that previously existed on the ground and terrace levels will be recreated with a similar look. Donor-engraved paver stones and dedication plaques that were there before



construction also will be reinstalled. Those items were removed before work began, placed on pallets, catalogued and taken off site for safe keeping.

After the project's construction phase is finished, the renovation phase will begin.

## Involving HACCC staff from the start

Compared with new construction, expanding and renovating an existing building while keeping it operational is more challenging. For starters, there is the impact of noise, parking changes, traffic and construction vehicles coming on and off site that patients and staff were not accustomed to.



We involved the staff early in the design process because it was important for them to know what would be happening and also provide feedback. They have the patients' best interests in mind. If there's a problem, they know they can discuss it with me so we can try to fix it.

*Mark Roberts,  
Construction Project Manager*

Parking was one of the bigger challenges impacting HACCC patients early in project, so the collective team focused on improving the situation. Part of this effort involved hiring a concierge staff member, Jamie Costa, said Debbie Bowden, administrative director of Oncology Services at MaineGeneral. "He assists people as they drive in, not as a valet but as someone who can bring wheelchairs to vehicles and help in other ways. When we start the renovation work, he'll help direct people to where they need to go."

Senior Architect and Project Manager Matthew Ranger of SMRT Architects and Engineers echoes Roberts' comments on the importance of including staff in the design process and in maintaining regular communication during construction.

"A lot of thought went into the early planning and design process to make sure we could expand and add the square footage and program elements the staff wanted while still maintaining operations," Ranger says. "We designed the addition to accommodate all existing clinical space, so we can relocate them temporarily while renovations are made to the existing facility."

## The importance of working relationships

With a complex project that has multiple phases, having solid, familiar working relationships is key, says Bowden, who previously worked closely with SMRT on the construction of the HACCC and Alford Center for Health (ACH).

"I knew that team well, so the mutual trust and positive working relationship was already there," she says. "Working with Lajoie Brothers was new for me and they've been phenomenal. They're quick,

responsive and passionate about their work."

Roberts has collaborated with Lajoie Brothers on several MaineGeneral projects, including the Gardiner medical office building that opened in 2019. He also worked with them before joining the MaineGeneral team.

"They're great to work with," he says. "They're very responsive and we know what to expect from them. I expect high-quality work and I know I'm going to get it."

For Lajoie Brothers, their longstanding relationships with the Maine-based subcontractors who will work on the project also benefit the effort.

"All but two of our subs are in Maine and everyone has an office within an hour of the cancer center, with many workers coming from even closer than that," he says. "These are people we've worked with before and trust."

To learn more about the expansion and see architectural renderings of what the finished project will look like, visit [give.mainegeneral.org/cancer-care-expansion](https://give.mainegeneral.org/cancer-care-expansion). ↘



# Restoring Wholeness and Self Image



After

## Breast Cancer

A breast cancer diagnosis and the treatment that follows can be as unique as the individual who receives it, based on their overall health, family history and other factors.

What is universal, however, is the tremendous impact the disease has on the lives of those who battle it – particularly when surgery is needed to remove the cancer and affects one’s appearance and self-image.

A collaborative effort between general and breast surgeon Leandra Jelinek, DO and plastic surgeon Alexander Mayer, MD, is helping some patients return to their former selves physically – and sooner – before breast cancer entered their lives.

### What is immediate breast reconstruction surgery?

Immediate breast reconstruction surgery consists of two surgical procedures, done on the same day.

The first surgery, done by Dr. Jelinek, removes the cancerous tissue in the breast. If the mass is small and contained, the patient may have a lumpectomy and only a portion of the breast will be removed.

If the cancer is more invasive, or the patient elects to do so because of a strong family history of breast cancer or other factors, Dr. Jelinek will perform a unilateral (single) or bilateral (double) mastectomy.

Once Dr. Jelinek’s work is done, Dr. Mayer will begin breast reconstruction surgery by inserting a temporary breast implant – a tissue expander – under the skin

where the breast tissue was removed and preparing the patient for the needed post-surgical healing process.



It offers them the chance to get back to feeling like themselves and hopefully be able to put their cancer and everything they’ve had to go through behind them once their reconstruction is complete.

*Alexander Mayer, MD, Plastic Surgeon*



"If chemotherapy or radiation therapy is needed after surgery as part of the treatment plan, the patient will have those treatments, recover and then come back to me for surgery to exchange the temporary implant for a permanent one just like we would use for cosmetic surgery," Dr. Mayer says. "As part of this process, I speak with patients about their goals and how they want to proceed with reconstruction."

Dr. Mayer says the impact of being able to start the reconstruction process early is significant for patients.

## Partnering for the best patient care

One strength of MaineGeneral's breast surgery program, Dr. Jelinek says, is the strong partnership that exists between the general and plastic surgeons and how that supports patient care. This is true for a number of breast surgery procedures beyond those that are cancer-related.

"We offer a wider range of interventions for breast patients. I was trained to do lumpectomies, mostly, with fewer mastectomies. At MaineGeneral, however, I have a wonderful partnership with Dr. Mayer and we can offer mastectomies with immediate breast reconstruction for select patients. That leads to less breast tissue and breast cancer in the future with better cosmetic results for patients."

Another strength of the program is how it is supported by advanced imaging technology and the staff who use it to find breast cancer as early as possible.

"We have a wonderful imaging center that allows us to detect and then remove cancer when it's very small, before it becomes invasive," Dr. Jelinek says.

She adds that being able to offer patients several treatment options is vitally important, as every patient's


circumstances and diagnosis are different.

"Every breast cancer case is different. At MaineGeneral, we have a large group of medical professionals who are involved, with each case treated individually," she says. "A lumpectomy may be the best option for one patient while a mastectomy is for another patient and chemotherapy or radiation therapy without surgery may be for a third.

"Every breast cancer case is reviewed by MaineGeneral's Tumor Board, which includes surgery, medical and radiation oncology and plastic surgery," she adds. "It's a beautiful program tailored to each patient, a net of people who hold these patients up."

Dr. Mayer adds that fully educating patients about their options allows them to make the best, most informed decisions about their care.

"One of the most important things for me in taking care of patients, particularly in plastic surgery where decisions are largely motivated by people's goals, is to have shared decision making," he says. "I want patients to have all the information they need to make a decision aligned with their goals and what makes the most sense for them."

"For breast cancer patients, knowing their reconstruction options helps them make an informed decision that will make them feel more like themselves after surgery." 

## Surgical Treatment for Breast Cancer, and More

Surgeons Leandra Jelinek, DO and Alexander Mayer, MD work together to offer immediate breast reconstruction surgery for patients with breast cancer. But that's not the only surgical team-up they provide for this patient population. Another is oncoplastic breast reduction surgery.

Oncoplastic breast reduction combines a traditional lumpectomy – the removal of a cancerous breast tumor – with a standard breast reduction. The procedure starts with the breast surgeon removing the tumor and an ample margin of healthy tissue. Once that surgery is done, the plastic surgeon assesses the remaining tissue and reshapes a smaller, more elevated, and naturally rounded breast.

If only one breast is treated for cancer, the other breast also is reduced during the surgery to maintain symmetry.

The best candidates for this procedure are those who require the removal of a large amount of breast tissue and have symptoms associated with large, heavy breasts including chronic headaches, back pain, neck pain or rashes under the breast.

Patients with moderate- to large-sized breasts also can be potential candidates for the surgery, and oncoplastic reduction is possible in patients who have had previous breast surgery.

"We have patients who come in for breast cancer surgery who also may have symptoms of back, shoulder or breast pain that otherwise would have made them candidates for a breast reduction," Dr. Mayer says.

"We can combine those two procedures to remove the cancer and do a breast reduction at the same time, leaving patients ready to move forward with any other cancer-related treatments they may need without additional reconstruction surgery," he adds. "This can be a great option for patients."

To learn more about this procedure, please call MaineGeneral Surgery at [207-621-4620](tel:207-621-4620).





MaineGeneral's  
Comprehensive  
**Spine**  
Program:

**Right Care,  
Right Time,  
Right Place**

Mary Beth Ranger, nurse navigator for spine and osteoporosis, is four months into her role helping patients with back issues find the right care, with the right clinician, as part of MaineGeneral Orthopaedics' Comprehensive Spine Program. A little over a year ago, Mary Beth was sitting in the chair as a patient. She is grateful to be in this role navigating and supporting our patients to achieve the best possible outcome, like she did.

"I had chronic low-back pain that was radiating down my legs. My doctor referred me to Stephen Clark, MD, who I had worked with at Central Maine Medical Center. I had tried non-operative interventions and ended up needing lumbar surgery. I had full confidence in Dr. Clark, and I loved his honesty. He didn't sugarcoat what would happen or how I would feel, and he was professional and kind. I had a fabulous experience from beginning to end."

One thing that made it fabulous was having a nurse navigator – Holly Patton, who was integral in the development of the spine nurse navigator role for MaineGeneral Orthopaedics. "It was reassuring to know someone was there if I had a question or needed anything. I know firsthand what the program can mean to patients."

In a wonderful twist of fate, Holly was soon named outpatient nurse manager for MaineGeneral Orthopaedics and the spine nurse



navigator position was available. Mary Beth applied as soon as she saw the posting. “When I saw the position and that it was with Dr. Clark, I saw it as a sign. My nursing career has always centered around spinal issues so this is a good fit. I’m where I am meant to be. I want to help every patient have the best experience possible, like I did.”

MaineGeneral Orthopaedics’ Comprehensive Spine Program connects people with back issues to the right health care professionals at the right time for the right treatment. Our care team evaluates and diagnoses spine problems, and designs and carries out a treatment plan tailored to each individual’s needs and lifestyle. Patients are part of the care team, helping staff understand their pain and participating in care decisions to help them achieve better outcomes.

Depending on their treatment plan, patients have the following care team members from the comprehensive spine program available to them:

- Nurses
- Orthopaedic Spine Surgeon
- Physiatrists (interventional procedures such as injections and nerve blocks)
- Physical Therapists (one-on-one physical therapy sessions, individualized home exercise program and education to help patients take an active role in their rehabilitation)
- Psychologist (to help manage emotions related to pain, build new coping skills and improve overall function and quality of life)
- Advanced Practice Providers (nurse practitioner, physician assistant)
- Medical Assistants

Coordinating this care team is Mary Beth as the spine nurse navigator. She reviews all referrals to determine patients’ next steps in care, based on an algorithm created by the surgeon, physiatrist and physical therapist.

“Some patients are surprised to learn that we don’t automatically recommend surgery,” she says. “We believe a multifaceted approach works best to help you get back to living as actively and pain-free as possible. Spine surgery can be an effective treatment for some patients’ spinal problems. However, we know it is not the solution for many patients, and we nearly always attempt conservative management before considering surgery.”



One of my favorite things is talking with patients after their procedures and hearing the improvement in their voices. This program makes a difference!

*Mary Beth Ranger, Spine and Osteoporosis Nurse Navigator*

If patients are appropriate for surgery, Dr. Clark meets with them individually to discuss the problem in detail until the patient fully understands it and is completely comfortable with the treatment plan. “Dr. Clark is very accessible if patients have concerns,” she adds.

Mary Beth also provides one-on-one preoperative education for these patients on what to expect before and after surgery. In addition, she coordinates needed wound care, pain control and communication with other care team members after surgery.

The Comprehensive Spine Program welcomes referrals from both medical professionals and patients who self-refer. Requesting the MaineGeneral Spine Program specifically in the referral will ensure Mary Beth receives the referral quickly.

“Many people are fearful because it’s their spine,” she says. “I certainly was! I tell people it’s worth a discussion to see what your options are. Call to discuss next steps or learn more about the program.”

Nurse navigators are at the heart of several service lines at MaineGeneral Orthopaedics, including shoulders, and total hips and knees. In addition to spine, Mary Beth is the osteoporosis nurse navigator.

“From the first interaction with a patient, it’s amazing how many people and processes are involved in making sure patients get the right care at the right time, in the right place,” says Philip Joseph, MaineGeneral’s director of surgical services. “The nurse navigators have very collaborative relationships with every member of the care team, including the surgeons. They make sure all the pieces fall into place before patients have treatment. It’s really something to watch and be proud of.”

To learn more about MaineGeneral’s Comprehensive Spine Program, call **207-621-8700** or visit [www.mainegeneral.org/spinal-surgery](http://www.mainegeneral.org/spinal-surgery). ✨





# Expanding Surgery

## at the Thayer Center for Health

Ten years ago, the Thayer Center for Health (TCH) in Waterville was transformed into Maine's most comprehensive outpatient center with a 24/7 emergency department, providing a one-stop experience for patients.

Since that time, surgeries performed at Thayer continue to grow, providing a range of benefits for both patients, Operating Room (OR) staff and surgeons.

Gail Labbe, RN, OR nurse manager at Thayer, has led her team through this transformation and growth.

"Because the focus is on non-urgent outpatient care, the goal is to provide safe, expedient care to our patients that will minimize disruption to their lives," Labbe says. "At the same time, this setting allows our surgeons to do surgery without interruptions to their schedules that can occur at an inpatient setting where emergencies and multiple service lines can impact the overall schedule."

Thayer OR, Surgery and Post-Anesthesia Care Unit (PACU) services are staffed with 45 full-time professionals.

Benefits to staff, according to Labbe, include predictable schedules, which is not common in inpatient facilities. "The schedule at Thayer is one not often found in nursing," Labbe explains. "For the most part, staff have weekends and holidays off with no night shifts. This makes it easier for them to manage their work/life balance."

MaineGeneral surgeons, most of whom spend a part of their time at Thayer, also find performing same-day surgeries at Thayer beneficial.

Medical Director of Surgery and orthopaedic surgeon John Thaller, MD, says, "At a full standing hospital there are trauma, C-section and emergency add-on cases every day that disrupt the normal OR schedule. At Thayer, none of this happens, so the schedule is more predictable."

Other surgeons note the expertise and compassion of the Thayer staff as a key benefit to patients and to their own satisfaction.



It would be impossible to provide adequate surgical services to our patients without Thayer.

*John Thaller, MD, Medical Director,  
MaineGeneral Surgery and  
orthopaedic surgeon*

"I look forward to every opportunity to operate at Thayer because I get to work with an exceptional group of people," says orthopaedic surgeon Ian Patten, MD. "I've worked at numerous large institutions in many major cities, and I would rank this group among the highest with regards to their patient care, knowledge, efficiency and compassion. I feel exceedingly fortunate that I am able to work with this group of people every week."



I know that, from the moment my patients walk in the door right up until they depart, they will receive the highest standard of care from an utterly stellar team.

— Ian Patten, MD,  
MaineGeneral Orthopaedic Surgeon

### Range of Surgeries Available at the Thayer Center for Health:

- The most current advanced technologies, including robot-assisted surgery
- General surgery, including robot-assisted hernia repairs
- Plastic surgery
- Orthopaedic surgery, including hand, ankle, podiatry, shoulder surgery, sports medicine, ACL reconstruction, arthroscopic surgery
- Gynecological surgery, including robot-assisted hysterectomy
- ENT (ear, nose and throat)
- Urology
- Ophthalmology, including cataract surgery, pediatric and adult eye muscle surgery

### Growth Expected to Continue

The Thayer OR is a critical part of MaineGeneral’s larger plan to increase surgery capacity in the Kennebec Valley, according to medical and administrative leaders.

“The goal is to improve access at both surgical locations,” Labbe says.

Dr. Thaller points to immediate plans of a 10 percent growth in surgical volume at Thayer in 2024 alone. Part of this is due to more surgeries that can be done appropriately at the same-day surgical facility.

Surgeon recruitment is also playing a part.

“We have hired four new surgeons who will join MaineGeneral in 2024 and all will be operating at Thayer,” Thaller says.

Labbe adds, “I’m excited about the future of surgical services at the TCH.”

## What Our Patients are Saying

All personnel went above and beyond. I received 110% personal care! Thank you for the excellence!

— Recent Same Day Surgery patient at the TCH

The team at Thayer once again hit it out of the park. The level of compassion they all show toward the patient is simply AMAZING.

— Recent Same Day Surgery patient at the TCH



# Virtual Visits:

Expanding

# Access

to a Range

of

# Health Care



Need access to health care quickly? Zoom appointments let you skip the waiting room.

MaineGeneral offers care in the comfort of your home through virtual visits.

We see patients virtually for a variety of needs, including:

- New-patient visits such as an initial visit with primary care;
- Annual wellness visits;
- Check-ins after a visit to the Emergency Department;
- Checking up after being discharged as an inpatient;
- Medication management;
- Mental health issues and follow-up; and
- Acute injuries or illnesses.

MaineGeneral outpatient practices had more than 1,000 virtual visits in January 2024.

More than half of these visits occurred with primary care medical staff, and a third were conducted for behavioral health services.

## Snapshot – Primary Care

While virtual care is available at all MaineGeneral primary care practices, Gardiner Family Medicine is the first to dedicate medical staff to seeing patients virtually, beginning with Meegan McCullagh, PA-C.

Two days each week, McCullagh works from home and conducts virtual visits with patients (pictured above).

Liz Mortimer, practice administrator for Gardiner Family Medicine, says the results have far exceeded expectations.

“We are alleviating a backlog in new patients getting to see their medical staff for first appointments,” Mortimer says.



We can see more patients efficiently with virtual visits, and we’ve been able to free up more staff and exam rooms in the office so we can see more patients here.

*Liz Mortimer, Practice Administrator, Gardiner Family Medicine*

In January alone, McCullagh saw 116 patients virtually, 64 of whom were new patients. In February, she saw 106 patients virtually, 95 of whom were new patients.

McCullagh enjoys being able to navigate patients through virtual visits and do the work remotely.

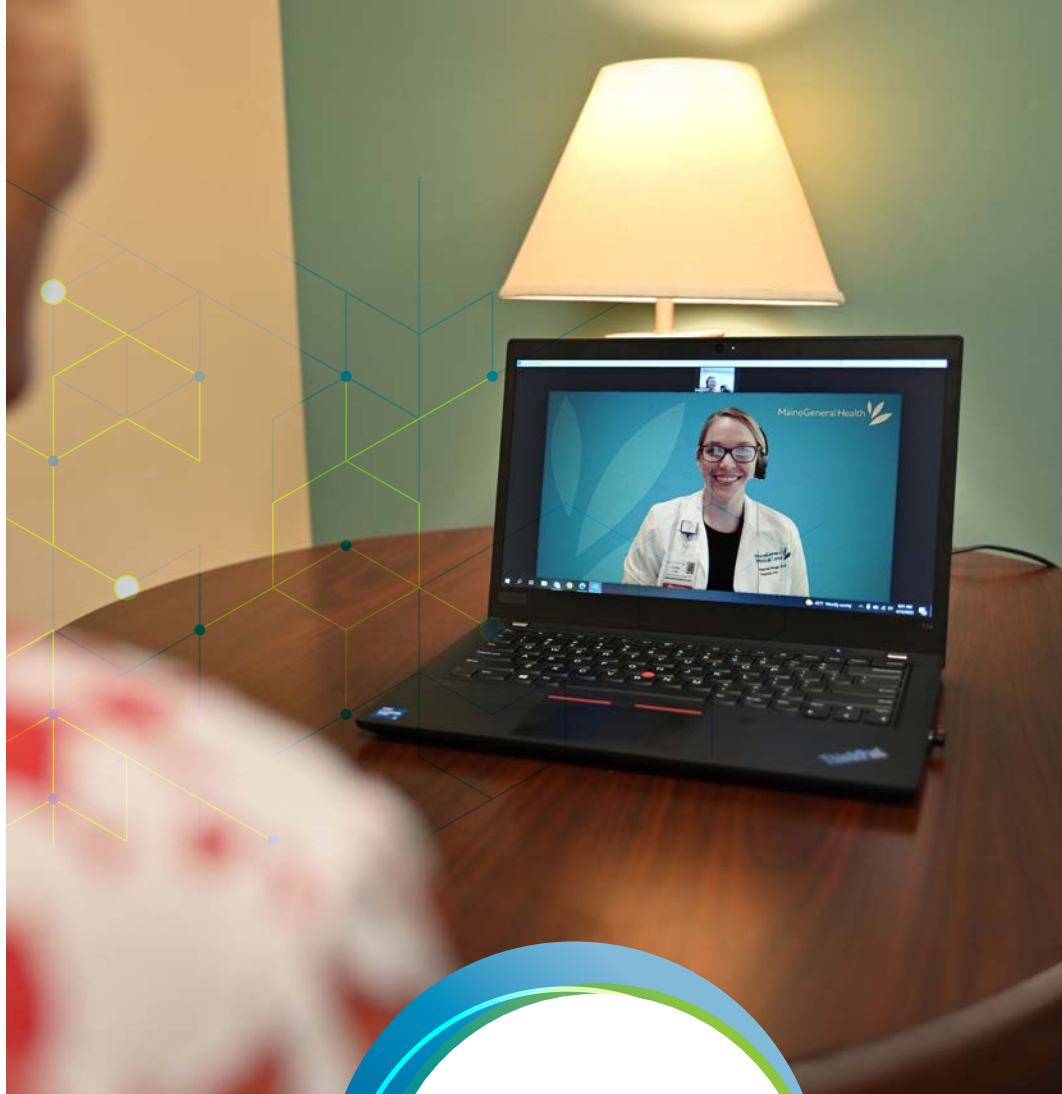
“Just eliminating the commute to and from work gives me more time,” she says. “I can take a run on my break, put in a load of laundry. It’s great for lifestyle balance.”

She also appreciates what virtual visits can offer patients for access. “I realized through doing more virtual visits just how many people have been waiting for that first visit with a medical staff member. For people with diabetes, for example, this option is really life-changing.”

“It works,” Mortimer says. “Medical staff are happy; patients are happy. It’s a real win-win.”

### Want a Virtual Visit?

Learn more about getting a Zoom appointment at [www.mainegeneral.org/zoom](http://www.mainegeneral.org/zoom) or by scanning the QR code. ↗



### Virtual visits are now offered for patients at:

- Primary Care Practices
- MaineGeneral Express Care
- Behavioral Health Services (including Assertive Community Treatment, Intensive Outpatient Services, Outpatient Counseling Services and Outpatient Psychiatry, Physiatry Behavioral Health Services)
- Edmund N. Ervin Pediatric Center
- Surgery (including general, plastic and bariatric surgery)
- Orthopaedics (including podiatry and osteoporosis services)
- Addiction Medicine
- Horizon (HIV & AIDS services)
- Maine Dartmouth Collaborative Care Center (functional medicine)
- Workplace Health
- Physiatry (psychology services)
- Allergy & Asthma



### Coming Soon!

- Surgery (ENT, Eye Center, Thoracic, Urology and Vascular)
- OB/GYN/Midwifery
- Palliative Care
- Dermatology
- Gastroenterology
- Sleep Clinic
- And more!



## What is a Hernia?

A hernia occurs when tissue pushes through an opening in the muscles of your abdomen or groin.



Excellence at Work

MaineGeneral Health



# Free Hernia Screening Events

Do you have pain and discomfort caused by a hernia? Join us at one of our quarterly hernia screening events!

Alternating between the Alford Center for Health in Augusta and the Thayer Center for Health in Waterville, MaineGeneral Surgery's free screening events can be your first step in returning to an active lifestyle!



These classes help you steer your own medical decision-making by being informed. MaineGeneral's program and discussion help take away the fear and mystery of hernias, and we also offer one-on-one interaction with a surgeon, where people can ask questions and then get the care they need.

*Leandra Jelinek, DO,  
MaineGeneral Surgery*

Come to a Hernia Screening Event if you:

- Suffer from chronic abdominal pain
- Have a bulge in the abdominal wall
- Cannot lift items
- Struggle with daily activities
- Have a feeling of heaviness or weakness in the groin

At the event, you will:

- Learn more about hernias
- See how hernias are detected
- Find treatment options, including robot-assisted surgery
- Receive a free hernia screening
- If desired, schedule your follow-up appointment

To register for any of MaineGeneral's classes and events, including our next free Hernia Screening Event, visit [www.mainegeneral.org/classes-events](http://www.mainegeneral.org/classes-events).

Did you know that, if you received great care at MaineGeneral, you can nominate staff members or whole department for an award?

We are proud of our staff and love to hear how they have made a difference in the lives of patients and family members. Here are a few of the many employees who received awards this past year.

Alison Paine, RN, received the DAISY Award, which is awarded to extraordinary nurses who consistently go above and beyond.

Alison is very knowledgeable, advocates for her patients on 3 West at the Alford Center for Health and is a team player. She is always one step ahead and can anticipate needs as she prepares for a hectic day on her always busy med/surg unit. She is thorough, kind and compassionate, as this nomination shows:

"My husband was hospitalized twice on 3 West. During his first stay, he had the privilege of having nurse Alison, who I found to be knowledgeable, caring and compassionate. He did not have Alison during his second stay, but she came to check on him. She even stopped by to visit with us and wish him luck before he was discharged. Her commitment was heart-warming.

Alison is a great nurse who we so appreciate for going above and beyond."

Joan Kheder, MD, MaineGeneral Gastroenterology, was recognized with MaineGeneral's Award-winning Exemplary Scholar



# Recognizing Our Amazing Team

of Medical Excellence (AWESOME) Award, which recognizes employed and non-employed medical staff (doctors, nurses, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, midwives and nurse anesthetists) for providing excellent care.

“Dr. Kheder has done so much for our GI patients,” one colleague wrote. “He consistently goes above and beyond to provide the best care. He stays late most nights to check in with patients and answer their questions. He is kind, dependable, caring and incredibly intelligent. Dr. Kheder advocates for his patients and truly cares about their well-being. He is dedicated to our patients, practice and the MaineGeneral organization. I’ve never worked with or witnessed a doctor as kind or caring as Dr. Kheder. He is so deserving of this recognition.”

Grace Dufour, certified nursing assistant (CNA), Physical Rehabilitation Unit, received MaineGeneral’s Pink Rose Award, which honors CNAs for their skills, compassion and caring. Grace is always a positive influence on her environment, smiling and laughing easily. She sees the good in both her patients and coworkers. She gives everyone the respect, care and understanding they deserve, even when things get tough. She is a truly beautiful person inside and out!



Here’s what a family member said about Grace:

“My mom was brought to the Emergency Department and transferred to the Physical Rehabilitation Unit. Grace put me at ease with her kind and professional manner. She put a human face on MaineGeneral and she did so with sincerity and commitment.”

Rebecca Burns, QA coordinator, Health Information Systems (HIS), consistently models dignity, professionalism and respect in the workplace. Her interactions with colleagues, especially medical staff, reflect a commitment to maintaining a positive and respectful atmosphere, even in the face of challenging circumstances. She is an effective communicator who is inclusive and empathetic. She works collaboratively to address concerns and actively find solutions to challenges, ensuring patient care remains a top priority.

Becky recently received MaineGeneral’s Exemplary MaineGeneral Model Employee (EMME) Award, which recognizes high-performing staff for consistent exceptional commitment, resilience and leadership, as well as her unwavering dedication to MaineGeneral’s mission and values, set a standard for excellence within our health care system.



MaineGeneral’s Print Shop team (Rick Thibodeau, Frank Arbour and Ken Pottle) is the definition of Excellence at Work. Their expertise, responsiveness, outstanding customer service, dedication and attention to detail ensure MaineGeneral is always represented,

both internally and externally, with professionalism and class. This small but mighty three-person team works long hours to make sure every department throughout the MGH system has what they need when they need it. Their skills and abilities are far-reaching, from printing pamphlets, clings, booklets, envelopes, scratch pads, patient reminders, transportation vouchers, banners, and SO much more! They are always available when we need them – ready to help with the utmost creativity and flexibility. MaineGeneral’s Excellence at Work Award recognizes any employee or team that goes above and beyond to provide the best care and service to patients, families, coworkers and the community. Our Print Shop team is incredibly deserving of this award and recognition.

MaineGeneral is proud of its many employees throughout the Kennebec Valley region who strive daily to provide exceptional, patient-centered care for you and your loved ones. If you have received great care at MaineGeneral and want to nominate a caregiver or team for an award, please visit [www.mainegeneral.org/awards](http://www.mainegeneral.org/awards).



# Welcome, New Medical Staff



Meet Cassandra “Casey” Sanko, MD, a fellowship-trained shoulder and elbow surgeon who specializes in treating both operative and non-operative injuries and chronic conditions affecting the shoulder, upper arm and elbow. She joined MaineGeneral Orthopaedics in September 2023.

After graduating in 2017 from Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, Dr. Sanko completed her orthopaedic residency, and shoulder and elbow surgery fellowship, at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital/ Rothman Orthopedic Institute in Philadelphia in 2022 and 2023, respectively.

A Pennsylvania native, she and her husband moved to Maine during the summer of 2023.

“I wanted to work where I could specialize in shoulder and elbow surgery, and we wanted to live somewhere with easy access to the outdoor activities we like to do. This was the perfect fit,” she says. “I love that I can enjoy the coast, go hiking or snowboarding, or explore different downtown areas with shops and restaurants all within an hour’s drive.”

Part of staying healthy for her is staying active. “I wake up early to squeeze in a workout before heading to the office or to the OR,” she says.

Outside of work, she enjoys snowboarding, hiking, kayaking, reading, spending time with family and friends and watching Philadelphia sports.

Asked what brings her joy at work, she says, “Seeing patients return to hobbies or sports after I’ve treated an injury or chronic problem. I also have amazing teams in the office and OR.”

Learn more about Dr. Sanko and other members of MaineGeneral’s medical staff at

[www.mainegeneral.org/  
find-a-doctor](http://www.mainegeneral.org/find-a-doctor). ↘

Eighty-three full- and part-time medical staff joined MaineGeneral in the past year, and we are pleased to welcome them to our team and community. Their knowledge, skills and experience add to the depth and breadth of care and service we are proud to provide.

## Addiction Medicine

Thomas Vatisas, AGACNP  
*MaineGeneral Addiction Medicine*

## Anesthesiology

Derek Bunch, DO  
Bryan Carter, MD  
Gissell Maquoit, MD  
Natasha Moody, CRNA  
*Kennebec Anesthesia Associates*

## Cancer Care and Hematology

David Adler, MD  
Erin Dauchy, DO  
Sariah Liu, MD  
Neil Majithia, MD  
*Harold Alford Center for Cancer Care*

## Cardiology

Lynn Bowden, FNP-C  
Heather McDaniel Miller, PA-C  
*MaineGeneral Cardiology Department*

Alycia Allen, NP  
Robert Bender, DO  
Jonathan Halevy, MD  
Pierre Morneault, PA  
*MaineHealth Cardiology*

## Chest Medicine

Samuel Bado, DO  
*Chest Medicine Associates*

## Dermatology

Angela Wo, MD  
*Maine Dartmouth Dermatology*

## Emergency Medicine

Mason Bosse, PA-C  
George Louka, MD (fellow)  
E Chin Mak, MD  
Josee Proulx, MD  
Katherine Russell Scholp, MD (fellow)  
Viviam Trejo, MD (fellow)  
*Alfond Center for Health (ACH) and  
Thayer Center for Health (TCH)*

## Express Care

Leah Drapeau, PA-C  
Karen Dunn, FNP-C  
Kiley Knapp, FNP-C  
*MaineGeneral Express Care*

## Family Medicine

Katelyn Bolduc, FNP-C  
*Oakland Family Medicine*  
Eric Caccamo, DO  
*Great Oak Family Medicine*  
Travis Chapin, PA-C  
*Winthrop Family Medicine*  
Kate Dorsey-Bernstein, FNP  
*FMI*  
Bridgett Fisher, FNP  
*Waterville Family Practice*  
Hannah Folk, PA-C  
*Great Oak Family Medicine*  
Dana Hallisey, FNP-C  
*Gardiner Family Medicine*  
Jeffrey LaRue, PMHNP-BC  
*Augusta Family Medicine*  
Colin Lucas, PA-C  
*Gardiner Family Medicine*  
Nora Mills, AGACNP-BC  
*Thayer Internal Medicine*  
Kristin Patterson, DO  
*Augusta Family Medicine*  
Brett Powers, MD  
*FMI*  
Jocelin Reatiraza, MD  
*Oakland Family Medicine*  
Michael Ripley, MD  
*Waterville Family Practice*  
Sierra Sirois, PA-C  
*Gardiner Family Medicine*

Katelyn Staring, MD  
*Maine Dartmouth Family Practice*  
Tracey Thornton, PMHNP-BC  
*Elmwood Primary Care*

## General Surgery

Jaina Gandhi, PA-C  
Leandra Jelinek, DO  
Christina Tuchsien, AGACNP-BC  
*MaineGeneral Surgery*

## Hospitalists

Breanna Glynn, DO  
Caroline Lombardo, MD  
Lauren Novitskie, MD  
Renee Violette, AGACNP-BC  
Alexander Wharton, PA-C  
*Adult Hospitalist Service*  
Erin Flynn, MD  
Efrat Lelkes, MD  
*Pediatric Hospitalist Service*

Jacob Leidholm, FNP-BC  
Kelli Kinane, PA  
*Hospitalist Fellow*

## Infectious Disease

Kenneth Delker, FNP-C  
*Infectious Disease Medicine*

## Midwifery Services

Rebecca Sucey, CNM  
*MaineGeneral Midwifery Services*

## Neurology

Alexa Craig, MD  
*Maine Medical Partners Neurology*

## Neuromusculoskeletal Manipulative Medicine

Crissandra Digges, DO (fellow)  
Holly Wadman Gwozdz, DO (fellow)  
Alecia Lentz, DO (fellow)  
Thomas Pentzer, DO (fellow)  
*Maine-Dartmouth Family Medicine  
Residency*

## Ophthalmology

Patrick Rapuano, MD  
*MaineGeneral Eye Center*

## Orthopaedics

Brooke Heathco, PA-C  
Brian Loring, DPM  
Casey Sanko, MD  
*MaineGeneral Orthopaedics*

## Pediatrics

Matthew Mason, DO  
Haley Pelletier, DO  
*Kennebec Pediatrics*

## Psychiatry

Lori Howard, PMHNP-BC  
Clair Sulerzyski, MD  
Andre Trzaskowski, DO  
*Inpatient Psychiatry*  
Natalie Keller, DNP, PMHNP  
*Inpatient/Outpatient Psychiatry*

## Pulmonary/Critical Care

Spencer Lefebvre, PA-C  
Nicole Letendre, AGACNP  
Chad Merrill, AGACNP-BC  
Bethany Tyburski, AGACNP-BC  
*MaineGeneral Pulmonary*

## Radiology

Matthew Moccia, MD  
*Radiology Alliance of Maine*

## Rheumatology

Erik O'Connell, DO  
*MaineGeneral Rheumatology*

## Sports Medicine

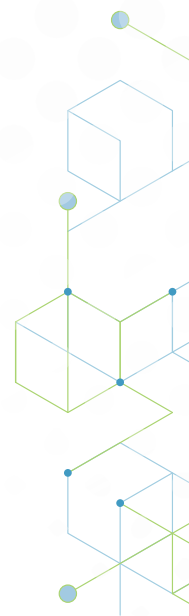
Kevin Connolly, DO (fellow)  
James Poulin, MD (fellow)  
*Maine Dartmouth Sports Medicine  
Fellowship Program*

## Vascular Surgery

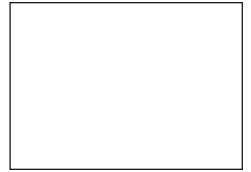
Kristina Giles, MD  
*Maine Medical Partners Vascular  
Surgery*

## Wound Healing/Hyperbarics

Margaret Chapin, ANP-C  
Rocco Ciocca, MD  
*MaineGeneral Wound Healing &  
Hyperbaric Medicine*







## High-Quality, Patient-Centered Care, Delivered by Our Expert Surgical Teams

