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## Survival skills

### Programs join forces to boost ecology education

By Gillian Graham  
Staff Writer

Moments after their pretend plane made an emergency landing near Ferry Beach, a group of campers set to work building a shelter to protect them from the elements.

Bustling through a sunny clearing, eight young campers gathered sticks and leaves to build a lean-to next to a tarp they strung between trees. The campers laughed frequently while they constructed a structure similar to forts they build while they play outside.

"This is fun," said 6-year-old Andrew Marcotte of Biddeford as he made a "bed" of leaves in the shelter.

The hands-on lesson was designed to teach Ferry Beach Ecology School April vacation camp participants survival skills while celebrating a new partnership designed to increase access to ecology education programs for Maine students.

Environmental Living and Learning for Maine Students, or the ELLMS project, was formed by four competing nonprofit environmental education programs in response to the economic challenges that face public schools across the state. Ferry Beach Ecology School in Saco joined the project with Chewonki Outdoor Classroom for Schools in Wiscasset, UMaine 4-H Camp and Learning Center at Bryant Pond and UMaine 4-H Camp and Learning Center at Tanglewood in Lincolnville.

The goal of the project is to encourage students to develop a lifelong commitment to environmental sustainability and stewardship, outdoor exercise and recreation, good nutrition, community building and civic engagement through positive, nature-based activities and lessons. The program also helps students understand the connection between natural resources and the economy so they will be better prepared to participate in the "green" economy.

The new program was celebrated April 22 with an Earth Day exchange of staff members from the four programs. Ryder Scott, project spokesman, and Bryant Pond program director, offered a workshop on survivor skills to students at Ferry Beach Ecology School. The students were part of an April vacation camp for children in kindergarten through seventh grade.

Scott said the goal of all involved with ELLMS is to provide more opportunities for Maine students to attend residential programs to learn about the world around them.

"We noticed over the past several years with school budgets shrinking that collaboration would be necessary to make this opportunity available to Maine students," he said.

Many schools have no choice but to eliminate field trips at a time when administrators struggle to fund programs, Scott said. Maine public schools will be able to apply for grants to attend residential environmental education programs through the ELLMS financial aid fund.

"We're hoping the scholarship funds will help fund, if not 100 percent, at least a school reaching the tipping point to be able to go," Scott said.



Above, Gaia Ayres, 7, of Saco, tries out a shelter she and other campers built during a survival skills lesson at Ferry Beach Ecology School. At left, Ryder Scott helps Ayres, left, and Sadie Gray make a shelter. (Gillian Graham photos)

The ELLMS Project Steering Committee currently is asking businesses and foundations to donate money for the initiative. The Bangor Savings Bank Foundation was the first to help fund the project.

"Investing in a program that celebrates

Maine's natural resources and improves quality of life in the communities we serve is a great investment for us," said Carol Colson, senior vice president and director of community relations and

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## What's next for racino?

### Proponents want legislative changes while opponents ask for statewide vote

By Gillian Graham  
Staff Writer

AUGUSTA — Supporters of the proposed Biddeford Downs racino on Monday asked state legislators to make "simple changes" to move the project forward and support the harness racing industry.

Opponents, however, urged lawmakers to put the issue to a statewide vote in November. They say any expansion of gambling in Maine should be decided by voters.

The Legislature's Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee heard about five hours of testimony on two bills that would increase the number of gambling facilities in Maine from two to five. The committee will recommend the Legislature either adopt the bills into law or put them on the November ballot for a statewide referendum.

One of the bills, LD 1203, allows a racino in Biddeford and a racino run by the Passamaquoddy Tribe in Washington County. A second bill, LD 985, would allow a slot machine facility in Bates Mill No. 5 in Lewiston. Both bills were brought to the Legislature through the citizens' initiative process of gathering signatures and qualify for the November ballot.

A work session on the bills has not been scheduled.

The proposed Biddeford Downs project, approved by Biddeford voters in November, would move Scarborough Downs to the city and create a racino and hotel complex. The \$120 million project would create 800 construction jobs, 500 full-time jobs and provide tax money for the city and state, according to project developers and city officials.

The Biddeford Downs project cannot move forward without changes to state law. Voters in 2003 approved racinos near existing harness racing tracks in Bangor and Scarborough with a tight deadline to

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# May Day!

## A favorite spring celebration returns to Saco

By Gillian Graham  
Staff Writer

A nearly forgotten Saco tradition will be reborn this Sunday to celebrate spring.

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Saco and Biddeford will host a May Day Festival Sunday to celebrate May Day, Earth Day and Beltane, an ancient Celtic feast celebrated May 1. The event revives the May Fair, which was held in Saco from around 1840 to 1964.

The May Day Festival will be 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. at 60 School St. in Saco.

Anne Dobson, archivist for the church, said the May Fair began at a time when the city allowed each church to use the city hall auditorium one weekend each month. The church, then known as Second Parish Unitarian, started the festival on the first weekend in May.

"It consisted usually of a dance, a play, a supper and a bazaar," Dobson said. "The May Fair was a really big deal."

Church member Tarik Sivonen said the original maypole used during the festival was stored in the church basement. After using it with religious education classes, interest in the tradition developed into organizing a festival.

"I've always been interested in having a May Day celebration," he said.

Sivonen said the festival will include cooperative games, celebratory spring crafts, maypole dancing and enactments from the Middle Ages. An area will be set up

for dogs to join in the festivities, he said.

The documentary "Vanishing of the Bees" will be shown in the sanctuary at 3 p.m. The documentary discusses the disappearance of honeybees from beehives around the world.

Dobson said some church and community members still remember attending the festival. Marguerite Clark Gardner of Hollis shared her memories of the festival for a church history project. Gardner, whose birthday is in early May, recalled sitting in the city hall balcony watching the festivities and thinking "how wonderful it was the whole town came to her birthday party," Dobson said.

Church records show the festival was the highlight of the church year, Dobson said. A 1963 program for the 120<sup>th</sup> festival lists events such as music, a play, coronation parade, dances and maypole braiding. Booths featured baked goods, fortune telling, candy, gifts and balloons.

Profits from the fair were given to the Social Circle, a women's club. In 1918, profits were donated to the Red Cross, according to church financial records.

Dobson said she is looking forward to helping children make May baskets during the festival.

"I think it's a wonderful idea for any community to celebrate warmer weather," she said.

For more information, call 282-0062 or go to [www.uuchurchsacobiddeford.com](http://www.uuchurchsacobiddeford.com).

Staff Writer Gillian Graham can be reached at 282-4337, ext. 213.

## Ecology

Continued from page 1

communications at the bank, in a prepared statement.

Scott said he believes students benefit when they attend one of the four education programs for an "immersion experience." Students stay at the programs overnight, eat in dining halls and participate in lessons and community-building activities.

"It's leading to better ability to focus and better ability to get along in a group," Scott said. "We engage and inspire kids to learn about ecology and science."

Maureen Duggan, associate director of Ferry Beach Ecology School, said organizers have tried to find different sources of revenue to help schools that have eliminated field trips.

"Our goal is really to be able to get every Maine child at some point to a residential environmental education program," she said. "They get a lot more than a one-day field trip because they're living what they're learning."

For more information, go to [www.ellms.org](http://www.ellms.org). Anyone interested in financially supporting the program should call Lucy Hull at 882-7323, ext. 127.

Staff Writer Gillian Graham can be reached at 282-4337, ext. 213.

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