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New businesses help to revitalize Lubec

Beautifying project helps create serene getaway in the country's easternmost town



BANGOR DAILY NEWS PHOTO BY SHARON KILEY MACK

The amazing sunset at Lubec's harbor on Cobscook Bay is just one of the many reasons visitors are coming to this easternmost town in the U.S. New restaurants, lodging and services are attracting visitors and raising the bar for existing ones. [Buy Photo](#)



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Surrounded on three sides by water, Lubec's balmy sea breezes caress visitors as they enjoy the natural beauty of the easternmost town in the country. Seals and eagles play in the narrows, and the chug-chug-chug of a fishing boat motor offers background music.

But until recently, choices of lodging, meals and shopping were limited.

A former sardine packing village, Lubec still has its roots deep in the fishing industry — the harbor is filled with draggers, not pleasure boats — but over the past several years, it has been undergoing a renaissance of sorts.

New restaurants, refurbished storefronts, a new tour and sightseeing business along with the town's commitment to beautify and preserve its

historic waterfront have combined to make the destination even more attractive and comfortable.

David and Julie Clay of Ohio were quick to notice the changes this week. This is their second visit to Lubec, their first being about five years ago.

“I can really see the difference,” David Clay said. “It seems much busier and perkier.”

Julie Clay said it was the “breathtaking beauty” that brought the couple back to Lubec, yet she said she was delighted to see new restaurants and development.

“I would like a few more little stores,” she added.

Carl Larkin at Dianne’s Glass Gallery was minding the store while his wife worked in her studio, creating 20 stained-glass windows for a renovation project.

“Five years ago, we wouldn’t have had this order,” Larkin said. “As far as I’m concerned, the more new businesses, the merrier.”

Shirley Brown at the Atlantic House, which specializes in deli foods, pastries and baked goods, said she has seen a big difference in the number of customers this season.

“The more businesses you have, the more you attract customers,” she said.

A walk down the main street — aptly named Water Street — brings visitors to a park and the historic McCurdy’s herring smokehouse, Mulholland Market Gallery, a hardware store, a chocolatier, a glass artist, the town library, a yarn and pet shop, a local watering hole, an Irish pub and restaurant, and two new restaurants that opened this spring.

“It’s been a drastic shift,” Cassie Kinney at Northern Tides gift shop said. “We are now getting a lot of international visitors. They are drawn to the Summerkeys music program, the lighthouses and the natural beauty.”

People are attracted to the quiet of Lubec, Brown said, not the hustle and bustle of other tourist destinations, such as Bar Harbor. “They like to sit on the deck and watch the seals play in the narrows.”

Jim and Judy Heyer of the recently opened Water Street Tavern and Inn agreed.

“It’s the peace and serenity here,” Jim Heyer said.

The couple came to Lubec on vacation in 2001 and have never taken a vacation anywhere else. They began renovating their restaurant in 2008 and opened this spring.

“If you get to know the Down East people and let them get to know you, they are the last pioneers,” Heyer said. “They hold multiple jobs trying to eke by. They are hard, tough, enduring people.”

Right next door to Water Street Tavern is the recently opened Frank’s Restaurant, where the menu features veal and other Italian specialties.

“Having two new restaurants this season has created a spark of friendly competition,” Heyer said. “It forces us all to kick it up a notch.”

Heyer said the town “has made the turn with the new restaurants. What we need now is more retail. We won’t ever be a Bar Harbor, though, with bars and T-shirt shops every 20 feet. This is a town, a gathering place.”

Overlooking the harbor, Cohill’s is an example of that gathering spirit.

Jack and Ellen Gearren operate the inn and restaurant, having relocated from New Jersey.

“Sometimes I stop with a cup of coffee and look out there at that view and say ‘Wow. How did I end up here in this paradise?’” Jack Gearren said.

Watching the new developments downtown, Gearren said he is optimistic.

“It’s exciting to see people commit to business ventures here,” he said. “When you give people choices, the town will thrive.”

Gearren said if someone comes to Lubec, “we can’t let them leave.”

Innkeepers and restaurateurs work together to make sure visitors’ stays are top notch. When both Cohills and the Eastland Motel were full a few nights ago, Gearren called around to help some tourists find a room in a local bed and breakfast.

Many of the vendors use local products and direct tourists to those other businesses frequently.

“When they say they love our salmon pate, I send them to Vinnie [at Bold Coast Smoke House],” Gearren said.

Yet visitors should no longer be surprised to discover a chef from Manhattan creating in a Lubec kitchen, Heyer said.

Heyer said that any future development along Water Street is likely to come from “people from away. That is the reality.”

But Lubec will always remain a village, Gearren said.

“It is just that kind of an area, where people can decompress, reconnect and just hang out,” he said.