

# The Climate Chronicles

December 2023 - Making a long-term commitment to organizational sustainability

## "Growing" is a big part of his work

**Therapeutic Garden contributes to well-being of staff and patients, and helps the environment**

If you spend any time in or around Northern Light Acadia Hospital, odds are good you will run across Shane "Mack" McPherson. Mack is a big presence here and has a passion for the work he does as Lead Psychiatric Technician for Acadia's Pediatric Day



Treatment (PDT) program. A "growing" part of the work he does is managing the hospital's therapeutic garden which was started seven years ago by a previous employee. Mack first became involved with the garden about five years ago when the founder moved on to another opportunity.

Knowing little to nothing about gardening, Mack took on the challenge and hasn't looked back since. The garden is "touching lives" and offers hands-on opportunities for kids (and staff) to learn and practice lessons in self-sufficiency, emotional regulation, stewardship of our planet, problem-solving, safety, and giving to the community. Kids develop a stronger sense of community and can take food or seedlings home to their families. There is a benefit for staff also, as exposure to nature has proven to reduce employee burnout. The garden currently has 13 raised beds that can be used for sensory experiences, herbs, flowers for bees, and to raise food. No chemicals are used and food and paper waste is collected and produces 80-120 pounds of compost a year. (cont. on page 2)

## A voice at the table

Tim Doak, vice president, Facilities, Sustainability, and Supply Chain has been nominated to serve on the Community Resilience Workgroup of the Maine Climate Council, to develop community resiliency goals and strategies as part of an update to the "Maine Won't Wait" climate action plan. We are proud to have Tim represent us as a voice at the table.

## Passion for food and sustainability



**Making the environment a priority while feeding patients, employees and visitors!**

When Max Brody came on board as the director of Dining Services at Mercy Hospital, he made it clear from the start that he wanted to make changes to lessen the environmental effect of operations at the cafeteria and inpatient dining.

With the support of leadership and staff, he began exploring more environmentally friendly alternatives, like replacing some of the traditional single-use plastic food packaging in his department. His storage shelves are now stocked with a variety of to-go containers, including leak-proof boxes, clamshell containers, and soup cups made from plant-based paperboard. There are clear plastic containers that look like the 'same old thing', but Max has been able to source alternatives made from corn-based plastic for several uses. Paper straws are used for cold cafeteria drinks, and individually packaged plant-based cutlery is kept on hand for patient use. (cont. on page 2)

"We are the first generation to feel the impact of climate change and the last generation that can do something about it.."

- Barack Obama

# Reusable Containers Reduce Emissions

## The numbers behind the red boxes



The red containers used for reusable sharps you see in clinical offices make a difference in reducing emissions. Using reusable containers over the span of one year at Northern Light Health has avoided the production of an estimated 80,588 pounds of greenhouse gases when compared to what single-use containers would have produced. This is the equivalent of greenhouse gases

that would have come from 91,844 miles driven in an average passenger vehicle, or the carbon dioxide emissions from 4,113 gallons of consumed gasoline. By using reusable containers rather than single-use containers, greenhouse gas emissions are reduced, and the landfill disposal of single use containers are avoided, including the disposal of their cardboard packaging.

## The Breakdown on Boxes

### Conserving Resources Comes Natural to Josh Lapierre

Josh Lapierre noticed an uptick in shipping when COVID hit as he started packing up monitors and PCs for remote workers on a regular basis. Josh is a technology support specialist for Optum, and he noticed shipping boxes and materials were at a premium. To conserve resources, he would scurry to get boxes from the recycle bin and save every little piece of packing material in inventory. This effort has saved hundreds of dollars on shipping costs, especially when Josh could find a box large enough for a full remote setup. Josh is a snowmobile enthusiast who will reuse trail signs when he sees them on the ground, so this type of thinking comes natural to him.



## "Therapeutic Garden" continued from page 1



This year's growing season may be over but exciting things are in the works. Plans include an expanded composting area, reconfigured growing spaces, a greenhouse, and an indoor garden. A particularly exciting project is an expanded composting program to include three bays to allow for optimal rotation and dramatically expanded production. There is also the potential for a 40% plus reduction in food waste along with accompanied cost savings. Prompt waste removal and proper compost management will minimize concerns regarding pests and odor. Mack notes that a system will be in place to ensure the busy Dietary staff are not burdened with additional responsibilities. Northern Light Blue Hill Hospital has a composting program, and their director of Dietary Services has provided valuable input. The program is entirely funded by generous support from local individuals and businesses. Donations of items such as reusable grocery bags, pots, and tarps have been more than welcome!

## "Feeding Patients" continued from page 1

In addition, Max has sought to limit departmental use of individual plastic packets of condiments and other food items where possible. He partners with a local vendor to compost food waste. Max is continuing to investigate greener options, including alternatives to water bottled in plastic, and is on the hunt for the elusive sustainable flexible drinking straw. Thanks, Max, and the whole team at Mercy Dining Services for everything you do to make the environment a priority while feeding patients, employees, and visitors!



Have something to share?



Do you have a story or resource you'd like to share with the team?

Send all information to [bespeed@northernlight.org](mailto:bespeed@northernlight.org) to be included in the next newsletter.