

University of Maine Business School Graduate Student Assists Camden Opera House in Planning for Financial Sustainability

The Maine Business School has a long tradition of community outreach. MBS Professor John Mahon said graduate students provided consulting services to 11 different organizations throughout Maine and to four firms in Germany last year both through his class on Entrepreneurial Management and during the international field trip he led.

The Camden Opera House was one of the organizations that received help from MBS after Camden's Development Director Brian Hodges, a UMaine graduate himself, contacted Hugh Stevens from the Knowledge Transfer Alliance (KTA). The KTA, located at the University of Maine, is an initiative to help Maine communities and businesses overcome and prevent hardships caused by the economic recession. Stevens connected Hodges with the MBS.

Camden Opera House Manager Kerry Hadley sought ways to continue to grow the Opera House without further stressing the limited staffing now in place, and to pursue ways to reduce the towns budget subsidy. Working with MBA student David Denton '13, Hadley said she was extremely pleased with the assistance Maine Business School provided.

"David presented creative and helpful recommendations," said Hadley, who included a few of his ideas in her annual budget. She plans to use the report which researched contributed income amounts at other venues in New England to help steer the Opera House's strategic planning. "He listened carefully to the needs of the town, performed thorough research and completed his work in a timely supportive and professional manner," Hadley said. "He provided an overview and depth of study on the arts industry and our role in it that we never would have had the resources to be able to complete ourselves."

For his part, Denton said he enjoyed the real-life project. "To my surprise, I learned that there really is no such thing as a profitable small town opera house and that they all tend to rely on an average subsidy of at least 50%," he said. "I decided it would be best for the Camden Opera House to shift the focus from earned revenue streams to contributed ones and suggested that it create an endowment and devote more time and money to marketing and fundraising and to bring on additional staff.

"The experience taught me that in a consulting relationship, sometimes the question being asked isn't necessarily the one that needs to be answered!" he continued. "I also learned about the social and economic value that arts can bring to a community. The town has identified economic development as a priority, and after my research, I can say I don't see any project more worthwhile than funding the Opera House to continue to sustain and increase downtown vitality and investment. "

Other Maine businesses that called on MBS for assistance in 2012 were: AC Lobster, Eastport; Grandy Oats, Brownfield; Kappa Mapping, Bangor; Label Top Software, Portland; Lighthouse Lobster, Eastport; Old Oak Farm, Maxfield; Rainwise, Bar Harbor; Snapspace Solutions, Brewer; and VMS, Caribou. In Germany, students worked with Areva Wind, Bosch-Siemens Hausgerate, Google Europe and Carl Zeiss.

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