

CONCORD

Maker of ski groomers moves to city

Italian company takes over former Concord Sports Center site for sales, parts and service

By **DAVID BROOKS**
Monitor staff

Batting cages and artificial turf have been replaced by 25,000-pound machines and mechanical parts by the thousands in Concord as a major provider of snow groomers has moved here.

Prinoth, an Italian manufacturer of snow-grooming machines that lists virtually every ski mountain in the state as a customer, moved this

summer into the site formerly used by Concord Sports Center, after 18 years in Gilmanton. The space on Whitney Road near Exit 17 is used for parts, service and sales.

“We basically doubled our space. It’s a convenient location right off the highway,” said Mark Palmateer, eastern regional manager for Prinoth, of the move into 23,000 square feet in an industrial building. Another advantage: It already had rails installed to hold a 5-ton overhead crane, useful for pulling engines and other parts from the massive snow machines during repairs or installations.

SEE **GROOMERS A3**



Prinoth’s biggest groomers can cost a half-million dollars while smaller machines for grooming local trails run into the low six figures.

GEOFF FORESTER
Monitor staff

HOMELESSNESS

Winter shelter set to open

Smaller space with less capacity expected this year

By **MICHAELA TOWFIGHI**
Monitor staff

The Concord Coalition to End Homelessness winter shelter will open Monday, providing a nighttime reprieve for people experiencing homelessness through March.

The shelter will return to the coalition’s site at 238 N. Main Street in the small building behind the resource center. With 20 bunk beds, there will be room for 40 individuals each night.

The shelter is open from 6 p.m. to 7 a.m. The nightly hours coincide with meals at the Friendly Kitchen, where dinner is served until 5:45 p.m. and breakfast begins at 8 a.m.

Often during winter months, the combination of the coalition’s Resource Center, the Friendly Kitchen’s meal times and the emergency winter shelter hours provide a patchwork of warm indoor spaces.

For the last two years, the coalition operated the shelter out of the First Congregational Church across the street, which it purchased in 2020 to provide more room for social distancing during the pandemic.

When the nonprofit initially purchased the church, it hoped to eventually convert it into apartments to provide permanent supportive housing for clients. However, the cost of doing so proved too high, and the building was sold to developers earlier this year for a \$5 million renovation that will create 33 market-rate

SEE **SHELTER A2**

ENERGY

NH Saves efficiency program returns

By **DAVID BROOKS**
Monitor staff

Two years after the Public Utilities Commission surprised many by virtually killing the long-standing NH Saves program that spurs energy efficiency in New Hampshire, it has reinstated the program. But only, it seems, because lawmakers made them.

“The legislature basically painted the PUC into a corner, and the PUC to its credit read and correctly understood the statute and responded correctly. From my point of view that is a good thing,” said Don Kreis, the state’s consumer advocate, who was sharply critical of the PUC’s 2021 decision that gutted the program known as NH Saves.

In an order released Thursday,

SEE **ENERGY A3**



ABOUT THE SERIES

Each week, the ‘Concord Monitor’ will recognize one of our region’s many Hometown Heroes. Follow along at concordmonitor.com and learn how you can nominate a Hometown Hero.



GEOFF FORESTER / Monitor staff

Dance therapist Heather Bigelow Hearne teaches a music and movement class Friday at the Blueberry Express Day Care Center in Pittsfield.

In tune with changing needs

Heather Bigelow Hearne teaches the power of music and dance to unlock potential

By **RAY DUCKLER**
Monitor staff

Lyne Sabien of Hopkinton, a grant writer at the Concord Community Music School, began working there less than six months ago.

That was enough time, however, to gauge the value Heather Bigelow Hearne brought to the company.

“She genuinely makes everyone she encounters feel like they’re the most important

person in the world,” Sabien wrote in an email to the Monitor. “She continually thinks of ways to expand her programs to other venues to better serve Merrimack County.”

Her admiration made it easy for Sabien to nominate Hearne as the next Hometown Hero, even though they first crossed paths in June.

Hopkinton’s Hearne is the dance movement therapist at the CCMS, incorporating music, song and dance to reach inside and unlock potential and confidence and focus while working with various age groups, from children, some

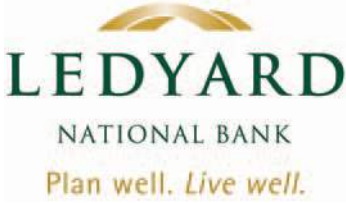
with special needs, to the elderly.

She’s doubled as the dance director at First Church in Hopkinton for six years and is identified as the Sacred Dance Director.

She says the human body can be used as a tool to aid with anxiety, trauma, “anything that has to do with cognitives, emotional, physical fitness, behavioral and social development,” Hearne said.

Instead of a student replying with the usual,

SEE **HOMETOWN HEROES A3**



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INSIDE



CLOSE-UP
METEOR SHOWER IS ON ITS WAY
Page B6

Classifieds	B3	KenKen	B4
Close-Up	B6	Nation&World	A4
Comics	B5	Opinion	A5
Crosswords	B4, B5	Sports	B1
Dear Abby	B5	Sudoku	B4



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In tune with changing needs

HOMETOWN HEROES FROM A1

low-decibel “fine” when asked about their feelings, “They can express themselves and know that mad and sad are okay,” Hearne said. “They interact. They make eye contact.”

Hearne grew up in Surry, just outside of Keene. She attended a three-room schoolhouse. Her mother was a singer and dancer and also directed musicals. The two performed together in shows like ‘The King and I,’ and ‘The Sound of Music.’ Hearne played the title character in ‘Alice in Wonderland,’ directed by her mother.

“I grew up dancing all the time,” Hearne said.

Her father taught her about woodworking and car engines, creating a singer and dancer who didn’t mind get-

ting her hands dirty.

She’s worked at the CCMS for 23 years, since around the time the facility more than doubled in size, to 23,000 square feet, and added teachers’ studios, larger ensemble rooms, a percussion room and a recording studio.

Hearne’s role is helping people to grow through her music and dance. She’s contracted out to various organizations, such as Merrimack Valley Daycare, Beaver Meadow School, Millbrook School and Pleasant View Retirement Center.

Clients pay what they can. Sabien takes care of the grant writing to make up the difference, receiving support from Lincoln Financial, New Hampshire Charitable Foundation, the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts and private donations.

And, Sabien said, Hearne helped secure a grant for the development of a sensory room as a safe space and the place for an expressive arts therapy program.

“That was through her vigilance and vision,” Sabien said.

In her nominating email, Sabien wrote that Hearne “works with clients of all ages from newborn to 90s. She conducts Music and Movement classes, instilling in toddlers and preschoolers a lifelong love of music. She travels off-site to a number of area organizations, helping at-risk kids with developmental issues.”

And that made her decision to nominate Hearne a whole lot easier.

“I knew she deserved it the first week I was here,” Sabien said, “but it’s nice to see it unfold through the semester.”



Dance therapist Heather Bigelow Hearne of Hopkinton teaches a music and movement class at the Blueberry Express Day Care Center in Pittsfield on Friday.

GEOFF FORESTER / Monitor staff

NH Saves program returns

ENERGY FROM A1

the last possible day under the deadline imposed by lawmakers in a law passed in February, the PUC approved the NH Saves program over the next three years as put together by the state’s four electric and natural gas utilities. The program has a budget of \$253.8 million for the period of 2024 to 2026, money that comes out of customers’ rates. That’s an increase of \$30 million over the previous three-year period, an amount designed to cover inflation.

NH Saves is a program created in 2001 to provide financial assistance, including rebates, as well as advice and technical assistance for people and businesses looking to reduce their energy usage. The website claims that in the 2018-2020 period, it helped customers save enough electricity and heating fuel “to power over 680,000 homes for one year.”

Details can be found at the website nhsaves.com.

NH Saves proceeds through three-year plans that the power utilities present to the Public Utilities Commission, which regulates them. In November 2021 the PUC rejected the plan for the upcoming three years, arguing that it suffered from a number of technical and legal flaws, and the program has been in limbo since.

Supporters got the Legislature to pass HB559 at the start of this year which amended the process and basically gave the PUC no option but to approve the three-year NHSaves program as designed by utilities, although the law did put a sharp limit on how much the budget could increase.

Thursday’s 21-page order acknowledged the effect of the new law in approving the utilities’ program. But it also included lengthy discussion about the program’s effect on ratepayer savings, uncertainty about tracking benefits and costs for different classes of ratepayers, and discussion of the economic tool known as the discount rate which was

central to the 2021 ruling that gutted NH Saves. It was signed by PUC Chairman Daniel Dolgner and Commissioner Pradip Chattopadhyay.

The third commissioner, Carleton Simpson, wrote a separate opinion that partly supported but partly dissented from the report, saying “the majority’s decision may cause confusion as to which aspects of the Plan are approved and which, if any, take effect as a matter law. The Plan contains numerous other elements, in addition to program changes. I fear that the majority decision creates uncertainty and sends the wrong message to the parties and the public.”

Kreis agreed.

“There are some troubling signs in the PUC’s order. It’s clear that 2 of the 3 commissioners are profoundly skeptical about this whole venture, with a fundamental hos-

tility to the whole idea that energy efficiency is a key part of the service that we all receive from our electric utility,” he said. “All this verbiage in that order that doesn’t need to be there is kind of a warning shot ... a transparent request to the legislature to give the PUC more authority to reign in ratepayer-funded energy efficiency further.”

Kreis said opposition to the program often sprouted from the belief the commercial market should reign supreme.

“I think the skeptics (think) if energy efficiency is such a great thing then people should just go out and buy it themselves, and the government should not put its thumb on the scale. The problem is that the government already has its thumb on the scale on the other side, on the supply-side of energy investments.”

Maker of groomers moves to city

GROOMERS FROM A1

Prinoth will host the annual industry kickoff for the New Hampshire ski season on Monday at an industry event sponsored by the state Division of Travel & Tourism Development and Ski NH. A number of ski areas will have tables to discuss their plans. The Ski 603 Winter Kickoff starts at 5:30, with an open house and tours starting at 3 p.m.

Prinoth is a well-known name in the business of machines that push around snow by the ton at ski areas, on cross-country trails and for snowmobile clubs. Founded by a racing driver named Ernesto Prinoth in 1951, it is headquartered on the edge of the Alps in northern Italy. Most of the machines sold in North America are made in Quebec.

The Concord office handles ski areas throughout the east,

from Ohio to Maine to Tennessee, with sales or service contracts with ski areas including Pats Peak, Crotched Mountain, Ragged Mountain and Tenney Mountain. It has 10 to 12 full-time positions and another half dozen or so remote employees.

Prinoth’s biggest groomers can cost a half-million dollars if they come with such add-ons as a winch to stabilize them on the steepest runs, while smaller machines for grooming local trails run into the low six figures. Their life span depends on usage – “a big mountain can run it 2,000 hours a

year; a small mountain maybe 600,” Palmateer said, but they can easily last a decade, he added.

Another advantage of the Concord location, near the new Concord Crossing development, is the large parking lot. At times this fall, in preparation for ski season, the company had as many as 30 of the snow-grooming machines on site. A half-dozen are still being prepped for the winter.

The company shares its Concord space with sister company DemaLenko, a maker of snow-making machinery.

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