



NEW MEMBER PROFILE

Maine Energy Systems Looks to Change the Conversation About Biomass Fuels

As the chilly Northeast warms to alternative energy sources, a cutting-edge firm in Bethel is working to pair consumer demands with renewable solutions.

Maine Energy Systems builds and distributes fully automated and EPA-certified wood pellet boilers and furnaces for residential, commercial and industrial use throughout North America. Acquired from OkoFEN, a leader in pellet boiler design, Maine Energy Systems' helps homes and businesses from Maine to Alaska transition to the use of renewable wood pellets. "This fuel transition not only lowers costs for users, it also retains and creates jobs in the region while significantly reducing the region's carbon footprint," the company notes.



The idea for Maine Energy Systems stemmed from informal seminars organized by ski mogul Les Otten in 2007 to focus on improving energy production and usage in the region. The consensus of the group was a strategy to convert central home heating systems in the Northeast from oil to wood pellet fuel. Additionally, because the pellets come from local forests, the new industry employs local workers and retains the economic benefits within the region.

A year after Otten's strategy sessions, during a period of extraordinarily high oil prices, then-Gov. John E. Baldacci formed the Governor's Wood to Energy Task Force to study biomass, particularly wood pellets, as a potential fuel source in Maine. The group reported that the state's under-used forests were ideal to produce millions more tons of biomass products than it had been, definitively opening the door to making wood pellets a primary heat source for many Maine residents.

One of the leaders of the policy shift, Dr. William "Bill" Strauss, who authored studies focusing on the negative economic impacts of relying on

foreign oil, then partnered with Otten and Dr. Harry "Dutch" Dresser to form Maine Energy Systems to implement the new approach to heating.

In a state where 70 percent of homes are heated by gas or oil, wood pellets can offer significant environmental benefits.

For example, the wood pellets used in residential heating are often manufactured from sawdust and shavings or even from whole wood harvested solely to produce pellets. Additionally, boilers or furnaces that run on sustainably harvested wood pellets provide a low-net-CO2 solution, providing an environmentally friendly heating option.

To encourage environmental stewardship, the company notes, both the state and federal governments offer incentives to use biomass heating systems. Many states offer rebates to help offset the cost installing a wood pellet boiler or furnace, and the Biomass Thermal Utilization Act of 2020 allows for a 26 percent federal tax credit on the purchase and installation of the systems. Also, according to Maine Energy Systems, some New England states offer the ability to offset each ton of pellets purchased by earning and selling renewable energy credits.

In addition to reducing a home's carbon footprint by up to 86 percent, Maine Energy Systems offers its customers the ease and reliability of delivery directly to the source – much as with an oil truck pulling up to the side of a home. "The customer never has to see or touch the pellets from the point of delivery to combustion," the company notes.

Maine Energy Systems also has been active in supporting the transition to renewable heating by working with regulatory bodies, academics and political groups to further the study and implementation of the industry. Dr. Dresser, for example, has been key in helping to achieve parity in heating regulations between wood pellet heating appliances and conventional systems. The company also sponsored a project headed by a student at Worcester Polytechnic Institute to design an automated ash removal system.

As an industry leader, education at all levels has been a hallmark of Maine Energy Systems' brand. Whether it's working with the Maine Department of Environmental Protection and other entities on updating regulations, informing the public, or training dealers how to install and service wood pellet systems, Maine Energy continues to take charge in changing how America heats its homes and businesses. "We expect to play a big part in the northeast's transition to renewable heating," they noted.

Spotlight on Maine Energy Systems' Hannah Campbell:

Air Force veteran, community volunteer, ski coach, sales and marketing powerhouse, and logistics expert.

The team behind Maine Energy Systems includes some of the region's foremost policy experts on energy consumption and economics. So, it makes sense that the voice of the company not only has a long history of public service, but also takes a deep and thoughtful approach to her work.

Our chat with Hannah Campbell:

What's your background?

I grew up in northern New Hampshire, close to the Canadian border, where most of my family still resides. I was fortunate enough to grow up in this area when our forestry and logging industries were very strong. Since then, we've seen a massive decline in the industry and the economic fallout from paper mills closing, a lack of demand for paper products, and a decrease in use of low-grade wood.

We understand you're a graduate of the US Air Force Academy?

I graduated from US Air Force Academy (2012) and ultimately decided to return to the area after serving overseas for several years. While northern New Hampshire is remote and I could likely make a more lucrative career elsewhere, I thought it was important to give back to the place that gave me my roots and a leg up on life. Two lessons that this place and its people have taught me are to work hard and be honest - the rest falls into place.

What did you do in the Air Force?

I was able to use these lessons to have a career after US Air Force Academy as a Logistics Readiness Officer in the Air Force. A lot of what I did involved coordinating, planning for everything, and managing people to most effectively achieve the mission. Failure to plan as we all know is not an excuse for a poor outcome.

What lessons from your service do you continue to use today?

Ironically, my Air Force experience has lent itself well to my current activities - being a member of the Development Team seeking to re-open The Balsams Resort in northern New Hampshire, working for Maine Energy Systems as a marketing and communications representative, logistics consulting for FutureMetrics (a well-respected consultancy in the biomass field), and in my free time donating my skills as President of our local region's Chamber of Commerce and a director for our regional Coos Economic Development Corporation.



How did you end up in this field, and with Maine Energy Systems?

When I returned to northern New Hampshire, I learned of the efforts to redevelop The Balsams (once a major area employer much like logging and paper mills). I was fortunate enough to be able to join the team and learn the ins and outs of development and through this came to know Les Otten, Owner & Developer of The Balsams and also Founder & Owner of Maine Energy Systems. I've been working for Les on both fronts for several years now. We work to further efforts to economically develop northern New Hampshire and also push for substantive changes to support decarbonization and use of wood as a carbon-neutral fuel source.

What are your professional/industry priorities? e.g., energy security, environmental stewardship?

My professional priorities are to improve the economic landscape of where I reside and give back to the area here. In conjunction with that, I would like to see us start to rely on a more broad-based, environmentally friendly way to heat and energize our homes - ideally improving the local and regional economy by using fuel that's right here in our backyard. We've been heating with wood for ages, just not with high efficiency and extremely low particulate emissions. What makes Maine Energy Systems stand out to me is that it's high-end technology, it's the same as using fossil fuels to the consumer, and it puts dollars and jobs back here.

