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## Deirdre Fleming: Need to preserve Maine resources comes into view for PBS' 'Visionaries'

PORTLAND - For 17 years the documentary series produced for public television called "Visionaries" has told the stories of nonprofits in small towns the world over, but never in Maine.

**DOWNEAST LAKES** Land Trust will again present the PBS "Visionaries" film about the organization from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday at the Camden Public Library.

For more information about DLLT, go to [www.downeastlakes.org](http://www.downeastlakes.org); and to learn more about Chewonki, go to [www.chewonki.org](http://www.chewonki.org).

However, this year for the first time the stories of two Maine nonprofits are being told on Public Broadcasting System stations across the country in the 18th season of "Visionaries."

Last week in Portland the premier of the two films was shown at the Space Gallery, where Chewonki alumni and fans of the Downeast Lakes Land Trust gathered to watch documentaries on each organization.

The documentary series produced for public television and hosted by actor Sam Waterston of "Law and Order" fame has worked since 1995 to highlight nonprofits making a positive impact in small communities. But after two decades of telling stories about issues such as disability awareness, education, health care and homelessness, the show's producers started looking at land conservation. And after a list of more than 100 conservation stories playing out across the country was narrowed down, "Visionaries" producer Bill Mosher said the search for the very best story ended with these two groups in Maine.

Mosher said the story of the work done by Chewonki and the land trust of Grand Lakes Stream was too compelling not to tell. So for the first time in one show, the "Visionaries" team told a pair of tales of good work and big hearts.

"We want to tell a story that might inspire other people. It's not real complicated. There aren't a lot of rules in what we do. We look for an experience. We want to have fun. And we want to put a story on television that might have an impact, so someone with similar problems or similar motivations will rise up and act in their community," said Mosher in Stoughton, Mass.

Since 1918, Chewonki has worked on the coast of Wiscasset to engage young people with the natural world in a personal, hands-on way by teaching them to live off the land, whether for a week or a high school semester.

And the Downeast Lakes Land Trust, which only was formed in 2001, was the result of the people in a tiny village near the New Brunswick border rallying together to protect 370,000 acres of forestland and watersheds, an area larger than Baxter State Park. While their efforts continue today with a campaign to purchase 22,000 acres around the small village of Grand Lake Stream, the area they have protected sits at the core of a 1.4-million acre international wildlife corridor between Maine and New Brunswick.

Mosher said the story of Chewonki's style of intimate, hands-on, experiential outdoor education together with the tale of a remote Maine village rallying to protect a vast network of forestland tells a powerful story of a caring, can-do attitude.

"These two are great examples of what can be done in places all over America and, frankly, what should be done," Mosher said.

"If a community like Grand Lake Stream can, with 100 people, preserve as much land as they have done, then certainly folks can rally together and preserve 100 or 50 acres. And in the case of Chewonki, the impact that organization has had over the years allowing young people to have an intimate experience with nature is tremendous. We've done stories on schools all over the country, and what is unique about them is that intimate personal experience."

Before the two films were shown at the premier in Portland last week, the crowd that gathered to see them got that.

Chewonki alumni, parents and former educators, proud of their affiliation, came together to share story after story of how their time on the tiny, wild peninsula in the midcoast changed their lives.

"I was so afraid of the chainsaw, afraid to chop wood. But I overcame that. Everyone gets something so different and takes away something so different from the work on the

farm at Chewonki. But we're sharing that experience (living there) together," said Claire Longcope, a senior at Waynflete who was a semester student at Chewonki.

And when the films ended, those present, many affiliated with Chewonki, wanted to learn more about the other Maine organization with which they now shared a national stage.

"I've been an outdoor educator at Chewonki for 28 years and we've never traveled to (Grand Lake Stream). If there is one result from this project, maybe it's visits from Chewonki. That would be a great thing because there is great synergy between these groups," said Greg Chute, Chewonki's outdoor program director.

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