



December 2014
 January 2015
 February 2015
 Volume XXXII, No. 4



With many successes after 31 years, David McKeehan looks ahead

Thirty one years ago, David McKeehan was hired to lead the way during the merger of the Fitchburg and Leominster chambers of commerce. The boards of both groups, along with several smaller business groups, had decided to regionalize and form the North Central Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce. This bold step forward resulted in the NCM Chamber eventually growing to be the fourth largest chamber in the state, promoting local business as a force to be reckoned with, and a voice that legislators listened to.

He has always made sure that the Chamber focused strictly on regional business advocacy and economic development; it now represents 1,000 member firms that employ over 25,000 people in Fitchburg, Leominster, and surrounding towns.

McKeehan is a leader within the chamber of commerce movement and served as vice chairman of the American Chamber of Commerce Executives, the industry's national association representing more than 6,000 chamber professionals in the United States and Canada. He's won awards as diverse as the "Service Above Self Award" from Mount Wachusett Community College for making significant contributions to MWCC and the area's communities in 2007 and the Ford Foundation Fellow for Sustainable Regional Development in 2008.

He and his wife Marilyn live in Westminster and have been married for 46 years. They have two grown children and two grandchildren. Son, Sean, is marketing graphics manager for Phillips Lightolear in Salem, Mass. and daughter, Brigid, is a compliance analyst for the FDIC.

McKeehan paused recently to answer a few questions:

Q: A lot has happened in 30 years. What comes to mind right away when asked: what's the most outstanding thing you've accomplished in that time?

A: First of all, I myself haven't accomplished anything... The business leaders of our region have allowed me to help them coordinate an action plan to grow and support all the area's industries and the resources that sustain them. The people who really "run" the Chamber--our directors, committee chairs and members-- are very aware of how important it is to develop an environment where business can expand... creating jobs and enhancing quality of life, for everyone who lives here.

Q: Then which cooperative Chamber effort, in your opinion, really stands out?

A: One major success we've had was establishing the North Central Mass. Development Corporation. This agency is in a unique position to provide alternative lending programs for small and start-up businesses. The NCMDC has participated directly in the funding of \$16.5 million in loans that have created or saved approximately 770 local jobs. And, in a related effort, we have secured over \$4.5 million of private sector support and more than \$1 million in government grants for economic development programming in the region.

Q: What else stands out?

A: At a time when people were realizing that tourism as an industry was virtually untapped in North Central Mass, and there was a real potential for growth, the Chamber was able to negotiate with the state Department of Transportation to build the Johnny Appleseed Visitor

Center on Route 2. Between our members and our staff, we had the resources to step in and operate the facility, providing information, services and even a successful retail operation for over 160,000 visitors annually, since opening in 1997. It has become a model for other visitor centers. The agency supporting this effort, the Johnny Appleseed Trail Association, was formed at that time and has since been designated as one of the commonwealth's Regional Tourist Councils, bringing over \$550k in tourism marketing funds to the region.

Q: Communities that are trying to promote job creation find themselves struggling with the cost of doing business. Has the Chamber tried tackling that?

A: We have worked on many strategies to lower costs for businesses... our ongoing goal of lowering the commercial tax rate in Fitchburg for instance. One creative project was coordinating

Continued on Page 2



David L. McKeehan plans to retire as Chamber president at the end of this year.

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ENTERTAINMENT - FAMILY

McKeehan... Continued from Page 1

the first electrical and natural gas aggregations among businesses in Massachusetts. We recently purchased 1 megawatt of solar energy for redistribution to local manufacturers to lower their utility costs.

As a private, nonprofit, member-driven organization, the Chamber is in a unique position to act quickly and to come up with creative solutions to the challenges facing businesses--and implement them.

Q: So when the year ends, are you retiring or starting a new venture?

A: Both; I'm just retiring from the Chamber -- not life. Marilyn and I will continue to live in the community and remain engaged in civic affairs. Also, I've acquired a small manufacturing firm and look forward to growing that business in the area. It's all good!



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Lunch 'n Learn Series

Lunch is included in these free, educational programs aimed at small business owners (non-members \$10).

Held in the Chamber Conference Room, 11:45 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Registration available online for all events at www.NorthCentralMass.com/calendar or call Maria McCaffrey at (978) 353-7600 ext. 235 or mccaffrey@massweb.org.

'No Cost Marketing for Small Businesses' presented on Jan. 20

Small Businesses always have a tight budget but need to get their name out there to increase revenue and grow their brand. But how do you do it on a shoestring?

Join Katherine Jasmine of MarketingFIRST to discuss no-cost/low cost efforts that small businesses can take on. No need to break the bank or waste time marketing your business when you can apply Katherine's "tricks of the trade."

Chamber presents free info session on 'Sick Time Leave' on January 16

A seminar on the state's new Sick Time Leave Law is offered on Jan. 16, 2015 from 8 - 10 a.m. at the DoubleTree Hotel in Leominster. The recently-approved Question 4, requires that employers provide earned sick time for employees. The law takes effect July 1, 2015, and states that employees who work for employers with 11 or more employees may earn and use up to 40 hours of paid sick time per calendar year. Employees who work for employers with fewer than 11 employees may earn and use up to 40 hours of unpaid sick time per year.

Attorneys Kimberly A. Rozak and Corey F. Higgins of Mirick O'Connell will explain the new earned sick time law, including the reasons for which earned sick leave may be taken; how such sick time may be used; when employers may require a medical certification for sick leave absences; the effect the new law will have on existing sick leave and paid time off policies.

Plus, for unionized employers who are parties to collective bargaining agreements that provide sick leave benefits, whether the new law trumps existing terms of a collective bargaining agreement. Call 978-353-7600 for more information.

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Plan on attending the February 17 session for 'Presenting Your Business - Signage & Materials'

The February session of "Lunch & Learn" starts at noon in the Chamber Conference Room with the topic: "Presenting your Business with Signage and Materials."

Getting potential customers and clients to see your small business on a busy street or in a big expo is challenging but a few key efforts can help you take that visibility to the next level.

Participants at this workshop will learn how to make an office, vehicle or booth stand out among the rest and help represent your unique business well. Grow your business and your customer base with these creative tips.

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Good Morning Breakfast

Sizer School to sponsor event on Jan. 9

The first Breakfast of the new year features sponsor, The Sizer School, a North Central Charter Essential School. After completing their new location on Rindge Road in Fitchburg, the school opened this year, with new plans, new facilities and a new name. Join us to learn more about The Sizer Schools activities and offerings. Check online under "Calendar" for more details. Admission is \$25 members, \$40 for non-members.



Chamber Ambassadors are shown at a recent meeting in the office of Ron Ansin in Leominster. From left are: Yasmin Loft (Chamber Member Services), John Heckel (My Virtual CFO), Donna DiMarzio (Curves for Women), John Daelhausen (BluCrate-Leominster), Keith Lanzilotti – Ambassador of the Year (Well-Being Total Home Care), Thomas Littlepage (Workers' Credit Union), Tim Johnson (The Arc of Opportunity), Dennis Mannone (Comcast Business Services), Roland Nutter (The Debland Group/AdviCoach), Melissa Glenny (Franklin Professional Associates). Not pictured: Cynthia Bryant (MassMutual Financial Group), Brendan Gallagher (Commerce Bank), Cindy Testa (Financially Fit).

Breakfast events start at 6:45 a.m. with coffee and buffet breakfast, at the Doubletree by Hilton Leominster 99 Erdman Way off Route 12 at Rte 2. Reserve online, or call Maria at 978-353-7600 x235 or mccaffrey@massweb.org



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HUMAN RESOURCES COUNCIL HRC

HRC events are from 11:45 a.m. – 1:30 p.m. in the Chamber Conference Room and include lunch. Fee is \$20 for members; \$30 nonmembers. Reserve online at NorthCentralMass.com or call 978-8353-7600 x235

Fidelity Bank's generous sponsorship of HRC has allowed a decrease in registration fees, allowing more businesses in the area to take part in one of the Chamber's longest running programs. The HRC features nine seminars from September to June featuring expert (and otherwise expensive) advice from attorneys and consultants. This program provides considerable value for all members who participate.

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Affordable Care Act is focus of workshop on January 21

The Affordable Care Act has been on the minds of human resource managers and business owners alike for the past few years. Changes have come and gone within the program, with deadlines approaching once again.

Join other HR professionals and small business owners for an update on the Affordable Care Act, find out what is expected and any upcoming deadlines for your business and your employees.

February 18 session looks at 'Data Security & Employee Files'

Every human resource manager is responsible for a wealth of information about employees, whether it's a medical note, a social security number or a written warning. Technology for data security can be both a blessing and a curse as more companies go paperless but hackers seem to get into every corner.

How do you safeguard your employees information and safeguard the business at the same time? Join HRC to learn more about the laws around data security as well as best practices.

Registration available online. For more information contact Maria McCaffrey at 978-353-7600, ext. 235. Reserve online at: northcentralmass.com



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New Director Profile - Steven Rocheleau

Steven Rocheleau is president of Rocheleau Tool & Die of Fitchburg, a third-generation family business operating in support of the plastics industry. The firm manufactures blow molding equipment, blow molding tooling and trimming equipment. "We make the machinery for molds that produce plastic bottles and other packaging,"

states Mr. Rocheleau. "We provide those manufacturing systems with the engineering, design and integration."

"The company was founded in 1938 by Leopold Rocheleau as a general tool & die shop and it grew with the local plastics industry through the 1940s and 50s," he reports. Blow molding plastic bottles is one enterprise that was not cheaper to make overseas, so it has remained local. "Bottles are manufactured no more than about 300 miles from where they're filled," he explains.

Mr. Rocheleau grew up in Westminster and graduated from Oakmont Regional and then Bucknell University in Pennsylvania where he received a bachelor of science degree in business administration. "I started right in (from college) at Rocheleau Tool. He and his wife Karla (Swedberg) have four grown children and are active in the community. "I coached (several sports) when the kids were young and I still teach Sunday school at Heritage Bible Chapel in Princeton," he says. "I also serve on the Capital Planning Committee in Westminster."

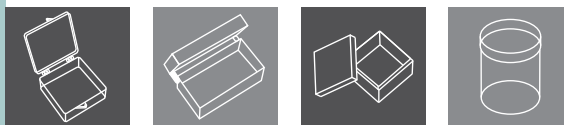
"I have been attending CEO Roundtable sessions at the Chamber for about five years," Mr. Rocheleau adds. "On the Board of Directors, I'd like to help grow and promote manufacturing awareness. I'm on the advisory board at the Mount Wachusett Community College Devens Campus, for developing their manufacturing readiness curriculum." Mount Wachusett joined several other schools, he explains, to create the Advanced Manufacturing, Mechatronics, and Quality Consortium, which will help job seekers obtain training and credentials in advanced

manufacturing fields. The consortium was awarded a grant from the Dept. of Labor totaling \$15,875,432 and MWCC will receive \$6,450,356 to provide accelerated training and credentialing programs in North Central Massachusetts.

"Manufacturing is now high tech and needs people with science and math skills," he points out. "I'm willing to support anything the Chamber does to promote education for manufacturing. It's important for the area in general to train and keep people here."



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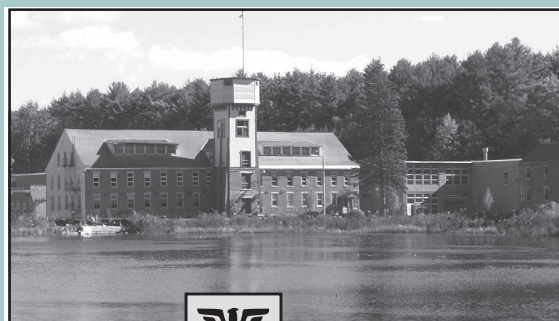
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BUSINESS AFTER HOURS

December 4: Business After Hours Holiday Party

Business After Hours will finish out 2014 with the Annual Holiday Party, this year hosted at Oak Hill Country Club. It will be from 4:30 - 6:30 p.m. and includes hot and cold hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar. Oak Hill C.C., which opened in 1921, recently underwent renovations to update the lounge and patio, and should provide the perfect backdrop for the season. Connect with old colleagues and new ones as we head into the holidays.

Cost for this event is \$20 for members, \$30 for nonmembers. Registration is available online or call Maria McCaffrey at (978) 353-7600 ext. 235 or email mccaffrey@massweb.org.



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11:45 a.m. - 1.30 p.m. unless otherwise noted

Bring your own lunch • These events are held at the Leominster Elks, 134 No. Main St. (Route 12) unless indicated otherwise.

To reserve a table top contact Maria McCaffrey at (978) 353-7600, ext 235 or mccaffrey@massweb.org

EWN to host Holiday Social on December 3rd

Don't miss the Executive Women's Network's Annual Holiday Social at the Fitchburg Art Museum on Wednesday, Dec. 3. This free event will be from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. Attendees will enjoy light refreshments, networking and new exhibits featuring local artists. Particularly engaging is the artwork of Mario Quiroz who was commissioned by the museum to photograph Fitchburg's Latino community.

Regular admission is \$9 for adults, but admission is free for this event. Come enjoy one of Fitchburg's hidden gems!

Contact Maria McCaffrey 978-353-7600 to be added to the EWN email list to receive updates or for sponsorship information.

Please note, this event does not offer exhibitor table tops.

Women's Health Expo coming February 4

Join us for the Annual Women's Health Expo, hosted by EWN from noon to 1:30 p.m. at the Elks in Leominster. Participating vendors will focus on various aspects of women's health and wellness. Attendees will have an opportunity for free information and giveaways.

Tabletops are available for women's health related businesses at a cost of \$30 for members and \$50 for non-members. Tables will go fast so book soon. Contact Maria at mccaffrey@massweb.org for more information and to register your business.



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Helping Young Professionals Emerge (HYPER) gets together on Thursday, Feb 26 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Check online or contact Maria at mccaffrey@massweb.org for more information.

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NorthCentralMass.com (USPS 773-650) is published quarterly by the North Central Mass. Chamber of Commerce, 860 South Street, Fitchburg, MA, for \$5.00 per year which is withheld from annual membership dues. Periodicals postage paid at Fitchburg, MA.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to NorthCentralMass.com, c/o North Central Mass. Chamber of Commerce, 860 South Street, Fitchburg, MA 01420.

Check the online calendar for extra updates and events

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DECEMBER

3rd	EWN	3:30 p.m.
4th	Holiday Business After Hours	4:30 p.m.
10th	Sales Leads	7:45 a.m.

JANUARY

9th	GOOD MORNING Breakfast	6:45 a.m.
14th	Sales Leads	7:45 a.m.
16th	Sick Leave Training	8 a.m.
20th	Lunch 'n Learn	11:45 a.m.
21st	Human Resources Council	11:45 a.m.
28th	Sales Leads	7:45 a.m.

FEBRUARY

4th	EWN	11:45 p.m.
11th	Sales Leads	7:45 a.m.
17th	Lunch 'n Learn	11:45 a.m.
18th	Human Resources Council	11:45 a.m.
25th	Sales Leads	7:45 a.m.
26th	HYPE	5:30 p.m.

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CHAMBER UPDATES *→ Recent Accomplishments*

LOANS: Recently, four loans totaling \$132,500 have been originated. These included: three loans to Fitchburg businesses; a start-up dental laboratory, the expansion of an existing liquor store; and the expansion of a rest home, as well as an expansion of a bakery in Leominster. Two of these loans were made in partnership with banks (“gap loans”) in our community in which the bank involvement (leverage) was \$668,000. As a result these loans helped to create six jobs and retain another eight jobs.

ADVANCED MANUFACTURING INITIATIVE: The second of our videos promoting careers in manufacturing is complete, and was premiered Oct. 3 at our Manufacturing Day event, at Fitchburg State University (our partner in the *AMPitup!* Grant that funded this work). This event brought 100 students, ages 12 to 16, to view videos, see demonstrations of 3D printing and computerized design programs, tour the Industrial Technology Department, and participate in activities that relate to the manufacturing process. We had successful tours at Burkhart Flutes, New England Studios and PCI Synthesis over the summer, for young students participating in Academic Adventures at MWCC, making a connection between the STEM programming in these courses and modern manufacturing.

TAX CLASSIFICATION: In September, members of the Chamber’s Government Affairs Committee held a meeting with the four freshmen members of the Fitchburg City Council to discuss the negative impact on economic development of the City’s dual tax rate and other business growth issues. The gathering was well received and productive, and Fitchburg has lowered its tax rate for businesses after this year’s tax classification hearing.

TOURISM MARKETING: Our affiliated Johnny Appleseed Trail Assn. (JATA) has received word that the Mass Office of Travel & Tourism (MOTT) has awarded grants totaling \$200,347 for visitor services and marketing. The awards will be directed toward the JATA advertising and marketing plans for FY15.

GOOD MORNING BREAKFAST SERIES: The September 12th Good Morning Breakfast featured Achievement Award Winner AIS, with the event sponsored by Great Wolf Lodge and guest speaker Jim Normandin, new publisher of The Telegram & Gazette. Attendance was at 125. November’s Breakfast held on 14th featured sponsor Hometown Bank and guest speaker Mark Bodanza.

MICROLOAN FUNDING: With the support of the region’s local delegation, our North Central Mass. Development Corp. (NC-MDC) secured a \$100,000 earmark in the state FY15 Budget for small business lending.

MORE GOOD NEWS: The Massachusetts Growth Capital Corporation has responded to NCMDC’s application with a \$30,000 grant to support technical assistance for our small business lending program.

BUSINESS AFTER HOURS: The Chamber hosted the first Business After Hours of the fall at Fidelity Bank, 75 Main Street, on October 2nd. About 80 people attended. The NCMCC was part of a Five-Chamber Business After Hours on November 5th at Great Wolf Lodge. The event featured attendees from Corridor 9, Greater Gardner, Nashoba Valley, North Central MA and Worcester Regional Chambers. Attendance was approximately 475. The Annual Holiday Business After Hours will be held on December 4th at Oak Hill Country Club.

EXECUTIVE WOMEN’S NETWORK: EWN hosted a Women Mean Business Conference on October 1st. After many requests for more education, the committee decided on a half day conference at Great Wolf Lodge with about 80 people in attendance. The Conference featured Keynote Speaker, Laurie-Ann Murabito and nine seminar classes, sponsored by GAAMHA and Fitchburg State University.

APPLESEED COUNTRY FAIR: This is the major event of the year planned and implemented by our Johnny Appleseed Trail Assn. The two-day affair is designed to launch the Autumn Season of events



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CHAMBER UPDATES ...CONTINUED

in the region and reinforce our “Johnny Country” brand. Staged on September 6 & 7 at Red Apple Farm in Phillipston, the fair was an overwhelming success attended by over 6,000 people. New this year was the beginning of an Annual Fiddle Fest contest with an open call for fiddlers of all ages to showcase their talents. We awarded prizes to the winners in each category and have hopes it will grow larger. The free event featured 50 vendors, continuous music, a great variety of food and family fun.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: Meetings continue with Economic Development Staff, Town Planners, and other representatives from communities across the region to create an economic development plan for the Route 2 Corridor. During the summer focus shifted slightly to identifying funding sources for the additional work needed to support community outreach efforts. A grant opportunity from USDA would provide a 1-to-1 match of funds for this kind of work, and we are writing to and meeting with the legislative delegation to gather support for a push on Beacon Hill to commit funds to this project.

HUMAN RESOURCES COUNCIL: Fidelity Bank is sponsoring the Human Resource Council this year.. September’s program, “Labor Wage Updates” hosted 28 attendees and October’s program was also a full house with 28 with “Discrimination and Harassment Training for Managers”.

SOLAR POWER: The solar field on Pleasant St. in Lunenburg was completed at the end of April, and interconnection was finalized at the end of July. The first full month of energy production was recently reported to us, and about \$27,000 of Net Metering Credits were distributed to participating manufacturers. Recent legislation has increased the ‘cap’ on solar once again, meaning that another 1MW of capacity may

soon be available in Unitil territory, and we are discussing an additional project with NuGen to capitalize on this.

FITCHBURG ROOMS TAX: After much communication and the support of Mayor Wong, the Fitchburg City Council voted on September 15th to appropriate \$32,000 in FY15 for the Johnny Appleseed Trail’s tourism efforts. This support, in conjunction with Leominster and Westminster, continues the partnership we have enjoyed from these communities for operation of the Route 2 Visitors Center from local rooms-tax revenue.

OJT: The Chamber participated in a new program over the summer with the Leominster Public Schools – Youth to Career Advancement, in partnership with Employment Links. We had a high school student work with us weekly for approx. 6-7 weeks up to 30 hours per week assisting us with mailings (chamber and JATA), data input, etc.

PUBLIC RELATIONS: Ongoing efforts include populating Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Telegram.com, WBJ, Sentinel & Enterprise, and WPKZ with upcoming events/meetings, ribbon cuttings, new member postings, and other announcements as needed. We continue to do our weekly “Chamber Chat” program on WPKZ radio (105.3 FM) every Monday morning from 8:15-8:30am. Yasmin Loft, sales and member services manager, talks about upcoming events/programs for that week and features a guest chamber member each week.

U.S. Postal Service STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION

(required by 39 U.S.C. 3685)

Publication title: NorthCentralMass.com, Pub. # 773-650 File Date: 9-7-2013, issued quarterly, 4 issues annually at annual subscription price of \$5. Mailing address of known office of publication, headquarters or general business office and of publisher and editor: 860 South Street, Fitchburg MA 01420. Full names & complete mailing address of publisher, editor and managing editor: Publisher: David L. McKeehan, C.C.E., 860 South Street, Fitchburg MA 01420. Editor: Marie N. Auger, 860 South Street, Fitchburg MA 01420. No managing editor. Owner: North Central Mass. Chamber of Commerce, 860 South Street, Fitchburg MA 01420. No known bondholders, mortgagees or other security holders. The purpose, function and non-profit status of this organization and the exempt status for federal income tax purposes has not changed during preceding 12 months.

Publication title: NorthCentralMass.com. The issue date for circulation data below is September 2014. Total copies (net press run) is 1,200 average number copies for each issue during preceding 12 months, number copies of single issue published nearest to filing date is 1,215. Paid/requested, outside-county mail subscriptions stated on Form 3541 is 45 average for preceding 12 months, number copies of single issue published nearest to filing date is 50; Paid in-county subscriptions is 1,065 average for preceding 12 months, number copies of single issue published nearest to filing date is 1,064. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, counter sales and other averaged none for preceding 12 months; number copies of single issue published nearest to filing date is none. None in other classes mailed through USPS, either for preceding 12 months or issue nearest to filing date. Total paid and/or requested circulation average number each issue during preceding 12 months is 1,110 and for single issue nearest to filing date is 1,114. Free distribution by mail, outside county, average for preceding 12 months is none; for single issue nearest filing date is none. Free distribution by mail in-county, average during preceding 12 months is none; for issue nearest to filing date is none. Free distribution by mail in other classes through USPS is 10 for both 12 month average and issue nearest filing date. Free distribution outside the mail is 40 average for preceding 12 months; number published nearest to filing date is 40. Total nonrequested distribution is 50 average for preceding 12 months; number published nearest to filing date is 50.

Total distribution: 1,160 average for preceding 12 months, number nearest to filing date is 1,164. Copies not distributed: average for preceding 12 months is 40; number nearest to filing date is 51. Total: 1,200 average for preceding 12 months, number copies of single issue published nearest to filing date is 1,215. Percentage paid/requested circulation: 95.69% average for preceding 12 months, number copies of single issue published nearest to filing date is 95.70%. This statement of ownership will be printed in December 2014 issue of this publication.

Signed: Marie N. Auger

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