

# DISPATCHES

A Publication of The LifeFlight Foundation

**NORTHERN LIGHT HEALTH  
CENTRAL MAINE HEALTHCARE**

IN THIS ISSUE

## L.L.BEAN'S GIFT TO LIFEFLIGHT AND ALL WHO LOVE TO EXPLORE

Updates from the Flightdeck

The Sound of Life: Bob Carr's LifeFlight Story

Clinicians in an Aviation Environment

Leadership Spotlight: Chris Fife

Helicopter IFR: How Technology and Innovation Are Saving Lives in Maine

OCTOBER 2024



# Updates from the Flightdeck



Dear Friends,

## Welcome to our Fall 2024 issue of Dispatches!

Imagine for a moment you are a member of our clinical crew. You are assigned to transport a critically ill pediatric patient from a rural Maine hospital to a major medical center. On the flight there, you run through your pediatric training in your head. You care for and safely deliver the child to the destination facility.

Almost immediately, you are tasked to treat and transport a completely different patient — a father suffering from a heart attack. While the logistics are similar, you need to change your mindset quickly to face a different set of medical challenges. With a precious short time to think, you need to react. This is often the way a full 12-hour shift unfolds.

Our crews go through this mental exercise daily — and not only our front-line, clinical crews. Our pilots, mechanics, communicators, and all of our support team members are constantly adapting to the unknown, preparing for the unexpected. We have the best in the business at LifeFlight, and we are intensely proud of this team every single day.

**This summer was our busiest on record.** We routinely transported 10-12 patients a day from all across Maine. July was our busiest month ever. We cared for 284 patients utilizing every one of our

transport modes.

Recognizing the constant pressure our crews face, we developed a list of goals at the start of the year; among them, ensuring we have rigorous support systems in place for our team. To that end, we were pleased to welcome Beth Andrews, LCSW, LADC, in August as the manager of our new **Elevate Program**. This program is designed to support the mental health and wellbeing of our crew. Beth has deep connections to LifeFlight. She previously served as a Trustee of The LifeFlight Foundation, but her connection to LifeFlight started in 2007 when her daughter, Lauren, was a LifeFlight patient — coming full circle, Lauren interned with The LifeFlight Foundation this summer.



*Beth Andrews, LCSW, LADC, Elevate Program Manager*

Also this past summer, we expanded our Critical Care Ground Transport program to our Sanford base, welcoming four new EMTs as part of that program. We will be expanding to our Lewiston base this fall. We brought our patient account services department into LifeFlight, hiring four individuals who for many years have supported LifeFlight’s patients and families after they have been transported. We strive to maintain some of the most ethical billing processes in the industry, and this team, led by Jill Sanborn, cares deeply about making sure every patient is treated fairly and compassionately when it comes to the financial aspects of their transport.

The summer wrapped up with our annual Cross for LifeFlight, our largest fundraising event of the year. We want to offer a sincere “thank you” to the many individuals from Maine (and beyond) who took part in the event. **This year’s event raised more than \$215,000 to support our mission.**

This fall will continue to be busy. We have hired two new aviation maintenance technicians and four

new clinical crew members, each of whom will go through a rigorous orientation program that will include developing technical skills and learning more about LifeFlight’s culture and mission.

**Finally, we are incredibly proud to announce that LifeFlight of Maine was named one of the “Best Places to Work in Maine” for 2024.** This recognition is based on feedback from our team members in a survey conducted by the Best Companies Group. It represents a significant honor for our organization and reflects our years-long commitment to excellence at all levels.

We feel fortunate to come to work every day alongside an amazing team, and it would not be possible without the generosity of people like you. So, *thank you* for your ongoing support of our mission! Fall in Maine is a special time, and we hope that you and those you care about have a wonderful season.



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Kellner".

Joe Kellner, CEO  
LifeFlight of Maine

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kate O'Halloran".

Kate O'Halloran, Executive Director  
The LifeFlight Foundation



We are incredibly proud to be one of the 2024 “Best Places to Work in Maine.”



**Best Places to  
Work in ME**



# L.L.BEAN'S GIFT TO LIFEFLIGHT AND ALL WHO LOVE TO EXPLORE



Maine is a beautiful state. Mountains to summit in the spring and ski on during long winters. Rivers to fish once the snow melts. Islands to explore in the summer. Beaches to enjoy on hot days. Forests to hike through in the autumn.

It's also the most rural state in the country in terms of percentage of the population that lives in a rural area. It has 36 hospitals, but only three trauma centers. 1.3 million people live here, but 15.3 million people visit this place every year. There is so much of Maine to explore, so many rugged places to discover, and one name that for a century has been practically synonymous with outdoor adventure: L.L.Bean.

*"X-ray Mike" flying over Penobscot Bay. Photo by Mark Fleming, Lone Spruce Creative.*



L.L.Bean sells recreation equipment and clothing to prepare you for nearly any adventure in Maine. It also understands that you are likely to carry that gear into a community or remote corner of the state far from a major medical center. Recently, the Freeport-based company made a significant investment in LifeFlight of Maine to ensure that while you're out there, you still have access to critical care in an emergency.

**L.L.Bean has donated more than \$100,000 to LifeFlight in the past year to radically enhance the scope and impact of the LifeFlight Access Program.**

Over the years, LifeFlight has compiled a database of designated landing areas across the State of Maine. These include hospital helipads, ball fields, roadside parking areas, rendezvous points along snowmobile trails, and small clearings deep in the woods. The goal is to always be prepared. LifeFlight works with 911 centers, first responder services, landowners, snowmobile associations, ski resorts, and members of the public to identify these locations. The hope is to never have to use them, of course, but better to be prepared and not needed than the alternative.

With support from L.L.Bean, LifeFlight hired Bill Yates to assess and make recommendations on how to expand and strengthen this important initiative. Bill is a licensed EMS clinician, a former ski patroller, and a former dispatcher for LifeFlight. He has a thorough understanding of EMS, first responder services, and, importantly, how communications work in an emergency situation. The LifeFlight Access Program is all about coordination among services and communities before an emergency arises, and Bill has the knowledge, experience, connections, and tenacity to advance this ambitious project for Maine.

While Bill works to enhance LifeFlight's database of landing areas into a more powerful tool, his colleague Kyle Madigan, director of client relations at LifeFlight, is working with local fire, EMS, police, and other first responder services to provide on-the-ground training on how to identify and secure temporary helicopter landing areas (which then get added to LifeFlight's database). Kyle, Bill, and the LifeFlight team offer a Ground Safety and User Course to first responders at no cost. The course is often offered several times a week, especially in the summer, in communities in every corner of the state.

Recently, thanks to L.L.Bean's generosity, Kyle has been distributing ground safety kits designed specifically for interfacing air ambulance programs with first responders to ensure safe operations. These kits include LED lights to mark the boundaries of the landing area, information on how to communicate with the pilot, and other safety equipment for the first responders on the ground.

*Photos: each LifeFlight aircraft has a safety and survival kit with gear acquired from L.L.Bean. Each kit is labeled with the tail number of the aircraft.*





These initiatives are expanding rapid access to critical care in communities across Maine. Identifying how to help someone facing a medical emergency is crucial, and helping that person quickly can make all the difference. The care that someone receives in the first hour of a medical emergency has a tremendous impact on that patient’s outcomes, and most of Maine is more than an hour by car or ground ambulance from a trauma center. LifeFlight’s aircraft can cut the time it takes to cover those distances by more than two thirds. The aircraft also brings ICU-level care to the patient, so that person is receiving advanced medical care before they even arrive at one of Maine’s major medical centers.

In March 2024, Linda Bean passed away peacefully in her home on an island off the coast of Port Clyde, where she had lived for decades. The granddaughter of Leon Leonwood Bean and scion of the Bean family, Linda was a successful businesswoman, entrepreneur, patron of the arts, and generous benefactor to LifeFlight of Maine. “Linda’s support of LifeFlight and healthcare access overall was emblematic of her deep affection for the people of Maine,” said Tom Judge, founding executive director of LifeFlight and a longtime friend to Linda. “She was a woman of action, and her generosity and spirit have impacted thousands of lives here in Maine.”

L.L.Bean’s most recent donation to LifeFlight was made in Linda’s memory. The impact of that gift for the LifeFlight Access Program continues Linda’s legacy of support for healthcare access in communities like hers. It represents her abiding love for Maine and its people. In the years to come, hundreds of Mainers will have the gift of a second chance, thanks to the generosity of a family and a company whose backpacks they carried to school, whose boots they have worn on every adventure, and whose love for Maine they share to their core.



Kyle Madigan, director of client relations, presented a ground safety kit to first responders in Harpswell after teaching a Ground Safety Course.



A LifeFlight ground safety kit purchased with the generous support of L.L.Bean.

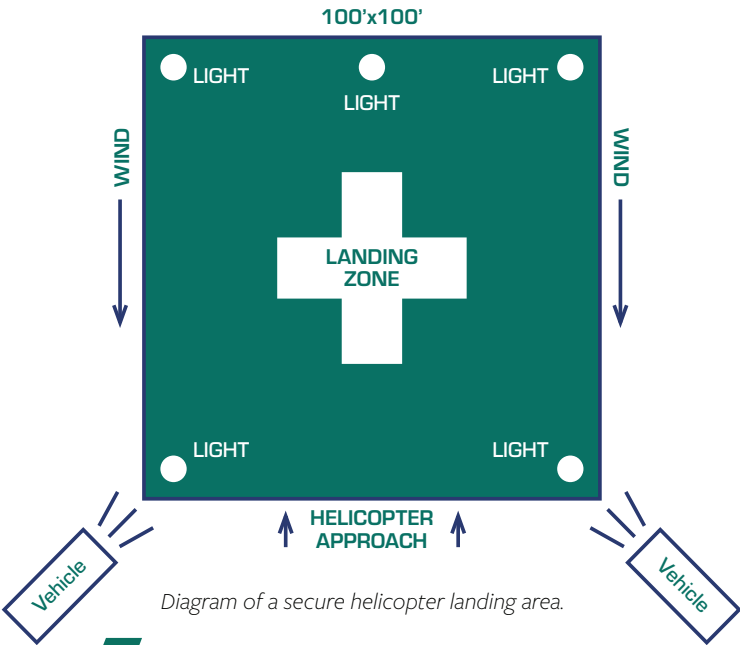


Diagram of a secure helicopter landing area.



# A PLANE FOR MAINE

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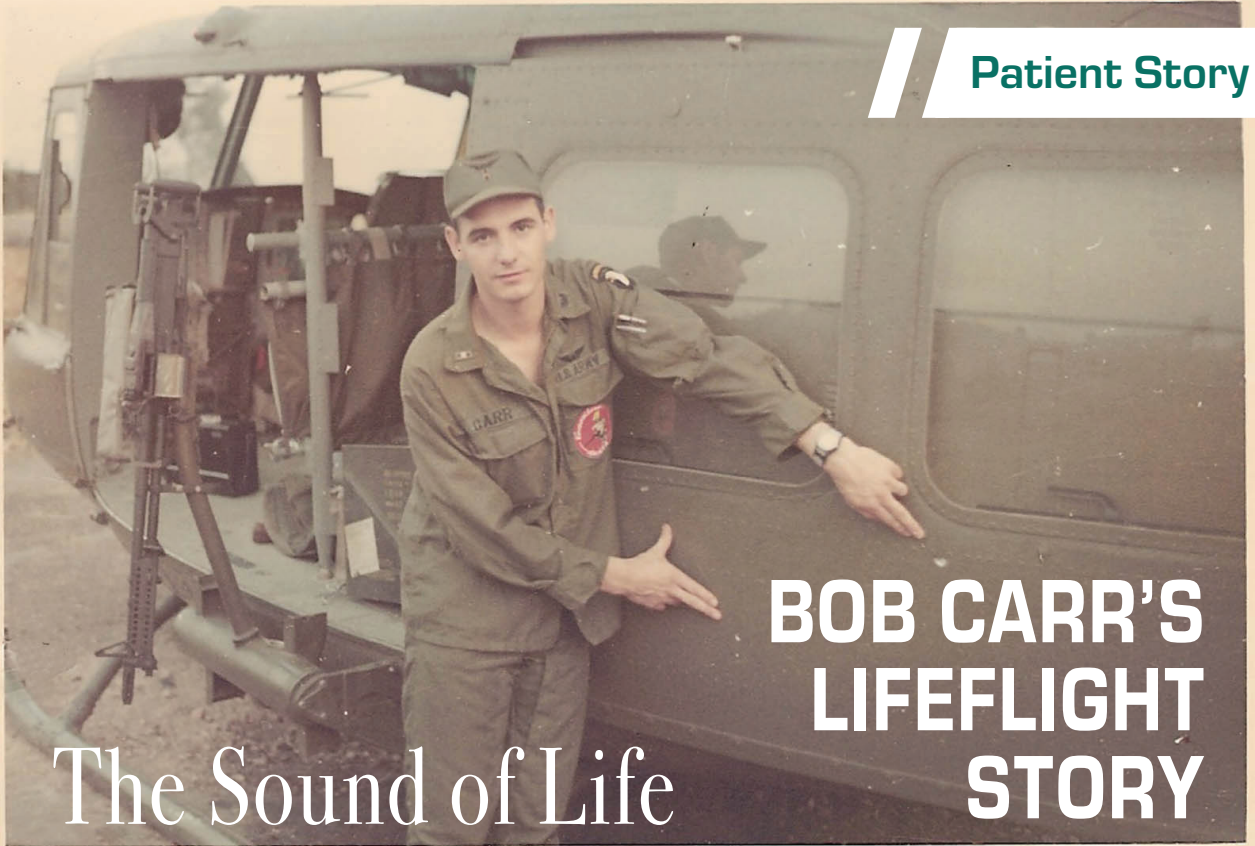
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**LIFEFLIGHT OF MAINE**

more than just helicopters.





# The Sound of Life

## BOB CARR'S LIFEFLIGHT STORY

**"I had to laugh, because I've been a helicopter pilot all my life, and it was the first time I flew in the back of a helicopter. I'm usually the driver."**

*– Bob Carr, retired US Army pilot, former LifeFlight patient*

Most of LifeFlight of Maine's patients do not remember the helicopter ride. Some will say that they wish they could remember, because they've always wanted to ride in one. Given the severity of illness or injury facing most of these patients, it is natural that their body and brain would block certain memories, even if they were not sedated.

Bob Carr, however, remembers his LifeFlight transport. He remembers thinking the stretcher in the aircraft could have been a few inches longer (he's a tall guy), and he remembers that the person flying the aircraft that day was a retired US Coast Guard helicopter pilot. This detail reassured him. He remembers the faces of the LifeFlight clinicians who cared for him, and he remembers, most of all, the professionalism of the crew.

"There was no joking around," Bob shared in a recent conversation. "The flight was incredibly smooth. I was very comfortable flying in the aircraft. I talked with the crew. I knew what the pilot's credentials were and that was reassuring to me. I knew that his military experience made him an extremely professional pilot."

Bob has spent his entire adult life around helicopters. As a young man, he joined the US Army, trained as a helicopter pilot, and then flew Hueys during the Vietnam War. When he returned to Fort Cavazos (formerly Fort Hood) in Texas, he flew helicopters as part of a military assistance program for civilian law enforcement. He later transferred to the New Hampshire Army National Guard, and earned his Airframe and Powerplant License, which is the mechanic's certification required by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to perform maintenance on aircraft.

After leaving the military years later, Bob moved to Florida, where he began working with the local sheriff, who had acquired a decommissioned Huey TH55 but didn't have a pilot to fly it or a technician to maintain it. "I was familiar with those, because that was what I had been trained to fly in the Army," Bob said. So, he joined as their pilot. As the sheriff's air program expanded, more pilots were needed. "So," Bob said, "I got my flight instructor rating to teach people how to fly."

*Photo: Bob Carr in Vietnam in 1970; photo courtesy of Bob Carr.*



In the late 1990's while still working in law enforcement in Florida, Bob had some medical issues that culminated in 1998 with an open-heart surgery. "I even taught my cardiologist how to fly after my surgery." It was all Bob had to say about the incident.

In 2000, Bob retired from law enforcement, though he remained heavily involved in helicopter aviation. He volunteered with a group of fellow Vietnam War veterans who were restoring Hueys from that era. In 2004, the group took their aircraft on a national tour. They finally landed the aircraft, known as "America's Huey 091," on the National Mall in Washington, DC, and then donated it to the Smithsonian. Dozens of Vietnam veterans were involved, and the tour received national media attention. "After that," Bob said, "I swore I was never going to fly again, because I could never top that. That was the best thing I could've ever done."



Bob Carr with Courtney Munger and the chair he built for her; photo courtesy of Bob Carr.

"Then, the first time I'm flying in the back of a helicopter was on my way to Portland." Bob had moved from Florida to Maine, where he had family. His mother was from Millinocket and his father was from Houlton. His niece, it turned out, was the head nurse in Maine Medical Center's cardiology department. It was October 2022, and Bob was in

the back of a LifeFlight of Maine helicopter flying from Millinocket Regional Hospital to Maine Med in Portland. He was experiencing cardiac issues, and his condition was critical.

Bob had been at his home in Millinocket when he began feeling ill. "I was struggling," he recalls, "and I called 911. The Millinocket ambulance wasn't available, so they had to call East Millinocket. The paramedic — Courtney Munger, I'll never forget that name — she put those paddles on me."

Courtney and the East Millinocket ambulance crew brought Bob to the nearest hospital. "Bob's situation was a mutual aid call for us," Courtney remembers. The sole ambulance Millinocket had at the time was transporting another patient. "We went to Millinocket Regional Hospital. Most of my transport times from East Millinocket were anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour. Kingman, Sherman, Staceyville — there's a huge area up there that we cover." Fortunately, Bob lived less than a mile from the hospital.

Courtney remembers the call, and she remembers Bob. "He's just very genuine," she said. "I remember talking to him about aviation on the way to the hospital. I think that was his way of being distracted. You would never have known how sick he actually was by the way he was talking. That decreases everyone's stress level in a difficult situation."

Courtney now serves as a paramedic and firefighter in Waterville. "Time is a huge factor for a lot of our patients," she said. "The utilization of LifeFlight in our rural areas is a huge asset."

Bob and his wife now live in Dover-Foxcroft. When we spoke recently, he answered the phone from under his kitchen sink, where he was halfway through installing a new faucet. When he's not working on his house, he is building Adirondack chairs, like the one he made for Courtney Munger. He has plans to make one for the LifeFlight crew as well, but he has a few other projects to finish first.

"I look up and I see the green and white helicopter," Bob said. "Every time that the aircraft flies into a community, it's the sound of life coming to somebody. In Vietnam, it was the sound of freedom. LifeFlight is the sound of life. Most people I know, they say a quick prayer for whomever the patient is."





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# Clinicians in an Aviation Environment

## Safety, Teamwork, and Professionalism

by Henry Frank



### It's the people who make an organization great, and LifeFlight of Maine is no exception.

There are more than 120 of us on the LifeFlight team. All of us are used to getting A's, we are unaccustomed to failure, we rarely meet a challenge we can't surmount, and our personal commitment to high achievement is coded into our DNA. **This dedication to excellence is reinforced and encouraged every day when we come to work, not for the sake of individual recognition, but for our colleagues, for our patients, and for Maine.**

Our mission is highly specialized and interdisciplinary. We have pilots who used to fly military aircraft now transporting civilians to lifesaving medical care. We have critical care clinicians who now practice medicine thousands of feet in the air. We adapt our skills and develop new ones, so that when someone in Maine is facing a critical injury or illness, we can provide them with the fastest, safest, most advanced medical care and transport available.

"Most of us on the clinical side have no aviation background," said Veronica Marzonie, one of our flight nurses and also the clinical leader of our

internal Safety Committee. The committee is comprised of individuals who represent various roles within the organization. It regularly reviews and reinforces our safety training — especially for the medical crew — and constantly looks for ways to enhance the safety of our operations.

"The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) does not recognize medical personnel as 'crew members,'" said Pete Cartmell, a retired US Army helicopter pilot and LifeFlight's Director of Operations for aviation. "However, internally, we do treat them as a crew member. We want them to be part of the aviation decision making process. We solicit their input. We want to train them up to at least a minimum standard for performance in and around the aircraft that far exceeds what would be required by the FAA for a 'passenger.'"

Our medical crew members receive extensive safety training during their months-long orientation when they join our team. The purpose is to make them comfortable in and around the aircraft, to educate

*Photo: flight paramedic Brad Alleger and flight nurse Sarah Healey.*



them on both FAA and LifeFlight safety protocols, and to train them to enhance the safety of our aviation operation.

“This is a single-pilot IFR program,” Pete explained. “As a pilot, you are expected to be able to accomplish all of the aviation tasks by yourself.” When a patient is on board, the medical crew is in the back of the aircraft, fully focused on caring for that person. When the pilot lands and the medical crew enters the hospital to transfer their patient, the pilot may reposition the aircraft to clear the helipad or refuel nearby.

But on the legs of each transport without a patient on board, our clinicians have a role to play in aviation. “The most helpful thing that the medical crew members offer us is another set of eyes. It’s another line of safety,” Pete said. “You leverage the people you have on board to enhance safety for your operation.” Since our helicopters are operated by a single pilot, a clinical crew member will typically sit in the front of the aircraft with the pilot on a flight leg without a patient on board.

Our clinical colleagues go through extensive safety training during orientation, and additionally participate in annual safety days and online instruction. “The general idea is all about bringing folks with medical experience into this environment,” said Veronica. “When I’m prepping a medication, my partner double checks me. The same principle applies here.”

For example, our medical crew members are trained to use night vision goggles to provide that extra set of eyes at night. They are trained for unforeseen circumstances and how to mitigate risk. They are trained to maintain situational awareness. Most importantly, they are trained to speak up.

**We have a mantra on our team: “Three to go, one to say ‘no.’”** On a typical helicopter transport, our crew consists of three people: a pilot, a nurse, and a paramedic. For a mission to proceed, everyone

needs to be on the same page. If someone has concerns, they are expected to speak up, and if we cannot sufficiently address the concern or question, we transport the patient by ground instead.

“We will solicit input from the medical crew,” said Pete. “I have had experienced crew members say, ‘I’m not comfortable with that. I think we should go by ground.’ We also do that in flight. I’ve encountered weather in flight that I was comfortable with, but a crew member said they weren’t. As the pilot, I explained my reasoning and in some cases we all agreed to proceed. In other cases, the medical crew reached the patient by ground.”

“Situational awareness is developed over time,” Pete continued. “We try right from the beginning to stress the importance that they are on board the aircraft and lives are at stake. They have a voice. We encourage them to speak up and be part of the decision-making process.”

“Coming into this industry, knowing that I wanted to do this type of job, I realized that the more knowledge I could gain, the more I brought to the table,” said Veronica. “I’m passionate about the fact that we can design systems that reduce the risks involved in what we do.”

**We do everything we can to be there for our patients, when and where they need us.** We have invested heavily in technology and training to make LifeFlight as safe and reliable as possible. Our team is deeply committed to these efforts. In the end, our patients are relying on us to get them the care they need, and we are relying on one another to do so safely. We strive to be worthy of the trust placed in us by our patients and their families in their hour of need, and we work tirelessly to be the best at what we do for the sake of our team and for the people of Maine.



*Henry Frank is the Director of Communications for LifeFlight of Maine and The LifeFlight Foundation. He joined the organization in February 2023 and is humbled daily by the expertise, professionalism, and dedication of his colleagues to the mission and to the people of Maine.*







# LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT CHRIS FIFE

**Forests are as emblematic of Maine as lobsters, schooners, and snow.** They represent a multi-billion-dollar industry, and they lure thousands of jobs and tons of machinery about as far from town as one can get and still be in Maine. The forest products industry has supported LifeFlight of Maine since the beginning, because the people who work in this sector understand that their jobs take them to places where help, if they need it, might only be able to reach them in time if it comes by helicopter. Deepening this partnership is a priority for LifeFlight, because everyone in Maine benefits from a strong forest products industry and expanded access to emergency medical care in the Maine woods.

In June 2024, Chris Fife joined the board of The LifeFlight Foundation. Chris is the Public Affairs Manager for a timber company called Weyerhaeuser. His responsibilities cover more than one million acres of the company’s holdings in New England and beyond, and he has spent most of his adult life among forests. He is intimately familiar with the Maine woods: the economic opportunities it provides, the iconic place it holds in the Maine imagination, and the perils that await the unprepared or unfortunate. As a forester, a recreational pilot, a former firefighter,

an avid outdoorsman, and a staunch advocate for sustainable, profitable, and accessible Maine forests, **Chris understands why the Maine woods needs LifeFlight.**

Like most people who are “from away,” Chris’s story, in his own retelling, begins when he moved to Maine. He attended the University of Maine in Orono, where he earned a degree in forest management and volunteered with the fire department. He started his career working for the timber division of Georgia Pacific down east in Baileyville (formerly Woodland).

Five years later, he relocated down south working as a forester and analyst — Georgia, Florida, Alabama, North Carolina, Virginia. Georgia Pacific spun off its timber division, which merged with another timber company called Plum Creek. When a position in Jackman, Maine, became open, Chris and his wife, Michele, who is originally from Dexter, Maine, moved north to the state they both love.

In Jackman, Chris stepped into a position managing a portion of Plum Creek’s 850,000 acres in northern New England. “For large landowners, that land is your portfolio,” Chris explained in a recent conversation. As a forest

*Photo: Chris Fife and his wife, Michele, at a Cross for LifeFlight event, August 2024.*



manager, he was responsible for determining what was on that land, both biologically and in terms of financial value, when different sections might be ready for harvesting, planning that harvest, securing the right contractors, and ensuring it was sustainably regenerated afterward. “As you can imagine,” Chris explained, “managing a million acres of timberlands is complex.”

For the past six years, Chris, who now lives in Winslow, has managed public affairs for Weyerhaeuser’s holdings in Maine, New Hampshire, Michigan, and West Virginia (Plum Creek later merged with Weyerhaeuser). Chris is involved in education and advocacy for forests and forest management at all levels: within the company, in policymaking and government, and among the general public. “There is a such a long, deep history of open lands and that historic use has persisted,” Chris said. He is a staunch advocate for public access to Maine’s forests for recreational use. Mutual respect between landowners and recreators, a strong and vibrant forest products industry, safety and access to emergency resources — these are all issues that are top of mind for Chris, and ones he believes in passionately.

“I really love the North Woods and those remote areas and doing things that put you out there, away from traditional EMS services,” Chris shared. “Living in a small town and being in this industry, on top of my volunteer firefighting time, I know how important LifeFlight is.”

LifeFlight has been in the background of Chris’s work for years as a critical safety net. He served as a volunteer firefighter when he lived in Jackman. “We would do trainings with LifeFlight both for Plum Creek and also with the fire department. We established a lot of landing zones,” Chris shared. He is also a recreational pilot with a tailwheel airplane designed to land on unpaved airfields. “I’m more interested in bush flying,” he explained. He enjoys being out there in the forest.

Weyerhaeuser is a generous donor to LifeFlight. Chris has also personally supported LifeFlight for years through the annual Cross for LifeFlight. Joining The LifeFlight Foundation board made sense to him. “With my interest in aviation,” he said, “and recognizing what a tool a helicopter can be in life-threatening situations, critical care situations, that was a natural fit.” **Having Chris on the board further deepens the longstanding partnership between LifeFlight, Weyerhaeuser, and Maine’s forest products industry.**

“Over the last four years, we have been very intentional and strategic about building the Foundation board to help us engage with specific industries and regions in Maine,” said Kate O’Halloran, executive director of The LifeFlight Foundation. “We have recruited board members with expertise in key industries and regions of the state as we expand and strengthen both our marketing and fundraising efforts. We are exceedingly fortunate to have added new Trustees such as Chris, who can help us achieve our goals and who are so personally committed to our mission.”

“What I bring to the board is a deeper, stronger connection to our industry,” Chris said. “LifeFlight and the Foundation are already highly regarded by my company and others in our industry. I think there’s an opportunity to think more strategically about priorities and connections, and continue to grow this partnership in a way that benefits everyone in Maine.”

*Photos by Mark Fleming, Lone Spruce Creative.*







## HELICOPTER IFR: HOW TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION ARE SAVING LIVES IN MAINE

**Josh Dickson is LifeFlight of Maine's director of aviation.**

He oversees LifeFlight Aviation Services (LFAS), the division of LifeFlight that is certified by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to operate LifeFlight's aircraft. Fully staffed, his department includes ten airplane pilots, fifteen helicopter pilots, nine aviation maintenance technicians, and a leadership team consisting of some of the best aviators and maintainers in the country. In addition to the aircraft and the team that operates them, Josh also oversees an extensive network of aviation infrastructure, including the majority of Maine's weather cameras and observation stations, refueling and de-icing

depots, and, importantly, LifeFlight's IFR program.

Dave Burr is LFAS's operations coordinator and the mastermind behind the IFR program. He flew helicopters in the US Navy and then the agriculture industry before coming to LifeFlight of Maine in 2001, transporting patients as a helicopter pilot for more than two decades. As LifeFlight's IFR program expanded, Dave transitioned to managing it full time. "Dave took more than 20 years of flying medevac in Maine and used that experience to create an IFR route system for LifeFlight from scratch based upon the needs of the operation," Josh said of Dave's leadership.



“IFR” stands for “instrument flight rules.” It is a highly technical, heavily regulated set of aviation policies and procedures that, simply put, makes operating aircraft safer. It is also saving lives here in Maine.

In the 12-month period from July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024, LifeFlight transported 407 patients in a helicopter under IFR. For the 12 months prior, that figure is 20. In many of those cases, transporting the patient by helicopter was only possible under IFR. Thanks to significant investments and a unique partnership with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), LifeFlight’s IFR program has expanded rapidly in the past year. **The labor-intensive, technologically advanced, and highly specialized work Josh, Dave, and their team have accomplished has made all the difference for hundreds of patients, their families, and their communities. Lives have been saved because a helicopter flying IFR was able to reach them.**

To understand what IFR is, it is helpful to understand what it is not. There are two sets of rules that govern how all air traffic in the United States navigates across the sky. One set is observed when navigating primarily by visual reference — “visual flight rules” or “VFR” — which means the pilot relies primarily on their ability to look out the window and see the ground, other aircraft, and anything that might obstruct their flightpath. When the weather and visibility deteriorate, the pilot can no longer navigate by visual reference. Without IFR training and capabilities, that pilot is forced to land the aircraft, navigate around clouds and low-visibility areas, or remain on the ground in the first place.

IFR is the second set of rules. Operating under IFR, the pilot is navigating the aircraft primarily by referencing the instruments in the cockpit, carefully following detailed procedures and protocols set out by the FAA.

Under IFR, the pilot stays in communication with Air Traffic Control (ATC), which confirms the intended flightpath does not intersect with another aircraft’s flightpath. GPS technology informs the pilot where their aircraft is in space. Their attitude indicator tells them the aircraft’s degree of pitch, bank, and roll — meaning, how it is oriented relative to the Earth’s horizon, which they may be unable to see through the windshield. Their altimeter notes how high above the ground the aircraft is flying. The heading indicator shows the direction the aircraft is pointing; it is essentially a compass. Their course deviation indicator informs them if they stray too far from their predetermined flightpath. This technology is highly advanced and, for the level of equipment required for LifeFlight’s sophisticated IFR program, represents a significant financial investment.

Airplanes, such as commercial jets, fly under IFR almost exclusively. It is a far less common practice for helicopters, and one that is only beginning to gain momentum. **LifeFlight of Maine is at the forefront of this development.**

Photos by Mark Fleming, Lone Spruce Creative.



“We need to have aircraft that are certificated for IFR flight. That’s a more expensive aircraft with all the avionics and capabilities required to do this,” Josh explained. “We need to hire pilots with higher qualifications. We need to put a lot more time and sophistication into training. We need to have weather reporting all over the state. We need to have a departure procedure to take off. We need to have routing that will allow us to fly to the patient without having to climb to such high altitudes that icing becomes a concern, even in the summer. And then we need to have an approach procedure to land at the receiving hospital.”

All five of LifeFlight’s Leonardo A109 helicopters, along with its King Air B200 airplane, are considered IFR capable by the FAA. All of LifeFlight’s pilots are IFR certified, which requires re-verification with check rides every six months, rather than the more standard 12-month intervals. “It’s probably the most challenging thing the pilots have to accomplish in aviation,” said Kirk Donovan, Chief Pilot for LifeFlight and a retired US Army aviator with more than 600 helicopter IFR flight hours. Kirk is responsible for ensuring LifeFlight’s pilots maintain their IFR proficiency. “We have routinized the use of IFR so that our pilots are more comfortable and more practiced at it.” **Flying IFR is a much safer way to operate a helicopter**, which is why LifeFlight has invested so heavily in both its pilots and its program.

Merely having IFR capable aircraft and pilots trained to fly them is still not enough to operate an IFR medevac program. Predetermined flightpaths must be established, particularly those used to navigate during takeoff and landing. These are called instrument “approach” and “departure” procedures. “We have more than 60 instrument procedures in Maine for helicopters. This didn’t happen overnight. The amount of infrastructure that we need to have to support our IFR program is mammoth,” said Josh. All of these procedures also have to be flown and

verified by the FAA at least once every 540 days.

Josh and Dave are also working with the FAA to develop the first helicopter “performance-based navigation,” or “PBN routes,” in Maine. These are predetermined routes between two points that are certified by the FAA and verified by Air Traffic Control as safe for helicopters to fly — highways in the sky, metaphorically speaking. Using state-of-the-art GPS technology, these PBN routes allow aircraft to navigate more precisely and avoid weather at higher altitudes through which helicopters may not be able to fly. This technology enhances both the safety and reliability of LifeFlight’s aviation program.

These PBN routes are highly complex, requiring significant expertise in helicopter IFR aviation, as well as considerable experience collaborating with the FAA. Under Josh and Dave’s leadership, the FAA has recently certified the first of these helicopter PBN routes in Maine with more on the way.

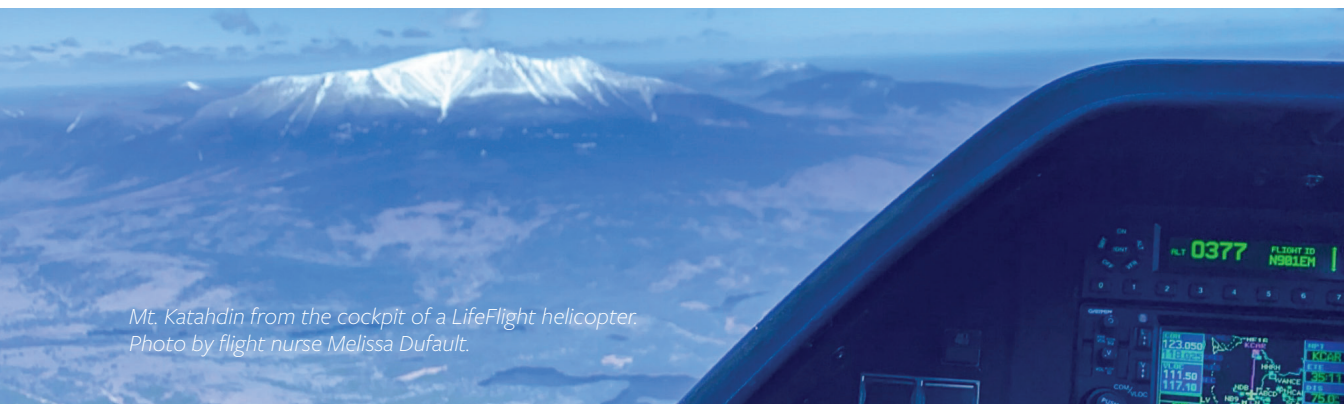
For the IFR program to function, every single one of these pieces — aircraft, avionics, pilots, air traffic controllers, infrastructure, instrument flight routes — must be in place and maintained to FAA standards.

LifeFlight of Maine was founded on the promise that it would answer the call for help, and that it would do so with the highest safety standards. Since the technology exists to allow Kirk and his team of pilots to fly a helicopter safely through a spring rainstorm or a summer fog bank, bringing a LifeFlight medical crew to someone facing a life-threatening emergency with no other options, those are tools worth having and an investment worth making.

**LifeFlight’s IFR program is esoteric by nature and challenging in practice, but it has made a second chance possible for hundreds of Maine families in the past year, and it will undoubtedly do so for thousands more in the years to come.**



*Mt. Katahdin from the cockpit of a LifeFlight helicopter.  
Photo by flight nurse Melissa Dufault.*





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THE LIFEFLIGHT FOUNDATION

*Dispatches* is a publication of The LifeFlight Foundation, which provides fundraising and public relations support to LifeFlight of Maine, the state's only air ambulance service.

The LifeFlight Foundation is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization under Section 501 (c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Service Tax Code. It is governed by an elected board of trustees who represent medical, business, legal, and educational fields throughout the state. The Foundation also supports the development and funding of Maine's major air medical needs, such as trauma training statewide; construction of hospital helipads; and installation of weather reporting, navigational, and communications systems.

**The Foundation's office is located in Augusta, Maine.** You can reach us at 207-230-7092 or by email at [info@lifeflightmaine.org](mailto:info@lifeflightmaine.org).

Donations are tax-deductible.

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LIFEFLIGHT OF MAINE

LifeFlight of Maine is a nonprofit, statewide critical care medical transport service jointly owned by Northern Light Health and Central Maine Healthcare Corporation. LifeFlight's airplane, five helicopters, and ground ambulances are based in Bangor, Lewiston, and Sanford. The aircraft are operated by LifeFlight Aviation Services and dispatched by MedComm. Along with dedicated ground ambulances, these vehicles cover the entire state and offshore islands. LifeFlight complements and supports the work of local EMS and hospital personnel in caring for the critically ill or injured. Each base is staffed by a highly qualified team of pilots, mechanics, nurses, and paramedics. Nearly 40,000 patients have been safely transported since LifeFlight's founding in 1998. LifeFlight was fully re-accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Medical Transport Systems in 2022.

As a nonprofit,

LifeFlight of Maine relies on your support to ensure that every person, in every community in Maine, has access to critical care and medical transport when needed.

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