

DISPATCHES

A Publication of The LifeFlight Foundation

As access to healthcare across Maine feels less certain, we are working harder than ever to be there when you need us.



IN THIS ISSUE

Updates from the Flightdeck
Connecting Maine's Islands to Healthcare
Leadership Spotlight: Dan Daigneault
Patient Story: Hollye Lord
Veterans at LifeFlight of Maine
We must do better. Lives depend on it.

OCTOBER 2025

Updates from the Flightdeck

Dear Friends,

As Mainers, we understand better than most the importance of access — how time, distance, and geography can mean everything in an emergency.

Since 1998, LifeFlight has flown over 41,000 missions, delivering rapid, expert care to people facing the worst moments of their lives — cardiac arrests, strokes, traumatic injuries, and newborn emergencies. The care we provide is not only fast, it is among the very best in Maine. **In an emergency, every minute matters, and LifeFlight knows how to make every minute count.**

But here's the reality: LifeFlight of Maine is a nonprofit, and a capital intensive one at that. LifeFlight exists because of people like you. Every time a helicopter lifts off or a crew races to a remote island or rural town, it is your generosity that helps make that response possible. We depend on support from communities, businesses, and individuals who understand that saving lives isn't just a nice idea. It's a shared responsibility.

Sincerely,



Joe Kellner, CEO
LifeFlight of Maine



Supporting LifeFlight is one of the most direct, impactful ways to invest in the health and safety of Maine's people.

Your donation doesn't just fuel a helicopter. It fuels training, equipment, and innovation — and ultimately, it fuels hope. It means a mother survives a car crash. A child survives a seizure. A grandfather lives to meet his great-granddaughter.

Together, we have built a system that reaches across water and wilderness to deliver expert critical care wherever it is needed. That system is more important now than ever. Thank you for believing in our mission, thank you for standing with us, and thank you for helping LifeFlight of Maine bring hope and healing to every community in our great state.

We hope the stories on the pages that follow encourage you to invest, or to reinvest, in honoring that partnership.



Kate O'Halloran, Executive Director
The LifeFlight Foundation





Connecting Maine's Islands to Healthcare

Why Jim and Pam Cleveland Support LifeFlight

Jim and Pam Cleveland have fond memories of spending summer days in Islesboro with their family. The island in Penobscot Bay is only fourteen miles long and is home to slightly more than 600 year-round residents. It's where Pam grew up and where the couple's children and grandchildren now come to visit Jim and her in the warmer months. Summer days are filled with boating, swimming, and enjoying the tranquility that comes with living on the island.

"There's nothing that can beat a sunset in our backyard. And, of course, seeing our grandkids enjoy the fun of the beach and the dock just really brings new life to you," said Pam in a recent conversation.

The tranquility of island life in Maine was brought to an abrupt halt for the Clevelands one day in July of 2015 when the couple's grandson Oliver needed emergency medical care that wasn't available on Islesboro. The island has a health center, but it is not equipped for the level of care available at larger hospitals on the mainland.

Oliver, who was two years old at the time, and his older brother, James, had been dropped off to spend the night at their grandparent's house.

"They were entertaining themselves in the living room," Jim remembered. "They seemed safe and secure."

While in the living room, the boys found a votive

candle with liquid paraffin inside. Jim said it resembled a sippy cup in a way, which is now apparent to him in retrospect. In the blink of an eye and unbeknownst to Jim and Pam, young Oliver took a sip of the toxic liquid. James immediately told his grandparents, who rushed to the living room to check on the toddler.

"He seemed okay. I looked at the bottle, it looked like none was gone," said Jim. The couple called Poison Control, who recommended they contact the Islesboro Health Center.

"The health center said to bring him right down," added Pam. The couple immediately took Oliver to the local clinic to be checked out.

"It was getting serious, but I didn't realize how serious. And then I'll never forget it, but the physician assistant said, 'Jim I'm so sorry to meet you at a time like this.' And then they put Oliver on a nebulizer, and the PA made the decision to call LifeFlight. And that saved Oliver's life," recalled Jim. "It gives me a chill now to say it."

Local EMS on the island transported Oliver in an ambulance from the clinic to Islesboro Municipal Airport, where they continued to treat Oliver as they waited for a LifeFlight of Maine crew to arrive.

After the crew landed, EMS briefed the LifeFlight clinicians on Oliver's condition. The toddler was

then loaded into the helicopter, where he was intubated. He was flown from Islesboro to Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center in Bangor.

Meanwhile, his parents, who were on the island and had been notified of the accident, got in line for the ferry because there was no room to ride with their son on the helicopter.

The ferry ride from Islesboro to Lincolnville is about twenty minutes. Once on the mainland, it takes another hour and fifteen minutes to drive from the ferry terminal to the hospital. “LifeFlight could do this in twenty minutes, and it was the difference between life and death,” said Pam.

Oliver was in the hospital for five days. Thanks to the quick response from his family, local EMS, LifeFlight, and the hospital, Oliver made a full recovery. The now 12-year-old is very active and enjoys soccer, basketball, and skiing.

Pam and Jim said they knew nothing about LifeFlight before their grandson’s transport. However, after witnessing the care firsthand, they learned how vitally important the organization is to the people of Maine — especially those who live on the islands.

“All of a sudden it became crystal clear that rural areas in Maine, and isolated areas like islands, have

to have a different way to get to healthcare,” said Pam.

“It was life-altering. I realize now that this would have changed our lives forever if this had gone south. And right now, it’s a wonderful story because Oliver is a healthy, happy boy,” said Jim.

For the past ten years, the Clevelands have donated to the LifeFlight Foundation. They encourage others to consider supporting the nonprofit as well.

“It’s an expensive operation, but it’s a lifesaving operation,” said Jim.

“As a donor, you can see all the improvements they make from year to year,” added Pam. “They’re so patient-oriented, and their crew is always training. As we think about where to donate, I always want to see where the money’s going,” said Pam. “It’s really a great organization.”

The couple, who now lives in Kennebunk when they’re not on the island, spoke at an event this past summer on Islesboro to raise funds for LifeFlight and to promote awareness on the island. They want to make sure more people are familiar with the organization’s services and appreciate LifeFlight’s vital role as a connector from the island’s health clinic to higher levels of care.



Pam and Jim Cleveland at a LifeFlight donor event, Summer 2025.

Additionally, the couple is sharing their family’s story to let others know that LifeFlight helps patients of all ages — from newborns to centenarians.

“I think a lot of people of our age — I’m retired, you know — think of LifeFlight as, ‘Oh, someone had a heart problem,’ or old-age things,” said Jim. “They don’t think about grandchildren coming to visit and something happening, because grandkids, they’re young and they’re healthy.”

Since the event, the Clevelands said they are already seeing increased awareness of LifeFlight on the island.

“A woman at the store, after we had shared our story, saw me in the parking lot, and she said, ‘You know, you really made me rethink the whole

LifeFlight thing’ Because just like Jim said, you think of it as care for elderly or maybe sickly adults, but really it could be for kids, too,” shared Pam.

While LifeFlight continues to serve Maine’s island communities, especially during the summer months as the population swells, Oliver’s transport was thankfully the Cleveland family’s first and only encounter with LifeFlight, until the reception they spoke at this summer. Jim and Pam love spending time at their summer home with their six grandchildren, and while their focus is mostly on swimming and pick-up soccer games, they’re glad to see their friends and neighbors on the island think a bit more about making an investment in access to healthcare.



Top: Oliver Cleveland on the day he was discharged from the hospital in 2015.
Bottom left: Oliver in 2025. Bottom right: the Clevelands on Islesboro, Summer 2025.
Photos courtesy of Morgan Cleveland, Oliver’s mother.



LEADERSHIP SPOTLIGHT **DAN DAIGNEAULT**



Dan Daigneault with his wife, Carol. Photo courtesy of Dan Daigneault.

Dan Daigneault is a native Mainer, French Canadian by descent, who grew up in Lewiston. He earned a degree in finance and accounting from the University of Maine. After a short period in Rhode Island early in his career, he moved back to Maine and eventually set down roots in mid coast Maine. Dan is focused and driven, dedicated to his family, his career, and the community. Like many Mainers, while he spends a bit more time in Florida since retiring, he maintains a steadfast sense of responsibility to the communities he lives in and remains fiercely loyal to this foggy, rocky, cold, and beautiful place called Maine.

Dan retired in 2015 from a 40-year career in banking. He worked for Camden National Bank for 15 years, moving his way up through various leadership positions. In 1994, he was hired as CEO of what was then known as First National Bank of Damariscotta — now simply First National Bank. At 42 years old, he was one of the youngest CEOs in the state, and he led that company for more than 20 years.

Throughout his career, community service was a consistent theme for Dan. He credits his passion for civic engagement to his time in student government

at the University of Maine, where he was Student Government Treasurer and a student member of the University of Maine Board of Trustees Finance Committee. Early in his professional career, board service with nonprofits and community organizations was expected of leaders at his bank. When he rose to the top, it was something he expected of his own leadership team. “Community service is a big part of who I am and what I like to do,” Dan shared in a recent conversation. Dan, who leads by example, added that he has served on boards almost continuously since the late 1970’s.

Dan and his wife, Carol, have long been generous supporters of LifeFlight of Maine, although they didn’t know much about the organization — especially that it was an independent nonprofit instead of a government entity — until a winter evening in 2001 when Carol’s car hit black ice and tipped over on its side.

One of their sons was a student at Gould Academy in Bethel, and Carol was driving home to Boothbay after dropping him off at school. Dan remembers that she was running late, and he hadn’t heard from her.

The phone rang, and it was the sheriff's department. Dan recalls the officer explaining that there had been a car accident in Edgecomb. Local EMS had responded and quickly determined Carol's injuries required more advanced care, so they transported her to Wiscasset Airport, where they met the LifeFlight aircraft. Carol was in a helicopter on her way to Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston, the officer told Dan.

Thankfully, Carol got the care she needed and recovered from her injuries. "Since then," Dan said, "we've always had LifeFlight at the top of our list. LifeFlight exists to save lives. Every dollar given to LifeFlight, one way or another, will save lives."

A few months after Dan retired, The LifeFlight Foundation approached him about joining its Board of Trustees. Dan agreed and was voted onto the board in 2016. He spent the first year or two getting to know both the Foundation and LifeFlight of Maine — its leadership, its culture, its operations, its mission, and its needs. In the years that followed, he became a staunch advocate for increasing the fundraising capacity of the Foundation to support the growing needs of LifeFlight of Maine and the increasing demand for its services. He was elected as Chair of the Foundation Board in 2018 and served as a representative on LifeFlight of Maine's Steering Committee, helping to identify those needs and to develop strategies at the Foundation to meet them.

A symbiotic relationship exists between LifeFlight of Maine, which operates advanced care teams to

transport critically ill and injured patients across the state, and The LifeFlight Foundation, which is a separate nonprofit committed to raising funds and awareness to make LifeFlight of Maine's mission possible. As a board member, Dan has been instrumental in helping both organizations rise to meet new challenges in recent years.

"Dan Daigneault is one of a kind," said Kate O'Halloran, Executive Director of The LifeFlight Foundation. "He is generous, thoughtful, committed, and decisive. His financial acumen and strategic thinking have been extremely valuable, but it's Dan's keen understanding of and unwavering commitment to the LifeFlight mission that always helps guide what we do. He brings a leadership presence to the board and to the organization that always pushes us forward and challenges us to do more, and to be thoughtful and rigorous in all of our endeavors."

This summer, after nine years of service, Dan concluded his tenure on the Foundation board. As a life-long Mainer, Dan is well aware of the issues faced by people across the state, particularly when it comes to healthcare. "Access to healthcare is continuing to be more challenging," Dan said. "I think we all see the healthcare system in Maine continuing to erode. LifeFlight is that link among all the hospitals in the state. I think ten years from now LifeFlight will have an even more crucial role, and I seriously believe it's in a solid position to grow and meet that need."



LifeFlight crew members with our plane, "Lima Mike."



Patient Story

Hollye Lord

“I’m a lifelong Washington County girl,” Hollye Lord said during a recent visit to LifeFlight of Maine’s Bangor hangar. She lives in Meddybemps, a small community between Calais and Machias. She has worked as a nurse at Down East Community Hospital in Machias for the past five years, and prior to that at Calais Community Hospital. Hollye also has a horse, Willow, which she boards in Jonesboro, and that horse is why she drove from Washington County to Bangor one spring morning to meet a LifeFlight pilot and flight nurse.

“I was probably three years old when I first fell in love with being on the back of a horse,” Hollye said. “I started taking lessons at ten.” Hollye is an experienced equestrian, but riding a one-thousand-pound animal always carries some risk, and on May 24, 2024, the Friday of Memorial Day Weekend, she almost died.

“It was day two of a four-day clinic over in Jonesboro,” Hollye recalled. The class decided to go for a trail ride. In addition to Hollye and Willow, there were six other horses and riders. As they were starting out, for no apparent reason, or at least not one Hollye can recollect, Willow reared up on her hind legs. Hollye was thrown to the ground. Willow fell back and landed on top of Hollye. “I remember laying on the ground and all I could see was brown,” Hollye said. “One thousand pounds fell on me. It happened so fast I didn’t even realize what was going on or have time to react.”

The other riders saw Hollye and Willow fall and called 911. Most of what happened next remains fuzzy in Hollye’s memory. An ambulance arrived at some point, but she doesn’t really remember it. She remembers hearing voices around her, and then she remembers hearing a helicopter.



An ambulance from Machias had responded to the call. The first responders had quickly triaged Hollye and could see the trauma her body had sustained. They had requested a LifeFlight transport.

The LifeFlight 1 crew, which is LifeFlight’s helicopter team based in Bangor, responded. Rotor Wing Captain Mike Bonenfant landed the aircraft in a field close enough to where Hollye had fallen that flight nurse Barrett Strout and flight paramedic Jillian Sheltra, with the help of the Machias Ambulance team, were able to roll her to the aircraft on a stretcher. The LifeFlight crew flew Hollye to Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center (EMMC) in Bangor. “I remember the ear protection being put on me, and I remember the hum of the helicopter going up,” Hollye recalled. “And I remember someone saying it was going to get bumpy.”

Hollye had suffered significant injuries. She had substantial internal bleeding, major lacerations to her liver, and two punctured lungs. She underwent two surgeries. “The trauma team [at EMMC] said that ‘people don’t come through these injuries like you have,’” Hollye said. “I didn’t realize until I got home and obtained my medical records that what they meant was people don’t survive.”

The incredible part of Hollye’s story is not so much her accident as it is her recovery. She spent seven days at Eastern Maine before being discharged, and then she was out of work convalescing for nine weeks. “I led my own rehab. Two walks every day. A little bit farther every time,” Hollye said. “As a nurse, I knew what I had to do to get better.”

“When I was in the hospital, I was going to get back on a horse on October 1. That was my goal. Horseback riding has always been my release. What hurts you is also what’s going to heal you.” She had been discharged from the hospital on May 31, and getting back on a horse in four months seemed ambitious. But it also felt to Hollye like a long time to wait. On August 22, she thought: “Today’s the day, I’m getting back on my horse.” And she did.

Hollye considers herself fortunate for the care she received. On her first day back at work, she met one of the first responders who had arrived at the scene of her accident, a paramedic named Ryan. A few months later, she reached out to LifeFlight and asked if she could meet the crew who transported her. She drove to Bangor in April 2025 to thank them personally for the care they had provided. Seeing her standing in the hangar, it would have been impossible to guess without knowing her story that nine months prior she had been laying unconscious in the back of the aircraft she was now smiling for a photo beside. “For me, it was the difference between living and dying,” Hollye said. “I was bleeding internally. I needed an OR. I needed a trauma team. I was in shock, so I needed the ICU level of care as well.”

Her recovery has been remarkable. “I shot an eight-point buck in November,” Hollye said proudly and with a chuckle. “Not many people are on a ventilator in May and then shoot an eight-point buck in November.”



Hollye participated in the 2025 Cross for LifeFlight on the Grateful Patient Team. She raised more than \$6,000 to support LifeFlight, far surpassing her goal! Hollye was recognized with the Founder’s Prize, which is given each year to the participant who embodies the spirit, intention, will, and grit of event founder Jessie Davis.

Hollye visited LifeFlight’s Bangor hangar in April 2025 to meet flight paramedic Barrett Strout (left) and rotor wing captain Mike Bonenfant (right) who transported her after her accident.



VETERANS AT LIFEFLIGHT OF MAINE



Pete Cartmell
Director of Operations (Aviation)
US Army Veteran

Mike Bonenfant
Safety Coordinator (Aviation)
US Army Veteran

Randy Collins
Director of Maintenance
US Air Force Veteran

Dustin Smiley
Rotor Wing Captain
US Navy Veteran

Dave Burr
Operations Coordinator (Aviation)
US Navy Veteran

Chuck Hogan
Chief Clinical Officer
US Air Force Veteran

LifeFlight of Maine currently has 143 employees across the organization. Thirty-four people — almost one quarter of the LifeFlight staff and crew — are either veterans or current members of the armed forces.

These men and women serve in nearly every role and crew position at LifeFlight and are a vital part of our team. They make us stronger as an organization, lend unique skills and expertise to our mission, and demonstrate, on a daily basis, what service means.

Many of our veterans received some initial training or certification in their discipline through the military — flight school, aviation maintenance

technician training, medic training. Others served their country in ways unrelated to their role at LifeFlight. All of them gained a penchant for teamwork, leadership skills, a commitment to a shared mission, a dedication to serving others, and a calm demeanor amidst chaos. These themes come up again and again when talking with them.

VETERANS AT LIFEFLIGHT OF MAINE IN THEIR OWN WORDS

“Having that service mentality of teamwork and a mission-oriented way of working together to achieve a desired outcome has helped me tremendously in my years at LifeFlight. And I see my colleagues with military backgrounds. They tend to be extremely team-oriented. They understand what it means to work toward a goal that is larger than themselves.”

Chuck Hogan, Chief Clinical Officer

Chuck served with the 22nd air refueling wing at March Air Force Base in Moreno Valley, California. He worked as a command and control specialist and deployed multiple times across the globe.



Darby Amelly, Aviation Maintenance Technician

Darby joined the LifeFlight team in 2022 after eight years in the US Navy. While in the Navy, she trained as an aircraft technician and worked on helicopters, mostly UH60Rs and UH60Ss. Darby earned her Airframe and Powerplant license from the FAA shortly before she left the Navy and joined the LifeFlight team.

“The Military experience of my colleagues varies greatly. However, there is a common thread that helps to strengthen us. We know the value of teamwork. It shows in our dedication, in our willingness to work together every day to accomplish our mission.”

Bill Bradley, Communications Specialist, MedComm

Bill served in the US Navy as an operations specialist in the Combat Information Center on an aircraft carrier.

“A common thread among veterans is a strong sense of duty, accountability, and purpose. These qualities, along with a dedicated work ethic, strengthen our team at LifeFlight and foster a shared commitment to our mission and to the people of Maine.”

**Pete Cartmell,
Director of Operations (Aviation)**

Pete is the senior leader of LifeFlight’s aviation department. Pete retired from the Army as a UH-60 Blackhawk pilot after 30 years of combined service between active duty and the National Guard, including three combat tours as a medevac pilot.



“Attention to detail is drilled into you from the second you reach basic training. Ultimately, it is this attention to detail and the ability to turn vast amounts of information into working knowledge for a job that really shows among the veterans at LifeFlight!”

Ryan McGowan, EMT Vehicle Operator

Ryan served with the nuclear Security Response Team in the US Air Force.

“Veterans are team oriented, well-grounded, and focused on task completion. They are highly trained in their field with real world experience, they are service driven, and they are dedicated to a cause much larger than themselves.”

Kirk Donovan, Chief Pilot

Kirk served in the US Army for 26 years. He flew helicopters for the Army's Special Operations Aviation Regiment (160th SOAR), and later trained as the High-Altitude Rescue Team Lead Pilot supporting the National Park Service on Mount Denali in Alaska.



“Our military service experience contributes significantly to the organization’s resilience. When confronted with obstacles or challenges, we are equipped to shift perspectives and efficiently rework problems to deliver effective solutions.”

Tommy Gallant, Flight Paramedic

Tommy began his service with the Maine National Guard as a flight medic. He now serves as a UH-60 Blackhawk pilot.



Dane Rodgers, Rotor Wing Captain

Dane served with the Wyoming Army National Guard as a Medical Service Corps Officer and Air Ambulance Pilot. He deployed with air ambulance units to Bosnia, Kuwait, and Afghanistan. He retired as the Wyoming State Army Aviation Officer in the rank of Colonel.

“If someone is just doing this job for the money, the money will never be enough to keep them here. There are always cushier vocations with less risk and effort than is asked of employees at LifeFlight. I know that all of my colleagues, especially the ones who are veterans, do this work, at least on some level, because what we do matters to the people of Maine and the rest of New England. They’re invested, and that’s a comforting thought for me.”

Abel Gleason, Rotor Wing Captain

Abel is a helicopter pilot with the Maine National Guard. He calls it “the unit he was raised in,” as his father, mother, sister, and all three of his maternal uncles also served there. He began as a medevac pilot, and then in 2014 switched to Air Assault.



“Our military veterans at LifeFlight of Maine bring discipline, adaptability, a collaborative approach, and expertise to our organization. Like civilian careers, military careers can vary. Still, you can expect veterans to have a sense of service, to look out for others, and to desire a role in something greater than themselves. That makes us a great fit with a team that shares these values.”

Dustin Smiley, Rotor Wing Captain

Dustin was a US Naval Aviator for 20 years, operating at sea from aircraft carriers, instructing flight students, building international partnerships, and leading citizen sailors while providing operational support to the fleet, maintaining mobilization readiness, and deploying forward around the world.

“As a flight paramedic in the Guard, including during combat deployment, I learned to deliver lifesaving care in high-stress, resource-limited environments where clear communication and decisive action are critical – skills that translate seamlessly to LifeFlight’s operations. More broadly, the military backgrounds represented across our organization bring a shared culture of discipline, teamwork, and mission focus.”

Greg Milliken, Flight Paramedic

Greg has served with the Maine Army National Guard since 2009 as a flight paramedic. He deployed to Afghanistan in 2018 and currently holds the rank of Sergeant First Class.



“I think the operational tempo and necessity of organizations like LifeFlight help us veterans to find purpose in the civilian workspace that is driven by something so much more than money. It’s about a connection to the state, our communities, and bridging the gap in our medical system which was something I’ve personally been searching for ever since leaving active-duty military life. I’m proud to be here and be a part of something bigger.”

Tyler Baker, Aviation Maintenance Technician

Tyler was an Apache helicopter repair technician in the Army and currently serves in the Air National Guard.



“My military experience relates well to flying because it was a no-nonsense type of job with no room for error. I was taught to be extremely effective in everything I take on, and flying is no exception.”

Drew John, Rotor Wing Captain

Drew served in the US Army for eight years. He was deployed to Iraq and later learned to fly helicopters and airplanes while working for a small private security firm.



Randy Collins, Director of Maintenance

Randy served in the US Air Force as a helicopter mechanic. He received an honorable discharge and went to work on civilian aircraft. He has been working on aircraft for nearly 50 years.

“Working the line here at LifeFlight has similarities to my time in the Marine Corps, such as the high importance placed on aircraft safety and readiness. The crews at LifeFlight are determined to provide the best care to the people of Maine and accomplish the mission. I can’t help but to feel proud when one of our birds fly by and I’m partly responsible for it.”

Scott Clark, Aviation Maintenance Technician

Scott served on active duty in the US Marine Corps for 20 years before retiring as a Staff Sergeant.



“I feel that my experiences in the service bring so many benefits to the organization. My experience with medical treatment in austere environments and previous aviation experience integrates especially with our pilots who also served. A lifetime of managing stressful situations also allows me to bring significant experience to the bedside every time we interact with a patient. I am grateful for my time in the service as it has significantly impacted the provider I am today.”

Cameron Bird, Flight Nurse

Cam was a hospital corpsman in the Navy, serving with the Marine Corps as it does not have its own medical personnel. After that Cam served as a flight medic with the Army National Guard based in Bangor.

VETERANS AT LIFEFLIGHT OF MAINE

Pilots

- Kevin Beaulieu – U.S. Marines
- Mike Bonenfant – U.S. Army
- Will Bradbury – U.S. Army
- Abel Gleason – U.S. Army/U.S. Air Force
- Karl Hatlemark – Norwegian Army, NATO Ally
- Andrew John – U.S. Army
- Tom McDevitt – U.S. Coast Guard
- Dane Rodgers – U.S. Army
- Dustin Smiley – U.S. Navy
- Joshua Tassone – U.S. Navy
- Frank Wolfe – U.S. Coast Guard

Aviation Maintenance Technicians

- Dylan Adams – U.S. Navy
- Darby Amelly – U.S. Navy
- Tyler Baker – U.S. Army/U.S. Air Force
- Tyler Blackler – U.S. Marines
- Scott Clark – U.S. Marines
- Alex Dence – U.S. Army
- Chris Dence – U.S. Army

Medical Staff

- Cameron Bird, Flight Nurse – U.S. Army/U.S. Navy
- Jim Boyle, EMT – U.S. Marines
- Tommy Gallant, Flight Paramedic – U.S. Army
- Jeff Hammersmith, Flight Paramedic – U.S. Army
- Ryan McGowan, EMT – U.S. Air Force
- Greg Milliken, Flight Paramedic – U.S. Army
- Barrett Strout, Flight Nurse – U.S. Army

MedComm

- Bill Bradley – U.S. Navy
- Jon Sanford – U.S. Army

Administration

- David Burr, Operations Coordinator – U.S. Navy
- Pete Cartmell, Director of Operations – U.S. Army
- Randy Collins, Director of Maintenance – U.S. Air Force
- Christina Donovan, Accountant – U.S. Army
- Kirk Donovan, Chief Pilot – U.S. Army
- Chuck Hogan, Chief Clinical Officer – U.S. Air Force
- Dan Richard, Chief Inspector – U.S. Navy

WE MUST DO BETTER. LIVES DEPEND ON IT.

by Joe Kellner



I am concerned for our country's healthcare system. I am worried that in ten years, despite the incredible promise of technology and medicine, millions of Americans will have less access to high quality healthcare than they do today. I am especially anxious about how quickly that access may dwindle as you get farther from our cities.

As the CEO of LifeFlight of Maine, I lead the only healthcare organization that serves every community and hospital in the state. I have worked in EMS in Maine for more than two decades, first as an emergency medical technician in the back of an ambulance and more recently in finance and administration. I've been to hundreds of Maine communities and all 35 of its hospitals. I can see what's happening on the ground and from ten thousand feet in the air. I don't have the answer, because there is no singular solution to the challenges facing healthcare. However, I am intimately familiar with the issues, and I believe there is reason to hope, because I believe we can do better.

First, the challenges, and there are many. The most obvious are financial. Reimbursements from health insurers, both public and private, often do not cover the cost of care. This issue is especially acute in rural EMS, for example, where about two-thirds of patients are covered by government payors (i.e. Medicare and MaineCare, Maine's version of Medicaid), while reimbursements from those payors, which are established at the federal level, cover only about one third of the costs. That means that, on average, rural EMS providers like LifeFlight are operating at a loss for the majority of the patient transports they complete.

It's simplistic to say that those providers should merely reduce their costs, because it's also the cost of readiness — it might be easier if we knew exactly when someone was planning to have a medical emergency. EMS agencies like LifeFlight of Maine have a profound public responsibility. We cannot simply tell someone who has called 911, "Sorry, we're closed. Call back in the morning." **We made a promise to show up, which is what we do every day and night.**

The challenges of working with private insurers are well documented and much discussed. Contested

claims, delayed payments, and obstinate negotiating tactics are the norm, none of which does anything to help patients or providers. Meanwhile, considerable costs are passed on to patients in the form of high premiums, high deductibles, and even higher out-of-pocket maximums.

Many patients have no insurance coverage at all, and we expect to care for more uninsured people in the future when recent changes to Medicaid funding take effect. What we do at LifeFlight of Maine is undeniably expensive. We provide ICU-level care in an aircraft to some of the most acutely ill or injured patients in the state. Most of our patients cannot afford the care we provide — most Americans couldn't. As a nonprofit, we provide them with the best possible care, regardless.

We do everything we can at LifeFlight of Maine to keep our fees low while still covering our costs. The difference between our average cost per transport (not including capital investments) and average revenue collected is less than \$50 — there are no shareholders turning a profit from our work. We continue to operate only because we have many generous supporters who contribute philanthropically.

Meanwhile, costs continue to rise. Inflation has affected most industries, and healthcare is no exception. Tariffs are also taking their toll. We operate Leonardo A109 helicopters, which are manufactured in Italy. The Pratt and Whitney engines in the aircraft are made in Canada. Each engine costs nearly \$1 million before tariffs and there are two in each of our helicopters. Even if we could find American-made alternatives for aircraft or engines, it would take nearly five years to put them into service from the time we placed the order. The impact of inflation and tariffs is being felt across the healthcare sector, exacerbating challenges for already struggling services and providers.

If there's cause for hope, and I believe there is, it lies in debunking one common misconception about the healthcare system, namely, that "the healthcare system" is some huge conglomerate out there — the proverbial "they" — making decisions about our health and healthcare. What we mean colloquially by "the healthcare system" is, in reality, a collection of agencies, private companies, nonprofits, public



servants, and people. Yes, many of them have profit motives, and some are outright greedy. Yes, it is messy and doesn't function as efficiently as we would like. But, in my experience, the "system" is also made of up thousands of doctors, nurses, paramedics, helicopter pilots, ambulance operators, administrators, and healthcare professionals of all kinds who are dedicated, compassionate, creative, exceptional at what they do, and remain deeply invested in providing the best care possible to their patients.

I see the dedication of these professionals every day when I come to work. Our helicopters are big, loud, and exciting to see in action, but they are merely a tool. The clinicians in the back and the pilot up front are the very best at what they do. I would unequivocally trust any one of them with the lives of my children. Our support teams on the ground, including our highly-skilled mechanics and communication specialists, are dedicated to ensuring our crews and patients remain safe.

Our crews at LifeFlight of Maine are trained to handle just about any situation they face. They can replicate what happens in an emergency room in the best hospitals in the world at the intersection of two logging roads in the Maine woods 50 miles from the nearest town. They can bring ICU-level care to the bedside of a patient in a small, rural hospital in the middle of the night.

This level of care is prohibitively expensive for most Maine hospitals, beyond the major medical centers in the state's largest cities. By putting it in an aircraft, we can deliver it to the point of need quickly, making critical care available statewide every hour of the day. **We are always trying to ensure sustainability at LifeFlight of Maine so that we can continue to be that safety net.** We are always looking for ways to improve, for creative solutions to the challenges we face, and to provide the best care possible to each person who entrusts their life to us. Mostly, we accomplish this by giving our crews the tools they need to succeed.

There is no singular solution to the challenges our healthcare system is facing, and I am deeply concerned about what access to healthcare will look like in the future. Everyone, regardless of where they live, deserves access to the care they need, when they need it. Behind the headlines, the life-threatening challenges, and the urgent needs, there are so many incredible people working tirelessly to care for us in our hour of need. I am proud to work alongside many of them, and we should make every effort to invest in them and their success, because our lives one day may very well depend on it.



Top: flight paramedic Tommy Gallant.

Bottom: flight paramedic Geoff Greenlaw (left) and flight nurse Jen O'Brien (right); photo courtesy of EMT Vehicle Operator Ben Rayer.



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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.

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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.

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