

# THE BEACON:

The latest news and happenings at HarborHouse



## COVID19 in coastal Maine. A new addition. Turning the acquisition crank.

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*“Great occasions do not make heroes or cowards; they simply unveil them to the eyes of men. Silently and perceptibly, as we wake or sleep, we grow strong or weak; and last some crisis shows what we have become.”*

— Brooke Foss Westcott

Friends,

### GREETINGS FROM BLUE HILL (44.4140° N, 68.5867° W)

We hope this note finds you and your loved ones safe, vigilant, and healthy at this unprecedented time. We’ve got a lot to tell you about, and even more to be thankful for. While the coast of Maine is decidedly less densely populated than many areas (with avg population density of 185 sq mi vs. national avg of 91 sq mi), the ripples of the pandemic have clearly touched our little coastal community. And Blue Hill, as it turns out, has the oldest average population of any community in the country (58.6 years old vs. nat’l avg of 37.7 years old). So we are basically staying home. Using Zoom. Washing our hands. Cooking decent food. Playing with the dog. Working on the house. As we are writing this, a late winter storm blew through, leaving behind 4 inches of snow, some downed tree limbs, and a beautiful, eerie white forestscape. Exercise today will be some light snow-shoveling....

As you might expect in a small community like this there have been many moments of heart-warming, life-affirming, human-scale generosity and caring. For example, here’s a snippet of one of several spreadsheets being circulated where locals offer up various things they are willing to do/provide to help out neighbors in need, as well as registering their own needs. A kind of “loaves and fishes” exercise for the Blue Hill peninsula.

Name	Offer	Request	Comments
Meg C	Yard work: if you are not feeling well and could use some help with outdoor chores, our family can come help on a Friday afternoon.		
Meg C		Tips on using Zoom.	
Meg C		Donations of vegetable seeds to send to a contact in Boston who supports community	
Meg C	Errands: I will get your groceries etc. and leave them, disinfected, on your porch.		
Meg C		Good read aloud books for our 7 and 9 year-old.	I have a bunch but need time to locate, could send a list (from Nancy). I am getting a lot of mileage out of The Secret Garden (skipping Ch. 1) with my class. Old stories in the public domain
Meg C	Usnea tincture (in alcohol)		
Amy B	Seeds for Meg's gardening friend! They're from last year but probably still fine.		
Nancy H	virtual reading aloud to 5-8 year olds		
Dick G	starting a community garden in our greenhouse- 10x14 plots available	gardeners are to grow enough to share with those in need in the community- looking for	Thank you so much for the read aloud book,
Dick G	coffee talk/book discussion on whatever from big bang on forward	Our best thinking got us to where we are- perhaps we might think about that	Thank you, Dick! What a great offer!
Amy B	I am also available for errands, grocery or medication pick-up, etc. I'm planning to make some calendula salve w/ calendula from a friend's beautiful Brooksville garden. This salve is healing and so lovely for		

As for HarborHouse Partners, we had the satisfying occasion this past week to make a donation to our namesake, the Harbor House Café in downtown Blue Hill. (Brendon and I have had so many breakfast “meetings” there that we ultimately felt compelled to reference the name. Some of the local venture fund guys now refer to it “the HarborHouse World Headquarters”). The café has recently started collecting donations to support its work to provide meals to locals in need during this difficult time. From the very beginning, our aspiration has been to not only create real, business-level value for our clients and investors, but to also make our little corner of the world better in whatever ways we can muster. So in a way, delivering that check (right alongside with registering the LLC and the onboarding our first client) felt like the rightful christening of HarborHouse Partners LLC ... the launch of our small firm into the deep blue ocean.



## SINCE LAST WE SPOKE

As a refresher, HarborHouse Partners ([www.harborhousepartners.com](http://www.harborhousepartners.com)) merges our complementary backgrounds and skillsets. So, we're engaged with small businesses here in Maine advising on business strategy and tactics, from operations and marketing to sales and raising capital. All this naturally draws on our experience and networks. We're happy to talk to small and mid-sized businesses that need help.

From the beginning, we've also been bitten by the e-commerce bug, and we've aggressively focused on learning the Amazon ecosystem, and on building our network in this new context. Maine's cold, dark winter is the perfect ambience for hunkering down and tackling new projects, and that's exactly what we did (it's also eerily similar to those really dark Nordic murder mysteries, which is kind of cool and kind of nervous-making). In the last few months, we've gained a brilliant new business partner, and established a separate e-commerce LLC. As of early March, we are the thrilled co-owners of one Amazon business, and we're actively looking for our next one(s).



## **WELCOMING OUR NEW E-COMMERCE PARTNER**

We are very pleased to welcome **Keith O'Brien** as a new HHP Principal. Keith specializes in delivering e-commerce – both as a vendor, as well as a full-service Amazon service provider – for a living. Most recently, Keith has served as the CEO of Page.One, a full-service, Amazon-focused advertising agency based in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Late in 2019, Brendon and I took the trip down to Florida to visit Keith and meet the Page.One team. We talked about the Amazon eco-system, about Page.One's growth strategy, about the utter injustice of Florida being 60-degrees warmer than Maine in early December. We strategized. We cooked some steaks. We drank beer in Keith's pool. We strategized some more. It is our good fortune that Keith ultimately made the decision to join the HHP E-Commerce Solutions team, where he'll be (and has already proven to be) a tremendous asset for our e-commerce clients, as well as our own in-house e-commerce brands. You'll hear more about Keith – and more *from* Keith – in the days ahead.

## **A SHOUT OUT BUSINESSES INTERESTED IN E-COMMERCE/AMAZON**

In addition to working on our own Amazon product brands, we've been very busy working to help other "traditional" businesses figure out how to properly set up, launch, promote and manage their Amazon platforms. Particularly in light of the challenges of COVID19, many brick-and-mortar companies are looking to figure out how to enter and/or optimize their e-commerce channel. We are working with a wide spectrum of businesses – from local/regional businesses, to Fortune 1000 multi-nationals. If you have or know of a business looking for practical e-commerce/Amazon assistance, we could probably help save a whole bunch of time, energy, money and frustration. We'd be very happy to talk.

## **A HEADS-UP TO POTENTIAL INVESTORS**

With the continued robust interest in Amazon properties, as well as some very (very) favorable SBA programs on-line from now through early fall, it's an opportune time for us to ramp up the AMZN-brand acquisition process. We've been meeting with SBA lenders, e-commerce brokers, e-commerce focused private equity firms, etc., to put the wheels in motion. While e-commerce is often associated with high-gloss lifestyle brands, social media "influencers", slick ad campaigns, etc., etc., we're actually more intent on mining the *other* end of the spectrum. The dull, predictable, under-valued, "boring" end of the product spectrum, to the extent that a real optimization and ROI path exists. (The Midwesterner in me dies hard, I guess). To date, the numbers look good - almost too good in many cases. For now, we just wanted to put this back on your radar and would like you to consider this investment class for your planning in the latter half of the year. We'll be circulating a number of potential investment opportunities in the near future. Stay tuned.

Well, that about covers it for now. Drop us a line or give us a shout if you have any comments, questions, or ideas. We look forward to the day when social distancing will be optional again; we'll then love to meet you at "HarborHouse World HQ" for breakfast, coffee, or lunch. In the meantime, wash your hands, stay safe, and keep on keepin' on. We'll be here, doing the same.

For now,

Chris ([chris@harborhousepartners.com](mailto:chris@harborhousepartners.com)) & Brendon ([brendon@harborhousepartners.com](mailto:brendon@harborhousepartners.com))