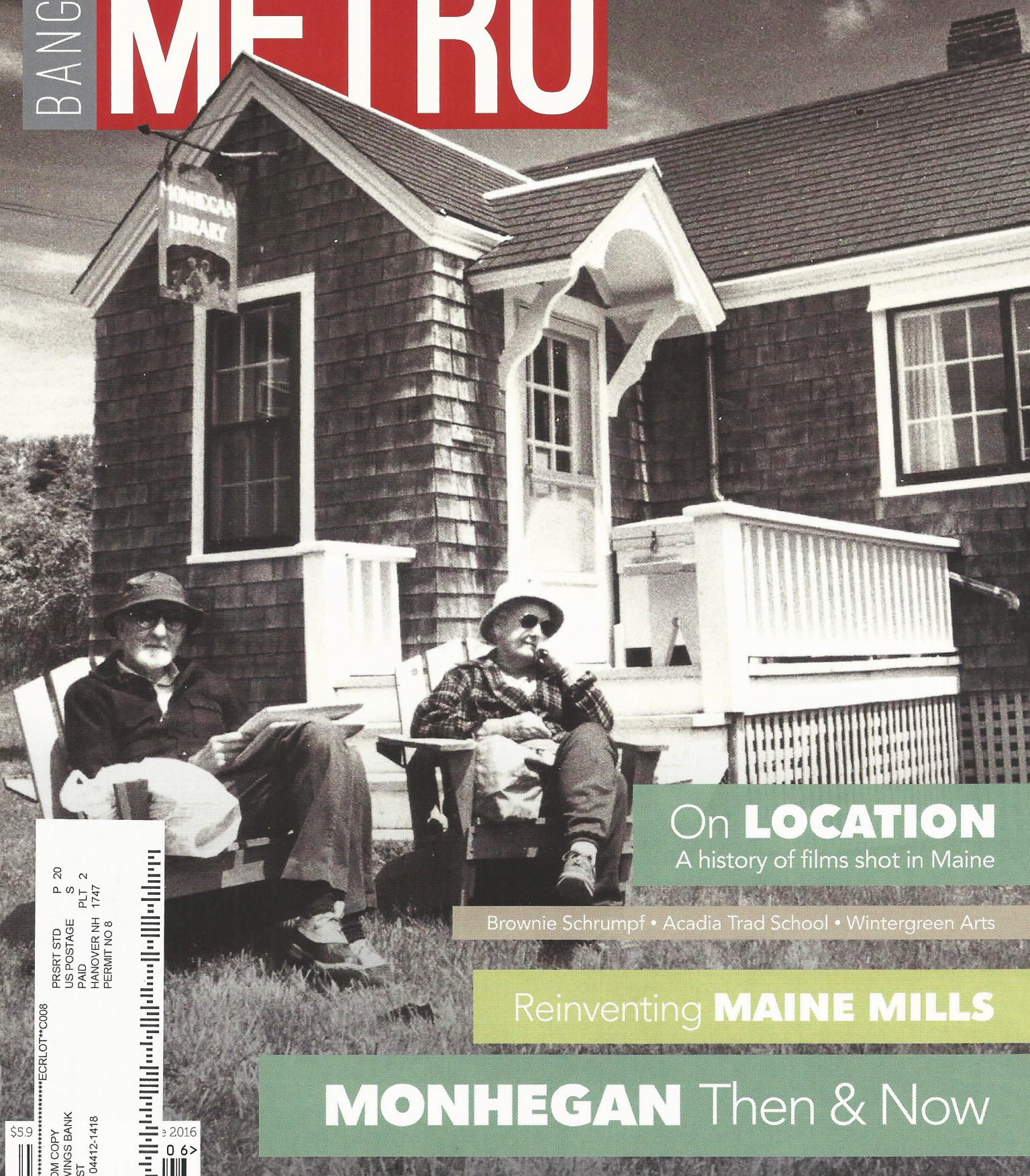


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On **LOCATION**

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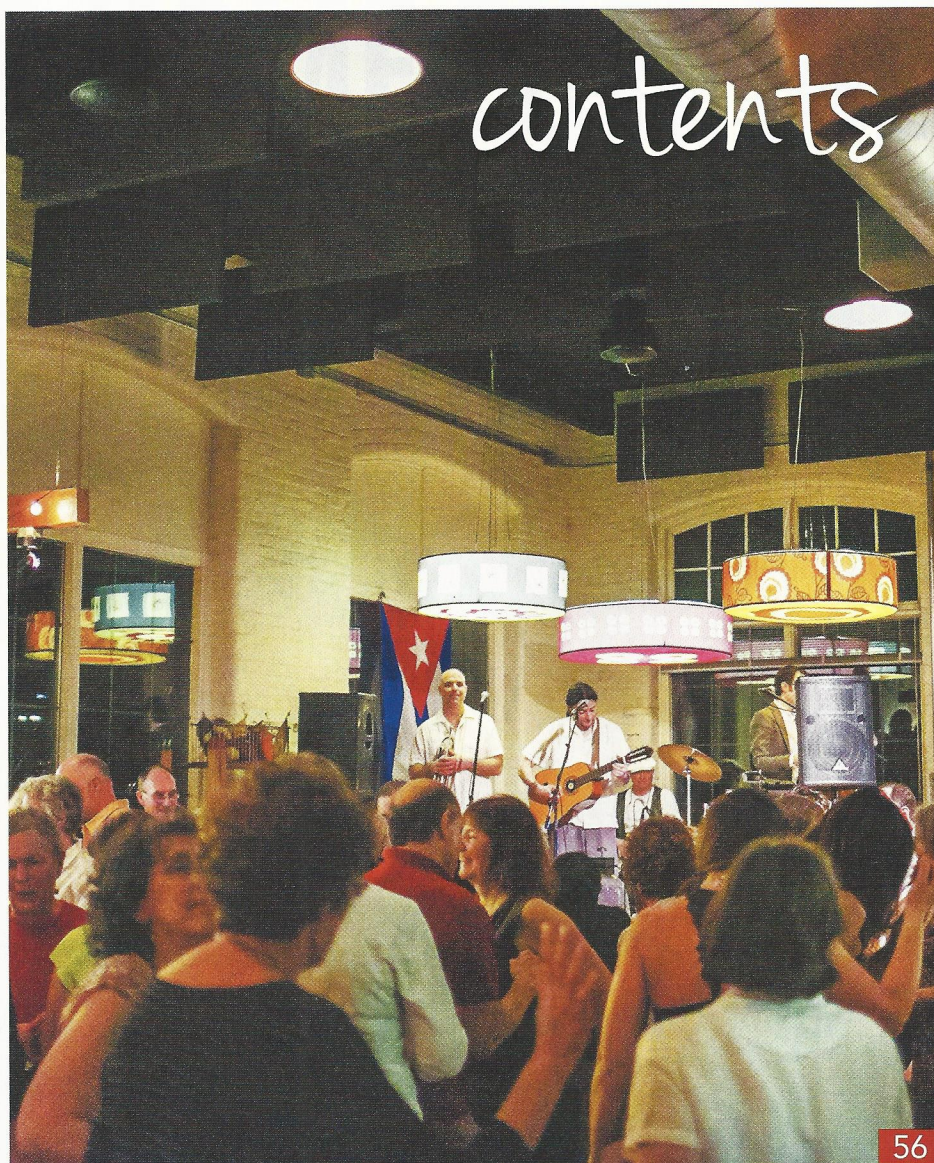
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Wood bat league a hit in southern Maine

ON THE COVER

Mr. and Mrs. Perry Laukhuff outside the Monhegan Library.
See story on page 44.

Photo: 1986 File Photo



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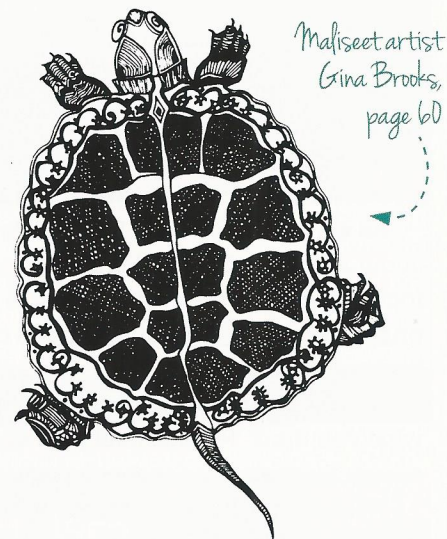
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Pitcher Bill Barron throws to batter Todd Steinman at Kelley Field in Bath during the 2015 baseball season. (Below) Pitcher Joe Baum winds up.

Wood bat league for players 45 years and older is a hit in southern Maine.

STORY BY AIMEE THIBODEAU
PHOTOS BY MICHAEL DOUCETTE

There's no age limit for these boys of summer. Started in 2002 by Dick Hill, Maine Woods Baseball is a wood bat league for players 45 years and older and consists of two age divisions. Maine Woods Baseball MW45 play 17 regular season games plus play-offs and MW60 play about 10 games.

"We play by standard baseball rules with a few modifications that take into account the age of some of our players," said league President Ben Johnson.

The season kicked off the first week in May and will continue until playoffs in September.

"We play a majority of our games on Kelley Field in Bath, Maine," said Johnson. "Once or twice a year, we play at The Ballpark at Old Orchard Beach and occasionally we play at Hadlock Field in Portland."

The league fee is \$195 for MW45 and \$150 for MW60, plus the cost of a uniform. The league provides bats and hel-

metts, but players are welcome to use their own equipment.

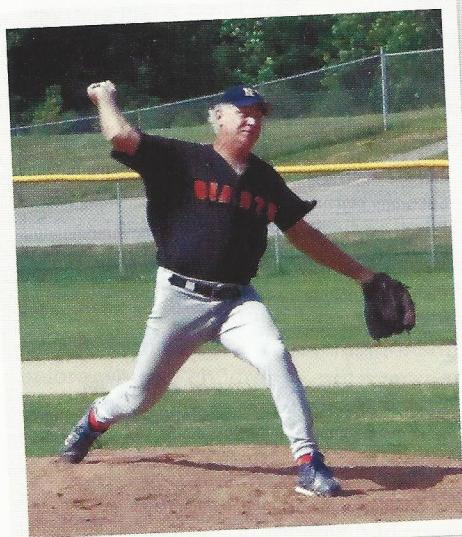
Johnson answered a few questions for *Bangor Metro* about what this league is all about and why it's hit home with players.

What makes this league different from other men's baseball/softball leagues?

I would say the major difference is we provide 45 plus year old men who live in and around Midcoast Maine the opportunity to live their dream of playing baseball forever. Whether you're 45 or 70....if you feel you still have game and you want play some baseball, we will do our best to find you a team.

How many players do you have? How many teams?

We have two different divisions broken up by age. We have a 45-plus division with six teams and approximately 84 players. New this year is a 60-plus senior



division that currently has three teams and 36 players. So, we've got nine teams and 120 players. From May through September the league will play approximately 80 games between the nine teams, including playoffs. Once we've crowned our champions we host a weekend fall league at the ballpark in OOB. We're just a bunch of guys who love baseball, so as long as the weather is nice, we keep playing.

When was the team founded? By who?

The league was founded 14 summers ago (2002) by Dick Hill. Dick is a force of nature. He's in his 70s now. He had both knees replaced in the last couple years and he still pitches in both leagues. When Dick sets his mind to something he's like a puppy playing tug of war: he doesn't let go. He built the league from nothing and he's doing the same now with the senior over-60 division.

Are there any leagues like yours left in Maine?

Yes. There are at least three other leagues in Maine playing baseball with wooden bats. But they are mostly for younger guys — 25 year olds and up and 35 year olds and up, where the competition tends to come with a heavier dose of testosterone and impetuous youth. We cater to an older demographic. Ours is a competitive league and guys play hard and everybody wants to win. But, as everyone knows, the best things in life mellow with age. So, I'd say our games are characterized by a friendlier, more social atmosphere than other leagues. For the most part the guys in both dugouts are rooting for each other. I think everybody would prefer to be involved in a well played game that you lose 3-2 than to win a sloppy 10-2 rout.

Who are the players? I was told there it's a pretty vast mix of white and blue collar guys who just love the game... can you elaborate?

Our league is a great reflection of diversity. We've got guys from all walks of life: pipefitters, lawyers, landscapers, accountants, entrepreneurs, lobstermen, shop owners, bankers, carpenters, ship builders, CEOs. A love for baseball is all you need to join this club....that and a birthday in 1972 or earlier.

From your website, it looks like players get together for gatherings off the

field, too. What's the camaraderie like?

The purpose of the league is baseball. But we find the baseball is a lot more fun when guys are on a friendly, first name basis with players in the other dugout. So we try to put together a year-round social calendar that gives guys a chance to get to know each other. It started with a year-end golf tournament and banquet. We do happy hours and bowling nights. We're planning a lobster bake, a fishing trip and things like that. It's a clubby, atmosphere.

How competitive are the players/teams?

The league is committed to competitive balance and parity. We want each team to feel it has an even chance to win every time it takes the field. In the 45+ division we play a 17 game schedule. Ideally, when the season ends, each team will have 8 or 9 wins. It doesn't always play out that way but in the last four years we've had four different champions so we're doing something right.

**A love for baseball
is all you need to
join this club....that
and a birthday in
1972 or earlier.**

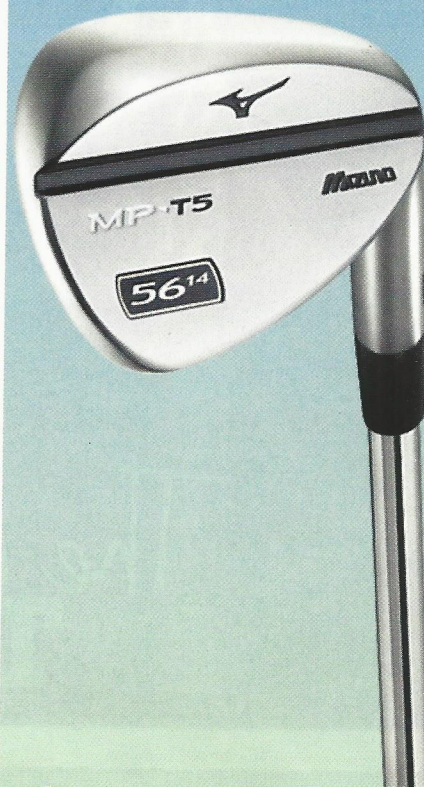
What does the future of the league look like?

We're definitely growing. The secret is out on how our little league strikes a nice balance between competition and camaraderie. In the last four years, we've grown from four to six teams in the 45-plus division and now we've added three teams in the completely new 60 and older division. Ideally we'd like to add two more teams to the 45s and one more team to the 60s.

If somebody is interested in playing, what should they do?

They should contact us through our website (mainewoodsbaseball.com) to indicate their interest. We are always willing to find a place on a team for anyone born in 1972 or before who wants to play baseball. Don't worry if you haven't played in years. We're old. We get it. We will find a roster spot regardless of your skill level. □

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