LifeFlight aircraft are uniquely equipped to help Maine’s island communities

Rural and remote towns are common across Maine, from Fort Kent to Lubec to Jackman to Coburn Gore. Islands, however, are a special kind of remote. Even a mile across the water—unbridged—becomes a transportation challenge. With a 3,500-mile coastline, more than 3,000 islands fill the waters off the coast of Maine. Only 15 of those unbridged islands have year-round communities, but nearly 300 more have seasonal or private populations.

All of these villages transform in the summer when seasonal residents and visitors join year-round islanders, increasing the population as much as tenfold. Attracted to Maine’s natural beauty, tens of thousands of artists, photographers, hikers, bicyclists, kayakers, climbers and more visit the islands each year. With the summertime population increase, there inevitably comes an increase in emergencies.

Answering a 911 call on the mainland 24 hours a day, 365 days a year requires careful and consistent coordination of resources and people (think 911 dispatchers, first responders, paramedics, public safety officers, emergency department staff). When a medical emergency occurs on an island, the additional logistics involved in crossing the water, together with the often limited personnel and transportation resources continued on page 2
available, make it even more difficult to get a patient to needed care in a mainland hospital.

Many of Maine’s busiest and most populated islands are located halfway up the coast in Penobscot Bay. Ranging in size from a few dozen to several hundred residents, emergency healthcare resources available to these diverse communities varies quite a bit.

Monhegan and Matinicus have year-round populations of less than 100, and require a 2-hour transit across the water. Neither island has a health clinic or a physician. Instead, a small (and dwindling) cadre of local volunteers provides fire, rescue and EMS services. The islanders rely on private boats or charter planes like Penobscot Island Air to get off the island, whether on a daily basis or in the case of an emergency.

Islands with larger year-round populations, like Vinalhaven (1,300 residents), North Haven (356 residents) and Islesboro (600 residents), are able to staff health clinics, and have developed more formalized EMS, albeit volunteer, and rescue services. These islands are also supported by the state-run ferry system, which can transport an ambulance to the mainland.

But, as Vinalhaven EMS Director Pat Lundholm explains, “even with our clinic, and our EMS crew, the resources we have are simply not enough to address some of the more critical emergencies we face.”

Depending on the resources available to them, every island may have a different definition of a “critical” emergency. But in nearly all of these cases, island communities rely on LifeFlight to fill the “critical” gap.

LifeFlight teams meet that need through three initiatives: they use nimble helicopters to bring advanced skills and equipment directly to the patient; they deliver advanced medical training to local EMS providers; and they work with communities to improve aviation infrastructure.

With three helicopters, LifeFlight has a unique ability to get to Maine’s islands quickly and safely, bringing specialized equipment and advanced medical skills along with them. According to Islesboro EMS Director Fred Porter, “Because of our remote location, when we have a critical situation we depend on LifeFlight to get our patients to the hospital. In addition to the fast transport, they also bring with them an advanced skill set.”

Day in and day out, LifeFlight medics and nurses care for the sickest patients in Maine. This experience, combined with their advanced certifications, make them experts in the field of critical care transport.

Armed with this advanced skill set, LifeFlight crew also provide medical training to local EMS and emergency department staff. For a number of reasons, critical care and emergency medical training can be challenging for island EMS providers to obtain. Through hands-on and high-fidelity simulation learning opportunities, LifeFlight brings important education directly to local services, creating a stronger chain of care for patients.

To overcome some of the challenges caused by Maine’s unpredictable weather, LifeFlight also works with island communities to install weather reporting systems, establish GPS approaches, lengthen runways and build dedicated landing zones. This means our aircraft can operate in a wider variety of conditions, making LifeFlight safer and more reliable all year long.
Sick on an island in Maine

DAVID WYLIE
Heart Attack on Vinalhaven

When he started experiencing heart attack symptoms at home, island resident David Wylie went directly to the local health center. As soon as the island medical providers realized David was having a heart attack, they called for LifeFlight. Less than an hour after his first symptoms, David was aloft and headed to Central Maine Medical Center in Lewiston, a 25-minute flight. Thanks to the quick flight and appropriate care, David attended his son’s wedding just a few days later.

OLIVER CLEVELAND
Accidental Poisoning on Islesboro

Little Oliver was visiting his grandparents on the island when he accidentally ingested lamp oil. A few minutes later he was struggling to breathe. The unique nature of this emergency required specialized equipment that was unavailable at the small island facility. LifeFlight was able to provide equipment, medication and the tools necessary to help Oliver. After the fast helicopter flight to pediatric specialists in Bangor, Oliver quickly recovered and was discharged from the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit just a few days later.

EVA MURRAY
Plane Crash off Matinicus

Eva was on a small plane headed to the mainland when the aircraft made an emergency landing into the ocean. While local boats and planes brought the survivors ashore, LifeFlight helicopters were dispatched to meet them. Fearing she had a major head injury, Eva was put on the first LifeFlight helicopter and transported to Portland. Specialists there treated her injuries, including 50 stitches in her face and scalp, and after several days she was sent home to complete her recovery.
The future of critical care transport

When minutes count and life hangs in the balance, physicians and emergency medical personnel across Maine, in every community and hospital, depend on LifeFlight to care for their most critically ill or injured patients.

With three helicopters, one airplane and two ground ambulance partners, LifeFlight is often referred to as Maine’s flying hospital. LifeFlight’s two oldest helicopters, Echo Mike and Charlie Mike, were purchased back in 2004. Since then, the aircraft have been beacons of hope in moments of need. They’ve crisscrossed the state, flying millions of miles and helping care for more than 24,000 patients.

With flight time racking up and aviation technology continually evolving, LifeFlight is looking ahead to the fast-approaching day when those aircraft must be replaced.

To meet growing patient need and in anticipation of new performance requirements for instrument flight, LifeFlight is in the midst of a campaign to replace Echo Mike and Charlie Mike, currently based in Bangor and Sanford. Donors across Maine have already contributed more than $2 million toward the replacement aircraft. Over the next two years, the LifeFlight Foundation needs to raise $6 million more to help offset the total project cost of $13 million.

The helicopters were state-of-the-art when purchased, and received major upgrades in 2012. However, avionics, materials and the boundaries of technical performance have been changing dramatically. In addition, the entire national aviation system is transitioning to “next generation” air traffic control using satellite systems and performance-based navigation. Half of LifeFlight’s fleet already meets the requirements—the airplane purchased in 2015 and the third helicopter, Whiskey Mike, purchased in 2017.

New aircraft with “next gen” aviation capability are the best way to deliver reliable and safe air medical service to the entire state. Contribute today at www.lifeflightmaine.org.
By some accounts, the most dangerous jobs in America are fishing and logging, two industries that have a long, storied tradition in Maine. This kind of work is also typically done in very remote areas, far from help if accidents happen.

Improving safety for these workers is an ongoing challenge, which is why earlier this year, LifeFlight took part in a series of safety training meetings hosted by the Professional Logging Contractors of Maine.

Over the course of 7 weeks, 640 logging professionals received training on a number of safety topics including what to do in an emergency. The training sessions were held in locations from Denmark to New Canada to Waltham to Rumford.

Topics covered by LifeFlight for the training included:

- When to call for LifeFlight; either a call to 911 or a call to LifeFlight will bring an emergency team.
- How to prep a patient for transport; how you can help us.
- How to set up a landing zone or access a preplanned landing zone.
- How to communicate with the helicopter; radio and visual signals.
- Safety first in operations. What LifeFlight needs to help keep everyone safe, including night operations; wind and weather; markings and lighting; and operating around the helicopter.

After the classroom portion of the training, a LifeFlight helicopter landed on site and the group practiced prepping and loading a patient onto the aircraft.
Don’t miss our upcoming events!

SUNDAY, AUGUST 12  
Islesboro Crossing for LifeFlight  
Point Lookout, Northport and  
Grindle Point Lighthouse, Islesboro  
LifeFlight’s biggest fundraiser of the year is a 3-mile swim across Penobscot Bay. More than 300 swimmers, paddlers and volunteers are hoping to raise $300,000 for LifeFlight’s replacement aircraft campaign. **Sign up to volunteer or donate at www.islesborocrossing.org.**

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 24  
LifeFlight Emergency Care Open  
Martindale Country Club, Auburn  
Join us for a day of friendly competition, delicious food and fun prizes. **Register today at www.lifeflightmaine.org.**

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 6  
Flannels and Flightsuits Festival  
Ram Island Farm, Cape Elizabeth  
Celebrate the fall season with live music, great food and a chance to experience a flight over Portland in a LifeFlight helicopter. Tickets start at $125 each. **Purchase at www.lifeflightmaine.org.**

CRITICAL CARE ACADEMY  
For the first time, LifeFlight’s critical care training curriculum is available to our hospital and EMS partners looking to upgrade the skills of experienced nurses and paramedics. This is a great opportunity to expand your critical care knowledge and skills in a unique, hands-on environment. The Academy uses a blended educational framework that incorporates didactic and procedural learning with clinical lab time using high-fidelity simulation, case study review and tabletop scenarios.

**October 15 - November 16**  
5-week course / 2 days per week  
Hosted by MaineGeneral  
Thayer Center for Health, Waterville  

FMI CONTACT: Jackie Turcotte at turcotja@cmhc.org
Islesboro Crossing event illustrates the challenges of living in Maine’s rural communities

In its sixth year, the Islesboro Crossing for LifeFlight filled to capacity just a few short days after registration opened, back when there was still snow on the ground and ice in the ocean. By the time you receive this newsletter, hundreds of adventurous folks from across the country will have swum and paddled just over 3 miles across west Penobscot Bay to the island community of Islesboro.

The 150 swimmers gathered pledges, bought wetsuits and spent weeks training in the open water. Another 150 paddlers lined up to support their swimmers, and dozens of volunteers signed up to lend a hand. Sponsors like Camden National Bank, Viking Inc., Hannaford Supermarkets, Eaton Peabody, Coastal Alliance Healthcare, Spectrum Healthcare Partners and more offered financial support.

Why are so many people eager to be a part of this fundraising opportunity? This distinctive event focuses on both the challenges and the rewards of living in a rural state with thousands of miles of coastline, millions of acres of forest and farmland, and more than 3,000 islands.

“Each year Pen Bay Medical Center and Waldo County General Hospital rely on the vital, lifesaving services provided by LifeFlight of Maine,” explained Mark Fourre, MD, President and CEO of Coastal Healthcare Alliance. “Coastal Healthcare Alliance is committed to this important partnership and is proud to continue our sponsorship of the Islesboro Crossing.”

Visiting and living in rural Maine, especially on one of the state’s islands, is a unique experience. It offers solitude, natural beauty, and small, tight-knit communities. But the time and distance to specialized medical care is formidable—especially in an emergency.

The swimmers and paddlers who made their way across Penobscot Bay physically overcame that distance. The journey is symbolic of the difficulties in accessing critical care in emergencies. It’s also a way to support LifeFlight, just one of the many organizations that help to overcome those challenges.

“The Islesboro Crossing is an incredible community event, and we’re proud to be a Beacon Sponsor of the swim for the fourth year,” said Greg Dufour, president and chief executive officer of Camden National Bank. “LifeFlight of Maine plays a critical role in keeping our communities safe and healthy, and we’re inspired by all of the swimmers, paddlers and volunteers who raise funds for making an emergency medical helicopter service possible in Maine.”

Here at LifeFlight, we’re grateful for the support we receive from both local and statewide businesses who recognize the value of an emergency helicopter service, especially in a rural state like Maine.
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 medical helicopter 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 the town of Camden at 13 Main Street, 2nd floor. You can reach us at 207-230-7092 or by email at info@lifeflightmaine.org.

Donations are tax-deductible.

LIFEFLIGHT OF MAINE

LifeFlight of Maine is a nonprofit statewide critical care medical helicopter service jointly owned by Eastern Maine Healthcare Systems and Central Maine Healthcare Corporation. LifeFlight’s airplane, three helicopters and dedicated ground ambulances, based in Bangor, Lewiston and Sanford and operated by SevenBar Aviation, 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, flight nurses and paramedics. More than 24,000 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 2017.

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