

# THE HOT LIST

Rumors of its demise to the contrary, the entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in Maine. The Pine Tree State doesn't have a reputation as a hotbed of hot start-ups, but every year new businesses discover profitable niches for themselves here, as evidenced by the following fifteen companies.

This first-ever DOWN EAST Hot 15 list is not meant to be an unconditional endorsement of these businesses. Instead, consider it as a sort of survey of contemporary commerce in Maine, with a focus on the more innovative ideas now being put to work. If you're interested in who has a plan to make money in Maine, these are some companies that bear watching.

So what makes a business hot? Profitability is an obvious measure, but we don't think it's the only one. Some of the following companies have distinguished themselves by exploiting previously unseen opportunities and changing ideas about what a Maine business can be. Others are trailblazers in their respective industries. Collectively, they all have something interesting to tell us about the state of entrepreneurship in the Pine Tree State.

## Aging Excellence

**Location:** Offices in Portland, Brunswick, Saco, and Bangor.

**What they do:** Provide non-medical and personal-care services to Mainers over fifty years old.

**Why they're hot:** It should seem like a no-brainer that in the grayest state in the nation there would be a need for non-medical services catering to senior citizens and those who will be seniors soon enough. That's why in 1999 Beth Lawrence, a registered nurse and former clinical director for a home-health agency, started Aging Excellence to help Maine's elder population with seemingly mundane tasks like grocery shopping, laundry, handyman tasks, and yardwork. Have an older parent who needs a gentle reminder to take his daily medications? Aging Excellence will give him a friendly call once a day. Need someone just to sift through the complicated paperwork you get from your insurance company? Aging Excellence will translate it for

you. Rates vary from eighteen dollars per hour for transportation and companionship services to twenty-five dollars per hour for home-management chores. Lawrence says the services her company provides are unique in Maine and even the country. "Typically a lot of the national services are offering more the homemaker/companion services, and we've packaged that with the personal-care services and the handyman-type offerings," she says. "We help a lot of clients here in Maine whose family members are in California, and they want someone on-site to make sure that they're taken care of."

Lawrence sold her first franchise, a Brunswick office, in 2003 and has since added franchises in Saco and Portland. She owns a Bangor office herself and has two new franchises, in Lewiston/Auburn and in the Bridgton area, under development and expected to open soon. Calls have come in from people interested in opening franchises across the nation, but Lawrence says within the next year she'll focus more on expanding into New Hampshire and

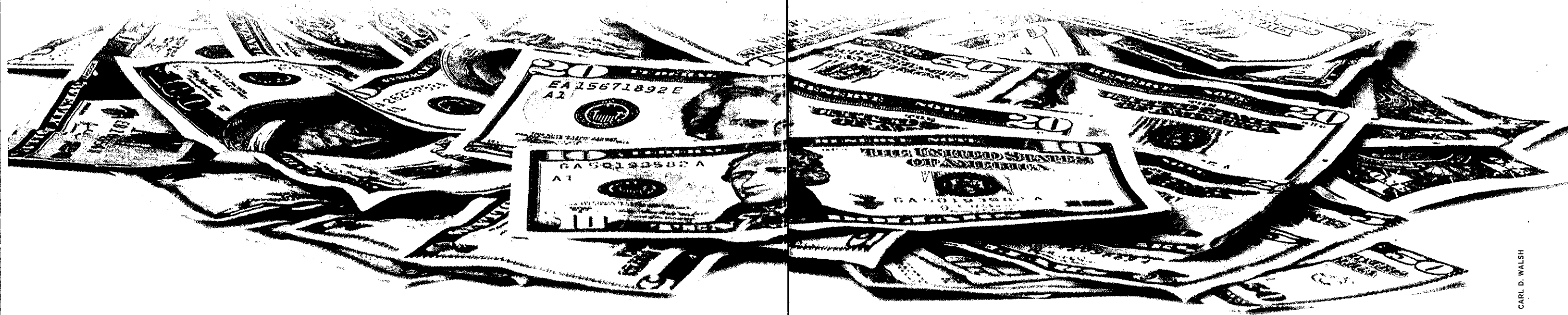
Massachusetts. Such expansion is helping Lawrence's company toward financial success, but she says it's having an impact also on Maine's older residents. "We're keeping seniors active, whether it's through the Maine Senior Games or through the Beach to Beacon race or another event or service," she says.

## Borealis Breads

**Location:** Waldoboro, Portland, Wells.

**What they do:** High-quality, handmade breads.

**Why they're hot:** Artisanal bread was a West Coast buzz phrase when Jim Amaral borrowed some sourdough starter from a friend's grandmother and some money from three investors to produce his first loaves of bread in the tiny basement of the Pine Cone Restaurant in equally tiny Waldoboro back in 1993. Four years later he moved the burgeoning business to its own building on Route 1, then opened other bakeries in Wells and Portland.



CARL D. WALSH