

Sargent Center closing in August



STAFF PHOTO BY CAROLE ALLEN

Student Hugo Barbeiro of Brazil negotiates the ropes course at Sargent Center on Saturday. Barbeiro was among 23 international exchange students using the facilities in Hancock for the weekend.

Future of access to 700 acres unknown

By MEGHAN PIERCE

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HANCOCK — The Sargent Center for Outdoor Education will close at the end of the summer, after which it will be maintained as a natural habitat.

Boston University, owner of the Sargent Center, announced this week that, effective Aug. 31, educational operations at the camp will cease.

The closure means 16 fulltime employees will lose their jobs, said Rob Rubendall, director of Sargent Center. The closure will also affect 18 to 50 seasonal employees who work at the center throughout the year. Some employees, however, may continue as caretakers.

The university, which obtained the property in 1932, will retain ownership of the property and maintain it as a natural habitat.

When asked if the center would remain open to the public for recreation, a media relations representative for the university Phil Gloudemans wrote in e-mail, "It is unknown at this time whether the property will remain available to residents for recreational use after Aug. 31."

The closure will also end a senior nutrition program, run in a partnership between volunteers and the Sargent Center. The program serves lunch to senior citizens twice a week.

Ducky Gardner, a former Sargent Center employee and a senior lunch volunteer, said yesterday the senior lunch program plans to continue to serve meals until the center closes. "Chef assures us we'll feed the seniors right up until the end."

Gardner said there are no plans to continue the lunch program after that.

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THE SARGENT CENTER

History: The center was founded in 1912, then bought by Boston University in 1932. The school closed the camp from 1969 to 1975.

Size: The center has 700 acres that are located in Hancock and Peterborough. There are 22 miles of trails. The center surrounds the publicly owned 60-acre Half Moon Pond, which can be accessed from a public boat landing on Sargent Road.

Uses: The center and its surrounding land is used by students, seniors, outdoor enthusiasts and visitors who use the conference center as a retreat.

Price: The combined assessed value of the property in Peterborough and Hancock is \$4.2 million. The university says it will retain the property.

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"We're closing down completely," she said. "That's the end of us. It's just a blow to everybody. I'm distraught over the whole thing."

Rubendall said the decision to close Sargent Center is a cost-saving measure as well as part of the current president's vision for the university. President Robert Brown has placed the focus of the university on undergraduate education and research in the city of Boston, he said. "The university has decided to close all auxiliary operations that are not ultimately self-sustaining."

Rubendall said Dr. Dudley Sargent founded the center in 1912. Sargent Camp, as it was known as then, was used as an extension of the campus of his college — Sargent College for women in Cambridge, Mass. In 1932 Boston University acquired Sargent College and Sargent Camp. The center continued to be used for psychical education as well as for retreats and training for student organizations. The center evolved into a co-ed campus over the years.

Rubendall said when it was run for women by Sargent College and Boston University, the camp was instrumental in building careers for woman in health and physical education.

In the 1950s the center branched out to provide outdoor education for middle school students, Rubendall said. The center closed from 1969 to 1975. When the center was re-opened the university used it for human development and environmental education as well as for team and group development.

The center currently educates 3,500 middle school students during the school year and runs a seven-week summer camp for about 700 children, ages 10 to 16. On the weekends, the center is used by nonprofit groups as a conference



Student Eki Tunjung Sari of Indonesia has her harness adjusted by Molly McWithey, a Sargent Center leader, before going to the ropes course on Saturday.

and retreat center.

The center is open to the public for recreational purposes all year long. People use the 22 miles of trails for hiking and bird watching, Rubendall said. "Many of the locals know about that and take advantage of it," Rubendall said.

The center surrounds Half Moon Pond, a public body of water.

Sargent Center has 42 buildings including two main lodges — one is 10,000 square feet and another is 4,000 square feet. There are also three dorms, seven smaller cabins, two two-story dwellings — one used by permanent staff and one used as a short-term rental — one farmhouse for use by staff, and two small staff cottages.

According to the town of Hancock tax records, the university owns four lots in Hancock. A 37-acre lot with the main Sargent Cen-

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**Ducky Gardner,
senior lunch volunteer**

ter building on it is assessed at \$1,607,600. A 27-acre lot with a small building on it is assessed at \$460,900, a 127-acre lot assessed at \$269,000 and a 197-acre lot is assessed at \$315,200. The town also assesses a building on one of the properties at \$99,000.

According to the town of Peterborough tax records the university owns two lots in Peterborough — a 136-acre lot with a building on it, which is assessed at \$1,099,200, and a 147-acre lot with no buildings on it, which is assessed at \$363,200.

Between the two towns the center is assessed at \$4.2 million.

As a nonprofit the center is not required to pay property taxes, Rubendall said, but does make payments in lieu of taxes. The center currently pays Hancock \$30,000 a year and Peterborough \$12,400 a year.



STAFF PHOTOS BY CAROLE ALLEN

Top: Student Teresa Alonso Lopez of Spain swings from the ropes course at Sargent Center in Hancock on Saturday afternoon. Lopez is living with an area host family and goes to Interlakin High School in Laconia.

Right: Student Mariya Medvedeva of Turkmenistan has her helmet adjusted by Michael Rand, a host father from New Ipswich, before going on the ropes course.

