

A Best Place to Work in Maine – 5 Years Running

For the fifth consecutive year, Allen Insurance and Financial has been named as one of the Best Places to Work in Maine. The awards program was created in 2006 and is a project of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) – Maine State Council and Best Companies Group.

This statewide survey and awards program was designed to identify, recognize and honor the best places of employment in Maine, benefiting the state's economy, its workforce and businesses. The 2016 Best Places to Work in Maine list is made up of 75 companies in three size categories: small (15-49 U.S. employees), medium (50-249 U.S. employees) and large (250+ U.S. employees).

Allen Insurance and Financial, with 68 employees in offices in Rockland, Camden, Belfast and Southwest Harbor, is in the medium category, which is the largest of the three categories, with 36 businesses making the list.

Companies from across the state entered the two-part process to determine the Best Places to Work in Maine. The first part consisted of evaluating each nominated company's workplace policies, practices, and demographics. This part of the process was worth approximately 25% of the total evaluation.

The second part consisted of an employee survey to measure the employee experience. This part of the process was worth approximately 75% of the total evaluation. The combined scores determined the top companies and the final rankings. Best Companies Group managed the overall registration and survey process in Maine and also analyzed the data and used their expertise to determine the final rankings.

Allen Insurance and Financial will be recognized and honored at the Best Places to Work in Maine awards ceremony on October 4.

The final rankings will be announced at the event. Partners endorsing the program include: Mainebiz, the Maine State Chamber of Commerce and Maine HR Convention.

Independence Day Safety Tips

Memorial Day might be the unofficial start of summer, but Independence Day is when the season truly kicks into high gear. July 4 is a holiday that has something for everyone, whether you like to host (or attend) backyard barbecues, get out on the water or just hang out at home and watch the “bombs” bursting in air once the sun sets.

As you celebrate America this year, however, keep safety in mind – those fireworks aren’t the only holiday staple that can be dangerous.

Along with using plenty of sunblock and staying hydrated, follow these tips to help ensure that you, your loved ones and your friends all have a great Fourth.

Food Safety

Whether you’re hosting a gathering or attending one, you’ll want to make sure the food you’re serving – and eating – is safe. The following U.S. Department of Agriculture guidelines can help:

Cook food thoroughly. Steaks, chops and roasts (beef, pork or lamb) should have a minimum internal temperature of 145 degrees Fahrenheit before being removed from the heat source. Ground meats need to be at 160 degrees and poultry at 165.

Keep hot food hot and cold food cold. You can keep cooked meats warm by placing them to the side of the grill rack, in a warm oven or in a chafing dish. Place dishes holding cold foods on

ice.

Bringing food to the party? Use an insulated cooler with ice or ice packs to minimize the growth of bacteria.

On the Road

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the July 4 holiday period ranks as the nation's deadliest in terms of people killed by drunk drivers. So, if you're heading somewhere to enjoy the fireworks or just driving to a friend's get-together, plan ahead: Have a designated driver or don't drink at all.

On the Water

Spending the holiday on a boat? Lucky you. Just make sure all the equipment is operating properly and that you have the right supplies on board. Here are two more recommendations from the Coast Guard:

If you're driving the boat, don't drink or use drugs. That should go without saying, but it's still a problem – alcohol use is involved in about a third of all recreational boating deaths. Everyone needs a life jacket. A boat needs a Coast Guard-approved life jacket for each person aboard. Kids need their own – adult-sized jackets will not work for them.

Fireworks

Thousands of people are hurt each year by fireworks. In the month around the July 4 holiday, according to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, 240 people go to the emergency room daily with a fireworks-related injury. Don't be one of them. Check out these quick tips, along with our fireworks safety post from last year, for some general guidelines:

- Find a safe place, and be prepared. Always have a bucket of water or a garden hose at the ready. And, never point

fireworks at a person, animal, home, tree or car.

- Make sure adults are present. Kids should never play with fireworks.
- Don't stand too close. The most injured body parts in fireworks accidents are the hands and fingers (36 percent), head, face and ears (22 percent) and eyes (16 percent), the commission says. All are pretty important, don't you think?

While these tips are great, perhaps the best thing about them is this: You can follow them and still have a wonderful holiday with family and friends. Here's to America – and to you!

From our partners at Safeco.

The Value of an Independent Insurance Agent

By Rachel Bannister

Independent insurance agents remain vitally important to the industry because of the professional insurance counsel they provide and the relationships they cultivate with consumers and in the communities where they live and work.

In addition to explaining all of the nuts and bolts of insurance protection, independent agents cultivate relationships with their clients and work to become trusted advocates for them. Although consumers often feel that it is essential to have a doctor they know and a banker or financial advisor they trust, they sometimes overlook the need for developing a similar relationship with their insurance agent.

As author and motivational speaker Bob Burg says, "All things equal, people will do business with, and refer business to, people they know, trust and like."

A relationship with an independent agent is equally as important in helping clients protect their families and property should an unfortunate event happen. Independent agents do more than sell insurance; they help identify exposures, find the insurance carriers that offer the needed coverage at the best premiums, and manage all policies to be sure they are working together for maximum protection.

Although it is true that some insurance coverages can be purchased at the click of a button and consumers can decide to go it alone, there is no substitute for the expertise that comes from choosing to work with an independent agent. In working with a variety of carriers, independent agents are well trained and equipped to handle the unique situations that arise over time and can review coverages to make sure that consumers' needs are being met as their lives change.

In addition, it should not be forgotten that local independent agents are often among the first people to respond when there is a loss, working to provide prompt service and to handle all aspects of a claim with insureds. That kind of experience is far superior to going it alone.

Nearly every independent insurance agency is involved in their community. Interests may vary from taking part in organizations such as the local chamber of commerce or networking groups to having a seat on hospital and school boards to being actively involved in the local culture and arts scene to coaching or sponsoring sports teams or volunteering at soup kitchens and homeless shelters.

No matter the vehicle, independent insurance agents are contributing members of their communities. Independent agents care about the area in which they serve and give of their time and resources to support them. Just listen to agents talk about

their city or town and you will know that the people in it are important to them, and their work is more fulfilling than simply providing a paycheck.

Above all, insurance is a relationship business. The independent agent will continue to work with insurance carriers to innovate and become more efficient, all the while embracing long-standing community partnerships and creating new ones – all to the benefit of their customers and communities.

Rachel Bannister, CPCU, CIC, AIS, API, AIM, is marketing supervisor at Patrons Oxford Insurance Company in Auburn.

Supporting the Waldo County YMCA

Allen Insurance and Financial is a sponsor of the 2016 Canoe Races put on by the Waldo County YMCA. These are the 37th annual St. George Canoe Race, which was March 26 and the 43rd annual Passagassawakeag River Race, set for Saturday, April 2.

In this photo, Allen Insurance and Financial's Karen Reed, center, poses with Dale Cross and Karen Varney of the Waldo County YMCA.



There's Still Time to Contribute to an IRA for 2015

There's still time to make a regular IRA contribution for 2015! You have until your tax return due date (not including extensions) to contribute up to \$5,500 for 2015 (\$6,500 if you were age 50 by December 31, 2015). For most taxpayers, the contribution deadline for 2015 is April 18, 2016 (April 19, 2016, if you live in Maine or Massachusetts).

You can contribute to a traditional IRA, a Roth IRA, or both as long as your total contributions don't exceed the annual limit (or, if less, 100% of your earned income). You may also be able to contribute to an IRA for your spouse for 2015, even if your spouse didn't have any 2015 income.

Traditional IRA

You can contribute to a traditional IRA for 2015, if you had taxable compensation and you were not age 70½ by December 31, 2015. However, if you or your spouse was covered by an employer-sponsored retirement plan in 2015, then your ability to deduct your contributions may be limited or eliminated depending on your filing status and your modified adjusted gross income (MAGI) (see table below). Even if you can't deduct your traditional IRA contribution, you can always make non-deductible (after-tax) contributions to a traditional IRA regardless of your income level. However, in most cases, if you're eligible, you'll be better off contributing to a Roth IRA instead of making non-deductible contributions to a traditional IRA.

Roth IRA

You can contribute to a Roth IRA, if your MAGI is within certain

dollar limits (even if you're 70½ or older). For 2015, if you file your federal tax return as single or head of household, you can make a full Roth contribution, if your income is \$116,000 or less. Your maximum contribution is phased out if your income is between \$116,000 and \$131,000, and you can't contribute at all if your income is \$131,000 or more. Similarly, if you're married and file a joint federal tax return, you can make a full Roth contribution, if your income is \$183,000 or less. Your contribution is phased out, if your income is between \$183,000 and \$193,000, and you can't contribute at all, if your income is \$193,000 or more. And, if you're married filing separately, your contribution phases out with any income over \$0 and you can't contribute at all, if your income is \$10,000 or more.

Even if you can't make an annual contribution to a Roth IRA because of the income limits, there's an easy workaround. If you haven't yet reached age 70½, you can simply make a non-deductible contribution to a traditional IRA and then immediately convert that traditional IRA to a Roth IRA. Keep in mind, however, that you'll need to aggregate all traditional IRAs and SEP/SIMPLE IRAs that you own—other than IRAs you've inherited—when you calculate the taxable portion of your conversion. (This is sometimes called a “back-door” Roth IRA.) Finally, keep in mind that, if you make a contribution to a Roth IRA for 2015—no matter how small—by your tax return due date and this is your first Roth IRA contribution, your five-year holding period for identifying qualified distributions from all your Roth IRAs (other than inherited accounts) will start on January 1, 2015.

2015 income phase-out ranges for determining deductibility of traditional IRA contributions:

1. Covered by an employer-sponsored plan and filing as:	Your IRA deduction is reduced if your MAGI is:	Your IRA deduction is eliminated if your MAGI is:
Single/Head of household	\$61,000 to \$71,000	\$71,000 or more
Married filing jointly	\$98,000 to \$118,000	\$118,000 or more
Married filing separately	\$0 to \$10,000	\$10,000 or more
2. Not covered by an employer-sponsored retirement plan, but filing joint return with a spouse who is covered by a plan	\$183,000 to \$193,000	\$193,000 or more

Founded in 1866 and celebrating 150 years in business in 2016, Allen Insurance and Financial is an employee-owned insurance, benefits and financial services company with offices in Rockland, Camden, Belfast and Southwest Harbor. For more information call 236-4311, or visit AllenIF.com

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Health Insurance and Filing Your Taxes

By Jan. 31, 2016, the Health Insurance Marketplaces will be mailing Form 1095-A to all individuals who enrolled in Marketplace health insurance coverage. Form 1095-A acts as proof of insurance, and is sent to individuals who had Marketplace coverage to allow them to:

- Claim Premium Tax Credits
- Reconcile the Credit on their returns with Advanced Premium Tax Credit Payments
- File accurate tax returns in general, as this information can be used to help determine exemptions or penalties under the individual mandate

Purpose of Form

Form 1095-A is not a form that you have to complete; it is simply used to report certain information to the IRS about individuals who enroll in a qualified health plan through the Health Insurance Marketplace.

If you received a premium tax credit to help pay for your Marketplace coverage, you'll use the information on Form 1095-A to fill out your Premium Tax Credit Form 8962. This form will allow you to claim additional tax credits or to repay amounts if you got too much assistance based on your income. Most people who received tax credits will need to fill out Form 8962, since even a slight change in income will change the amount of any tax credit that they are owed.

Who Has to File the 1095-A Form?

The Health Insurance Marketplace (state, federal, regional or

subsidiary) must file Form 1095-A. Individuals don't have to file the form; they will use the form furnished to help them complete other forms, including Form 8962.

If you enrolled in health insurance through the Marketplace and received a premium tax credit, you'll use the information on Form 1095-A to fill out your Premium Tax Credit Form 8962.

Can I File Form 8962 Without a Form 1095-A?

If you received tax credits, then you'll want to wait until you have your Form 1095-A. It would be very difficult to correctly fill out the Premium Tax Credit form without the information from your 1095-A. If you are running up against the deadline, you can file for an extension on your taxes and request another form from the Marketplace. Don't forget: you can also view your form online after it has been filed.

What if I Had More than One Provider?

If you had more than one type of health insurance throughout the year, then follow this rule of thumb: for 2015, you'll get a Form 1095-A from every provider that you had a Health Insurance Marketplace plan with. If you don't have your Form 1095-B or Form 1095-C from your employer or coverage outside of the Marketplace, then use the honor system to report those types of coverage.

For 2016 and beyond, you'll get forms from anyone who provided you with coverage by early February.

6 Best Practices to Protect

Your Confidential Information

Presented by Allen Insurance and Financial

Although there is a vast amount of technology available that is designed to safeguard your devices and personal information, that information is still vulnerable to cyber criminals and identity thieves. In fact, security breaches are not always due to a weakness in technology control. Sometimes, they are the result of the action or inaction of the user—you! Therefore, you are one of the best lines of defense against cyber crime.

October was National Cyber Security Awareness Month. It's still the perfect time to implement the following information security best practices to do your part in keeping your personal information safe and secure.

1) Build strong passwords

It's important to create strong passwords for all of your online accounts. But what exactly does this mean? A strong password:

- Contains both uppercase and lowercase characters, as well as digits and punctuation
- Is at least eight characters long
- Is not a word in any language, slang, dialect, or jargon
- Is not based on personal information, names of family members, and so on

A good rule of thumb is that passwords should be hard to guess but easy to remember.

2) Use multifactor authentication

A user ID and strong password alone are not sufficient protections for securing web accounts. Multifactor authentication—one of the simplest and most effective ways to secure your data—adds an extra layer of protection. With multifactor authentication, users must provide two forms of identification in order to log in to a site.

Here's how it works: After a user enters a user ID and password, the website will send a passcode to the user's mobile device. He

or she must then enter this code on the site, ensuring that only that individual can sign into the account.

3) Be suspicious of unsolicited e-mail

Be wary of any e-mails that convey a sense of doom and gloom (e.g., threatening to close an account) or that claim immediate action is required. Grammar mistakes, spelling errors, and generic salutations are also red flags. Perhaps most important, scrutinize those e-mails that contain links and attachments from sources you don't know (and, unfortunately, even from sources you do know). It's quite easy for cyber criminals to craft a legitimate-looking e-mail in the hopes that you'll be fooled into thinking it came from a company you do business with or from a friend. To protect yourself from this scenario, don't hesitate to verify: Call the source directly to authenticate from whom it was sent it; if it came from a company you know, go to the company website directly to log in.

4) Protect your mobile devices

Outdated software can leave your mobile devices open to security vulnerabilities. By keeping your apps and mobile operating system software up to date, you can mitigate the risk of a cyber criminal exploiting a hole in your system. Most devices simplify this process for you by offering automatic update options for apps, as well as notification systems that let you know as soon as an operating system update is available. It's your job to take care of these updates immediately!

Another mobile device necessity is to do your homework, making sure the apps you're downloading are from a reputable company (e.g., by checking their ratings and comments). Be sure you know what the app does and what information it's going to access on your mobile device.

5) Engage in safe web browsing

Keeping your browser up to date is critical in preventing malware. Just like apps and your operating system, an out-of-date browser can open up security gaps that cyber criminals will

take advantage of. Be alert to pop-ups and advertisements: Both could be spyware used to plant tracking cookies on your machine, which can steal your information, direct you to bogus phishing sites, and pummel you with pop-ups.

When transmitting personally identifiable or payment information, you can ensure that you are on a secure site by checking for the "https://" before the "www.whateversite.com." When on public Wi-Fi networks, consider connecting through a personal virtual private network (VPN) and disable auto-connect; this way, your device won't automatically connect to found public networks.

6) Stay vigilant

Although advanced technology today is certainly a safeguard and buffer to keep cyber criminals at bay, it's critical to remember that you are in the first line of defense to keeping your data safe and secure.

For more tips and tricks to stay safe online, visit the National Cyber Security Alliance at www.staysafeonline.org.

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Individual Health Insurance Open Enrollment Starts Nov. 1

Starting Nov. 1, consumers can fill out or update a Health Insurance Marketplace application to enroll, renew, or change

plans.

The assistance of an independent insurance advisor, such as those at Allen Insurance and Financial, doesn't cost the consumer anything additional. And working with Allen Insurance and Financial means that when it comes to claims issues or questions during the plan year, an Allen advisor will be available to answer those questions.

According to Dan Wyman, manager of the insured benefits division at Allen Insurance and Financial, an independent advisor can help explain basic health insurance terminology and can help a consumer calculate the impact of out-of-pocket costs, premiums and deductibles. Wyman notes that it is this kind of assistance that can make an important difference in helping to determine the level of health insurance plan a consumer can afford, with or without a subsidy from the government.

Said Wyman: "Our staff specializes in health insurance. We can explain the differences in plans, right down to the smallest of details. We work with businesses, families and individuals every day to help them pick the insurance plans that best serve their needs."

Call 855-710-5700 or start with information and an online form at AllenIF.com/healthcare.

September is National Preparedness Month

Floods are the most common and widespread of all natural disasters. Most communities in the United States can experience some degree of flooding after spring rains, heavy thunderstorms

or winter snow thaws. Most floods develop slowly over a period of days. Flash floods, however, are like walls of water that develop in a matter of minutes. Flash floods can be caused by intense storms or a dam failure.

Your organization should have a written plan for responding to floods and flash floods. [Use this PDF](#) from our partners at The Hanover Insurance Group for guidance.

Why An Independent Agent?

Not all insurance agents are the same. Choosing the right one can make a big difference – in price, service, and value.

With other agencies, you get one company that sells one brand of insurance. With an independent insurance agency like Allen Insurance and Financial you get choices.

Why? Because independent insurance agencies like Allen Insurance and Financial represent a number of different insurance companies, and can compare coverage and prices to find the best possible value for your individual circumstances.

Here are a few reasons why Allen Insurance and Financial should be your first and last stop when looking for insurance.

- We work for you when you have a claim.
- We are not beholden to any one company. This means you don't have to change agencies as your insurance and service needs change.
- We are your consultants, working with you as you determine your needs.
- We are value-hunters who look after your pocketbook in finding the best combination of price, coverage, and service.
- We offer one-stop shopping for a full range of products,

including home, renters, auto, business, life, health, and retirement plans.

- We can periodically review your coverage to keep up with your changing insurance needs.
- We are committed to customer satisfaction – it's the key to our livelihood.
- We treat you like a person, not a number.
- We are licensed professionals with strong customer and community ties.

There is a difference. To find out how our independent insurance agency can help you find the right insurance coverage, call today.