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Governor Janet Mills to cut ribbon signifying official Tanbark launch

Saco-based startup in full production thanks to widespread, collaborative Maine effort

- Who:** Tankbark, a Maine company that designs and manufactures sustainable packaging using pulp from Maine trees and other plant fibers to help replace rigid, single-use plastic
- What:** An official company launch and ribbon cutting to celebrate that production is in full swing, shed light on the collaborative effort it took to reach this milestone, and touch on what this means for Maine and the planet
- Where:** Tanbark headquarters, 34 Spring Hill Rd., Saco, Maine
- When:** **Wednesday, Oct. 11, 2023, 4-6:30 p.m.**
- 4-4:45 Production demo:**
Watch as slurry (pulp dissolved in water) goes through the forming machine and hot press to transform into a 3-D finished product
- 5-5:30 Remarks:**
Melissa LaCasse, Tanbark co-founder
Janet Mills, Governor of Maine
Ribbon (Type 3 Molded Fiber) Cutting
- Onsite interview opportunities:** Melissa and Christopher LaCasse, Tanbark co-founders
Janet Mills, Governor of Maine
Luke's Lobster and Hannaford Grocery, Tanbark customers
Deb Mills-Scofield, Tanbark board
Anita Verna Crofts, community member/consultant on what this means for Maine communities and the planet
- Photo opportunities:** Production demonstration, product shots, speakers, ribbon cutting, crowd. We'll also have professional video/images available post-event upon request



Tanbark is a sustainable packaging company created to shake things up for good and help end the plastic problem. We believe the choice to switch from plastic to Type 3 molded fiber should be an easy one that advances sustainability *and* amplifies design, performance, and the customer experience. We also maintain alternatives to plastic should be available onshore at low volume runs with the ability to customize, which our first-to-market low-volume machines allow.

OUR STORY

Tanbark was born at an intersection. Literally and figuratively. Melissa LaCasse remembers exactly where she was driving in Westbrook, ME, when these words synced up perfectly with a junction in the road: “What kind of ancestor do you want to be?” Melissa was listening to the *On Being* podcast, and this particular episode – featuring Krista Tippett in conversation with best-selling nature author Robert Macfarlane – struck her big time. Then and there, Melissa decided to turn her climate grief into action. To show up with impact. And Tanbark was born.

OUR TEAM

Melissa didn’t have all of the answers, but she knew where to start. Her husband Christopher LaCasse had been turning wrenches on machines that produce molded fiber packaging since he was 13 years old, and his knowledge of the equipment and processes is first among equals. Meanwhile, Melissa has a background in distribution, business development, B2B sales, community partnerships, and strategic planning.

THE LANDSCAPE

Ninety-five percent of plastic is not recycled and at the rate we’re going, there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean by 2050. It’s a worldwide problem, and one of the fastest growing solutions is to replace plastic with Type 3 Molded Fiber Packaging. Tanbark has the knowledge, technology, equipment, and resources to create this sustainable, recyclable, and often compostable packaging right here in Maine with Maine trees, Maine labor, and Maine ingenuity.

EARLY WINS

In Tanbark’s first year, Melissa successfully secured an impressive \$3.2 in pre-seed funding. The company was also selected for The Roux Institute’s Founder Residency program, supercharging its momentum and access. Furthermore, Tanbark was named Gorham Saving Bank’s \$50,000 Launchpad winner, earned a \$500,000 grant through the Maine Technology Institute Forestry Recovery Initiative, and won \$25,000 through Greenlight Maine. Tanbark kicked off production in the summer of 2023.

THE VISION

The Tanbark team understands real change on the climate front requires vast amounts of people to choose better, which starts with *giving* businesses, and thereby people, *choice*. That’s exactly what they plan to do. Beyond meeting immediate demand for things like food and medical supplies packaging, Tanbark is positioned to change the game in the high-end beauty market.



KEY THEMES & STORY IDEAS

Information/Interview Requests: Angela Smith at 207-272-6894 or angela@asmithconsultancy.com

THE MAINE STORY

- **Maine's thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem:** The magnificent story of how Maine's best – The Roux, Maine Venture Fund, Finance Authority of Maine (FAME), Maine Technology Institute (MTI), University of Maine, Maine Angels, Live + Work in Maine, Gorham Savings Bank, Greenlight Maine, SCORE, etc. – came together to help launch Tanbark. Tanbark exemplifies why Maine is a smart place to start or grow a business. Starting a business requires extraordinary focus, resources, hard work, thoughtfulness, and courage; however, amidst an innovative, supportive, and comprehensive ecosystem, even the insurmountable becomes achievable.
- **Innovating a Maine heritage industry to solve a modern problem:** Maine is the birthplace of molded fiber but this planet-friendly material has largely been ignored because of plastic. Tanbark is tapping into Maine's forestry and pulp industries to help replace single-use plastic with Type 3 molded fiber. Tanbark combines Maine's abundant natural and human resources, unmatched industry knowledge, and first-to-market technology to deliver simple elegant packaging powered by the earth for a circulatory economy. Could map the journey of a tree from forest to finished product.

INNOVATING MANUFACTURING

- **Revitalizing Manufacturing:** In July, President Joe Biden signed an executive order, "Invent it here, make it here," requiring federally funded inventions to be manufactured in the United States. During a visit to Maine, he emphasized the role manufacturing once played – and needs to play again – in our economy. He recalled how "between 1990 and 2010, Maine lost nearly 45,000 manufacturing jobs," adding that across the country, "once thriving cities and towns became shadows of what they used to be." Tanbark recognizes this and plans to be among the Maine manufacturers that create new jobs, show up with impact, and help local communities thrive again. Biden proclaimed "Bio-based products are the future in Maine." Tanbark agrees and is committed to helping put Maine and the U.S. back on the map for manufacturing.
- **Changing the face on manufacturing:** Tanbark co-founder and majority owner Melissa LaCasse is happy to help put a new – female face – on manufacturing. According to the U.S. Census, manufacturing is the fifth largest employer with about 30% of the jobs filled by women. In comparison, women make up about 47% in the overall workforce. One in four manufacturing leaders is female. But thanks to factors like automation, STEM in education, and initiatives like Women MAKE America, the gender gap is tightening. Explore national and state trends and uncover how companies like Tanbark can help keep the ball rolling. In Melissa's own words: "I want as many women as possible to be part of this company."

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INNOVATING MANUFACTURING cont...

- **Onshore manufacturing solution:** Until now, there has not been an onshore solution for companies that want to use Type 3 Molded Fiber to replace plastic. Tanbark changed this with its first-to-market smaller machines that allow for smaller volume runs. Thanks to a Maine manufacturer, companies – like Luke’s Lobster and Hannaford – now have an accessible and affordable sustainability option right here in the United States. Tanbark is based in North America. The machines it uses are made here, their renewable resources (Maine trees and other plant fibers) are from here, and their products are made here.

SEEING THROUGH PLASTIC: IT’S TIME TO OFFER A PLANET-FRIENDLY ALTERNATIVE

- **Mandating change: what’s being done about the plastic epidemic?** From international efforts like the up and coming UN treaty against plastic pollution to companies bracing for PFAS regulations to state bans on plastic bags, change – big and small – is knocking at the door. What’s this all mean for business? What role can a company like Tanbark play? How does Maine fit into the equation?
- **Goodbye elitism – Tanbark offers a viable solution to arresting plastic.**
Ninety-five percent of plastic is not recycled and at the rate we’re going, there will be more plastic than fish in the ocean by 2050. It’s a worldwide problem and *everyone* needs to be part of the solution with businesses – the real tool for change – leading the way. No more excuses. Tanbark gives businesses a practical solution. It’s time businesses introduce Type 3 Molded Fiber packaging into the *mainstream* and, in turn, giving customers across the board a plastic-free alternative.
- **Made from the earth for the earth.** Made from Maine trees and other plant fibers, Type 3 Molded Fiber packaging is modern beauty powered by the earth. It’s the result of nature and technology, design and engineering, science and the arts all intersecting to create a beautiful and functional alternative to plastic. A story about the interdisciplinary approach to taking care of the planet: how scientists and designers, for example, are coming together to answer not only does it look good, feel good, etc., but also *does it do good?*



Melissa LaCasse

Sometimes you have to close one door to open another. Melissa LaCasse not only believes this; she acts on it. So, when posed the question, “What kind of ancestor do you want to be?” while listening to the *On Being* podcast, Melissa pivoted in an instant. Drawn to nature from a young age and determined to be someone who “showed up with impact,” Melissa decided on the spot to transition from her work in public media at WNYC and turn her climate grief into action. Tanbark, a sustainable packaging company, was born.

Melissa loves to disrupt the status quo for good. Reducing single-use plastic is no small task, but Melissa doesn’t dream small. “I just decided to bet on myself.”



Melissa co-founded Tanbark in 2021. She successfully secured \$3.2 in pre-seed funding in Tanbark’s first year, and is backed further by more than \$700K in grant funding. She continues to put her skills in distribution, business development, B2B sales, community partnerships, and strategic planning to work each day.

Along with helping to stop the plastic epidemic, Melissa is happily changing the face of manufacturing. Tanbark is the only female-owned business of its kind in the Western Hemisphere. In her spare time, Melissa reads cookbooks to relax and memoirs to explore how other people navigate the world. Happiest walking a forest path or sailing out on open water, she also spends time outdoors as much as she can.

\$3.00
Monday
November 27, 2023

Portland Press Herald

pressherald.com

WEATHER:
Rainy morning,
afternoon dries out
High 51
Details, B6

Providers push back on proposal to require testing of medical marijuana products

The Maine Office of Cannabis Policy cites a recent study showing 45% of 127 medical marijuana samples failed the same testing that's required for the recreational market.

By HANNAH LACLAIRE
Staff Writer

The agency regulating the sale of medical cannabis in Maine believes the results of a new study are the missing evidence needed to overhaul the program and institute a set

of requirements that industry participants have opposed in the past. John Blazak, director of the Maine Office of Cannabis Policy, is hopeful that the department's study, which tested medical cannabis products for mold and pesticides, will push

the Legislature to create a medical cannabis testing mandate similar to the one in the recreational market.

However, cultivators and caregivers — the industry lynchpin for medical cannabis providers — have criticized the study for its small sample size, its conclusions and its methods, calling it "intellectually dishonest." The Maine Office of Cannabis Policy collected 127 samples of med-

ical cannabis this summer during inspections and ran them through the same testing process required in the recreational-use program. Of the 127 samples, 57 — or about 45% — failed, meaning they contained at least one banned material or substance.

The report, released a little more than a week ago, comes about two

Please see CANNABIS, Page B1

The Maine Office of Cannabis Policy has urged mandates in the past, but industry members argued it would be too expensive and force them to either close shop or raise prices.



Melissa LaCasse is the co-founder and CEO of Tanbark, a Maine startup that designs and manufactures sustainable packaging using pulp from Maine trees and other plant fibers. LaCasse only has 20 employees, but is already looking at a second facility. "(Businesses) know plastic is bad and they know their customers are getting tired of not having plastic-free alternatives," she said. "Now, we just have to scale up at an appropriate speed."

Innovation in food packaging boosts Maine's forest industries

Tanbark Molded Fiber Products in Saco is making clamshell containers for Luke's Lobster shops with pulp from Maine trees.

By KELLEY ROUGHARD
Staff Writer

When Tanbark's Molded Fiber Products began producing wood pulp-based packaging using Luke's Lobster shells in October, the Saco startup took Maine's centuries-old pulp and paper industry into innovative and uncharted territory.

But Tanbark co-founder and CEO Melissa LaCasse had an inkling early on that she was heading in the right direction, becoming one of the newest players in a struggling legacy industry that continues to reinvent itself as technology and markets evolve.

Her instincts were affirmed as she raised \$2.5 million in seed funding from various sources, including the Maine Venture Fund, Coastal Enterprise Inc., the Maine Forestry Recovery Initiative



Katie Guilmette checks the rigidity of packaging at Tanbark in Saco last month. The containers are made from dried wood pulp processed by ME Paper in Rumford. The sheets are then turned into a slurry that is molded, dried and formed into clamshell boxes that are fully recyclable and compostable.

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Hamas frees third group of hostages

Monday is the last day of the cease-fire, but Hamas has said it's looking to extend the agreement.

By WAFIA SHUBAFA
and SALLY MAGDO
Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — The fragile cease-fire between Israel and Hamas was back on track Sunday as the militants freed 17 more hostages, including 14 Israelis and the first American, in a third exchange under a five-day truce that the U.S. said it hoped would be extended. In turn, Israel released 39

INSIDE
Palestinian prisoners.

Most hostages were handed over directly to Israel, waving to a cheering crowd as they arrived at an air force base. Others left through Egypt. Israel's army said one was airlifted to a hospital, and the director of Soroka Medical Center said Elma Avraham, 84, was in life-threatening condition as "a result of an extended period of time when an elderly woman was not taken care of as needed."

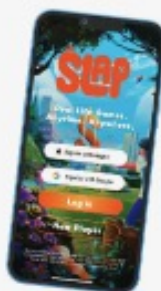
The youngest hostage released was Abigail Eden, a 4-year-old girl and dual Israeli-American citizen whose parents were killed in the Hamas attack that started

the war. The youngest Israeli-American citizen whose parents were killed in the Hamas attack that started

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Israeli Army via Associated Press
Hila Rotem Shoshani reunites with her uncle on Sunday in Israel after being released by Hamas. Hospitals said the physical condition of the freed hostages has largely been good, though little is known publicly about the conditions of their captivity.



Tag, you're it: Cape Elizabeth natives develop an app for the adults who are kids at heart

By HANNAH LACLAIRE
Staff Writer

On a crisp November night in Cape Elizabeth, more than a dozen 20-somethings traded in a circle, faces illuminated by their phone screens as the game Slap started counting down.

"Spread out," the app warned.

"Get far as possible from everyone. Anyone can be coming for you."

Participants took off, running through the dark. Some headed toward the shore, others to the woods, all laughing.

"You don't really know who's going to be after you," said Wyatt Thayer, 25, who compared the

chase to "The Hunger Games," a young-adult book series. "She wants to win, you're missing for your life, but also trying to tag the other person."

Slap, a digital variation of the playground classic tag, is the first

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