



EYE ON THE STORM: A MAINE MARINER HAS WATCHED THE WEATHER FOR DECADES, AND NOW HE'S WRITING ABOUT IT. **PAGE 18**

PASTIMES

Staying in Her Lanes

In Ellsworth, an old candlepin alley finds an unlikely new champion.

Twenty-year-old queenpin Autumn Mowery has been working at D'Amanda's since 2019 and running it since 2020.



tightening loose conveyor chains. “If I could clone myself, I totally would,” she says. The mechanized pinsetters are from 1949, and the equipment isn’t compatible with new parts. “It’s like all duct tape and bubble gum back there,” Mowery says. She knows each lane’s quirks and attends to them like a tired but doting mother. The motor on Lane 8 is dying. Lane 11 often has ball jams. Lane 2 is her “last-resort lane,” because the pinsetter tends to collapse. Lane 5 is her scrap yard, where she strips parts to fix other lanes.

It’s often well past midnight by the time she’s done tinkering with equipment. She lives in an apartment above the lanes with her dog, Diamond, and her fiancé, who bought the building last summer and owns a trading-card shop next door. Her stomach is usually growling by the time she heads upstairs, a reminder that all she’s eaten are the cookies she stashes behind the counter. “The hungry thought doesn’t come,” she says. “I’m so busy.”

In addition to the constant lane repairs, there’s the leaky roof and the unreliable heat. An electrical fire on New Year’s Eve fried the scoring system. She’s lost friendships because she’s always working. Her family worries about her health. Once, she broke a finger while fixing a ball jam. Her mom wanted to close the alley, and her grandmother admonished, “What happens when you fall in the lane and it chips you up?”

But Mowery says she’s committed to her customers and to candlepin, many decades past its heyday. Sam Sawyer, now in her mid-20s, has been bowling at D’Amanda’s since she was a kid, and her family has frequented the lanes for generations. “It means a lot to so many people around here,” Sawyer says. “It’s really like another home for us.”

Mowery’s friends and family were surprised by her affinity for the alley. “They joke about it,” she says. “They’re like, ‘You really want to be a lame bowling-alley owner?’ I’m like, ‘What are you talking about? This is so much fun.’ Honestly, I mean, I love this place.” —TRESSA VERSTEEG

Mowery posts behind-the-scenes videos of the lanes to her 12,000 followers on TikTok (@ellsworthcandlepinalley), where she also links to a crowdfunding site for occasional repairs. 25 Eastward Ln., Ellsworth. 207-667-9228. damandas.com

Autumn Mowery stands on a wooden platform, peering into a jungle of conveyors, chains, and chutes behind the lanes at D’Amanda’s, a candlepin-bowling alley in Ellsworth. The pins on Lane 1 aren’t resetting. The clunking and whirring is so loud it’s hard to think. Mowery tucks her hair behind her ears. “It’s too cold!” she yells, pointing to the sweeper bar, which collects the pins after the third frame. “This is not moving the way that it should.” She flips a switch to restart the lane, and things get back on track, but she expects the same problem all day because cold weather has stiffened the grease on her equipment.

Back at the front desk, Mowery, who’s 20 years old, is surrounded by well-worn rental shoes and balls waiting to be degreased. On the wall hangs a photo of her with her dad and their antlered quarry from a 2021 moose hunt. “Funkytown,” the 1979 Lipps Inc. song, bumps from speakers. Within easy reach, Mowery has a can of shoe-sanitizer spray and a Dunkin’ coffee cup — five caramels, four creams, four sugars.

She started working at the alley in 2019, while still in high school. Innately shy, she found that her growing rapport with regulars gave her more confidence. When the previous owner decided he wanted out, Mowery talked her mom into buying it and took over all the day-to-day. “I didn’t want it to leave and there not be anything for families to do,” she says.

A friend sometimes drops by to help out, but Mowery otherwise works solo, unjamming ball chutes, wiping down the bar, teaching people to keep score,