KAREN NEARY, a history teacher at H.B. Emery Jr. School, Buxton, is pictured holding a sample of pellets from Northeast Pellets, LLC, in Ashland.

Neary said she planned to use what she learned during the recent tour of forest industry facilities in Maine, hosted by the Maine TREE Foundation, when putting together future lesson plans.

By Kathy McCarty

ASHLAND — Forests of Maine Teachers’ Tour 2, hosted by the Maine TREE Foundation, made a stop Thursday at Northeast Pellets, LLC — one of several visits the group made to a variety of wood-related establishments over a three-day period. Northeast Pellets has been online and operational for about six weeks but was idle during the tour.

“A lot of teachers don’t know how wood gets from the tree to the finished product. The tour serves to educate and promote good forest practices, so teachers can teach the next
Southern Maine teachers get firsthand look at forest industry

“generation of students,” said Matt Bell, mill owner.

Bell credits early education experiences as a youth for inspiring his future business goals.

“I remember as a student learning about the forests — found it very interesting,” said Bell, who was unable to be present for this year’s tour.

In his stead, Bell had his father, Steve Bell, and cousin, Jason Forbes — both full-time employees at the mill — serve as tour guides.

Joining the group of educators on the tour was Sherry Huber, director, Maine TREE Foundation.

“The participants had a very positive overall impression of forest and mills in the County. They really enjoyed the chance to ‘see for themselves’ and to talk and ask questions with so many resource professionals like Jason and Steve,” said Huber.

THE MAINE TREE FOUNDATION hosted a number of tours of Maine forest industry facilities the last week of July. Pictured during a tour of Northeast Pellets, LLC, in Ashland are, from left: Anita Lyons, Biddeford Middle School; three unidentified participants; Jeffry Chase, Goodwill-Hinckley High School, Hinckley; Angela Ferrelli,
Southern Maine teachers get firsthand look at forest industry

AmeriCorps intern with Maine DEP; Steve Bell and Jason Forbes, both of Northeast Pellets; Barbara Higgins, Buxton Center Elementary School, Gorham; Christos Gianopoulos, University of Southern Maine; Sherry Huber, director, Maine TREE Foundation; Jeff Lovejoy, Troy Howard Middle School, Belfast.

Participants in this year’s tour represented a variety of southern Maine schools and organizations, including: Huber; Anita Lyons, Biddeford Middle School; Jeffry Chase, Good Will-Hinckley High School, Hinckley; Maureen Cousins, Buxton Center Elementary School, Limington; Angela Ferrelli, AmeriCorps intern with Maine DEP; Barbara Higgins, Buxton Center Elementary School, Gorham; Christos Gianopoulos, University of Southern Maine; Jeff Lovejoy, Troy Howard Middle School, Belfast; Patricia Maloney, Maine Project Learning Tree coordinator; Barry Burgason, wildlife biologist, Huber Resources; and Karen Neary, H.B. Emery Jr. School, Steep Falls.

Huber said such tours provide an opportunity for educators to go beyond the textbook, learning firsthand what’s involved in transforming wood into a number of usable products. That learning experience is then taken back to the classroom, enabling the teacher to better explain to students the process involved.

“They left with a far better understanding of the forest products businesses they visited and their importance to the state’s economic future,” she said.

“They were also impressed with the hospitality shown them by all their hosts, but perhaps especially by Tammy (Curran, officer manager at Northeast Pellets), Steve and Jason at Northeast Pellets who provided trays of wonderful vegetable snacks and dips and water on a hot day,” continued Huber.
Southern Maine teachers get firsthand look at forest industry

JASON FORBES, of Northeast Pellets, LLC, discusses the mill with Sherry Huber, director, Maine TREE Foundation, during a tour of the facility on July 28. Participants were split up into two groups, with Forbes leading the first group as they toured the facility. He explained the various buildings and the purpose of the machines each housed. The teachers appeared fascinated by the process — some taking notes, while others snapped photos to take back to their respective classrooms.

"We did so much learning over the past few days. I'm exhausted but excited to take all this information back to my students," said Lyons, who teaches grade 6-8 special education. "From identifying trees at the Scientific Forest Management Area at Baxter (State Park), to the Lumbermen's Museum in Patten and the various mills we've visited, we've learned a lot."

Like Huber, Lyons said she was very impressed with the people at each stop. "They've been very helpful and welcoming. At the Huber site (Huber Resources Corp., of Old Town), we learned the mill process. I even got to ride in a feller-buncher," said Lyons, smiling as she recalled the experience and noting how she's looking forward to sharing pictures of her riding in the equipment with students this coming school year.

Neary, of SAD 6 in Limington, took home a sampling of pellets from the Ashland mill. She's looking forward to incorporating what she learned on the tour into lesson plans for her class. "I'm a history teacher and teach grade 5. I can use some of what I've learned for a lesson on the history of logging. The museum gave me ideas," said Neary.

She said the pellet mill also gave her ideas on ways to incorporate past and present forestry methods into a lesson plan. "This is so cool — how it goes from the tree to fuel for your home. I will definitely be using what I've learned to teach future classes," Neary said.

One of the last stops on the tour was a trip up Mars Hill Mountain. "A visit to the wind farm was one of our final stops," said Huber.

Huber said such tours serve to educate not only the teacher but all those who come in contact with them. "It gives the teachers an opportunity to look at what's going on in the forest industry. The mission is to help Maine people understand all the values of the forest industry. Teachers are potential ambassadors," said Huber.

"Teachers are well-respected professionals — have credibility," said Huber. "They go home and tell of good things going on in the forest industry. They go home feeling more knowledgeable and having a better understanding of the business."

The importance of these tours, according to Huber, is "in giving a group of respected professionals (educators) a chance to get information firsthand and be able to share it with their students, colleagues and community when they return home."

For over a decade, Maine TREE has been hosting these tours. "Almost 900 teachers from all over the state and all grade levels and subjects have taken these four-day tours of Maine's forests and mills over the 14 years that Maine TREE has been offering them. They arrive with generally little knowledge of one of Maine's most important industries and leave as ambassadors for the forest resource and the people who live and work in the industry," said Huber.

For more information on the Maine TREE Foundation, visit www.mainetreefoundation.org.