

Soap Factory Raising the Bar

SUNFEATHER TOUR: FOUNDER PITCHES UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE

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Dateline: PARISHVILLE

Sandra R. "Sandy" Maine gave state Sen. Joseph A. Griffo something more to think about than what to bring his wife when he took a tour of the SunFeather Natural Soap Co. on Thursday. In the soapmaking room, the company founder pitched universal health care.

While two workers mixed a batch of cranberry rose soap and poured it into a 100-pound mold, Ms. Maine told Mr. Griffo, R-Rome, that she recently lost an employee, Jewina M. "Wendy" Cota, to colon cancer.



Photo Credit: Catherine Whalen - SunFeather Vice President

Sandy Maine with Senator Griffo in SunFeather's Factory Outlet Store located in Parishville, New York

Mrs. Cota mastered the art and science of soapmaking in her 15 years at SunFeather, but she couldn't afford the high price of a colonoscopy when she turned 50, Ms. Maine said.

"If it wasn't for the high price of health care, Wendy might be here today," Ms. Maine said.

Mrs. Cota died two weeks ago. Her family is left with \$350,000 in medical bills, Ms. Maine said.

"Tell that to the governor the next time you're sending him soap," Mr. Griffo said. "Last year, he went after health care. That's not a good place to be making cuts. We'll be more sensitized to that."

He said his mother also was diagnosed with colon cancer and is in remission, and he stressed the importance of early detection.

The rest of the tour was filled with oohs and ahs as Mr. Griffo and his staff sniffed bars with names such as "Starry Night" and "Forest Melody" and poked jelly-like soap left to harden and set.

The senator came to the factory from a Thanksgiving lunch he helped serve to Colton-Pierrepont Central School students along with Assemblywoman Dierdre K. Scozzafava, R-Gouverneur, and the St. Lawrence University football team.

Tanya L. Conto, a sales associate and administrative assistant, served as the tour guide. She led the politician through the candle and lotion room to the lunch room where Ms. Maine's scent library shares space. Here the soapmaker mixes natural essences from around the globe to create her scents.

"I tell people I always know she's thinking of something new when she's got her apron on and she has that mad-scientist look," Ms. Conto said.

Ms. Maine creates scents for her own lines and for custom orders as well. Once, a soda company asked her to create root beer, ginger ale and cherry cola soaps.

"What about beer soap? Can you make that?" Mr. Griffo asked, suggesting the Utica-based Saranac Brewing Co. as a patron.

As it turns out, Ms. Maine said she probably could. More than 150 varieties of soap are produced at the Parishville factory, which employs 14 people.

SunFeather is embarking on a \$1.1 million expansion and hopes to make its products certified organic and market them to large retailers such as Whole Foods and Target. A Body Candy line of lotion, soap and lip balm will hit Kinney Drugs next month.

At the end of the day, Mr. Griffo posed with Ms. Maine and a bar of soap. His goal was to join U.S. Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y. on the SunFeather soap museum wall. He'll get his wish, Ms. Conto said.

Ms. Maine made one more addition to the museum Thursday. Her 6-year-old daughter, Clara, proudly wrapped her first bar of soap in plaid fabric. That made it to the wall, too.

Mr. Griffo represents the 47th Senate District, which includes all of Lewis County, the eastern part of St. Lawrence County and most of Oneida County.

Caption:

B/W photo by Melanie Kimbler-Lago Watertown Daily Times - photo appearing in original article

Memo:

ON THE NET SunFeather Natural Soap: www.sunfeather.com