

# Face time: Scott Cole — Trusted administrator may no longer be 'from away'

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Being "from away" isn't necessarily a permanent brand in the eyes of Mainers.

It may not be entirely forgotten, but it can be pretty much forgiven.

"If the 'from away' thing exists," wrote Oxford County

Administrator Scott Cole for this interview, "I am the ultimate example of assimilation: Mainers have let me run their towns and a county, levy their taxes (and) spend their money for 25 years and counting."

Cole came by his Maine heritage as a kid. While growing up in Warwick, N.Y., his father and uncle pooled their resources to buy a camp on the Belgrade Lakes.

"My uncle was about 10 or 12 years older than my dad," Cole said, "and they got it in their heads that they wanted property in Maine. They wanted something on water. They had grown up on the Neversink River, the Delaware River. By the time I was born they had bought this big old lodge, and so all my summers were up here in Maine."



Scott Cole delivers his bass boat to Norway Lake May 2 for a springtime checkup.



County Administrator Scott Cole enjoys a moment at an Oxford County Commissioners' meeting April 19.

Cole did an Army ROTC program at Cornell University with a full scholarship. Part of the deal with the Army led him to becoming an officer in the Transportation Corps, and it was during that time he met his previous wife, who had Maine roots.

"The career worked out better than the marriage," Cole said.

"We ended up in central Maine and, by coincidence, I ended up getting hired by the town of Belgrade as town manager.

We were living in Rome, and my (former) wife was working

at Central Maine Power at their headquarters in Augusta. I got out of the Army and I got a job as a substitute teacher at Waterville Junior High School. A couple months later, in the fall of 1990, the town manager resigned at the town of Belgrade. They advertised and I applied, thinking it would be a good fit."

Cole has been a transplant to Maine ever since — "25 years now, and counting."

He has just one small issue to resolve, coming from New York state.

"I'm a Mets fan," he said.

**How long have you been county administrator?** About 6.5 years – I was hired in the fall of 2009 and started a transition with my predecessor, Carole Fulton. She was a good mentor. I officially took over the job on Jan. 1, 2010.

**Is it a 40-hour-per-week job?** It's really 40-hours-plus. I enjoy flexibility setting my schedule and where I need to be for optimum effectiveness. But no matter how hard I try, I can't seem to duck the long days. The job has a broad scope of varied tasks and seemingly perpetual communication in one form or another. That is where the time goes.

**How do you fit in with the state court system?** County governments in Maine serve as physical host to the court system in their buildings. Their related maintenance are the county's responsibility while actual operation of the courts, and their personnel are sole province of the judicial branch of state government. In a sense, the county is the court system's landlord.

**What's it like to work with a sheriff's department and a jail?** It is interesting, to say the least. My position allows me to regularly interface with law and jail officers in the context of budgeting, procurement and personnel actions. As a result, I have learned a great deal about police work and incarceration strategies that I wouldn't have known otherwise.

**Are you the "go-to guy" when it comes to buying for the county or funding county programs?** Yes. State law designates the administrator as purchasing agent for all departments and the Board of Commissioners as overall fiscal authority for county affairs. Although county government is a collection of separate departmental silos, when it comes to money, "all roads lead to the commissioner's office."

**What is your relationship with the county commissioners?** On the whole, being the county commissioners' day-to-day representative and holding their confidence is a privilege. I strive to communicate ideas, analyze issues and make decisions that are consistent with the commissioners' world view. There is a lot of subjectivity to it, and I relish the challenge.

**How valuable has your previous experience as a town manager been to you?** My 19 years as a town manager have been invaluable. Town managers serve on the front lines of public policy and

their work is not for the faint-of-heart. One learns a lot about many things in a town office and I regularly draw upon that municipal experience.

**What are your greatest challenges?** A constant challenge is to wisely allocate time in order to keep things moving forward. I sometimes use a “triage” approach in order to handle the numerous issues demanding attention. The trick with triage is to not overlook something that may have been temporarily stabilized, but ultimately needs more permanent solution. It's like having a leaking boat that is plodding across the water at slow speed. Things are working, and the vessel is moving, but perhaps not that well. If we could just build a better boat, we would spend less time pumping the bilge and travel farther in the same amount of time.

**How does Oxford County fit in with social issues, such as drug abuse, that affect the courts and law enforcement?** The county's mission and functions are defined by statute. The county's elected officials, through ongoing budget development and implementation, address those issues and imprint their views where they intersect with statutory functions.

**What is your relationship with the state Legislature?** County government is truly a creature of statute. Laws affecting one aspect or another of county government are constantly being created and amended. It is imperative county officials monitor everything and stay in contact with legislators as situations may dictate. The jail funding has been in the forefront, but there are other topics of interest. Our rapport with the Oxford County legislative delegation (eight representatives and two senators) is extremely important, and our legislators have truly delivered for us when asked.

**What was your work before becoming county administrator?** I attended college on a four-year ROTC scholarship and entered the regular Army as a transportation officer, serving 1984-1990. I was selected for command twice during my time in the service. After resigning my commission and being honorably discharged with rank of captain, I moved to Maine and was hired as town manager in Belgrade where I spent two years. From there I went to Standish as town manager for six years, and then another 10 years as Bethel town manager.

**Are you happy to have spent so much of your career in Maine?** Yes. While every location has tradeoffs, Maine is a good place to be. The comparatively sparse population makes public policy issues and their associated numbers and metrics at least comprehensible. When I travel out of state, I often ponder how those public officials grapple with their issues involving far greater populations and the increased complexity that goes with the territory. Their challenges are staggering and their responses are impressive. As one lives longer, one can better appreciate these things.

**What would you like to do later in your career?** I would like to be (or actually remain) involved in something that requires top-notch communication skills and where I need to think on my feet and draw on my knowledge.

**What do you miss about New York state?** I miss springtime. I grew up in Warwick, N.Y., which is in the southern part of the state. Spring weather is wonderful there. In Maine, winter is dominant and seems to drag on for so long that before you know it, spring has been eclipsed and summer has arrived. Of course, Maine summers are best.

**What do you like to do in your free time?** I follow current events and politics at all levels and around the globe. I also enjoy Roman history and reading biographies. But I'll read anything. And I don't read as much as I'd like. Dependent on time of year, I downhill ski, snowmobile or hit the Androscoggin River in my small bass boat. Days spent fishing are not deducted from one's allotted time on earth.