



## **B.I.G. Event Innovation Expo Recap**

If you didn't get a chance to attend our recent B.I.G. Event at the City Theater in Biddeford, there were insights presented by five local innovators that are valuable to share with the entire Chamber membership. Here's a summary of their fantastic presentations:

John Ready and Brian Skoczinski of Ready Seafood talked about their growing seafood business and the challenges and opportunities inherent in processing and marketing lobster. A major takeaway is that there are critical times in an industry when a company can make investments in next-generation technology and facilities to leapfrog the competition, and Ready is taking that step with revolutionary high-pressure processing technology in their new facility in Saco.

Innovation plays an important role in non-profit organizations too, so it was interesting to hear from Tammy Ackerman about her experiences in leading Engine, the local arts leader. Two major themes were the need to be agile and adaptive, as well as having the willingness to seek out partnerships whenever possible vs. going it alone. Ultimately these approaches are also relevant with for-profit businesses too.

The third presenter was Mitchell Lench of Ocean's Balance which is in the Biddeford Mills. Mitchell shared a wealth of information on the emerging seaweed-as-a-food market and the company's go-to-market strategy within the value-added food additive category. Innovative thinking in their supply chain (the raw material is all grown in the Gulf of Maine), marketing, product development, and messaging led to their recent win in the Greenlight Maine competition for new businesses. Celebrate seaweed week from April 28<sup>th</sup> – May 4<sup>th</sup>!

Liz McLellan from Sterling Rope gave a riveting presentation on the high-performance rope market and the leadership position that Sterling has in areas such as mountain climbing and firefighting. Innovative branding and product development efforts come from a team-centric attitude throughout Sterling. The company knows that their focus on continuous improvement and innovation is crucial since lives can hang in the balance on their products.

The final presenter was Scott Gillespie from Saco Sport & Fitness, who educated attendees about the less-than-ideal state of health of Americans today, and the problems that need to be solved within the fitness and health industries. Using lessons applied millennia ago towards military strategy, Scott encouraged attendees to look at problems from new paradigms and not try to solve problems with the same thinking that created the problem in the first place.

Overall it was a great initial Innovation Summit that we will work to build on next year!