



## Faltering After Plant's Closing, Maine Town is Resurrected as Artists' Colony

Located in the heart of the state, the tiny town of Monson, Maine never had much to boast about. Even locals referred to it as “on the way to somewhere else” – naming either the nearby final stretch of the Appalachian Trail or the recreational mecca of Moosehead Lake less than twenty miles north.

Once the home of Moosehead Manufacturing Company, maker of custom-designed furniture, Monson suffered the fate of many small towns when that largest local employer shuttered its doors in 2007. In the decade following, the population dwindled to half that of a century before and Monson became yet another casualty of the decline of American manufacturing and a failing economy.

But all that changed in 2017 when a Portland-based philanthropic organization set its sights on transforming the town into a bona fide artists' colony. Established by Elizabeth Bottomley Noyce, widow of Intel Corporation founder Robert Noyce, the Libra Foundation takes its name from the “sense of proportion and fairness [in the] balance and diversity of giving throughout Maine.” Since Mrs. Noyce's passing in 1996, the foundation continues to issue annual grants in the areas of agriculture, public recreation, and the arts, with the goal of spurring economic and creative growth across the state.

After buying more than twenty properties along the town's Main Street, the Libra Foundation began plans to renovate structures to serve as the nucleus for an arts community.



The Unico System keeps workers and visitors of the Monson Store comfortable.

That's when The Unico System entered the story.

### Strategy

To oversee the project, Libra Foundation hired former town manager, Lucas Butler, who in turn hired construction consultant, Anthony DeRice, who specified energy efficient state-of-the-art heating and cooling systems that would also fit into the limited space afforded by the original, cramped structures.

McKusick Petroleum has been providing heating and cooling services for central Maine for almost fifty years and, being well-known to the residents of Monson, won the public bid for HVAC services for the buildings that would constitute the new arts community.

Though he had never worked with The Unico System before, McKusick sales and project manager, Tom Ronco, heard of the product's ability to fit into tight spaces and thought this might be just the job to get acquainted with small-duct systems. DeRice trusted Tom's instincts and agreed that The Unico System would meet his specification.

"I had heard of small-duct systems before," states DeRice, "but I was not familiar with Unico. When Tom

brought it to my attention, we realized that The Unico System would not only solve our space limitation problems but also provide the energy efficiency we wanted while having a minimal impact to these century-old structures' aesthetics."

Working with equipment supplier, Matt Wotton of Webber Supply, and with advice from Unico sales representative, Mark Toth of RST Thermal, they set about designing the systems that would handle the central heating, cooling, and ventilation for the first building to be renovated – the 100-year old Monson General Store.

Though the renovation provided the store's old clapboard structure with steep-peaked A-frame roof a new facelift, it added no additional space in which to house mechanical equipment. However, the compact modular Unico air handlers, heating and cooling coils, and smaller than traditional plenum and flexible supply ducting – one-third the size of conventional forced air systems – were able to snug into what little space was available.

The installation went so well in the general store, it was decided to use the same approach in two more renovations on Monson's Main Street – the A.C. Gilbert

building and the Moore building. The Gilbert building formerly housed a hardware store and Monson's power and light company, while the 7,000 square foot Moore building, the largest of the three structures, sits on the shore of Lake Hebron.

In total, the McKusick team installed nine Unico Systems in the three buildings. All Unico Systems were paired with Lennox outdoor heat pumps with Unico hot water coils for backup heat. "Because these are commercial structures," says McKusick's Ronco, "we also paired the Unico Systems with Soler & Palau ERVs (energy recovery ventilators) which allow for the introduction of fresh air as mandated for public places."

### Results

Butler, who has taken a position with Pineland Farms, a not-for-profit subsidiary of the Libra Foundation that runs the general store and a nearby farm notes that "workers and visitors alike are kept completely comfortable and unaware of the unobtrusive small outlets of The Unico System."

Adds Ronco, "With the establishment of the arts center, the Libra Foundation has a very interesting and unique vision and impact for the town of Monson. It's really great to see a local community reinvigorated in such a creative way."

For a town that once was just "on the way to somewhere else" Monson has itself become a destination. Where the quaint surroundings and beauty of Lake Hebron once fired the imaginations of photographer Berenice Abbot and landscape painter Carl Sprinchorn, there is a new, thriving community of residential artists who draw their inspiration from the heart of the Pine Tree State.

### Benefits

- Even, draft-free temperatures
- Quiet operation
- Discreet supply outlets
- Flexible design and installation
- Preserves historic aesthetics

### Developer

The Libra Foundation/Pineland Farms  
Lucas Butler  
[www.pinelandfarms.org](http://www.pinelandfarms.org)

### Installer

McKusick Petroleum  
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### Distributor

Webber Supply  
Matt Wotton  
(800) 524-4141  
[www.webbersupply.com](http://www.webbersupply.com)

### Unico Sales Representative

RST Thermal  
Mark Toth  
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[www.rstthermal.com](http://www.rstthermal.com)



Unico System air handlers are neatly tucked out of the way.



Outdoor heat pump units are kept from view with period-specific fencing.



Once a victim of economic misfortune, the town of Monson is now a destination for artists and tourists alike.



## The Unico System®

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Unico, Inc. manufacturing plant and sub-assembly plant

Unico, Inc. is the leader in small duct heating and cooling systems and other high-end HVAC systems. The company manufactures all of its products in St. Louis, Missouri, with over 125,000 square feet of modern manufacturing space. The company is well known for extensive use in older, architecturally unique homes and buildings as well as elite, high-end custom homes. The company is family owned and operated and their products are available throughout the United States and Canada, and in over 28 countries around the world.



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 Historic Preservation  
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