

The Citizen

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LOCAL NEWS

RM of Ritchot Unveils Summer Concert Series

■ Back for a third straight summer is the Homegrown Harmonies outdoor concert series, featuring terrific local musical acts.

Details on Page 6

LOCAL NEWS

Childcare Funding Gets Major Boost

■ The federal and provincial governments have joined forces to significantly increase funding to childcare facilities in Manitoba.

Details on Page 11



LOCAL NEWS

New Strip Mall in Niverville

■ A series of new and expanding businesses are on their way to the latest strip mall to open in Niverville, including Negash Coffee, George's Burgers & Subs, Warehouse Family Entertainment, and Prime Physiotherapy.

Details on Page 15

SPORTS & RECREATION

Niverville Approves New Fitness Studio

■ Atelier Cycle will open their doors later this year in the former location of the Corner Car Cash on Main Street Niverville.

Details on Page 25

A Look Back at the Early Years of the Olde Tyme Country Fair

» READ MORE ON PAGES 22-23



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Public Notice

Combined Public Hearing for Bylaw No. 876-25 and No. 877-25

On **Tuesday, June 17th, 2025**, at **7:00 p.m.**, the public is invited to join Council at the **Niverville Community Resource & Recreation Centre**, 501 Centre Street, Niverville, for a combined Public Hearing where Council will hear any person who would like to make a presentation, ask questions or register an objection to **Bylaw No. 876-25** and **Bylaw No. 877-25**.

Bylaw No. 876-25 officially closes Venture Way, which is currently unconstructed and consists of only bare land. This bylaw also permits the sale of the land that was formerly the Venture Way road allowance to the Developer. Additionally, the bylaw also establishes a new municipal road allowance off of Krahn Road that will serve as the access point for the private road the Developer plans to construct as a replacement for Venture Way.

Bylaw No. 877-25 closes a section of land currently designated as a public reserve along Krahn Road. This closure is necessary to facilitate moving the access point on Krahn Road to accommodate the private road the Developer plans to build. Additionally, it will lead to the establishment of a new public reserve along Krahn Road, which will then be consolidated with the existing public reserve to the north.

Both Bylaw No. 876-25 and No. 877-25 are an essential part of the legal requirements to achieve the goals mentioned above.

For a visual description of the changes taking place, please see below. Please be aware that this map is strictly for representative purposes, and is not a legal description of the changes taking place.

Copies of both Bylaw No. 876-25 and Bylaw No. 877-25 are available for review and may be examined by any person during regular office hours at the Town Office, 329 Bronstone Drive, or online at <https://www.whereyoubelong.ca/town-services/resources/public-notices/>. If you are interested in attending or participating in this combined public hearing either in-person or by written submission, you may review all relevant procedures either during regular office hours at the Town Office, or online at <https://www.whereyoubelong.ca/town-services/resources/public-notices/>

If you have any questions, please contact the Town of Niverville by email at feedback@whereyoubelong.ca or by phone at **204-388-4600**.



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NIVERVILLE FAIR

Wonder Shows Back in Action Despite Legislative Changes

By Brenda Sawatzky
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Ken Kiernicki and his company, Wonder Shows, is back in action after the federal government's decision to curb the employment of temporary foreign workers almost shut him down.

Last fall, the government announced that they'd be turning down applications from companies who bring in temporary foreign workers in areas where the jobless rate was six percent or higher.

For carnival owners like Kiernicki, that could have meant the end for Wonder Shows, which has been around for more than 60 years.

For most of those years, Kiernicki and the company's previous owners relied heavily on local students and young adults who were glad for a summer paycheck and the adventure of an itinerant lifestyle.

That all began to change around

the time of the pandemic.

"If we do seem to get anybody local, they come and work a week and then they find out it's not that easy," he says. "It's not an easy job. It's very physical and demanding. And also, who really wants to go live in a bunkhouse that travels from town to town every week?"

While it may not be locals, in 2019 Kiernicki discovered who is willing to do the hard labour and live on the road for a summer: Jamaicans. He's been bringing in these willing workers ever since. In recent years, they've made up over half of his staff.

He doesn't do it because it's cheap labour, he says. In fact, each foreign worker he brings in costs him around \$4,000 just for their flight. Then he provides their housing and pays them a \$16 per hour wage plus overtime pay.

"The deal is they only come in for four months, so they want to work as much as they can," Kiernicki says. "Our employment is temporary and

it's long hours."

Kiernicki says he's unsure as to what happened regarding the federal government's changed legislation. All he knows for sure is that he applied for his 30 foreign workers for 2025 and they were granted, so he's in business for another year.

But there are carnival owners and other companies across the country who rely heavily on outsourced help and he believes there must have been some lobbying to convince the government to change their minds.

"I believe there are some companies out there that are bringing in foreign help when they shouldn't be, but certain industries do have a tough time finding the people to work," says Kiernicki.

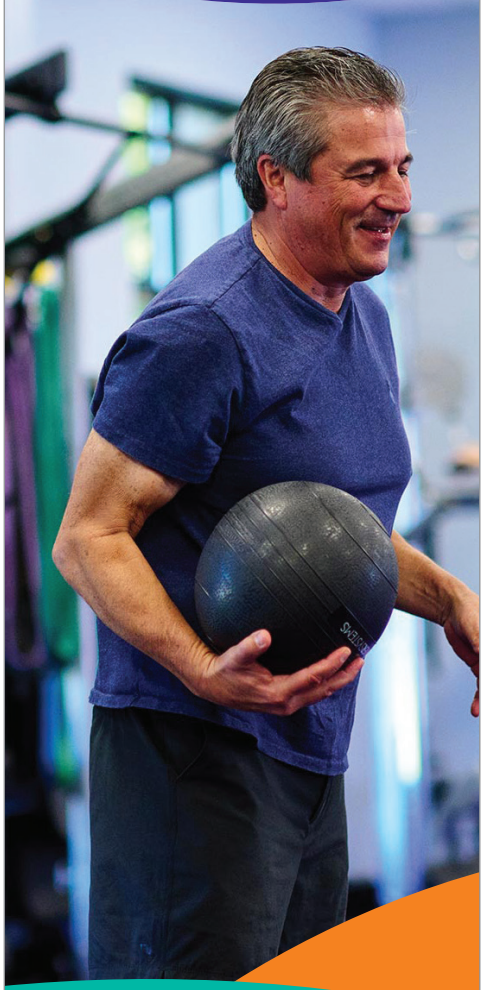
For Wonder Shows, the 2025 season is already well underway. In early June, they'll make their annual two-day appearance at Niverville's Olde Tyme Country Fair, just like they have done for the better part of 25 years.

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Kuldeep Randhawa presents a cheque to staff of the CRRC in Niverville.

C/O KULDEEP RANDHAWA

BarBURRITO Gives Back through Cinco de Mayo Fundraiser

By Brenda Sawatzky

Three months into business in Niverville, barBURRITO's owner, Kuldeep Randhawa, is already finding ways to give back to the community.

On May 5, Randhawa hosted a Cinco de Mayo sale. Ten percent of the sale proceeds were earmarked for the Community Resource and Recreation Centre (CRRC).

"We want to be a part of the community," Randhawa says. "If the community is supporting us, this is a way to pay it back."

The CRRC caught

Randhawa's attention because it benefits every demographic in the community, from toddler to senior.

The cheque he presented to the team at the CRRC came to \$227.19.

"Everything helps," says Niverville's recreation director Warren Britton. "When a business has a neat idea like that, it's just fantastic! BarBURRITO was looking to give back to the community, so obviously we graciously accepted."

At this point, Britton says the CRRC will likely invest the donation into its general building fund to help pay down the

mortgage.

As for future Cinco de Mayo events, Randhawa says that he expects to spread the donations around to local organizations one year after another.

But it's not the only way Randhawa plans to invest in the town. The 2025 Niverville Fair will be benefiting from more than \$1,200 in donations thanks to barBURRITO.

Of course, providing jobs is another way of giving back. Randhawa employs six local individuals to help him run the business, five of which are youth of Niverville.



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Niverville Council Talks High Speed Internet, Sewer Rates, and Promoting Growth

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Niverville council's May 6 public meeting began with a request for a conditional use permit by Rural Connections Manitoba Ltd, a high-speed fibre optics internet provider.

Thanks to a unanimous vote by council, the company will soon be setting up their newest location in the Niverville Business Park.

"We've been working off and on with a couple of [internet providers] over the last year and this is the first one who's essentially agreed to the terms of our right-of-way access in the business park and then also the lease for the property," CAO Eric King told council. "This will [potentially] provide high-speed internet into all the existing buildings in the business park."

The Niverville Chamber of Commerce's executive director, Bre-Ann Boulet, was there to provide feedback on behalf of local business.

"There are some concerns from the business park [businesses] in regard to the type of internet being put in, in regard to speed and [cost]," Boulet told council. "Right now, they're really struggling with the providers they're currently working with."

Brian Stasynec from Rural Connections was on hand to speak to those concerns.

At this stage, he told council, the plan is to service only the business park within town limits unless there's a demonstration of demand from residential areas.

"At this point, we would offer the base package of 450 megabytes for \$150 and then a gigabyte is \$250," Stasynec said. "Dedicated internet is \$325."



Niverville's town council meets on May 6.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

Unlike Starlink, he added, fibre internet is not subject to weather system interference. While it takes some infrastructure installation, in the end it's more reliable.

From their Niverville location, Rural Connections would be able to service an area within an approximate 40-kilometre radius.

"We want to service the farms and farm residences," he said. "That's our bread and butter, the rural houses."

Rural Connections already has an active presence in communities like Domain, Oak Bluff, Starbuck, Sanford, and Osborne.

Niverville's location is expected to open some time in midsummer.

"We're increasing infrastructure to businesses to allow them to come here and thrive," says Niverville mayor Myron Dyck.

The business park is currently one of the last remaining areas in Niverville that doesn't have high-speed internet access. Much of the community has been able to obtain these services through either Bell MTS or Shaw.

This is true with the notable exception of Roselawn Bay and

Edelweiss, where those larger companies have so far declined to run their infrastructure.

"It's an easement issue," Mayor Dyck says. "We have utility corridors and they can lay their wire in our utility corridor. But they're like, 'No, we don't do that.'"

FIXING A SEWER RATE DEFICIT

During the same morning meeting, council also approved a recommendation to move forward with a sewer rate study which, according to King, will likely result in higher sewer rates for residents in 2026.

"Large capital projects that aren't done yet make life very difficult cashflow-wise," said King. "We met with a consultant who is an expert in rate studies. Going through a rate study process is better than us declaring a deficit [to the Public Utilities Board]."

Any way you look at it, King says that a study and rate hike is overdue. It's been years since Niverville residents saw an increase in their sewer rates.

In part, the reason for deferral has to do with changes to the way Niverville will deal with its septic

needs, primarily the construction of a wastewater treatment plant.

King is confident that every one of the six municipalities entering into the shared wastewater plant agreement will be looking at rate hikes in the coming year as well.

To increase the rates, though, requires an application to the Public Utilities Board (PUB).

The PUB must then advertise the proposed rate increase in order to provide opportunity for public feedback.

ANONYMOUS HEALTHCARE DONATION

Thanks to one community champion, Open Health Niverville are the beneficiaries of yet another large donation to assist them in their service to local residents.

The donor, who asks to remain anonymous, provided the gift of over \$100,000.

Councillor Nathan Dueck responded on behalf of the clinic.

"Anybody can donate to a not-for-profit and receive a tax receipt," Dueck said. "[These donations] really advance the healthcare system in Niverville."

PROMOTING NIVERVILLE

In the coming weeks, Niverville's town council will be working hard to promote the community throughout the province. A promotional video is in the works to showcase Niverville at two upcoming events.

In early June, council members will attend the annual Manitoba Chamber of Commerce Minister's Dinner, an event that facilitates unique connections between community leaders and key provincial cabinet ministers.

The Town of Niverville is a sponsor to this event.

"[Our goal is] to spark interest in those that may not have thought about Niverville, to become aware," Dyck says. "It's also about trying to keep Niverville front and centre in the minds of the reps that will be there when we're talking about different projects."

Days later, Mayor Dyck will be seated next to Premier Wab Kinew at an event called the Premier's Breakfast. With approximately 2,000 leaders expected to be in attendance, Dyck says it will be a prime opportunity to promote the town.

"You're either going backwards or you're going forwards," Dyck says of Niverville's ongoing efforts to foster growth. "There is no standing still. People have made a significant investment in their businesses and homes here. If we stand still, the [property] values start to diminish. We feel we have a responsibility to make sure that people's investments continue to grow."

According to the provincial government's property assessment branch, council's efforts are working. In 2025, residential properties in Niverville saw an average 20 percent increase in value from just two years ago.

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IN BRIEF

Students Build Timberframe Structure in Niverville

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

A new timberframe structure stands proudly just to the west of the railway tracks in Niverville. Its purpose is to provide shelter over the historic CPR well.

The CPR Well Historical Park is a joint initiative of the Town of Niverville, Communities in Bloom, and local historian Ernie Braun. The goal is to pay homage to a key icon of Niverville's history which was accidentally rediscovered a decade ago.

On May 30, ten construction students from the Steinbach Regional Secondary School (SRSS) stopped in to erect the final portion of the structure they built.

The student crew, along with their teacher Paul Wilson, have been busy for the past six to eight weeks planning, designing, drawing, and cutting the various components.

Out of Wilson's 14 construction students, three are women.

A crane operator met the students onsite to put up the ridge and rafters, completing their portion of the build and readying it for roofers to finish the job.

"We try to do one of these [types of projects] a year," Wilson says. "It has to be a public project. We don't ever do work for [private] community members. It also has to be something that's doable. It can't be a huge project."

Most of the projects these students are commissioned to do are for towns or municipalities in southeastern Manitoba. Last year, they built a ski hut in the Sandilands district.



Visitors gather for a concert in the park last summer in Grande Pointe.

KOBY WILSON

Homegrown Harmonies to Bring Out Ritchot's Summer Soundtrack

By Dave Baxter

A travelling music series that showcases homegrown talent is gearing up to return to the RM of Ritchot this summer.

"It's just a great opportunity to bring people out and to bring community together," says Danielle Peters, Ritchot's coordinator of community development. "It's a free evening out with your family and friends, and it's just a really fun environment."

According to Peters, the RM has been hard at work organizing the third annual Homegrown Harmonies free outdoor concert series, which will visit five communities this summer and offer a free evening of music by a variety of local acts.

Peters says that when the RM held their first Homegrown

Harmonies concerts in 2023, they visited two communities. Because of the success during those first two years, they are now up to five towns.

"We started more small-scale the first year and each year it has grown, because the reaction has been so positive and because we get so much good feedback, that other communities started asking for it."

This year, the series will visit Howden on May 22, Île-des-Chênes on June 19, Ste. Agathe on July 24, Grande Pointe on August 14, and wrap up with a show in St. Adolphe on September 12.

And with each show starting at 6:30 p.m. and wrapping up around 8:30 p.m., Peters says the concerts are a perfect family-friendly night out for all ages.

"We see everything from really

young families to seniors groups, so we've created a setting where everyone can just come together and enjoy the evening," she says.

Each show will feature a pop-up stage, sound system, and lighting, as well as other activities and games for families.

There will also be food and beverage truck options onsite at each location.

Peters says each location will make for a "picturesque summer evening," as long as the weather holds up.

"It's all outdoors in beautiful greenspaces at sunset, so it's really beautiful and just has a really good vibe to it," she says.

Along with offering community members an evening out, Peters says the concerts offer local artists and talent an opportunity to perform. She says that dozens

of acts auditioned to take part in this year's event, and 15 acts in total will perform, with three acts playing at each show, including soloists, duos, and full bands.

The first of five Homegrown Harmonies free outdoor concerts will take place Thursday, May 22 at the Howden Community Centre and feature artists Jordan Basso, Jeff Sahulka, and The Wagons.

Peters adds that each show can be moved inside so none will be cancelled, even if there is rain or inclement weather. Attendees should bring their own lawn chairs, shades, or blankets if needed.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more, visit the Ritchot Recreation page on Facebook or Instagram, or email Peters directly at dpeters@ritchot.com.

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Both boys and girls can be affected, and it often impacts a child's self-esteem, confidence, and even their social life. If you suspect your child is experiencing nocturnal enuresis, it's important to speak with your primary healthcare provider.

In many cases, consulting with a pelvic floor physiotherapist can be extremely beneficial. These professionals specialize in exercises, toileting strategies, and lifestyle adjustments that support healthy bladder habits and improve control. A physiotherapist can help identify contributing factors such as muscle coordination, posture, and daily habits that might be affecting bladder function.

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Incoming and outgoing directors: Keith Bueckert, Rachel Niessen, Libby Hanna, Paul Dufour, Ken Rempel, Annette Fast, Andrew Neufeld, and Ludolf Grollé.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

Niverville Foundation Hosts AGM and Art Show

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

The Niverville Foundation hosted their annual AGM on May 1 at the Friendship Centre in Niverville. New this year was the addition of an art exhibit showcasing paintings by emerging and experienced local artists.

This year's AGM portion saw the election of two new board members, bringing the total to seven. Andrew Neufeld stepped away from the board this year.

Attendees were treated to wine and a variety of finger foods while mingling with the artists and their art. Local artists included Helene Dyck, Elaine Krahn, Jenn Lundy, Jolene Pauls, Cody Sawatzky, Ludolf Grollé, and Heather Ward.

Three special grants were gifted by the foundation to local projects this year. A donation of \$2,000 will assist the mobility van committee in achieving their goal of bringing this unique vehicle to Niverville.

Niverville's new lending library also received \$2,000, allocated towards the

purchase of a computer and audiobook licensing.

A final \$1,284 was presented to Open Health Niverville for the acquisition of a bariatric weigh scale.

In the 33 years since its inception, the Niverville Foundation has raised well over a million dollars for projects that improve the health and wellness of residents living within the community.

Seniors housing projects, the Niverville Fire, and EMS and Niverville Open Health are just a few of the many grateful beneficiaries of the foundation's work.

The premise of the foundation is to provide an avenue for people to make charitable donations to local causes of their choice. The Niverville Foundation is there for those who are in the midst of estate planning, as well as those who have sold capital and are looking to ease their tax burden while benefitting their community.

Donors can direct their donations anonymously or choose to be recognized for their contributions.

Either way, the foundation promises to take care of all the administrative work

and reporting to the Canada Revenue Agency, freeing the donor from the hassle.

To the crowd of attendees at Thursday's AGM, director Ken Rempel spoke about the human need to leave a legacy which provides both meaning and purpose to a person's life.

"People that have put their heart and soul into the community and want to give back, that's [who our donors are]," Rempel says.

Donor Advise Funds represent a way for individuals or families to be specific about which organizations or charities they'd like to allocate their donations towards.

"The minimum donation [for a Donor Advise Fund] is \$25,000," Rempel says. "You can keep adding to that or just do a one-time donation."

But the foundation will accept donations of any denomination. Gifts of under \$25,000 will be added to the regular endowment fund and dispersed at the board's discretion.

Every year, like this year, investment income from the growing endowment fund will be used to bolster local projects in need of financial support.



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Second Annual Pizza Wars Produces Two Winners

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

What do you do when you have so many pizzerias in one community? You send them into battle.

For the second year running, Niverville's Pizza Wars week, which ran from May 1 to 8, was a big hit. And by the weekend, two winners were declared.

The Smokin', eh! pizza by Papa Peppie's Pizza and Deli took top honours in the Most Creative category.

Niverville's Santa Lucia won the Best Overall category with the introduction of The Mennonite.

In total, seven restaurants competed in this year's event, many of them pulling out all the stops to create a completely original and enticing pizza pie. They included the Pho-tastic pizza by Niakwa and Pizza Mac by Hespeler's Cookhouse and Tavern.

Other entries were submitted by local franchises of Pizza Hut, Pizza Pizza, and Domino's.

Pizza Wars is an initiative of the Niverville Chamber of Commerce. Started in 2024, it falls on a week in May which coincides with Niverville's annual townwide garage sale.

Sara Kindzierski, a board member of the Chamber of Commerce, helped organize the event.

"This year's Pizza Wars was absolutely amazing," Kindzierski says. "The engagement from the restaurants was unbelievable and from the community really strong."

Buzz over the event could be heard all around town, she says, and the interaction on social media was exceptionally engaging.

Next year she hopes to simplify and streamline the online voting process in order to encourage more votes.

As well, she hopes this year's event will encourage more Niverville restaurants to get their creative juices flowing in time for next year.



Dean Delorme of Santa Lucia.



Rose and Shana Friesen of Papa Peppie's Pizza. BRENDA SAWATZKY

"I think some of [the restaurants] weren't sure how creative they were allowed to be, but this year was a learning curve," says Kindzierski. "They're like, 'You know what? We can be bold next year. We can go a little bit crazier.'"

PAPA PEPPIE'S PIZZA AND DELI
Rose and Pete Friesen are the co-owners of Country Snacks, which they manage alongside their daughters Shana and Jessica.

Their pizza restaurant, Papa Peppie's Pizza and Deli, is one of Niverville's original pizza joints. It's been around for 20 years and is still a favourite spot for many locals.

This was Peppie's first time as a contender in Pizza Wars.

Shana says that the inspiration for the Smokin', Eh! was a collaborative effort among the staff.

In the end, it incorporated a thin crispy crust brushed with

garlic-infused olive oil and loaded with two kinds of cheese, Montreal smoked meat, zesty pickles, and smoky barbecue sauce.

During Pizza Wars week, they offered it in two different sizes as well as a single slice option.

It was so popular, they say, that it has since made its way onto the regular menu.

"One person said it was the best pizza they ever had," Rose says. "I guess because it was quite different. We're proud to have won the Most Creative [category] and we're very thankful to our customers and our staff who put in the effort."

The Papa Peppie's brand is not a franchise. It was created by the Friesens back in 2005 in collaboration with a couple of other business owners. There is currently only one other Papa Peppie's in Landmark.

A few years later, the Friesens added Rosa's Homemade to broaden

their menu offerings. Now diners can find fresh soups, sandwiches, cheesecakes, cinnamon buns, waffles, and more in their store, all made in-house.

"We make waffles from scratch here, all day long," Rose adds. "And they come with a nice white sauce like the traditional Mennonite sauce, as well as a strawberry sauce."

Country Snacks is a family-owned business spanning 35 years and four generations. The building was passed down from Rose's parents, who once ran an automotive shop and hair salon from this location.

Since its inception, Rose is proud to say that she's employed thousands of Niverville's youth. For many, it was their very first workplace experience.

SANTA LUCIA NIVERVILLE

Dean Delorme is the manager of Santa Lucia's Niverville and is thrilled with his company's win in this year's

Pizza Wars.

At this point, he can't confirm whether his pizza creation, The Mennonite, will make a permanent appearance on their menu, at least not until corporate heads get their chance to sample it later this month.

What makes the pizza culturally relevant and undeniably delicious are some of the key ingredients, like Manitoba farmer sausage, perogies, and schmaundt fat (cream gravy).

During Pizza Wars, the pizza was available in a variety of sizes and by individual slice.

"Garage sale weekend helped get us out there," Delorme says. "We could barely keep up [with demand]. I bought what I thought would be too many [topping ingredients] and it turns out it was just enough."

Delorme credits his 18 staff members for their creativity in the kitchen and willingness to experiment with new flavours and textures. They've already masterminded two exciting new pizza creations for next year's Pizza Wars event.

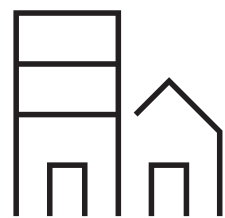
Delorme was one of the young people who gained his early work experience at a Santa Lucia location. This was followed by about 30 years in construction before he found his way back to the pizza franchise as a manager.

He takes great pride in the dough, which is made fresh at his store every morning. The rest of the ingredients for his ever-expanding menu are also made in-house from scratch.

In recent weeks, Santa Lucia introduced daily menu specials, which include Mexican Monday, Fat Boy Tuesday, Wienie Wednesday, and a three-pound chicken wing special every Thursday.

As for the annual Pizza Wars event, Delorme just can't say enough.

"I love that everybody gets involved. It's good for all of us. Winner [or not], you get your food out there and people get to try something different."



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Childcare Boost Announced from Feds and Province

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

On May 23, both the federal and provincial governments announced new childcare funding in Manitoba, representing the largest increase in the province's history.

"In order to provide families in Canada with high-quality, affordable childcare, we need to support the early childhood education workforce with better compensation," said Patty Hajdu, federal Minister of Jobs and Families. "Development that happens in early childhood plays a big role in future learning, so it's important to keep highly trained, qualified people in this field and also attract future educators who want to build safe and inclusive spaces where all children are welcomed, accepted, and nurtured."

To that end, Manitoba is implementing a new wage grid which will guarantee a minimum income for all frontline early childhood educators (ECEs) at \$27.56 per hour, retroactive to April 1.

For some ECEs, it could mean a wage increase of up to \$5 per hour from their earlier rate.

The wages of childcare assistants will also be guaranteed through this grid. It's a strategy, the province says, to help improve early learning and childcare workforce recruitment and retention.

"Early childhood educators are the foundation of a humming and productive economy," said Tracy Schmidt, the provincial Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning. "Because of their work, parents across Manitoba

can go to school or build careers that power our province. They are more than child minders, they are shaping our kids' early development foundations, so they can go on to be happy, healthy and fulfilled Manitobans. With this historic wage increase, we are valuing the role ECEs play in our province. We are investing in Manitoba's future."

Further to wage subsidies, every licensed childcare facility across the province will receive an additional two percent base operating fund increase, also retroactive to April 1.

"Early childhood educators are the foundation of a humming and productive economy."

Tracy Schmidt | Minister of Education and Early Childhood

Rhonda Kenning is the director of Growing Minds Childcare Centre Inc., with three locations around Niverville. Her centre employs 50 staff members, the majority of which will benefit from the new wage funding.

Kenning says this new funding is the highest increase Growing Minds has seen since they opened in 2008. All in all, she says, the funding promise amounts to an 18 percent increase for the facility.

"There was an increase in 2024," Kenning says. "It was a long time coming because, prior to that, our operating funding had been frozen for almost eight years under the former PC government. So things were very tight, and it was difficult to give wage increases or to keep up with inflation."

The advantage of the new wage subsidy, Kenning says, is that childcare facilities will be granted some flexibility on how it's allocated.

"If you are a centre who was already paying the \$27.56 per hour or more, you have the option of paying even higher wages just to stay competitive or to move that money around if you have some areas where [other] staff aren't quite on par," Kenning says.

For Growing Minds, it means that every staff member will see a wage increase from \$1 to \$4 per hour, assuming this is approved by the parent

oversight board.

Childcare assistants who are just getting started in the childcare field have a starting wage of \$19.40 per hour at Growing Minds.

In an effort to encourage them to continue in the pursuit of an ECE degree, the province offers up to \$5,000 in tuition grants. Growing Minds tops that up with a further \$1,000 grant for tuition and textbook support.

If the training is taken at Red River Polytechnic, a workplace program grant allows students to attend classes two days per week, work for three days per week, and still receive a full-time wage.

"This year alone we have five new graduates that we supported through the training program," Kennings says.

As exciting as this new

funding promise is, Kenning says it still has some flaws.

Primarily, the strategy doesn't take into account the differences in overhead experienced from one provider to the next.

"I have three locations and I pay a huge amount of rent," Kenning says. "But if you're a centre who's located in a school or a church basement and they don't charge you any rent, you have that much more money to put towards salaries and other expenses."

Despite strides made in the past two years, Kenning acknowledges there is still a long way to go before childcare is accessible to every parent who needs it.

For example, the waiting list for kids to get into the Growing Minds program is nearly quadruple the number of spots for which they are licensed by the government. Today, their enrolment sits at 204 and their wait list exceeds 700.

"It all boils down to politics at the end of the day, and what kinds of funding [is made] available," says Kenning. "Everybody's scrambling for funding and we're just hoping that our advocating will pay off."

In August 2021, a childcare accessibility agreement was signed between the federal and provincial governments. It included a five-year plan to build a local, affordable childcare system.

Over five years, Manitoba was scheduled to receive approximately \$1.2 billion in federal funding to implement that plan. In February of this year, Canada and Manitoba signed extensions to the program, adding \$1.9 billion in funding to be used by 2031.

CITIZEN POLL

Is it the job of government to ensure that everyone who wants daycare can afford and access it, regardless of family income level?



Yes. Subsidizing daycare is a good way to bolster the economy. This service should be available who wants it.



No. Daycare should be subsidized based on income, similar to the federal dental program, for example.

Have a more nuanced opinion? Leave us a comment online.

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LAST MONTH'S RESULTS:

Do you think developers and local councils should work to make space for tiny homes in our communities?

Yes

66%

No

34%

YOUR COMMENTS:

I am retired and I am on a five-acre lot with a home much larger than I can manage. I would love to have a tiny home on a two-acre lot. My pets are a priority for me as well as room for my garden.

The town and governments in general should prioritize affordable living and removing all of the unnecessary barriers to ownership, in whatever form that comes in. I find that governments often tend to hyper-focus on a single idea rather than seeing what actually works by seeing what the market is doing and what is driving people to invest. Remove policies that led to this in the first place. I have grown tired of seeing strictly reactive governments as opposed to a government that actually avoids this from the very beginning.



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The **Citizen**

IN BRIEF

Ritchot Sponsors Spruce Tree Giveaways

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE
REPORTER

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On Tuesday, May 27, residents of Ritchot lined up at the municipal civic office to get their hands on free spruce trees, courtesy of the RM.

According to RM staffer Uriel Jelin, the tree giveaway was an extension of the municipality's ongoing community outreach initiatives. It is hoped that the project will encourage yard beautification and sustainability.

All in all, the response to the giveaway was even better than Jelin expected. Just two hours into the giveaway, the 270 available trees were gone.

"We were thrilled to see how eager the community is to take part in greening their properties," Jelin says. "[The giveaway] was supposed to start at 9:30. I was ready at the table at 9:15 and there was already a lineup of people. Some helped me to bag the trees and it was just a really nice community vibe."

The trees were limited to three per household. In order to be eligible, one had to show proof of Ritchot residency.

Ryan Faucher is the municipality's economic development officer and the man who initiated the giveaway. He, too, was surprised and pleased at resident uptake.

Faucher ordered the young spruce from an online company when the trees went on sale for around \$1 each. They were affordable enough to warrant the expense without needing to seek outside funding. The trees came in a variety of sizes, the tallest being about 30 inches.

"All of the programs out there for free trees right now tend to be only available for putting on public property," Faucher says. "We're just a big fan of people having the ability to green up their own properties. It's part of the [RM's] overall strategy, like the EV chargers and the car share. It's just the right thing to do."

Thanks to the positive public response, Faucher and Jelin say more trees are on their way.

The next round of spruce tree giveaways will take place over the course of the summer at events being hosted by the RM. It's Faucher's way of encouraging more attendance.

Ritchot Council Reviews 2025 Crime Stats

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Staff Sergeant Ron Poirier from the St. Pierre RCMP detachment joined Ritchot's council virtually for their May 6 meeting to provide a lengthy report on crime stats for the first quarter of 2025.

Traffic enforcement has been down recently, he said, due to the loss of three officers. MPI-sponsored traffic blitzes are also down, meaning that stats from this year may not fairly stack up to previous periods when enforcement has been in full swing.

Going forward, once fully staffed again, Poirier hopes to challenge all his staff to include traffic enforcement in their daily duties rather than relying on just a few staff to handle it.

"I would much prefer to see each one of my members participate on a daily basis rather than to just go and blitz certain areas," Poirier said. "I think we get a much better impact in the community by having regular enforcement."

In general, crimes against

persons were down across the RM, although both Île-des-Chênes (IDC) and Grande Pointe saw a bit of an increase. IDC's reports revolved around uttering threats and harassment, whereas Grande Pointe had a couple of incidents which were listed as assault causing bodily harm.

Looking back to last year, he says that incidents of violent crime were down in St. Adolphe. But they were up in IDC.

Poirier said that it's not unusual to see a trend where specific types of crime shift from one community to another, yet he's at a loss to explain why.

St. Adolphe's Main Street on a more frequent basis has been a boon.

Councillor Joel Lemoine added that video surveillance in Ste. Agathe seems to be helping. Poirier said the RCMP were able to use some of that recorded video footage recently to intercept a crime.

When it comes to reporting crime, Poirier reminds residents that they can either call 911 or the St. Pierre detachment directly if an incident occurs during their open hours and if there isn't any urgency.

Mayor Chris Ewen questioned Poirier on the jurisdiction of the Niverville-assigned officers once that detachment is open.

"If you have an incident in St. Adolphe and the nearest member's in Niverville, the Niverville member will respond as the St. Pierre members make their way there," Poirier said. "I see it as an enhancement because in the past we'd all be responding from St. Pierre. Now you're going to have people to respond from Niverville, which shortens the response time."

"I think we get a much better impact in the community by having regular enforcement."

Staff Sergeant Ron Poirier | St. Pierre RCMP

Property crimes were up slightly across the RM in terms of theft, mischief, and break and enter.

"We saw an increase in mischief with vehicles," Poirier told council. "I don't think it's someone walking around damaging cars. I think it's more someone trying to steal cars and they're unsuccessful, so it gets reported as mischief."

Council members weighed in, agreeing that there have been few public complaints about crime as of late.

For Councillor Janine Boulanger, however, there is one exception. She says that drag racing along Discovery Drive is back.

For Councillor Jason Bodnarchuk, seeing law enforcement vehicles along



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New and Expanding Businesses Greenlighted for Niverville

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

A handful of new and expanding businesses were given the green light by Niverville's council at the May 20 public meeting. Most of them are destined for the new strip mall proposed for 300 Drovers Run. Council's chambers were filled with a group of enthusiastic entrepreneurs to represent their various businesses.

Only one business owner declined comment to *The Citizen* at this time. He attended the council meeting as a representative for a dental clinic which is coming to 300 Drovers Run.

NEGASH COFFEE

Artisanal coffee lovers will be glad to discover that, in a few months' time, they'll be able to grab their Negash coffee in the drive-thru planned for 300 Drovers Run.

Proprietor Mohamed Ali says that their decision to move to the new location was inspired by a desire to serve the community more effectively.

"We've seen increasing demand and wanted to offer a more spacious, comfortable, and versatile environment," Ali says. "The support and love from the town has always encouraged us to aim higher, and this expansion is our way of giving back."

What's new for Negash customers is more than just the convenience of a drive thru window.

The interior café will be twice as large and, with the addition of a cozy outdoor patio, will be even more welcoming for those who wish to sit down and linger. Ali and his partner Khalid will be adding a new menu to include breakfast and lunch options.

Ali says, all in all, their new space will be the perfect spot for students to study and groups to meet.

"We've been proudly operating Negash Coffee in Niverville since April 2019," says Ali. "It's been



A conceptual rendering of the new strip mall planned for Drovers Run in Niverville.

STONEFIELD

an incredible journey filled with growth, learning, and unwavering community support."

GEORGE'S BURGERS AND SUBS

Moving in next door, and sharing in the patio space, is a well-known Manitoba restaurant chain that will be new to Niverville: George's Burgers and Subs.

Proprietors Dimitri Ifantis and Kosta Makrigiannis say they've had their sights set on Niverville for a couple of years now.

"Being part of a growing community is fantastic, and we're thrilled to be part of one that supports local businesses," says Ifantis. "As we give back to neighbourhoods across Manitoba, we ensure the community can count on us when needed."

For the ownership duo, Niverville's location will be their tenth in the province.

George's Burgers specializes in Greek and Canadian cuisine, offering not only their famous Fatboy burger but also Greek salads, gyros, souvlaki, and more.

At the Niverville location, patrons will be able to drop by for hard ice cream and a shake to go.

The 40-seat dining room will be fully licensed.

"As we celebrate George's Burgers' fiftieth year, we've learned to adapt to changes and prioritize our customers," Ifantis says. "Each location has its unique character, and we plan to do the same in Niverville, becoming more than just a restaurant, but also neighbours and friends."

WAREHOUSE FAMILY ENTERTAINMENT

A new business venture, Warehouse Family Entertainment, will be moving in next door to George's Burgers to provide the families of Niverville with some unique entertainment options.

"The Warehouse will be packed with the latest and greatest in interactive entertainment," says proprietor Trevor Rempel. "We're talking modern arcade games, axe throwing, and a high-tech golf and multisport simulator, plus an event space perfect for birthday parties, special events, or just a great night out."

Rempel says that the space will also be available for live music events, e-sports tournaments, Jets and Bombers watch parties, or trivia nights.

In collaboration with the proprietors of George's Burgers, the businesses will share connected

access, making it easy for patrons to grab a bite while enjoying some arcade fun.

"In our axe-throwing and simulator bays, [users] will be able to order [George's Burgers] directly from their bay so they can keep the food and drinks coming without leaving the action," Rempel adds.

Warehouse Family Entertainment is owned by Rempel and his wife along with partners from Niverville and Steinbach.

Rempel is also the co-owner of Steel Creek Developers, the company behind the Blue Crescent Hotel coming soon to Niverville.

Warehouse Family Entertainment opened its only other location in Altona, although in recent weeks that location was forced to close its doors as the community wasn't large enough to support the venture.

Rempel is confident that Niverville's growing population with a high ratio of young families will provide the right atmosphere for this business to thrive.

"We were drawn to Niverville because of the need to provide new and exciting entertainment options for this growing community and a desire, by the local owners, to provide a venue to foster a face-to-face

social experience that appeals to all ages," Rempel says.

Rempel has such high hopes for Niverville, in fact, that he already imagines opportunities for growth into other entertainment spaces, such as bowling and virtual reality.

And there's the employment pool to consider as well, since his business will need a local manager and staff to operate it.

"Partnering with Warehouse Entertainment has been a fantastic project, bringing something new to the town," adds Ifantis of George's Burgers.

PRIME PHYSIOTHERAPY

Niverville's Justin Giesbrecht is no stranger to local sports fans. He's the official physiotherapist for the Niverville Nighthawks team and has been treating the public for five years.

And in a few short months, Giesbrecht will open his own location at 300 Drovers Run, calling it Prime Physiotherapy.

"I like this new location on Drovers Run, as it is on a side of town that continues to grow with new businesses," says Giesbrecht. "It is also very close to the recreation centre, which is such a central gathering space in town, and I hope it will be a great market for myself to reach out to people with their various injuries."

Giesbrecht says that Prime Physiotherapy will be a state-of-the-art facility with a welcoming atmosphere. LaShawn Giesbrecht will move in to provide massage therapy, and at some point there will be room for another three or more physiotherapists to work onsite.

At the same time, Giesbrecht hopes to continue in his role with the Nighthawks.

"I have created many great relationships with the players, past and present, including billeting some of the Nighthawks this previous year, so it is something that I would continue if the opportunity remains there," he says.



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IN BRIEF

Classic Car Show Brings Smiles to Niverville Seniors

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Thursday, May 22 brought weather so perfect that it was seemed almost made to order for the classic car show held at the Niverville Heritage Centre.

Members of the Country Classic Car Club rolled into town in their vintage rides, bringing smiles to the faces of the seniors who fondly remember when these cars were new.

Sandy Kihn is the car club's organizer of these events. She tries to bring car shows to seniors living facilities four times per summer.

"It's really special for the [seniors]," Kihn says. "Some of the older cars they remember, so it's kind of nostalgic for them."

This was the first such car show the organization has held in Niverville. Until now, they've focused on Steinbach's seniors facilities, since that's where the majority of club members reside.

For a first time showing in Niverville, Kihn says they had an impressive turnout.

The shows typically last about an hour and a half, she says, but old car enthusiasts of all ages kept the Niverville show going for a full three hours.

"We had just shy of 60 cars at the Niverville Heritage Centre," Kihn says. "We had cars coming from Sprague, two from Beausejour, and one from Lac du Bonnet. They came from all over."

There was some strategy in planning the car show for a Thursday night, she adds. It was also wing night at Hespeler's Cookhouse and Tavern.

Cindy Plessis is the coordinator for Niverville Service to Seniors and the local organizer of Thursday's event.

"We decided to host it in the [Heritage Centre] parking lot because it's a bit of a hub for where the seniors are," Plessis says. "It was really convenient for them just to pop over and take a walk down memory lane. A lot of our seniors are isolated and lonely, so it was nice to [see them] get out and socialize with other seniors."

It was also the perfect opportunity to host a raffle table for the Niverville mobility van fundraising organization. 50/50 raffle tickets continue to be sold until June 15 and the jackpot is already nearing \$6,000.

The mobility van is something Plessis says her organization will make good use of.

"With the amount of seniors that we have, we do tons of day trips, but we don't have accommodations to take them," Plessis says. "So we mostly book busses from Winnipeg or the Handivan from St. Pierre."

This is exactly the kind of need the Country Classic Car Club believes in supporting on an annual basis.

Every September, they hold the Cruising for a Cause fundraiser, raising money for the Pat Porter Centre of Steinbach. These funds are earmarked specifically for costs related to medical transportation for seniors.

Last year, the club raised \$16,000.

The Country Classic Car Club has been meeting since 1979. They have about 70 active members and hold regular car shows in the parking lot of McMunn and Yates in Steinbach every Wednesday night throughout the summer.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.rafflebox.ca/raffle/niverville-mobilityvan

Ritchot Develops Symbols of Inclusion and Belonging

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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For RM of Ritchot employees Danielle Peters and Emma Dequier, inclusion and belonging are feelings they want every resident of the RM to experience all the time.

Peters is the coordinator of community engagement and Dequier operates as the RM's recreational program coordinator.

Together they're drumming up ideas they believe will instill a little extra hometown pride.

Inspired in part by the RM of Springfield's mascot, Springer the Moose, Peters has determined that a Ritchot mascot would be a great way to help spread the joy at community events throughout the summer.

"We want this to be a community-based mascot," Peters says. "We didn't want to just pick something. We gave every [resident] the option to give some input and we've had some really great feedback."

Peters ran an online campaign asking residents to provide mascot ideas which could be either Ritchot-specific or simply begin with the letter R.

She ended up with four finalists: the chimney swift, the fox, the racoon, and the river otter.

In the coming days, residents can go online and vote for their favourite option. By the end of May, Peters planned to be getting quotes from mascot designers in order to have someone filling the suit at this summer's lineup of outdoor events.

If you're wondering who will fill that suit, Peters says she's already had offers from



Danielle Peters and Emma Dequier.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

previous summer camp staff. High school students may also provide an option.

"A mascot kind of gives a sense of identity to the community," Peters says. "It brings that sense of belonging. We're a part of something bigger than ourselves."

Peters has other things on the go this spring, too.

A new initiative this year is the Ritchot/Niverville/Hanover flag football league. And to provide a no-cost option to golf enthusiasts, Peters encourages residents to try out the disc golf course in St. Adolphe.

"We have a nine-hole course and this summer we're actually adding nine more," Peters says. "As part of our lending program, we have disc golf sets. So you can just come grab your discs and head over to the park."

While mascot plans are in full swing, Dequier is working on a creative initiative of

her own to build community inclusiveness.

Signs of Belonging is an idea she saw featured in a county in Minnesota. Drawing from the talents of local artists, Dequier hopes to install new 12-by-48-inch art signs in each of Ritchot's communities this summer.

Funding for the signs will come from the Healthy Together Now initiative provided by Southern Health-Sante Sud.

"We like the approach of using public art as a tool for inclusion and we felt it could be meaningful and impactful," says Dequier.

Dequier has already sent out requests for submissions. By the end of May, she was hopeful that at least four local artists would have stepped forward with their own creative renditions depicting what belonging, connection, and inclusion mean to them.

Artistic designs can

include paintings, drawings, or even digitally created art.

"We're looking for artists from different backgrounds," Dequier says. "We believe that it would be important to highlight those under-represented voices. We could include women, artists with disabilities, people of lower socioeconomic background, people of colour, 2SLGBTQ+, and Indigenous peoples."

If all goes as planned, each community will be invited to an official hometown sign celebration and pop-up party later this summer, planned by RM staff.

Beyond the Signs of Belonging initiative, Dequier has also been busy organizing a Biz Camp for Ritchot's kids.

"We're partnering with Community Futures to deliver this camp," Dequier says. "It's for ages nine to 13. Basically, the kids get to come in and learn how to be an entrepreneur. Then they get to design and create a product. At the end of the week, they get to sell it at a mini-market."

Peters and Dequier are also combining forces to help residents celebrate National Recreation and Parks month this coming June.

Activities are being planned for every Tuesday and Thursday throughout the communities in the RM. These will be drop-in and free to the public. Events will include yoga in the park and art in the park. Rec on the Road will make a comeback in June as well.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more, visit: www.ritchot.com/p/recreation or contact Emma Dequier (program@ritchot.com) or Danielle Peters (dpeters@ritchot.com).



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Riel Industrial Park, An Economic Success Story

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Local stakeholders, politicians, and representatives of the Rural Manitoba Economic Development Corporation (RMED) gathered at Cheyenne Park in Ste. Agathe on May 16 to recognize the economic success story that is the Riel Industrial Park.

Margot Cathcart is president and CEO of RMED, an organization under the umbrella of the provincial government whose mandate is to support economic development projects in rural communities.

RMED has been a supporter of the Riel Park project since the organization was created in 2020.

"One of the things I like most about my job is being able to come out to community events like this and see the energy, the passion, and the vision that exists in them," Cathcart said. "If we could get that all harnessed [across the province], we would be a serious force to contend with all around the globe."

The Riel Industrial Park is located at the corner of Highways 305 and 75 and covers an area of 95 acres. The number of businesses here has been growing for the past 20 years, with an average of one or two lots being sold per year. Now in its third phase of development, only 11 lots remain. The park has been mortgage-free for two years.

A total of nine businesses have invested in the park to date, including anchor companies like Hemp Oil Canada and Flying J.

Before the park is completely sold out, RMED is seeing the value of what's happening here and has created a full-colour 23-page case study to help other communities around the province model what Ste. Agathe is doing.

The reason that innovative solutions such as the Riel Industrial Park are so important, Cathcart said, is because they can change communities and the people who live in them.

"I just returned from visiting



Representatives of RMED meet with Sean Crew and Joel Lemoine in Ste. Agathe.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

a community in Europe that has reversed their population decline, they've reversed their average age, and they've increased their average income over the last ten years."

MLA Ron Schuler couldn't help but echo Cathcart's enthusiasm for the Riel Park project.

"This is a great place to invest in this community," Schuler said. "You're on the number one corridor for Canada to access the U.S... This corridor is incredibly important."

Cathcart agreed. Not only is Ste. Agathe's location on Highway 75 important, but its proximity to Winnipeg plays a role when it comes to attracting international businesses.

The Perimeter Highway, just ten minutes to the north, provides the needed east-west trade connectivity.

And having a city so close means

having good access to the skilled workers which Winnipeg's educational institutions turn out every year.

"I have been so privileged to be able to help promote [Riel Park] literally [around the globe] for the last few years," Cathcart said. "It's been one of the projects that we have featured when we go to one of the world's largest real estate investment shows. You don't need to be big to punch way above your weight class."

Sean Crew is the acting president for the Ste. Agathe Community Development Inc. (CDI), a key player behind the creation and development of the park. He's also the chairman of the park's board.

Along with other community champions, he's been involved in the CDI for the better part of 20

years. As a not-for-profit organization, the CDI has been able to fund a number of community projects from profits made through industrial park lot sales.

Among those are Cheyenne Park, the boat launch, walking trails, and enhanced community infrastructure.

"Money [from the park] comes into the CDI and goes right back into this community," Crew told the crowd. "We're all volunteers, so none of us are paid for our services. We do it for our community and for the opportunity to keep our kids here in Ste. Agathe."

The success of the park, though, is not solely because of CDI volunteers, he adds. It's also thanks to funding from all levels of government and organizations such as RMED.

Ritchot councillor Joel Lemoine also spoke at the Friday event. He says the RM is currently talking to local farmers to determine the availability of more land surrounding Riel Park in the hopes of a future expansion.

"Job creation is key in what we're seeing," Lemoine says. "We're luring workers not only from our own community but neighbouring communities [too]. Residential development is great. It brings in some tax dollars, but commercial and industrial brings in even more tax dollars."

Even so, residential development must at least keep up so that workers filling local jobs have a place nearby to settle.

Cathcart says that adequate and affordable housing is a problem for many communities around the province.

As a matter of fact, one of RMED's first case studies was on the city of Steinbach and revolved around housing solutions. Now other communities are following suit based on the results of that study.

"We want to be able to do that over and over again, because we don't need to recreate the wheel," she said. "There is incredible work being done across the entire province and this is an opportunity for us to not just highlight but brag about and showcase the great work that communities are doing. We don't need to compete with each other. We're stronger together."

Ste. Agathe resident Guy Gagnon closed the formal part of the gathering with words of thanks to those who helped build the community.

"If it wasn't for volunteers, and if it wasn't for their leadership skills and initiative to put our community on the map, especially after the 1997 flood, we wouldn't have what we see here today," Gagnon said. "So folks like Sean, Joel, Jeanot Robert, and others who preceded as chairman of the CDI, need to be thanked by the whole community and communities surrounding our area."

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NHS Student Takes Lead in Asian Heritage Awareness

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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In mid-May, students of Niverville High School (NHS) had the opportunity to verse themselves in what it means to be of Asian descent.

In large part, this is thanks to students like Naomi Sarmiento, a Grade 11 student of Filipino background.

Sarmiento is joined by two other students, Eddy Paez and Ruolin Zhang, to bring three days of Asian Heritage events to NHS for the second year running.

"The idea is to essentially reignite the interest in our culture, especially in this community," Sarmiento says. "I want to use this event to push us forward and to accept the facts [of our heritage]."

May is recognized as Asian Heritage Month across the country. NHS's events ran from May 14-16 and provided students with three days of activities to celebrate the culture.

On day one, Paez and Zhang provided some background on celebrations and traditions inherent to their respective Filipino and Chinese backgrounds.

Zhang addressed the importance of the lunar new year in many Asian traditions.

Paez's focus was on traditional celebrations like the debut, an event which recognizes a young lady's transition from childhood to adulthood.

This coming-of-age celebration is similar in many ways to the Spanish quinceañera and involves ball gowns, cultural food, and a formal dance with the special males in her life.

"Asians in general like to celebrate [life events] surrounding growth and just moving from one stage to another," Sarmiento says.

Other traditional celebrations include Fatima, a celebration of the Mother Mary, and of course



Naomi Sarmiento.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

getting a jumpstart on Christmas. "Christmas is a huge thing in the Philippines," Sarmiento says. "It starts in September. We have Christmas trees and everything up [months before]."

Day two included a visit by Marie Mallari of Sugar Blooms and Cakes, a Filipino-based bakery in Winnipeg. Mallari works alongside her mother, Genevieve Melegrito. The two have become famous for their win in season three of *The Big Bake Holiday* on The Food Network.

During this session, students had the hands-on opportunity to decorate cakes while learning about how Mallari and her mother integrate their culture right into their business.

On day three, the event got political.

Sarmiento was excited to receive confirmation that some of Manitoba's elected officials of Asian descent would attend the school to take part in a panel discussion on the importance of recognizing and celebrating cultural differences.

Paez moderated the panel, consisting of MLA Jennifer Chen, MLA Jelynn Dela Cruz, and Minister of Labour and Immigration Malaya Marcelino.

"One of the reasons why I wanted to invite MLA Jennifer Chen was because she started the Asian Heritage Month [Act], which is amazing," Sarmiento says. "She is so active in the community and such an inspiration."

This panel was followed by a potluck where every school attendee could celebrate their own culture by bringing a dish indicative of their particular background.

Sarmiento's pursuit to bring Asian awareness to her school began with her involvement in NHS's Student Action Group.

Teacher Tony Clark oversaw this extracurricular class.

"Student Action Group is an initiative where, if you're interested in something, you take it on yourself," Sarmiento says. "No teachers are involved."

For Sarmiento, taking the opportunity to teach people about her culture felt like an effective way to bridge the divide between herself and others of different descent.

When she first moved to Niverville a couple of years back, Sarmiento says there were few Asian students attending NHS and the cultural divide felt palpable.

It wasn't outright racism she experienced, she says, but simply comments made out of ignorance.

"When immigrants move from one country to another," she says, "they tend to shy away from their own culture because they're ashamed or don't want to deal with [questions about their differences]."

For these reasons, she believes that fun and interesting events like this one provide opportunities for awareness and help to restore pride and end racism.

IN BRIEF

Funnel Cloud Spotted Near Niverville

By Brenda Sawatzky

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

On May 16, Environment and Climate Change Canada received reports of three funnel clouds spotted near Sperling, Gretina, and Niverville.

Leah Brandt lives on Wyndham Court in Niverville. On Thursday night, she found herself watching at the window as the southern sky filled rapidly with a system of dark, turbulent clouds.

"I saw on some weather Facebook pages that there was some rotation in the sky," Brandt says. "We were looking to the south for a while and then we didn't see anything."

Brandt and her three small kids then moved to a spot where the northern sky was more visible—and that's when she spotted it.

She had just told her son that she'd always wanted to witness a funnel cloud and then there, at the edge of the cloud system, a finger-like funnel appeared for a short time.

"We moved here a year and a half ago from Winnipeg," Brandt says. "We just couldn't see the skies where we lived. Now we face the south, [which is] a field, and we can just see so much sky."

As of early Friday morning, Environment and Climate Change Canada had yet to receive any reports of injuries or damages caused by tornadoes.

This is the second such tornado spotting near Niverville this month. The first occurred on May 1 about eight kilometres southeast of Niverville, touching down in a farmer's field.

The rain from Thursday's weather system provided much-needed relief after extreme temperatures and windstorms blasted the region earlier in the week.



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Sports & Recreation



C/O ATELIER CYCLE

Fitness Studio Approved in Niverville

By Kim Kielley

Atelier Cycle has gotten the green light from Niverville's council to launch a new local studio on Main Street.

Focusing on fitness, the spin class/barre fusion studio, is expected to be open in November, according to owners Maxine Carels and Stephanie Comte.

The spin class portion of the studio experience is self-explanatory. The barre fusion classes will combine yoga, Pilates, and dance and will be open to anyone over the age of 16.

The location of the new business is 21 Main Street, where the Corner Car Wash was previously located.

Ray Dowse, part-owner of the building, says that the fitness studio is a good fit for that location. He and his partners are renovating the four-day car wash to make it a suitable home for Atelier. This includes upgrades to the building's exterior.

"We never intended on getting into the car wash business," Dowse explains.

Car washes are expensive to operate and repair, so it made perfect sense to repurpose the existing building and keep costs down for

the new tenants.

"We're doing everything on the exterior," she explains. "Updating the parking lot, installing a whole new retail front with windows, repaving the floor, and adding rooftop units is the aim."

Carels and Comte are certified spin and barre fusion instructors.

However, they will be hiring staff and providing a six-week training course for the new staff. The cost of this training has yet to be determined.

For the entrepreneurs, both of whom are wives and busy mothers of young children, they would love

to move to Niverville but they're married to farmers and moving to the fastest growing municipality in Manitoba just isn't an option right now.

"We absolutely love Niverville," Comte says. "You want to belong here."

The women will be managing the business from afar with a floor manager and fairly large staff base on the ground in Niverville.

Carels already has two similar businesses in Portage la Prairie and Notre Dame de Lourdes. Comte is an instructor at both locations.

Online booking will be available

and classes will accommodate 15 people for both spin and barre fusion.

Drop-in service won't be available.

Classes are expected to start at 5:30 a.m., with five or six classes running throughout the day and ranging from 30 to 45 minutes each.

An intro class will be offered to encourage new beginners.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

You can connect with Atelier Cycle on both Facebook and Instagram. Search for Atelier Cycle+.

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Arts & Culture

“Even Better than Christmas”: A Look Back at the Early Years of the Olde Tyme Country Fair

By Brenda Sawatzky

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

With Niverville's fair entering into its fourth decade, many people who consider themselves long-time community residents may have no recollection of how this institution came to be.

There is one small collection of locals, though, who remember those early years with fondness: the original Olde Tyme Country Fair committee. 2025 marks the thirtieth year since this diverse group first sat down to plan their inaugural event.

It's not that Niverville hadn't ever had a fair before. Indeed, the community had been celebrating an annual fair for nearly 30 years. In the typical small-town fashion of yesteryear, those fairs were held in August and showcased Niverville's farming ideals.

These were the years when women competed for first place in baking and canning contests and men displayed acts of bravado on the ball fields or tug-of-war pits.

As is the way of many good things, though, a lack of volunteers brought the fair to an end in the early 1990s.

In 1995, new vigour brought the fair back to life. The first event in June 1996 ran an approximate budget of \$3,000, which would have been considered an inconceivably lofty target compared to years prior.

The new fair committee was comprised of about eight members. Come fair weekend, a couple dozen additional volunteers were required to bring their plans to fruition.

The mostly young parents who sat on the committee hoped to start something that would bring joy to the families of Niverville for a long time to come.

But in their wildest dreams, they never would have anticipated the magnitude of what it became.



The original committee behind the first Olde Tyme Country Fair in Niverville. Back: Elaine Krahn, Tim Friesen, Ian Wallace, Russell Hicks, Nancy McNaughton. Front: Mona Stott, Brenda Sawatzky, Bev Wieler, Jeff Stott, Heather Fast.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

The current 19-person committee runs an approximate budget of \$375,000. They rely on the efforts of over 300 volunteers to work more than 900 hours to pull off the two-day event.

THE EARLY YEARS

The vision for a new Niverville fair originated with Jeff Stott.

“I used to have a lot of fun at the fair as a kid,” Stott says. “Eating all the baking and [playing] the coconut game and dunk tank. We were always involved because, at that time, my dad was part of the small group of people running it.”

To renew interest, Stott created sandwich board signs which he placed along Main Street, large enough that traffic had to negotiate around them. Then he picked up the phone and called everyone he

knew.

Stott's father warned him not to get his hopes up.

The first townhall-style meeting took place in the dining room of Clare's Family Restaurant, the location of Subway today.

Much to Stott's surprise, the dining room was packed with people. He chaired the initial meetings, which resulted in roles being distributed. The adult and children's entertainment coordinators were Elaine Krahn and Brenda Sawatzky. Bev Hiebert took on food services while Heather Fast eventually came on as parade coordinator.

Nancy McNaughton, Jeff Stott, Tim Friesen, and Russell Hicks filled in the many other gaps.

Among the committee's early goals in the summer of 1995 was to establish a new date. Despite some

disappointment from previous fair enthusiasts, the committee decided to launch in June as a kickoff to summer. This would precede vacation season, the harvest, and—fingers crossed—the worst of the inevitable mosquito infestation.

Next on the agenda? Giving the new fair a catchy name, something that would be both modern and capture Niverville's roots and small-town values. The committee solicited the public for ideas. Ballot boxes were placed at prominent businesses, giving residents a chance to vote.

The winner, by a country mile, was the Niverville Olde Tyme Country Fair.

In keeping with the theme, a logo was designed which incorporated a pig, a pie, and a first-place ribbon.

By the spring of 1996, the plans

were coming together. The old Niverville fairgrounds, located where the CRRC stands today, needed some work. The small, partially covered wooden stage had seen better years. Volunteers stepped forward to shore up its structure and bring in electricity. The canteen building, too, was in a sad state. The committee set to work with paint and brushes.

Local bands were solicited to play that stage, including Ken Dyck's band, who had built their reputation around performing a repertoire of radio classics.

Without the financial means to secure a full-on midway for the kids, Sawatzky found the next best thing. Somewhere in small-town Manitoba, a grandfather had built a series of makeshift wooden rides, including a roller coaster and tilt-a-whirl. Without a doubt, it wouldn't pass code in the twenty-first century, but it was good enough for 1996.

Inflatable games, a climbing wall, and a mud pit were thrown in for good measure.

Soliciting startup funds to pay for all these items required convincing local businesses to get behind the project—which they did, albeit somewhat reluctantly at first.

Admission, it was determined, would be \$2 per adult. Children would get in free.

To build buzz around town, the committee produced hundreds of posters and restaurant placemats to go around town.

In an act of generosity, the print shop went one step further and hand-delivered ad copies to every business in town.

Unfortunately, too late was it discovered that the advertising contained a critical error: the first Niverville Olde Tyme Country Fair, the ad proclaimed, was absolutely free to attend.

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The first year's budget was stretched to the maximum, but the event proved its value.

"The thing that I was proudest of is that people stood in long lines to get in," Stott says.

MOVING TO MAIN STREET

With one year under their belt, the committee turned to town council for financial aid in preparation for year two.

"I went to see [Mayor] Clare and I said, 'We need some money to pull this fair thing off,'" Stott recalls. "And he said, 'How much are we talking about?' I think I had said \$5,000 to get this thing going and he said, 'Then ask for \$10,000.' Clare was one of the driving forces for this thing."

Growth was exponential in those early years. With the addition of a car show and a second stage, as well as expanding entertainment options, the attendance multiplied.

A hint of rain, however, left the fairgrounds a muddy mess. A better option for future years, the committee decided, was to move the event to Main Street. Since the road fell under provincial jurisdiction, everyone involved knew this would be no small feat.

"Albert Driedger was the Minister of Highways at the time and he lived in Grunthal," says Stott. "He was a good friend of my dad's and so I drove down there to see him."

That meeting was integral to the slow move to Main Street. It began with the closure of a small section at first.

Clare Braun, Niverville's mayor at the time, admits that council was sceptical.

"It was a new concept, and I didn't think there'd be enough people [to justify it]," says Braun. "But then we saw it was going to work because on opening night we

had people coming in droves down the street with their lawn chairs. It was, like, 'Wow, the town really cares about this!'"

Over the next two years, the fair committee was granted more and more Main Street access until the street became completely consumed by the event.

This set the stage for many exciting additions, including the Wonder Shows midway.

It also meant more stages, more tents, and room for popular entertainment such as motorcycle stunt shows.

Probably one of the most unique aspects of the Main Street fair, though, was the incorporation of a community food fest.

Stretching the length of a few blocks, businesses set up food booths that offered sausage burgers, pork on a bun, wontons, watermelon and roll kuchen, and more, all included in the cost of admission.

Perhaps the greatest testament to Niverville's community-wide fair adoption was the massive borscht cauldron where hungry attendees could find soup, served up hot, made by the women of local churches.

This food tradition carried on for 25 years.

If ever there was doubt that the move to Main Street was a good idea, it was quickly eradicated when one witnessed the sight of hundreds of elementary school children glued to the schoolyard fence, watching and waving in anticipation as the carnival trucks rolled into town every year.



Members of the original fair committee reunite: **BRENDASAWATZKY**
Back: Russel Hicks, Jeff Stott.
Front: Brenda Sawatzky, Elaine Krahn, Heather Fast

"[My] five-year-old niece saw the midway pulling into town and she said, 'This is even better than Christmas!'" Krahn muses.

As the fair grew, the committee added security personnel to ensure that parents could let their children roam free without fear.

"That was the big reason for security," Stott says. "We were making sure people felt safe. We all had kids at the time, and it was a big deal to us."

MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS

Over the course of the fair's early years, the committee looks back on a feast of good memories. And invariably, these recollections are based around people, not weather.

For example, the ordeal of counting coins, literally thousands of dollars of them, from admissions in the fair's second year.

Into the wee hours of the second night, the small committee sorted and counted, using garbage cans

and anything they could find to store them. Once counted, the collection was dropped into the bank's night depository for safekeeping.

As the church crowd gathered the next day for a stage-side church service, the fair committee came to an awkward realization: they'd kept no float aside to run the canteen.

"We didn't have a nickel between us," Krahn recalls. "We came up with this idea that we were going to beg the offering plate off the church [collection]."

And so they did. That demonstration of trust and support from the

local churches carried on over the years as various church groups inevitably stepped forward to offer their behind-the-scenes services.

There were also demonstrations of support from the community as a whole for cleanup efforts.

"[The committee] got some brooms and we started sweeping," Stott says. "Then Jake Hiebert... brings some brooms and shovels, and then other people started showing up, and before long we had this big group going down the street."

One of the most memorable events was the year when two local pilots entered their small planes into the Main Street car show. Both successfully landed on Highway 311 and rolled into town. One had a small gas leak, causing the pilot to temporarily disconnect the fuel source while grounded.

Unfortunately, he failed to reconnect the fuel before taking off later that night.

"He decided he was going to buzz Main Street," Stott says. "We could see him coming and then [we heard his engine sputtering]. He turned, right across from the Chicken Chef, and went into the houses."

The same night, Manitoba Hydro crews were called to respond to a downed line when the second plane snagged one following takeoff.

Thankfully, in both cases, the damage was minimal and no one was hurt.

WHAT'S BEHIND ITS SUCCESS?

"The reason that this thing has worked is because the community embraced it," Stott says. "We had good organization as far as ideas and drive go, but the community latched on and they loved it. That's why it survived and that's why people continue to come to it today."

The early fair committee can't deny this sentiment.

Time after time, year after year, the community rolled up their sleeves on fair weekend and jumped right in.

As a result, the fair has evoked province-wide curiosity and interest. The organizers of other events, such as Steinbach's Summer in the City, have coming seeking advice in an effort to model Niverville's success.

But in the end it's about the people, those who demonstrate hometown pride, and this is a resource in which Niverville is undeniably rich.

Over the years, every one of the early fair committee members have produced second-generation volunteers or core committee members.

Taking an active role on today's committee are Tim Friesen's daughter, Raesha Enns, and Elaine Krahn's son, Dustin Krahn.

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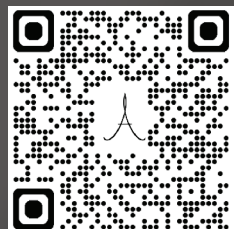
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