

# The Citizen

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**LOCAL NEWS**

**Local Candidates Chase PC Nomination**

■ A pair of locals have announced their intention to succeed Ron Schuler, the retiring MLA of Springfield-Ritchot.

Details on Pages 10-11



**LOCAL NEWS**

**Residents Oppose IDC Data Centre**

■ A group of residents north of Île-des-Chênes have joined forces to oppose the proposal to build a large AI data centre on a parcel of agricultural land. They cite a range of concerns, including a drain on water and other resources.

Details on Pages 12-13

**SPORTS & REC**

**Panthers Roaring!**

■ The Niverville Panthers are playing just their second season in the WSHSL. They have now finished their regular season with a stellar record of 21-2-0-1.

Details on Page 16

**ARTS & CULTURE**

**NHS Artists Pull Out All the Stops**

■ At a recent art show, the best and brightest at Niverville High School put their soul on canvas for all the world to see.

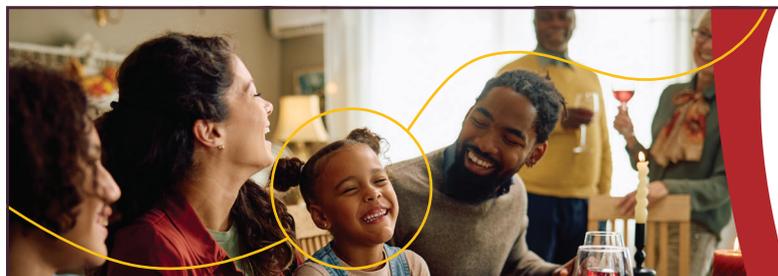
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**HANOVER SCHOOL DIVISION**  
ADMINISTRATION OFFICES  
5 CHRYSLER GATE

**Not on the Registry: Charges Against Former Teacher Reveal System Gaps**

▶▶ READ MORE ON PAGES 4-5

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Niverville's council meets in early February 2026.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

# Niverville Council Talks Bylaw Enforcement and Commercial Neighbourhood Zoning

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Niverville's council met for their morning public meeting on February 3 to address a number of by-law-related concerns.

To open, council voted in favour of appointing seven Commissionaires officers to manage bylaw enforcement this year.

The Commissionaires are a national not-for-profit security company employing military veterans.

They provide municipal bylaw enforcement services as well as traffic control and non-core policing services to all levels of government, as well as to the police and RCMP.

Their goal is to help free up police to more effectively focus on more critical duties.

Niverville's council has contracted the Commissionaires for many years. CAO Eric King says that the town pays an annual fee for the services they carry out on a relatively random basis. There are no specific days or times when they drive along the streets, looking for infractions. Although they respond

to specific concerns, mostly they keep an eye on recurring issues such as school zone parking infractions.

During certain events, such as fair weekend, they'll ramp up their efforts.

"It's not meant to be a cash recovery business," says King. "We're not in the business of printing tickets for the sake of printing tickets."

Also in terms of bylaw enforcement, council gave first reading to an amendment on their current noise ordinance. If approved, noise exemptions would be provided for snow-clearing, both residentially and commercially.

"We had a resident contact us about a particular incident," says Mayor Myron Dyck. "And when we checked into our bylaws, we realized that there was an omission or a gap."

The exemption now gives greater flexibility to snow-clearing contractors who need to open up commercial parking lots early so businesses can operate, as well as church parking lots before Sunday morning services.

The noises which this bylaw are intended to address are those created by contractors and their

equipment or neighbours revving motorbikes at midnight. General quiet hours in Niverville run between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m.

Residents wishing to host an event where the noise level may extend beyond those hours are asked to contact the town office for special one-time exemptions.

Finally, council voted in favour of making Niverville's business incentive grant available to businesses that fall within a commercial neighbourhood zone. This type of zoning has been discussed with Highlands West developer Len Peters. If pursued, it would be the first such zoning in Niverville.

"[Commercial-neighbourhood-zoned companies] include the mom-and-pop type of businesses," says King. "Whereas commercial corridor is more for the big box outlets like IKEA and Home Depot."

Examples of businesses that fall into a commercial neighbourhood zoning could include the small corner grocer or hair salon, the kind of business one might see in residential neighbourhoods rather than busy commercial hubs.

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**The Citizen**

Box 266, Niverville, MB ROA 1E0  
www.nivervillecitizen.com

**Managing Editor:**  
Evan Braun

**Sales Manager:**  
Ray Dowse

**Operations Manager:**  
Cara Dowse

**Design/Production Manager:**  
Dustin Krahn

**Contributors:**  
Evan Braun, Brenda Sawatzky,  
Holly Dunphy, Bill Burfoot

**CONTACT US**

**Letters to the Editor:**  
editor@nivervillecitizen.com

**Advertising Sales:**  
sales@nivervillecitizen.com

**Classifieds/General Information:**  
info@nivervillecitizen.com

**Artwork/Ad Proofs/Graphics:**  
ads@nivervillecitizen.com

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**SUBWAY**

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## PUBLIC NOTICE

## Manitoba Hydro Integrated Resource Plan & Major New Facility Public Review

On February 2, 2026, the Manitoba Government referred Manitoba Hydro's 2025 Integrated Resource Plan ("IRP") to the Public Utilities Board ("PUB") for its review and recommendations.

The IRP examines how best to meet Manitoba Hydro's expected short-term (2030) and long-term (2035) growth in electricity consumption with different options to increase electricity supply. The primary objective of the IRP is to plan for safe and reliable energy that meets the evolving needs of Manitobans. The IRP includes both Manitoba Hydro's electrical system and the natural gas system operated by Manitoba Hydro's subsidiary Centra Gas Manitoba Inc.

Manitoba Hydro's IRP includes its recommended future development plan, which incorporates a major new generating facility consisting of three new simple cycle combustion turbines at the Brandon Generating Station that will provide approximately 750 MW of capacity. In addition to the IRP, the needs for and alternatives to Manitoba Hydro's proposed new natural gas generating facility will be referred to the PUB for its review and recommendations.

The PUB will be conducting a public regulatory review over the coming months into both the IRP and the proposed major new natural gas generating facility. While these reviews by the PUB will not immediately result in a change to the rates charged by Manitoba Hydro, the costs of the new generating facility and other aspects of the development plan are expected to have an impact on future electricity rates.

Further details related to the upcoming review are available at: [www.pubmanitoba.ca](http://www.pubmanitoba.ca).

You can share your views on the filing with the Public Utilities Board in three ways:

- **As a Presenter** – If you want to make a virtual or in-person formal presentation to the Public Utilities Board on this matter and are willing to respond to questions about your presentation, please submit an application to become an approved Presenter using the application form linked on the PUB website ([www.pubmanitoba.ca](http://www.pubmanitoba.ca)) by June 18, 2026. Presentations are limited to a maximum of 10 minutes and presenters will be scheduled to appear during the hearing in August.
- **Written comment** – If you would like to comment in writing on this review, please go to [www.pubmanitoba.ca](http://www.pubmanitoba.ca) and provide your written comment.
- **As an approved intervener** – If you want to actively participate in the public hearing as an Intervener, please go to [www.pubmanitoba.ca](http://www.pubmanitoba.ca) and apply for Intervener status on or before February 24, 2026. Interveners are required to represent the interests of a significant group of customers and may be required to combine their intervention with others representing similar interests.

A Pre-Hearing Conference with prospective Interveners will be held in the Board's hearing room, at the address below, commencing at 9:00 a.m. on Monday March 2, 2026.

Manitoba Public Utilities Board  
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BY BRENDA SAWATZKY

# Not on the Registry: Charges Against Former Teacher Reveal System Gaps

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ [bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com](mailto:bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com)

On January 23, news broke of sexual misconduct charges being laid against a former teacher in the Hanover School Division—specifically, Braeden Martens, who taught at the Steinbach Regional Secondary School (SRSS).

According to the Steinbach RCMP, Martens faces charges of luring a child under the age of 16 and an invitation to sexual touching. These incidents allegedly took place between September 2023 and January 2025.

The division removed him from his teaching position when the allegations first surfaced in early 2025, although an entire year passed before police released official details to the public.

As the story made headlines in the past few weeks, it wasn't just Martens facing public scrutiny. HSD also came under the microscope.

According to reporting in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, there was more to the story than accusations of child sexual abuse. Their article

suggested that Martens had been allowed to teach at the SRSS without proof of provincial certification.

The *Free Press* reported that Martens's name never appeared on the Manitoba Teacher Professional Conduct Registry. This provincial database, created one year ago, is intended to provide the public with a transparent look at teacher suspensions and charges of misconduct.

Every certified teacher in Manitoba is supposed to appear on this registry, whether or not they hold a clean teaching record. Since Martens does not appear on the list, his alleged misconduct could not be reported on it.

Three days after the *Free Press* article was published, the HSD offered an official response.

"In the interest of transparency and maintaining public trust, Hanover School Division is issuing this statement to clarify inaccuracies, including statements in the article that were uninformed and/or patently false."

Rebutting what they believed were insinuations that Martens was never

authorized to teach at all, HSD clarified that they applied for, and received from the province, four separate Limited Teaching Permits (LTP) over the years. This means that Martens was legally eligible to teach at the SRSS during those terms. HSD also confirmed that each permit was accompanied by the required child abuse registry check and criminal record check.

By the fall of 2024, HSD did not apply for a fifth LTP, as they believed Martens was waiting on his permanent teaching certification from the province.

Four months later, he was removed from his teaching position at the SRSS following allegations of sexual misconduct.

For those four months, it would appear that Martens was indeed practicing without a license. *The Citizen* reached out to the HSD for an explanation.

"The individual was transitioning from a Limited Teaching Permit—valid with all required safety clearances as of June 2024—to teacher certification," says HSD superintendent Joe Thiessen. "Unlike Limited Teaching

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Permits, which are submitted by the division, teacher certification applications are initiated by the applicant through the Professional Certification Unit. In this case, the application was not submitted during the referenced period [of] fall 2024.”

Manitoba’s Minister of Education, Tracy Schmidt, also responded to the *Free Press’s* reporting.

“The safety and well-being of students is our government’s highest priority,” Schmidt says. “Parents deserve full confidence that every teacher working in our schools is properly vetted and authorized to be in the classroom.”

**TEACHING PERMITS AND CERTIFICATION**

To work as a Kindergarten to Grade 12 teacher in Manitoba, one must be registered through the province as either a professional certified teacher, a provisional professional teacher, or a short-term limited teacher.

Obtaining permanent professional status requires a minimum of a bachelor’s degree in education from a locally recognized university.

A three-year provisional license can be obtained for those working towards their professional certification.

Finally, a Limited Teaching Permit allows non-certified instructors to work in specific schools for one term at a time. This permit can be renewed repeatedly, at the province’s discretion.

“Individuals granted an LTP do not have their teaching experience recognized by Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning,” the provincial LTP application states. “A LTP may be granted in cases where the school is able to provide evidence demonstrating efforts to recruit and hire a Manitoba certified teacher have occurred but have not been successful.”

According to HSD, Martens worked at the SRSS for four terms under a legitimate LTP permit and with security documents that checked out.

Martens graduated as a Red Seal electrician from RRC Polytech’s Technical Vocational program in 2024. By summer of that year, his LTP permit had expired and was not renewed by the school division.

The employment of LTP teachers is common in Manitoba, especially since the years of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*“Parents deserve full confidence that every teacher working in our schools is properly vetted and authorized to be in the classroom.”*

**Tracey Schmidt** | Minister of Education

According to the *Free Press*, there are nearly 900 LTP educators in Manitoba’s grade schools this school year alone, more than twice the number who were teaching in this province ten years ago.

**PROVINCIAL ROLE**

Unfortunately, HSD’s explanation as to why Martens was on their payroll without official certification during the fall and winter of 2024 is vague. Was it an administrative lapse or did the division believe Martens’ official paperwork was imminent?

According to a provincial spokesperson, it can take anywhere between two to 12 weeks to process documents of certification.

“Processing times vary based on factors such as the volume of applications in queue and the applicant’s academic credentials,” the spokesperson says.

Perhaps a more pointed question should arise: what is the province’s responsibility in this?

While Minister Schmidt promises to make student safety and well-being a top priority, it’s not a provincial requirement for LTP educators to be listed on their teacher professional conduct registry. The registry includes only the names of professional certified teachers and authorized clinicians.

So whether Martens was operating under a legitimate LTP license or no license at all, his name would never have been found there. That is not the fault of the HSD.

“Our government is acting immediately and decisively to close gaps, reinforce oversight, and ensure that every student in Manitoba is protected,” Schmidt states.

For reassurances, *The Citizen* reached out to Schmidt’s office to ask whether the professional conduct registry would soon include every person who holds a position in Manitoba’s public school system, including LTP educators. No quotable response was offered.

Instead the minister is focused on ensuring that school divisions review their teacher certifications and the background checks that accompany them.

This is nothing new. It’s simply a reminder for divisions to be vigilant in their compliance to existing law.

Manitoba’s school divisions are to report back to the province by March.

**CRIMINAL CHECKS AND ABUSE REGISTRIES**

According to RCMP Media Relations Officer Corporal

Melanie Roussel, for a small fee individuals can request documentation from the police to verify their criminal background or lack thereof. This is known as a criminal record check. Anyone can request one for themselves, and an employer can ask to see a copy. However, employers may not obtain from the police a criminal record check on behalf of any employee.

Indications of past criminal activity are limited to actual convictions and don’t typically reflect allegations or charges. A person can function in society for a long time with allegations that haven’t yet been proven in court.

“[A person] won’t have a criminal record if there’s no conviction,” Roussel says. “It can take years before they get a conviction. They get a trial and the trial can be set up in a year or more from now.”

The province has another tool, called the child abuse registry. A child protection committee determines who earns a place on that registry.

Roussel says that she sat on such a committee for a time, representing law enforcement. Also on the committee were doctors, social workers, and other professionals. Together they reviewed charges to decide whether individuals should be listed.

According to Roussel, it’s unlikely that Martens’s name will appear on the child abuse registry until he is formally convicted of a crime in a court of law, a process that could take years, if it ever happens.

What about teachers who are guilty of sexual misconduct that goes unreported by their victims?

Until someone has the courage to step forward—and for a child, it takes an enormous amount of courage—such a teacher’s name would appear on no registries for either employers or the public to see. Their registry checks would come back clean.

**CITIZEN POLL**

**Has the Braeden Martens case affected your trust in the school system’s ability to protect students?**

- Yes. This incident raises big questions about how teachers are hired in Manitoba.
- No. Despite this disturbing case, the system largely does a good job of vetting teachers.

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

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**LAST MONTH’S RESULTS:**

**Should a local municipal council require sports and recreation facilities to be self-sustaining in order to be considered viable?**

Yes. Taxpayers should not be expected to fund facilities that don’t attract enough programs or sponsorship to pay for themselves.

8%

No. These community-owned facilities promote wellness and social connection, benefits that justify public investment even if they don’t break even.

92%

**YOUR COMMENTS:**

I have curled at NCC for many years now. I’ll miss it. I am disappointed to see the town send NCC packing over a supposed 12-20k facility cost, while the town also lets the building sit empty for the majority of the year. There are a lot of solutions to look into before this slap-in-the-face direction they had chosen to pursue. This is the exact attitude that kills volunteerism and pride within the community.

There’s nothing wrong with trying to reduce or even eliminate the costs of operating a facility. I think it is debatable whether this relatively small deficit warrants displacing a community group like the curling club, though. Given the small amount of this facility cost, it would be nice to see council at the very least explore options to offset it before killing a long-time sport like curling. The goal isn’t necessarily a bad one, but as with many things with Niverville council, they seem to take an aggressive, non-thought-out approach that isn’t based on engaging the actual community, and without considering all of the negative implications that come along with their decisions.

It’s nice to see council being aware of spending. But there are far better places to begin in terms of saving money and reducing spending. This is insulting not just to curlers but all volunteer organizations.

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## IN BRIEF

## Province Orders Grocery Pricing Study to Tackle Rising Costs

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

On February 11, the NDP officially launched a study designed to look for ways to make groceries in this province more affordable.

“Manitobans are feeling the cost of groceries every week,” says Premier Wab Kinew. “As a government, we have a responsibility to make sure life is affordable for families. This study is about going after the practices that are driving up prices and making sure grocery prices work for people, not against them.”

The province hopes that the study, expected to be completed by spring, will open doors for opportunities for the province to intervene in retail prices.

“Preliminary technical findings will inform potential affordability measures for inclusion in Budget 2026, demonstrating immediate action to help Manitobans reduce their grocery costs,” the province says in a statement.

This announcement follows on the heels of a report produced in 2025 by Harvest Manitoba which indicated that about 60,000 Manitobans currently rely on foodbanks. In the past five years, the need for foodbanks in Manitoba has risen 150 percent.

The new study promises to include an analysis of pricing practices used by local grocery chains, especially predatory or differential pricing.

Differential pricing refers to the practice of charging different prices for the same product at the same store. According to Kinew, some retailers may track consumers and target certain demographics to arrive at these prices.

A recent American consumer report revealed a disparity between online prices and in-store prices at certain grocers. In other cases, the price shown on the shelf may be different than what’s charged at checkout.

Also under scrutiny are practices that suppress competition, giving grocery conglomerates an edge and the power to fix prices.

The province will analyse rising production costs and local supply-chain vulnerabilities. They’ll also investigate the underlying causes of food desserts as well as disparities in access to healthier foods.

Eventually, the government believes this could lead to new food taxation policy, a strengthening of competition laws, and greater support for Manitoban food producers.

“As finance minister, my job is to focus on two budgets: the province’s budget and your household budget,” says Finance Minister Adrien Sala. “This work will help identify real, workable steps to bring grocery costs down and make life more affordable for Manitobans.”

According to the government, this will be the first province-led grocery pricing study in Canada.

# 2026 Grad Committee Brings Grad Social Back Home

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

The Niverville High School grad committee is excited to bring the grad social back home for 2026.

The banquet, planned and funded by the Hanover School Division, saw some unfortunate mishaps at the Southeast Event Centre in Steinbach last year. This year, it’s moving back to the Niverville Event Centre.

In 2025, the safe grad social, planned by the grad committee, followed at the TC Energy Centre in Île-des-Chênes. While that event was a huge success, it too will come home in 2026.

“We are very excited this year because we’re going to be hosting our safe grad at the CRRC, so nobody has to leave town,” says Lindsay Unrau, grad parent and grad committee co-chair. “We hope this relationship continues throughout the next couple of years.”

The ceremony will take place in the high school gymnasium and the banquet will then return to the Heritage Centre.

From there, students will be transported to the CRRC for the safe grad social.

With about 107 potential graduates this year and the numbers growing year after year, the committee imagines it won’t be long before the entire event, from start to finish, may be held in the CRRC campus.



Krista Shidel, Lindsay Unrau, and Amanda Kipe of the 2026 Niverville High School grad committee. **BRENDA SAWATZKY**

This year, the social will take place in the arena. It’s a similar venue to last year’s in Steinbach.

One big difference, is that the CRRC’s arena offers a concrete floor in the summer months, unlike the Southeast Centre, which provided a faux floor covering over ice that left attendees with cold feet. Another issue was water wicking through the floor.

A lot of plans are already in place for this year’s social, a direct reflection of what the graduating class has said they want from their milestone celebration.

There will be silent auctions and casino games, and the Nighthawks will provide bar services.

Unrau is one of four co-chairs on the 2026 grad committee. Joining her are Krista Shidel, Amanda Kipe, and Bonnie Sagriff. Rounding out the committee are a list of subcommittees consisting of more parents and grads.

The cost of creating a memorable event can be

exorbitant. The committee’s budget this year is \$21,000, and that doesn’t include any big extravaganzas.

“That’s a lean budget, we’re finding, as we’re getting quotes,” Kipe says. “We’re having to be very creative. Inflation has really [impacted costs].”

Part of that creativity comes in finding ways to encourage local support through sponsorships that benefit the sponsor and not just the grads.

“We have a sponsorship package where businesses are going to get quite a bit of value for their sponsorship,” Unrau says. “Sponsorship starts at \$250 with the bronze level and goes all the way to \$1,000-plus for the gold level.”

Whether making a monetary donation or providing an item for the auction, sponsors will receive varying levels of online promotion, signage, and special mentions. The first six gold sponsors will have their logo on the back

of the grad ticket.

But the grad committee is hoping that the Niverville public will also stand behind their newest graduating class. For this reason, they’re hosting a number of fundraisers to reduce the ticket costs.

“We don’t want there to be obstacles for any of the grads to attend based on costs,” Kipe says. “So we want to fundraise as much as possible.”

The fundraisers began last year with a Rocco’s frozen pizza sale and an online 50/50 which is still in progress. Ticket sales for the draw ended at midnight on February 12.

At the time of this writing, just over \$7,000 had been raised.

Aside from financial investment, the co-chairs say that there’s one more way for the public to show big support for their graduating students.

Each year, just prior to grad, the Grade 12 students participate in a parade that meanders through the community.

This is an event that began during COVID-19 restrictions and continues for the simple reason that the graduates love putting on such a fun display of pomp and pageantry.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For fundraiser and sponsorship details, or more grad event information, visit Safe Grad NHS on Facebook and Instagram.



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# Turning the Page on the Winter Blues

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
 ✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

February in Manitoba brings many opportunities to overcome the winter blues. There's a day dedicated to love and a festival dedicated to honouring our unique franco-ophone heritage.

But all of February celebrates literacy, and the roots of I Love to Read Month are distinctly Manitoban.

It all began in February 1980 with the establishment of I Love to Read Day by Dr. Bev Zakaluk, president of the Reading Council of Greater Winnipeg. Years later, Manitoba's lieutenant-governor, the Honourable Pearl McGonigal, hosted a group of Grade Three students in the Manitoba Legislature's Blue Room. They were presented with a book bound in red velvet containing stories that the students had written and submitted.

By 1990, it became a month-long celebration in response to the International Reading Association's call to foster a love of reading. Schools have since developed their own strategies to encourage literacy.

This year, students at Niverville Elementary School sat in on readings by local celebrities.

"We have a reading challenge bingo board and Guess the Book Cover contest," says NES principal Tracy Beaudin. "We have also connected with Smitty's for their I Love to Read initiative and one of our local [indigenous] elders is coming to read to our student about Metis legends."

The month also brings classroom, library, and outdoor readings to establish a love for the written word.

At Niverville Middle School, students are encouraged to go for Olympic-style gold in their reading challenges.

Competing as classrooms, students earn points based on time spent reading, with bonus



✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

points available for classroom reading discussions and book reviews. The winning class receives complimentary tickets to a Nighthawks game, sponsored by Your Grocery People.

In an age where distractions like the internet and electronic gaming abound, NMS vice principal Susanne Kwiatkowski says that books play as important a role as ever.

Local educators work year-round to make literacy a priority by connecting reading to kids' natural interest. Whether it's sports, games, culture, or identity appreciation, there are books relevant to every topic.

"Reading is the foundation of learning in our school," Kwiatkowski says. "Print books help students build focus, comprehension, vocabulary, and imagination. There is real value in holding a book, turning pages, and spending uninterrupted time with a story or informational text. That experience helps students develop reading stamina and a deeper connection to what they are reading."

She adds that the school recognizes the role technology can play in supporting reading through digital texts and audiobooks. In the end, what matters most is that students are reading, no matter the format.

Books remain the heart of the NMS library. Still, the idea of the library as a physical space is evolving.

"The space is designed to be welcoming and dynamic,"

Kwiatkowski says. "It's a hub where students can read quietly, collaborate on projects, explore new interests, and connect with peers."

## LEGACY OF LITERACY

For generations of Manitobans, the name Scholastic is synonymous with a love of reading. Scholastic is a globally recognized publisher and distributor of children's books with operations in 13 countries and exports to most corners of the globe.

For decades, Scholastic Canada has helped tens of thousands of children develop a love for the written word through monthly catalogues, book clubs, and book fairs.

Scholastic Canada first launched in 1957. Today their programs run in 88 percent of the more than 10,000 public elementary schools in Canada, resulting in three million books being shipped to young readers each year.

Beginning as a magazine publisher for young readers, Scholastic was founded in Pennsylvania in 1920.

In 1948, the company promoted the idea of student book clubs and the Scholastic book fair became an institution in 1981. Typically, Canadian elementary schools recognize the program in March.

For schools hosting Scholastic book fairs, the event is a way to raise important funding and add library books thanks to the company's rewards program.

According to Scholastic, a cool \$20,000 million in books,

supplies, and cash was earned by Canadian schools last year.

Regardless of age, Manitobans may remember the thrill of being ushered into the school gymnasium or library to witness tables upon tables of books, posters, and trinkets for sale during a Scholastic book fair.

For many students, the book fair provided opportunities for personal shopping, but it also gave them a say in which new books were acquired for the local library.

"It gave me the chance to explore new books, genres, and authors," says local resident Mylène Gagné-Colliou. "Not that I was able to buy anything, I still loved looking at it."

"We didn't go to Winnipeg shopping, and it was my only chance to look at new books," adds Amanda Kipe, a Niverville mom. "So much goodness for this reader."

It's not just about books. Laura Chevrefils says that she looked forward to the Scholastic book fair to collect more Lisa Frank gear, a collection of whimsical stickers and school supplies made popular in the 1980s.

"I remember [buying] bookmarks and picking up reading on my own at home just so I could use the bookmark," Chevrefils says. "It's so fun to watch my Kindergartener come home now, proud as a pumpkin with the book he chose and read it for the next few days straight."

Mary Hughes agrees that Scholastic had a way of enticing kids to read.

"At first it was all the cool stationary and knickknacks you could get with the \$20 your parents gave you to spend," says Hughes. "Then came all the access to niche books that weren't available at your school library. It made accessing reading materials so much easier as a kid and young adult. I even ordered through Scholastic [books] at my high school."

## IN BRIEF

# Changes on the Menu at the Heritage Centre

By Brenda Sawatzky

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

What do you do when faced with healthy competition? Rebrand and rethink business strategy. That's what Hespeler's Cookhouse and Tavern and the Niverville Event Centre are doing.

According to Chelsea Gauthier, restaurant and events manager at the Heritage Centre, some exciting new things are on the way.

In the coming months, Hespeler's Cookhouse and Tavern will see a major menu revamp. The cuisine change is expected to offer something different than any other restaurant in the area.

"I can't say too much just yet, but there will be menu items that are new to Niverville's offerings and we're focusing on a cookhouse theme," Gauthier says.

The menu will be complemented by a submenu offering a variety of short-term specials at exclusive pricing. Beer lovers will enjoy a greater selection of brews.

Despite the new menu, Hespeler's will continue with everyone's favourite: Thursday night wing nights. Once a month, families can still enjoy table game nights and seniors are invited to table games on Wednesday afternoons.

Some big changes are also happening on the event centre side of things. A new name and logo were recently introduced, setting the centre apart from the campus.

"There are many moving pieces to the Heritage Centre," Gauthier says. "The manor has their own logo, the personal care home has their own logo, and Hespeler's has theirs, but the event centre did not."

Like Hespeler's, food and alcohol services at the event centre have seen a refresh.

To provide more flexibility

in bar services, clients will now have the option of booking a hybrid version of both cash bar and host bar.

Gauthier is excited about new menu items for both buffet and plated meals.

"We also take requests of new food options," Gauthier says. "If you don't see something on our menu, we can work with you on that."

All the catered food is made in-house, but the Heritage Centre recently partnered with Marquise Hospitality, a Canadian-based culinary and hospitality service. The collaboration has allowed the kitchen to tap into Marquise's years of experience, which is important when you're producing 200,000 meals per year.

Perhaps part of the facility's allure is the fact that the event centre offers a variety of settings: a banquet hall holding 350 guests or a timberframe atrium that holds around 130. Because they are connected, the centre can cater to larger events by utilizing both spaces at once.

Another virtue, of course, is the fact that they are all-inclusive. They've always catered to those looking for the whole package—chef-inspired meals, décor for any occasion, bartenders, and a fully stocked bar to make hosting an event seamless and stress-free.

Because of the community's support, the campus is likewise glad to give back. For example, one of their favourite nonprofits to support is the Niverville Nighthawks.

"Supporting the Nighthawks provides us the opportunity to give back to them as they support the Niverville Heritage Centre in many ways," says Gauthier. "Hockey goes beyond the ice, and the Nighthawks have certainly demonstrated that to our community."



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## IN BRIEF

## Joy Smith Foundation Hosts Annual Fundraiser

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

The Joy Smith Foundation, soon to be headquartered in Niverville, is getting ready to launch its annual fundraising gala aimed at exposing the ugly reality of human trafficking.

On March 12, the Illuminate Hope Gala will be held at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

Janet Campbell, CEO of the Joy Smith Foundation, says that the museum is an appropriate venue, as Joy Smith herself played a role in opening the museum more than a decade ago. A current display tells the story of how Smith paved the way to make human trafficking a punishable offence in Canada.

This year, Meagan Walker will take the podium as the gala's keynote speaker.

Walker has been advocating to end human trafficking since the 1990s. Based in London, Ontario, she served as director of the London Abused Women's Centre.

"She grew that agency so that the many girls who were impacted by human trafficking were supported," Campbell says. "She really understands the link between human trafficking and violence toward women."

Walker was also a key resource for Joy Smith during her years in provincial and federal politics.

Today, Walker works on the police service board. She's been a recipient of

some well-deserved awards, including the Governor General's Award and the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee medal.

The gala will provide a night of inspiration with entertainment by a youth choir, Metis jiggers, and Indigenous hoop dancers. An art exhibit will bring an opportunity to meet the artists and bid on their pieces.

At least some of the funds raised will be allocated towards the next chapter of the Joy Smith Foundation story: a teaching campus to be constructed on a rural property near Niverville.

"The campus will be a game-changer in the effort for this fight in Canada. There are many systemic barriers that get in the way of [our work] and the campus will really start to bring those pieces together."

The campus will be a place for education for people of every stripe.

It will also be a place for survivor support. When survivors gain their freedom, Campbell says it often takes everything they've got just to figure out how to go on.

That's where counselling, therapy, and foundation's resources come in.

"Many of the services that survivors access now are fragmented," Campbell adds. "We want the campus to support survivors without that financial burden on them."

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For gala tickets or to learn more, visit [www.joysmithfoundation.com](http://www.joysmithfoundation.com).

# Niverville's Craig Tomlinson to Run for PC Nomination in Springfield-Ritchot

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

Niverville's Craig Tomlinson is throwing his hat into the ring to represent the PC party in the Springfield-Ritchot riding, a provincial seat currently held by Ron Schuler.

With 18 months to go before the next election, it would seem early for candidates like Tomlinson to announce their candidacy. Still, he says, if the NDP government calls an early election, the PCs needs to be ready.

"It's just smart for the party to have somebody in place because you don't want to be scrambling last minute," says Tomlinson. "And it will be nice for the candidate to learn from Ron because he's got 26 years of experience. You're filling big shoes here."

Tomlinson is no stranger to the political arena. For the past five years he's served as chief of staff for Ted Falk, Member of Parliament for Provencher.

This experience, along with his recently acquired master's degree in political science, puts him in a seemingly strong position to understand what he's stepping into.

As chief of staff, he oversees all of Falk's administrative duties, lays the groundwork for events and appearances, and fills in at functions when Falk is in Ottawa.

"I talk to a lot of people on behalf of Mr. Falk and I try to find solutions," Tomlinson says. "I also ran his campaign for two elections. I oversee his budget, his advertising, and his social media."



Craig Tomlinson (far right) with his family.

© C/O CRAIG TOMLINSON

the Canadian military to begin flight training.

"I got my wings in 2002 where I was posted to the 427 Special Operation squadron," he says. "I worked with our Canadian Joint Task Force 2, American special forces, and some foreign ones too."

Eventually he moved to Saskatchewan to instruct pilots in combat aircraft, transports, and military helicopters. After two decades, he completed his military career in Manitoba. "After I got out of the military, we could have moved anywhere in the country. I've visited all ten provinces and the territories, and we chose to stay in Manitoba. It's a hidden gem for young families."

Over the next few years Tomlinson piloted for a major airline and then worked for a U.S. defence company. When

Ted Falk offered him the position of chief of staff, he jumped on it.

Now, with his family settled in Niverville, he's excited to invest in the region through strong political representation.

There are big issues facing this region, he says, including an AI data centre proposed for Île-des-Chênes. Important as water and energy resources are, he shares the concerns of many locals who are urging their government toward due diligence before approving a business which draws so heavily on natural resources.

For the province as a whole, he says that concerns about ensuring adequate electrical power is imperative.

"A lot of people think Manitoba has an unlimited amount of hydro electricity. We don't. I know of companies that were waiting three years [for hydro hookup] and, economically speaking, if you're trying to invest in this riding and you can't get hydro, we need to figure out a solution to that."

Of course, like other parents, cost of living is also top of mind for Tomlinson. He worries how the next generation of young adults will manage if the province doesn't step up.

"People making \$75,000 a year are taxed more in this province than they are in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. Why is that? Let's put more money back in their pocket."

Unless an early election is called, the province will go to the polls on October 5, 2027.

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# St. Adolphe Resident Seeks PC Nomination for Springfield-Ritchot

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

Since MLA Ron Schuler announced his resignation in late December of last year, a St. Adolphe resident has decided to enter the race to succeed him as the next representative in the Legislature for Springfield-Ritchot.

Adam McAllister will seek the Progressive Conservative nomination.

At this stage, the next provincial election is scheduled for October 5, 2027, giving him plenty of time to organize his campaign strategy.

McAllister lives in St. Adolphe with his wife Melissa and their two young children. He works as a consultant in the engineering and manufacturing industry and holds a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering.

"Springfield-Ritchot is an incredible riding with a strong agricultural foundation, vibrant rural communities, and a growing entrepreneurial spirit," says McAllister in a press release. "Ron Schuler leaves behind an extraordinary legacy of service and principled leadership. I'm humbled by the opportunity to put my name forward and



Adam McAllister and his family.

ADAM MCALLISTER

work to serve this community with the same level of care, competence, and character."

If elected, McAllister says he'll continue to provide Springfield-Ritchot with "competent, hard-working, and approachable representation" that reflects the conservative values held by the party and many residents in his riding.

McAllister witnessed much political activism growing up in Steinbach. He remembers going door-to-door with his father, listening as he campaigned for the PC candidate of the day.

"I've always been kind of

interested and involved [in politics] on the side," McAllister says. "I went door-to-door in various federal and provincial elections with my dad. Coming out of high school, [I was] on the constituency association board for Vic Toews and then, soon after that, Ted Falk. I was also on Kelvin Goertzen's board."

Apart from his investment in career and family, McAllister has been actively involved in the church, supporting youth initiatives and serving on grassroots committees.

As a young family man, he sees what his peers face in

terms of housing challenges and economic uncertainty. At the same time, he believes healthcare, transportation, flood protection, and senior care are important to everyone in the region.

"Our community needs leadership that understands both the pressures facing younger individuals and families today and the importance of maintaining reliable services for those who have helped build these communities," McAllister says. "That requires responsible, disciplined government focused on long-term prosperity."

Announcing his intention to run a full 18 months before the next election should help McAllister prepare for his first official foray into politics. He says he'll be ready in case Premier Wab Kinew decides to call an early election.

In November, Kinew hinted at such a possibility if the PC party continued to "play games" while the NDP worked to pass a law to detain intoxicated people for longer periods.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about Adam McAllister and his campaign, visit: [www.adammcallister.ca](http://www.adammcallister.ca)

### IN BRIEF

## Wastewater Plant Construction Contract Awarded

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

As of February 4, the contract to construct an intermunicipal wastewater treatment plant has been awarded to Aecon Group Inc. The plant will be located in Ritchot, just north of Niverville.

The oversight board for the project is the Red-Seine-Rat Wastewater Cooperative (RSRWC) Ltd., comprised of shared leadership from Niverville and the RMs of Ritchot, Tache, and Hanover. Recently, La Broquerie and De Salaberry joined.

According to the RSRWC, this contract covers the first phase of the project, including the plant itself.

Eventually, the addition of approximately 90 kilometres of effluent pipeline and new lift and pump stations will complete the project, connecting all municipalities.

"I am pleased to see this next significant step taken towards the completion of our wastewater treatment facility," says RSR board chair Jim Funk. "With the construction contract

awarded, I look forward to breaking ground for this project and the benefits it will bring to RSR's member communities."

The approximate 13 communities within the participating region are currently reliant on lagoon systems.

This wastewater treatment plant is said to provide a much more sustainable and forward-thinking approach to wastewater management going forward.

It will not only service existing homes and businesses but provide additional capacity for at least 17,400 new housing starts across the region. Construction of the project is expected to provide around 3,400 jobs.

As of September 2025, an engineer estimated the project at \$235 million. Various levels of government have kicked in funding for the project, leaving around \$12 million to come out of taxpayers' wallets.

Both Niverville and Ritchot will roll out sewer rate increases over the next three years to cover their municipal portion, beginning in 2026.

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# Ritchot Residents Worry Over Data Centre Ramifications

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

It's been two months since *The Citizen* published the news that a major AI data centre is being proposed for Île-des-Chênes (IDC).

In the newspaper's monthly poll in January, we posed the following question: "Are you concerned about the size, scale and energy and water usage of the proposed data centre in Île-des-Chênes?"

This question garnered more public feedback than any other in the paper's ten-year history, and a clear consensus prevailed: there is no room for industry like this in IDC.

A small minority did point to its potential economic benefit.

Since the story first broke in mid-December, a group of IDC homeowners have banded together in the hopes of snuffing the data centre flicker before it grows to become a flame.

For this group, composed mostly of homeowners bordering the property, the data centre poses more than a threat to their homes and community. They say that it reeks of "city ties" while destroying "country skies."

## FAMILY LAND

The 350-acre parcel of land lies to IDC's north, bordered by Mondor Road to the north, Arnould Road to the east, Highway 405 to the south, and Swerdyliak Road to the west. The section contains seven residential properties.

The site map published by Jet.AI, one of the data centre's corporate ownership groups, draws neat lines around these private properties, making the section look like a puzzle with

a few pieces missing.

Chris and Mona Hardie and Matt Howard own two of these properties.

Immediately outside the section lies approximately a dozen other residential properties. Mona's brother Gilles Hogue owns one. Christie Little owns another. A third is owned by André and Rhonda Hudon.

Mona and Gilles have a history with this land that goes back nearly three generations. The siblings' maternal grandparents, the D'Auteuils, were responsible for donating much of the land on which IDC currently sits. It includes greenspace now known as D'Auteuil Park.

Their paternal grandparents, the Hogues, owned land north of IDC, including that on which Mona and Gilles now live and part of the acreage being proposed for the data centre.

"This land has been in our family for a long time," Mona says. "We have very deep roots here and I take that seriously. We want to continue that for our next generation."

Grandfather Hogue eventually sold 240 acres of the land to his two sons, one of whom was the father of Mona and Gilles. After the siblings claimed their stakes, the father eventually sold his portion to an outside buyer.

The remaining 120 acres still belong to the family of their deceased uncle.

There is a third title on the 350 acres, although they are unsure who currently owns it.

At this stage, with little information available, it's unclear how close the data centre's ownership group is to assuming title of the three parcels of connected land.

This kind of industry,



Mona Hardie, Chris Hardie, and Gilles Hogue stand next to photos of their ancestors who owned local land. **BRENDA SAWATZKY**

though, is certainly not what they believe their forefathers had in mind. Likely, their grandparents anticipated that IDC's residential neighbourhoods would continue to grow northward.

That's certainly what Gilles had in mind when he tried to subdivide his large acreage into a series of roadside residential lots bordering Mondor. He was confident there were others, like him, who'd love to live on large multi-acre properties south of Winnipeg.

For all his attempts, though, he was told by previous RM councils that it would never happen in his lifetime. The land was zoned for agricultural purposes and that's how they wanted it to stay.

And thus, the land here has remained steadfastly agricultural. It provides stunning vistas of golden wheat and vibrant sunflowers, thanks to the farmer who rents it.

Over the years, the bucolic setting has attracted other residents, like the Hudons, Littles, and Howards.

"I have no plans to move," says Matt Howard. "I'm here for the long haul. We moved here because we didn't think there'd be anything around us. Maybe residential eventually, but never an AI data centre."

Now, with the potential for an industrial building large enough to accommodate "hyperscale tenants," of which Microsoft and Google would qualify, these locals foresee problems.

Christie Little is one of them. As a real estate agent, she says that she'd absolutely have to disclose the potential risk to prospective buyers if one of her clients wanted to buy one of these properties. They would have a legal right to know about the potential changes ahead.

## MORE THAN A "NOT IN MY BACKYARD" ISSUE

All the residents interviewed by *The Citizen* agree that their concerns go far beyond the development of land in their literal backyard. If such a project were to be approved, they say, it would affect IDC as a whole, not to mention the region, province, and country.

Rhonda Hudon is a veterinary technician by trade. She raises a cow, chickens, ducks, sheep, and bees on her acreage at the corner of Mondor and Arnould.

"My worst fear was when [the farmers] would spray the field and my cow was in the backyard," Rhonda says. "That's the only thing I had to

worry about."

Animal lover that she is, she worries not only for her own livestock but for the future of Wildlife Haven, a rehabilitation centre existing just south of the proposed data centre. Could light pollution, noise pollution, and resource consumption from the data centre affect them negatively? She believes it would.

Her husband André is focused on the environmental impacts.

"[A data centre] consumes so many resources—electricity and natural gas, water, and land," he says. "We're taking away good farmland when there's a cry in the world for more food. The emissions [it] will give off alone are greater than [that of] the city of Winnipeg in a year. If the federal government wants to hold me accountable for the stuff that I put back into the environment, why can't I hold them accountable?"

Little agrees with him. "Those AI data centres have huge impacts," Christie says. "Almost all of the universities have done studies on the impacts and none of it is good."

Some of those impacts were cited in *The Citizen's* December article, based on historical data collected from other AI data centres around the world.

Jet.AI's promotional materials suggest that six turbines will be necessary to run the data centre as proposed.

For Chris Hardie and others, this will likely result in a constant audible drone that is disruptive to humans and animals on both a physical and mental level.

The centre also promises to be a drain on the region's natural resources, they say. Already IDC deals with regular

power outages. Adding the power needs of a massive industry will only exacerbate the problem unless Manitoba Hydro first commits to improving local infrastructure on a major scale.

Probably of greatest concern, though, is the immense strain that a data centre could put on one of the region's most essential resources—water.

According to Water Security News Wire (WSNW), AI data centres are water guzzlers and the risks they pose to humanity are still being widely ignored.

WSNWS contends that some regions surrounding existing data centres already experience increased water scarcity. Studies have shown that a small one-megawatt data centre can use up to 26 million litres of water per year. This equates to the same average consumption of 62 American families.

"The international community lacks a clear understanding of data centers' impacts on water resources," reads a report from WSNW, "as there are no uniform regulatory requirements for data center operators to track and report their water use."

For Gilles, who's lived in the area his entire life, the story of big industry pushing its way into residential communities isn't new. He saw it before when the TransCanada Corporation, known today as TC Energy, built their natural-gas transmission and distribution station on IDC's north end.

It took a lawsuit from a local resident, Gilles says, for the company to put mufflers on their system in order to buffer off-gassing noise that sounded like fighter jets over the community.

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smell that occasionally drifts over from the plant, the group adds.

For Gilles, it's once burned, twice shy.

"That big Goliath should have never been built [so close to a community]," says Gilles. "Same with this [data centre]."

And that's exactly why the group of residents means to educate the public on the hazards of the data centre proposal, in the hopes of stopping it before it grows legs. Once these big companies put down roots, they say, they won't be uprooted.

"Put it in an industrial area where there's a bunch of buildings already," Christie says. "Or go even further up north where agricultural land is not as sustainable."

**MAYOR EWEN RESPONDS**

Over the past weeks, the group has been sending emails to politicians at all levels, as well as Manitoba Hydro. So far the responses they've received have been vague at best, suggesting that there's little to comment on until Jet.AI begins a formal process.

Since then, however, Ritchot Mayor Chris Ewen has responded to a variety of the concerns expressed.

Like the others, Ewen acknowledges that he knows very little about the data centre proposal.

Back in October 2025, he was approached by data centre reps who came to inquire about land in the area. They provided few details and no drawn-up plans for such a facility.

Ewen says that part of the 350 acres of land they have their eyes on was rezoned years ago in order to accommodate a cryptocurrency mining company that wanted to build there. The company never followed through with their plans.

Apart from that small section, Ewen says that council has never entertained any other industry with designs on this area.

"It's never been a part of Ritchot's plan to develop this land, residentially,

commercially, or industrially," Ewen says. "Our council's [mandate], during the last nine years, has always been to protect agricultural land."

Even now, he puts little stock in the data centre inquiry. On a monthly basis, he says, he receives phone calls from franchises and corporations inquiring about locating in Ritchot. In the majority of those cases, it ends there.

"I could lie to you and say that this is a priority for me, but it's not, because it hasn't come to us yet," Ewen says. "Once it comes to council, then it becomes a priority."

When and if this proposal does come to council down the road, members of council would evaluate it according to a number of criteria.

First and foremost, Ewen says, they will look at the effect the business could pose in terms of land use and nearby residents. As well, they will question its employment potential, economic benefits, and environmental impacts.

Most projects of this magnitude, he says, take many years to go from the proposal to completion stage.

For now, Ewen recommends that residents do their own due diligence if they're concerned about the data centre's potential.

If the proposal comes to a public hearing in the future, he adds that council will be looking for residents to come forward with fact-based evidence. He points out that council has been swayed in the past by large numbers of residents who stand opposed to a project.

**BOTTOM OF THE HIERARCHY**

Even with Ewen's reassurances, the group still wonders just how much power Ritchot's council will have at the end of the day.

In Canada, municipal governments are accountable to provincial governments and they, in turn, are accountable to the feds.

In the past year, both higher levels of government have publicly stated their intent to help pave the way for the AI

industry in Canada.

To do so, the federal government developed the Canadian AI Compute Strategy, which will provide \$2 billion in funding to help mobilize private sector investment and help construct public super-computing infrastructure.

Premier Wab Kinew was equally vocal about his government's endorsement of the creation of local data storage infrastructure initiatives. The goal, he said, is to make Manitobans less reliant on U.S.-based tech giants like Google and Microsoft.

The IDC homeowners take little comfort in this. The corporate group looking at the IDC location, Convergence Compute, is owned in part by Jet.AI, a Nevada-based company.

Based on a public announcement to investors last summer, Jet.AI says that the IDC proposal is already garnering interest from hyperscale tenants who are looking to produce AI-related services on a massive scale.

For Mona Hardie, saying yes to this company would be akin to selling out to U.S. interests. If endorsed by the province, she feels it would fly in the face of Kinew's major selling points.

Mike Winston, founder and CEO of Jet.AI, has spoken with great optimism for the two data centres his company hopes to construct in Canada, including one on the east coast and one in IDC.

"Overall, we're encouraged by the progress and believe the odds of success for both projects have now moved in our favour," said Winston in a 2025 public release.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

<sup>1</sup> "AI Data Centers Threaten Global Water Security," Water Security News Wire, December 23, 2024 (<https://watersecuritynewswire.com/treatment-security/2024/12/23/ai-data-centers-threaten-global-water-security>).

To read the original story, visit: <https://nivervillecitizen.com/news/local/major-ai-data-centre-proposed-ile-des-chenes>



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# Ritchot Fire Department Calls Remain Steady in 2025

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

According to Ritchot fire chief Scott Weir, emergency calls in 2025 were pretty consistent with prior years. In total, 144 calls were received last year as compared to 147 in 2024.

While the majority of the calls were alarm-related, 49 of them were connected to motor vehicle accidents. In two cases, the fire team required the use of their extrication equipment.

Five calls came in for mutual aid services from surrounding municipalities. For Ritchot's fire department, the wildfires of 2025 gave members an added opportunity to flex some muscle around the province.

As for fires in Ritchot, Weir

says there were no incidents of exceptional loss.

"We had six structure fires," Weir says. "[Those included] a few garage and shed fires. Nothing that I'd call suspicious in nature."

As is typical, he says many of the calls that came in were false alarms for both fire and carbon monoxide detection. This is a pretty normal day in the life of a fire attendant.

If the call comes in for a rural property, response time generally varies from 10 to 15 minutes. Less, if it's urban.

"In most cases, we're getting to the hall in five or six minutes and then, if it's in town, it's at the 10- or 11-minute mark."

Between the municipality's three fire halls—in Île-des-Chênes, St. Adolphe, and Ste. Agathe—the fire crew

numbers almost 60 members. A couple of those were hired in 2025.

"We could use a few people in Île-des-Chênes," says Weir. "We have a full roster in St. Adolphe, and maybe we could use one or two people in Ste. Agathe. But we are pretty full, all things considered, so we're in pretty good shape."

About ten percent of the fire team does the same job on a full-time basis somewhere outside the municipality. And about ten percent of the frontline fire team are women.

Every second Wednesday, with the exception of July and August, the team performs drills to keep their training up to standard and their response times quick.

With the addition of

some new equipment in recent years, the fire team had no big expenditures to report in 2025.

"We're all very fortunate in this municipality that we have good equipment and we're all very well-trained."

While they were called volunteer firefighters in the

recent past, today the more accurate term is paid on-call. That means they receive a stipend from the RM for every service call they attend and every training hour they put in.

"Council is very supportive of the fire department," Weir says.

To continue keeping their

numbers at a reasonable rate throughout 2026, Weir encourages Ritchot residents to continue the work of maintaining their smoke alarms and checking their fire extinguishers.

As well, he adds, stay on top of those family fire drills, practicing them at least once per year.

## HSD Restricts Students' Nighttime Internet Access

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

The start of a new semester is as good a time as any to encourage new student habits.

In that vein, the Hanover School Division has instituted a new policy this month designed to help senior students develop better sleep routines.

As of February 3, local students will no longer have internet access from their school-issued Chromebooks between the hours of midnight and 6:00 a.m.

"We recognize this change will not solve everything, but it does reinforce an important message: school-issued devices are intended for school use," says Marlin Adrian, the school division's assistant superintendent. "The nighttime restriction supports parents by reinforcing the importance of healthy sleep

routines and balanced technology use."

Access to offline features of the Chromebook will still be available to students round the clock.

School-issued Chromebooks have been a tool in HSD's toolbox for the better part of a decade.

Every student from Grades Nine to Twelve is granted one, courtesy of the division. It's been an effective way for the division to support learning both in the classroom and at home.

"It is a key part of the senior years learning experience and helps ensure equity for students by providing consistent access to the same technology," Adrian says. "Having a school-issued device supports collaboration between students on shared projects, helps students stay caught up when they miss school through online classroom tools, and provides equitable access to

learning resources, research, and coursework outside of school hours."

The recently instituted nighttime policy isn't the only internet restriction imposed on the Chromebook, though.

From the start, the device is set up with a built-in internet filtering program called GoGuardian which cannot be bypassed or removed by the student and applies wherever internet connection can be made.

As well, the division lays out expectations for responsible use for both the student and their family.

"Families are free to make their own choices about personal devices, but [at night] school-issued Chromebooks will not be used for general internet browsing," Adrian says. "Ultimately, this is about supporting student well-being and helping students arrive at school rested, focused, and ready to learn."

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# Sports & Recreation

## Local Youth Ready to Compete at Manitoba Games

By Holly Dunphy

The Winter Olympics have come to a close, but several local youth athletes are preparing for their own moment on the big stage at the upcoming Manitoba Games.

Held every two years and alternating between summer and winter competitions, the Games will take place in Thompson from March 1–7. More than 1,500 competitors from across Manitoba will take part, including more than 150 athletes representing Team South in 12 sports.

While Thompson will be bustling with competitors, families, coaches, and volunteers, many of these athletes' stories began close to home, on backyard rinks and in local recreation centres.

For 12-year-old Carter Sawatzky, goalie for the Eastman Selects AA team, that journey began in Timbits at age four. After a few seasons with the Niverville Clippers, he had the opportunity to try net and the position quickly proved to be the right fit.

"He started off as a player," says his mom Leanne. "I wasn't sure if hockey was going to stick. That was, until he got his turn in net."

Sawatzky quickly found his rhythm as a goaltender, earning the confidence of his coaches and gaining valuable experience. In the first game of the season against the Kenora Thistles, he faced 41 shots and allowed only one goal. He attributes this success to staying mentally locked in.

"Before a game I get really focused," says Sawatzky. "I play my game and if I let in a goal, I don't get discouraged. I just stay focused and keep playing, just keep going no matter what happens."

Aside from the intense competition, Sawatzky looks forward to the



▣ CARTER SAWATZKY



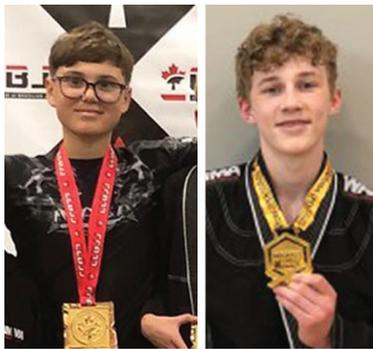
▣ SAVANAH BUZAN



▣ KENZIE CANTLON



▣ LILYANNE REUTER



▣ BENJAMIN REUTER AND NOAH FAST



▣ RYAN UNRAU

full Manitoba Games environment.

"I'm excited to have this experience with my friends," says Sawatzky. "And to sleep in a school. I also think the eight-hour bus ride will be fun."

In the coming months, he will play for the Pilot Mound Buffaloes AAA team. He has also been selected to compete in the all-star game on March 28, which also happens to be his thirteenth birthday.

Thirteen-year-old Kenzie Cantlon shares a similar enthusiasm for both the Manitoba Games and the atmosphere that surrounds it.

Having first learned to skate on a frozen pond at three years old, Cantlon has spent years building her hockey skills, balancing hard work

with enjoyment along the way.

"You have to work hard," says Cantlon. "Put in the time and effort and everything else will come to you."

Cantlon is especially looking forward to the opportunity to experience an Olympic-style village alongside her teammates.

In ringette, the excitement carries a similar energy. For 12-year-old Savannah Buzan, a ringette player with the Eastman Heat A, the Manitoba Games brings together many of the things she loves most about her sport.

"I love the competitiveness in ringette," says Buzan. "The friendships you make along the way and travelling to compete in tournaments."

Her favourite memories extend

beyond the minutes played on the ice. One in particular stands out: her first plane ride for a trip to Calgary to compete in the Esso ringette tournament, an opportunity she'll never forget and one that she credits in part to the support of her coaches.

"I am proud of my coaches for pushing me along the way to make me stronger," she adds.

Looking ahead at the Manitoba Games in particular, Buzan welcomes the competition.

"I am most excited to represent Team South and compete against other top athletes. I can't wait to put on our team clothing and walk with my team in opening ceremonies."

Beyond the ice, Team South will

also be well represented on the mat, as four local athletes prepare to compete in wrestling.

Following strong performances at a jujitsu tournament in Saskatchewan in October 2025, and at a WAMMA-hosted tournament in Niverville in December, Noah Fast, Lilyanne Reuter, and Benjamin Reuter secured their qualification for the Games, alongside 13-year-old Ryan Unrau.

Benjamin Reuter shared that the competition presents both challenge and opportunity.

"I think it's going to be hard because I know there are some good wrestlers that I'm going to have to go against," Benjamin says. "But I feel like I've been training well and know what I'm going to do, even though I'm in the younger half of the competitors."

Having his dad, Jens Reuter, as his coach has given him more confidence going into the competition. Jens believes that his son's strength lies in his persistence.

"Ben is a very good ground wrestler," says Jens. "He can pin people from anywhere. He's shown that no matter what the score is, he keeps going."

Lilyanne Reuter, who has competed at this level before, is equally excited about the opportunity, noting that she is familiar with many of the competitors.

"I'm excited. I think it's going to be a great event," she says. "I may have to wrestle against one of my training partners in Winnipeg, so that's really cool."

For families at home, the Manitoba Games represent more than medals. The Games reflect years of early morning practices, commitment, resilience, and the pride of watching local youth earn their place on a provincial stage.



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# Panthers Roaring: Niverville High School Team Making Noise in WHSHL

By Bill Burfoot

It's a great time to be a hockey fan in Niverville. While the Niverville Night-hawks continue to dominate in the MJHL, another Niverville squad has been quietly building something special of their own.

The Niverville Panthers, in just their second season of existence, have surged to the top of the Winnipeg High School Hockey League standings, finishing first in the Price Division with a stellar 21-2-0-1 record, two points ahead of rival Lorette and three ahead of Warren.

Last season, the Panthers finished with a strong 15-9-0 record and won their first round playoff series against Windsor Park before falling to Lorette in the best-of-three quarterfinal.

This season, they've not only raised the bar but also expectations, and they've been doing so with confidence, depth, and a clear sense of who they are as a team.

At the helm is head coach Brandon Lockerby, who also serves as the school's physical education teacher. A former University of Manitoba Bisons player with four years of U-Sports experience, not to mention 150 games in the Western Hockey League, Lockerby has been part of highly successful programs and understands what it takes to win.

He's seen those same qualities emerge in his group this year and attributes much of the team's success to a strong returning core from its inaugural season.

"For us, we've had a lot of returning



The Niverville Panthers have completed their regular season with a stellar 21-2-0-1 record.

BY BILL BURFOOT

players, so I think we had a foundation from last season and have been able to build off that," says Lockerby. "The new players integrated themselves well, combined with some early-season success which helped."

That early success? A ten-game winning streak to open the season. After a narrow 2-1 overtime loss to Warren snapped the streak, the Panthers responded the only way they knew how—by winning 11 straight.

The only blemish down the stretch came in the final two games of the regular season, both against second-place rival Lorette.

But Lockerby believes those losses may prove valuable.

"Sometimes when you're on a run like we've been on this season, you need a bit of a humbling to remember the feeling after a loss," he says. "It's a reminder that you can't take a night off and expect to walk out of the arena with a victory."

One of the most impressive aspects of Niverville's season has been their offensive depth. Six players averaged more than a point per game and 11 players surpassed the 20-point mark. No one line carries the load singlehandedly. Everyone

contributes.

"The success this season has certainly been by committee," Lockerby says. "It takes everyone to contribute, and we've had a lot of that."

The balanced attack has made the Panthers difficult to defend and even harder to shut down, a dangerous formula entering playoff hockey.

The energy inside the rink has matched the performance on the ice. Niverville High School Principal Paul Grosskopf says that the support from students and families has been just as meaningful as the wins.

"Seeing our stands filled, hearing

the energy in the building, and watching students rally around their peers is exactly what we hope for."

Lockerby echoes that sentiment, noting that the early start times allow classmates to walk over after school and support their friends.

He believes the program's impact stretches far beyond wins and losses.

"Not only is the product and the hockey important, but it's also about building characteristics and qualities to make them great people—not only now, but for the future too."

Grosskopf agrees. "It creates shared experiences, pride, and connection across grades and friend groups. When students show up for one another, it strengthens belonging and reinforces that we are part of something bigger than ourselves."

The Panthers now await word on whether they'll represent the A/AA Division at the Provincial Championships, set for February 26-28 in Carberry. If they qualify, it will be a whirlwind stretch—a first-round playoff series followed immediately by Provincials.

But regardless of what happens next, Lockerby knows that this group has already built something lasting.

"They may not realize it yet, but when they get a little older they'll understand they've built relationships that will last the rest of their lives."

In a town already buzzing with hockey success, the Panthers have ensured one thing: the future of hockey in Niverville is in very good hands.

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▣ BRENDA SAWATZKY

# New Parks and Greenspace Planned for Niverville

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

On February 17, Niverville’s council addressed the matter of adding new parks and greenspace in the coming years.

The topic arose during a discussion with developer Len Peters of Sunset Estates, who was seeking a rezoning approval for Highlands West.

In the coming months, Peters says, residents of the existing Highlands development will see the start of construction of a play park on the north side of Balgownie Drive, a new street that runs parallel to Crown Valley on the southernmost end of the development.

“In between the pond and Balgownie, there’s four or five acres,” Peters says. “There’s a fairly large play structure that we’re putting in there.”

On the west side of Krahn Road, a ten-acre parcel has

been set aside for a potential future school. Should the province follow through with plans to construct a school here, Peters says that the community would automatically benefit from greenspace and play structures that typically accompany schools.

As Highlands West begins development, Peters adds that there will be a few more pocket playgrounds scattered throughout.

Plans are also in the works for a new project called Grant Park.

Located on the southwest side of Niverville, with access from Krahn Road, Grant Park will consist of ten acres fully protected by mature trees.

The property was once the homestead of the Grants, a well-respected farming family with ties to Niverville going back one hundred years.

Sheila Grant was the last of the siblings to reside on the property. Before she passed, she donated the parcel to the

town of Niverville, to be used as greenspace for residents to enjoy.

“Based on a conversation with her sister, they were honoured to have their name on this land as a memory to their family,” says Mayor Myron Dyck.

As council entertains ideas for the park’s features, it is certain that the space will remain as natural as possible. It won’t be a place for typical play structures and swing sets. The park will feature groomed walking trails and benches.

“There are people that would love to see a butterfly garden to attract pollinators,” says Dyck. “There are people that would like to see an area where they could do yoga in the park. So would there be a platform for that? We could do that. Whether there’ll be something to show historical significance, that is yet to be determined.”

In the meantime, council welcomes suggestions.

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# Nighthawks Maintain Top Spot

By Bill Burfoot

As the postseason approaches, the Nighthawks remain atop the MJHL standings, although the gap has closed somewhat over the last month.

## JANUARY 27 PORTAGE TERRIERS, AWAY

This showdown between the Nighthawks and Terriers was destined to be tight—and through the first 50 minutes, it lived up to the billing.

The opening period was a defensive chess match, with neither team giving much space.

The pace picked up early in the second. Niverville dominated the shot clock but couldn't score.

In the third, Dawson Zeller won a puck battle along the right wall and sent a backhand feed to Loik Leduc. The rebound then kicked right back to Zeller, who buried it.

Tyler Bernier then found Ryken Arran on the left side, and the speedy forward carried the puck into the zone before slipping a backhand pass to John Scott, who moved in and scored.

The Nighthawks put the game away 53 seconds later. Wheddon won a footrace to the puck in the Portage corner and found Merik Boles in the right circle, who slid a pass across the crease to Marlen Edwards. Edwards finished from the top of the blue paint.

## JANUARY 30 WINNIPEG BLUES, AWAY

With this win, the Nighthawks became the first team in the MJHL to clinch a postseason berth.

The opening period was evenly played, but the Blues struck first when William Marceus absorbed a hit along the right-side boards, recovered, and caught Niverville goaltender Ben Chornomydz off-guard.

Niverville tied the game in the final seconds of the period thanks to Evan Panzer. After being taken down at the top of the crease, he took a rebound and slipped it past goaltender Justin Perreault with nine seconds remaining.

Midway through the second, the Nighthawks capitalized again.



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Panzer found Calyb Moore near the goal line, and Moore redirected the puck from a sharp angle for the goal.

Niverville added another counter late in the period on a beautifully executed passing play. Edwards carried the puck into the zone and dropped it to Wheddon, who fed Parker Carrier. Carrier froze the defence with a shot fake before sliding a pass back to Edwards, who redirected the puck in.

The Nighthawks put the game away midway through the third. Edwards started the rush once again, sending the puck to Boles on the right wing. Boles entered the zone and delivered a perfect saucer pass across the ice to a streaking Wheddon, who sent it back across the crease to Edwards. Edwards tucked the puck past Perreault's outstretched glove.

Niverville capped the scoring late on a great individual effort from Boles, who chipped the puck past a defender at the blue line, drove deep into the zone, and slid a pass across to Wheddon, who recorded his third point of the night.

## FEBRUARY 1 DAUPHIN KINGS, AWAY

After a scoreless first period, Niverville opened just over a minute into the second period on the power play.

Wheddon found Edwards at the top of the crease, and Edwards buried the chance past Hunter Bauer.

Dauphin found itself in penalty trouble and Edwards struck again. After some beautiful puck movement, Krestanowich sent the puck low to Boles, who one-timed a pass into the slot, where Edwards unloaded a one-timer that beat Bauer under the glove.

Less than a minute later, Nighthawks struck again. Zeller's pass from behind the net found Leduc just on top of the crease. Leduc went to his backhand, slipping the puck past Bauer.

Late in the period, the Nighthawks were awarded their sixth power play and made it count. All five skaters touched the puck, but Wheddon finished the play at the side of the crease to push the lead.

The Kings' discipline issues carried into the third period, giving Niverville a full two-minute five-on-three advantage.

Once again, Edwards made them pay, completing his hat trick.

Dauphin broke through late in the game during their own five-on-three. With under eight minutes remaining, Ty Pratte, having broken his stick moments earlier, grabbed a new stick from the bench, moved into the right circle, and snapped a

shot blocker side to beat Dubinsky, the only blemish on an otherwise strong night for the Nighthawks.

## FEBRUARY 3 WINNIPEG MONARCHS, AWAY

With no scoring in the first period, the Nighthawks cracked the deadlock early in the second. The Monarchs were hemmed in their own zone when Panzer slid a perfect pass across the crease to Rolston, who beat Dylan McFadyen to give Niverville a 1-0 lead.

Edwards then carried the puck down the left wing and found Boles in the slot. Boles buried the chance to double the advantage.

Niverville added another late in the frame when Carrier sent a hard cross-ice feed to Scott at the side of the crease. Scott was stopped twice by McFadyen but stayed with the play and eventually knocked home the rebound.

It has been said that a 3-0 lead is the most dangerous lead in hockey, and that was true in this case.

After a defensive zone faceoff win, Mason Munday moved the puck up to Alt, whose shot was stopped by Dubinsky, but Andre Cho pounced on the rebound to make it 3-1.

Moments later, the Nighthawks gave up their second three-on-one

of the period and Alt scored, narrowing the lead.

Wheddon got things back on track in the third, sending the puck down low to Boles, who circled the net and returned the feed to Wheddon at the top of the crease. Wheddon's quick release beat McFadyen to restore Niverville's two-goal lead.

Just 11 seconds later, Zeller retrieved a dump-in and found Kole Mears, whose shot was stopped, but the puck trickled into the crease where Leduc knocked it home.

With the floodgates open, Rolston collected his second goal of the night from inside the crease.

Scott continued his big night by snapping a shot past McFadyen.

The Monarchs got one back on the power play when Alt's shot from the left circle eluded Dubinsky, but the response was immediate. Niverville capitalized on a power play of their own as Edwards tipped in an Krestanowich shot.

## FEBRUARY 6 WINKLER FLYERS, AWAY

The Nighthawks-Flyers rivalry delivered in a big way.

The Flyers fed off the home crowd, opening the scoring fast on the power play. Tanner George buried his first of two goals on the night to make it 1-0.

Winkler doubled the lead seven minutes later when Joshua Ingram beat Dubinsky.

The Flyers appeared poised to carry a 2-0 advantage into the intermission, but Wheddon had other ideas, cutting to the net from the corner and scoring a beautiful goal with under two minutes remaining.

The Nighthawks drew even early in the second when Zeller notched his first of two on the evening.

Midway through the second, Winkler responded with a pair of goals just 46 seconds apart. Riley Fequet pounced on a loose puck in front, followed quickly by an Aiden Jacobson strike.

Niverville pushed back when Arran ripped a shot past Liam Ernst to make it 4-3 and give the Nighthawks life, but the Flyers' leading scorer Nik Gudmundson restored the two-goal lead seconds later.

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Early in the third, Leduc created space and fired a shot that was stopped by Ernst, but the rebound bounced right back to him and Leduc sent a quick pass to a waiting Zeller, who fired home his second of the night.

Moments later, Niverville had a prime chance to tie it on the power play, but Winkler's penalty kill held firm. Immediately after the kill, George struck again, forcing a turnover at the Flyers' blue line, breaking in alone, and beating Dubinsky to make it 6-4.

Still, the Nighthawks wouldn't go away. Wheddon drove the puck into the zone and dropped it to Carrier, who wired home a goal.

That was as close as they got.

With Dubinsky pulled, Charles Bernier sealed the win with an empty-netter.

Despite the loss, the game marked a milestone behind the Niverville bench: head coach Dwight Hirst coached his one hundredth career game in the MJHL.

#### FEBRUARY 7 VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS, HOME

The opening period saw Niverville battle through penalty trouble, surrendering three consecutive power play opportunities. Chornomydz and the penalty kill rose to the occasion.

Both goaltenders shone in a tight second period as the teams traded chances with no result.

The deadlock was broken with just under nine minutes remaining in the third. A turnover at the Virden blue line turned costly for Niverville, as Brooks Siemens sprung Tyson Ulmer on a breakaway. Ulmer lifted a backhand over Chornomydz's glove for what proved to be the game-winning goal.

"Games like last night and games like tonight, when the skill dries up the habits show themselves, and it's been pretty bad for the last two or three games for us," said Hirst. "It's something that the guys are going through, and most teams go through this during a season."

Despite the frustration, Hirst believed the setback could ultimately benefit the group.

#### FEBRUARY 11 WINNIPEG BLUES, HOME

After dropping back-to-back games for the first time this season, the Nighthawks responded in emphatic fashion.

Just 25 seconds in, Edwards

spotted Wheddon alone in the slot and the MJHL's leading scorer buried his twenty-fifth of the season.

Carrier doubled the lead late in the first, jumping into the rush and finishing off a feed from Arran.

Midway through the second period, Zeller pushed the Nighthawks' lead to 3-0, converting a pass from Mears into an open net.

Niverville struck again when Konecni took a feed from Moore in the right circle and made it count.

"It's good to see Jase get his first of the year," said Hirst. "I think anyone who knows our team knows the importance he brings as far as defending and being hard to play against."

In the third, the Blues spoiled Dubinsky's shutout bid on a goal by Shea Chornley, but Niverville had four goals of its own in the final frame to seal the win.

"It was a game of ups and downs for us tonight, with glimpses of what I like to see, and glimpses of things I didn't like," said Hirst.

#### FEBRUARY 13 STEINBACH PISTONS, AWAY

In this marquee matchup, the sixth and final regular season meeting of these clubs, the Pistons broke through first. Liam Doyle sent a puck toward the crease, looking for a streaking Sam Noad. Noad appeared to have bumped Chornomydz after he made the initial stop, but play continued and Jackson Kostjuk buried the loose puck from the top of the crease.

Niverville responded on the power play just two minutes later. Wheddon notched his twenty-seventh of the season after Jayden Mah set him up in the slot, beating Chris Quizi blocker side to tie the game.

Steinbach regained the lead early in the second. After Niverville failed to clear the zone, Rory Gilmore found Connor Paronuzzi at the right faceoff dot and made his one-timer.

The turning point came midway through the frame while the Nighthawks were on the power play. Ryan McDonald and Cole Cairns broke away shorthanded on a two-on-one. After a quick give-and-go, McDonald tapped home the return pass to extend the Pistons' lead.

The netminders then took over.

With under two minutes remaining, Niverville executed a perfectly drawn-up play off a timeout. Boles won the offensive zone faceoff, after which Edwards gathered the puck and ripped a wrist shot glove side

to cut the deficit.

Niverville's final opportunity came with 28 seconds left, when Noad was assessed a delay-of-game penalty. Off the ensuing faceoff, Cairns broke free toward the empty net and was taken down by Krestanowich while attempting to shoot.

#### FEBRUARY 14 NEEPAWA TITANS, HOME

On Valentine's Day, the Nighthawks and Titans met for the fourth and final time this season.

The opening frame had plenty of physical play, but no goals.

The second period began with end-to-end action. Early, Zeller forced a turnover in the offensive zone and the puck found Panzer in the slot. Panzer blasted a slapshot past Burleigh for the goal.

A minute later, Mah threw a heavy hit near the boards on Cooper Kasprick, who crashed awkwardly into the wall and remained down for several moments before being taken to the dressing room. Mah was given a five-minute major for boarding and a game misconduct.

The Titans capitalized. Keenan Skrupa tied the game on a tap-in after a perfect cross-crease feed from Kyle Weisgarber.

Jacob Faith then snapped home a shot from the top of the left circle to give Neepawa the lead.

The Titans struck again on a power play when Owen Durigan's point shot, which was stopped by Dubinsky, saw the rebound fall to Logan Paquette at the top of the crease who slid it under Dubinsky.

With 19 seconds remaining in the period, Skrupa cashed in on a rebound after another setup from Weisgarber.

Neepawa looked to put the game out of reach when they added to their total seven minutes into the final frame. Jack Clark carried the puck down the right side and snapped a shot past Chornomydz, who had replaced Dubinsky.

Wheddon then sparked life into the building. After Konecni's shot missed the net, Wheddon banked the puck in from behind the goal line off Burleigh.

With 2:19 remaining, Max Dowse, playing his first game back from injury, ripped a blocker-side shot from the right circle for his first goal of the season.

Only 32 seconds later, Boles blasted home a Wheddon feed to pull Niverville within one, igniting

the close to 700 fans in the building.

The comeback bid nearly gained another opportunity when Weisgarber was assessed a cross-checking penalty with 39 seconds left, giving the Nighthawks a late power play.

However, they couldn't find the equalizer before time expired.

#### FEBRUARY 16 SELKIRK STEELERS, HOME

The Nighthawks looked like a team returning to form. They opened the scoring when Boles carried the puck around a defender and fed Wheddon in the slot. Wheddon buried the chance.

After a scrum in front of the Nighthawks bench, the puck was sent back to the Steelers' Jules Delapouille, who moved into the slot and snapped a shot glove-side on Dubinsky to tie the game.

Two minutes later, Ayden Collins took a cross-ice feed from Carter Haney, moved into the right circle, and ripped a shot past Dubinsky.

Panzer tied the game two minutes into the second, finishing a slick setup from Leduc at the side of the crease. Seventeen seconds later, Panzer became the setup man, digging the puck free and sliding a cross-crease pass to Zeller, who tapped home the go-ahead goal.

Selkirk answered shortly after, as Wyatt Witham converted on a two-on-one to knot the game at 3-3.

Panzer restored the Nighthawks' lead after dropping a pass to Leduc. Panzer drifted into the right circle and hammered home a one-timer.

Wheddon struck just over a minute into the third, finishing a feed from behind the net for his thirtieth goal of the season.

Leduc then dazzled with another magical stickhandling display, something Niverville fans have gotten used to this season, going coast-to-coast before splitting the defence, spinning around, and sliding a pass to Panzer at the side of the crease, completing his hat trick.

Shortly after, Krestanowich snapped home another goal.

Mears rounded out the scoring with a late power-play marker.

"It was good to get back in the win column here and just get back to the habits, and I thought our third period is more of what we've been doing for the majority of the season," said Hirst.

#### FEBRUARY 20 SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDERS, AWAY

Both teams tested the waters early, but the goaltenders prevailed and neither side broke through.

The first goal, and eventual game-winner, came just over five minutes into the second period. Carrier fired a wrist shot from the point that found its way into the Stampeders' net.

The middle frame was defined by special teams, with the Nighthawks' penalty kill standing tall through four Swan Valley power plays.

The special teams battle continued in the third. Niverville earned three power plays in the first half but was unable to convert.

Dubinsky delivered perhaps his biggest save of the night when Dylan Ruff beat his defender at the blue line and drove hard to the net, but Dubinsky shut the door.

With two minutes left, the Nighthawks got some breathing room. After a Swan Valley turnover, Boles kicked in a rebound to make it 2-0.

#### FEBRUARY 21 NORTHERN MANITOBA BLIZZARD, AWAY

On paper, it was a matchup between the top team in the MJHL and the last-place club in the West Division. But games aren't decided on paper.

After a scoreless first period, Niverville controlled the second. The breakthrough came on Niverville's twenty-eighth shot. Krestanowich fired a puck toward the net that was redirected by Panzer, giving the Nighthawks a lead.

In the second, the Blizzard capitalized on one of their few opportunities. John Adlyss let a shot go from the point that was stopped, but the rebound bounced back to him in the slot and Adlyss buried it glove side to tie the game.

After drawing consecutive penalties, the Nighthawks cashed in on the second power play. Wheddon created space in the slot before ripping a shot glove-side to restore the lead.

The Blizzard refused to go away. With under two minutes remaining, Dylan Westmann carried the puck into the Niverville zone and snapped a shot past Chornomydz.

Just 33 seconds into the extra frame, Krestanowich started, and finished, the play that led to the overtime winner. After sending the puck up to Zeller at the blue line, he joined the rush, received the return pass, and ripped a wrist shot under the bar to seal the win.



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# NHS Student Launches School's First Lacrosse Team

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

When one door closes, sometimes the accompanying window can't open until someone builds it. Niverville High School (NHS) student Antonio DaPalma is a builder of such proverbial windows.

With no club volleyball to close out his senior year of high school, DaPalma decided to introduce the student body to field lacrosse.

"I have grown up playing volleyball, and that's been my sport ever since Grade Seven or Eight," DaPalma says. "But unfortunately, this year, my [club] couldn't put a team together."

The high school volleyball season is brief, however, leading DaPalma to fill the rest of his free time playing with the Providence Junior Pilots. That team played in Winnipeg and Brandon and, over the past three years, competed at the national level in Edmonton.

"We were already sad that this was going to be his last year [playing club volleyball]," says DaPalma's mom, Ashley. "He had no idea the team would fold, but they only had five boys."

Not wanting to waste precious time feeling sorry for himself, DaPalma began to explore the idea of learning a whole new sport.

"I'm a very spontaneous person and I'm always willing to learn new things," he says. "I had lacrosse in my mind because I've watched it and found it interesting. I figured



Antonio DaPalma.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

there's no better time to try a new sport than now, because I have nothing better to do."

For many Canadians, lacrosse isn't well known despite it being recognized as Canada's national summer sport. Its origins trace back to the Indigenous peoples and today it's recognized worldwide.

DaPalma believed others might share his desire to learn the sport, so he set out to build a team. Within no time, he had garnered the interest of at least 22 students from across all grade levels, including one female.

A few of them had already been playing for the Southman Saints Lacrosse Club in Ste. Agathe. Indeed, the Southman Saints agreed to loan their equipment to the NHS startup team for its first year.

Next, DaPalma and his mother set out to find a coach.

They found him living in Niverville and ready to step into the role, assuming a team could be approved.

It was now time to pitch the idea to the school's principal, Paul Grosskopf.

"When students come to me with an idea, I will never say no," says Grosskopf. "I will listen to them first. We want to build community and culture, and this is a prime example of students doing just that."

With a full gym schedule and little funding to support more equipment, it isn't an easy sell to request a whole new sports program.

But something tipped the scales in DaPalma's favour, according to Grosskopf: the project was completely student-initiated. DaPalma had done all the legwork to prove the idea had merit.

There was only one more box left to check. The

prospective team now had to join a league.

In mid-February, the Niverville High School lacrosse team was welcomed as the newest member of the Manitoba High School Field Lacrosse League.

Play will officially run from April to June, giving the local squad only two months to learn the game and practice teamwork.

Games will take place at Winnipeg's Shaughnessy Park.

Though field lacrosse is an outdoor sport, the team will need to practice in the school gym until the weather changes. They began on Tuesday, February 10, with an introduction to the sport for students and their parents.

Once buy-in is confirmed, Ashley hopes to start fundraising for jerseys and registration costs to ease the burden for players to join. As for personal protective gear, hockey equipment translates over to lacrosse pretty well.

With graduation just around the corner, DaPalma's participation with the team will be brief. Still, he hopes the enthusiasm demonstrated by students this year will translate into long-term adoption.

"If I can start something that lasts for years in the school, then I'm completely happy with that," DaPalma says. "I didn't want to have a team of just seniors where, next year, if this program continues, they have nobody to play."

As for learning a whole new sport in time for the upcoming season, DaPalma says he's up for the challenge.



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# Arts & Culture

## NHS Artists Showcase Talent, Identity, and Voice at Annual Art Show

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

To look into the soul of an artist, gaze upon their art. On January 29, 30 Niverville High School (NHS) students from Tony Clark's Grade 12 art class put their souls on canvas for the world to see, with inspiring and thought-provoking results.

Clark has been teaching art for the better part of two decades. Every year since NHS opened, the graduating class has been showcasing their work through a public art show. Clark says that the event was inspired by the school's first principal, Kimberley Funk.

"This night is such a big night because it's an authentic audience," Clark says. "It's an amazing experience for them. They did all the PR, all the snacks, and all the setup. I'm just here for moral support."

With this much free rein, the students pulled out all the stops, inviting political leaders, media, professional artists, family, and peers. Each student had five pieces on display.

Their mediums varied, depending on their interests and passions, from painting to sculpting, pottery to mixed media, and quite literally anything that felt like a creative outlet.

While Clark's job is to encourage skill-building and creativity, he says that he loves to watch for emerging patterns in each student's art and help them recognize what their inner voice may be telling them.

"You think what you're doing is just a random, but this is what came out of your heart over and over again," Clark would tell his students. "This is what you're interested in and you really want to talk about."

To Clark, art is a dialogue. It not only tells the artist's story but



Sarina Jafari, senior at Niverville High School.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

evokes a story in the beholder.

In the end, these two stories may not be the same, but the art itself opens a door to mutual dialogue, something that feels lacking in the bigger world right now.

He encourages freedom of expression but reminds his students to practice provocative imagery with caution, always keeping the viewer in mind.

To challenge themselves, each Grade 12 student was expected to try their hand at mural painting, using a four-by-eight-foot plywood sheet as their canvass. These completed pieces will find a long-term home on the exterior of the Centennial Arena for all to see.

### SARINA JAFARI

Sarina Jafari has only been in Manitoba for six months. Jafari, her moth-

er, and siblings lived the last eight years in India, having escaped Afghanistan when the Taliban took over.

It was in India where Jafari learned English and developed her artistic creativity.

While her favourite medium is charcoal, for the plywood mural project she put her skills to work on acrylics for the first time. The result is a piece she calls "Buzkashi," depicting Afghani horsemen in pursuit of a goat. It's a popular sport in her home country, she says, and one that women and girls weren't free to participate in, or even watch.

Another is called "Evolution." This is an abstract piece done in monochromatic tones of charcoal. It's a self-portrait, she says.

"An Afghan girl faces a lot of restrictions from the Taliban," says

Jafari. "They are not allowed to laugh loudly or go out without a male. They're not allowed to get an education. I feel like they're trying to erase women from society. So I see this girl as getting erased, but she is trying to put her identity back together. I see a fighter in this one."

Following graduation, Jafari plans to attend the University of Manitoba to pursue a degree in medicine. She'll continue to use art as a way to express herself.

### JAELE LUNDY

Jaele Lundy comes by her gift naturally. Her mother is an artist as well as a couple of her siblings. Her favourite medium is paint.

Together with fellow student Londyne Enns, Lundy pitched the idea of painting Indigenous art on the four pillars that line the NHS

foyer.

Both Lundy and Enns come from an Oji-Cree background. Their fathers were Sixties Scoop survivors.

"We wanted to bring the voice of Indigenous students into the school," Lundy says. "We wanted something big and bold and based on the seven teachings of our culture."

The seven teachings, they explain, are humility, honesty, courage, wisdom, love, truth, and bravery. At the same time, through artistic imagery, the duo incorporated the four guiding questions as posed by former senator and Truth and Reconciliation leader Murray Sinclair: "Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why am I here? Who am I?"

"We wanted it to be not just for Indigenous students but something that everyone could relate to," Lundy says. "The seven teachings of life can [resonate] with anyone. Also, it's not just for the present but something that will still matter in the future."

### LUKA PROCIW

Luka Prociw is a graphic novel designer and digital artist. His mural display was his first foray into acrylic painting.

"This is a piece I made based on my own thoughts and feelings of suicide," Prociw says. "The angel inside of the noose is supposed to [represent] that feeling of coaxing, that urge to harm yourself."

Prociw lost his mother a few years back and admits to struggling with suicidal ideations and self-harm in past years. For Prociw, art has become the healing outlet that's helped him move through his dark places to find peace.

Following graduation, he hopes to pursue a degree in animation at a college in Ontario.

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