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LOCAL NEWS

Understanding Snow Routes and Parking Bans

■ Where can we park during the winter? As the snow-clearing season kicks off, it's important to familiarize ourselves with the rules.

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LOCAL NEWS

Showing Gratitude for Emergency Workers

■ This month, *The Citizen* interviews locals who have had a front-row seat to the demanding and absolutely essential work done by those who show up in a crisis.

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The Benefits of Eating Pizza

■ After four years, Daniel Dacombe is bringing his mental health column to a close. He ends by addressing perhaps the biggest questions of all.

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New Sitcom Explores Cultural Collision

■ A new locally produced TV comedy, *Maria and the Menos*, puts Mennonite and Filipino culture in its crosshairs.

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Can Manitobans Expect a Break on Grocery Prices in 2024?

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DEPOSITPHOTOS

Niverville Council Defends Take One, Leave One Library Model

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
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At least one Niverville resident is not happy with town council's decision to keep library funding to a minimum over the next few years. And given public questions over the lack of a community library in recent years, she's likely not alone.

Bonita Garrett of Niverville is a semi-retired church pastor. When news surfaced about council's intent to fill the community library void with a "take one, leave one" model in the coming year, Garrett had words for council.

"I read the suggestion of a 'take one, leave one' library and, as a taxpayer, I'm furious," Garrett told them in an email. "[It] feels like a copout... and a complete failure to commit to library services."

Garrett and her family are well-versed in the important role that a library plays in the educational well-being of a community.

Her grandfather helped create a public library in Killarney back in the 1950s when he served as mayor.

Her husband Stephen has worked as a librarian for almost 27 years, first at the Louis Riel Library in Winnipeg and, more recently, at

Fort Garry Library. Stephen's step-mother was employed as head of the provincial library systems until her retirement.

Garrett has earned two master's degrees, and she says libraries were formative in her education.

"We moved here with an understanding that a very committed group of citizens had done the necessary groundwork for a library," Garrett continued in the email. "Many years later, and with a substantial increase in the population, nothing has changed. It is incredibly disheartening and disappointing that the town council seems unable to recognize the value a library brings to a community."

For Garrett, and many other public library users, access to books is only a small part of what a library provides.

In recent decades, libraries have become purveyors of literacy programming for all ages. They offer safe public spaces for book clubs and special interest groups to gather.

Libraries also provide new immigrants with opportunities to learn the language and seniors a chance to spend time in quiet public settings alongside those of all other ages.

Among the resources of a library

are ebooks, audiobooks, electronic devices, internet access, and databases for research.

In Garrett's mind, the lack of a public library in Niverville is the result of years of council members who just don't understand the important role they play.

Instead, she says, councils have focused on recreation programming, as seen in the CRRRC.

"The town has built a physical literacy centre and now it's time to build the educational literacy centre to prepare children, youth, and adults for the future," Garrett says.

BIG TICKET ITEMS

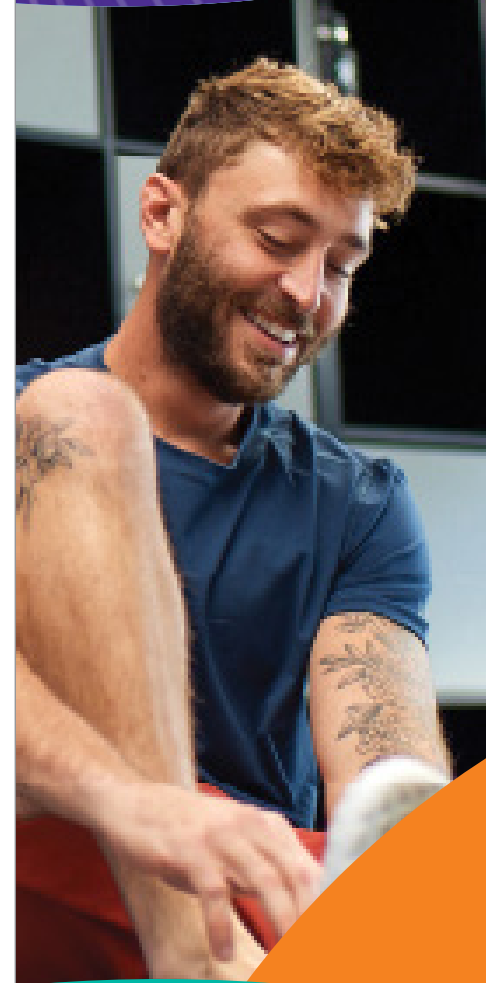
First and foremost, Mayor Myron Dyck says, the community needs to understand that council's idea of a "take one, leave one" library has little connection to the small Little Free Library boxes residents occasionally install at the front of their properties.

Instead, he says, council's version will be housed inside a comfortable indoor space. The location, though, has yet to be determined.

In the new year, council will assign the task of researching the best library option to the Niverville Recreation and Wellness team.

(continued on page 5)

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January 25th - Chamber 101 Info Session
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(continued from page 3)

It's a natural fit for this department since they already organize a host of arts and culture events for kids, including Neighbourhood Storytime at the CRRC.

"A primary goal of council and staff is to provide the residents of Niverville with ever expanding opportunities in the resource, wellness, and recreation realm," Dyck says. "This, combined with a goal of being fiscally responsible, says that council is looking to start small and envisions a multi-use and consistent space with a defined schedule."

Having recently engaged in fiscal planning for the upcoming year, council isn't shy about stating their mission to practice great responsibility over the next three years of their term.

In this case, it means paying down debt in order to prevent saddling the next council, whoever they may be, with a massive debt load.

The most obvious example of this is the \$3.4 million still owing on the CRRC. In the coming years, council hopes to double down on their payments to help make that happen.

"The CRRC was a \$20 million project with a segment to be paid by other levels of government, some through municipal taxes, and the rest through donations," says Dyck. "With the COVID years and now inflation and higher

interest rates, the donation amounts have not come in to pay down this debt as was planned. Thus, this is being paid through general taxes collected each year and will take a little bit longer to pay down than was planned."

Dyck says it's also important to note that, sometimes, it's the kind of exponential growth that Niverville's experiencing that actually stalls some services in order to make room

operate pretty lean and have a higher debt load than some other communities."

Also weighing heavily on council's mind these days is the costs that will soon be incurred by a new RCMP office and the need to expand Niverville's fire and emergency services building as well as the facility used by the operations department.

So, in short, council's not saying no to an eventual full-

and comfortable space to not just exchange books but also where patrons will want to stay and study or read," says Dyck. "To date, many books have been donated to the town and part of the plan would be to roll out a model by which more book donations could be made. Book lending will be on an honour system for now. Residents can come and leave a book they have read or wish to donate and take one which they would essentially own until such time as they wish to return it."

Conversely, he adds, the prospect of collaborating with the Hanover School Division to provide public library services out of the Niverville High School library is not off the table.

Council had the unique opportunity to meet with the HSD board this fall to engage in dialogue about further building upon the relationship between the division and the community.

Dyck says that scenarios were presented which would see an exchange of public library services for the added use of CRRC amenities for high school students.

"We've had these discussions before," Dyck says. "But, for whatever reason, we just never receive any traction from them on that."

He encourages residents to petition their local HSD trustees to help further this conversation.

"This concept is trying to take advantage of present programming and space we already have at the CRRC with the goal to try to find an underutilized, inviting, and comfortable space to not just exchange books but also where patrons will want to stay and study or read."

Myron Dyck | Niverville Mayor

for others.

Bearing the weight of the title of fifth fastest growing community in all of Canada means trying to make sure local infrastructure keep up with housing starts.

"Communities that are stagnant or growing slowly have decades go by between having to upgrade a water treatment plant, wastewater treatment plant, more roads, and so on," Dyck adds. "Niverville does not. Because of this high rate of growth, we

sized library. They're just saying it won't happen right now.

In the meantime, finding the most cost-effective means to provide some library services is the goal.

Dyck hopes that the "take one, leave one" model can help bridge that gap for the time being.

"This concept is trying to take advantage of present programming and space we already have at the CRRC with the goal to try to find an underutilized, inviting,

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CITIZEN POLL

Is a "take one, leave one" library a good interim option for Niverville until town council opts to budget for a full public library down the road?

- Yes. It will help the town gauge interest in a library before going all-in on the investment.
- No. This type of library won't meet people's needs, since it cannot offer a full range of books and resources.

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

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LAST MONTH'S RESULTS:

Should the government criminalize specific vape products, such as flavoured liquids, due to their potential allure to young people?

Yes. If it could help to curb the incidence of vaping among youth, then criminalization seems like a good tool.
66%

No. We live in a free market and the government should not penalize consumers for a problem recognized in a specific demographic.
34%

YOUR COMMENTS:

I was a menthol smoker up until the government banned menthol to curb young smokers. I then started vaping not only for cost but, menthol is available. I can only vape one brand otherwise I suffer headaches. Why should I be penalized as an adult with limited options? I should not have to suffer the consequences of the government when young people will still find ways around it.

Yes. It is unconscionable that they are targeting youth with addictive products that are harmful to their health.

If we don't protect kids, who will?



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The new MMIWG2S license plates.

MANITOBA PUBLIC INSURANCE

New Manitoba License Plates to Support MMIWG2S

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Manitoba drivers now have one more option to choose when getting a license plate. At a cost of \$70, the sale of these new plates will help support families of the MMIWG2S (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirited) community.

From each plate sale, \$30 will be donated to Winnipeg-based Ka Ni Kanichihk, an Indigenous-led charity that provides prevention and intervention programs to help families and individuals of all ages heal from trauma, find success in life, and become leaders themselves.

They also provide education and job skills training and mentorship. Proceeds from the licence plate sales will primarily support education costs for students from MMIWG2S families.

The announcement of the new plates, which are available at any Autopac agent, was made on December 8 by Bernadette Smith, Minister of Housing, Addictions and Homelessness, and Justice Minister Matt Wiebe, the minister responsible for Manitoba Public Insurance (MPI).

"I introduced the bill to create this special licence plate on behalf of MMIWG2S families as it is very close to my heart and has impacted my own family deeply," said Smith in

a press release. "We wanted to make sure other Manitobans recognized the significant impact of the reality we face. Ka Ni Kanichihk has incredible programs that support families who have been impacted by the loss of missing and murdered loved ones. Supporting education is a priority for these families and for me. This will truly make a difference in our community."

Smith introduced the bill earlier this year and on May 30 it received royal assent in the Legislature after garnering unanimous support from all the parties.

There are two designs. One includes a red handprint and the other features a red dress. They were chosen, in part, based on consultations with MMIWG2S family members. Both have become nationally recognized symbols which incite people to resist violence against women and gender-diverse individuals.

"The pain and grief of the families of missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people is felt every day across our province," said Wiebe. "These specialty plates are just one small way Manitobans can show solidarity and contribute to an important cause."

According to an RCMP report, nearly 1,200 Indigenous women and girls were murdered or went missing between 1980 and 2012.

In September 2016, the

federal government launched a national inquiry to investigate the cause. Three years later, the MMIWG National Inquiry released their final report, finding that the murders and disappearances were largely the result of "persistent and deliberate human and Indigenous rights violations and abuses."

The REDress project began with Métis artist Jaime Black. Her goal was to draw public attention in an artistic way to the gendered and racialized nature of violent crimes meted out against Indigenous women in Canada.

Red, she says, is a sacred colour in many cultures. The fact that the dress is empty, she adds, is symbolic of the person who is no longer with us.

Dodie Jordaan, the executive director of Ka Ni Kanichihk, is grateful for the license plate initiative and believes the proceeds will go a long way to healing within the Indigenous culture.

"Together we drive change, honouring the lives of the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQ+ while supporting survivors and communities on the path to healing and justice," Jordaan said in the press release.

According to Wiebe, the license plates have the potential to raise around \$180,000 for Ka Ni Kanichihk by the spring of next year if all 6,000 plates are purchased by then.

Niverville's Winter Snow Routes and Parking Bans

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Every year, the first snowfall of significance results in a little confusion as to which streets qualify as designated snow routes and when parking bans may be enforced.

Every municipality creates its own snow-clearing bylaws and it's important to note that those bylaws may be amended from year to year.

Thus, everyone should make a point of informing themselves about the rules well before the first snow event occurs.

DESIGNATED SNOW ROUTES

In most communities, certain streets are designated as snow routes. These usually include the main arterial streets passing through a community. They take first priority for clearing after a snow event, enabling traffic to quickly resume their usual flow.

In Niverville, the snow routes include 16 streets or partial streets and one back lane. The town's website lists these streets and provides a map for further clarity.

According to CAO Eric King, all the designated snow routes have permanent signs erected along them.

From November 1 through May 1, Niverville's designated snow routes are subject to parking restrictions in order to keep these main arteries open for snow clearing when needed.

Drivers are discouraged from parking their vehicles on a designated snow route between the hours of 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., every day of the week. Vehicles or trailers parked on these are at risk of being ticketed or towed at the owner's expense.

"The town's intent is not to actively enforce no parking when there is no snow," says Mayor Myron Dyck. "However, residents who choose to park on the designated snow route do this at their own risk, as the cleaning of the [these] streets remains at the discretion of the town and enforcement of the parking regulations will be enacted as needed."

WINTER PARKING BANS

The remainder of Niverville's streets, which are not designated snow routes, fall under the street parking ban bylaw when it comes to snow-clearing.

On these streets, the town reserves the right to create short-notice



In Niverville, snow routes are marked with special signage.

© BRENDA SAWATZKY

parking bans during the same 12-hour timeframe.

Notices regarding street parking bans will be posted on the town's website or their Facebook page by noon the day prior to the ban being implemented. Residents are strongly encouraged to check these sites during a snow event to determine whether their street will be affected.

Residents should also be aware that parking bans can be implemented for snow-hauling as well. This could occur after snow-clearing efforts are already completed.

In Niverville, graders and ploughs are required to pile the snow somewhere until such a time as it can be picked up and hauled away. Before a development plan is approved by council, the developer must provide proof that snow storage areas will be created in each neighbourhood.

On a cul-de-sac, for instance, snow is intended to be collected in the bulb area. On Landsbury, for example, a hammerhead section of the street provides passage for snow clearing equipment to access a greenspace designated by the developer for snow storage.

SNOW-CLEARING EFFORTS

According to Dyck, council's snow-clearing bylaws reflect their desire to clear snow in a way that allows for vehicles to pass through as

quickly and efficiently as possible. The method of snow-clearing should also demonstrate financial responsibility of taxpayer dollars.

In years past, Dyck says that the town experimented with nighttime clearing in an attempt to provide the least inconvenience for drivers.

Unfortunately, complaints were received regarding the noise created by snow-clearing equipment. Now the earliest start is around 5:00 a.m.

There may have also been a time when vehicles left on the street during a snow ban would not have been towed. Instead the grader would simply move around it.

But if the priority is to create safe passage for vehicles, it could be argued that the parked vehicle and resulting windrow narrows the street to such an extent that it creates a single lane for traffic going both ways, providing greater opportunity for accidents.

WINNIPEG'S POLICIES

As much as possible, the city of Winnipeg performs their snow-clearing during the nighttime hours.

There, designated snow routes are subject to a parking ban from November to April between the hours of 2:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m.

The city provides an app, called Know Your Zone, which residents can download. Alternatively, the

snow map can also be viewed online. Residents can call 311 to inquire about snow routes and snow-clearing.

Residents do have to be somewhat proactive in order to stay in the know. In Winnipeg, too, you risk a ticket and a tow if you don't stay abreast of what's happening.

Residential streets there are not guaranteed to be cleared as often as main arterial streets. Here, snow-clearing could take place during a day shift or night shift and residents are required to find alternative parking spots for their vehicles during that time.

New in 2023, the city has implemented a temporary suspension of snow route parking bans during the duration of a residential street parking ban. This means that residents can move their parked vehicles to a spot on a designated snow route while their street is being cleared, but only if the snow-clearing takes place during overnight hours.

It should be noted that residential streets in Winnipeg take third priority. In the event of a major snowfall that requires residential streets to be cleared, it could take days before ploughs hit those streets.

From that point, the city's bylaws allow for an additional five days for cleanup efforts to take place.

Of course, in a town the size of

Niverville, it's a rare event for any street to remain covered in snow more than a few days.

COULD COUNCIL DO BETTER?

While she prefers to remain anonymous, one Sheffield Way resident says that she only became aware that her street was a designated snow route when her neighbours asked for the use of her driveway for extra parking when their kids came to visit.

Later, she discovered that a neighbour received a ticket for parking on the street during parking ban hours.

"It is quite possible that it's just my bad for not knowing, but I'm on social media and not too bad with technology, and I simply don't recall anything being sent about it," she says. "I understand snow routes, but there is no reason to ban parking on the street 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. seven days a week. There has to be an app or something that can notify people when the ban is on. I'm not wanting to ask my neighbours if my kids can park there when they come for Christmas dinner. I don't need to park on the street, but my kids sure do when they come to visit."

The resident says that she only has room for two small mid-sized vehicles on her driveway. Many young families living on her street have multiple vehicles and regularly use the street for parking.

She'd like to see the town implement an app, similar to Winnipeg's, to make it less likely that residents will miss last-minute parking bans and risk a ticket and tow.

"I know not everyone has a cell phone, but even my 81-year-old dad has one, so I think that could work," she says. "I think there are plenty of resources from other towns and cities that [council could research to] find a better option."

Indeed, the RM of Ritchot has just such an app. It's called Ritchot Connect, and it is used to connect with residents anytime about announcements that need to be quickly relayed.

Once downloaded, the app allows residents to choose their preferred method of notification. They can be contacted by email, text message, phone call, or a combination.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To find details about Niverville's snow routes and parking bans, visit: www.wheretheyoubelong.ca

Residents Express Debt of Gratitude for Emergency Workers

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Whether they're firefighters, paramedics, emergency medical responders (EMR), surgeons, or emergency room nurses, Manitobans literally rely on them every single day of the year.

But until we experience our own health emergency, we may not fully appreciate their dedication, sacrifice, and call to duty.

For this article, *The Citizen* interviewed a cross section of Ritchot and Niverville residents who all share the same sentiment: a deep sense of gratitude for the medical heroes among us.



LUDOLF GROLLÉ

On November 18, Ludolf Grollé's heart stopped pumping—not once, but six times over the course of the night.

If not for the quick response of a string of on-call medical professionals, Ludolf can say with confidence that it would have been his last day alive.

Keith Bueckert, fire chief for Niverville Fire and Emergency Services, says that Ludolf's was one of 50 cardiac and shortness of breath calls his team has attended this year so far.

In total, Niverville's firefighters and EMS, at the time of this writing, had been dispatched to 226 medical calls since the year began. That's an average of 20 calls per month.

For Ludolf, that Saturday began much like any other. He and his wife Diane were headed downtown to pick up Chinese food. Diane was behind the wheel.

Diane says she was suddenly startled when Ludolf's body began to convulse. He's a practical joker, she says, so in the beginning she thought he was playing a cruel prank.

She pulled over and gave him a loving swat, making it clear to

him that she didn't find his antics amusing.

Ludolf had survived a heart attack 13 years prior and, for the better part of the last year, had been experiencing some shortness of breath.

Within seconds, Ludolf came to and had no recollection of what had just taken place. Diane turned around and took him back home to rest before heading out again to pick up supper.

She implored Ludolf to call Jason, their neighbour and friend, to keep him company until she returned. Begrudgingly, he complied.

Within moments of arriving, Jason called 911. A firefighter himself, he was familiar with the symptoms of cardiac failure.

Diane was only gone minutes when she returned to another shock.

"When I came home my house was full of neighbours, [EMR] and firefighters," Diane says. "They had Ludolf hooked up to some monitors and I could tell from his eyes that he wasn't well."

Within a brief time, emergency medical technicians [EMTs] arrived in an ambulance from St. Pierre-Jolys.

Ludolf remembers with fondness the care he received from the attending EMTs, Jenn and Colleen, and their ability to make astute judgments on the fly.

Ludolf's condition was serious, they determined, so they turned the ambulance in the direction of Winnipeg's top heart specialists at the St. Boniface Hospital.

Attached to a gurney and en route to Winnipeg, Ludolf's heart stopped again.

"I suddenly wake up and the [EMTs] have their masks off," says Ludolf. "The ambulance was stopped and they were saying, 'Are you with us? Are you with us?'"

Ludolf feels a sense of gratitude to the attending EMTs, who remained at his side for the next few hours as he reached the emergency room.

In the following hours, he was put through a barrage of tests and numerous visits by cardiologists. He was diagnosed with bradycardia, a dropping of the heart rate, and would need a pacemaker implant.

The average heart rate lands somewhere between 60 and 100, but Ludolf's was dropping below 30 at times.

Throughout that night, Ludolf's heart stopped another four times. Each time, he awoke to emergency staff pumping his chest to bring him back.



The aftermath of an accident on February 14, 2023 on Highway 210.

© SUZANNE LEPAGE

"I go to lie back and the next thing I know the orderlies are there and half the trauma team is all around me going, 'Wake up. Are you with us?' Then the cardiac guy comes down and he says, 'Looks like we're going to do the emergency surgery right now.'"

In the wee hours of the morning, a temporary pacemaker was installed. Ludolf was conscious throughout the procedure.

Since he had to be fully horizontal during the surgery, an electrical pulse was applied to his heart. He describes it as feeling like a meat mallet pounding his chest with constant and discomforting regularity.

Hours later, Ludolf underwent a second surgery to have a permanent pacemaker installed.

And 48 hours after his arrival, Ludolf was on his way home.

During that time, Ludolf says he was seen by no less than six cardiologists and a host of medical technicians.

From beginning to end, Ludolf and Diane felt the peace and assurance that comes from emergency attendants and staff who demonstrate kindness and professionalism amidst the urgency and chaos of life's

emergencies.

Both Diane and Ludolf can't fully express the heartfelt gratitude they feel toward everyone responsible for his survival. And they are grateful as well to live in a country with our healthcare system.

"It didn't cost me a penny," Ludolf says. "Thank the Lord for that!"

Diane still shakes her head in happy disbelief when she recalls the level of support they received during that experience, from the neighbour who came to stay with her dogs to the other neighbour who dropped everything to escort her to the St. Boniface emergency ward.

"It's overwhelming how much support we've had," Diane says. "From the wonderful neighbours and the emergency people to the hospital staff. It's just phenomenal."

As fire chief, Bueckert has seen endings that don't go as well as Ludolf and Diane's.

His advice, in all circumstances, is to never delay when symptoms arise, however mild.

"If you're not sure, make the call," Bueckert says. "Emergency services can attend. And if they are not required, then they can leave. No

problem. EMS does not come from up the street in Niverville. EMS can come from anywhere in the south-east. Time does count, so don't delay with the call."

According to Bueckert, cardiac symptoms can include chest pain which may radiate outwards to the jaw, back, and arms. The pain can feel sharp, dull, or heavy.

Sufferers may also experience sweating, nausea and vomiting, lightheadedness, or have difficulty breathing.

EMILY SCOTT

It's been almost a year since Emily Scott experienced a trauma she hopes to never repeat.

Even so, she's thankful to this day for the rapid response of the local firefighters and EMTs.

Scott's young son was about nine months old when she decided to treat him to a little bit of peanut butter on his baby biscuit.

"Within a minute, he broke out into a rash around his mouth," Scott says. "The rash started to spread all over his face and he became quite red and his eyes puffy and watery. He got hives on his hands as the peanut

butter was all over them. I quickly washed him up and stripped his clothes off while my husband called 911."

Although it felt like an eternity, Scott says that the first firefighters arrived within about five minutes of the call. They did everything to ensure that the infant's condition was stable until the EMTs showed up in the ambulance.

Thankfully, the boy's body was already self-regulating for marked improvement by the time they reached the hospital.

"The medics who came to our home to look after our son did a great job," says Scott. "They checked his breathing, then gave us a rundown of how he seemed to be fine. But it was still vital to take him in to get checked to be safe. The medical staff [at the hospital] were all fantastic and the doctor prescribed an EpiPen for our son."

SUZANNE LEPAGE

On February 14, 2023, Suzanne Lepage was driving home from work in St. Norbert, headed east on Highway 210 towards the bridge that leads to her home in St. Adolphe.

Before she reached the bridge, though, Lepage's vehicle was struck head-on by a vehicle heading west. The driver had lost control when they hit a snowbank created by high winds on this stormy afternoon.

Lepage's vehicle was a complete write-off. Her battery was later located in a field nearby.

Two gentlemen immediately stopped to assess the scene. One directed traffic while the other climbed into the passenger side of the vehicle next to Lepage. It happened to be Christian Clavelle, president of the Winnipeg chapter of Canadian First-Aid Training Inc.

Clavelle kept her calm and talked her through the pain.

When she feared that her car was on fire, he told her that it was actually the scent of deployed air bags.

Ritchot firefighters arrived on scene in short order and put their extrication equipment to use to free Lepage from her vehicle.

"They couldn't get me out because both my legs were in pain and I had trouble breathing because all of my ribs on my right side and my sternum were fractured," says Lepage.

They took great precautions, she said, first cloaking her with warm blankets and then a tarp to keep flying debris away.

A firefighter in the back seat covered her left ear while the extrication saw worked nearby. The firefighter performing the extrication placed his own body between Lepage and the saw blade in order to protect her.

"If you're not sure, make the call. Emergency services can attend. And if they are not required, then they can leave. No problem... Time does count, so don't delay with the call."

Keith Bueckert | Niverville Fire Chief

Within the hour, Lepage was being whisked away by ambulance, in the midst of a winter storm, to the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg.

"I knew some of the [emergency medical responders], but in most cases these people are strangers," Lepage says of the firefighters who came to her aid. "They leave the comfort of their home, their families, and they drop everything they're doing to come and help a complete stranger in a time of trauma. I can't even explain how touching it is. These people are true heroes."

RAYA FRIESEN

In August 2023, nine-year-old Raya Friesen was doing what so many other adventurous kids do: climb-

ing a tree.

Unfortunately, she lost her grip and fell 12 feet to the ground, sustaining an open fracture to her elbow and another to her wrist.

Her mom, Jenn Trinkies, called 911 and EMTs arrived on site within seven minutes of the call.

"They were kind, empathetic, telling her jokes, and helping keep us calm," Trinkies says. "They were efficient in gathering information without being too overwhelming, and so supportive of us."

According to Trinkies, the EMTs determined that a STARS airlift would be the safest transport available. She was delivered to the HSC children's unit where she underwent a five-hour surgery.

Trinkies describes the Niver-

ville Fire and Emergency team as professional, efficient, and amazingly adept with kids.

As for the STARS crew, Trinkies just can't say enough.

"They greeted me in the parking lot and told me what they would do to keep her calm and comfortable during the flight," Trinkies says. "Apparently, they talked and joked with her the whole way, and gave her a VIP teddy bear in a STARS jumpsuit on the roof of the hospital. She was so excited to see it when she came out of surgery. Raya is waiting for her meeting with her STARS team now and is so excited to thank them."

IMMEASURABLE VALUE

While the Ritchot fire department does not have trained EMR on

staff, they are able to administer CPR and first aid when required and while waiting on paramedics to arrive.

This mostly occurs when responding to motor vehicle accidents.

"To date, we have responded to a grand total of 125 calls in 2023," says Ritchot deputy fire chief Paul Houle. "This is down a little from our average of 150 per year. Perhaps the mild winter weather has contributed to this by reducing the number of motor vehicle collisions we usually see through November and December."

Apart from firefighting, his team of volunteers have extricated people from vehicles and farm equipment, performed water rescues, confined space rescues, and faced many life-threatening situations.

They also help STARS air ambulance by establishing safe landing zones and provide lift assistance for patients into an ambulance when needed.

When asked just how valuable Ritchot's volunteer firefighters are to the municipality, Houle says it's almost too great to measure.

"Our men and women are very dedicated to serving their community," Houle says. "Like so many smaller communities across Canada, the services we provide would not be possible without our volunteers. RFD is also well supported by municipal council, which makes it possible for us to provide a broad range of emergency services. Volunteers are our backbone, but training and equipment do come at a cost."

Bueckert, too, can't say enough about Niverville's team of volunteer emergency service providers.

"Niverville emergency services work hard every day to provide service to our community," says Bueckert. "Our members are dedicated to helping our neighbours in time of need. I could not be prouder of our group."

IN BRIEF

Annexation Public Hearing Date Set for New Year

By **Brenda Sawatzky**

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Three days of public hearings have been scheduled by the Manitoba Municipal Board (MMB) to hear stakeholder feedback on Niverville's proposal to annex 2,600 acres.

From January 31 to February 2, MMB representatives will make themselves available at the CRRC.

In the weeks prior, the MMB will send out notices inviting stakeholders to make an appointment if they have concerns.

During the same time, the various governmental departments and others with a vested interest will be given an audience.

Mayor Myron Dyck says that this public hearing is being fully organized by the MMB and is not an initiative of town council.

"The Manitoba Municipal Board will be here and we're still waiting for the schedule on who's speaking when," Dyck says.

Niverville's council made the request to annex more land one year ago. The request comes as a result of an agreement between Niverville and the RM of Hanover, in whose jurisdiction the land in question now lies.

If approved by the province as proposed, Niverville would more than double in size, consuming a large, mostly agricultural swath of land from the town's existing east border all the way to Highway 59.



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Grocer Says Fuel Tax Freeze Won't Make Big Dent in Prices

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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True to their fall campaign pledge, the NDP have made good on their promise to apply a temporary freeze to the 14-cent per litre provincial fuel tax starting on January 1.

For Manitobans, this amounts to some significant savings at the pumps and on home heating bills. The tax freeze applies to gasoline, diesel, and natural gas.

At this point, the province has committed to seven months of tax savings, although they have reserved the option to extend the freeze if inflation remains high.

Addressing delegates of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM) at their fall convention in Brandon, Premier Wab Kinew said that his party intends to ensure that consumers see the results of the tax freeze reflected in their grocery store receipts as well.

"You've heard the big chains, the billionaires owning these big chains, talk about 'Oh, it's transportation costs that are the reason why grocery prices are going up,'" Kinew said. "Well, guess what? We're calling their bluff. Transportation costs will be reduced for the big grocery chains starting on January 1 and if they don't pass the savings to you, then we will take further action to follow up with that."

So far, Kinew has been unclear as to what that further action would entail.

At the same time, Kinew says he's taking a keen interest in steps being discussed at the federal level regarding the stabilization of skyrocketing grocery prices.

Earlier this year, NDP MP Alistair MacGregor introduced a motion in the House of Commons to adopt a grocers' code of conduct.

The CEOs of Canada's five major grocery chains have been called to roundtable sessions at Parliament to discuss its implementation. They



Your Grocery People in Niverville.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

include Galen Weston (Loblaws), Eric La Flèche (Metro), Michael Medline (Empire, Gonzalo Gebara (Walmart Canada), and Pierre Riel (Costco Wholesale Canada).

Some say that the code of conduct won't be effective unless all these companies sign on.

Others, like Galen Weston, say that certain clauses in the code will actually make matters worse for the consumer and, until it's rewritten, he won't sign on.

According to Centre for Future Work (CFFW), a Canadian research institute, while food inflation has slowed it still remains higher than overall inflation.

Public anger, CFFW claims, is directed at the major supermarket chains which dominate the sector.

"Supermarket executives claim they have not profited from food price inflation but have merely passed on to consumers the higher costs they pay for their own inputs and products," reads a report from the CFFW website. "Economic evidence refutes this claim. The latest industry-wide financial data on food retail, produced by Statistics Canada for the third quarter of 2023, shows that food retail profits have more than doubled since pre-pandemic norms, and profits continue to grow."¹

LOCAL GROCER TAKES PRAGMATIC STANCE

John Schmitke owns Your Grocery People (YGP) in Niverville. He says it's misleading for the provincial government to suggest that the 14-cent gas tax relief will result in significant savings to grocery bills, especially in light of the fact that only a small fraction of his costs involve local freight.

"I don't control the grocery industry," Schmitke says. "I just operate within it. And it's the same thing for all of Manitoba. We're such a small market in the bigger scheme of things. The grocery industry is an international business and a policy in Manitoba won't significantly affect most of it. Your bananas don't come from Manitoba. Your green onions and lettuce don't come from Manitoba. Your Kraft Dinner isn't manufactured in Manitoba."

For Schmitke and other Manitoba grocers, the most significant freight expenses by far are international, since groceries are brought in from all over the globe.

It's only the last leg of the shipping journey, on Manitoba soil, where tax savings can be realized.

According to Schmitke, Manitoba shipping costs amount to about one percent of his total cost of doing business.

One must also consider that only about a third of the cost of running a freight truck is related to purchasing fuel, he adds.

Based on these realities, Schmitke says that his customers may only benefit to the tune of 0.046 percent on their groceries. In dollars and cents, that amounts to about a nickel's worth of savings on a \$100 grocery bill.

ARE GROCERS GOUGING US?

According to Schmitke, another misconception is that grocery prices are significantly inflated.

While he does admit that big conglomerates have been responsible for some shady practices at times, gouging the consumer at checkout isn't one of them.

On the contrary, he says that the grocery industry has a fairly compressed profit margin in comparison to most other commodities.

"The profit margin in the 80s and 90s was better than today," Schmitke says. "Grocery stores have certainly increased their sales, and they've certainly increased their profitability in dollars, but that's only because they're selling more stuff."

That's not to suggest that there was no increase in profit margins due to the pandemic, he adds. He says it

was more of an industry correction from the very low margins being experienced in the years just prior to COVID-19.

In Schmitke's estimation, that correction amounted to about a one percent increase for grocers on their gross profit margins. So when you consider net profit margins, the increase in profit isn't all that impressive once all the costs of staffing, utilities, mortgages, and product has been subtracted.

Why then has the price of groceries risen more than profit margins?

Just like in every other industry, Schmitke contends that it costs more to do business than it once did, especially in light of recent hikes to Manitoba's minimum wage.

He says that retailers in virtually every industry experienced a buying frenzy during the pandemic, contrary to what everyone expected.

Schmitke personally witnessed this change, and the uptick in spending still hasn't slowed down. Generally speaking, consumers are more willing to spend money on what they value.

"People got really used to the idea that they can't just have everything they want right now," Schmitke says. "That's partly why people didn't care what things cost. When it was there, they just bought it because they knew it might not be there next week."

He says this created a shift in thinking for the average grocer, too.

There was a time not that long ago when it was commonplace for a grocer to take a loss on certain products in order to be more competitive. It still happens, he says, but probably not with the same regularity as it once did.

REFERENCE

¹ "New Data on Contributed Record Profits in Canadian Food Retail," Centre for Future Work, December 10, 2023 (<https://centreforfuturework.ca/2023/12/10/new-data-on-continued-record-profits-in-canadian-food-retail>).

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UPCOMING HOME GAMES



Justin Giesbrecht, Kelvin Cech, Nathan Brown, and Alex Mandolidis.

ERICA PERREAUX/HOCKEY CANADA

Brown, Cech, Giesbrecht Win World Junior A Challenge

By Ty Dilello

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For the first time since 2017, Team Canada West has won the gold medal at the 2023 World Junior A Hockey Challenge, claiming its sixth gold with an explosive 7-2 win over Team Canada East in the gold medal game in Truro, Nova Scotia.

The Niverville Nighthawks were well represented on Team Canada West with forward Nathan Brown, coach Kelvin Cech, and physiotherapist Justin Giesbrecht.

Nathan Brown, who has 11 points in 27 games with Niverville this season, was excited at the opportunity to represent his country on the international stage.

"The opportunity came about starting at the MJHL Showcase," says Brown. "And then all the way until the team was announced, from the staff coming down to the MJHL Showcase and watching games online after until they made

their decision."

It was also beneficial for Brown to head to the tournament knowing that he was accompanied by two members of his Nighthawks staff in Cech and Giesbrecht.

"Having Kelvin and Geezer there was great, especially at the start, since I was kind of the outsider, being the only guy from the MJHL," Brown says. "I didn't really know any of the guys, so it was nice to have some familiar faces around."

Canada West snuck into the playoff round with only a single win in the preliminary round before going on to stun the undefeated United States in overtime in Saturday's semifinals.

They then went on to beat Team Canada East in the gold medal game 7-2 to cap off an incredible run.

"I had a great time in Truro, as I got to play with some of the top players in the west of the CJHL and got to play against international

talent, which was a first for me, as well as playing a pretty stacked American roster," says Brown. "It was also awesome to have my parents and my older brother make the journey and watch the weeklong tournament."

To cap things off, his billet family in Niverville surprised him by journeying all the way to Truro and staying for the whole week.

"Winning a gold medal on the international stage like that could be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I know. We started off pretty slow, going 1-3 in round robin, but once we figured out how hard we work, plus sticking to a simple game plan, we could beat any team in that tournament. And everyone on our team knew that, so we all came together and stuck to our simple game plan."

Brown was able to score a goal for Team Canada West in the gold medal game, which surely made the victory a little sweeter.

"It was nice to score one," he says. "I felt my line was getting more and more chances every game, so we knew the goals would start coming eventually. And when it happened, it felt great to rip one in the back of the net in a game like that."

After the Christmas break, Brown will try to bring that same level of intensity back to Niverville for the rest of the season, and keep improving his game and building off his teammates.

A St. Cloud State University recruit, Brown has also appeared on NHL scouts' radars. His name has shown up on lists for the upcoming 2024 NHL Entry Draft as a potential prospect.

"Getting drafted in the NHL is every little hockey player's dream," Brown says. "Getting drafted would be great, but I just have to keep growing my game and playing the right way with my team. And hopefully good results will come both ways."

STANDINGS

** AS OF JANUARY 1, 2024

WEST DIVISION

TEAM	GP	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS
1 VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS	30	21	5	2	2	46
2 OCN BLIZZARD	32	20	10	0	2	42
3 DAUPHIN KINGS	28	16	11	1	0	33
4 NEEPAWA TITANS	31	15	15	1	0	31
5 WAYWAYSEECAPPO WOLVERINES	32	11	18	0	3	25
6 SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDEERS	32	8	22	2	0	18

EAST DIVISION

TEAM	GP	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS
1 STEINBACH PISTONS	31	24	4	3	0	51
2 PORTAGE TERRIERS	35	21	7	4	3	49
3 WINKLER FLYERS	29	20	5	2	2	44
4 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	33	20	12	1	0	41
5 SELKIRK STEELERS	30	13	15	1	1	28
6 WINNIPEG BLUES	30	6	21	3	0	15
7 WINNIPEG FREEZE	29	6	21	2	0	14

MJHL POINTS LEADERS

PLAYER	TEAM	GP	G	A	PTS
1 Trent Penner	WNL	28	16	23	39
2 Leo Chambers	STN	31	10	29	39
3 Josh Lehto	VIR	30	17	17	34
4 Alex Walicki	SVS	32	11	23	34
5 Brody Beauchemin	WNL	29	9	25	34
6 Kaycee Coyle	NIV	33	9	24	33
7 Nolan Chastko	VIR	30	17	15	32
8 Kirk Mullen	STN	28	14	18	32
9 Gabriel Laflamme	POR	35	10	22	32
10 Sean Williams	WAY	32	17	14	31
11 Jack Clarke	WAY	32	16	15	31
12 Slade Stanick	POR	29	13	18	31
13 Cody Gudnason	NEE	31	10	20	30
14 Dalton Andrew	WNL	26	15	14	29
15 Brandon Funk	STN	31	14	15	29
16 Anthony Bax	DAU	28	11	18	29
17 Trey Sauder	SVS	32	11	18	29
18 Noah Szabo	STN	31	8	21	29
19 Grady Hoffman	STN	26	18	10	28
20 Parker Korman	POR	35	14	14	28

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EVAN BRAUN

One Dramatic December

By Ty Dilello

tdilello@nivervillecitizen.com

This month, the Nighthawks gave their fans one thrill ride after another, winning some of the most exciting games in franchise history.

In the process, they took down all three teams ahead of them in the East Division standings, each game being decided in overtime.

It wasn't a perfect month of hockey, but it won't soon be forgotten.

NOVEMBER 29

(WINKLER FLYERS, HOME)

The Nighthawks came up short on offence on this Wednesday at the CRRC,

getting blanked 2-0 by the formidable Winkler Flyers.

As the game got underway, the Flyers had a slight edge over the Nighthawks, a dynamic that would carry forward through the rest of the contest. Winkler scored early in the first period, and then again late in the second period.

A couple of power plays for Niverville in the third period failed to yield any goals, and that was the ballgame.

"Winkler defends very well and locks things down, as they are great in the middle of the ice," said Nighthawks head coach Kelvin Cech. "We had the puck a lot, but they defended well and scored on a couple of deflections for

the only goals of the game."

This was Cech's last game with the Nighthawks until after the World Junior A Challenge, which ran from December 10-17 in Truro, Nova Scotia. Until then, assistant general manager Mike McAulay would be joining the coaching staff to fill the gap.

Following this contest, the Nighthawks had a week off before getting back on the ice the following Wednesday for a home game against the Winnipeg Blues.

"The guys are down after this loss tonight, but we've got to come back with some good vibes," said Cech. "That's a good team, and we have got to learn from that and just try to keep

getting better."

Prior to puck drop, the Nighthawks honoured Rich Gosselin, who was born in St. Pierre-Jolys and raised in St. Malo.

A former draft pick of the Montreal Canadiens, Gosselin was one of the top players to ever come out of southeastern Manitoba.

He went on to have a very successful pro career in Switzerland.

DECEMBER 6

(WINNIPEG BLUES, HOME)

It was a forgettable evening at the CRRC on Wednesday as the Nighthawks fell 6-2 to the Winnipeg Blues.

The Nighthawks were nowhere to

be seen in the first period as Winnipeg scored three unanswered goals to jump out to a 3-0 lead.

In the second period, Michael Debrito scored his eleventh goal of the season to cut it to 3-1, but the home team would get no closer.

Winnipeg scored another two goals in the second period and added another in the third period, although Debrito did score his twelfth goal of the season and second tally of the contest in the third period.

This was the first game without Cech behind the bench, perhaps marking the start of an adjustment period. Fortunately, the adjustment was swift.

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DECEMBER 9 (SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDEES, HOME)

The Niverville Nighthawks escaped the Swan Valley Stampeders with a dramatic 4-3 victory at home at the CRRC on Saturday night.

It was a back-and-forth game all night long, with both teams hanging in with each other.

Ty Kennett got the Nighthawks on the board early in the first period before Swan Valley replied with a goal of their own. Luke Mackenzie, just acquired in a trade a few days earlier, put the Nighthawks back ahead with a goal before the first period ended.

The teams traded goals the rest of the way, with goals from Swan Valley, then another from Nighthawk Luke McCrady, and another Stampeders counter to level the game at 3-3.

Kaycee Coyle was the hero for Niverville, scoring with three minutes remaining in the third period.

That one proved to be the game-winner.

Raiden LeGall stopped 27 shots in the Nighthawks' goal.

On Friday, the Nighthawks had announced the acquisition of Mackenzie, a forward from the Virren Oil Caps, and the list rights to Jeremiah Warkentine.

The Oil Caps received a 2024 Second Round Pick in the 2024 MJHL Prospect Draft and the list rights to 2006-born forward Hayden Moore in return.

Mackenzie, who had 10 points in 20 games this season so far with Virren, would prove to be a great addition to the Nighthawks in his opening games with the club.

DECEMBER 10 (WINNIPEG BLUES, AWAY)

On Sunday evening on the road, the Nighthawks earned a big 5-2 win over the Winnipeg Blues.

It was a game in which the Nighthawks never trailed. They got first period goals from Mackenzie, Brendan Bottom, and Michael Tanchak. By the time the first frame ended, Niverville led 3-1 and didn't look back.

In the second period, the two teams traded goals, with Adam Vigfusson scoring his third of the season for the Nighthawks. Niverville captain Brett Tataryn scored his tenth goal in the third period.

"I would say we just stuck to our gameplan tonight," said Bottem. "We wanted to have a better start against these guys, and I think we did that

today. I would say we played a solid 60 minutes, and we just found a way to get a win. It's always fun winning games, and it definitely felt good to win this one after they beat us a couple of days ago."

Bottem has been impressed with the play of Nighthawks newcomer Mackenzie, who had joined the team earlier in the week.

"Luke has fit in great with our group so far," said Bottem. "He's come in and made an impact right away, scoring two goals in his first two games with us."

Next up, the Nighthawks looked forward to facing off against the first-place Steinbach Pistons.

"We have to play a complete 60 minutes moving forward if we want to get wins. There is no room for error in this league, so we have to make sure we are ready every shift."

DECEMBER 13 (STEINBACH PISTONS, AWAY)

The Nighthawks earned their biggest win of the season, defeating the Pistons 2-1 in overtime on Wednesday night on the road.

It was a low-scoring and tight hockey game all around as the rival teams battled away for more than 60 minutes.

After the scoreless first period, Carter Spirig got Niverville on the board early in the second with his sixth goal of the season. Steinbach tied the game before the second period ended to make it 1-1.

Neither Niverville nor Steinbach could break the deadlock in the third period, forcing the teams into overtime to solve this one.

A Nighthawks power play in overtime did the trick. Colin Whaley scored the game-winning goal to give his club the 2-1 victory.

"Tonight was a huge win for our team, and I think it helps us huge going forward with team confidence," said Nighthawks defenceman Ethan Kelly. "We pulled it out by just sticking to our game plan the whole game, even when it seemed that the ice was one-sided in Steinbach's favour at the beginning. But we never gave up and knew they would crack before we did."

Raiden LeGall put up his finest performance of the season. He stopped 47 shots in goal.

"I feel like it all started in practice this week," said LeGall. "Instead of taking the day off Monday after a back-to-back, we were on the ice. The guys were really giving it their

all the last few days in practice as well, which really helped us. I felt like this was one of my stronger performances of the year. But also, as a team, we really pulled together as a group and got it done."

"That was one of the best goaltending performances I've seen out of Raiden tonight, and that helps us a lot knowing that you have a goalie who is rolling," added Kelly. "The only goal that Steinbach scored was when he wasn't in the net!"

DECEMBER 15 (WINKLER FLYERS, HOME)

The Nighthawks kept rolling with another dramatic 2-1 victory against the Winkler Flyers, once again in overtime.

For the second straight game, it was a low-scoring affair.

Winkler scored first, but the Nighthawks replied midway through the first period with a goal from McCrady.

There would be no scoring in the second or third periods, as both goaltenders put on a clinic.

The Nighthawks headed to overtime for the second straight game against one of the toughest teams in the league, and they earned the same result as on Wednesday night.

It was Tataryn who found the back of the net to give Niverville the 2-1 overtime win.

Raiden LeGall put up another strong performance, stopping 33 shots in net. LeGall moves to 11-5-1 on the season with a 2.10 goals-against average and .939 save percentage.

He currently leads the league in every MJHL goaltending category.

"This was a super big win for us, as it took everything we had," said Tataryn, the overtime hero. "It was straight hard work that won the game for us."

Tataryn is quick to give credit to his goaltenders, as they are a big reason for the Nighthawks' success this season.

"Raiden has been superb for us," said Tataryn. "He's a real gamer. Both of our goalies are unreal. Gordo is super clutch when we need him, too. They work together to give us the best goaltending duo in the league."

DECEMBER 16 (SELKIRK STEELERS, HOME)

The Nighthawks came back down to earth on Saturday evening with a rough 5-2 loss on the road to the Selkirk Steelers.

Things started off well as Debrito scored the game's opening goal midway through the first period.

Selkirk replied with a goal of their own a few minutes later.

In the second period, the Steelers pulled away with a pair of goals to lead 3-1.

Mackenzie then got the Nighthawks to within one in the third period, but that's as close as Niverville got.

Selkirk scored twice more before the final buzzer.

"Tonight's loss was definitely deflating after all the momentum we had going this week," said Debrito. "We took these guys for granted, and it came back to bite us. Selkirk definitely has a different style of play compared to Winkler and Steinbach because Selkirk runs a very tight neutral zone trap to force turnovers and dumps, while Winkler and Steinbach are both very aggressive in all three zones. So you can sometimes catch them off-guard with one or two quick passes. However, Selkirk tends to direct traffic to where they want the puck to go in order for them to get it back quickly."

Despite tonight's tough loss, Debrito is very happy with how his club has been playing lately.

"Obviously, the two huge wins are big for us against Steinbach and Winkler, where everyone has been doing their jobs really well, and the team is starting to gel a lot more as the year goes on."

Next up? A home match-up against the always tough Portage Terriers. It would be their final game before the Christmas break.

"To get back in the win column, I think we just need to wipe the Selkirk game from our memory," said Debrito. "We beat two really good teams this week and proved that we can be one of the best teams in the league. We just need to get back to our identity of working hard in the offensive zone and working even harder tracking back to the defensive zone."

The Nighthawks found themselves in the unenviable position of having to kill off a pair of two-minute five-on-three scenarios at different points in the game.

That would be a tall order against any team, not to mention against a powerhouse like Portage.

"We stuck to our fundamentals and didn't give them much offensively," Laliberte said. "But in the end, our penalty kill won us the game, as well as another fantastic game by Raiden LeGall. We have played well defensively, and our goalie has been playing out of his mind lately, so we have rallied around him."

The Nighthawks are off for the holidays now and will be back in action on January 5 with a road game against the Winkler Flyers. The puck drops at 7:00 p.m.

"I'm excited for the break, but anxious for the second half, as we have made some really good strides lately," said Whaley. "My plans are to go home and spend Christmas with my family back in Michigan, recharge, and get ready for the next half."

It was a battle of the goaltenders



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Niverville Plans 2024 Budget

By Brenda Sawatzky
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
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In mid-November, Niverville's council huddled around the planning table for another long annual planning session to set their priorities.

The result was an interim fiscal plan which will give council guidance on spending until the budget is finalized in the spring of 2024.

BIG TICKET ITEMS

A number of bigger ticket items are being planned for purchase in the coming fiscal year.

Niverville's Fire and Emergency team will benefit from a new water tanker, but not until 2025.

Mayor Myron Dyck says that the truck is currently on order and will take about a year to arrive. It will replace an aging tanker that has been in use by the fire department for a number of decades.

Similarly, the Open Health team may also have some new tools in their toolkit in the new year.

If all goes well, council hopes to invest in some items at the top of the medical clinic's wish list.

"Ultrasound machines, a liquid nitrogen gun, and automated blood pressure machines are on the list," Dyck says. "So those are things that council will be budgeting for."

INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL

Some badly needed infrastructure repairs will get underway next spring and summer, including the re-

building of portions of Fourth Avenue South, Church Avenue, and Edelweiss Crescent. Errington Way and Hampton Drive will see some resurfacing in areas.

A new sidewalk will be installed along the back lane behind the Niverville MCC Thrift Store.

A new running path is also coming to Drover's Run.

"There's more money being spent on road repairs than in other years," Dyck says of the \$1.1 million being set aside for the 2024 budget.

While it doesn't appear in the budget, council hopes to get a jumpstart on water infrastructure planning.

This project will eventually see the entire community get hooked up to the municipal water system.

In the new year, residents should expect an open house where residents will be able to weigh in on their hopes or concerns regarding water hookup.

"Generally, the province of Manitoba provides a 50-cent dollar on projects like this," says Dyck. "Council is very cognizant of where people are at with their household budgets these days. We're talking numbers that are probably around \$10,000 and \$15,000 [per household]. We're going to present it. And if there's enough interest, we'll go after it."

LIBRARY

The recent planning session also took into consideration the notion of bringing a library to town.

According to the mayor, council will not build a new

structure at this time.

This leaves the town with the option of trying to decide which existing space might accommodate such a service in the near future.

"We've asked Niverville Recreation to investigate the feasibility of what we're calling a 'take one, leave one' library," says Dyck.

This scaled-back and low maintenance version of a library would require less space, less administration, nominal expenditures on books and resources, and likely operate on an honour system for book borrowing.

The Niverville Rec committee will also look into programming options, like storytime for kids, to enhance the library space.

DEBT REDUCTION AND FINANCIAL RESERVES

One of council's loftier financial goals for the next three years of their term is to pay down the debt still owing on the CRRC.

That debt currently sits at approximately \$500,000.

"Whoever council is in the next term, they won't have to worry about that debt and will have the means to possibly plan for other things," says Dyck.

In order to achieve this, council will need to double down on their current payments.

Alternatively, they are also welcoming a donation of \$1 million in lieu of naming rights for the building.

In order to save more for a rainy day, council is asking all town departments to put their focus on building up their

fiscal reserves this coming year. These reserves will get funnelled into an Emergencies and Opportunities fund.

"That would just leave us a bit more in a strengthened position," Dyck says. "When you grow as fast as we grow, we've been running pretty lean."

GROWTH AND EXPANSION

In light of Niverville's ongoing growth, council has determined that it's imperative to focus in 2024 on certain community services and amenities.

With the town's fire department and operations department rapidly outgrowing their space, council has established a working group whose mandate is to determine what those services will need in the coming years.

Niverville Open Health is faced with similar challenges as an influx of new health professionals moves in to respond to the region's growing medical needs.

Finding ways to expand clinic services onsite or at a new location is up for discussion.

Very soon, too, council anticipates the need for more outdoor recreation space. After all, Hespeler Park is filling up.

Another large park would help meet that need.

"We're looking at [creating] a new greenspace somewhere on the west side of town, and a significant one," Dyck says. "We don't know where we'll find land of that significance, but that's the kind of thing we're talking about."

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Town of Niverville Provides Feedback Opportunity on Community Planning

By **Brenda Sawatzky**
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Niverville's town council is seeking feedback from the community about planning for the future. As part of their consultation efforts, they hosted an open house at the CRRC on the evening of December 19.

Under the microscope is the town's development plan and zoning bylaws, both of which are tools used by a municipal government to guide growth and development.

Urban Systems, the Winnipeg-based planning and engineering firm retained by Niverville to create the updated development plan for the community, was on hand to listen to the feedback and compile it.

A survey can be found on the Town of Niverville's website. Residents are strongly encouraged to have their say.

"We would love people to do that," says Aaron Snider of Urban Systems. "The more engagement, the better. We're trying to get everyone to have their input [and say] what's important to them so that we can craft the vision. Essentially the first step of doing a development plan review is to... make sure that whatever plan results from this process, it meets what people's aspirations are."

DEVELOPMENT PLANS AND ZONING BYLAWS

Every five years, the province requires municipalities to reassess and update their development plans.

The new plan is then submitted to the province for approval in order to ensure that it's consistent with provincial land use policies.

As the planners at Urban Systems undertake work on Niverville's new plan, their goal is to include a 25-year vision for the community.

As well, they hope to create a document that is user-friendly and transparent so it can be easily understood by administration, council, developers, and the public.

The plan will help guide decisions on land use, housing, transportation, recreation and open space, infrastructure and services, economic growth and development, and sustainability.

In turn, the plan also informs the creation of zoning bylaws. Zoning bylaws don't require provincial approval and are intended for use by a municipality to create consistency in local development.

Zoning bylaws help determine

how land can be used. They also determine where buildings and structures can be located on a lot and the standards by which they must be erected.

HISTORICAL DATA HELPS

Urban Systems will use Niverville's historical data in order to help set the community's vision for the future.

For Niverville especially, meeting population growth is imperative.

Historical patterns show Niverville growing at a rate of 29 percent from 2016 to 2021 and a whopping 210 percent since 1996.

Considering the possibility for low, medium, or high growth rates into the future, the town is expected to expand by between 4,800 and 11,000 residents over the next 20 years. By 2041, the population could easily reach between 10,000 and 17,000 residents.

The average age of residents also plays a factor in future planning. Niverville continues to maintain a lower than average median age of 32.8.

Conversely, the average household size in Niverville ranks higher than the provincial average. According to the data, 55 percent of Niverville's households have three or more people living in them.

The average gross income for Niverville households is nearly \$116,000. The unemployment rate is 6.1 percent, compared to the provincial average of 8.3 percent.

Based on most recent data, nearly 30 percent of Niverville's population now works within the community. More than half of those residents work from home.

With the potential for significant further residential growth and the need to create jobs close to home, the new development plan will take a close look at the town's proposed annexation of more than 2,000 acres of land from the RM of Hanover.

Without this annexation, it is anticipated that Niverville will run out of developable land within the next 15 to 20 years.

Once public engagement is complete in early 2024, Urban Systems will get to work creating the development plan draft.

More public engagement will follow next spring before the plan is finalized and submitted for provincial approval.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To complete the survey, visit: <https://www.wheretheyoubelong.ca>



DEPOSITPHOTOS

Feds Introduce Publicly Funded Dental Care

By **Brenda Sawatzky**
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Beginning this month, lower income Canadians with no current access to dental insurance will have an opportunity to sign up for the newly unveiled Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP).

Introduced as a part of the 2023 budget, the new publicly funded dental plan will cost the federal government \$13 billion over the next five years and \$4.4 billion ongoing to implement.

"Oral health is essential to Canadians' overall health, but oral health care can be expensive," reads a statement from the federal government. "A third of people living in Canada do not have dental insurance, and, in 2022, one in four Canadians reported avoiding visiting an oral health professional because of the cost."

Similar to Canada's universal healthcare program, the intent of the CDCP is to ensure that all Canadians have access to affordable and essential oral healthcare.

But not everyone will qualify for the publicly funded program.

The CDCP is targeted specifically toward uninsured Canadians with an annual household income under \$90,000.

According to the federal government, that includes about nine million Canadians, or approximately one-quarter of the population.

Those who have access to employer- or pension-sponsored dental benefits or private dental plans do not qualify, regardless of income.

If provincial or territorial social dental programs exist, the CDCP will be there to help fill any gaps in those programs for uninsured lower-income families.

"Oral health professionals play a vital role in delivering oral health care, and this plan will allow more Canadians to receive their care," the statement continues. "Resources and tools on how to assist and inform their patients about the oral health professional community."

The CDCP will cover basic dental services such as teeth-cleaning and

scaling, examinations, X-rays, fillings and crowns, dentures, root canals, and some oral surgeries.

Teeth whitening, dental implants, and mouth guards will not be covered under the plan.

Qualifying applicants with household incomes under \$70,000 per year will have all their basic dental treatment covered by Ottawa.

Those falling within the \$70,000 to \$89,999 bracket will qualify for copay plans and the feds will foot the bill for between 40 to 60 percent.

The program, in its entirety, will be phased in incrementally over the course of the next year.

Those aged 87 and over can begin applying this month.

Between January and May, seniors 65 years and up will continue to be phased in.

In June 2024, children under 18 years of age and those with a disability tax credit certificate may apply.

All remaining qualifying residents will be eligible in 2025.

The federal government will be sending letters to every qualifying resident inviting them to apply for the program.

Commentary

The Mental Health Benefits of Eating Pizza

Because let's face it, Niverville, at this point there'd better be a few...

By Daniel Dacombe

Well, Niverville, here we are. With half a dozen pizza places in town, it's time to ask ourselves the hard questions. Questions like, "Where do you want to get pizza tonight?" and "Where do you want to get pizza tomorrow night?" Variety is the spice of life, and in Niverville at least most of those spices are Italian.

All kidding aside, this will be my final mental health column for *The Citizen*.

Since March 2020, I've been writing every month on subjects like conversion therapy, antidepressants, critical thinking, altruism, grief, affirmation, and ADHD.

I've heard from people both online and in person who found these articles to be enjoyable, and I hope some of what I've written has perhaps inspired some to seek help for themselves when they need it, or encourage loved ones to get help as well.

However, all things must come to an end.

So if this is the end, why not end it by talking about pizza?

Pizza, the official food group for the town of Niverville, comes in many shapes and sizes and can be made with an almost infinite variety of toppings.

This makes defining pizza a bit of an exercise in futility. In its basic form, what is pizza? It's a flat dough, baked and layered with toppings, usually including but not limited to a tomato-based sauce and various cheeses. It may also include meats, vegetables, and other toppings.

But wait! Pizzas also exist with white sauce, or vegan cheese, or—eschewing all tradition and propriety—they may be entirely sweet creations: the controversial "dessert pizza."

All this dizzying variety invites an existential dilemma: what truly is



DEPOSITPHOTOS

a pizza? Is a cake pizza? Is an open-faced sandwich a pizza?

Regardless, if the current rate of pizza restaurant opening continues, then by 2026 a new pizza place will be opening in Niverville approximately every eight minutes.

Before we reach critical pizza mass, we should probably figure out whether eating pizza is good for our mental health, shouldn't we?

Research has indicated for years that comfort foods, especially foods high in fats, salts, and carbohydrates, can give us a short-term dopamine boost, dopamine being the brain's primary reward chemical, the chemical that tells us we feel good and are having a good time.

If you've noticed that you feel pretty darn good after eating a couple of slices, that's probably why. Your brain is patting you on

the back for a job well done.

In addition, researchers from Italy (no surprise there) have found that eating pizza can actually reduce the impact of rheumatoid arthritis.

Is there anything pizza can't do?

Of course, there can be too much of a good thing. Pizza can also be made with highly processed ingredients, which can have a cumulative negative impact on our health in the long run. Plus, eating foods high in those fats, salts, and carbs can cause us to gain weight, develop high blood pressure, and impact our cholesterol.

Some studies even link the over-consumption of fast food, including pizza, with higher incidences of mental health issues, especially mood disorders like depression and anxiety.

The sound you're hearing now

is the owners of six pizza places quietly banning me.

So what do we do? Do we eat pizza, or don't we?

To provide maximum reassurance, we aren't going to suggest that you don't eat pizza, or even that you don't indulge in comfort foods. These studies that show a link between fast food and mental health issues need to be interpreted through the proper lens, and we have to be cautious of assuming that causation from correlation.

Many researchers have pointed out that the causal relationship may in fact run the other way—that is, having higher levels of depression or anxiety may cause someone to be less able to care for themselves, and more likely to rely on quick and easy foods.

So it's unlikely that eating too much pizza will cause depression.

It's much more likely that people with depression may be eating more fast food in general, including pizza.

In a way, too much pizza isn't the problem. It's a sign that someone is trying to care for themselves as best they can.

Of course, as amazing as pizza is—a true super food; step aside, broccoli—we can't solely rely on it to boost our mental health.

Throughout the history of this column, we've discussed many things that can contribute to positive mental health: having hobbies, getting exercise, and paying attention to when a problem might be developing.

But over and above every other aspect of mental health promotion, the deciding factor is human connection—the interpersonal relationships we have, the time we spent together.

This determines whether our underlying predispositions towards depression, anxiety, and other issues could become serious.

We've said it before and we are saying it again: humans are social animals. We've spent the last 200,000 years working on our communities and cultures, and they are far from perfect. But they are the best we've got.

So don't neglect those connections. And if at all possible, don't let political, religious, or cultural differences get in the way. All we have is each other, and human connection is as essential to life as water and air—and yes, even pizza.

Talk to each other.

Maybe if you notice a friend or loved one is a little down, or not quite themselves, don't brush it off, or excuse it, or ignore it. Do the brave thing and reach out. Check on them.

And maybe, if you're up for it, share a pizza with them. I can recommend a few places.

How it started



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How it's going

Sports & Recreation

Coaches Recount Niverville JV Provincial Runs

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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The Niverville Panthers had a highly successful volleyball season this past fall.

Both the girls and boys junior varsity teams secured their zone championships, earning for them the right to compete at the provincial level.

JV AAA BOYS

This year's coaches included Austin Anderson and Joshua Limpricht. The duo led the boys through a challenging season.

They started off with a combination of both new-to-the-sport and experienced players.

The result? They were able to build a team with an aggressive offence paired with determined defence.

Anderson observes that their major strengths came from the serving line as well as in passing, allowing the team to play "in system."

"Our team struggled a bit at the beginning of the season with some injuries, and some guys were gone lots that played soccer," says Anderson.

Despite a few challenges, he says they played strongly against one of their main rivals early in the season.

"We had a team in our zone that beat us in zones last year, Steinbach Christian [School]," says Anderson. "And we knew that was the team we had to get through this year to get to provincials. We played against them for the first time in October, winning in a thrilling third set. Very close game. And they were our focus between then and the zone finals on November 14. Leading up to this game, I was super proud of the guys in how they executed our team's game plan and just played very well against them, winning 2-0 in the finals."

Having clinched a spot in provincials, the Panthers set their sights



The Junior Varsity AAA girls.



The Junior Varsity AAA boys.

on another team they knew would provide stiff competition: Westgate Mennonite Collegiate.

They'd lost to Westgate earlier in the season and player Antonio DaPalma says they were determined to flip the result in the rematch.

"We all knew we could beat them, which is exactly what we did at provincials," says DaPalma.

It wasn't enough to bring home the provincial banner, however. The team went 4-0 to start in the round robin only to run into Winkler's Garden Valley Collegiate in the playoffs. Winkler ended up placing first.

"We made it to the quarterfinals in provincials, which wasn't exactly what we had in mind, but not something to complain about at all," says DaPalma. "Me and the rest of the guys on the court gave it our all and played amazing, while the guys on the bench were so unbelievably supportive and made such an impact on our game."

DaPalma credits his coaches for never doubting the team.

"They have taught us so much

about the game and encouraged us constantly. So a big thank you to them for their contributions."

DaPalma continues to be passionate about young people's involvement in sports and hopes to spread a message of encouragement to anyone thinking about playing sports in high school.

"Do it. Junior varsity sports are such a great starting place to get you interested and further in sports, and they're a crucial part of your experience," says DaPalma. "I've had some of my greatest memories from playing JV sports. Everyone's gotta start somewhere, so why not start with your high school JV sports?"

JV AAA GIRLS

Taran Peters, head coach of the junior varsity girls team, was pleased to lead the squad alongside assistant coaches Rhea Peters and Anika Buys.

Peters says their year started off unusually, with them needing to fill a few gaps left behind after two players were brought up to play at the varsity

level instead.

"At tryouts, it was determined that the varsity girls team had a small team and so the JV team gave up two players to join that team for the entire season," says Peters. "This meant we gave up two very strong players for the year. However, that meant we were able to take two other girls on to our team who we wouldn't have otherwise and develop more players for future teams."

The league was highly competitive this year, and the zone playoffs proved the perfect opportunity for the Panthers to test themselves under optimum conditions.

"In our Zone 13 South playoffs, we played Lorette and [Steinbach Christian] played Ste Anne," reports Peters. "Our team played very well in the game against Lorette, winning two straight sets, 25-17 and 25-14. Then we played Steinbach Christian in the Zone 13 south final."

The Panthers won the first set 25-17, dropped the second 20-25, only to rebound with a 15-10 win

in the third.

Following that, the Panthers emerged victorious from the north-south crossover game to win the banner after a best-of-five set against Beausejour. They won in three straight sets.

The girls then headed to provincials, held at Linden Christian School. The team knew competition would be fierce, entering the tournament ranked ninth.

"The competition was tough. We played really well in the round robin and took each game to three sets," says Peters. "However, we only came out with a win in one of the three games."

In the first playoff game, the team struggled and unfortunately lost in straight sets.

Despite the loss, Peters notes that it was a coaching highlight to see so many players develop this year. A few of the girls had only played middle school volleyball.

"It is a lot of fun to coach at this level because the progress you see in many of the players from September to the end of November is a night and day difference," he says. "At the start of the season, we had several players who struggled to get their serves in. By the end of the season, they were consistently delivering their serves."

He adds that a number of less experienced players learned quickly, adjusting from never having played a positionally structured system before to knowing exactly where they needed to be on the court within a week or two.

"We had players who at the beginning of the year didn't have the proper footwork to approach to hit a ball, and they were killing it by the end of the season," he says. "Seeing that progress, that is always the highlight for us as coaches. Our main goal as coaches is development."

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Questions? Please email info@hsd.ca or call 204-326-6471.

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IN BRIEF

Gab-Roy Stuns Field to Capture AAAA Volleyball Provincials

By Ty Dilello

tdilello@nivervillecitizen.com

On November 27, Ecole Gabrielle-Roy's junior varsity boys volleyball team captured the AAAA provincial championship after defeating Sisler High School in the final.

The amazing fact about this is that Gabrielle-Roy is an A/AA school by size that applied for a wildcard spot just to get the opportunity to play in the AAAA provincials.

This is also the first time in a very long while that a small school like Gab-Roy has been successful on such a large stage.

"It was super exciting sneaking into the provincials as a wildcard spot," says player Logan Barnabe. "Playing in it was obviously super exciting, but nerve-wracking at the same time."

Gab-Roy went on a run for the ages, dispatching Glenlawn in the quarterfinals before beating Daniel McIntyre in the semis.

In the championship, Gab-Roy went up against Sisler and prevailed in straight sets.

"We could win it all if we fought very hard and stayed disciplined, and we did, which I'm very proud of," says Barnabe. "We stayed disciplined and played our hearts out."

Barnabe is excited that the team was able to bring home a AAAA championship. He says it was quite the Cinderella story.

"I think it's huge for our school to beat a school of almost 2,000 students while we're at around 200 students."

Rockettes Celebrate 50 Years of Adventures On and Off Ice

By Jennifer Lavin

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The St. Adolphe Rockettes have been curling together for an amazing 50 years, but curling is really only a small part of what ties this group of women together.

Cheryl Kennedy-Courcelles, president of the Rockettes, has been a member for 25 years. She stresses how close-knit the group is. These women are there for each other through thick and thin.

The Rockettes Club was begun by two women who have since passed away: Margaret Stott of Niverville and Irene De Cruyenaere of St. Adolphe.

When the group began curling together, the world was quite a different place. The majority of the women didn't work outside the home. The Rockettes offered childcare so moms could get out of the house and curl with their friends.

Times have changed and the Rockettes no longer offer childcare, but they do still meet during the day. Kennedy-Courcelles says that the women in the group make attending their Tuesday morning get-togethers a priority.

"Most [of the] ladies, actually, make their work schedules around having Tuesday mornings off," says Kennedy-Courcelles. "It's amazing how they're very dedicated to keeping that time open."

The fundamental goal of the Rockettes, according to Kennedy-Courcelles, is camaraderie.

She describes how members have helped each other over the years as many of them had children, then grandchildren, then great-grandchildren.

And at times the women support members who have lost loved ones as well.

"There's many members that, you know, spouses, unfortunately,



The St. Adolphe Rockettes, still curling together after 50 years.

CHERYL KENNEDY-COURCELLES

have passed on, and we are absolutely there for each other... from attending the funeral to making meals, to helping out and just being that steady person."

The Rockettes don't just support each other. They also support their community. Over the years, they've put together many fundraisers and special events.

They're also supporters of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). Many members make quilts and other products to be sold on behalf of MCC.

Kennedy-Courcelles says that by now some of the Rockettes have retired from their careers and moved to Winnipeg. Some have joined clubs in the city, or other places, but they still make time for the Rockettes.

"It's quite clear that the Rockettes are their favourite organization," says Kennedy-Courcelles. "It really is, because we have such caring hearts towards each other and towards our communities... We're very respectful of everybody."

The women don't just gather in the winter. They golf together in the summer and gather for other special occasions.

Kennedy-Courcelles stresses that nearly anyone can curl, regardless of age. Last year they had a new recruit who was 74 and had never curled before.

Physical disabilities can often be compensated for in the sport as well. A curling "crutch" can aid players in delivering the rock, providing more security and stability as they slide. There are also

long-handled devices that allow a player to push the rock without having to bend down.

Kennedy-Courcelles points out that the artificial ice is also a boon for many, as one doesn't have to push the rock so hard. The artificial ice is particularly smooth.

"We are always open to having brand-new ladies come curl with us, and we will take the time to teach you. And we're not too competitive," she says. "We're all about having fun and getting some laughs in, and certainly getting some exercise. But, you know, we're not looking to go to the Scotties!"

The St. Adolphe Rockettes curl every Tuesday morning from 9:30 to 11:30 and welcome women of any age to join them.



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Arts & Entertainment

Artist Exhibits New Collection

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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Since mid-December, Niverville-based artist Daniel Dueck has been presenting an exhibit of 70 new paintings at The Public Brewhouse in Steinbach. Entitled “New York to Niverville—New Works,” the work explores rhythm, pattern, and sequence in an abstract collection that is bold, colourful, and graphically whimsical.

Typically, Dueck says that he gravitates toward idealized representational landscapes, only dipping a toe into the world of abstraction.

Since it’s been more than five years since the local artist presented work publicly, he wanted to make a comeback statement, giving people an invitation to step out of the elitism of art world norms and interact instead with work that is unexpectedly fun.

Using the materials and traditions of street art, Dueck uses wood panels which he makes himself. He comes at them with humble spray paint to build layers of colour topped with a high-contrast black applied in organic patterns and sequence.

“I tend to use a lot of stuff you can get from your hardware store, like the Tremclad paints you could paint your bikes with. It’s not about graffiti, but there is an influence,” says Dueck.

Paint has long been his material of choice. He finds that it speaks to the way his creativity flows.

Dueck’s body of work is developed through the use of layers. His starting point lies underneath the surface of the final piece. After adding layers of colour, the viewer might not see a hint of the original base colour.

As each of these new works emerged, Dueck envisioned the highly contemporary, colourful collection displayed on a stark white wall, allowing the art to speak. He also wanted each piece to be approachable and fun. The Public Brewhouse in Steinbach offered such an environment.

Alexandra Ross, co-owner and curator at The Public, says that when they came up with the gallery aspect of their business they decided to focus on the intersection of contemporary and rural-based Manitoba artists.

“Typically, the artists we feature are more emerging, but [Dueck] is an established artist, which we are super



Local artist Daniel Dueck has a new collection on display at The Public Brewhouse in Steinbach.

✉ SARA BETH DACOMBE

excited about,” said Ross.

She learned about Dueck’s work history and achievements, then visited his home studio to get a sense of his style.

“Daniel had his old body of work, which was representational, and then it was this new body of work that I wanted to exhibit,” she says. “His representational work has a lot of the same materiality to it, but maybe one of the risks with rep work is that you can take it at face value and Daniel’s work is more complicated than face value.”

Ross says that she resonated with Dueck’s idealized landscapes and pop culture art, but there is a fantastic invitation that happens when you see abstract work.

“It challenges the viewer to spend a little bit more time on it... sometimes you can get lost in the world that is supposed to be elite art and you forget about the fun that art can be,” she says. “Abstraction is a wonderful invitation to have fun. No one is telling you, ‘This is a tree.’ We don’t know what it is. So we’re allowed to participate with the artist in creating in our minds what the art piece actually is.”

The exhibit will run until March 9, 2024.

RETURNING HOME

Dueck grew up in the St. Vital neighbourhood of Winnipeg and started

making art when he was just four years old. He received his BFA at the University of Manitoba’s School of Art in 1997 and holds an MFA from the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University, Boston, which he completed in 2002.

He has been awarded numerous grants and teaching fellowships and his work has been exhibited both nationally and internationally. It is held in collections of the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Tufts University, Deutsche Bank, and the Children’s Hospital.

He spent a number of years living and working in New York. Like many artists, work slowed during the COVID-19 pandemic and he found himself thinking about moving back to Manitoba.

As an only child who was always close with his parents, Dueck found himself agreeing to move to Niverville after they relocated to gain a better appreciation of small town life.

“Now I’ve been in Niverville for about three years,” says Dueck. “It feels like home, because this is actually closer to where my ancestors came and settled. Home is where the heart is, and being a Manitoban, it’s kind of weird. You can live anywhere and I’ve lived in a variety of cities and states, but you always come across people who lived in Manitoba.”

Dueck enjoys the way in which people are able to get to know each

other better in small towns. And it doesn’t hurt that he has other extended family here as well.

“I have aunts and cousins, literally, on every other block,” he says. “In the city, I never had that. It’s really great.”

THE CREATIVE LIFE

Aside from art, Dueck is a skilled carpenter and works for Southern Health.

But it’s the creative side of life that fuels his passion.

“Creativity is essentially giving birth,” he says. “You’re creating something from nothing. And all artists will tell you, you can’t stop it.”

One of Dueck’s earliest memories is using a paint-by-number kit. As an adult, he then took work as a commercial painter to pay the bills.

However, colouring inside the lines was never going to be enough.

“I’ve been making art since I could draw. A drawing is any distance that creates a line from A to B. But with paint, one day it’s purple, the next day it’s white. And with painting murals, there are many, many layers sometimes. With my work, I can go over it if I don’t like it, and sometimes I do, again and again, and then there’s like this ghost of the painting inside the painting. I know what used to be there, but it’s not there and no one else would know what used to be there.”

While trained in a variety of artistic disciplines, Dueck has returned to drawing and painting rather than sculpture or other media.

“My main medium is 2D and I use a mixed medium,” he says. “Crayon, spray paint, pencils. Contemporary oil painting, acrylic, collage. I have done 3D work before; those works are scarce in terms of my practice. I tend to think that I’m a lover of paint. Paint is part of my life. I understand it.”

Dueck credits the encouragement of many mentors and teachers with inspiring him to study art professionally.

And studying gave him the discipline to make work, which led to bodies of work that he is now proud to share and exhibit.

While discipline is important, he acknowledges that treating art like a business can quickly block creativity.

“I’ve had different processes, where I do it when I want to, or I do it like a discipline, Monday to Friday, professionally going to the studio. I’ve seen that working, like being a business, but it takes encouragement. Once you get successful, you feel like you need to maintain what you’re doing. At times I’ve had artistic depression... There have been hiatuses in my work and mental health will kick you in the butt and you have to take a break. And that’s okay. You’ll come back to it. It’s compelling.”

Dueck describes being an artist like having an addiction; if you don’t make the work, you don’t feel good.

At this point in his career, he has found a creative process that enables him to create art consistently in a fun and healthy way.

“When I’m inspired, I’m articulating my mind’s thought. I’m expressing my feelings through a mind thought, then through a medium. If I was a dancer, I would dance. If I was a poet, I’d make a poem. I’m an artist, so I paint.”

There is a lot of creativity in southern Manitoba and Dueck encourages any budding artist to continue to pursue their dreams.

“Commercial success is statistically hard to achieve,” he says. “It’s like a thousand hours that you should put into your discipline. And then people say it’s location, location, location. And then it’s luck. But without art, there is no culture. And without culture, what do we have? Pursue your dreams. You never know what’s going to happen. Pursue it.”

Mennonite-Based Sitcom to Debut in New Year

By Brenda Sawatzky

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There's a brand-new TV sitcom ready to hit the air in early January—and it's one that should hit close to home for Mennonites and Filipinos alike in southeastern Manitoba.

The pilot episode of *Maria and the Mennos* will air on Wednesday, January 3 on YESTV, a faith-based television Canadian station. The show can also be streamed online at no cost at www.yestv.com/streaming.

Winkler is the backdrop of the half-hour comedy. The cast features local actors Victoria Exconde as Maria, Kenton Dyck as Maria's newlywed husband, Erna Peters as her mother-in-law, and Chuck Fefchak as father-in-law.

Maria is a young, recently married Filipino-Canadian who finds herself living alongside her new husband in the home of her in-laws. The show revolves around this bubbly yet independent woman as she attempts to maintain her own cultural identity in a world of pierogis, hymn sings, and rural prairie life.

Zany antics ensue as these two very different cultures collide under one roof.

Orlando Braun and Paul Plett are the executive team of Ode Productions, the producers behind the sitcom.

The show's creative team consists of locals Paul Plett, Tina Fehr Kehler, and Hazel Wallace along with a writing team of which half are of Mennonite descent and the other half Filipino, for script authenticity.

Plett describes how the idea of *Maria and the Mennos* first took off.

"I'm a Mennonite, and although



The cast of *Maria and the Mennos*: Victoria Exconde, Chuck Fefchak, Kenton Dyck, and Erna Peters.

ODE PRODUCTIONS

I've often seen Mennonites portrayed in the media, I have never seen my own experience represented," Plett says. "Likewise, I've collaborated with many Filipino-Canadian artists in Manitoba who have never seen their experiences on screen. So that was the genesis of the idea for *Maria and the Mennos*. What if we were to make a show that shows Mennonites as we know them? Filipino-Canadians as we know them? What if we were

to celebrate these cultures here in Manitoba and share our own experiences with the world? Take all of that and throw it into the context of a TV sitcom, and we have the beginnings of an idea here."

While a good portion of the show was shot inside a house near the outskirts of Winnipeg, other filming locations are set in or near Winkler, including one episode that was shot at the Altona MCC Thrift Store.

To keep the show as true to the Manitoba Mennonite experience as possible, Plett says there's episodes revolving around crokinole, faspas, thrift shopping, and borscht.

"We really wanted this show to feel familiar, so the Mennonite writers drew as much from their real-life experiences as possible," Plett says. "And the Filipino writers did the same, giving us episodes that focus on Filipino festivals, karaoke, and as

many flamboyant characters as we could fit in. We also tried to incorporate as much Low German and Tagalog into the show as we could, to make the show feel as authentic as possible."

A favourite episode of Plett's is the hymn sing episode, he says, since he grew up loving the hymns sung in church.

"But the Filipino karaoke episode is also completely hilarious, as are a number of other episodes," Plett says. "I just don't want to give anything away!"

From inception to completion, *Maria and the Mennos* took about a year and a half to produce. Plett says this is relatively quick for a show of its calibre.

Ode Productions has been in the film business for the last 12 years, telling stories from around the globe of human struggle and achievement.

Last year, the company produced a feature documentary called *Surviving Suicide* which told the stories of four people, all touched by suicide and yet still living for hope.

Plett says that not all of his company's film creations are faith-centred, but they all hold deeper meaning that will touch the hearts of viewers.

"We try to make all of our projects touch on deeper issues, such as cultural identity, mental health, [or] environmental awareness."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

View the trailer for *Maria and the Mennos*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?si=vsDc_bXA1ApoEvVM&v=R7Q6TRrRvc&feature=youtu.be

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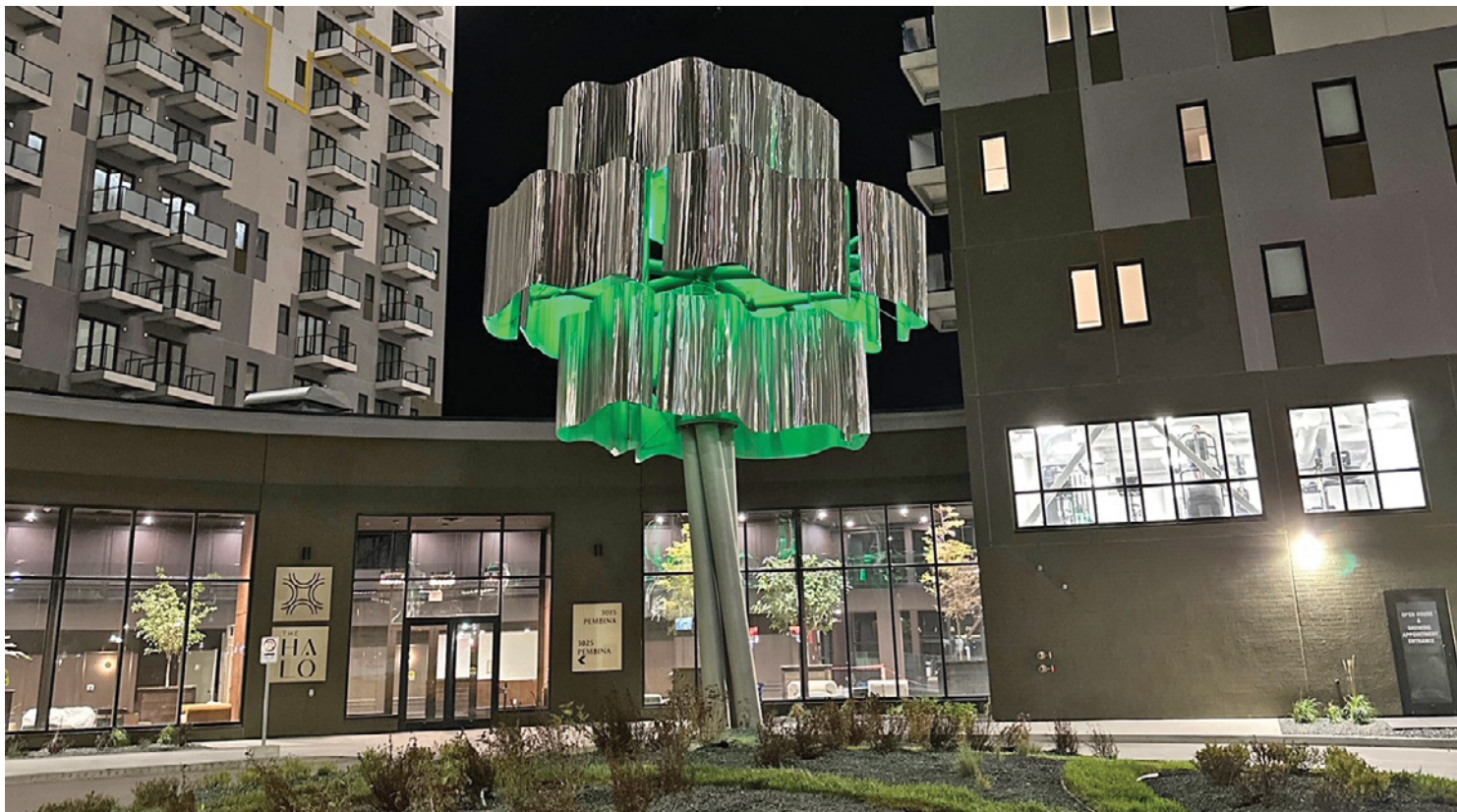
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The new steel art installation at The Halo in south Winnipeg.

TAYLOR SAKWI

Niverville Man Behind New Art Installation

By Jennifer Lavin

jlavin@nivervillecitizen.com

A Niverville artist is behind the new art installation at a prominent property on Pembina Highway in Winnipeg.

The massive stainless steel piece at The Halo was designed and built by Darren Sakwi.

Sakwi isn't exactly a newcomer to the world of stainless art installations, having created and sold several large-scale pieces in recent years.

In 2016, he designed a sculpture to be displayed on Broadway in downtown Winnipeg. A couple of years later, he created another piece, dubbed "Sky Spirit," for the village centre plaza in Sage Creek.

In 2020, he also created the physical time capsule commemorating the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of Manitoba joining Confederation.

Gerry Gyles, one of Sakwi's customers, introduced him to the owners of Private Pension Partners (PPP), the organization behind The Halo's development. PPP was looking for a Las Vegas-style sculpture for the roundabout in the front of the new property.

"I was intrigued by the name [of

the apartments] and had an idea to use a project I had started designing in the past," Sakwi says. "The Tree of Life' was an unfinished idea and I felt it was coming full circle with the meaning that would nicely tie into the overall vision of The Halo."

Sakwi enlisted Gyles, also an artist, to help with lighting and artistic advice. Sakwi says that the engineering of the sculpture was a hurdle due to its massive size.

"All of the hours in the shop seemed to be a blur once the final bolt was connected on site," Sakwi says. "It's weird how the second the last bolt was tightened, I felt a huge sense of relief, as though the weight of the sculpture was removed from my shoulders. 'The Tree of Life' can be seen illuminating different colours throughout the seasons and I feel it is a successful and beautiful piece of art added to the property."

Although Sakwi has no formal art education besides a few classes he's taken throughout the years, he feels that every step he's taken in life has contributed to his artistic vision and talent.

"I have always been naturally artistic in different ways. I was always doodling, drawing, or cutting up cardboard boxes, making

my own toys as a kid. I remember taking art classes as a young kid at the Winnipeg Art Gallery, which turned out to be an awesome experience to allow myself to explore more of my creativity and talents."

Throughout high school, Sakwi always chose art electives, since they provided a mental break from the stress of his other classes.

It never occurred to him that art would be a part of his adult life, and certainly not a part of his life that actually earned him an income.

During and after high school, he spent much of his time racing mountain bike and travelling across Canada with Team Manitoba.

"One year I came home from racing to my mom saying, 'Get in the car. You're signing up for school.' So after completing a ten-month drafting course at Red River College, I went out into the real world and got a job that allowed me to draw and design using computer software which I still use today."

In 2009, Sakwi started his own business with a longtime coworker. That business, Stainless Concepts Inc., began with the building of a sculpture for another local artist.

The piece is now on display on Provencher Boulevard.

"This project was a turning point for me in relation to my art, when that artist challenged me to produce my own type of sculpture," Sakwi says. "After seeing the first piece I designed and fabricated, he jokingly suggested I quit my day job."

Always on the lookout for another creative outlet, Sakwi recently tried something new.

"I designed something that I like to call functional art, which is actually a pizza oven that is aesthetically pleasing. I have a bit of a passion for food and wanted to design something that I could cook on that also looks like a sculpture for your backyard. I have customers who have also purchased this design of pizza oven and love how it adds to their backyard and even more so how it functions."

The pizza oven plans are currently being streamlined so they can be made available for more customers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about Sakwi, you can visit his website (www.darrensakwi.com) or connect on Instagram (@darren_sakwi).

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