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VOLUME 10 - ISSUE 11

NOVEMBER 2024

www.nivervillecitizen.com

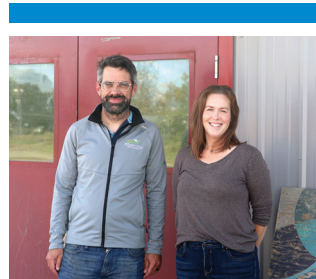
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LOCAL NEWS

The Need for a Regional Library

■ Niverville will soon be home to a new lending library, located in the Centennial Arena. However, the town is also taking part in discussions with other municipalities to address the lack of library access in rural areas like ours.

Details on Page 12

LOCAL NEWS

Acknowledging the Southeast's Homeless

■ Homelessness is not just a Winnipeg problem. A group in Steinbach is working on a project to provide needed support.

Details on Page 14

COMMENTARY

Welcome, There Is Room

■ On the occasion of her husband's citizenship ceremony, one of our writers reflects on our nation's history and what it truly means to be a Canadian.

Details on Page 17

SPORTS & REC

Niverville High School Debuts Hockey Program

■ The new Panthers hockey team has been years in the making, and this month they took their first faceoff.

Details on Page 19



Ritchot Unveils New RM Office

▶ READ MORE ON PAGE 4

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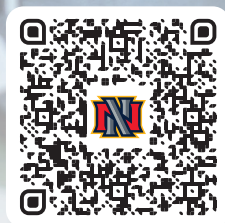


TABLE OF 8: \$1400

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WHAT'S INSIDE

- Ritchot Celebrates Grand Opening of Renovated Civic Building 4
- Niverville Mayor Says Plan20-50 in Limbo 4
- Niverville's Remembrance Day Service Heads Back Indoors 5
- Niverville Thrift Shop Marks 50th 6
- Ex-Military Man Heads to Capital for Remembrance Day Service 8
- Community Groups Appeal to Province for Improved Rural Public Transit 9
- Citizen Poll 9
- École Gabrielle-Roy Hosts 40th Anniversary Celebration 11
- Niverville Joins Other RMs to Explore Creation of Regional Library 12
- MMHS Presents Guided Tours of East and West Reserves 13
- Non-Profit Focuses on Southeast Homeless Crisis 14
- Almond Nail Bar Opens Its Doors in Niverville 15
- Ritchot Reviews Food Waste Management Pilot Program 16
- Welcome, There Is Room 17
- Niverville High School Introduces Hockey Program 19
- West Coast Adventure: Taking on the Pacific Crest Trail 20
- Rising Star Chases Soccer Dream 21
- An Offensive Struggle for Nighthawks 22



The Louis Riel Bridge in Ste. Agathe.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

Province Boosts Funding for Rehabilitation of Ste. Agathe Bridge

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On October 22, the provincial government announced it will be dedicating increased funding toward the rehabilitation project already underway on the Louis Riel Bridge in Ste. Agathe.

Original estimates provided by Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure (MTI) in their preliminary design document, created in the spring of 2021, estimated the project to come at a cost of \$25 to \$30 million.

Three years later, in the early stages of rehabilitation, the province says an investment of \$48.6 million is needed.

“Estimated costs are subject to change over time as the province advances and further refines this project through the preliminary design and detailed design stages,” a provincial spokesperson reveals.

Market volatility, inflation, and the increased costs of materials and

construction fees were also cited as factors that could affect a project such as this.

“This is a complex project due to many factors, including the extent of foundations works and staging of construction works,” the spokesperson continues. “The department received approval for a total project cost of \$48.6 million.”

The original construction of the Louis Riel Bridge dates back to 1959. It has since served as a vital east-west link over the Red River, connecting traffic to Highway 75, a major corridor between Winnipeg and the United States.

Bridge rehabilitation will include a rebuild of the structure’s foundation to bring it up to current federal standards.

The deck and railings will be completely replaced, creating wider lanes and shoulders.

The sidewalk bordering the east-bound lane will be separated from traffic by concrete barriers, providing an increased level of safety for pedestrians.

Working in stages to allow for a continued flow of traffic throughout construction, MTI estimates final completion won’t happen until the fall of 2026.

“The rehabilitation of the Louis Riel Bridge is an important project for our community and the region,” Ritchot mayor Chris Ewen said in a press release. “This bridge serves as a critical link for residents, businesses, and agricultural operations, and its modernization will ensure safe and efficient travel for everyone. We are deeply grateful for the provincial investment in this infrastructure, which honours the legacy of Louis Riel and supports our growth and prosperity for generations to come.”

Project information, frequently asked questions, and design details can be found on the Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure website (see below).

FOR MORE INFORMATION
www.gov.mb.ca/mti/projects.html

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The Niverville Citizen is published monthly and distributed through Canada Post to all those with a postal box in Niverville, Ile-des-Chenes, St. Adolphe, Ste. Agathe, New Bethwell, Otterburne, and Tourond. Additional copies are distributed to businesses in the aforementioned communities. The paper is printed in Canada by Derksen Printers Ltd. Republishing of this paper in whole or in part without prior approval is strictly prohibited.

Funded by the Government of Canada
 Financé par le gouvernement du Canada

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The advertising deadline is 5:00 p.m. on the 20th of each month. The paper will be distributed the first week of every month.

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LEST WE FORGET

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MLA for Springfield-Ritchot

Ritchot Celebrates Grand Opening of Renovated Civic Building

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Residents of Ritchot joined its council and RM staff on October 16 for the official grand opening of the newly renovated civic office.

The major project, which took just over a year to complete, adds 4,000 square feet of space to the building, providing nearly 8,000 square feet in total. The grounds also received a major facelift, making the outdoor space beautiful, functional, and community-friendly.

In order to demonstrate its functionality, RM staff treated celebrants to a live band which played from a newly installed and permanent stage onsite. Participants gathered on the grass nearby to enjoy the band or play outdoor games.

Bordering the half-circle drive, a variety of local market vendors and food trucks hawked their wares.

"When there's community events, this is where everybody could get together," Councillor Joel Lemoine says. "Music can be played, kids can play activities, people can sell local goods, etc. So that was the dream and now it's right here beside the municipal office."

Guests were treated to tours of the building's expansive interior. Entering through the new public



Jason Bodnarchuk, Chris Ewen, Mitch Duval, Janine Boulanger, Joel Lemoine, and Shane Pelletier at the ribbon-cutting ceremony. BRENDA SAWATZKY

access doors, one is greeted by a large, high, and open reception area, spacious enough to accommodate groups as well as wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

To the left, a new oval-shaped room has been constructed to serve as council chambers, large enough for 30 seats in the viewing gallery. Two large projection screens hang on either side of the chamber.

"The [idea] is, basically, if we have a large group of people, to make them comfortable and be able to see whatever's on the screen and able to hear [what's being said]," Lemoine says.

A brightly lit board room sits next

door featuring a floor-to-ceiling windows, a kitchenette, furnishings, and up-to-date audio-visual equipment. Thanks to another large projection screen, this room can act as overflow space when public gatherings exceed council chambers capacity.

The older portion of the building, completely unrecognizable, has been gutted and restored to include a series of well-lit offices for each department.

A couple of extra offices provide storage space in the interim and room to grow in the long-term.

The area containing the former reception desk, board room, and

council chambers is still a work in progress. Sectioned off from the rest of the building by a door, this area has almost endless possibility as community space.

With its own private entry and washroom facilities, Lemoine sees opportunity for business startups or corporate gatherings to rent the space.

Ryan Faucher, economic development officer, has other ideas, too. The RM has already begun conversations with Assiniboine Community College, he says, to offer courses in careers like early childhood educator and homecare.

In this way, the old but still functional furnishings and technical equipment can find a new purpose.

"What I'd like to see, because we have the audio-visual aspect, is having people come in here and actually take their course as a group so then you have that networking and, as they say, social capital, to build your community," Faucher says.

As well, he adds, the space could be utilized for public services such as blood drives, vaccination clinics, and information sessions.

"Also, anything that our rec department offers we'll be able to do onsite, which is just convenient and easy to support," says Faucher.

Swipe lock entry will soon make it easy for renters of the space to gain personal access.

"If you're a student, if you're someone that works from home, an accountant, or a lawyer that needs to meet with people, you can meet here," says Faucher. "Sometimes you need to have a meeting or just a place to sit quietly and work. We'll have this area all set up and they'll have network connectivity, a printer, scanners, and equipment."

Attendees of the Wednesday celebration were treated to free gourmet coffee provided by Perk and sugar cookies decorated with the RM logo. Council and the CAO participated in a formal ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Niverville Mayor Says Plan20-50 in Limbo

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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In late September, board members of the Winnipeg Metro Region (WMR) met with Ian Bushie, Minister of Municipal Relations, after the organization failed to successfully roll out Plan20-50 this summer.

Mayor Myron Dyck attended the meeting, held at the Legislature in Winnipeg. He says that the WMR board, made up of council members from the region's 18 municipalities, were each provided an opportunity to voice their concerns and questions regarding WMR membership and the regional planning document.

"[The meeting] was well received," Dyck says. "The Minister just said, 'We've heard you, there's changes

coming, we're putting in legislation and we'll have it in this fall.' So the WMR is kind of on standdown, if you will. There's no action. There's no meetings planned."

Dyck anticipates that at least one piece of the new legislation will include a WMR opt-out clause, allowing municipalities such as Niverville to back out of WMR membership if they so desire.

While many of the 18 municipalities that make up the WMR are members by choice, Niverville was not provided the option when they were inducted into the organization by the provincial government in the spring of 2023.

In August, after both Niverville and Selkirk councils issued public statements indicating their desire for an opt-out clause, Premier Wab

Kinew announced his party's intent to honour that request.

Even so, Mayor Dyck says it doesn't mean that Niverville will opt out of WMR membership. He and his council await the legal wording used to define the clause.

"It's politics," Dyck says. "Is it [going to come with] no strings attached? We don't know."

The community's forced inclusion into the WMR was only one concern made public by Niverville's council this summer. Following the postponement of WMR's Plan20-50 public hearing in August, council named flaws to the plan that would need to be amended before they could endorse it.

The first echoed concerns shared by many residents regarding the potential loss of autonomous

decision-making power enjoyed by municipal governments.

"Plan20-50 needs to be revised and further developed to ensure that final land use planning decisions remain in the hands of locally elected officials at the community level," council's statement read.

As well, council saw some worrisome financial implications when it came to costs related to provincially required studies and reports that may not necessarily be of local benefit.

Finally, council wished to be recognized in the Plan20-50 document as a transition zone due to its unique position on the outskirts of the region.

Once the province roles out new legislation related to the WMR, Dyck says that his council will re-evaluate membership based on how it stacks

up next to council's concerns.

"If the changes are such that it looks positive and there's a good way forward, council may choose to [remain a WMR member]," Dyck says.

What the legislation may not indicate, though, is whether an opt-out of WMR membership will result in the loss of certain provincial funding or privileges.

Indeed, Niverville has been the recipient of some hefty provincial grants in recent years.

As well, there is a lot at stake as council waits on the province's decision regarding the annexation of nearly 2,600 acres of land in order to expand Niverville eastward.

To these unknowns, Dyck is unprepared to speculate on what a rejection of WMR involvement might mean for the community's future.

Niverville's Remembrance Day Service Heads Back Indoors

By **Brenda Sawatzky**

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
 bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

On November 11, 2024, the Niverville Remembrance Day service is heading back to the Heritage Centre for another event that won't soon be forgotten.

The formal service will begin at 10:00 a.m. in the ballroom followed by a light luncheon in the atrium immediately afterward.

Attendees can anticipate another moving service featuring this year's special guest, Angela Orosz-Richt.

Hailing from Montreal, Orosz-Richt has become known as one of Auschwitz's youngest survivors. She was born in the Nazi concentration camp in December 1944 weighing only 2.2 pounds. Her mother Vera had been subjected to painful prenatal experiments carried out by Nazi physician Josef Mengele.

Upon her birth, Orosz-Richt was too weak to cry, which meant she went completely unnoticed by Nazi guards until camp survivors were liberated one month later.

Orosz-Richt's father didn't escape the camp alive.

In 2015 and 2016, she testified



against two former concentration camp guards at trials held in Germany. In recent years, she's become an active speaker at the Montreal Holocaust Museum, bringing her story to thousands of students.

Unfortunately, due to unanticipated medical concerns, Orosz-Richt was unable to accept the invitation to speak at Niverville's service in person. In lieu, *The Citizen's* Brenda Sawatzky flew to Montreal

to conduct a live interview in Orosz-Richt's home.

Attendees of the November 11 service will be the first to witness the video recording of that interview.

As in previous years, the Niverville Remembrance Day service will be an event geared for every generation.

The 3234 Manitoba Horse St. Pierre Army Cadets, along with the

Girl Guides Embers, will be there to greet guests and escort the wreath layers. The beautiful voice of Melanie Bergen will transport attendees back to wartime 1939 with the song "We'll Meet Again."

Niverville Remembrance Day committee member Donald Stott says it was important for the committee to bring the traditional service back indoors.

Last year, for a change of pace,

the service was held outdoors at the cenotaph on Main Street. It was a bitterly cold and snowy day, bringing out a small gathering in comparison to the hundreds that typically attend the service.

The Heritage Centre had conducted its own Remembrance Day service for the many seniors located in their facility.

For Stott, though, the act of remembering is something he believes the community needs to do together, under one roof, in one accord.

"We don't want to lose anybody anywhere," Stott says. "We want [to keep] everyone together."

As for Stott, he is among the third generation of his family to have experienced the peace that was purchased through sacrifices made by his father, Jack Stott, who served in World War II, and his grandfather David Stott, who served in World War I.

To become complacent about war, he says, is just not an option.

"We just cannot forget," says Stott. "All we have to do is look around the world right now. We cannot forget what we've gone through or we're going to repeat it."

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Niverville Thrift Shop Marks 50th

By Jennifer Lavin

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The Niverville MCC Thrift Shop has reached a remarkable milestone: it has been serving the community for 50 years.

After the first MCC (Mennonite Central Committee) Thrift Shop opened in Altona in 1972, a group of women from Niverville decided they could do the same thing for their community. By 1974, the Niverville location was open for business.

Five women from five different churches spearheaded the project—Kathy Dyck (Word of Life Mission Church), Sadie Friesen (Niverville Mennonite Church), Hedy Peters (Niverville Mennonite Brethren Church), Katherine Unger (Niverville Christian Mennonite Conference Church), and Frances Klassen (Elim Mennonite Church).

It should be noted that one of those founders, Katherine Unger, and her husband Abe are still regular volunteers at the store.

Over the years, the location of the store has changed multiple times, providing a kind of memory road of former businesses. The original thrift shop was at 226 Main Street, the building that currently houses Anya's Hair studio.

The next year, the thrift store moved into a building which had previously been home to Neil Toews's Grocery Store and was owned by Jake's Electric. This building was located to the rear of what is now Chicken Chef.

In 1977, the shop moved to its third location, a former bakery on Main Street. The store was housed in this spot for six years, until it was time to move again.

In 1983, the original location of the thrift store came up for sale and the business moved back to its first



Store manager Chris Banman and the four day managers of the MCC Thrift Shop.

📷 GEOFF TOWNSEND

home, this time as owners of the building. In 1991, after some renovations, Mayor Gil Wiebe presided over a grand opening of this new expanded version of the store.

In 1995, a second story was added to this building and the store remained at 226 Main Street for another 13 years after that.

That's when the former Keystone Hatchery right next door was purchased, renovated, and

reconstructed into the MCC building currently in use. The grand opening for this location was held on April 19, 2008.

"The footprints of the store's various locations have increased, as have the monthly financial donations to world missions," says Geoff Townsend, an MCC Thrift Shop board member. "From its humble beginnings in 1974, the aim has been to serve the Niverville

community and raise financial support for worldwide missions."

The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) is an Anabaptist Christian ministry. Their website states, "We are an international charity that shares God's love and compassion for all by responding to urgent needs around the world and working for peace and justice."

The business model is simple but has many moving parts. Anyone

can donate their gently used items, from dishes to clothes to sporting goods. The Niverville shop then has its approximately 100 volunteers sort, clean, and price the items.

Profits are used for the upkeep of the store, the managers' salaries, and any needed improvements or repairs.

After funds are used to maintain the business, excess profit is donated to MCC Manitoba, which uses the funds to support relief, development, and peace work around the world. The store also contributes to multiple local non-profits.

MCC does charitable work in 45 countries on 393 projects with 1,108 workers. To date, they boast some impressive statistics, such as having provided training for 45,000 people in improving agriculture and animal production methods, providing direct clinical care to 38,000 people, giving educational supplies and MCC school kits to 66,000 children, improving water sources for 55,000 people, and providing 208,000 people with food assistance. This is just the tip of the iceberg.

"Our thanks go out to the members that have served on the board, the management teams over the years, as well as the many, many volunteers that made all of this possible over the last 50 years," says Townsend. "Our hope and prayer is that many more people will take up the baton and work together for the future of your local MCC store, possibly seeing it grow even more in years to come!"

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The Niverville MCC Thrift Shop always welcomes new volunteers. For more information about the store or to volunteer, call 204-388-4404.

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Ex-Military Man Heads to Capital for Remembrance Day Service

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On November 11, at 11:00 a.m., Niverville's Steve Choquette and his partner Renee Baudry will be observing a moment of silence in the nation's capital.

Choquette, who served 20 years in the Canadian Armed Forces, views this trip to Ottawa as a personal pilgrimage.

"I think it's so important to remember to honour those that went before us," Choquette says. "Some people don't have the privilege of being able to go because they're not with us. So we go and we stand for those that can't any longer. Also, we're honouring the survivors. We're still losing veterans through suicide and post-traumatic stress, so I think it's really important to show our support."

It will be Choquette's first Remembrance Day service at the National War Memorial and his first time participating in the veterans' march.

Choquette was just 17 years of age when he joined the military, inspired by a brother and several uncles who also served. For 17 of his 20 years, Choquette served as a military policeman both domestically and abroad.

While on Canadian soil, he provided law enforcement on military bases. When deployed, his job description included war crime investigation, prisoner of war containment, and peacekeeping.

Choquette was only 25 when he was deployed to Haiti in 1996, right after the Haitian president was ousted and revolutionaries took over the country.

"There was no infrastructure, no medical [system], the hospitals were empty, there were no police," Choquette says. "So we flew in and established a camp and then we did everything we could to help that country. We delivered humanitarian aid and liberated a police station. We intervened in a firefight between the



Steve Choquette with Rommel, his faithful German Shepherd.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

[rebel] police force and the Haitian national police."

Choquette describes one particular incident that was especially unnerving at the time. On their way to help liberate a police station, he and his partner drove through the gang-controlled region of Haiti's capital city in a military-issued open Jeep which offered almost no protection.

"The streets were lined with these military-aged men waving machetes and saying, 'Go home!'" Choquette recalls. "It was like driving through a riot. But we kept our cool. Sometimes you have it and sometimes you fake it."

For a military person, putting oneself in harm's way in order to save the lives of others is what it's all about. Still, Choquette says he needed constant reminders as to who he was

doing it for.

In Haiti, Choquette says the local children he saw on a daily basis inspired him to keep going.

"I knew why we were there," he says. "To give those kids a chance."

In 2003, Choquette headed on a peacekeeping mission to the Golan Heights, an area between Syria and Israel which had been under military occupation since 1973.

Peacekeepers from around the world were deployed there, year after year, to ensure the ceasefire between the two middle eastern countries was maintained.

A road runs through the Golan Heights, creating a demilitarized zone that stretches approximately one mile across. Along this road is a place called Checkpoint Charlie. Here, Choquette was stationed

along with other military police from Poland, Slovakia, and Austria. He was the only Canadian on the site.

It was also here, under the instruction of two Austrian men, both named Wolfgang, that Choquette learned the art of military dog training.

"We lived in this zone where there were landmines and barbed wire and we were the only road that connected Syria to Israel," Choquette says. "Anyone that crossed our border crossing area, we would conduct searches with the dogs to make sure there were no explosives, no unauthorized firearms, no drugs or contraband items, things like that."

Choquette has many other stories he chooses not to tell, including stories that bear witness to the untold cruelty man is able to inflict upon his fellows in times of conflict.

When Choquette finally left military service in 2008, he says it took some work to reintegrate back into civilian life.

"It takes so much time," Choquette says. "I had to seek counselling for myself in order to get to a good place. I've experienced those things and I guess knowing that I did everything that I could helped me get to a place where I could manage those feelings. I'm not going to lie. We all have our nightmares about the things we'll never unsee. But somebody had to do it. You do for those who cannot [do for themselves]."

Today a framed display of Choquette's five military medals rests in his dining room, a daily reminder of his time in service.

Apart from those medals, Choquette also brought home some basic fluency in about seven different languages which he learned while making friends abroad.

More recently, Choquette is finding joy in his vintage motorcycle collection and his faithful German Shepherd, Rommel.

The first bike he purchased was a 1968 BSA Thunderbolt, the same make and model his father owned as a much younger man.

The bike has since sparked some fond memories for his aging father, who suffered a few strokes and lives with dementia.

"I said to myself, if my 80-year-old dad wants to go for a ride, I'm going to make it happen," Choquette says.

Choquette's next purchase was a vintage Russian Ural bike with an attached sidecar painted, appropriately, in a camouflage pattern. Choquette has since fulfilled his dream, taking his dad for occasional spins in the bike's sidecar.

But it's Rommel's occupation of the sidecar next to Choquette that really garners attention from Niverville's residents. Using skills from his military dog training days, Choquette has created the perfect riding partner in his trusty Shepherd, who sits proud next to his master as they parade through town.

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Community Groups Appeal to Province for Improved Rural Public Transit

By Brenda Sawatzky
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On October 18, representatives from a variety of Manitoba organizations convened at Brandon University for a public launch and panel discussion on a new report entitled “Connecting Communities: Strengthening Public Transportation Options in Rural Manitoba.”

“All people have a right to movement and mobility, but for many rural Manitobans, options for traveling between communities are few to non-existent,” says report author Hannah Muhajarine. “While many rural municipalities and local organizations are stepping up, the provincial government needs to take on more responsibility to ensure a baseline of efficient, affordable, interconnected, and sustainable public transportation services for Manitobans across the province.”

Muhajarine, policy researcher with Manitoba’s Climate Action Team (CAT), was one of four experts to attend the launch and discuss the report’s findings. She was accompanied by Niall Harney of the Manitoba chapter of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Connie Gamble of the Southeast Regional Transportation Initiative, and Serena Bittner of Transportation Options Network for Seniors.

“Rural communities heavily rely on personal vehicles and the support of friends and family to reach their destinations, whether for work, school, services, medical appointments, or other needs,” says Gamble in a press release. “To achieve sustainable transportation equity comparable to urban areas, it is essential to secure operating funding for the creation of affordable and reliable regional public transportation, enabling



Connie Gamble, Serena Bittner, Niall Harney, and Hannah Muhajarine. CLIMATE ACTION TEAM

rural communities to thrive and grow.”

According to the report, though, it’s about more than just creating equal opportunity to get around. Affordable and accessible public transportation ensures that everyone has adequate access to healthcare. It also helps to improve local economies and overall public safety, all while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Leading to the completion of the report, Muhajarine and others spent the past year researching the topic of Manitoba’s rural transportation needs.

They engaged public interest groups in conversations and reviewed how provinces like Ontario and Nova Scotia are currently supporting their own interconnected rural transportation systems.

A survey was also sent out, open to all adult Manitobans, especially those who are more likely to be transportation-dependent. These included seniors, the mobility-challenged, newcomers to the province, low-income earners, and members of the Indigenous community.

The survey sought to pinpoint the most significant transportation challenges

within these groups. Based on responses received, 81 percent said that a public rural bus service with affordable fares, convenient scheduling, and service to the communities they frequently visit would improve their lives.

“We also asked people if they are satisfied with their transportation options to access medical services because we know that that’s a really pressing issue for rural communities,” Muhajarine tells *The Citizen*. “Thirty-five percent said yes, they are satisfied, but 40 percent said no, they weren’t, and 21 percent were unsure.”

Any way you look at it, says Muhajarine, people are falling through the cracks.

Historically speaking, there was a time when some rural communities enjoyed a limited level of public transit options.

According to Muhajarine, Greyhound buses offered rural services for approximately 30 years in Manitoba.

Around the year 2010, they began to cut back their services, and in 2018 they discontinued rural services here altogether.

With the exception of a few privately owned taxi or shuttle

companies, there’s been no replacement for Greyhound’s services.

Muhajarine says there are a number of ways the province could use the report’s findings and these recommendations will be presented to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure as well as the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, along with a copy of the report.

Though invited to attend the launch, no government officials were represented.

The first step Muhajarine says the province should take is to create their own steering committee to meet with rural municipal and organization representatives to determine the exact needs and strategize ways to fill those needs.

“Responsibility can’t be [left to] municipalities and other organizations to handle this problem on their own,” Muhajarine says. “The province supports urban public transit in Winnipeg and a few other major urban centres. People like me, living in Winnipeg, get to benefit from it. But if you’re living in a rural community, then there’s no services for you. It becomes up to you to buy your own vehicle or to ask your friends and family for rides.”

Working on the Climate Action Team, Muhajarine can appreciate the effort the province has been putting into electric vehicle adoption in recent months.

Still, she says, to focus all the attention there is a bit myopic.

“The CAT is obviously a climate organization, but we wanted to take this on because, [while] rural transportation may not be the main lever for driving down emissions, I think that it has a role to play. The province can’t just be thinking about electric transportation as the only option.”

CITIZEN POLL

If a community-to-community bus service was offered at a reasonable rate in rural Manitoba, would you use it?

- Yes. I would be glad to have an affordable way to get from town to town without needing my own personal vehicle.
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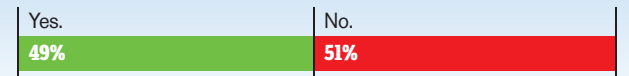
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I already made the switch to a full EV six months ago... I would never look back.

Yes. When there are more charging stations and more reliable stations, then I would jump at the opportunity to switch. We currently have a hybrid vehicle (non-plug-in) and have noticed big savings on gas over the last six years. So a fully electric option would be even better.



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Student body of Gab-Roy, Grades Nine through Twelve.

GAB-ROY

École Gabrielle-Roy Hosts 40th Anniversary Celebration

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On November 9, alumni of École/Colège Régional Gabrielle-Roy (Gab-Roy), their parents, members of the community members are invited to the celebration of a major milestone of this all-French school.

The special occasion? Gab-Roy is turning 40.

The event will kick off at 6:00 p.m. with tours of the school provided by teachers and administrators.

For many of the earlier alumni and their parents, the tour will be of interest due to the many facelifts the school has undergone since it first opened in 1984.

At 7:30, the festivities will continue at the TC Energy Centre with a social that includes a dance, cash bar, and late lunch.

Special addresses will be made by the four founding Île-des-Chênes

(IDC) residents who are the key reason the school exists today.

“We’re hoping to have some memorabilia and some of the [school] clothing there on display,” says vice principal Roxanne Tétreault. “The school [also] has every yearbook since it opened.”

Over the course of the last 40 years, 1,911 graduating students have donned cap and gown in a fully French setting thanks to Gab-Roy.

The school’s success, Tétreault says, has much to do with the dedicated staff who have taught here through the years.

“They teach not only the French language but the French culture,” says Tétreault. “We’re known for being proud of our francophone history and it’s a big part of our education here at the school.”

The community, too, can be proud of the hard-won battle that brought the school to IDC in the first place.

It all began in the 1970s when a

group of local parents started advocating for their children’s French education.

“It was deemed the white elephant of southeast Manitoba because the provincial government didn’t think that a French high school was necessary in our area,” Tétreault says of that uncertain period. “The parents had to fight for years and years... but the province always kept saying, ‘You’re never going to fill up that school.’ And now we’ve had four major additions and we’re at 565 students and we’re still overflowing. It’s definitely a success story.”

The original school, built in 1984, began with students from Grades Seven to Eleven. That first year, Grade Twelve students were transported to Collège Lorette.

But by 1986, Gab-Roy was already undergoing its first addition, making space this time to accommodate students from Kindergarten through Grade Twelve.

As an elementary student attending the nearby Île-des-Chênes School at the time, Tétreault recalls being among those kids whose parents wanted them to have an all-French education.

“I remember, because the schools were close together, that we actually walked to the new school with our [supplies] in our hands,” Tétreault muses.

Exactly ten years later, in 1994, another monumental event took place in Manitoba, and this one once again changed the face of French education forever.

“It was the year that the DSFM was formed,” Tétreault says. “We transferred from Seine River to the DSFM. I remember that very distinctly because we had a parade down IDC Main Street to celebrate the new school division. That year we were also celebrating the tenth anniversary of Gab-Roy, so we had a celebration in the gym with all of

the students there and we had done little skits to compare 1984 with 1994. The parents were invited and it was a huge deal.”

In 2003, another addition was built. This one was quite significant, adding a full second floor to the building.

“They added a new library, a few classrooms, and a music room,” Tétreault says. “Upstairs we had home economics and woodworking.”

According to Tétreault, this is the first such celebration the school has seen in 30 years. The DSFM has also jumped on board, adding their own contributions as they celebrate their own 30-year milestone.

“We’re hoping that this will be like one big class reunion for all of the Gab alumni as well as former staff members who we’re inviting,” Tétreault says.

Tickets for the social event are \$20 per adult and available on the school website.



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Niverville Joins Other RMs to Explore Creation of Regional Library

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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When Niverville councillor Meghan Beasant ran in the last municipal election, she told voters that she'd make it her mandate to research the feasibility of a local public library.

Two years into her term, she's making good on that promise.

Very soon, the unused space in the south end of the Centennial Arena will have received a complete makeover. When the doors open, residents of Niverville will enjoy their new lending library.

At council's October 1 public meeting, council also voted unanimously in favour of appointing Beasant and Warren Britton, Niverville's Director of Recreation, to a working group whose job will be to explore the possibility of creating a regional public library.

Beasant says it all began with a meeting initiated by Meghan Hansen, the province's library consultant, held at Steinbach city hall.

"They reached out to all of the southeastern communities and everybody was there, [including] representatives from major libraries like Springfield and Jake Epp [Library]," Beasant says. "It was a large information session showing the benefits of regional libraries."

While the meeting's primary objective was to provide generalized information, a secondary goal was



Warren Britton and Meghan Beasant at the Niverville Centennial Arena, where a new lending library will soon open.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

to facilitate a working group which could include members from each interested municipality.

Attendees from the various municipalities have until the end of the year to register their interest in being involved in the working group.

At that point, Hansen will oversee meetings which will begin sometime in the new year.

Beasant says that she and Britton will register.

"It's nice to see that this is being considered important by the [provincial] government," Beasant says. "They were looking at how many

people live in southeastern Manitoba and how many actually have access [to a public library] within a decent driving distance, and the numbers are just not really where anyone would like them to be."

Should the working group end up ironing out the details for a shared public library, Beasant says the government will provide a lot of flexibility in terms of what those communities would like their regional library to look like.

For example, Beasant says there is a municipal library in Manitoba that lends more than just books and audio

materials. There is also an entire section dedicated to the lending of housewares and other items, too.

But there's nothing simple about planning a regional library in collaboration with other communities.

Perhaps the biggest question they'll have to ask themselves is basic: where will it be located?

Available space, of course, is probably front and centre in that equation. As it stands, Niverville has little to no existing space that would suffice for a library of any significant size. And building one would be an expensive endeavour.

"Unfortunately, there is no government grant that [provides] capital funding," Beasant says. "You're always on your own to find the space and do the fundraising for [a library]."

That's why, for now, Beasant will continue to work with Britton on the completion of the lending library. She sees it as taking the first step.

Britton, who is overseeing the renovations at the Centennial Arena, says that an updated kitchen has been installed and final touches are being taken on the flooring, ceiling tiles, and paint.

The inclusion of a kitchen, he says, is to allow the space to operate as a mixed-use facility.

As for donated books, Britton says the collection is already well underway.

"My uncle downsized a couple of years ago and he had a huge library," says Britton. "His biggest concern with downsizing is what would happen to all his books. So he was very happy to hear [about our library] and we took pretty much a full palette over from his house."

Other donations have also been trickling in. But Britton recommends, at this stage, that residents wait until the facility is open to drop off any more books.

As for the types of books they'll accept, Beasant says every genre is welcome.

"That is the point of a library," Beasant says. "To have a lot of [different] resources."

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MMHS Presents Guided Tours of East and West Reserves

By Brenda Sawatzky
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On October 10 and 22, local history buffs were treated to two special events in honour of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the Mennonite people in Manitoba.

Thanks to the dedicated efforts of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (MMHS), guided bus tours carried participants to all the major points of significance on both the East and West Reserves.

Tickets for the all-day excursions sold for \$60 per person.

For that price, guests were treated to a seat on a chartered bus, a Mennonite-inspired lunch, and the dynamic historical storytelling of their tour guides: Conrad Stoesz, the president of the MMHS, and Ernie Braun, an MMHS board member.

"Being on location, you get a better sense of [the story]," says Stoesz. "It's a different way of learning history, a little more tangible than just a textbook or listening to stories or even seeing it on film."

The October 10 event covered the territory known as the East Reserve, which runs from the banks of the Red River eastward to Steinbach.

Participants were picked up at the north grounds of the Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg at 8:30 a.m. and returned to their starting point by 5:00 p.m.

The first stop was the Mennonite Memorial Landing site, located near Niverville at the

confluence of the Red and Rat Rivers.

Participants could also choose to begin their ride from this location.

The tour included the Schantz sheds cairn, a stop in Niverville at the site of the ox cart used by early settlers, as well as a series of other significant sites en route.

At the halfway point, participants took a break at the Chortitz Heritage Church for lunch. This church in Randolph is the gathering place of one of the first Mennonite congregations in western Canada. The building dates back to 1897.

The West Reserve tour followed on October 22 and focused on the eastern half of this territory.

The first point of interest was the Fort Dufferin National Historic Site of Canada, located near the town of Emerson. Established in 1872, this site served as a port of entry to Manitoba and gateway to western Canada.

For years, it also functioned as an immigration station to many newcomers, including Mennonites.

From there, the tour bus trekked westward along Post Road.

"If you can imagine a flat, almost treeless plain, in the dark, in a winter snowstorm, you're going to get lost," says Stoesz. "In 1878, the Mennonites decided to put in posts every 250 feet along the most commonly used road. It went from Emerson, which was the economic hub at the time, to Mountain City, which was just south of Morden."



Conrad Stoesz at the Mennonite Memorial Landing.

CONRAD STOEZ

Post Road, also known as Provincial Road 243, is believed to be the trail taken by the Mennonites from Fort Dufferin to all points west.

Other stops along the West Reserve route included a cemetery in Edenberg, cairns at Neuanlage, and the community of Neuberghthal, the nationally recognized site of the historic Mennonite house-barns.

Participants travelling with either tour enjoyed far more than just interesting historical sights.

Both Stoesz and Braun are storytellers who kept the participants engaged by telling heartwarming and tragic Mennonite migration stories.

Stoesz recounts one story of young Margaretha Esau. At the tender age of four, Margaretha went down in history as the

first Mennonite immigrant to die on Manitoba soil.

As the story goes, Esau's family was on a train, headed from their home in Ukraine to England where they would board a ship bound for Canada.

"On the train, she gets yanked by the conductor off the train and she falls and hits her head on a stone," Stoesz says. "From then on, her health is not good. The [family] arrives by ship at the Red and Rat junction on August 1 and goes to the immigration sheds. Margaretha dies on the third of August in 1874."

With no cut wood to build the young girl a coffin, the family solicited the help of local swimmers to retrieve a plank which was afloat on the Red River.

With only bare essentials, they fashioned a box in which to lay her body.

According to Stoesz, 30 unmarked graves lie at an unknown location somewhere just west of Niverville. This site holds some of the earliest Mennonite immigrants, like young Margaretha.

Another story with a less tragic ending is that of 67-year-old Johann Schroeder. Schroeder and his family were also at the English port that day, ready to board for their trip to Canada.

Schroeder, having very poor eyesight, relied on the guidance of his young son Jacob to help him navigate the busy port. Over the father's shoulder was slung a huge bag of dried bread known as reischja, which would sustain the family on their arduous

journey across the ocean.

As the story goes, and unfortunately for Schroeder, his young son gradually became so transfixed by the busyness of the port, ships, and machinery that he failed to vigilantly guide his father along the way.

"Johann is walking up the plank [to the boat] carrying this bag of reischja and holding Jacob's hand," Stoesz says. "Johann missteps and he falls off the plank and into the water below, pulling his son in with him. Jacob is able to grab hold of a bar, and he's looking around for his dad who doesn't know how to swim. But because Johann is holding the bag of reischja, it acts like a life preserver and so he is saved by it."

Stoesz points out that many stories like these have been trickling down from generation to generation since the time of the first Mennonite's arrival.

Thanks to the work of the Mennonite Heritage Archives (MHA), where Stoesz is employed, these stories are finally being written down for posterity.

"This is the 150th anniversary of Mennonites in Manitoba, but there were commemorative events for the 25th and the 50th and the 100th too, and all of those events were times when people would gather stories and write them down," says Stoesz. "Because of those events, we now have these stories 150 years later."

The Plett Foundation has been instrumental in supporting the East and West Reserve bus tours.

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Non-Profit Focuses on Southeast Homeless Crisis

By Brenda Sawatzky

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For years, many Manitobans have held to the common misconception that homelessness is a Winnipeg-centric issue, but nothing could be further from the truth.

In recent years, more and more communities in the rural southeast are witnessing the telltale signs left by an ever-growing homeless population.

Many of these rural homeless have been congregating at encampments, or tent villages, in Steinbach.

Thanks to the generous spirits of a collection of local volunteers in recent years, the idea for The INN Inc. was born.

Board members of The INN, which stands for Initiative for Neighbourly Nights, believe it's possible to put an end to homelessness in southeastern Manitoba if the right resources are provided.

And that's just what they intend to do.

Still in its fundraising and design phase, The INN will be a two-storey, apartment-style structure in Steinbach. Its primary purpose will be to provide shelter for people in the region who find themselves homeless.

Clients of the facility will have short-term use of private or semi-private rooms. Washrooms, a kitchen area, and laundry spaces will be shared.

In total, The INN will provide a place of solace for around 30 people, with additional room to create an emergency shelter if needed.

Leona Doerksen is the original visionary for The INN and is chairperson of its board today. She says that the board's intent is to maintain a local focus.

"We don't have the resources to help people from all over the province, so we will be focusing on the needs of those in southeast Manitoba," Doerksen says.



A staff member of the Salvation Army Winnipeg Centre of Hope gives a tour to Leona Doerksen (middle) and Lisa Clark of Lisa Clark Designs (right).

LEONA DOERKSEN

The board has already secured a general contractor for the build, utilizing Hillside Construction based out of Blumenort. The Lisa Clark Design firm from Steinbach will be responsible for creating the facility's layout. Other local businesses have pledged in-kind support.

A seed fund has been established thanks to church fundraising initiatives as well as events like Summer in the City and Worship in the City. The goal of The INN board is to complete the build mortgage-free.

The mission statement of The Inn Inc. is to provide safe, low-barrier, transitional housing as soon as it opens its doors.

"Rather than just a shelter in the winter, The INN is committed to being open 365 days of the year, because, simply put, everyone needs a home all year-round," states a news release from the nascent organization. "It is only with stable housing that people can focus on other needs they may have."

Beyond just a place to eat and sleep, The INN will provide, or assist in accessing, full wrap-around services through agencies that work in housing, employment, mental health, addiction recovery, spiritual wellness, and other supports.

"The strategies used by The INN are those endorsed by the

evidenced-based Housing First model," the news release adds. "Simply put, this means that people are welcomed in off the street and given a place to live until a permanent housing solution is found. Guests will have access to the building 24/7 and they will work together with staff and volunteers to help keep the neighbourhood safe and clean."

For Doerksen, a registered social worker, the issue of homelessness is one that seems to have been escalating ever since the pandemic. Contrary to common belief, it is not always the result of poor life choices.

"Ninety-eight percent of people living on the streets would say they'd rather have a secure home," says Doerksen. "People don't grow up saying, 'Someday I'm going to be homeless.' One of the biggest drivers [of homelessness today] is a lack of affordable housing."

Long-term affordable housing, though, is one of the key components that The INN can't provide.

Nonetheless, Doerksen is hopeful that developers will soon be encouraged to fill that gap.

In the meantime, those who find themselves in a homeless situation are often Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) recipients, sometimes collecting government support after the loss of a job or the inability

to work while they are ill.

"[EIA recipients] get like \$800 per month," Doerksen says. "None of us, really, should be spending more than 30 percent of our income on housing. Well, that's \$240 [for those on EIA]. Where can anyone even find a room for \$240 per month?"

But there's another class of homeless person these days. Doerksen calls them the working poor.

"We have couples that are both working and standing at the foodbanks because two people that are at entry-level jobs can hardly afford to pay rent, let alone a mortgage," Doerksen explains.

Many churches in the southeast, she says, are doing their best to address homelessness in their communities. But when it comes to dealing with addictions or mental health concerns, they aren't always equipped to help end the cycle.

"[This region does] have addiction treatment [and mental health resources] available, but for someone who doesn't have an address or a way to get around, it's harder for them to access that," says Doerksen.

With a mandate to end homelessness in the southeast, Doerksen says that The INN board has developed a twofold strategy to make that happen: prevention and diversion.

Prevention includes more than

just lobbying for the construction of affordable housing units. The board also intends to work alongside the province's corrections system and Child and Family Services (CFS) to determine housing needs for those exiting correction facilities or aging out of the foster system.

Diversion, on the other hand, will mean helping guests of The INN get safely back to the community from which they came.

In some cases, where a relationship breakdown is the cause of someone's homelessness, the team anticipates providing mediation counselling to help restore them to their original home.

Currently, the board has seven members, but Doerksen says they would welcome more. Over the coming months, they hope to build board diversity by adding members of the business community as well as those who provide spiritual care, including a member of the Indigenous community.

Eventually, a director and two staff members will be hired to run the facility. Volunteers will be needed on an ongoing basis for food preparation, maintenance, and general guest care.

"We've committed to the community that we will work with our guests to keep our neighbourhood clean and work towards increased safety," Doerksen says. "We feel that we are going to make the neighbourhood safer because we're welcoming people off the street so they will no longer have a need to be stealing or breaking into people's property to try to stay warm."

Optimistically, Doerksen says the first shovel could hit the ground as early as the upcoming spring.

That projection is dependent, however, on the board achieving their fundraising goals.

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Almond Nail Bar Opens Its Doors in Niverville

By Jennifer Lavin

✉ jlavin@nivervillecitizen.com

On Tuesday, October 29, the long-awaited Niverville location of Almond Nail Bar opened its doors at Unit 8A, 40 Drovers Run.

The store is open Monday to Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. and on Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

To celebrate the opening, Almond is offering a special 50 percent discount on services until November 30.

Almond Nail Bar has hired six team members for the Niverville location, three of whom are local. The manager of the store is an already established Almond employee.

Thomas Nguyen, founder and CEO of Almond Nail Bar, established his company 14 years ago and has proudly led it ever since.

"Almond Nail Bar stands out because of our commitment to providing a unique, healthier nail care experience," says Nguyen. "Our success is driven by our innovative, proprietary products like Magic Polish and Almond-X, which offer safe, high-quality alternatives to traditional nail products. We're also known for our accessible luxury—our clients enjoy consistent quality at affordable prices. Finally, our unwavering dedication to high standards in cleanliness and eco-friendly practices has built trust and loyalty among our customers."

Almond is a thriving business with 11 locations in Winnipeg and another four coming soon. A Steinbach



The store manager at the new Niverville location.

THOMAS NGUYEN

location is also on the way.

The company is in the process of branching out to other provinces. One nail bar is already in business in British Columbia, with two more on the way. An Ontario location is coming soon.

"Niverville is our second location outside of Winnipeg, and we're thrilled to bring our high standards in nail care and dedication to quality,"

Nguyen says. "Our mission is to make top-tier nail services accessible, and we look forward to becoming part of this community."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- To learn more about Almond Nail Bar Niverville, email niverville@almondnailbar.com.
- Book an appointment at: www.phorest.com/salon/almondniverville



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Ritchot Reviews Food Waste Management Pilot Program

By Brenda Sawatzky
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
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One hundred Ritchot households participated in a food waste reduction program this summer, thanks to a pilot project sponsored by the RM.

At council's October 2 public meeting, the results of the project were available for review.

Presenting the results was Brigitte Kirady, municipal program coordinator for Food Cycle Science, an Ottawa-based corporation whose mission is to promote widespread food waste solutions for Canadians.

Based on Kirady's presentation, the program seems to have been an overwhelming success.

Kirady's first presentation to Ritchot's council took place in February of this year.

At the time, she introduced them to the FoodCycler, an innovative household appliance, about the size of a bread machine, that transforms regular food waste into a nutrient-rich soil amendment in a matter of hours.

The byproduct is dry, sterile, and odourless. It takes up about one-tenth the mass and weight of the food waste it originated from and can be added to garden beds once complete.

"From an environmental

standpoint, the FoodCycler is a net negative carbon solution," Kirady told council. "What that means is that, just like planting trees or using solar panels, when you use the FoodCycler to avoid sending food waste to a landfill, you're avoiding more greenhouse gasses than you're creating."

Since its inception, Food Cycle Science has partnered with more than 150 municipalities across Canada, providing the means for each municipality to cost-share with their residents.

Ritchot's council was among those that agreed to greenlight a three-month pilot program.

After a \$10,000 investment, the RM was able to find 100 residents willing to purchase a FoodCycler and participate in the 12-week trial.

In the end, all the program's participants were allowed to keep the appliance.

During the trial period, users tracked their FoodCycler usage. Afterward they were asked to complete a survey and submit it to Food

Cycle Science.

"We were able to collect a total of 86 survey responses," Kirady told council at the October meeting. "Typically, response rates are anywhere between 75 and 80 percent, so this 86 percent is a lot higher than expected and it speaks to your community's strong engagement and interest in the program."

"Just like planting trees or using solar panels, when you use the FoodCycler to avoid sending food to the landfill, you're avoiding more greenhouse gasses than you're creating."

Brigitte Kirady | Food Cycle Science

Based on survey results, 57 percent of Ritchot's participating households reported throwing these food scraps into the garbage prior to their purchase of a FoodCycler.

Thirty-eight percent were using a backyard composting system before, but only half of that number

composted all year-round.

Reasons for not composting in the past included undesirable odours and attraction of wild animals. However, most admitted that it was just too labour-intensive and required more space than they had available in their yard.

With the introduction of the FoodCycler to households, though, the participants were shown to have run the machine an average of 3.5 times per week.

According to Kirady, over the course of just one year, this level of indoor composting would divert approximately 26.5 metric tonnes of food waste from the landfill from this one group alone.

In terms of CO₂ emissions, this equates to the amount of carbon a 40-acre forest sequesters over the course of one year.

Reducing household waste also means that people go through far fewer plastic garbage bags.

According to this study, it is realistic to expect a reduction of approximately 41 garbage bags per

household per year.

"With just 100 FoodCyclers in your community, there are now over 4,000 fewer garbage bags being hauled to your landfill each year," Kirady said.

Food waste awareness was another key component to come out of the pilot program. By far the majority of the survey respondents indicated a greater motivation to waste less food.

These same respondents believe that the majority of Ritchot residents could be encouraged to run FoodCyclers in their homes if the municipality made them available to residents at a low cost or no cost at all.

One hundred percent of respondents indicated an intent to continue using their FoodCycler after the program was complete.

"This level of participation far exceeds any other organic waste management solution out there today," Kirady said. "For example, here in Ottawa we have a green bin program that offers weekly curbside pickup. That only has a 57 percent participation rate."

Mayor Chris Ewen thanked Kirady for her presentation.

As one of the 100 participants, Ewen says he loves the FoodCycler appliance and highly recommends it to others.



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Commentary

Welcome, There Is Room

By Jennifer Lavin

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Earlier this month, I had the privilege of witnessing my husband Paul become a Canadian citizen. During the ceremony, we were shown a video called “Welcome, There Is Room”—and I was struck by the power of those words and the weight of history behind them.

The story of Canada begins between 10,000 and 12,000 years ago as the last Ice Age wound down and sea levels shifted.

That’s when a strip of land, now known as the Beringia land bridge, appeared between present-day Siberia and Alaska. This bridge is theorized to be the point of arrival for the first human beings in this part of the world.

Over the next several thousand years, the descendants of these travellers settled throughout modern-day Canada, eventually populating much of the country.

They were the ancestors of the Indigenous peoples who still call this land home.

In 1285, the Indigenous peoples of Canada held a meeting that drew an estimated 10,000 people from dozens of communities, some hundreds of miles away, at Nistawayak.

Nistawayak, meaning “Three Points,” is the original Cree name for the Forks.

It is believed that this gathering was held during a time of great struggle and war, and it would have required extensive and lengthy preparations to pull off.

Yet after a few weeks, the group succeeded at signing a treaty that forged peace throughout vast territories that now comprise multiple provinces and states.¹

The historical significance of the Nistawayak gathering, so large and so diverse, is immense and a testament to the Indigenous peoples



Paul Lavin becoming a citizen of Canada.

JENNIFER LAVIN

and their desire to live peacefully together on their land.

Less than 300 years after this historic gathering, the first Europeans set foot in Manitoba and the lives of the Indigenous peoples of Canada changed forever.

But let’s get back to my husband’s citizenship ceremony. It was held at Union Station in Winnipeg, only steps from the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers—in other words, the Forks, or historic Nistawayak.

It is very likely that the hugely consequential meeting that took

place here 739 years ago saw Indigenous peoples walk the exact same ground where today newcomers to Canada are granted citizenship.

Judge Suzanne Carrière, Canada’s first Métis citizenship judge, presided over the ceremony and spoke about our country and its history. She reminded everyone in attendance that being a Canadian affords many privileges and rights, but it also requires us to be good stewards of the land.

This land was not ours. It belonged to the Indigenous peoples

for thousands of years before European settlers arrived. These settlers took the land from the people who had been living and thriving here, people who still suffer today because of what newcomers to their country did.

But Judge Carrière, a descendent of both groups, was the one to welcome my husband into Canada.

This powerful full circle moment had me in tears from start to finish.

On October 7, 72 new Canadians from 18 different countries were sworn in as citizens of this free, beautiful country. They weren’t told

that our borders were closed or that they weren’t wanted here. Instead we all sang *O Canada* together and 72 people were given the message that they are accepted.

As Canadians, we now hear land acknowledgments on a regular basis. They generally sound something like this.

“We acknowledge that we are gathered on Treaty 1 Territory and that Manitoba is located on the Treaty Territories and ancestral lands of the Anishinaabeg, Anishinewuk, Dakota Oyate, Denesuline, and Nehethowuk Nations. We acknowledge that Manitoba is located on the Homeland of the Red River Métis. We acknowledge that northern Manitoba includes lands that were and are the ancestral lands of the Inuit.”²

Through land acknowledgments, we grant the first residents of Canada the tiny offering of our words for our shared country... and we work to repair the damage that was done to them and teach our children about Canada’s long, complicated history so we are not doomed to repeat its darkest hours.

Canada is a glorious country—vast and beautiful, free and open—and every one of us is incredibly fortunate to live here.

As immigrants and refugees continue to seek the safety of our nation, I hope we all choose to say, “Welcome, there is room.”

REFERENCES

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Niverville High School Introduces Hockey Program

By Ty Dilello

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The Niverville High School Panthers have been accepted into the Winnipeg High School Hockey League for the 2024–25 season, marking the first time that Niverville will have a high school hockey team.

The process began in the previous school year, when administration from both the Hanover School Division and Niverville High School sent out a survey to the community to see whether there would be enough interest in starting up a program.

The result? Plenty of interest, and even more support.

In May, Niverville High School made a presentation at the Winnipeg High School Hockey League's annual general meeting. The league approved Niverville's proposal.

As soon as the Panthers became an official member of the league, the team's inaugural coach, Brandon Lockerby, got busy preparing for the

start of play in late October.

"There has been a lot of excitement for the season to get going, not only for the players on the team, but students and staff at Niverville High School," says Lockerby. "[After] one exhibition game at home so far, the turnout was great. We're looking forward to playing home games to showcase the current roster, but also showcase an alternative for younger hockey players."

Enough students signed up that the school had to hold tryouts in early October at the CRRC. The interest has been quite overwhelming.

At the time of this writing, the Panthers had already faced a couple of regular season opponents.

They first travelled to the South Winnipeg Community Centre to take on Linden Christian on October 16.

That game resulted in a loss.

Their second bout, however, took them to the Beausejour Sportplex where they went up against the Edward Schreyer Barons.

In that closely fought match, Niverville came out on top, beating the Barons 7-6.

The team came home to the CRRC for the first time on Tuesday, October 29, facing off against the Glenlawn Lions.

It was an opportunity for the team to show the community some school spirit.

"Starting up a new program like this, there's a lot that has gone into getting to day one on the ice," says Will Cuccaro, the new team's assistant coach.

Cuccaro is also a board member on the Niverville Nighthawks.

There are 24 regular season games on the team's schedule for their first year in the WSHL's Price Division, including 12 home games.

The games typically take place in the late afternoons on weekdays. All games have free admission.

There are 11 other teams in the division, including the Edward Schreyer Barons, Kildonan East

Reivers, Lorette Scorpions, Louis-Riel Voyageurs, Pinawa Panthers, Powerview/Sagkeeng Wild, Warren Wildcats, Windsor Park Royals, Glenlawn Lions, Linden Christian, and Churchill.

"This was years in the making through school approvals and school positions being made so coaches could be brought in to do both jobs," Cuccaro adds. "So a lot of work has gone into getting a high school hockey team in town. And now we've finally put a foot on the ice, which is great!"

In the future, there may also be opportunities for the Panthers to collaborate with the Nighthawks, since they share a home facility.

"It's been a lot of work behind the scenes by many people to make this amazing opportunity possible for our students," says Lockerby. "I'm looking forward to working with the other coaches and the players this season. With the group we have, we hope to establish a culture that will garner

the interest of many up-and-coming hockey players at Niverville High School for years to come."

PITA PIT FUNDRAISERS

The team is partnering with the local Pita Pit for a monthly fundraiser for every month the team is on the ice.

For anyone who visits the Pita Pit in Niverville to purchase food or drink on these fundraising days, always on a Tuesday, and mentions that they're there in support of Niverville High School's new hockey team, the proceeds will go towards the program.

This month, the fundraiser will take place on October 29. Later in the season, the fundraisers fall on the following Tuesdays: November 26, December 17, January 21, February 25, and March 25.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Check out the full schedule of home games: <https://www.winnipegshl.ca/team/11162/0/25569/268898/games>

West Coast Adventure: Taking on the Pacific Crest Trail

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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If you ask Rebecca Rempel what brings her deep gratification, she'd tell you it's challenging her body and mind to the ultimate extreme and coming out on top.

Rempel speaks from experience. This summer, over the course of five and a half months, she hiked more than 3,000 kilometres of rugged terrain to complete the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT).

The PCT is a nationally protected trail running north from the U.S./Mexico border to British Columbia, winding through three states: California, Oregon, and Washington. It's comprised of more than 4,000 kilometres of trail. Rempel had to detour past about 700 kilometres due to forest fires this year. Even so, she's proud of her accomplishment.

It's a gruelling trek, and not for the faint of heart. It covers almost every kind of terrain imaginable, from desert to alpine and deep woods to river crossing. This trail intentionally avoids civilization, although villages and towns can be reached off the beaten path in certain areas.

Elevations along the route range from 110 feet above sea level to over 13,000 feet as hikers pass through mountain ranges like the Sierra Nevada.

In recent years, the PCT garnered fame from Cheryl Strayed's memoir, *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*, which went on to inspire a film starring Reese Witherspoon.

But Rempel's inspiration came from a source much closer to home.

Recently, she celebrated her thirty-eighth birthday. This was also the age at which her aunt's life was cut short due to cancer.

"It hit me in a new light because we were very close," says Rempel. "She was like a second mom to me. [I realized that] all the time I have yet to live is time that she didn't have. And it's not guaranteed that any one of us will have that time."

For Rempel, this meant taking a hard look at the dreams that still lay dormant within her.

Upon reflection, hiking the PCT rose to the top of that list.

Rempel was no amateur hiker. She's undertaken other famous trails, like the Juan de Fuca or Vancouver Island, the Havasupai Trail in Arizona, and the Kalalau Trail in Hawaii.



Becky Rempel takes on the rugged Pacific Crest Trail.

BECKY REMPEL

A dietitian by day, Rempel also teaches a backpacking course in her free time at Stone Brook Strength in Steinbach. It took months of preparation, she says, to ready herself for the summer-long trek.

On April 6, she set out.

"I stuck my foot through the tall metal fence, touched Mexican soil, and started hiking north," she says. "For the first thousand miles of my hike, I was what they call a purist. I hiked every single step. Even if [I wandered off the trail], I'd go back to where I started and I would carry on from there."

Along the way, she says, you naturally meet other hikers and travel together for a time. They become known as your trail family, or in hiking terms, your *tramily*.

While there are trails that cater to hikers by offering easy to access sleeping accommodations and amenities en route, Rempel says the PCT is not one of them.

"The PCT is not luxurious," Rempel says. "You're very much in the wilderness. The longest stretch I did was ten days between towns. It's very rugged rural."

Rempel, like many other long-distance hikers, carried a single-person tent on her backpack to provide nightly sleeping accommodations under the stars. Hikers are expected to leave no trace, a policy that requires campers to pitch their tents a certain distance from any natural water source in order to disrupt wildlife as little as possible.

"Some of my favourite nights were sleeping solo. Sometimes I preferred to camp at the top of a ridge or mountain. Just the view was spectacular so

I would sometimes climb a little extra just to pitch my tent up there."

Daily, she rose before the sun, paused from her walking about midday, and took a siesta in her lightweight hammock. After a brief rest, she'd carry on, hiking an average of 12 hours per day.

Occasionally, when there was a town nearby, she'd reward herself with a zero day where no official trail miles were logged. On these days she'd gather groceries, shower, and do her laundry.

The initial stretch of trail Rempel walked took her through desert terrain. Here she came in direct contact with her first wildlife threat; she stepped on a rattlesnake which was hiding beneath a bush that overhung the trail.

"You have to be very careful. If you sit down on a rock or a log, you don't want to put your hand into any crevice because that's where the snakes like to hide."

Thankfully, the snake was scared off and didn't strike.

Rempel shares other stories of close encounters with black bears, especially in camps when hikers were cooking dinner. They'd been instructed by park rangers on what to do in such a situation: run directly at the bear, making lots of noise—as if you're the threat.

The tactic proved effective, but not always immediately so.

Mother Nature could prove equally ominous. Rempel is aware of other hikers who have lost their lives on the PCT, some due to altitude sickness and others who were washed away when attempting river crossings.

For Rempel, it was the mountainous regions that required the real grit. Specifically, Mount San Jacinto, which came early in her trek. By the time she arrived, the summit snows were just beginning to melt.

"It's actually recommended to hike [the mountain trails] with other people. We'd start pretty early in the day, like 4:00 a.m., when it's still dark and the snow is hard and it's safe. Then you'd try and get as many miles hiked as you can."

In this terrain, many dangers await. When snow conditions are soft, hikers can end up post-holing, a situation where the foot pushes through the top layer of snow. When this happens, there is a risk of being impaled by sharp objects beneath the surface.

Blowdowns are another common hurdle. These conditions result from trees falling across the trail, oftentimes massive old growth trees that land in places where the trails are as narrow as 18 inches wide with steep rock cliffs on either side.

In these circumstances, hikers are forced to climb over or under the massive trunk in order to continue forward.

Rempel recalls nearly losing her grip while ascending a tree that was barkless and slippery and leaned precariously toward a sharp cliff.

She made it, she says, but not without every muscle in her body experiencing spasmic shaking for some time afterward.

In these regions, GPS systems are a must as trails generally aren't marked. Hikers are also wise to wear spikes on their boots and carry icepicks.

"There was one section where there was nowhere to camp, as we were climbing up the mountain, so we had to continue later into the day than we wanted to. The snow started getting slippery and slushy. And even with one-inch spikes, it was harder to get that bite into the snow. We were walking on this one ridge where it's very steep. It's a good long slide down and you'd be pinballing off of trees if you fell. That was the longest point-four miles of my life."

She describes the trails through Oregon and Washington as somewhat easier. They meander deep into lush old-growth forests, into canyons, and through volcanic landscapes with breathtaking emerald lakes and never-ending hilltop vistas.

Throughout the trip, Rempel wore the SOS device with which she maintained contact with home on a daily basis. The device allowed Rempel to request a change in gear or arrange for extra food to be sent from home.

It also helped her keep her backpack at a reasonable weight.

Rempel's mother Diana waited at home, sending new parcels to destinations where Rempel would soon be scheduled to arrive. She likewise received packages of gear that her daughter no longer needed.

Included in these regular shipments was food. Prior to leaving home, Rempel prepared more than 150 dehydrated meals to be shipped at intervals throughout her trek. These included white wine and mushroom risotto, broccoli cheddar soup, chicken pad thai, and tuna noodle casserole.

These fully cooked, dehydrated meals kept hiking life simple. They required only a bit of water, a small pot, a small burner and gas canister, and a spork.

At a few points throughout the journey, Rempel was joined by hiking cohorts. Diana was among them.

"She hiked in six miles and met me on the trail and then we camped for the night," Rempel says. "There was a waterfall there that goes over a tunnel and you get to hike in behind the waterfall and it's just beautiful."

Rempel arrived back at her parents' home in Niverville in mid-September, feeling accomplished and empowered.

"The PCT kind of taught me that it's possible to achieve your dreams. A lot of the time life is about goals, like getting that car or [chasing] your career. But dreams should happen too."

Rising Star Chases Soccer Dream

By Jennifer Lavin

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Earlier this month, 11-year-old Bautista Ramirez Imaz travelled with his team to the United Kingdom to play against 16 of the best under-12 football clubs in the world.

Imaz is a midfielder for the Toca Pro Football Club, a training academy for rising stars in the world of soccer, based in Mississauga, Ontario.

Earlier this month, the Toca FC travelled to the UK to participate in the Norwich Mina Cup. Imaz's team was the only Canadian squad in attendance.

The Norwich Mina Cup tourney is a qualifier for the Dubai Mina Cup, one of the more prestigious soccer tournaments in the world.

Toca Pro FC played against powerhouse teams such as Chelsea and Liverpool and advanced to the Gold Cup semifinals of the Norwich tournament to end the event in fourth place. They won seven out of eight of their matches and allowed only one goal into their net throughout the weekend.

Imaz was born in Argentina and received a soccer ball from his grandfather on the day he was born. When he was two, his family moved to Manitoba, settling down locally in Grande Pointe.

By age seven he was training with Ivl Fútbol Dreams, an organization that connected him to Argentinos Juniors, a club in Argentina with whom he was able to train for three weeks in 2020 while visiting family.

In the summer of 2023, Imaz participated in a summer



Eleven-year-old Bautista Ramirez Imaz (centre) with his teammates.

by C/O PAOLA IMAZ

camp with Toca Pro FC and their head coach and owner, David Velastegui, invited him to be part of their Showcase team, making him the only out-of-province athlete able to travel with the team to big tournaments.

A year later, the family left Manitoba and relocated to Mississauga, where they are now closer to the Toca Pro club.

Imaz's mother Paola describes some of the family's experiences so far with the organization.

"We joined them in multiple tournaments, the biggest one being the Inter Miami Youth International Tournament, where they lost in the finals against the

number-one-ranked team in the U.S.A.," Paola says. "Of course, one of the highlights was watching [soccer star Lionel] Messi watching his kids playing in the same tournament!"

Velastegui shares how proud he is of his team.

"This was a significant test to measure [the athletes'] abilities against some of the top academy teams in Europe," says Velastegui. "They not only demonstrated remarkable technical skills but also displayed the hunger and determination to compete at the highest level. I am truly excited about the future for these boys. Their success in dominating the Canadian soccer scene, and now with

these results, proves that we are ready to take on the world."

According to Velastegui, the Mina Cup tournament plays a crucial role in the development and scouting of Canadian players. This made the tourney even more important to Imaz, as he hopes to one day become a professional soccer player—or, if that doesn't work out, he wants to become a coach and remain engaged in the soccer community.

"The most important thing I've learned is that you can be a small club in front of the big teams," says Imaz. "They can underestimate your team, but when the game starts they are just another 11 boys playing soccer. So you get out there and show what you have."

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An Offensive Struggle for Nighthawks

By Ty Dilello

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After starting off the season with a flurry of offence, the Niverville Nighthawks ran into a wall in October, struggling to find the back of the net.

Despite some tough losses, however, the team roared back to end the month on a high note.

OCTOBER 4 VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS, AWAY

The Nighthawks gave it a spirited effort but were unable to overcome the Virden Oil Capitals, falling 3-1 on the road on this Friday night tilt.

Niverville's Avery Laliberte opened the game's scoring five minutes into the opening frame while on the power play.

That was the only scoring in the first period.

In the second period, Virden came alive with a couple of early goals that put Niverville on their heels.

The Oil Capitals added another tally in the third period, and that was all she wrote.

"I thought Virden filled the shot lanes very well," said head coach Dwight Hirst. "They had a lot of shot blocks tonight and we didn't recognize the importance of getting pucks off quickly and not dusting it off. Defensively, as a team, we just didn't play well enough as a five-man unit in our own end. We didn't box out or get to loose pucks quick enough and Virden's second effort tonight was more noticeable than ours."

Hirst was also quick to point out the positives of his team's play.



Celebrating a goal versus the Winnipeg Freeze on October 25.

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"Our special teams added another power play goal and we had a few good pushes to pull it back closer at times. There were glimpses, but more lapses in our own game," Hirst added. "This one is over now, and we've got to move ahead towards practice on Monday. We have to pull out some of the positives and drop the negatives. Watching some game film will be important in the days to come for our team."

OCTOBER 9 WINNIPEG BLUES, AWAY

The team got back in the win column with a swift 4-2 victory over the Winnipeg Blues.

The Nighthawks found their offence early as they exploded in the first period with a trio of goals.

Adam Vigfusson scored twice while Alex Ballard scored as well, to give Niverville a 3-0 lead after the first frame.

In the second period, Winnipeg

would get one back before Aiden Corbett extended the Nighthawks lead.

Winnipeg scored once more in the third period but couldn't make the game any closer and Niverville held on for the win.

"We just needed to start in the driver's seat and push our style upon the Blues," said Hirst. "It is a goal of ours to not chase hockey games."

Vigfusson was the star of the

night. The Nighthawks forward had two goals and two assists on the night. He was leading the team at 10 points in seven games to start the season.

"Viggy had a great game and played with the speed he's known to play with," Hirst said. "When he gets the puck moving north and putting pucks into space to make it another foot race, he's winning that race and getting himself into those opportunities like tonight."

OCTOBER 11 NORTHERN MANITOBA BLIZZARD, HOME

The Nighthawks couldn't overcome a defensive struggle at home on this Friday night at the CRRC, falling 1-0 to the Northern Manitoba Blizzard.

It was a closely checked game the whole way through, and in the process, despite the loss, Niverville proved they could play with the league's best.

After a scoreless first two periods, Northern Manitoba got on the board early in the third. The Nighthawks pushed hard but were unable to score the tying goal.

The Nighthawks outshot the Blizzard by a 21-14 margin.

"It was a very close game all the way," said Hirst. "It was a play-off-type game that was tightly contested by both clubs. Defensively, I thought we were good tonight, but we got to score to have a chance and that's the bottom line."

The Nighthawks looked ahead to a road game the following night versus Steinbach.

"We need to get pucks at the net and go to the hard areas for second chance opportunities," said Hirst.

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"We generated opportunities to get to those areas and didn't take that step into that space. We just need to develop that layer of attack and we'll be okay going forward."

OCTOBER 12 STEINBACH PISTONS, AWAY

Steinbach proved to be too much for the Nighthawks, defeating them in convincing fashion.

After a scoreless first period, the Pistons turned on the gas, exploding with a four-goal outburst to lead four to zip.

The teams traded goals in the third period, and the game ended 5-1 in Steinbach's favour.

Dawson Zeller had the lone goal for Niverville on the power play.

"Steinbach is very good, as they stay with what works and always stay to their identity. They are calm, composed, and confident with what they do game in and game out," said Hirst. "We made some mental mistakes that were bad errors in judgment and those things caught up to us. The first period was great, and then it felt like we didn't need to stick to our game plan."

Hirst said the team would take a couple days off the ice and get back at it in preparation for a midweek tilt against the Portage Terriers.

"We need one good day of details and habits before we go to Portage on Wednesday."

OCTOBER 16 PORTAGE TERRIERS, AWAY

But the losing streak extended to three, despite the Portage game being tight and seeming like it could have gone either way.

In fact, the Nighthawks actually outshot Portage 32-27 over the course of the contest.

Portage opened the scoring just two minutes into the game, but the Nighthawks replied a few minutes later with Corbett's third tally of the season.

Portage scored twice in the second period, just nine seconds apart, and that seemed to break the game open to the point where Niverville could not recover.

"The first period was good for us, as we outshot them. We let them hang around, and then turnovers gave them those opportunities to score," said Hirst. "They just got pucks on net and kept with it. We played in spurts and didn't play with enough battle in our game."

Despite the rough string of

losses, Hirst noted there were a lot of positives going on behind the scenes.

"The positives are that we continue to shut down other teams' power plays and then score when we get a power play," said Hirst. "Our special teams have been really great. Our defensive structure throughout the ice has been good too. We've just got to take pucks to the net harder and get into those trenches around the net to generate second chance opportunities, because our first shots are not beating goalies clean. There are opportunities for tips, screens, and rebounds. But you've got to be there to capitalize when the puck is there. When you have a tough time generating offence, you have to create second and third chance opportunities."

OCTOBER 18 WINNIPEG BLUES, HOME

On Friday night at the CRRC, the Nighthawks got back to form with a close victory over the Winnipeg Blues by a score of 3-2.

The Nighthawks put on a great performance for the home crowd, outshooting their opposition 51-18.

After a scoreless first period, Winnipeg opened the scoring just 30 seconds into the second frame.

Niverville found their offence later in the second period. They scored three goals in eight minutes to go up 3-1. The tallies came from Jase Konecni, Matteo Speranza, and Carter Spirig.

In the third period, Winnipeg got one back, but they came no closer.

"It was great to get back in the win column," said Hirst. "Viriden's goalie played very well, but we didn't make it hard enough on him with getting in his eyes and making him fight through traffic. Our goals came from second chance opportunities and traffic in front of the net."

It was a quick turnaround, as the Nighthawks were back in action

with another home game the following tonight against the Viriden Oil Capitals.

"It's going to take a full group effort, as it will be three games in four days for us," Hirst said. "We need to stay in the fight every shift along the way if we're going to be successful."



Raïden LeGall in net for the Nighthawks.

OCTOBER 23 STEINBACH PISTONS, HOME

Despite being shut out versus the Pistons on home ice, it was a close game.

Steinbach opened the scoring with a pair of goals in the first five minutes of the game, and then both teams locked things down on the defensive side.

Both teams had chances in the second and third periods, going on the power play several times, but neither could find the back of the net.

The Nighthawks pressed but just could not score and time eventually ran out.

"It was another tight loss, but there are some posi-

tives to take, like the willingness to stay in the fight and compete for every shift ahead of you," said Hirst. "I think we are our own enemy right now... We just need to get back to the basics of getting to the net and creating opportunities for second and third chance opportunities that are there when you are at the net."

OCTOBER 25 WINNIPEG FREEZE, HOME

The Nighthawks at last found themselves on the winning side with a thrilling 6-5 home victory over the Winnipeg Freeze—a contest that got pushed all the way to a shootout.

Niverville scored twice in the first period with goals from Vigfusson and Merik Boles.

After jumping to a 2-1 lead, though, Winnipeg got rolling in the second period. The Freeze got a trio of quick goals to go up 4-2.

Luke Mackenzie got one past the opposing netminder for Niverville at the tail end of the period to tighten the score.

In the third period, Niverville's Calyb Moore scored his first of the season to tie the game at four goals apiece—only for the Freeze to go up again.

With just 30 seconds left in the game, Vigfusson played the part of hometown hero, netting his second goal of the night and the equalizer.

No goals in overtime meant the

teams were headed to a shootout.

Vigfusson and Zeller both scored in the shootout to give Niverville the 6-5 victory.

"I'm very proud of the boys for staying with it and getting that tying goal," said Hirst. "Then we were pushing the pace in overtime, controlled the possession in overtime, and got two big goals in the shootout. Raïden [LeGall] gave us the opportunity to get to overtime and held up his bargain in the shootout as well."

It was another quick turnaround as the Nighthawks were back in action the following night, this time versus the Neepawa Titans.

"Big wins are great and those are moments that can jumpstart an offence back to what we are capable of," said Hirst. "It should be a great game with Neepawa."

OCTOBER 26 NEEPAWA TITANS, HOME

The Nighthawks won their second straight game with a big 4-1 win over the Titans.

With the win, the Nighthawks ended the month in fifth place in the MJHL's East Division with a record of 8-7-0.

It was a dominant game from start to finish for the home team. The Nighthawks scored three times in the opening frame, with goals from Speranza, Hayden Wheddon, and Vigfusson.

Corbett then got another in the second period to make it 4-0. To make it extra sweet, this one was short-handed.

In the final period, Neepawa got one back, but that's as close as they ever got.

"It was about playing responsible hockey with or without the puck, and we did that tonight, riding waves of momentum throughout the game and taking what is available during those shifts and not getting into situations that favoured Neepawa," said Hirst. "It's a step in our maturity as a team."

He added that the team got pucks up quickly and put the Titans on their heels.

"Getting the puck deep with pressure was key for our club tonight," he said. "Pushing pace and speed goes back to our identity as a team. We want to be fast, heavy on pucks, and resilient with our game plan. We checked all three of those off tonight, so we want to keep that going heading into next week."

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