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LOCAL NEWS

Town Tenders Highway 311 West Rebuild Design

■ The process is officially underway to redesign a one-mile stretch of Highway 311 on the west side of Niverville.

Details on Page 3



LOCAL NEWS

Main Street Bakery in Production

■ A Niverville couple is breaking in their new commercial kitchen at 69 Main Street. Chris and Maria Holbrow are not yet ready to open the new Forgotten Flavours bakery to the public, but the kitchen is off to a hot start.

Details on Page 4

NIGHTHAWKS

Struggling Local Team Sees Change Behind Bench

■ Amidst a stark winter slump, the Niverville Nighthawks have made a big coaching change midseason.

Details on Pages 11-14

LOCAL NEWS

To Hook Up to Water System, or Not?

■ Niverville is holding public meetings to investigate the issue of whether residents should have to abandon their independent wells.

Details on Page 17



Nighthawks Celebrate Opening of The Kettle

➤ **READ MORE ON PAGE 21**

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The stretch of Highway 311 in Niverville that will be redesigned.

MORRISON HERSHFIELD

Niverville Council Tenders Highway 311 West Rebuild Design

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On Tuesday, February 20, Niverville's council voted in favour of tendering the design for the reconstruction of Highway 311 west to engineering company Morrison Hershfield.

This decision comes one year after council held an open house where Morrison Hershfield presented three preliminary mock-up designs to the public.

The design boards were intended to show various options to address forecasted heavy traffic flows on that side of town.

The section up for redesign is a one-mile stretch between Krahn Road and Wallace Road. Both intersections will see some major changes with the new design.

A number of factors have played into council's decision to proceed with highway reconstruction in this area. First and foremost, promises of a major movie studio and hotel are expected to increase traffic.

Council also anticipates that this stretch of road, which reaches the western border of town, will in time be developed into a commercial corridor, with more and more franchises expected to see the opportunity of doing business in Niverville due to its continued growth.

Last spring, Transportation and Infrastructure Minister, Doyle Piwniuk announced a \$40.6 million investment into improvements along Highway 311 west.

Following last year's open house, the three designs created by Morrison Hershfield were presented to the province.

"The province has since approved a recommended path for a couple of the options and so now we go into detailed design," says Niverville CAO Eric King. "It will probably take the better part of this year and we could go into construction in 2025 if the funding and everything aligns."

Council will pass the province's recommendations on to the engineers as they prepare the final reconstruction design.

Those recommendations will include the construction of a roundabout on the highway between Wallace and Krahn Roads. Wallace Road traffic would then be rerouted to the roundabout.

What is still up for debate is whether a traffic light will be installed at the intersection of Krahn Road or, instead, a second roundabout. This decision will be left to the province.

"The province dictates a lot of this because this is a [provincial road]," King says.

The cost to have Morrison Hershfield draw up the newest design comes to around \$237,000.

Mayor Myron Dyck says that this will be partly funded through a cost-share initiative with the developers who choose to develop along this stretch of highway.

"Council's giving the CAO the means to be able to negotiate with the developers at such a time as development happens in and around those intersections... because they're [the ones] benefiting from it," Dyck says.

The Citizen

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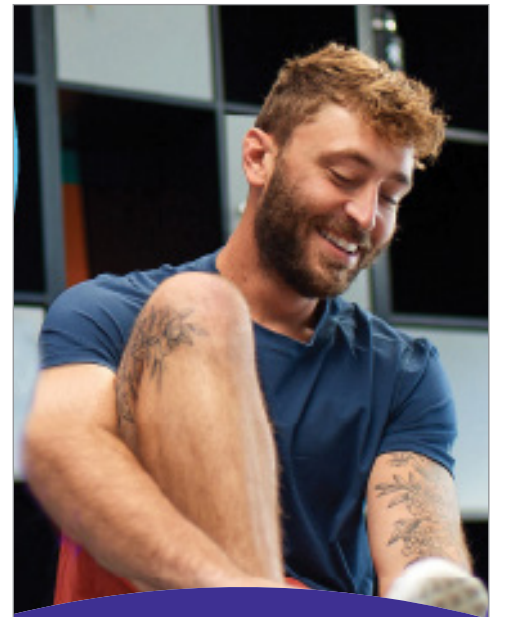
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IN BRIEF

Ritchot Seeks Energy Efficiency Advocate

By Brenda Sawatzky
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The RM of Ritchot is looking to fill a new term position on its staff.

The role of energy efficiency advocate (EEA) is a full-time two-year term. The employee will answer to the RM's economic development officer (EDO) and work collaboratively with Efficiency Manitoba and the Ritchot Community Development corporation.

The goal is to promote the province's Energy Efficiency Assistance Program (EEAP), as well as other environmentally forward initiatives.

"The RM is looking for opportunities to partner with other organizations to improve living within the municipality," says Ritchot EDO Ryan Faucher. "Efficiency Manitoba provides funding for 80 percent of the energy efficiency advocate's salary up to a maximum of \$40,000 each year, as well as expertise to support the municipality's long-term energy efficiency goals."

The remaining 20 percent of the EEA salary will be covered by the RM.

In an effort to promote greater movement toward stewardship, the RM is putting out a challenge to all of its residents, asking them to work towards the common goal of becoming the most energy efficient municipality in the province.

"It is important for municipalities to have goals that resonate with residents," says Faucher.

The job of the EEA will be to work together with homeowners and businesses on energy efficiency initiatives and coordinate planned community activities.

HSD Cautiously Optimistic as Budget Planning Begins

By Brenda Sawatzky
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The Hanover School Division's (HSD) meeting room was full to capacity on February 6 as stakeholders of all stripes came to participate in a public consultation regarding the 2024-25 divisional budget.

The hope of the trustee board was to gain feedback as they launch into budget planning sessions over the coming weeks.

Following a provincial funding announcement on February 1, trustee boards can now get to work allocating their available funds. As well, divisions will once again be at liberty to increase school mill rates, which hasn't been an option available to them over the past few years.

Including \$575,000 in funds designated specifically for nutritional programming, HSD will be receiving almost \$65 million in provincial funding this year. That is up by \$4.6 million over last year, or 7.1 percent.

Based on the 2022-23 school year, provincial funding was covering 69 percent of HSD's operational budget. The provincial average at the time was just under 58 percent.

Trustee chairperson Ron Falk says that HSD receives a little more from the province than some other divisions due to Hanover's generally smaller taxbase.

"You would think that we're a very well-to-do region, and I think we are, but we don't have a lot of industry like some areas in Winnipeg," Falk said. "So our taxbase is actually a little on the lower side. And because we can't raise enough money locally, the province gives us additional funds."

Also making things more financially challenging is the fact that Hanover has a higher than normal number of average students per household. Thus, the school tax collected from one household must stretch farther.



HSD superintendent Shelley Amos addresses stakeholders. **BRENDA SAWATZKY**

"We have more children per family [in Hanover]," says Falk. "Some divisions might have an [overall] assessment that's high, but they have fewer children, so [the taxes] go a lot further that way."

Currently, Hanover's school mill rate seems relatively healthy at 12 percent, compared to the provincial average of 11.7 percent.

But when you consider the larger family sizes in the region, the property assessment per pupil in Hanover comes to only \$293,000. This is well below the provincial average of almost \$489,000. The division with the highest assessment per pupil in the province sits at more than \$1 million.

Since the PC government first began removing taxation authority from school boards, most divisions in the province have needed to implement significant austerity measures.

In the 2023-24 budget, HSD was required to cut almost \$2.7 million from their annual operating costs. This resulted in the layoff of 10.5 teacher positions and major reductions in purchases and programming.

By the end of this school year, the HSD board is projecting a balance of just over \$1 million remaining in their reserve funds. To be on par with province's

recommendation of a four percent reserve, another \$2 million is needed.

"The division will strive to reduce some of those lost services," Falk said. "We're in an area where assessment growth is very positive... and the government is saying we can tax for that now."

Even so, Falk is confident that the board won't choose to try and recover all the losses in the first year.

One attendee to the meeting challenged Falk and the trustee board to reconsider the emphasis that they've placed for years on keeping the cost-per-student spending below the provincial average.

"I'm wondering if the board has ever entertained the notion of doing an audit on what it is that we're not providing [our students] that other schools are providing," he said. "I've heard you say over the years... that we do more with less. But I have been wondering recently what we would do if we [could do] more with more. How much more support could we provide for EAL kids... for kids who have learning difficulties... for kids who are really struggling with mental health?"

Falk responded, indicating that raising the divisional tax rates will

be a balancing act. Just that day, he said, he'd received an email from one local taxpayer who was very concerned that school taxes would be going up in light of the government's new legislation.

"It's something that the board is going to have to look at," Falk replied. "If we decide to go with a tax increase, what is our comfort level? I think it's safe to say, though, that not having a tax increase is not going to work. That's been shown very clearly in the last three to four years and there's no dollars left in [our] tank."

Apart from budget talk, Falk also addressed the provincial government's priority to bring down the early years class sizes to a 20-to-1 student to teacher ratio in the coming years.

At this stage, the government has set aside \$300,000 for the hiring of additional teachers to make this happen.

According to Falk, though, it will barely make a dent.

Considering the average teacher makes around \$100,000 per year, the funding would provide only one new teacher position for 30 out of Manitoba's 37 school divisions.

"It's not a huge difference," said Falk. "It's a step in the right direction, but you're not going to see massive decreases in class sizes."

Even so, another attendee, a teacher in HSD, indicated a hope that the board would make a conscientious effort to restaff all the HSD schools with an adequate number of teachers next year.


"The effect [of teacher cutbacks] was a rise in the teacher-to-student ratio by two students in almost every grade level across the division," they said. "Will you plan this budget to hire the 25 teachers necessary to catch up plus the additional teachers to meet this year's anticipated growth?"

At this early stage, Falk said, he could only anticipate that teachers would rank highly on the board's priority list.




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NDP Announces School Nutrition Programming

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
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In an effort to ensure that every student has a chance to excel in their learning experience, the NDP government recently announced new funding for in-school nutrition programming for all.

Beginning this school year, the province will increase their grant funding to the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba (CNCM) from \$2.5 million to \$3.87 million.

The additional \$1.37 million will enable the non-profit organization to expand its current nutrition programming in schools and hire another dietitian for support.

Founded in 2001 as a way to address poverty in Manitoba's communities, the CNCM currently provides funding to help cover the costs of more than 300 healthy in-school breakfast, lunch, and snack programs.

"When we feed hungry kids at school, we set them on the right path towards success in both their education and their future," said Premier Wab Kinew in a press release. "Our government is a leader in Canada in implementing universally accessible school nutrition programming. Children experiencing food insecurity should not have a disadvantage in their learning outcomes because they are hungry."

But it's in the upcoming 2024-25 school year where the province will really be stepping up. According to Tuesday's announcement, a record \$30 million will be budgeted for provincewide school nutrition programs to ensure that every child has access to nutritional food during the school day.

The funding will be rolled out in three streams.

The first \$15 million will be distributed directly to school divisions to help them establish or enhance their nutritional meal programming. It will be doled out based on student enrolment numbers and socioeconomic factors within the division.

Public schools existing in communities where the socioeconomic need is extra high will be eligible for an



▣ BRENDA SAWATZKY

additional \$6 million distributed between them.

Finally, \$9 million in grants will also be available for nutrition programming on an application basis. This funding will include expanded support for the CNCM, as well as help support family outreach initiatives and after-school, summer, and school break programs.

"Recognizing the importance of nutrition as a basic need for academic success, having a universal program at each school community, means that they don't have to fundraise to get this basic need met," says Irene Nordheim, trustee of the Louis Riel School Division board. "This is going to take time-consuming work and lots of stress off the backs of teachers and administrators."

Wendy Bloomfield is on the board of directors of CNCM. She's also the chairperson on the trustee board for the Seine River School Division.

This year will be Bloomfield's tenth on the CNCM board and she says they are all ecstatic about the province's funding announcement.

"We hear all kinds of feedback from schools and parents on the difference it makes to kids when they have access to food at school," Bloomfield says. "There's a lot of different reasons [kids might come to school hungry]. There are a lot of families that are really struggling with having good food at home when the costs, as we all know, are rising daily. Also, some rural kids are on

the bus a long time in the morning, so being able to have a snack... really helps them to stay focused."

The CNCM, though, is intended to be only a support vehicle for nutrition programs. Applicants should understand that only 20 percent of a school's food costs will be provided by the organization. The remaining 80 percent will be up to the school, division, or parent organizations to raise on their own.

According to Bloomfield, there are around 700 schools in Manitoba and only around 300 of those currently have nutrition programs being subsidized by the CNCM.

The organization has had a waiting list of 70 schools for some time now, all hoping to receive funding from CNCM to start their own program. The additional \$1.37 million slated for this year will help CNCM take care of everyone on their waitlist.

"After that announcement yesterday, our staff have already been getting phone calls about how they can access funding," Bloomfield says. "But we don't have the details on... how this is going to all roll out just yet."

Bloomfield says that interested parties can fill out an application, which is available on their website, if they'd like to see a nutrition program started in their school.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
www.childnutritioncouncil.com

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IN BRIEF

NDP Take Credit for Reduction in Provincial Inflation

By Brenda Sawatzky
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Less than two months into the gas tax holiday initiated by the provincial government, the NDP are already touting it as a big success.

According to Premier Wab Kinew, new data released by Statistics Canada shows Manitoba as having the lowest inflation rate across the country. Kinew says this is a direct result of the 14-cent reduction in gas taxes his party enacted on January 1.

"The numbers are in and they show that our government is taking real action to make Manitoba more affordable," said Kinew in a press release. "Government can't do everything, but we can do some things to help families deal with rising costs. We took action right away to give people relief at the pump and now we see that relief helping to lower costs across the province."

For many Manitobans, the gas tax freeze amounts to significant savings at the pumps, as well as on home heating bills since it applies to gasoline, diesel, and natural gas.

But it's likely to be short-lived. From the beginning, the NDP government only committed to a seven-month period for the tax freeze, at which point they will reassess.

For now, though, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) from Statistics Canada indicates a 0.4 percent decrease in inflation in Manitoba, suggesting that the 14-cent tax savings has directly contributed to that.

According to Statistics Canada, gasoline prices in Manitoba are 20.2 percent lower than they were in January 2023.

Production Begins at Main Street Bakery

By Brenda Sawatzky
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It's been just 18 months since Chris and Maria Holbrow first opened a bakery in their Niverville home's commercial kitchen, and now their new expanded digs at 69 Main Street are finally heating up.

Within the confines of the old post office, the Holbrows have been hard at work gutting the interior, plumbing and rewiring, and assembling commercial bakery equipment that's been shipped in from around the world.

This is the new home of Forgotten Flavours, a homespun company whose products include organic artisan breads, pastries, cereals, and pastas.

Maria was originally the sole operator of this small business, but her husband Chris has now quit his corporate job thanks to the bakery's instant success.

Chris says that one of the biggest renovations needed in their new building was the installation of heavy-duty three-phase electrical power.

"It's been an expensive and time-consuming endeavour," says Chris. "But it's the lifeblood to all of our equipment."

The bread oven alone is a marvel to witness. Built in Italy and retailing for \$150,000, it stands floor to ceiling and contains four deep baking chambers that are fed by a conveyor belt running vertically from chamber to chamber.

Arriving disassembled on pallets, the Holbrows had to fly in a special assembly technician from Spain to put it together. By early February, the couple were hard at work familiarizing themselves with the oven's many bells and whistles.

"We understand science from how Maria's wild yeast works," Chris says. "Now we're learning science on how every aspect of an oven will change your bread."

Without question, the oven will



Chris and Maria Holbrow in their new kitchen.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

change their productivity. Where the couple was able to produce 70 loaves in a production day before, this Italian oven will pump out 80 loaves of bread per hour.

"So what we normally do in eight hours, we can do in one hour," says Chris. "Our production will increase tenfold, easily."

But the oven is only one piece of the impressive automation going on in the new Forgotten Flavours kitchen.

Next to the oven stands a proofing room which provides the perfect temperature for 100 loaves of bread to rise. Nearby, two 130-quart commercial dough mixers come equipped with automated technology that adds water to the dry dough ingredients in the perfect quantity and at the optimal temperature.

Where cutting, weighing, and dough rolling previously required a lot of manual labour for the couple's signature brioche buns, an automated bun roller now turns every bun into the perfect size and shape.

Along one wall stands a long series of coolers where the proofed bread goes to spend 18 hours in a fermentation process before it's

baked. It may be one of the most unique characteristics of Maria's bread-baking, a process that sets it apart from most commercially produced breads.

"That's why our bread has such a low impact on people's guts," says Chris. "It is fermenting for so long that it eats up all those carbs and gluten proteins. Good for people like myself with chronic digestive issues."

In the early stages of the new bakery's operation, the Holbrows hope to hire two full-time production employees. In a few more months, when the business expands to include a café and storefront, more staff will be needed.

"We're really excited for the future and how many jobs we're going to provide for Niverville," Chris says. "But also we're just excited for the unique [products] we're going to be able to bring to Niverville."

The Holbrows aren't just entrepreneurs. They're also parents to three growing kids, children who they believe deserve the most wholesome food options available.

The organically grown Einkorn, whole wheat, and rye grains that

make up Forgotten Flavours wild yeast products are sourced out of Treherne, Manitoba, and are milled into flour in the couple's commercial kitchen.

"Our kids already understand the importance of what we put in our mouths," says Chris. "We probably get a little preachy about it, but our kids are our future and they need to understand where our food comes from and what real ingredients are."

These same freshly milled flours will also be available in the retail section of the storefront.

As well, the couple intends to keep the home commercial kitchen active as a small-scale test kitchen and a place where they can continue to host bread-baking workshops.

"It's not just about buying bread from us," Chris says. "We want to be able to get a lot of people making it in their own homes."

Now on the cusp of large-scale production in their new space, the Holbrows look back over the past months and feel a deep sense of gratitude to the many people who helped them get here.

These include their landlord, who helped pave the way to make the building workable, to the staff at Wm. Dyck & Sons, who went above and beyond to locate the hard-to-find supplies and forklift their equipment into place.

They're grateful, too, for residents like John Funk, who pulled together a crew of men on short notice to move the Holbrows' two 1,700-pound mixers into position.

"So many stops have been pulled out to help us," says Chris. "It's been humbling beyond words. We would not want to put our business anywhere but here. This is community."

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Therapist Opens Practice in Niverville

By Jennifer Lavin

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

Those looking to pursue better mental health and wellness have a new option in Niverville. Horizon Mental Health Services' Diane Ford is taking new patients at her office at A-227 Main Street.

HMHS will offer a range of services, including cognitive behavioural therapy, dialectical behavioural therapy, mindfulness-based therapy, and solution-focused therapy. Ford's practice is person-centred, trauma-informed, and LGBTQ2S+ friendly.

"I believe in creating a safe and nonjudgmental space where clients can explore their emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, and work towards positive change," says Ford. "My approach is evidence-based and tailored to meet each client's unique needs and goals."

Ford began her career as a registered nurse. She graduated from Grace Hospital in 1992, then received her bachelor's degree in nursing through the University of Manitoba in 1999.

Last year, she acquired an



Diane Ford has opened a new counselling practice in Niverville. **DIANE FORD**

Applied Counselling certificate with a specialization in addictions.

After 32 years as an RN, Ford became acutely aware of the needs of her fellow Manitobans and, in particular, the

areas of health coverage in the province that need shoring up.

One of the biggest issues Ford noted was a lack of available mental health services outside the major population centres. She specifically chose

to locate her practice in a rural area.

Ford also saw frustration in people trying to book appointments outside Monday to Friday business hours. Because of this, she has chosen to take appointments until 8:00 p.m. She will open her office on Saturdays as well.

Ford's goals for the new venture include getting involved in the community and expanding her practice to include more practitioners.

Ford is married and lives on an 11-acre hobby farm in Domain. Her husband, Gordon Ford, grew up in Niverville and still has many relatives in the town. Getting to know Niverville through these in-laws was part of what made her choose the town for HMHS.

When not working, Ford loves spending time on her property enjoying the outdoors with her assortment of animals, going for lunch with friends, trying new foods, reading, and writing.

Virtual or in-person appointments with Ford can be booked at the Horizon Mental Health Services website: www.horizonmentalhealthservices.ca.

Province Takes First Steps in Doctor Retention

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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True to an election promise, the NDP government is taking first steps in encouraging doctors, both newly trained and more established, to stay and work in Manitoba.

With \$300,000 in newly allocated annual funding, programming will soon be underway to help support and mentor physicians during the first five years of their practice.

"Every Manitoban deserves quality care, close to home," said Uzoma Asagwara, Minister of Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care, in a press release. "To make sure that happens, we need to attract more doctors and keep doctors already in our system working here in Manitoba. This initiative will make sure all doctors new to practicing in Manitoba get the assistance and encouragement they need to thrive and provide

excellent care to Manitobans. It shows the profession that we understand the demands of their job, particularly at the outset, and are here to help."

As is expected, the new funding initiative is welcomed by staff at Niverville's medical clinic, too.

"With healthcare a top priority for many residents of Niverville, Open Health welcomes this investment into recruiting and retaining physicians in the province," says Sheyna Andries, Director of Health Services at the Niverville clinic. "As Open Health Niverville continues to grow, doctor recruitment is one of our priorities. This new program announced by the provincial government will help Open Health continue to provide a high level of support for our fantastic team of physicians and give us one more reason as to why physicians should consider Open Health Niverville their next home."

In partnership with Doctors Manitoba, the provincial government has created the New to Practice Program. The new funding stream is intended to provide resources which will help reduce physician burnout and isolation while at the same time improve patient care.

Founded in 1908, Doctors Manitoba is a provincial advocacy organization governed by doctors who work toward supporting and representing its more than 4,000 physician members and medical learners from across the province.

Collaborating on the content of the New to Practice Program will be representatives from Doctors Manitoba as well as University of Manitoba staff, clinic managers, health authorities, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba, and other members of the health-care system.

An advisor will be recruited from among them to lead the work.

"We appreciate this new funding from the government of Manitoba to support doctors as they begin and grow their medical practices in Manitoba, an important step as we work together to address the critical physician shortage," said Dr. Michael Boroditsky, president of Doctors Manitoba. "For both recent Manitoba graduates or established physicians new to Manitoba, our New to Practice Program will help with establishing and maintaining a strong practice and foundation of support."

Some of the practical support expected to come out of the program includes assistance for new doctors who are settling into a practice as well as settlement support for their families.

Doctors Manitoba will continue to work with the provincial government to find ways to reduce the administrative burdens faced by Manitoba's doctors.

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Seine River Custodial Staff Take to Picket Lines

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@niverillecitizen.com

Custodial staff of the Seine River School Division (SRSD) are hitting the picket lines as of 8:00 a.m. on Monday, February 12.

According to Kyle Ross, president of MGEU Local 143, the 47 custodial union members have been working on an expired contract since July 2021.

Negotiations have been underway with the SRSD trustee board in the hopes of receiving wage increases that would help members catch up after the past two years with wages frozen under the previous contract.

"Custodial staff work hard to ensure our kids have clean and safe learning environments," said Ross. "They are key players on the education team and they should be treated with respect and fairness. That includes fair wage increases that help all members catch up and keep up with the rising cost of living."

The last negotiated custodial wages ranged between \$19.46 for a class-2 caretaker to \$21.44 for a class-4 maintenance person after their first year.

In December, the SRSD board brought an offer to the table which would provide a 9.8 percent wage increase over a four-year period. This equates to an approximate \$2 increase by the end of the next contract term.

On December 9, union members voted to reject the offer. By December 23, with no new offer on the table, members voted overwhelmingly to take strike action.

Both sides met again in early February, but the stalemate persisted.

The union argues that the division can do better for its custodial staff, citing the recent 5.8 percent increase in funding that's been promised to SRSD by the province.

"This division can afford fair wages that close the already massive gap

between wages for these workers and their counterparts next door in Winnipeg," added Ross. "We know a deal can be reached at the table. We proved that with many groups this past year. That's why we have agreed to engage a conciliator to help reach an agreement. Having said that, our bargaining committee believes strike action is necessary because the division has refused to change the unfair offer that members already rejected in December."

TEMPORARY WORKERS

The Seine River School Division (SRSD) board held a public meeting on the evening of February 13 to discuss a variety of agenda items, including the hiring of temporary workers to replace striking custodial staff.

Discussions on the subject had already taken place during a non-public board meeting held on Saturday, February 10, two days prior to the workers going on strike.

At this meeting, a motion was made to move forward with the decision to hire agency workers for the duration of the coming strike.

The trustees passed the motion with the majority voting in favour.

An SRSD board press release, issued on February 11, made public their intent to move forward with a replacement agency.

"While some disruption of services may occur during this time, the division has taken proactive measures to minimize the impact on its daily operations," states the media release. "The division has contracted Express Employment Professionals to provide temporary services for the duration of the strike."

Even so, the board is extending an invitation to its current custodial staff to continue reporting for work during the strike if they so desire.

MGEU president Kyle Ross says that his union, which represents the custodial staff, also represents two other groups working for the SRSD, including educational assistants and the tech support team.

In each of those cases, Ross says, the SRSD has been willing to negotiate for a fair wage increase. Yet with the custodial staff, they aren't demonstrating the same level of flexibility.

Ross is unclear as to why the custodial staff is being treated this way, but he adds that it might suggest that the role of these staffers is undervalued by the school division's administration.

Kevin Rebeck is president of the Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL), an organization acting as the voice for over 125,000 public and

than not, temp workers often cost the employer as much or more than what the regular employees were asking for in the first place. This sends a harsh message to the employees about their value in the workplace.

Statistically speaking, too, hiring temporary workers often results in a strike that can last twice as long as it otherwise would have.

"We also worry about what kinds of qualifications these folks have," Rebeck adds. "They are in schools where kids are. Do they have their child abuse registry checks and have they done all of those steps?"

Rebeck reiterates just how avoidable this strike was in the first place. In his experience, about 97 percent of collective bargaining processes never go to strike action. But when they do,

it's because workers feel that they have exhausted their options and aren't being heard.

Even then, it's a difficult choice to make, since it renders strikers without pay for an indefinite period of time.

Rebeck is hopeful that, with the new NDP government, legislation can finally be created that puts an end to the hiring of temporary workers during a strike. This legislation

already exists in British Columbia and Quebec and is being considered at the federal level, too.

Rebeck currently sits on the Labour Management Review Committee along with a variety of business heads. It's their mandate to advise the provincial government regarding labour legislation and employment standards.

"This is something we're very actively exploring and something we're pushing hard for," Rebeck says. "It's something we think would be good for all Manitobans to make sure we have a fair process and to encourage people to get back to the bargaining

table and negotiate fair deals that everyone can live with."

SRSD superintendent Ryan Anderson has responded to queries and allegations made by Ross and Rebeck.

According to Anderson, the last time they sat at the bargaining table with the union rep was on Thursday, February 8, at which time the division recommended that they file jointly for conciliation as a next step.

On Saturday morning, he says, the division received news that union members were willing to enter into joint conciliation efforts, but they'd be proceeding with a strike.

"It was at that point that we needed to start pulling things together for contingency plans," Anderson says.

Anderson says the division has never used this temp agency before and he was unprepared to speak to the pay structure on which they'd be compensated. He asserts that any temp workers hired by the division will be able to present criminal record and child abuse registry checks.

"We are very much concerned about student well-being, safety, and the security of our facility," he says. "So it makes, hopefully, intuitive sense that as a school division we would ensure that proper security clearances are in place for people who are working in and around our children."

STRIKE RESOLUTION?

Just prior to *The Citizen's* print deadline, news was received that a tentative deal had been reached between the bargaining committees. Strikers took it to a vote on February 27.

"The bargaining committee has been hard at work and is recommending acceptance of this offer," said Ross. "These members just want to get back to doing their jobs ensuring our kids have clean and safe learning environments, but they will have the final say tomorrow on whether this offer is good enough for them."

"This division can afford fair wages that close the already massive gap between the wages for these workers and their counterparts next door in Winnipeg."

Kyle Ross | MGEU Local 13 President

private sector workers through the unions they participate in.

Rebeck says that it's disheartening when employers act in the way that the SRSD board has chosen to go.

"It's really frustrating," Rebeck says. "The idea that they're hiring replacement workers on the day of the strike is particularly troubling. Clearly this has been their plan [all along]. Rather than give a fair deal, they thought they would just try and ignore the strike, and we don't feel that that's a fair action for anyone to take."

According to Rebeck, what's even more unfortunate is that, more often



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Main Street Storage in Niverville.

CARA DOWSE

Main Street Storage Under New Ownership

By Jennifer Lavin

✉ jlavin@nivervillecitizen.com

Main Street Storage in Niverville is under new ownership. The business is now operated by Greg and Derek McKnight, the owners of Storage Brothers.

Cara and Ray Dowse of Niverville had owned Main Street Storage since 2013, when they started by building a few test lockers in an older building on Main Street. Over the years, the site continued to expand. It now sits at 3.5 acres.

As their storage facility

grew, the Dowses began to realize that the industry was simply not their passion and they decided to focus on other commercial and development projects.

The McKnight brothers had reached out to the Dowses several years ago to let them know they would be interested in purchasing Main Street Storage if it was ever put up for sale. When the Dowses decided to sell, they took the McKnights up on that offer.

“Our dealings with Storage Brothers throughout this process has been nothing but

positive,” the Dowses say. “We are confident that customers will be in very good hands. They are experienced in the industry, as this is their eighth location. But they are also good people who are looking to ensure their clients will be looked after.”

The McKnight brothers say that they look forward to serving the community of Niverville and intend to provide the same high level of customer service to which the clients of Main Street Storage are already accustomed.

Storage Brothers has been

in business since 2020 and has locations in Taber (Alberta), Kenora (Ontario), Lac du Bonnet, Winkler, Lorette, Ste. Agathe, and La Broquerie.

No action is required for current customers of Main Street Storage.

Monthly payments will continue to be processed without interruption through the coming transition of ownership.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To get in touch, contact: storage-broscanada@gmail.com



INDEPENDENT COMMISSIONER SEEKS PUBLIC INPUT ON MLA PAY

An independent commissioner of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly has been appointed to make decisions about the appropriate salary, allowances and retirement benefits for all MLAs.

The commissioner, Michael Werier, K.C., would like to hear from you before April 15, 2024.

Your submission may be sent to:

Public Input for Independent Commissioner
302-386 Broadway
Winnipeg, Manitoba R3C 3R6
E-mail: commissioner@legassembly.mb.ca

Current MLA pay, allowances and retirement benefit information can be found at www.reviewcommissioner.mb.ca

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Kelvin Cech, former head coach and general manager of the Niverville Nighthawks.

CRYSTAL STOTT

Coach Cech Relieved of Duties

By Ty Dilello

dilello@nivervillecitizen.com

On February 12, the Niverville Nighthawks announced that they had fired head coach and general manager Kelvin Cech, effective immediately.

"We want to thank Kelvin for his significant role in developing and building the MJHL's newest franchise," reads a press release from the organization. "We wish you all the best, Kelvin."

The move to fire Cech appears to have been a big surprise for most in the organization.

"Shocking is a good word for it," says Cech. "I really can't believe it and I have no idea why it happened really. They're pretty resistant to giving me a solid reason. There's

lots going on behind the scenes, I guess."

Niverville had been in a deep slide as of late, with the team holding a 3-7-1 record since January 1. At the time of the coaching change, they were only six points ahead of the Selkirk Steelers for the final playoff spot in the MJHL's East Division.

This may have played a factor in the move to replace Cech.

On February 14, the Nighthawks' chair of the board of directors, Clarence Braun, provided some clarity regarding Cech's departure.

"Upon the recommendation of hockey operations, we made the decision to relieve our head coach/general manager," says Braun of the difficult decision. "The trend within the past three weeks was not good.

We had a difficult post-Christmas last year, but we were at the least competitive. This year we were getting blown out and that was unacceptable. It's all about players competing and not necessarily winning. We were not competing."

Braun says that the decision was a very challenging one, especially in light of the fact that deep personal relationships had been established over time.

"We all have to own this," says Braun. "The coach paid the price at this time, but the entire team, including the players, have to own their responsibility to bring their best game every night."

At the same time as the firing, the Nighthawks also announced that Mike McAulay had accepted the interim role of team general

manager.

Furthermore, the organization hired Dwight Hirst as the interim coach for the remainder of the 2023-24 season.

The 44-year-old Hirst has an extensive history playing hockey in the MJHL, USHL, and NCAA Division 1 and 3. He also played for the University of Manitoba Bisons. He finished his career playing senior hockey for the Lac du Bonnet Blues of the MEHL. He has served as the head coach of the Eastman Selects U18 AAA team for the past four seasons and will be looking forward to getting his feet wet coaching at the MJHL level.

"The new coach brings in a fresh perspective," says Braun. "We all understand that this is a team game and a collaborative effort."

STANDINGS ** AS OF FEBRUARY 1, 2024

WEST DIVISION

TEAM	GP	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS
1 VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS	50	35	9	3	3	76
2 OCN BLIZZARD	50	32	14	1	3	68
3 DAUPHIN KINGS	48	32	14	1	1	66
4 NEEPAWA TITANS	49	23	25	1	0	47
5 WAYWAYSEECAPPO WOLVERINES	49	21	24	1	3	46
6 SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDERS	52	10	40	2	0	22

EAST DIVISION

TEAM	GP	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS
1 STEINBACH PISTONS	51	41	7	3	0	85
2 WINKLER FLYERS	50	37	8	2	3	79
3 PORTAGE TERRIERS	50	31	11	4	4	70
4 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	50	24	22	3	1	52
5 SELKIRK STEELERS	50	20	22	4	4	48
6 WINNIPEG BLUES	48	9	34	4	1	23
7 WINNIPEG FREEZE	49	8	37	4	0	20

MJHL POINTS LEADERS

PLAYER	TEAM	GP	G	A	PTS
1 Dalton Andrew	WNL	47	34	36	70
2 Trent Penner	WNL	49	25	40	65
3 Leo Chambers	STN	51	21	41	62
4 Brody Beauchemin	WNL	47	13	46	59
5 Kirk Mullen	STN	47	26	29	55
6 Josh Lehto	VIR	50	24	30	54
7 Sean Williams	WAY	49	27	22	49
8 Ben Roulette	WAY	49	20	29	49
9 Nolan Chastko	VIR	46	28	19	47
10 Trey Sauder	STN	51	20	27	47
11 Alex Walicki	NIV	49	15	32	47
12 Jack Clarke	WAY	49	21	25	46
13 Kaycee Coyle	NIV	49	14	32	46
14 Sam Zagari	OCN	48	13	32	45
15 Grady Hoffman	STN	46	27	17	44
16 Gabriel Lafamme	POR	50	15	29	44
17 Slade Stanick	POR	43	15	28	43
18 Mathieu Moreira	SEL	44	16	25	41
19 Jordan Bax	DAU	48	16	25	41
20 Noah Szabo	STN	42	12	29	41

MJHL GOALIE LEADERS

GOALIE	TEAM	GP	GA	GAA	SV%
1 Cole Plowman	STN	36	67	1.85	0.932
2 Liam Ernst	WNL	20	37	1.91	0.923
3 Malachi Klassen	WNL	30	59	1.98	0.921
4 Eric Reid	VIR	39	82	2.09	0.916
5 Tomas Anderson	OCN	32	65	2.11	0.931
6 Cole Sheffield	DAU	38	83	2.18	0.924
7 Jayden Catellier	POR	32	76	2.40	0.919
8 Gavin Renwick	POR	19	47	2.48	0.908
9 Loic Morin	OCN	21	50	2.51	0.907
10 Noel Olsonawski	SEL	37	94	2.64	0.913
11 Raiden Legall	NIV	30	89	3.08	0.913
12 Kaiden Kirkwood	WAY	18	55	3.17	0.909
13 Mason Lobreau	NEE	28	93	3.31	0.911
14 Keegan Gordon	NIV	22	76	3.57	0.887
15 KC Couckuyt	NEE	21	79	3.75	0.890
16 Gage Stewart	SVS	20	77	3.86	0.909
17 Elias Giaccari-Dimitriou	SVS	19	74	4.27	0.901
18 River Leslie-Toogood	WPB	36	157	4.63	0.902
19 Nicolas Rempel	WPF	37	171	4.99	0.875

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Nighthawks Stumble

By Ty Dilello

dilello@nivervillecitizen.com

With one month left on the regular season schedule, the Niverville Nighthawks' playoff hopes are teetering on the brink.

February has been a turbulent time for the team. Perhaps the biggest change happened behind the bench, with head coach Kelvin Cech being let go midseason.

All hope is not lost. At the time of this writing, the Nighthawks still have a four-point lead on the Selkirk Steelers for the last playoff spot.

FEBRUARY 3 (WAYWAYSECAPO WOLVERINES, AWAY)

The Nighthawks led this one for most of the game but found a way to fall 5-4 in overtime to the Waywayseecappo Wolverines on a Saturday night on the road. It turned out to be their fourth straight loss.

It was a tale of two games as the Nighthawks were the better team for the first two periods, before Waywayseecappo clawed their way back into the contest.

After 40 minutes, Niverville led 4-2 thanks to goals from Brett Tataryn, Adam Vigfusson, Luke McKenzie, and Luke McCrady.

In the third period, the Nighthawks found themselves in penalty trouble. They took six whistles, which led to two Wolverine goals.

Waywayseecappo then tied the game and scored the game winner one minute into overtime.

"It's unfortunate, as we fell into penalty trouble in the third period, but that's the way things go sometimes," said head coach Kelvin



The Nighthawks have struggled to muster offence through the month of February.

TY DILELLO

Cech. "I thought we did a good job of being resilient, and I thought that we deserved better tonight. But the universe doesn't care about that, and we just got to keep getting better."

Cech noted that it was nice to have some of the club's prospects out at practices over the past week, as some of the players were off competing at the MJHL-SJHL Showcase.

"We just want to continue competing and creating our offence the hard way," said Cech. "Doing the little things that create chances. We can't hope that we'll score nice goals. We've got to play the right way, and we want to keep showing that resiliency every night."

FEBRUARY 7 (WINNIPEG FREEZE, HOME)

The Nighthawks fought their way back in the win column on Wednes-

day night at the CRRC with a come-from-behind 6-5 victory over the Winnipeg Freeze.

It was a game the Nighthawks needed to win. After getting on the board in the first two minutes, Winnipeg replied with a pair of goals to make it 2-1 after the first period.

The Freeze would make it 3-1 early in the second period before Niverville stormed back with a trio of goals.

However, Winnipeg came back with a pair of goals to go up 5-4 in the third period.

The Nighthawks took over from there, tying the game before scoring the game-winning goal in the final minutes of the contest.

The offence was spread around, with goals scored by Josh Mettimano, Michael Debrito, Nathan Brown, Ethan Kelly, Tataryn, and

Alex Walicki.

Keegan Gordon stopped 22 shots in the Nighthawks' goal in the win.

"This was a big one for us. After losing a couple in a row, we've fallen behind a little bit, so wins are very necessary for us now," said Tataryn, the team's captain. "We strive on our first shift after a goal against being our best shifts of the game. We used our frustration towards putting the puck in the net."

"We definitely showed a lot of resiliency," added forward Brendan Bottem. "It would have been easy to just hang our heads when we went down a couple goals, but we put our heads down and went to work. Guys on our team stepped up huge with some goals, so it was nice to see. We need to limit the odd man rushes and clean up our defensive zone for next game. We left Gordo out to dry

a few times tonight, so that definitely cannot happen moving forward. If we can get better at that, we will be successful."

FEBRUARY 9 (VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS, AWAY)

There's not much to say as the Nighthawks fell 7-1 to the Virden Oil Capitals on Friday night after one of their poorest performances of the season.

Virden scored four times in the first period and three times in the third period in a game that they dominated from start to finish, outshooting the Nighthawks by a 50-16 count.

Colin Whaley of Niverville broke the Oil Capitals' netminder's bid for a shutout with two minutes remaining in the game for his third goal of the season.

Raiden LeGall stopped 43 shots in goal.

"It was just not a great game for us," said Bottem. "Virden was the better team the entire night and we didn't play very well. So we'll have to correct some things if we're going to start scoring more goals and being successful going forward. There are some things we can tighten up in practice this week that will hopefully give us the best chance to play better and give Winkler a good battle."

FEBRUARY 14 (WINKLER FLYERS, AWAY)

The Nighthawks once again found themselves on the losing end of things as they fell 7-2 to the Winkler Flyers on this Wednesday night on the road.

Winkler was the dominant team all game long, scoring three times in the first period, twice in the second

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period, and then twice in the third period.

Niverville's two goals on the night were scored by Debrito and Vigfusson.

The game was also the debut for the Nighthawks' new head coach Dwight Hirst.

"I saw a number of things we do well and a number of things we can definitely improve upon," said Hirst. "It's going to be a process over the next few games yet, as mistakes can happen in a game. But if they continue, it's now a choice and not a mistake. I thought offensively we've got to recognize what we do well and stick to it. Hockey is a game of highs and lows. When you're low, you have to learn to ride those waves back to a high."

Hirst is looking forward to the challenge of helping lead the Nighthawks out of this hole they've dug themselves into since the start of 2024.

"It's an exciting opportunity for sure and kind of surreal, in fact," said Hirst. "Being a player in this league 28 years ago, and now coaching in it, is pretty cool. At the end of the day, it's a great opportunity to work with athletes at this level. I see a group that's going to need to know that hard work and good habits are what drives this team. The talent and skills are here, but the consistency of habits needs to ramp up."

FEBRUARY 16 (OCN BLIZZARD, HOME)

The Nighthawks gave it a more spirited effort than many games of late on a Saturday night at the CRRC, but they ultimately lost 4-3 in a shootout to the OCN Blizzard.

In one of the team's best games in the 2024 calendar year to date, the Nighthawks played solidly but just found themselves on the wrong side of the inch by the time the game ended.

Niverville opened the scoring late in the first period with a tally from Kaycee Coyle.

After OCN tied the game early in the second period, Debrito scored

his twentieth counter of the season to put the Nighthawks ahead.

In the third period, Carter Spirig scored for Niverville, while OCN had a pair of goals in the final frame, leaving the score tied 3-3 after 60 minutes.

Overtime solved nothing, and it took an eight-round shootout for OCN to pull out the 4-3 victory.

Keegan Gordon stopped 34 shots in the Nighthawks' goal in the loss.

"I liked the resiliency of staying in the fight and the game tonight," said Hirst. "There were some moments where I thought we might regress, and we didn't. We kept moving forward with a positive attitude."

FEBRUARY 17 (VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS, HOME)

The Nighthawks once again found themselves on the losing side of things, falling 6-3 to the Virden Oil Capitals at the CRRC.

Viriden came out firing right from the start and proved why they are one of the MJHL's top teams.

The Oil Capitals scored three times in the first period to jump out to a 3-0 lead and cruised the rest of the way, adding a pair of goals in the second period and one more in the third period.

The Nighthawks' scoring came from the likes of Coyle, Debrito, and Avery Laliberte.

But it wasn't enough.

"It wasn't anything in particular tonight," said Hirst of the losing effort. "We just can't come out in the first period and spot a first-place team a 3-0 lead and get out shot 16-4."

With only one win in the last nine games for Niverville, Hirst believes that the team can still find a way to climb their way out of this hole and hang on to the final playoff spot in their division.

"Habits and habits, they dictate your outcome," he said. "We've got to learn quickly here that winning

the defensive zone and neutral zone enables you to contain teams. You take care of those items and you can play in the offensive zone."

FEBRUARY 19 (PORTAGE TERRIERS, AWAY)

The Nighthawks continued their losing ways as of late on Monday afternoon with an 8-2 road loss to the Portage Terriers.

Once again, there wasn't much positive to say about today's game for Niverville as they allowed the Terriers to open the game with a trio of goals before eight minutes had elapsed.

Unfortunately, it was 4-0 for the Terriers before Brown got one back

week to ready themselves for their next contest versus Dauphin.

"We're going to be working on defensive zone structure, building structure from the inside out, and we need to really focus and communicate in our defensive zone," said Hirst. "We also want to focus on our neutral zone and transitioning back up the ice. If we can clean up our neutral zone and defensive zone, then we can start getting pucks up the ice sooner than later."

FEBRUARY 24 (DAUPHIN KINGS, AWAY)

The Nighthawks were left clinging to the final playoff spot in the MJHL by a thread after a 4-1 loss to the Dauphin Kings.

The King were the ones to open the scoring just a few minutes into the first period. They added another tally midway through the second period to take a 2-0 lead.

Ty Kennett scored his thirteenth goal of the season to cut the deficit to 2-1, but that's as close as the Nighthawks got on the evening.

Dauphin added a pair of goals late in the third period to win 4-1.

"The effort and the compete was there, as we just had four mistakes that ended up in our net," said Hirst. "Our neutral zone play gave us a chance to get pucks back in the offensive zone. I was happy with the structure we had tonight, but at this time of the year those small mistakes cost us two points. There was nothing that Dauphin gave us trouble with, I felt. We just need to focus on what we need to do to turn pucks over and counterattack. If anything, I thought Dauphin did a good job of getting in shot lanes in the offensive zone."

However, it would be a short turnaround for the team, which would have to up against the Winnipeg Freeze less than 24 hours later.

"We really do need to realize the

importance of every shift and not taking a shift off," he said. "We have really improved on neutral zone and blue line pressure, which in turn gives us an opportunity to get pucks into the offensive zone. It's a fast turnaround, so we need to reflect for a short moment and get ready for tomorrow."

FEBRUARY 25 (WINNIPEG FREEZE, HOME)

The Nighthawks snapped a very long, six-game losing streak on Sunday afternoon at the CRRC with a monumental 7-3 victory over the Winnipeg Freeze.

The teams opened the game by trading goals throughout the first and second periods in a back-and-forth affair.

Deadlocked at 3-3, the Nighthawks exploded in the third period with four goals to pull away and earn the 7-3 win.

Bottem led the charge with a pair of goals for Niverville, while Whaley, Walicki, Brown, Mettimano, and Caleb Lepitre scored the other goals.

Raiden LeGall stopped 18 shots in goal.

Hirst was pleased with his team's performance in this first win since his being named the interim coach.

"It was nice to put some pucks on the net. For a team that has been struggling for offence, it was great to see that open up," said Hirst. "But for that to happen, we needed to be good in our neutral zone, as that drives us north on the attack again."

Although the Winnipeg Freeze occupy last place in the MJHL, the Nighthawks are just happy to have snapped their losing streak and hope that getting the feel for winning again can give them a spark for the remainder of the regular season.

"They may have fewer points, but Winnipeg competes very hard," said Hirst. "The thing with teams lower in the standings is they learn to play defence very well. We just needed to keep positive and upbeat with our attack and eventually the offensive portion will come alive."

"Being a player in this league 28 years ago, and now coaching in it, is pretty cool. At the end of the day, it's a great opportunity to work with athletes at this level."

Dwight Hirst | Interim Head Coach

for the Nighthawks.

Portage added two goals in the second period and two more in the third period, while Coyle got Niverville's other goal in a disheartening 8-2 loss.

The Nighthawks have made a habit lately of not starting to play hockey from the opening puck drop and falling behind on the score board early.

"We're not prepared mentally, and waiting to see what the pace will be when the game starts as opposed to dictating the pace ourselves," said Hirst. "We're a team in search of its identity, and we need to find what was successful prior to the Christmas break."

Hirst noted that there was a lot the Nighthawks would need to be working on in practice during the



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Kevin Pauls oversees the auction at this year's annual Niverville Nighthawks fundraising gala.

BY BRENDA SAWATZKY

Annual Gala a Resounding Success

By Brenda Sawatzky

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

The Heritage Centre resonated with life and energy on February 10 as hundreds of attendees converged for the Niverville Nighthawks' second annual fundraising gala. It was an evening chock full of fun, including both a silent auction and live auction and a meet-and-greet with the team's players and coaching staff.

Kevin Pauls, the voice of the Nighthawks, was joined on stage by former Winnipeg Jets forward Ray Neufeld for a one-on-one parley which delved deep into the highlights and low points of Neufeld's illustrious hockey career.

Renowned local comedian Matt Falk kept the crowd in stitches throughout as he co-emceed the event alongside Pauls.

Nighthawks vice president Ray Dowse opened the formal portion of the evening by reminding attendees of the reason they were gathered there that night.

"There's so many of you here tonight who have invested countless hours and dollars into so many [great causes]," Dowse said. "So why do we do that? Why do we coach, sit on boards, volunteer, or donate? Because it feels good when we contribute back to a community, sport, or purpose that has made a positive impact in our own lives and influenced who we have become."

The Nighthawks is a community-owned non-profit organization that relies heavily on outside donations for support. According to Dowse,

the team's revenue split comes from three primary sources: 33 percent from ticket and gate sales, 33 percent from sponsorships, and 33 percent from fundraising initiatives such as the gala and golf tournament.

This year, though, the Nighthawks are needing additional funds to allow the team to erect a new bleacher seating system on the east side of the rink.

"The Nighthawks took on the work and all the financial responsibility for the installation of the new bleacher system," Dowse said. "Upon completion, everything becomes the property of the Town of Niverville and available for the entire community to enjoy."

The total anticipated cost, he said, will be around \$530,000, of which \$150,000 was still needed.

In order to make this happen, a variety of impressive items was auctioned off from the stage, including framed hockey jerseys, fly-in fishing adventures, a custom pair of CCM skates, and a stunning three-carat diamond donated by Mokada Custom Jewelry Design.

Also, Access Credit Union made a presentation of \$10,000 to the Nighthawks team.

All eyes were on stage as Neufeld was grilled with questions posed by Pauls. The former NHLer grew up as a black child adopted into a white family in the town of Winkler. He did not experience the game of hockey firsthand until he was ten years old.

Thanks to a mother who recognized his early talent, Neufeld rose in the junior hockey world, eventually

making his way into the Western Hockey League and then the American Hockey League before finally being drafted into the National Hockey League (NHL).

His NHL career began in 1979 with the Hartford Whalers.

Unfortunately for Neufeld, his early career was also plagued by an addiction to alcohol. Married and with a child on the way, Neufeld says that his first big wake-up call came when he recognized the magnitude of his responsibility to a wife and baby on the way.

He kicked the alcohol habit on his own, but things went downhill again when he was traded to the Winnipeg Jets, a trade he wasn't happy with. Neufeld spent four years as a Jet before being traded again to the Boston Bruins and eventually finishing his hockey career with the Maine Mariners.

But it was his time with the Winnipeg Jets that Neufeld reflects on today as one of the most pivotal and important times of his life.

Falling hard off the wagon upon his arrival in Winnipeg, Neufeld says that it was the friendships he made with team players like Laurie Boschman and Doug Smail that helped him find his way back. Today, Neufeld boasts 39 years of sobriety.

"A lot of times people ask me, 'Was the trade worth it? Was it good for me to come to Winnipeg?'" said Neufeld. "And I can tell them with honesty that it was the best thing that ever happened to me, coming back to Manitoba and being a part of the Winnipeg Jets."

Being a man of colour, Neufeld says that it wasn't always easy being taken seriously in a world dominated by white hockey players in the 70s and 80s.

Today, to give back, Neufeld invests time in the NHL's diversity and inclusion committee. He's proud to say that the league is making some great strides in including a greater diversity of cultures and backgrounds.

Just recently, at a rink in Winnipeg where Neufeld volunteers, he couldn't help but notice that the majority of young prospects on the ice were of Filipino descent, something that would have been unheard of in his younger years.

"It was the first time in 55 years of my life on the ice where there was more people of colour than white people, and I say hooray for the game," Neufeld said. "Things are moving in the right direction."

While still a fledgling team, the Niverville Nighthawks is backed by many supporters, including but not limited to their board of directors and team founders.

Nearly 100 volunteers and 20 billet families make it possible for this team of players, who hail from across Canada and the U.S., to live out their dream.

"This team has already been building its own identity and it's contributing to the identity of the community," Dowse said. "When they reflect on their time in Niverville, we want to be a positive stepping stone in their hockey career and their life path."



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IN BRIEF



The giant pizza gets picked up at Santa Lucia. **BRENDA SAWATZKY**

Santa Lucia Niverville Bakes First Giant Pizza

By Sara Beth Dacombe

sdacombe@nivervillecitizen.com

Santa Lucia Pizza has made their first 30-inch pizza out of their Niverville location. The auspicious occasion took place on Friday, February 9.

Nighthawks board member Will Cuccaro placed the order to surprise his poker club in celebration of their twentieth year of playing together.

Neil Crockford and Rich Roberts, friends of Cuccaro who picked up the order, were unaware of the size of the pizza until they arrived.

When Santa Lucia first became interested in opening in Niverville, they partnered with the Nighthawks to provide pizza at events. Their work ethic and quality food impressed Cuccaro.

Since Cuccaro's daughter works at the new restaurant, he promised her he would be the first one to place an order for the giant pizza.

Dean Delorme, co-owner of the Santa Lucia Niverville, was excited to see the order for the large pie come in.

Having worked for the company for a long time, he has seen the giant pizzas made before, but it was exciting to see his new ovens put to the test.

Daryl Joachim, manager from Steinbach's Santa Lucia, came out to help oversee the

first giant pizza bake.

"Santa Lucia makes the largest pizza in Manitoba, but this is our first one done in Niverville," says Delorme. "We have to have the screen we put it on custom-made and the takeout box is custom-made. It's massive."

Delorme says that the box, unfolded, is more than six feet long. The pizza barely fits into their pizza oven.

"I got the biggest oven available, the largest one you can purchase," he says. "It's 32 inches wide at the belt."

Each giant pizza is made to order and customized with whatever the customer wants.

Cuccaro's pizza was barbecue chicken and meat lovers with jalapenos and a pepperoni design on the top.

"If someone orders this, you can have any toppings you want on the pizza or any kind of design, or we can do words on the top out of toppings. You name it. People want all kinds of custom or strange things. We don't say no. It's fun and we make the pizza they way they want it to be made."

Delorme says that the pizza will feed 10 to 15 people.

According to Cuccaro, it was massive, delicious, and their group couldn't even finish it.

Habitat for Humanity Manitoba Takes on Ownership Role at Red River Group

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

For Habitat for Humanity Manitoba, this year marks a new beginning, with the addition of both a fresh revenue stream and valuable team. The not-for-profit has formed a unique alliance with the Niverville-based for-profit real estate appraisal firm Red River Group (RRG).

Thanks to a legacy gift received from RRG valued at nearly \$125,000, Habitat is now an RRG shareholder, holding ten percent of the company's shares and earning annual dividends based on those shares.

"This is a wonderful and innovative way to be generous," says Jamie Hall, CEO of Habitat for Humanity Manitoba. "It is also a natural extension of the generosity that Red River Group has shown Habitat Manitoba for many years. We are thrilled."

Hall says that the relationship will help Habitat by establishing an ongoing funding stream. Not only that, but Habitat will also benefit from the years of expertise in the housing industry that RRG can provide.

"Red River Group is continuing their donation of free appraisals outside of Winnipeg and has included discounts in services in Winnipeg as well as consulting time," Hall says. "Over time, I envision an even closer working relationship, where Red River Group gives advice and counsel, helping us ensure that we find the best ways to serve our families. Of course, I expect several shareholders will still pick up a hammer every summer and volunteer



RRG shareholders and Habitat Manitoba team members. **BRENDA SAWATZKY**

their time to help build a home for a family."

Indeed, that's been Habitat's experience over the past decade as RRG's charity of choice. Along with regular donations, RRG team members have actively participated in many Habitat builds.

RRG's president, Gord Daman, says that his shareholder team began discussions on this unique merger over 18 months ago, as RRG approached its twenty-fifth year in business.

It came with some sacrifice, meaning every shareholder would need to give up ten percent of their own shares in the company and the dividends that came with that.

Once the decision was made internally, months of financial and legal counsel followed for both RRG and Habitat Manitoba.

In January of this year, Hall participated in his first RRG annual general meeting as an active shareholders.

"What's the focus at the end of the day?" Daman asks. "That's to serve clients and to ensure that we're doing it sustainably. Habitat actually

has a strong track record in that, so they provide a level of business value through their not-for-profit lens which helps make a for-profit company [like us] focus on long-term sustainability matters in regards to fiscal, social, and ecological outcomes. So, essentially, [they help] make sure that we're staying in check when it comes to people and planet and profit."

Daman says that he's not aware of any other for-profit and not-for-profit mergers like this one, although other models have been created in recent years.

"This is rather unique," Daman says. "With it comes some Revenue Canada rules that we have to follow... A registered charity [like Habitat] cannot hold more than 49 percent of the shares."

Founded in 1976, Habitat for Humanity now has chapters in more than 70 countries around the globe.

The first Manitoba Habitat home was built in Winkler in 1985.

Two years later, Winnipeg became home to the first Habitat chapter in all of Canada.

Habitat provides affordable home ownership solutions to lower income working families who don't qualify for conventional mortgages.

Through Habitat, qualifying applicants receive a renewable interest-free 15-year mortgage plan requiring no downpayment.

In return, they are expected to contribute at least 500 hours of sweat equity into the build of their home or at one of the Habitat ReStore locations. They are also required to attend financial education workshops to help prepare them for the many facets of home ownership.

Habitat draws much of their additional support through volunteerism from the community in which a Habitat home is being built, which helps ensure the family's long-term success there.

"Our 2024 business plan has identified a minimum of 23 homes to be built across Manitoba this year," says Hall. "Depending upon our cash-flow, we could build up to 33 homes."

Along with new home builds planned for the city of Winnipeg, rural construction is also planned for Winkler, Selkirk, Brandon, Killarney, Virden, and Kenora.

RRG team members are excited to offer their clients an opportunity to be a part of something good every time they employ RRG's services.

As well, they'll be encouraging clients to convert their RRG loyalty reward points into Habitat donations.

"Sadly, the need for housing is not decreasing for folks that are facing economic barriers," Daman concludes.

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BY BRENDA SAWATZKY

Niverville Council Encourages Resident Feedback Regarding Municipal Water Hookup

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

If you're a Niverville resident whose home or business is not yet connected to the municipal water service, town council wants to hear from you.

On March 1, from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., the Town of Niverville will be hosting an open house at the Niverville Community Resource and Recreation Centre to gather feedback and answer questions.

"The Town of Niverville

is holding this open house because it is exploring the interest of affected ratepayers in installing water mains in the core of town where they currently do not exist," says Cyrus Reimer, Niverville's director of communications, of the consultation plan. "Currently, the town is eligible for provincial grants which would cover 50 percent of the total cost of the project. However, even with these grants, there would still be a substantial increase in property taxes to affected ratepayers if this project is to

go forward."

The open house will provide residents with information on the total cost of the project and how it would financially affect each homeowner.

As well, town staff will be on hand to discuss the benefits of connecting to the municipal water supply.

"The town hopes that it can collect the opinions of affected homeowners to see if there is a substantial number of homeowners interested in pursuing it," Reimer adds. "To be clear,

the Town of Niverville will only move forward with this project if there is substantial buy-in from affected ratepayers. The town cannot accurately gauge if there is substantial support for or against this proposed project unless a substantial number of affected ratepayers attend and share their opinions."

According to CAO Eric King, there are approximately 700 households in the community that continue to get their water from independent wells.

CITIZEN POLL

Is it prudent for Niverville's council to encourage a broad shift to municipal water as soon as the government grants become available?

- Yes. The wells are old and upgrading to the municipal water system is inevitable as the town grows.
- No. I believe in giving residents the option to switch only when and if they desire.

Have a more nuanced opinion?
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No.
32%

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Letting the government regulate what your kids see is a dangerous road to go down. Teach the kids at home and to fact-check what they see elsewhere before believing it.

It's a hard battle for parents these days, trying to protect their children from all the ills that overwhelm them and their families. Having some government regulation in place would be a support to parents who are wanting the best for their children but who also have to fight constantly against pop culture.

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Mortgage Sale Advertisement 18 Venture Lane, Ile Des Chenes, Manitoba

The land and buildings described below will be sold at a public auction on Thursday, the 28th day of March, 2024 at 1:00 p.m.

The auction sale will be held by way of video or teleconference. There will be no in-person attendees at the auction.

In order to participate you must pre-register at least 48 hours prior to the auction by contacting Kelsey Bromley at either 204-717-8581 or kbromley@tdslaw.com.

The property is legally described as:

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Title No. 3187119/1

The Mortgagee is advised that the property consists of a vacant partially completed new bungalow of approximately 1,500 square feet, located on a 2 acre lot.

Property taxes are paid to December 31, 2022. The property is sold subject to property taxes and penalties accruing after that date as well as any outstanding water accounts.

The following encumbrances shall remain on title: Easement Nos. 5053368/1 and 5053369/1, Caveat No. 5053370/1

The property is sold subject to sale conditions approved by the District Registrar and subject to a RESERVE BID to be available one week in advance of the sale.

The successful bidder will have a period of twenty-four (24) hours to provide a deposit of \$20,000.00 in the form of cash, certified cheque, or a bank draft payable to "Roy Johnston TDS", and a signed copy of the mortgage sale conditions to the offices of Roy Johnston TDS. Should the successful bidder fail to do so, the auction will be considered abortive. The maximum amount of cash that may be provided as part of the deposit is \$7,500.00.

Please note that the auction sale will be conducted pursuant to an Order for Sale issued by the District Registrar. Certain parties may be prohibited from purchasing the property, including but not limited to, parties who by virtue of their employment or relationship to a person involved in the sale process would have special knowledge of the circumstances pertaining to the sale. For more information and a list of prohibited purchasers please visit: www.teranetmanitoba.ca.

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Province Promises School Divisions More Funding and Greater Taxing Power

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

Many Manitoba school divisions will be breathing a sigh of relief after an announcement from the province on February 1 promising more operating funding to come.

Though the current school year is already past its halfway point, new funding will still be dispensed this year at a rate of 3.4 percent, an amount the province says is more than the current inflation rate.

This 3.4 percent increase is there to aid school divisions who have seen high midyear enrolment growth rates and those that have smaller tax-bases than other divisions.

"Today, as the minister, I'm proud to say that our government is funding schools at the level they need," said Nello Altomare, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning, in a press release. "We're going to deliver stable, predictable funding that meets their operational needs so kids succeed and teachers and all other support staff are supported in the important work that they do."

Altomare says that his department has established two primary goals for the coming years.

Firstly, they plan to develop a directive that will see a 20-to-1 student-to-teacher ratio throughout Kindergarten to Grade Three classrooms.

As well, accessible in-school nutrition programming will soon be available in schools across the province.



Nello Altomare, the Minister of Education, speaks on February 1.

PROVINCE OF MANITOBA

In the works for the 2024-25 budget is a plan to increase school division funding by more than \$104 million.

Of that total, \$51.5 million is designated for public school operating costs. This includes \$6.2 million to be used to aid schools who are experiencing midyear enrolment growth.

Another \$3 million will be invested in additional teacher salaries in order to accommodate the smaller class sizes.

"This funding will facilitate greater one-on-one support for our youngest learners, so that they can acquire the foundational skills and knowledge necessary to succeed as they proceed through the school system," Altomare said of the initiative.

In-school nutritional programming for the next school year will require \$27.5 million. Capital support related to the building of new schools is set

at \$11.3 million.

Finally, independent schools will be eligible for \$10.9 million of that funding.

In an effort to distribute these funds in an equitable manner, Altomare says that his department will be looking at the enrolment rates and socioeconomic needs within each division.

"We want to do a better job of ensuring every kid gets the same experience at school regardless of where they live in Manitoba," Altomare said.

In the 2024-25 school year, the Hanover School Division will see a 7.1 percent increase in funding. Seine River School Division comes in at just under 6 percent. Division Scolaire Franco-Manitobaine can expect an increase of nearly 11 percent.

But there's more for school divisions to get excited about beyond the increase in

government funding.

The NDP government is agreeing to provide more flexibility to school divisions when it comes to their property tax mill rates.

In recent years, under the PC government, a freeze on school tax mill rates put divisions in a position where shortfalls in their budgets could no longer be compensated for by increasing the property taxes of their ratepayers.

"School divisions now will be able to go to their local ratepayers and talk to them about their local levy," Altomare said. "We trust school divisions to make the choices that will impact positively on their community. They are certainly in touch with their community members, and we trust them to do the right thing."

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Commentary



The Value of a Flippant “I Love You”

By Jennifer Lavin

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Recently I've been thinking about love. Valentine's Day has come and gone, but my mind is still stuck on love.

The other day I walked into a building to attend a meeting and noticed another woman heading towards the same meeting, walking slowly and looking uncomfortable.

I asked if she was okay and she replied that she had hurt her back, but that she was fine and I shouldn't be concerned.

“But I am concerned!” I said. My fellow meeting participant laughed and we hobbled to the meeting together, she with her bad back and me with my bad knee.

Even as we had our big, grownup meeting, I kept thinking, *Have we, as a species, become so hard or so fearful that we don't want our fellow humans to express their love and concern for us?*

Often on TV, people will say “I love you” to nearly perfect strangers. The first person to get voted off *Survivor* every season walks offscreen to a chorus of “Love you!”

from people they've known for less than 24 hours. Comedians onstage will call out “Love you all!” to their audiences.

These casual declarations of love have always bothered me. We shouldn't be so flippant with our “Love yous,” I would think. They should be reserved for the people we actually love, like our children, our partner, or our parents.

But in thinking about my bad-backed acquaintance, I've completely changed my thought process on this.

Suddenly, to me, the idea of

giving out flippant “I love yous” seems delightful. Instead of being stingy with my words of affection and concern, I'm going to throw them around like confetti!

Because let's face it: the world is often a wall of granite that we have to chisel through day by day.

But we don't have to chisel alone. Standing beside us are eight billion other human beings who are all working on their own sections of the wall, too.

These other humans are just like us, with hearts that can break, minds that can worry, and bodies

that can hurt... and, well, I love them!

So far as we know, we're the only species of our level of intelligence in the entire universe. Just us. For goodness sake, doesn't that make us all part of an exclusive club? And shouldn't we be able to express our love for our fellow club members?

So to my friend with the bad back, I did think about you and I felt sorry for you and I sent positive thoughts into the universe for healing.

And, fellow chisellers at the wall, I love you.



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Sports & Recreation

Bothwell Rink Gets Major Facelift

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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New Bothwell may seem like a sleepy little town with their population of under 1,000, but they know how to dream big and get things done.

In 2023, the community's main source of outdoor recreation, the outdoor rink, received a \$600,000 facelift thanks to six visionaries on the recreation committee, as well as some generous local donors.

Today, the rink is jacketed by an impressive pole shed structure with metal cladding all the way around. The roof is fire-rated and insulated, and an LED lighting system illuminates the vast interior.

As far as its creators are concerned, the design is one of a kind.

While the north- and south-facing walls are solid, the length of the building is comprised of custom-built canvas curtains that can be raised or lowered, depending on the weather outside.

The curtains help to regulate internal temperatures, preventing melt on sunny days and offering patrons protection from chilly winds. It also incubates the ice, to some degree, keeping it from melting as quickly.

Travis Doerksen, the Ward 1 councillor for the RM of Hanover and a New Bothwell resident, is one of the people behind the project, which took only two years to complete from when the idea was first born.

"We came up with this pole structure design and decided it was the route we would take because it was more permanent," Doerksen says. "[In terms of] longevity, it was going to be way better than some other structures that we'd seen."

With pragmatism in mind, the structure was designed to extend



The revamped rink in New Bothwell.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

past the rink boards about 12 feet on one end to make the facility useful 12 months of the year.

"We want to put a stage there so that, at our summer carnival, we can host bands, or for weddings or socials," says Doerksen.

The vision began in the fall of 2021, a brainchild of Doerksen's and the local recreation committee. Wasting no time, the group applied for their first provincial government grant through the Building Sustainable Communities program.

With the \$75,000 they received, they dug right into phase one, installing an asphalt floor and surrounding it with new boards. With the addition of asphalt, the ice would stay cooler

for a few more weeks during the winter months. In summer, it would provide an excellent surface for a variety of functions.

Upon completion of phase one, the committee sat down with contractors and RM administrators to design the kind of rink cover that would stand the test of time.

By early 2023, they were applying for their second government grant. This one had a 50/50 cost share requirement attached to it. The committee would have to fundraise.

"We ended up running significantly overbudget because of some engineering changes," says Doerksen. "Our initial budget was around \$425,000. We received a grant for up

to \$300,000—but whatever we used, we had to match."

The fundraising campaign quickly got underway and soon funds were coming in from local corporate sponsors and private donors alike.

Two of New Bothwell's largest industries invested about one-third of the needed funds: Bothwell Cheese and Accurate HD. In lieu of those donations, the companies' names are boldly displayed on the exterior of the rink.

In order to expedite the build prior to the 2023–24 season, Doerksen and his team secured some funding from the RM's recreation reserve fund, to be replaced by donations as they come in.

As well, advertising signage inside the structure is being sold to help with the revenue stream.

"My fundraising goal was in the \$250,000 mark," Doerksen says. "We have not reached that goal yet."

Despite the unseasonably warm winter to date, Doerksen says he's pleased to see the amount of use the rink has been getting. And not just from residents of the community, either. Doerksen says it's been a draw for residents from all over southeast Manitoba.

"If it's -25 and 50 kilometre an hour winds, you drive around and you don't see many people skating on the outdoor rinks," Doerksen says. "When you come to New Bothwell to skate, there's 10 or 20 cars in the parking lot [all the time]."

For casual skating, the facility is open most every day from morning to night. There is no cost for its use. The community recreation centre, situated right next to the rink, is available for groups to rent, and the rink will be a handy amenity to have close by.

In late February, the rink will host its first hockey tournament.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony has been planned for February 3. Fittingly, it falls on the Saturday of the annual New Bothwell Winter Carnival.

"It was one of those things where we had a vision and a dream and the question became, 'How do we make this a reality?'" Doerksen says. "It took a whole bunch of hard work and a never-quit [mentality]. In the end, it worked out really well for our community."

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The new seating area at the CRRC arena, a.k.a. The Kettle, made its debut in mid-February.

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Nighthawks Celebrate Opening of The Kettle

By Brenda Sawatzky

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What do you get when you bring together a group of nighthawks?

A kettle.

And that's what the fans and organizers of the Niverville Nighthawks gathered to celebrate just prior to game time on Friday, February 16.

The aptly named Kettle is a brand-new gathering space at the CRRC where fans can gather before, during, and after games.

The initial unveiling and ribbon-cutting took place last Friday with MP Ted Falk, Niverville mayor Myron Dyck, Nighthawks president, vice president, and board members there to commemorate the occasion.

The addition of The Kettle adds an extra 291 seats to the arena's overall capacity.

Located at the northeast

corner, The Kettle boasts a full bar offering cocktails, mixed drinks, Nighthawks lager, and a variety of products from Torque Brewing.

The bar-style seating around tables provides a different way to take in a game, and the new mezzanine rises high above the bar area, giving fans the best possible vantage point of the ice without losing the bar-like atmosphere.

From day one, plans were made to add more seating to the arena. In order to secure an MJHL team at all, Nighthawks organizers had to promise an eventual seating capacity of 1,000. The existing seating at the time came to 600 seats on the west side of the rink.

"Just talking with the guys, we were trying to create a unique place that can be used year-round," says Bryan Trottier, the Nighthawks' director of team special projects. "I was looking for a place where people could go when their

kids were in bed or they were done work for the day. They'd be like, 'The Kettle will be open. Someone will be there.' Kind of like the old Cheers."

Further to that, Trottier imagines The Kettle being a unique onsite feature when tournaments, concerts, or special events are held anywhere in the vicinity of the CRRC.

Trottier and his board applied for a government grant for the upgraded seating area in January 2022.

Just two years later, their dream has been realized. But it didn't happen without some hiccups along the way.

Thanks to two years of pandemic, which brought on supply chain issues, inflation, and rapidly rising trade costs, the grant didn't stretch as far as they needed. This meant that the completed project had to be smaller in scale than

originally hoped. Plans for the original project included a mezzanine that would have stretched along the entire east side.

At this stage, Trottier is unsure whether the remainder of the east side seating will happen anytime soon.

"Right now we have lots of asks from other areas, too," says Trottier. "We still need a dressing room for the players. Currently they're in an ATCO trailer."

Despite the project being scaled back, it still brought smiles to a lot of faces on opening night. According to Trottier, The Kettle was full to capacity during the February 16 game and fans stayed afterward to socialize over drinks long after the game ended.

"Friday night was a good example of how it could look and how we'd dreamed it would look," says Trottier. "It was a pretty fun atmosphere."

IN BRIEF

Niverville Hosting Upcoming Hockey Provincials

By Ty Dilello

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The Niverville Clippers have been awarded the chance to host the 2024 Hockey Manitoba Provincials for both the U15 and U18 age levels. The tournaments will take place March 1–3 and March 8–10 in Ste Agathe.

The Clippers will be welcoming 18 teams in total with more than 300 players from across the province, not to mention the various family and friends who will attend.

"We are working to partner with local businesses to obtain sponsorships to help support our weekend," says organizer Jacelyn Boone. "Various businesses have already committed to supporting us."

Boone, who is on the U15 Provincial Committee, notes that the opening ceremonies will take place on Friday March 1, at 7:00 p.m. Each team will walk onto the ice in their respective team jerseys.

"We will have a very short program featuring local talent, national anthem, etc, followed by an 8:00 p.m. game featuring the Niverville Clippers versus Rivers Jets."

Admission for the weekend will be cash only. There are several options, including a family weekend pass (\$50), an adult weekend pass (\$25), a child weekend pass (\$15), a family day pass (\$30), an adult day pass (\$15), and a child day pass (\$10). Kids 12 and under are able to enter for free.

The social media channels for the U15 weekend are @2024_u15a_hockeybprovincials for Instagram and @2024U15AHockeyManitobaProvincials on Facebook.

"We are looking forward to an incredible weekend of hockey," says Boone. "Weekends like this are what hockey is all about: community, fun, and entertainment!"



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KENT KEELER

Lacrosse Comes to Ste. Agathe

By Jennifer Lavin

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A new team is joining the array of sporting opportunities in southern Manitoba. The Southman Saints Lacrosse Club, based out of the Ste. Agathe Arena, is looking for players of what's often called "the fastest game on two feet."

Matthew Girardin is the driving force behind the creation of the Saints. He and his wife moved to St. Adolphe six years ago and he made himself a goal of bringing lacrosse to the neighbouring communities.

"Lacrosse has been a major part of my entire life," says Girardin, "and I want to share the fun, excitement, and history of Canada's national summer sport with as many people as possible."

The St. Adolphe Arena hosted a Come Try Lacrosse event on February 26, and another is happening on March 4 for those who are interested in checking out the game.

The Southman Saints are part of a league with teams in Winnipeg (East St. Paul, The Maples, Allard, Fort Richmond, and Notre Dame) as well as Stonewall and Garson.

Saints Lacrosse is co-ed and available to kids as young as five years old. The season runs from the beginning of April until the end of June, with a mid-April start for the U7 and U9 teams.

The U7 program will run on Fridays at 6:00 p.m. and consist of a half-hour skills session and a half-hour three-on-three half-court game. U7 is an introductory program that focuses on basic skill development and having fun.

Practices for the U9 age group will be held on Mondays at 6:00 p.m. with a similar routine to U7, as well as six scheduled games on Wednesdays or weekends throughout the ten-week season. These games will not be scored and the coaches will serve as officials.

U11 will meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 6:00 or 7:00 p.m., with some weekend play. This age group is the first division that allows for modified contact and full-court five-on-five play plus a goalie.

From this age up, teams will run a full league schedule, including playoffs, and play will include scorekeeping and assigned officials.

The U13 age group will meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays at 6:00, 7:00, or 8:00 p.m. This division and up will follow standard Canadian lacrosse rules that allow contact on the ball carrier and contact on offensive non-ball carriers within a 24-foot semi-circle in front of the goal.

With U15 and U17, full contact is allowed on the ball carrier and cross-checking is permitted on non-ball carriers in the offensive zone. Practices will be held on various days during the week, depending on the coaches' availability and arena schedules. Games will generally run on Mondays and Wednesdays.

Girardin says that the benefits of playing lacrosse are myriad.

"Lacrosse will provide your child with great cardiovascular exercise and is an excellent cross training sport for hockey," he says. "It's an excellent balance of hand-eye coordination and athletic endurance. Given that lacrosse is a team sport, your child will

learn the value of working together to achieve success. Lifelong friendships are part of the game."

For those families who are concerned about overlap with another sport, Girardin acknowledges that there may be some conflicts. Spring hockey and lacrosse may both be possible at the same time depending on the individual team schedules, but baseball and lacrosse generally have too much direct overlap.

As with most youth sports, the success of Saints lacrosse will rely on getting enough volunteer coaches.

"Absolutely no lacrosse knowledge is necessary to be a coach," Girardin says. "Coaching experience in other sports would be extremely helpful but is not mandatory. Saints lacrosse is a volunteer-based organization made up of parents just like you, so help is always needed and appreciated."

Besides coaches, the Saints will also need volunteer managers, bench helpers, assistant coaches, scorekeepers, timekeepers, and other help during tournaments.

"I would love to see the Saints represented in all age divisions for this upcoming season," says Girardin. "If this goal can be achieved and the players' experiences are positive, I intend on continuing to build the Saints organization into a sustainable lacrosse club for decades to come."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Interested players and coaches can register at saints.rampregistrations.com. For any other questions or concerns, contact Matthew Girardin at saintslacrosse@shaw.ca.



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Guenther Back as Pilots Volleyball Coach

By Jennifer Lavin

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Last March, *The Citizen* reported that Kyle Guenther, head coach of the Providence Pilots volleyball program, would be stepping down after 13 seasons.

Nearly a year later, circumstances have changed and Guenther is back at the helm.

Guenther has led the Pilots to multiple championships and just last year was recognized as the Manitoba Colleges Athletic Conference (MCAC) women's volleyball coach of the year.

He began his career at Providence University College (PUC) as an assistant coach before assuming head coaching responsibilities in 2017. At the end of the 2022–2023 volleyball season, Guenther announced his intention to leave the program but agreed to serve as the team's interim coach for one year.



Head coach Kyle Guenther has led the Providence women's volleyball team through their best-ever season. **GRACE DRIEDGER**

Last week, Guenther has agreed to continue on as head coach at least until the end of the 2024–2025 season.

As interim coach this year, Guenther has guided the team through their best-ever season, boasting a perfect regular season record of 18 wins. The women's

volleyball team has achieved their highest-ever national ranking in Canada. They currently sit tenth in the Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association's (CCAA) weekly Top 15 list.

"I am happy to welcome Kyle back to the program next season," says Russell Willms, Providence's

director of athletics. "Kyle is well-connected within our conference, institution, and local club volleyball networks. He is an excellent coach who facilitates a positive sporting experience and healthy, competitive culture for athletes. I know that Kyle will continue to steer the program in a good direction next season."

Guenther and the Pilots completed the final weekend of their regular season this past weekend in Brandon, going up against the second-place Assiniboine Community College (ACC) Cougars.

They then returned to Niverville to host the 2024 MCAC Volleyball Championships, which took place February 24–25 at the CRRC.

Unfortunately, despite the perfect season, the Pilots were stunned in the final by the Canadian Mennonite University Blazers, who now travel to Red Deer, Alberta to represent Manitoba at the national championships.

Niverville to Host National Men's Volleyball Championship

By Jennifer Lavin

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An exciting sporting event is coming to Niverville next year. The CRRC has been chosen as the host facility for the 2025 Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA) men's volleyball championship. Providence University College in Otterburne will also play host to their fellow CCAA teams from March 3–9 next year.

The CCAA has six regional conferences that will each be represented at the championship, including the Pacific Western

Athletic Association, Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference, Ontario Colleges Athletic Association, Atlantic Collegiate Athletic Association, Réseau du Sport Etudiant du Québec, and Manitoba Colleges Athletic Conference (MCAC).

The announcement has been made even more exciting by the fact that it was only recently that the MCAC gained access to national championships such as these by joining the CCAA.

The MCAC has spent many years aligning their policies with those of the CCAA and building more nationally competitive

programs. In 2019, the CCAA accepted MCAC into their conference, and in 2021 the MCAC gained full access to CCAA national championships in the sports of soccer and volleyball.

"It is truly an honour to play host to this championship event in 2025," says Russell Willms, Providence's director of athletics. "It really is a big announcement for Providence, Niverville, and this region of the province. With such a wealth of volleyball talent, both in terms of athletes and coaches, in this area of Canada, it is only fitting that we showcase the passion for

volleyball that lives in these communities by hosting an event such as this."

Warren Britton, director of recreation and wellness for the Town of Niverville, agrees wholeheartedly.

"It is fantastic that the CRRC has been selected as the host facility," Britton says. "Our cutting-edge fieldhouse is designed to comfortably host events just like this, and we are excited that CCAA has recognized this. It puts Niverville and the CRRC on the map as a viable host for further national championships."

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