

The Citizen

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LOCAL NEWS

Watching for Signs of Sex Trafficking

■ Many don't see this as a local problem, but a recent exploitation ring bust says otherwise.

Details on Pages 4, 8



LOCAL NEWS

Is Social Media Dangerous?

■ Some professionals are raising a red flag about the high use of social media among young people, a trend that intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic and hasn't returned to pre-pandemic levels since.

Details on Pages 10-11

SPORTS & REC

Plans Halted for 40-Acre IDC Park

■ The sprawling Legacy Park, announced two years ago to be developed in IDC, is on hold.

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

St. Cyr Announces Hometown Show

■ Jordan St. Cyr, a rising star in Christian music, is returning to Niverville on August 29.

Details on Page 20



IDC Main Street Bump-Outs Reconsidered After Outcry **▶▶ READ MORE ON PAGES 6-7**

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Historic Steam Train Passes Through Niverville

By **Brenda Sawatzky**

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On July 4 at approximately 3:18 p.m., history passed through Niverville.

It was called the Final Spike Steam Tour, a three-country trek featuring the *Empress 2816*, a 4-6-4 Hudson-type steam locomotive built in 1930. The *Empress* was on her way to Winnipeg where she made one last stop on her 11-stop tour.

This once-in-a-lifetime steam train tour began in Calgary and wound its way east to Moose Jaw before heading south. The *Empress* made pitstops in seven American cities, turned around in Mexico City, and then headed back north to Winnipeg.

On Saturday, July 6, Manitobans had an opportunity to see the *Empress 2816* up close, learn more about its history, and enjoy a ride on the Puffer Belly Express mini-train, a quarter-scale steam locomotive model.

The event took place at the CPKC Winnipeg Yard at 949 Jarvis Avenue.

The train then headed back out to Calgary, headquarters for CPKC.

The CPKC is the combination of two historic railways, Canadian Pacific (CP) and Kansas City Southern (KCS), both founded in the 1800s.

Established in April 2023, the CPKC created the first and only transnational rail network in North America. The objective is to move essential goods across 20,000 miles of railway supporting the Canadian, American, and Mexican economies.

It was also in April 2023 that the final spike for the new railway network was ceremonially driven into the ground, thus completing the continental connection.

The Final Spike Steam Tour kicked off exactly one year later in celebration of the CPKC's first year.

"CPKC is fortunate to have a unique group of railroaders committed to restoring 2816, named the *Empress*, for a once-in-a-lifetime



The *Empress 2816*, a 4-6-4 Hudson-type steam locomotive. **ASHLEE-ANN HEMBROFF**

cross-continent trip," the company's website states. "Their job descriptions are anything but straightforward, with each member of the team bringing a unique jack of all trades set of skills to the project. For this group of railroaders, the steam locomotive restoration project has become personal—a connection to the past and a chance to add a piece of themselves to the 2816's story." ¹

In preparation for the restoration, the team of rebuilders tapped into the wisdom of a number of 80- and 90-year-old CP pensioners whose familiarity with the 2816 was like reuniting with an old friend.

"Retired CP master mechanic George Doerr has been a significant part of the work on 2816," the CPKC website says. "George was hired on in Winnipeg in 1947 when steam was king and remembers the 2816 like it was yesterday. He even provided a passport-sized Canadian Pacific notebook from 1961... to help the steam crew with a bearing refurbishment project on the 2816's tender."

The 2816 comes with its own rich history. It ran throughout the Great Depression, World War II, and was finally taken out of commission in the 1960s, replaced by the more affordable and efficient diesel engine.

The 2816 averaged, at times, up to 18,000 miles per month. In its years of use, it is estimated to have

run more than 3.5 million miles, far more than most diesel locomotives of the same age.

"These are very robust, overbuilt, heavy-duty machines," says Jonathan Morris, Manager Operating Practices, Steam. "It would leave Winnipeg running at 100 miles an hour. Eight hundred fifty miles later, it would arrive in Calgary where it would be turned, serviced, and sent east again. It would do this seven days a week."

Without question, there is something beautiful and mysterious about the old steam engine. It evokes, for many, a sense of nostalgia and historical relevance.

"In an increasingly digital age, where speed, innovation, and affordability overtake delayed gratification, the 2816 represents hope—an antithesis to the monotonous search for the next big thing and a reminder of the joy of resurrecting a job done well," says the CPKC website. "For the steam team and their fans, it embodies the delight of stumbling across a passion and the surprise of finding that generations of others are, and have always been, waiting for you there, too."

REFERENCE

¹ "Final Spike Steam Tour," CPKC. Date of access: July 4, 2024 (<https://www.cpkcr.com/en/community/final-spike-steam-train>).

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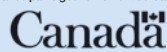
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by: Josh Schouten

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RCMP Bust Child Exploitation Ring and Warn of Others

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On July 9, RCMP informed the public of a series of arrests made in Portage la Prairie involving drug and human trafficking as well as possession and production of child pornography.

Police say that at least three female victims were exploited ranging in age from 13 and 15.

The RCMP Internet Child Exploitation Unit (ICE) has made seven arrests with a total of 65 charges between them.

Authorities also warn there are likely many more such human trafficking rings around the province and ask the public to be vigilant.

“If you think this is not happening in your community, you are wrong,” says Constable Kirandeep Hira with the ICE unit. “This is human trafficking and it is happening all over Manitoba. We all need to do our part to protect those victimized by traffickers. If you see something, say something. Those engaged in the production or exchange of child pornography are also throughout our province and we are dedicated to enforcing against anyone who exploits children.”

Investigation of the crimes began on February 2, 2024 when the RCMP was notified by a suspicious observer that a young girl was spotted in Portage accompanied by older men.

Officers were able to locate the 15-year-old girl along with an additional female of the same age and confirmed that they were victims of sex trafficking.

Over the course of the next four months, ten search warrants were carried out.

A full investigation revealed that the two young women had been befriended by an adult female who had invited them to hang out with some of her



DEPOSITPHOTOS

friends. Trusting the female, the girls were taken to a variety of residences between June to December of 2023.

At each location, an adult male was present, offering the girls drugs in exchange for sexual acts. On many occasions, the girls were locked in the building by the adult female, preventing their escape.

The adult female received payment from the male perpetrators in the form of drugs, including methamphetamine and cocaine.

“The exploitation included the adult males sending nude photos to the two youth and requiring photos of the two youth,” the RCMP release states. “As well, telecommunications between several of the males and the adult female took place via Snapchat or Facebook Messenger to groom or procure services from the youths.”

During the search warrants, RCMP seized a large quantity of illegal drugs as well as 13 firearms, including rifles and shotguns.

Charged is 43-year-old Chasity Nicole Assiniboine for child luring, trafficking, and benefitting from sexual services provided by someone who is under 18.

Six men were arrested, ranging in age from 34 to 44. They include David Guy Howard Taylor, Wesley Clayton Roulette, Frank Peter Justin Tecza, Alexander Paul Lidster, and Sean Michael Boak.

Charges for the latter two men include possession of child pornography and the printing, publishing, or making of child pornography. All of the accused are known to each other.

“Investigators do believe there are more victims and survivors,” says Inspector Shawn Pike, Investigative Services Officer for RCMP Major Crime Services.

“Information has led officers to know that a currently unidentified 13- or 14-year-old female was also exploited by this group. We ask anybody who knows anything about this operation, or is a survivor of it, to please call the Internet Child Exploitation Unit at 204-984-3129.”

In the meantime, the investigation continues.

RCMP media relations officer Tara Seel says that this crime ring was stopped and the victims saved thanks to a couple of vigilant Portage citizens who reported what seemed like a suspicious sight.

She strongly urges residents everywhere to not stay silent when such circumstances are observed.

“I really think knowing the signs to look for include anything that seems out of the ordinary,” Seel said at a July 9 press release. “If anything's raising your suspicions and just doesn't seem right, there's no harm in calling and just saying, ‘This is what I saw. This is what I feel.’”

For anyone in need of resources, Klinik Community Health has a 24/7 Sexual Assault Crisis Line at 204-786-8631 or toll free at 1-888-292-7565. Klinik can also help those wishing to make a third-party report of sexual assault, meaning that survivors can report the sexual assault to a recognized third party, such as Klinik, and that crime is then reported by Klinik to the police without the survivor's identifying information. Reporting can also take place through Cybertip.ca.

UPDATE & CORRECTION

This story has been updated. A previous version indicated that charges were laid against Scott Joseph Taylor, but the authorities have been determined that Taylor was not involved in this occurrence. All charges against him have been formally stayed in court.



Ritchot Council Clarifies Position on Short-Term Rentals

By Brenda Sawatzky
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In mid-July, Ritchot's council brought some clarity to the municipality's position on bed-and-breakfasts, Airbnbs, and VRBOs.

The discussion came in response to an application put forward by Joshua and Laura Boettcher of 274 Calla Bay in Grande Pointe.

The Boettchers, who attended the meeting virtually, indicated an interest in opening their home for short-term rentals.

"We've had movie producers wanting to rent the home for a bit," Laura told council. "And when we go away in the winter, we can have someone stay here and [provide us with] an income while we're away."

The application, which was drawn up to read as if the property was intended to be a bed-and-breakfast, was incorrect, Laura said. It was more the VRBO-type rental they were after.

Mayor Chris Ewen and Councillor Shane Pelletier both suggested that Ritchot's zoning bylaws currently only allow for bed-and-breakfast rentals. Owners must be living in their home throughout the duration of the rental period.

"At this time, there is no other zoning that would allow some kind of VRBO-style rental, where you could vacation... and rent out your home for a month," said Mayor Ewen. "That just wouldn't fly here. We've never seen that and I don't think there's an appetite at this time for it, but it would be something we could review at our zoning bylaw meeting."

CAO Mitch Duval clarified Ewen's statement, saying that there is no specific wording in the bed-and-breakfast bylaw to regulate that. He encouraged council to consider applying a condition to this particular permit if they feel the need to ensure that rentals cannot occur while homeowners are living onsite.

As for VRBOs, Councillor Janine Boulanger suggested

that council re-evaluate their position in the coming months. If a new zoning bylaw were to be created to allow for such a business, the Boettchers would have an opportunity to reapply at that time.

Duval suggested that the RM investigate how the city of Winnipeg currently deals with vacation rental permit requests.

Joshua Boettcher asked council about their position on the use of their home as a regular rental unit, not specific to the vacation classification.

In that case, Mayor Ewen said, the process would be different and require proof that rental home insurance had been obtained.

Three others attended the meeting virtually, all having submitted letters of dissatisfaction or concern. None of those letters were read aloud for the public's benefit.

A neighbour to the Boettchers, Lisa Rowswell, questioned council's silence regarding the content of these letters and the number of objections they had

received.

"It's a decision [left up to] the chair," Ewen said. "This evening, nothing is being read out loud."

As well, Rowswell made council aware that there is at least one Grande Pointe home that is being advertised online as a VRBO rental.

Mayor Ewen asked that she or other residents report illegal operations to the RM through the service request portal on their website.

Another resident from the Boettchers' neighbourhood, Robert Dvorski, thanked council for providing clarity about the requirement for homeowners to remain onsite during rental periods.

Dvorski was concerned, though, that residents in Grande Pointe aren't receiving notices about public hearings like this one.

At the Boettchers' request, council proceeded with a vote on the application for a bed-and-breakfast permit. It was approved in a 4-1. Councillor Boulanger stood opposed.

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IDC Bump-Outs Reconsidered After Outcry

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Following concerns raised by residents of Île-des-Chênes (IDC) over the bump-outs being built along the community's Main Street, changes are underway.

Ritchot Mayor Chris Ewen says that the construction crew was not to blame for the wide girth of the two finished bump-outs which left only ten feet, eight inches of roadway from curb to curb. They were simply following the blueprints.

Since that time, he adds, conversations took place between the construction company, the RM's public works department, and an engineering team.

They concluded that a wider space would be preferable to accommodate larger vehicles.

The recently installed concrete curbing was removed and rebuilt, now leaving a vehicle gap of 12 feet where the bump-outs are located.

"As background, most residential lanes are between 10 and 11 feet," says Ewen. "Most highway lanes are 12 feet. Main Street, between the curb-outs and the boulevard will be [at least] 12 feet."

The original reconstruction designs for the Main Streets in IDC, St. Adolphe, and Ste. Agathe were created by HFTC Planning and Design back in 2017. At that time, Ewen says that a public open house was held in order to glean feedback from Ritchot residents.



A series of bump-outs are being installed along Main Street in Île-des-Chênes.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

"Safety was the primary focus of this reconstruction with the addition of new sidewalks, bike lanes, and multiple crosswalks," Ewen says of the IDC street renewal. "This was something the community had been asking for during the consultation process. This includes multiple bump-outs along Main Street which are designed to reduce

traffic to one lane so pedestrians only need to cross one lane, not two."

Likewise, the conceptual drawings for the Main Street renewals in St. Adolphe and Ste. Agathe also include bump-outs with crosswalks. As well, there is potential for the use of roundabouts, or traffic circles, in both of those

communities.

Like IDC, St. Adolphe has a bike lane drawn into the design which will follow traffic along the street. In Ste. Agathe, bike traffic will be managed by a nearby multiuse path.

It's been nearly three months since construction of IDC's Main Street began. Ewen says that residents can expect project

completion sometime around the end of summer.

For business owners located along Main Street and patrons trying to access them, the wait already feels interminable.

The Citizen interviewed the owner of the Île-des-Chênes Convenience Store. At the time of this writing, IDC Main Street was completely blocked to public vehicular traffic in both directions. The only way for patrons to reach the business was on foot.

The owner says that the street has been fully closed like this several times throughout the construction period.

She says all the businesses along Main were visited by someone from the RM office a week prior to the commencement of construction.

"They told everyone that their place [of business] would remain accessible," she says, believing that the promised accessibility referred to vehicular traffic.

Even when traffic has been allowed to flow in one direction or the other, she adds that parking has been virtually impossible. The convenience store is one of the few businesses along Main with ample parking space. Even then, she says that construction vehicles often block access to it.

Lately, there's been days when the convenience store has seen as few as ten customers walk through their door as opposed to the constant flow of traffic they had before. Their sales have dropped by more

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IN BRIEF

Authorities Search for Sex Offender

By Brenda Sawatzky
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
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The RCMP and Winnipeg Police Service are warning the public to keep an eye out for a high-risk sex offender who is currently evading police.

Clay Byron Starr was released from federal custody on June 20 under conditions, one of which was that he reside in Sandy Bay First Nation.

He has since been in breach of those conditions and is being sought by the Manitoba High Risk Sex Offender Unit.

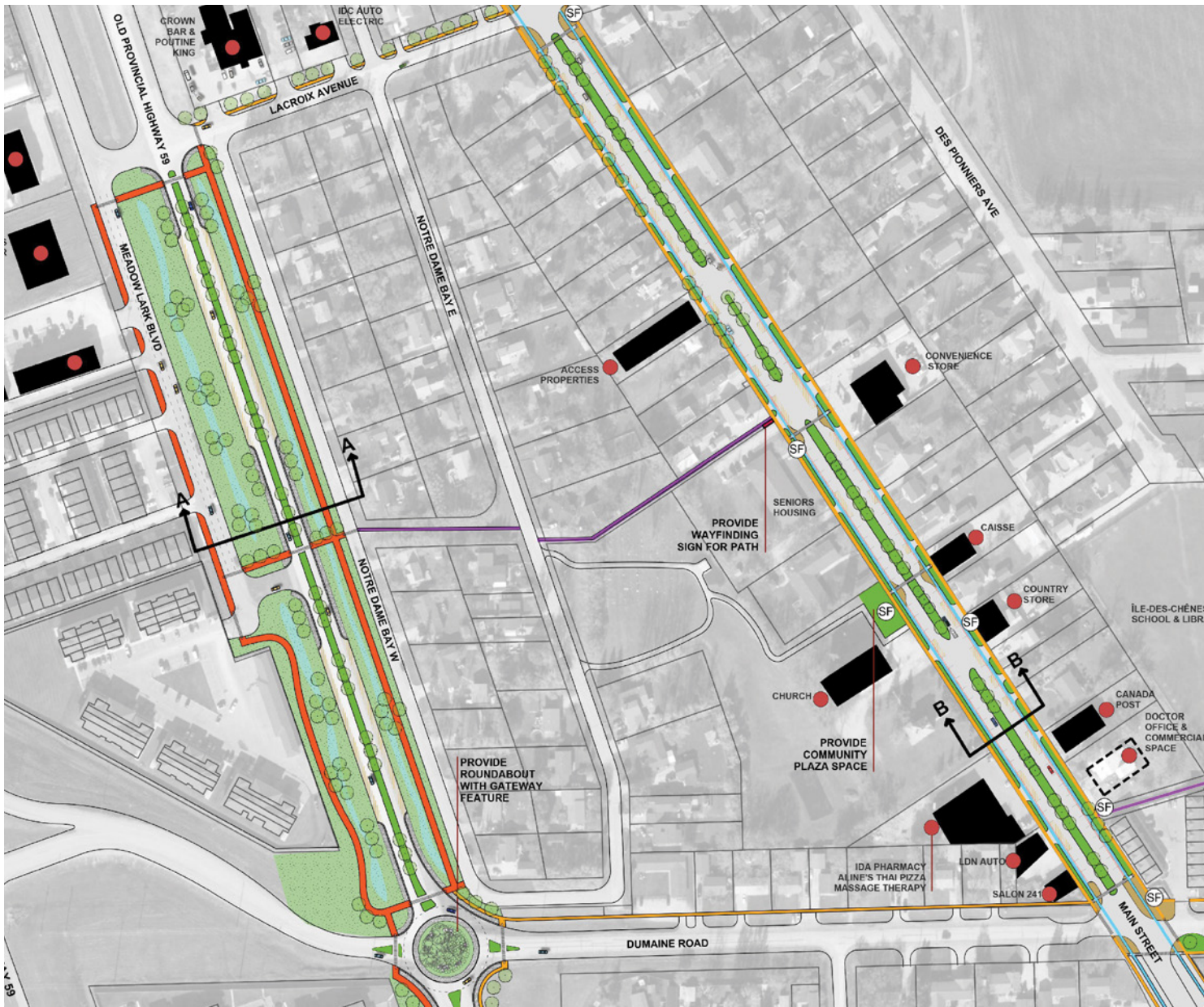
The 33-year-old Starr may also use pseudonyms such as Chad Crate, Clayton Starr, Richard Starr, Clay Richard, and Byron Richard.

“Starr is considered to be at high risk to reoffend in a sexual manner and females are at risk of sexual violence,” the RCMP release states. “He is considered violent and should not be confronted.”

Starr has been known to frequent cities like Winnipeg and Brandon, but RCMP warn that he could be anywhere.

He is described as six feet tall, 262 pounds, with black hair and brown eyes. He has scars on the bridge of his nose and his chin, and lettering tattoos on his neck. Starr also has sleeve tattoos on each arm.

Anyone with information is asked to call the Manitoba High Risk Sex Offender Unit at 204-679-2257 or 204-471-2811, Crime Stoppers anonymously at 1-800-222-8477, or secure tip online at www.manitobacrimestoppers.com.



The design plan for street renewal in Île-des-Chênes, created back in 2017.

HFTC PLANNING AND DESIGN

than 50 percent over the past three months.

In her opinion, the RM could have made things better in two ways. Firstly, she feels that businesses along Main should have been invited to a meeting prior to construction to discuss ways to minimize the impact on them.

Secondly, she adds, residents should have had another opportunity to speak to the design since a great deal has changed in the community in the past seven years.

Further down the street, *The Citizen* spoke to a staff person at a service-related business. She requested anonymity but had much to say about the difficulties the business has faced since construction began.

Confusion and poor communication, she says, has been the norm. At times, one-way traffic that was supposed to be open to the public has been inexplicably closed.

“We anticipated that [traffic] would always be accommodated,

that there would be traffic on one side at all times,” she says. “[But] things change from day to day, hour to hour, morning to night. And there’s no signage, no one communicating.”

While parking has been difficult for their clients to locate, it’s been as difficult for staff who have to hope they’ll find parking spaces on Dumaine or Lacroix for the day.

As for the two bump-outs that had to be deconstructed and rebuilt, it’s anyone’s guess

as to who will be responsible for covering that cost.

Along the street, while on his break, one construction worker offered *The Citizen* an educated guess on what the costs would come to. Around \$15,000, he said, for each bump-out.

Rather than posting comments and questions on social media, residents are being encouraged to reach out directly to the RM or to contact Mayor Ewen at 204-803-1447 or mayor@ritchot.com.

Apology

In our previous print edition, an unfortunate typo appeared in a Town of Niverville ad intended to advise homeowners about how to pay this year’s property taxes. The property tax due date was incorrectly printed as “September 297” instead of the correct date, September 27.

In this case, the Town did send a revised ad with the correct date prior to our deadline, and *The Citizen* received it. *The Citizen* sincerely apologizes for the ensuing mix-up and printing the wrong version of the ad.

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Raising Awareness of Sex Trafficking in Southeast Manitoba

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

It's a difficult subject to broach and an issue many want to believe only affects people somewhere beyond our small town borders: the trafficking of children for sex.

According to the Joy Smith Foundation, though, the problem is also very real right here in southeast Manitoba.

The Joy Smith Foundation is a charitable organization based out of Winnipeg and is one of the only organizations in the world to focus on the prevention and intervention of human trafficking as well as provide healing support for its victims.

Since 2012, the foundation has helped more than 7,000 human trafficking survivors.

According to the foundation, a child is likely being groomed for the sex trade at any given time within a single kilometre of your home.

"When we hear the term human trafficking, there is still some sense that it's in another community or it's somewhere far away. It couldn't apply to me," says foundation president and CEO Janet Campbell. "But each and every one of the survivors and their families that we've connected with felt the exact same way."

In Manitoba, the average age range of entry into the sex trade is 13 years and the majority of these children are female.

Ninety-three percent of Canada's sex trafficking victims are Canadian-born.

Like the drug trade, human sex trafficking is a lucrative business. A single trafficker can earn in excess of \$280,000 per victim per year.

According to Campbell, there is a common misconception that child victims of human trafficking are on a missing children's list somewhere.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

In reality, victimization most often happens in secrecy while the child lives at home and parents and siblings go completely unaware.

That's because many of the introductions and stages of initial grooming happen online.

HOW CHILDREN ARE LURED

Any social media platform or online chatroom, including video game chatrooms, frequented by youth these days, is going to have some lurking traffickers and informants.

That doesn't mean the internet is the only risky space for kids. Anywhere where youth hang out could provide an opportunity, including shopping malls, sporting events, skateboard parks, and parties.

Most human traffickers are adult males. When befriending potential victims online, they may use software to change their appearance and voice in order to leave the impression that they're a fellow teenager looking for friendship.

Traffickers may also lure young males into their fold, attracting them with bribery in order to use them to initiate contact with girls they know.

Campbell provides the example of a student in Manitoba who was befriending female students in order to gather their personal information and share it with a trafficker. The trafficker in turn reached out



Joy Smith.

CEO JOY SMITH FOUNDATION

to these female contacts via Instagram accounts, posing as a young friend of their schoolmate.

The reason so many young women fall for the ploy should be obvious. Traffickers are experienced groomers who understand a girl's vulnerabilities and they play on them.

Flattery is the most common way to begin a relationship, whether complimenting the girl's appearance, athleticism, or talents.

Once trust is built, she's likely to reveal more vulnerabilities, which might include feelings of being misunderstood by friends or family members. She might believe she's not loved the way she deserves, that her talents go unrecognized, or that she's not fully appreciated for the

unique individual she is.

The perpetrator poses as an understanding friend or even new love interest.

Experts in control and manipulation, these traffickers build a wall between the young woman and her support group. Fear tactics ensure that the girl keeps their relationship secret.

According to Campbell, this grooming process might take months.

With time, the perpetrator is able to introduce sexual innuendo and pornography, attempting to normalize them.

"The [victims] are really coerced into doing things against their will and they become paralyzed with fear," Campbell says.

They may ask the young woman to share lewd

pictures and videos which the perpetrator can then use as blackmail, threatening to share them with family or friends if she doesn't cooperate.

"Sextortion is happening at a very alarming rate. We often see cases of individuals that have been convinced to share an intimate photo of some type and then it's held over them. That can be for money, but it can also be for sexual services."

Eventually, the victim will receive requests for their attendance at parties or discreet locations of the perpetrator's choosing.

"Oftentimes, alcohol and drugs are introduced and inhibitions go down. Then [the victim] is encouraged to participate in a [sexual] activity or act. And once that happens, the trafficker uses that as a way of gaining more control and having them do even more."

At some point, the young woman will find herself being required to perform sexual services with strangers for a fee that is collected by the trafficker.

At this stage, most often, the victim finds herself experiencing such a deep level of guilt and shame that her silence deepens.

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS

According to the Joy Smith Foundation, education is our greatest weapon.

It's important, they say, that every parent, caregiver, teacher, and adult in authority learn to recognize the signs that a child is being groomed.

Firstly, ask questions if the child expresses an interest in a boy or man who is several years older than they.

The appearance of new clothing, jewellery, or gifts

the child doesn't have the means to afford are key signals. As well, a sudden change in the way the child dresses or applies makeup can be a warning sign.

Pay attention when the child goes on frequent sleepovers to a friend's house. As well, if they develop a new circle of friends and shut out the old ones.

A change in attitude or a drop in their grades may occur. Unexplained cuts and bruises should be a point of concern.

Finally, the use of more than one cellphone would be a red flag.

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

According to Campbell, there is no more effective tool for a parent than open communication and nonjudgmental listening.

"I think we need to talk to our children early and often about those [things] that will help prevent their victimization," Campbell says. "That really includes helping them understand the dangers of the online world. The internet is a wonderful tool, but it can be a weapon. It's important that kids really understand the steps they can take for online safety."

Ensuring that your child understands the signs of healthy and unhealthy relationships is key. Also, help them recognize false flattery and manipulation tactics.

Children need to be taught to trust their instincts. If something feels off, it should be avoided or at least shared with a trusted adult.

Shame and embarrassment are deeply entrenched when a child is being groomed. That's why creating a safe space for open dialogue is key.



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“Parents need to have an open line of communication with their youth so they know that no matter what is [going on], they have a safe channel to be able to come to you and not get into trouble.”

Finally, parents should create an atmosphere of safe internet use at home. Household computers should be kept in common spaces where they’re difficult to use in secrecy. It’s also a good idea to monitor the amount of time a child spends on computers and cellphones, and to coach them never to give out passwords, their real names, their home or school address, or any other personal information online.

Parents, too, should be cautious about sharing photos of their children on social media or in emails and texts if they’re not 100 per cent assured of the legitimacy of the recipient.

RECOVERY

While education and intervention are paramount, the stark reality is that recovery services are also needed to help victims. The Joy Smith Foundation takes care of that aspect, too.

“The healing journey is one that is complicated and it is nothing short of monumental,” Campbell says. “We care so much about the individuals that have been impacted by this. They are truly our inspiration and our heroes.”

The trauma of such an experience, she adds, leaves a lifelong mark. But Campbell’s organization has witnessed firsthand many young victims who grew up to become successful and

high-functioning members of society.

The foundation works together with government, law enforcement, schools, and other agencies.

“Number one, we want to see this prevented from happening in the first place. We want our youth to be protected. We want our communities informed and engaged so that they can play a part in creating an atmosphere where this doesn’t happen.”

WHO IS JOY SMITH?

Joy Smith is a Winnipeg native and mother to six grown children. While working as a schoolteacher, she became aware of human trafficking

evolved into a three-generational effort, Campbell being one of Smith’s daughters and an ally in the fight.

The National Human Trafficking Education Centre (NHTEC) was launched by the foundation in 2021. This is Canada’s first and only education centre addressing human trafficking across the country. The NHTEC provides training courses and materials covering both prevention and intervention.

Through the foundation, more than 100 victims and their families received recovery support in 2023.

That same year, more than 4,800 attendees took part in NHTEC’s educational workshops and presentations.

The “See the Signs” awareness campaign has garnered 335 million views online, a new podcast was launched last fall which broke into Apple’s top 200 podcasts globally. Here, listeners gain understanding and compassion as victims tell their stories.

“The internet is a wonderful tool, but it can be a weapon. It’s important that kids really understand the steps they can take for online safety.”

Janet Campbell | CEO, Joy Smith Foundation

when one of her students fell prey.

Discovering that no laws existed in Canada to protect young children from these predators, Smith set out on a mission to change all that.

In 2004, she became a Member of Parliament and went on to make history as the first sitting MP to amend the Criminal Code twice. These amendments strengthened sentencing for traffickers and expanded Canadian law.

In 2011, she created the Joy Smith Foundation. It started as a small operation at home but has since

HOW TO HELP

First and foremost, Campbell says, become informed. Knowledge is power. Further, she adds that her foundation welcomes more partners.

As a not-for-profit, all their educational programming and victim support is provided free of charge, so the foundation relies heavily on the generosity of donors. Volunteers are always needed at annual fundraising events.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

■ www.joysmithfoundation.com

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REPAIRS & PARTS ON ALL MAKES & MODELS

Experts Address Risks of Social Media on Youth

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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In this article, The Citizen interviews Dr. Jo Ann Unger, a registered clinical psychologist who manages a private practice in Winnipeg. She works professionally with people across the lifespan, from children to families, adults, and couples. Unger also serves as the specialty lead for the child and adolescent division of Clinical Health Psychology through Shared Health. In years past, she's been the acting manager of the family therapy program at New Directions and the clinical director for Kidthink.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that the years following the COVID-19 pandemic have revealed a lot of difficult things about human nature. Not the least of these insights is the negative role social media now plays in the lives of many young people.

Driven to physical isolation during the first two years of the pandemic, youth naturally turned to social media to maintain relationships and stay connected.

But experts say that this screen-time obsession hasn't tapered off much since the restrictions were lifted.

"Emerging evidence published since the Canadian Paediatric Society's 2019 position statement on digital media use by school-aged children and adolescents correlates social media use and adverse mental health impacts—effects that have magnified since the onset of the pandemic," says the Canadian Paediatric Society's (CPS) website. "Evidence gaps exist on the long-term impacts of social media use and overuse due to novel technologies, but there are enough red flags to warrant action. We are in the midst of a youth mental health crisis that demands meaningful and conscientious mitigation measures."¹

Long before the pandemic, parents and experts alike were already



DEPOSITPHOTOS

recognizing the detrimental effect of social media on children in terms of broad content exposure and online behaviours such as sexting and cyberbullying.

According to the CPS, though, screentime remains a defining factor in the research of healthy media use among kids.

Based on a study of students across Ontario and Alberta, the CPS says that the average high school student spends more than 7.5 hours per day on various screens. For a good many of them, much of that time is spent on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat.

However, it's not just older teens who are overly engaged in screentime.

"Three-quarters of Canadian parents are concerned about how much time children spend using media, reporting that 36 percent of their 10- to 13-year-olds spent three hours or more per day using digital devices for reasons unrelated to schoolwork," says CPS.²

Emma Duerden, the Canada Research Chair in neuroscience

and learning disorders at Western University, says that some of the statistics paint an even more dire picture.

According to Duerden's research, screentime today is down only slightly from what some parents were reporting as the norm during the early months of the pandemic. At that time, reports indicated that 13 hours a day on screens for six- to 12-year-olds was common.

Using brain imaging to study the impacts of social media on children's brains, Duerden has found that obsessive use is increasing the levels of childhood depression, anxiety, and aggression.

"Absolutely, I think this is a public health issue," Duerden told the CBC.³

In response, the U.S. surgeon general, Dr. Vivek Murthy, put out a call in May recommending that social media platforms include health warnings on their sites and apps similar to those found on cigarette packs.

Murthy has been said to criticize tech companies for unleashing powerful technology without

providing adequate safety measures or accountability.

Shortly after, Canada's Minister of Health, Mark Holland, also went public on this subject—although he didn't agree with Murthy's conclusion.

Warning labels wouldn't be helpful, Holland said. Instead parents should be having these conversations with their kids.

WHAT LOCALS THINK

One parent, Jennie Rempel, agrees with Holland. She has three children between the ages of 11 and 16.

"Warning labels will do nothing," Rempel says. "It's up to parents to set limits."

It's no easy task for any parent to manage, she admits, but it begins with open conversations with your kids.

"As parents, we have to be on top of it," she says. "Blocking them, monitoring, checking their phones and laptops."

As well, Rempel believes that parents should be researching safer alternatives, such as Messenger Kids, which doesn't require a

Facebook profile and can be monitored by parents.

Putting a shutoff timer on the Wi-Fi router, she adds, is a good way to manage screen use for the entire family.

Another parents, Ricki Harms, agrees that there's little benefit to a warning label on a social media platform.

"I'm very thankful I grew up without social media," says Harms. "It's terrible for kids. Added peer pressure, more opportunities for bullying... and ridiculous beauty standards for girls to try and achieve. But a warning label wouldn't really fix any of that. If you are on it, it will affect you."

Elizabeth Legault wonders whether warning labels on social media may actually have the opposite effect of what they intend.

"Warning labels just make kids want something more," says Legault. "[Teaching] abstinence instead of sex education is a really good example of this. Lack of education causes kids to not understand what they need to do to prevent certain things and also to hide those things from their folks."

From Jazmin Dobson's viewpoint, kids have no business being on social media at all.

But since they are, she says warning labels may pose some benefit.

"The warning labels on my cigarette packs don't stop me from smoking," Dobson says. "But at least I am fully informed about the choice that I'm making. Warning labels are a way to inform the general public of the dangers of something. Even adults should be aware and informed of the dangers of social media."

INSIGHTS FROM A CHILD PSYCHOLOGIST

Dr. Jo Ann Unger is a Winnipeg-based child and family psychologist. She and a colleague have set out to write a book on the subject of the effects of social media and screentime on children.

Almost more importantly, she

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says, the book will provide useful tools to help parents manage the healthy use of screens and apps.

Unger says that research on the subject is certainly imperative in helping set standards that can protect kids. Parents need to understand, though, that the research is based on averages. Recognizing that, they should know that it is possible for them to develop healthy family practices which in turn create healthier kids.

It's all about context. How well are children being supported, how full is their life with other distractions, and what challenges are they facing that might make them more vulnerable?

"When we're looking at these different types of research studies, what we're often seeing is the averages," Unger says. "In that regard, having a warning that's up to date is useful [on average]. There is reason to believe that we are not doing a good job of making the internet or social media platforms set up in such a way that it supports adolescent mental health."

While she doesn't deny that social media screentime can have adverse effects on adults, too, without question youth and children are exponentially more vulnerable. This is due to their immaturity in terms of brain development, identity development, and social and emotional development.

"All [adolescents] have these elements of really being sensitive to rejection, really being sensitive to the approval of others, and figuring out where they belong in terms of their friend groups," says Unger. "They're differentiating from their parents, appropriately so, and they're looking to their peers more than they ever have before for information, for validation, and for support."

As well, she adds, the fear of missing out is much stronger in adolescents than in adults.

"For adolescents it's like, 'If I'm not online, I'm going to miss something that's very important socially and that will have a negative impact on my relationships or my sense of belonging,'" Unger says.

We are by nature, after all, flock creatures. Social connection is where we derive a sense of security and love.

So a sense of separation or not belonging can activate a survival instinct, making isolation feel bigger than it actually is.

Unfortunately, Unger adds, social media is only pseudo-social in nature. It gives the appearance of engagement but leaves out a key element that only person-to-person contact can achieve: nonverbal communication. Facial and body cues tell us so much.

"It gives you a social hit but not enough of the real stuff to keep you [mentally] healthy," Unger says. "To me it's just a nice supplement to a real relationship, but it can't replace it."

Another problem with extended screentime, she adds, is that it provides constant distraction from real life. While it's an effective boredom prevention tool, she reminds parents that boredom breeds creativity, making it an essential part of life in terms of personal growth.

But what is it that makes social media an obsession in the first place?

According to Unger, it provides an instantaneous fix and it's with you all the time. The reinforcement patterns which are built right into social media platforms—the use of symbols indicating "likes" and "loves"—are mechanisms for approval, something we all crave.

"That, I think, is what we need to be addressing," Unger says. "How these social media algorithms and reinforcement patterns are set up to actually keep people engaged. That's where the changes and regulations need to come in. Right now, they're set up to benefit the app and their advertisers. They're there to make money, but the cost is coming at our children's mental health."

The use of algorithms, Unger says, also adds to the addictive quality of social media. Designed to keep users engaged and scrolling longer, they can have a polarizing effect.

"It's tailored to you," Unger says. "What you've clicked on before, it will give you more of that. And that's actually influencing the polarization of our world right now. Because it pulls you more and more in one direction, away from the average, toward one end of a pole."

It's this external curation

of our interests that prevents us from finding the balance that comes from perspective.

One has to be very intentional in their search for a wider spectrum of information to find balance.

Children rarely do that.

RESPONSIBILITY

But where does the responsibility lie—big tech, the regulators, or parents?

In Unger's mind, the onus falls on all three.

"Even we as adults struggle with self-regulation," she says. "But teenagers' brains don't finish developing till they're 25, so to expect them to self-regulate something that is very reinforcing and is designed to be so, is not realistic."

That doesn't mean they can't be coached, she adds, but it would serve parents well to enforce screentime rules. These might include switching off the Wi-Fi or turning in cellphones at a certain time of day.

Without question, the best way to reinforce any family policy is to model it.

"There's research to show that high use [of screens] in parents equals high use in kids," Unger says. "And high use with parents affects the parent-child relationship as well."

Another question many parents struggle with is figuring out when their child is ready to own their own cellphone device. In Unger's opinion, this shouldn't happen before they turn 12.

"For some parents, if the child is independently transporting themselves, like walking to school, they might want to have a cellphone for safety and that sort of thing," says Unger. "But I would challenge parents to think about why their child would need their own device. So if there is a need that it meets, that's what I would use as my parameter as opposed to, 'Well, their friends have one.'"

It's a tricky dance, though, when parents don't want to be the reason their child becomes socially ostracized.

One strategy to address that, she says, would be to collaborate with the parents of your child's friend group in order come to a mutual agreeable age in which the majority feels their kids will get cellphones.

The prohibitive cost of giving every member of the family their own cellphone

also needs to be considered for many families.

SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

Unger says there are a few signs parents can watch for when it comes to determining if their children are struggling due to social media overuse.

Parents should pay attention to how engaged their child is when trying to converse with them face to face.

Are their marks at school suffering?

Do they tend to isolate in their rooms or become quiet in public?

Do they get anxious when a parent suggests they put the phone away in order to do another activity?

Finally, how much time are they spending in person-to-person connections with friends and how much physical activity are they engaged in on a regular basis?

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CITIZEN POLL

Do you believe that placing warning labels on social media would be an effective first step in helping parents manage their kids social media use?

- Yes. Warning labels create an awareness of risks which people may not otherwise have considered.
- No. Parents and teens need resources to teach them how to manage social media use, not warning labels which only serve to state the obvious.

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

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Are you concerned about the prospect of Canada evolving into a fully cashless society?

Yes. Cash is tangible and can be used anonymously. It remains highly relevant and should not be eliminated.

87%

No. Cash can be counterfeited or lost and is no safer than digital currency. Cashless is the way of the future.

13%

YOUR COMMENTS:

Only the banks profit from a cashless society. Every card transaction makes money for the banks and cost the individual and the retailer money in fees. Banks are also subject to hacks, power outages, and system failures. Cash works in all those scenarios. If we become a cashless society, that would be a perfect time for banks to raise fees because it leaves us no choice but to use their cards. Putting all our purchasing options in one cashless system is dangerous. The concerns about cash being counterfeited or lost is easily fixed by everyone. Use your card if that's a concern. The way of the future is more options, not less. Nearly everything else in our lives offers us more than one option. Cashless is definitely government and bank overreach.

Every time we use a cashless system, we are devaluing the money and banks are getting richer. We need to keep cash around.

There are a million more significant issues in today's world than this. Trust a fool like Ted Falk (and his boss, Pierre) to make this something important.

Cash is used all the time. It should not be eliminated for many reasons.

Cash also allows parents the ability to teach their kids money management in a tangible way, and allows neighbours to hire teens to cut grass, etc.

2024/2025 SEASON SCHEDULE

SEP. 20	 WINNIPEG FREEZE @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	NOV. 17	 WINKLER FLYERS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	JAN. 19	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  WINNIPEG FREEZE
SEP. 22	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  WAYWAYSEECAPPO WOLVERINES	NOV. 20	 PORTAGE TERRIERS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	JAN. 22	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  PORTAGE TERRIERS
SEP. 24	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  SELKIRK STEELERS	NOV. 22	 STEINBACH PISTONS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	FEB. 2	 WAYWAYSEECAPPO WOLVERINES @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS
SEP. 27	 WINNIPEG BLUES @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	NOV. 27	 SELKIRK STEELERS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	FEB. 8	 DAUPHIN KINGS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS
SEP. 29	 SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDERS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	NOV. 29	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  NORTHERN MANITOBA BLIZZARD	FEB. 9	 WINNIPEG FREEZE @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS
OCT. 4	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS	NOV. 30	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDERS	FEB. 14	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDERS
OCT. 9	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  WINNIPEG BLUES	DEC. 3	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  SELKIRK STEELERS	FEB. 15	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  NORTHERN MANITOBA BLIZZARD
OCT. 11	 NORTHERN MANITOBA BLIZZARD @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	DEC. 7	 NORTHERN MANITOBA BLIZZARD @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	FEB. 16	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  DAUPHIN KINGS
OCT. 12	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  STEINBACH PISTONS	DEC. 8	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  WINKLER FLYERS	FEB. 22	 DAUPHIN KINGS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS
OCT. 16	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  PORTAGE TERRIERS	DEC. 13	 SELKIRK STEELERS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	FEB. 23	 WINKLER FLYERS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS
OCT. 18	 WINNIPEG BLUES @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	DEC. 15	 WINKLER FLYERS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	FEB. 26	 PORTAGE TERRIERS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS
OCT. 19	 VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	DEC. 18	 WAYWAYSEECAPPO WOLVERINES @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	MAR. 1	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  DAUPHIN KINGS
OCT. 23	 STEINBACH PISTONS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	DEC. 20	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  WAYWAYSEECAPPO WOLVERINES	MAR. 5	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  WINNIPEG FREEZE
OCT. 25	 WINNIPEG FREEZE @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	DEC. 31	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  STEINBACH PISTONS	MAR. 8	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  SELKIRK STEELERS
OCT. 26	 NEEPAWA TITANS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	JAN. 3	 SELKIRK STEELERS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	MAR. 9	 NEEPAWA TITANS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS
OCT. 31	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  WINNIPEG BLUES	JAN. 5	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  WINKLER FLYERS	MAR. 12	 PORTAGE TERRIERS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS
NOV. 2	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  WINNIPEG BLUES	JAN. 7	 STEINBACH PISTONS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	MAR. 15	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  PORTAGE TERRIERS
NOV. 8	 SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDERS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	JAN. 11	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  STEINBACH PISTONS	MAR. 16	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  WINNIPEG FREEZE
NOV. 11	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  NEEPAWA TITANS	JAN. 12	 VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS @  NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS		
NOV. 16	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  NEEPAWA TITANS	JAN. 17	 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS @  VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS		

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The Immigrant Experience: World Travellers Choose Niverville as Home

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

This is the third article in a series presented by The Citizen which explores the lives of newcomers to southeastern Manitoba. Everywhere we look, new and diverse faces surround us. It's time to get to know our neighbours and welcome them to our communities.

Over the course of their lives, Andrew and Nigar Gorozhankin have lived in a wide variety of global locales. Still, when choosing the best home in which to raise their family, they settled on Niverville.

The Gorozhankins immigrated to Canada in 2019, just months before the COVID-19 pandemic struck.

The couple settled in Morden with their first child.

They hadn't chosen Manitoba, they say. It chose them.

Morden was the Canadian destination where the Gorozhankins' immigration officer found a sponsorship team.

They tried to make a go in that rural community, but they found no work matching their training, so they moved to Winnipeg.

Here Andrew landed work with AGI Westeel, a manufacturer and worldwide distributor of agricultural grain bins and equipment.

Today, Andrew works in the company's corporate office, heading up the Australian and New Zealand markets. They have three children ranging in age from two to ten years old.

With the arrival of their second child, they began to reconsider city life.

Looking for a quiet community to raise their children, they took a drive to Niverville to check out an apartment

that was listed for rent.

"It was a horrible rainy day and we were just driving through and I said, 'I like this place,'" Andrew says. "I was looking at it from the kids' perspective: many playgrounds and a small community where everybody knows each other."

For his wife Nigar, a good blend of multiculturalism was also important.

Unfortunately, the apartment didn't work out. But in no time, the family put down a deposit on their first house and moved to Niverville in 2021.

While both Andrew and Nigar have Jewish heritage, they lived in Israel only briefly before immigrating to Canada.

Andrew was born in Ukraine and Nigar was raised in Azerbaijan, both countries whose borders flank Russia. In many ways, their lives played out in parallel to each other.

At the tender age of seven, Andrew joined a Ukrainian children's choir thanks to his mother's influence as a gifted pianist and musical academy professor.

For months every year, Andrew's choir travelled Europe and Asia, performing far away from their families. He remembers tours in Korea, Taiwan, and especially France.

Picked up by a French agent for their uniquely traditional song and costuming, the choir toured the villages of France year after year.

"We sang in Catholic churches so all of the villagers of the town could come," says Andrew. "They could fit 300 people and it was sold out all of the time."

For the next ten years, Andrew and his choir mates billeted with local families as



Andrew and Nigar Gorozhankin.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

they travelled.

"It was a very good experience for me because I didn't speak French at the time," Andrew says. "After a couple of trips, I spoke French fluently. And I still have some friends [I made there] and we're still communicating."

He distinctly recalls being in France in 1997 when news broke of Princess Diana's fatal crash in Paris.

While Andrew was touring with his choir, Nigar's childhood was also spent in Europe, thanks to a father who served in the Soviet military.

When her parents eventually divorced, Nigar settled in Azerbaijan with her mother. During breaks from school, she flew to meet her father at military stations in Moscow and Germany in order to spend time with him.

As a young adult, Nigar took an interest in her father's new career as a hotelier in Germany. She attended school in Switzerland where she completed her postsecondary education, receiving a master's degree in business

the Marriott hotel chain.

"By the time I came back to Azerbaijan, they were opening up the first Marriott in Baku," Nigar says. "I applied and I got the position."

Once again, both Andrew and Nigar found themselves restless and looking for something new. Andrew decided to move to Israel for a year of study. For Nigar, the move to Israel would bring needed change and fulfill a desire to connect with her Jewish heritage.

They arrived in Israel one month apart. Their paths finally crossed for the first time in Hebrew language classes. They married in 2015.

During their time in Israel, Nigar put her degree into practice, working in the tourism industry. Andrew found work with a shipping company and eventually fulfilled his duty to the Israeli army; the country requires six months of basic training from its young citizens.

"What I noticed is that people started to look at me in a different way," Andrew says. "When I came to [work] wearing my army clothes, I saw that people looked at me with such a big respect, even the superiors who didn't notice me before."

He says that young people from the international Jewish community frequently travel to Israel to serve in its army.

"There were Jews from Canada and the U.S. who came to serve," Andrew says. "They wanted to give part of their life to Israel because they felt some connection."

Even so, it didn't take long for Andrew and Nigar to determine that the Middle East was not where they wanted to raise a family. They describe it as noisy and the people nosy, with everyone

believing they have a right to know everyone else's business.

"One of the first questions they would ask is, 'Where is your husband?' or 'Where are you working and how much do you get as a paycheque?'" Nigar says. "Nothing is private."

At this point, Nigar was fluent in four languages and Andrew in five. The most important language they shared, though, was English. It would be key to simplifying their immigration process to Canada.

Today, all three of the Gorozhankin children are experiencing the advantages of being raised in a multilingual family. They already have a good grasp of the four languages spoken regularly at home.

With wars and political unrest raging in both Israel and Ukraine, the Gorozhankins couldn't be happier with their decision to relocate to Canada.

Andrew's parents still live in Ukraine, specifically in Odessa, a city with a port on the Black Sea. It is a major battleground in the Russia-Ukraine war.

"Odessa was historically a Russian-speaking city, but it doesn't mean that we don't feel ourselves as Ukrainians," Andrew says.

Andrew is happy to host his mother, who is visiting from Ukraine this summer. He is working diligently to secure a visa allowing his father to visit Canada as well. It's a waiting game, though, since male adults are currently forbidden from leaving Ukraine until they turn 60. Andrew's father is 59.

As for Andrew and Nigar, 2024 is the year they hope to make their Canadian citizenship official.

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Exploring the Salaries of Elected Officials

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On June 28, 2024, the province released a report on the pay for elected officials. The document covers salaries, allowances, and retirement benefits for the premier as well as MLAs serving in the Manitoba Legislature. It is the first such report since 2017.

Prepared by Michael D. Werier, Commissioner on Salaries, Allowances and Retirement Benefits, was appointed by the Legislative Assembly Management Commission, which in turn is chaired by the Speaker of the Assembly. The commission consists of members of all three parties who currently have elected members: the NDP, the Progressive Conservatives, and the Manitoba Liberals.

Werier's role is to research historical and interprovincial data for comparison's sake in order to decide on appropriate salaries and benefits. His decisions are binding.

"There is a consensus across the country that MLAs should be paid a fair and reasonable salary," Werier says in the report. "It should be at a level to attract qualified individuals to run for office, but not at a level where it is considered to be an inducement to seek the position."

There is no precise formula to help determine appropriate salaries for elected officials, he adds, and no other occupations to compare with that share the unique characteristics of these governmental positions.

"That is why independent reviewers have consistently opined that the best comparables are salaries paid to MLAs and other elected officials in other provinces and federally," Werier continues. "This, of course, must take into account the economic conditions in each jurisdiction, including the cost of living in each area."

Based on the report's findings, Premier Wab Kinew's annual salary as of April 1, 2024 will come to \$195,936. This includes a base salary of \$106,603 as well as an additional salary of almost \$90,000 to compensate for the roles he plays as both premier and MLA.

"The premier earns the highest



The Manitoba Legislature in Winnipeg.

DEPOSITPHOTOS

salary of elected members," Werier says. "It is a demanding job and has many high-pressure responsibilities. None of this is disputed."

When comparing salaries to premiers across the country, Newfoundland and Labrador comes in lowest at \$160,525 while Quebec is at the top at \$270,120.

Werier's report also takes into account the salaries being paid to Winnipeg's mayor and city councillors.

Winnipeg mayor Scott Gillingham currently earns \$213,328 annually, well above that of the premier.

City councillors, too, earn more than an MLA. A Winnipeg councillor takes home \$114,609 annually compared to the MLA, who earns \$106,603.

"One would expect that salaries at the provincial level would be higher or at the very least equivalent to the municipal level, but this is not always the case," says Werier. "While I cannot find justification for the difference in salary, I am mindful that economic conditions do not support the kind of wage increase that would be necessary to bridge or eliminate the gap, but it is relevant to take into account these differences when assessing

fair and reasonable compensation for members."

The report compares wages across the country for MLAs. For these provincial representatives, Prince Edward Island is at the bottom of the list with a wage of \$82,116 and Quebec once again tops the chart at \$131,766.

Werier's report takes things one step further by reporting on the wage of a member of the federal House of Commons. Members of the House see almost double the annual salary of an MLA, coming in at \$203,100.

In Manitoba, the leader of the opposition comes in just under the premier at \$164,967. The cross-country comparison here, too, keeps Manitoba at around the midrange of all the provinces.

Over and above salaries, MLAs are also eligible for allowances which cover authorized expenses. These include meal and travel expenses as well as costs incurred in setting up an office, paying office rent, and staffing expenses to pay an assistant's wage.

Some living expenses are also covered.

Annual cost-of-living increases are also determined by Werier.

MLAs in Manitoba, as well as the premier, can expect a 2.5 and 2.75 percent increase over the next two years. After that, their increase will be reassessed and capped at three percent.

The recently introduced Fiscal Responsibility and Taxpayer Act requires that the provincial government not incur a deficit larger than the baseline amount.

If this is not met, the salaries of MLAs are to be reduced by 20 percent if the deficit exceeds the baseline in the first year and as much as 40 percent in the second year if the trend continues.

These withheld wages are to be repaid once the deficit is reduced to below the baseline.

MUNICIPAL SALARIES

When talking municipal politics, the salaries of elected officials drops off significantly. That's because it's presumed that these jobs will require significantly fewer hours.

Even so, there are no overarching guidelines by which municipalities must set the payscale for their elected officials.

For the most part, councils determine the cost-of-living allowance (COLA) increases they'll be eligible

for over a series of years.

In 2024, the mayor of Niverville is collecting just shy of \$28,000 per year for his work for the community. The deputy mayor receives just over \$20,000 and each councillor just over \$18,000.

Each council member can also collect nominal compensation when they attend meetings or events outside the community.

"When looking at remuneration provided to councils in southeastern Manitoba, one can see that rural municipalities like Hanover, Ritchot, and Springfield have much higher remuneration than Niverville does," says Cyrus Reimer, communications director for the Town of Niverville. "We can also look at communities of similar size to us, such as Morden, Altona, Neepawa, or Stonewall, and see that [Niverville council salaries are] in line with them. We then balance that with the workload that is required to help run our community, which is the fifth-fastest growing in the country."

Two years ago, the salaries of Ritchot council members underwent a formal review by an ad hoc committee called the Ritchot Community Indemnity Committee.

St. Adolphe resident Ron Rochon chaired the committee of six, which represented each ward in the RM plus the business community.

At the time, the committee determined that a significant salary increase was in order if quality people were to be attracted to these positions.

In 2024, the mayor of Ritchot is set to receive just under \$50,000. Each councillor's salary will come to just better than \$28,500.

Additionally, Ritchot's mayor and councillors receive hourly pay for attending meetings and events that are considered extraneous to their regular duties.

FEDERAL SALARIES

This year, federal parliamentarians were awarded a 4.4 percent increase in pay. This results in an annual salary of \$406,200 for the prime minister. The leader of the opposition receives \$299,900, about the same wage as the average federal cabinet minister.



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Sports & Recreation

Coach Named Volleyball Manitoba's Best of the Year

By Jennifer Lavin

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At this year's Volleyball Manitoba awards banquet, Niverville resident Kyla Zacharias received the award for Elite Coach of the Year. The award is presented in recognition of outstanding coaching and dedication in the sport of volleyball.

Zacharias, along with her husband Dylan and her parents, Carl and Heather Fast, are the coaches of the 16U Providence Junior Pilots Navy team.

Zacharias has been head coach for five years, the last three of which she has moved up with the same team.

This year was particularly successful for the Navy team. They won the provincial championship and placed in the top 16 at nationals.

Zacharias is quick to give credit to others.

"I owe it all to the amazing parents, players, and assistant coaches I had that brought me to getting this award," she says. "I truly believe this award was a full team effort."

Zacharias has a long history with the sport of volleyball. She started playing at a young age before joining the Providence Junior Pilots in their inaugural year.



Kyla Zacharias, alongside her husband Dylan.

HEATHER FAST

After four years with the Junior Pilots, Zacharias went on to play for Providence during her college years as well.

The love of volleyball runs deep in Zacharias's family. The influence of her father, Carl Fast, was a big part of why she got into coaching.

Her father coached her for many years, and after she graduated she began working as his assistant coach.

It's easy to see why Zacharias won this prestigious award when she speaks about the sport she loves.

"I love the strategy of the game and wanted to give back to the program I played in," says Zacharias. "I have such fond memories from playing, but coaching has become a bigger passion of mine in the last few years. I do it because I love watching my athletes grow, not only in their volleyball skills but also in their leadership skills, dealing with adversity, and seeing them grow into confident athletes. I have always emphasized the importance of being a team and supporting each other no matter the amount of wins or losses we have."

It is also exciting to Zacharias that coaching a team from Providence University College means she has an opportunity to incorporate her Christian faith into her passion for coaching.

"It is very cool to see the girls I coached this season be such a bright light to the other athletes around them not only on the court, but off the court as well. And I love what I do because I get to coach with my family. They are all a huge support system for me and they played a crucial role in our success this season."

New stories published daily!

www.nivervillecitizen.com **The Citizen**

Nighthawks Looking for Billet Families

By Ty Dilello

tdilello@nivervillecitizen.com

Among the most underrated heroes in any junior hockey organization are the local billet families who host players throughout the season and give them a home away from home.

With just two years of Nighthawks hockey under their belt, the organization has developed a solid base of billet families.

"Billeting in our second season was good," says Nighthawks billeting coordinator Gail Chornoboy. "It's had some challenges and still some learning curves, but all in all it was a great year."

However, Chornoboy notes that she is always looking for new billet homes to sign up to host players.

In particular, the team is looking for families to get involved in the short-term.

When prospects arrive for the team's training camps in August, they need a place to stay for a few weeks.

"And just because it doesn't work out to sign up in the beginning of the year, that doesn't mean you can't reach out at any time," she says.

After two years of involvement with the team, Karly Friesen is one very happy billet parent. Last season, she and her family hosted Nighthawks forward Michael Tanchak.

"We loved the idea of opening our home and hearts to a young man needing a loving home and supportive family," Friesen says of the experience.



The Friesen family hosted Michael Tanchak last season. C/O KARLY FRIESEN

"Michael was a very polite, responsible, and respectful young man. Since he is from Winnipeg, he would go home quite often, but we loved spending time with him when we could. Mike loves our children, especially our youngest, who was only five months old when he moved in. She still gets excited when she sees pictures of him."

For those interested in getting involved in billeting a young player, Friesen notes that you need to be willing to love and care for these boys as if they are your own.

"It's important to verbalize expectations and rules at the beginning and have check-ins regarding these every once in a while," says Friesen. "Encourage them to participate in family activities and outings—and participate in things they are interested in, too. Finally, ask them about their day and

how they are doing physically and mentally. These boys are under a lot of stress and often miss their friends and family from back home. They need to know that they can talk to you and trust you."

The Friesens have loved the billet experience to date and will continue to billet another player for the next Nighthawks season.

"Our three kids love having a big brother. They talk about our two hockey sons regularly and are already asking how much longer until the next one moves in. Our house doesn't feel normal with the room empty during the summer."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Any families in the Niverville and Ste. Agathe area looking to get involved should contact Gail Chornoboy: billeting@mjhlighthawks.ca

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**The 2024 property tax statements
have been mailed to property owners.**

If you do not receive a copy of the bill, please feel free to contact the Town Office for a copy (email taxes@whereyoubelong.ca or call 204-388-4600 ext. 1109).

New property owners are reminded that they are responsible for the payment of the taxes whether or not they have received a tax notice in their name.

All payments must be received in the Town Office, 329 Bronstone Drive, Niverville by 5 p.m. on September 27th, 2024. Cheques may be post-dated to the due date (Sept. 27, 2024) but must be received by the Town Office **on or before September 27th, 2024 by 5 p.m.**, or they will be considered late and will be subject to a penalty. Receipts may be emailed upon request or picked up at the Town Office.

All taxes remaining subsequently unpaid are subject by law to a penalty of 1.25% per month (compounded annually). **STATEMENTS CURRENTLY SHOWING ARREARS WILL HAVE ADDITIONAL PENALTIES.** Call the Town Office or log into your eServices account for an updated balance on the day the payment is remitted. Note that penalties are posted on the first of every month. (Please allow 3 business days for bank processing).

Cheques or money orders should be made payable to the "Town or Niverville". Visit www.whereyoubelong.ca for the various payment options.



Former plan for Legacy Park in Île-des-Chênes.

C/O RM OF RITCHOT

Plans Halted for 40-Acre IDC Park

By Brenda Sawatzky
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
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After almost a decade in the planning, the RM of Ritchot's goal to build a major park in Île-des-Chênes has been put on indefinite hold.

The new Legacy Park was to be built on a large parcel of vacant real estate currently owned by TC Energy.

The land in the northeast corner of the community would have connected the existing Optimist and D'Autelle Parks.

Based on prior dealings with TC Energy, the RM was hopeful that a deal could be worked out to lease the parcel of land.

The plan looked so promising, in fact, that a Legacy Park planning committee was formed and a public open

house held back in February 2022.

Prior to that meeting, Scott Rosin, a registered landscape architect from SiteworkLA, was hired to research the project and develop a conceptual design.

This month, the RM of Ritchot released a statement on the project.

"Our plan was to use this land to develop a much-needed park space in the community," the RM says. "Unfortunately, and to our disappointment, TC Energy has stated that they are unable to donate this parcel of land at this time but will work with the municipality to identify other areas they may be able to support the community."

For both council and the Legacy Park committee, the recent development is very disappointing.

"While this is not the answer we had hoped to receive, we will stay in contact with TC Energy should the situation change in the future and remain focused on providing more park space in Île-des-Chênes," says Councillor Shane Pelletier, who lives in IDC and represents the town on council.

The Citizen reached out to TC Energy and did not receive a response prior to the writing of this article.

However, TC Energy did provide some assurance, through the RM, that they would continue to be a good neighbour.

The company also sought to remind residents that they have invested more than \$50,000 in Ritchot projects.

The Legacy Park project, if developed based on the original design, would have

provided residents with some unique recreation options.

Proposed features included a toboggan hill, outdoor fitness equipment, a public art space, washroom facilities, a skatepark, and an all-ages playground.

There were also ambitious plans for a sheltered area with a pond, gardens, and an amphitheatre. Two large sports fields would have provided ample room for sporting events such as soccer and ultimate frisbee.

Walking paths would have wound throughout the entire park. An extensive mountain bike course was being considered for the north end.

With the project now seemingly dead, the RM says that their recreation director will continue to work together with TC Energy in the hopes of finding alternative solutions.

IN BRIEF

Brown Attends Jets Development Camp

By Ty Dilello
tdilello@nivervillecitizen.com

It was a sight to behold as Niverville Nighthawks star forward Nathan Brown took part this month in the 2024 Winnipeg Jets development camp from July 3-7.

Back in May, Brown received a call from Jimmy Roy, the Jets' director of player development, who told him that if he didn't get drafted at the 2024 NHL Entry Draft, he would receive an invite to the camp.

"It was a dream come true," says Brown. "I grew up going to the Jets development camp and watching these players and getting autographs from them. And now this year, I got to be one of those guys that the little kids are watching and wanting autographs from."

Brown says he had a fantastic time rubbing shoulders and making friends with the Jets' top prospects and learning what it takes to be a pro.

"The camp was great and was such a good learning experience and helped me see where I stand compared to these draft picks and older players," he says. "I learnt lots and I got to see how hard these older guys push the pace in practice and how hard they work in the gym."

Brown notes that he didn't feel out of place and was able to compete.

"I felt smaller out there, but still competed and battled for every puck. So it's definitely going to help me become more confident in

my abilities and push myself the rest of the offseason and then come into this season hungrier than ever."

In Brown's rookie season of junior hockey with the Nighthawks last year, he scored 32 points in 49 games.

"I loved my first season with the Nighthawks," says Brown. "Everyone in the organization is great, and they are pushing for everyone to become the best version of themselves. Also, being in a great billet home this year helped me stay focused on hockey and not being homesick. I think this year, I really adapted to playing different roles, whether it was on the power play, penalty kill, producing on the first line, or getting in and bringing energy on the third line. I felt I was always making an impact on the ice, and that's one thing I'm trying to carry into this season. Also, I think my board work and hard skill really improved this year, being up against older, stronger players."

Brown is also a recruit of the St. Cloud State Huskies team, a Division I NCAA school out of St. Cloud, Minnesota.

He will start attending college with St. Cloud for the 2025-26 season.

Brown will head down to the USHL's Fargo Force in the fall to try and make that team. But if it doesn't end up working out in Fargo, Brown will be welcomed back with open arms for the Nighthawks in their 2024-25 season.

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Arts & Entertainment

St. Cyr Announces Summer Hometown Show

By Jennifer Lavin

✉ jlavin@nivervillecitizen.com

As Jordan St. Cyr continues his rise as a star in contemporary Christian music, his small-town roots, strong faith, and loving family keep him firmly grounded.

This August, St. Cyr will perform his first hometown show since 2017. Not only is he excited to play in Niverville after being away for a couple of years, but he's also pleased to be performing with Winnipeg legend Steve Bell, who St. Cyr calls "the quintessential artist."

Bell and St. Cyr's father have been longtime friends. Bell even offered advice and connections to St. Cyr early in his career.

St. Cyr says that he was tremendously honoured when Bell accepted his invitation to join him for the show.

The format for this hometown show will be a little different than his usual shows. St. Cyr will start the night with a set of his own songs. Then Bell will perform. Afterward the pair will sit together on stage and have a conversation.

"We'll talk about life and music and the whole thing! We really want to create something a little different for the hometown crowd."

St. Cyr believes that the power of music can spur important conversations.

"I'm not saying I have answers, but I just love being able to chat with people and let everybody know that I'm on the same journey as they are."

LIFE IN NIVERVILLE

When St. Cyr was six years old, his parents moved their family to Niverville.

He describes a happy childhood with loving parents.

As he got a little older, though, he felt a bit of restlessness, as small-town kids often do.

"Growing up as a young teenager, I definitely had that angst," St. Cyr says. "You know, like, 'I wanna leave my small town.' And now that we have four kids and we look back, we're like, 'Oh, we actually had everything that we wanted.'"

For 13 years, he and his wife Heather lived with their kids in a house on Ritchot Drive.

"We lived on a block where there were like 30 kids, and we were kind of that corner house with the open door policy," he says. "Kids were just always at our house. We had neighbours like family."

TRANSITION

As St. Cyr's popularity as an artist grew, he and his wife realized they needed to be elsewhere. So they decided to leave their beloved home and create a new one in the United States.

Although they believed the decision was for the best, it wasn't easy.

"We grieved," says St. Cyr. "We grieved what we had been given, what we had built. We loved where we lived. I look at Niverville with so much fondness."

In February 2022, the family of six packed up their



▣ JORDAN ST. CYR

last items and left Niverville to start a new life in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, a suburb of Nashville.

"We left Niverville at four or five o'clock in the morning, it was -40, and our driveway was lined with three- or four-foot drifts. It just felt like we were leaving the tundra for the desert!"

The St. Cyrs prayed for a way to recreate the sense of community they had enjoyed so much in Niverville.

Now he feels that they've found just that in their new home.

Speaking with St. Cyr, there's already the hint of a Southern drawl in his voice, but he speculates that he may have always sounded that way.

"People have always kind of said that," he says. "I think I'm just a lazy talker. I say that with much affection, because people here in the South,

they're just a little more, you know, there's an ease to their vocabulary."

The climate has been one of the biggest adjustments for family. Tennessee is hot and humid. In a way, he posits that Tennessee summers are like Manitoba winters in that you just stay inside and get through it.

The food landscape has also been an adjustment for St. Cyr. Although the southern food is great, he misses everything that Winnipeg had to offer.

"The food scene in Winnipeg, I felt, was just a lot more earthy and organic," he says. "We have an amazing food culture in Winnipeg. I think that maybe a lot of us take it for granted, but it is quite special."

Another big adjustment has been the challenge of being a Christian in a time of so much division, especially in culture

and politics.

"The overwhelming weight I feel being a believer here in the U.S. is that subconsciously you feel you're supposed to join a side or a team," he says. "I have a real problem with that because I don't think it's Gospel-centric. I don't think it's kingdom-minded... So often in Christian culture and church, we want to control and we want to tell people what to do. And you know what? If you're loving, really loving, you're going to be in the mess. You're going to be in the mud... You've got to give people grace and allow them the space to live their lives and choose the things that matter to them."

FAMILY CHALLENGES

St. Cyr's youngest daughter, Emery, was born with a rare neurological condition called Sturge-Weber Syndrome (SWS). Her blood vessels grow large, forming angiomas which produce a characteristic port-wine birthmark on the face. The symptoms include seizures.

The first year of Emery's life was difficult, but the situation was looking up when they made the move.

Nonetheless, one of St. Cyr's biggest concerns about moving to the U.S. was their healthcare system.

Later that same year, while St. Cyr was on the road in Texas, he got the call from his wife that Emery was back in the hospital with seizures.

"It took me two days to

get home," he says. "That was just our introduction to the U.S. healthcare system... and here we are, trial by fire. Who's gonna be our new neurologist? Who's our new general physician? Who are all of her people? You go through an incident like a seizure and you find your people real quick!"

That trial by fire was the last time Emery had a seizure. It's been nearly two years and Emery is still seizure-free.

The family is cautiously optimistic about Emery's future. For now, St. Cyr says, they are trying to live in each moment and just be so grateful for everything they have.

THE FUTURE

Without hesitation, St. Cyr says that his biggest goal for the future relates to his family. His biggest hope is to be content with what he's been given. If the popularity of his music and message continues to grow, he's excited.

If not, he's quite okay with that, too.

"I know that there's work that I'm supposed to do right in the here and now. I think, to be honest, that it's just using music as a vehicle to spark and inspire conversation that drives people to think on the deeper things."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

St. Cyr performs at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday, August 29 at the Niverville Community Fellowship Church. For tickets or for more information, visit www.jordanstcyr.com/tour.


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Local Author Releases Children's Book with ADHD Theme

By Jennifer Lavin

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A Niverville resident was proud earlier this summer to release her first children's book. Natalie Batkis says that the story's main character has a key characteristic her family can strongly relate to: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

The idea for her book, *Zoe and the Wiggle Wigglesons*, was born when Batkis's daughter Zoe was approaching graduation from Collège Régional Gabrielle-Roy.

Batkis says that her daughter is not into material things, so she wanted to create a graduation gift for her that had sentimental value.

"When my kids were younger, I would always read them three or four books at bedtime—usually a few in English and a few in French," says Batkis. "I thought it would be fun to write a book about Zoe's search for the perfect activity when she was younger and how she ultimately decided on the sport of cheerleading."

Zoe, the character, has ADHD.

Zoe, the inspiration, was never formally diagnosed with ADHD, although it was strongly suspected.

Having ADHD or ADHD-like qualities made finding the right sport a bit of a challenge.



Natalie Batkis of Niverville.

NATALIE BATKIS

Batkis's son received an official ADHD diagnosis at the age of five, so the whole family is very familiar with the realities of the disorder.

Batkis describes the challenges

in her synopsis of her book.

"ADHD can be difficult to navigate, especially when you're growing up," Batkis writes about the condition in her book's blurb.

"Sometimes it means not being able to sit still, focus, or make friends easily—it is tough! But, in our home, we don't see ADHD as something you need to fix—we

consider it a superpower! Once you find what you are passionate about, ADHD makes you a force to be reckoned with."

Both Batkis and her daughter are very involved in the cheer community in Manitoba and have been big advocates of the sport.

So writing about a cheerleader with ADHD for Zoe's graduation seemed like the perfect choice.

Although *Zoe and the Wiggle Wigglesons* is Batkis's first book, it is far from her first published material. She has been a freelance writer for more than 20 years.

In 2016, a documentary Batkis wrote, *Closing Time: The Vanishing Prairie Beverage Room*, aired nationally on the CBC.

Her day job is in the marketing department of APTN.

Besides her regular job, and her writing jobs, she's also an avid crafter.

"I've always been interested in creative things since I was a little girl: drawing, painting, knitting, crocheting, etc.," she says. "My new obsession is learning how to do Métis beading! I can't wait to end my workday so I can bead."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Zoe and the Wiggle Wigglesons is available for purchase on Amazon.ca

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Illustrious Photographer Remembers Niverville Childhood

By Brenda Sawatzky

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It's been close to 65 years since famed photographer Hans Sipma called Niverville home, but a few memories still linger. They include his paper route, his home on the north side of town, and his frequent visits to the principal's office at the Niverville Elementary School.

Sipma was 12 when his family moved from Niverville. In the years following, he would go on to develop a love for photography, which became an illustrious career for him, spanning more than 40 years.

Today, he's retired and settled in Vancouver, enjoying his life as a recent grandparent.

Much of Sipma's distinguished career was spent in freelance photography, taking promotional ad shots for hundreds of corporations over the decades, including Canadian Airlines, McDonalds, Subaru, Pepsi, Kokanee, Ikea, and *Macleans* magazine.

On the side, Sipma busied himself marrying his passion for photography with his love of rock and roll music.

He built a whole second portfolio of fame in this arena, eventually photographing musical legends like Bryan Adams, Prism, Doug and the Slugs, and Trooper.

Much of Sipma's work has been memorialized on highly recognizable album covers for these bands.

Sipma and his family immigrated to Manitoba from Holland in 1957 when Sipma was nine. He was the middle child of three sons. They came to Canada, he says, because his father was looking for work opportunities as a self-taught mechanic.

"We ended up in Dominion City," Sipma says. "It was only about five months and my dad ended up not getting along with [his boss]. He was a Dutchman, too, so maybe that's why they didn't hit it off that well."

In the fall of 1957, Sipma's father took a job in Niverville, moving his family to their new home.

Based on Sipma's recollection, the new boss was W.G. Loeppky, who ran an International harvester dealership



Photographer Hans Sipma.

© C/O HANS SIPMA

in the community.

Sipma's father became the primary mechanic, hired to work on the farm equipment that came in.

"I remember getting into trouble in school at Niverville Elementary," Sipma muses. "I was a bit of a troublemaker, I think. I probably deserved it. It meant going in to see the principal a lot, and at the time they'd administer the strap."

Sipma has other scattered memories, like the house that his father relocated from Main Street to the north side of town.

The Sipmas lived in Niverville for less than three years before they packed up and moved back to Dominion City.

Here, Sipma's father finally achieved his dream of being self-employed in his own welding shop.

It was also here that young Sipma developed a taste for photography and rock and roll music.

At the time, bands like The Beatles were taking the world by storm.

Locally, the rock and roll scene was also burgeoning, with Winnipeg becoming a hotbed of young musical talent. With an established drinking age of 21 in Manitoba during the

1960s, these bands spent their spare time playing high school gyms, legion halls, and community centres wherever they were welcomed.

"I befriended a lot of bands that came to my town on the weekends for dances at the Legion," Sipma says. "I took pictures of them, so when I eventually moved to Winnipeg, I kept in touch with these rock 'n roll people."

One of the first bands Sipma recalls playing his hometown was The Mongrels, a city band of which Winnipeg native Joey Gregorash was a member.

As a young adult, Sipma set out on his own, finding an apartment in Winnipeg. He took a job at Eaton's, working in their onsite studio as a product and fashion photographer.

On the weekends, Sipma caught up with his musician friends, photographing their stage performances and doing private shoots on the side.

Eventually, Sipma was hired by Gar Gillies of Garnet Amplifiers to capture concert shots of the musicians who had rented their musical equipment for a show.

Among them were the Guess Who, Fats Domino, and Diana Ross and the Supremes.

"In summer 1967, I attended a concert by The Blues Magoos, The Who, and Herman's Hermits," says Sipma. "The night started with the Blues Magoos in their electric suits, followed by The Who. The band was known for their incredible amounts of energy during their performances. As they ended their set playing 'My Generation,' both Pete Townsend and Keith Moon set about trashing their instruments. The mayhem that ensued included explosions from Keith's bass drum and smoke effects out of Pete's amp. When it was all over, they walked off the stage leaving behind a trail of destruction. It was then time for the headline act, Herman's Hermits. The Who were a tough act to follow."

During these years, Sipma maintained close ties with local rising bands.

"I ended up becoming a roadie for The Mongrels, driving their truck, setting up the equipment," Sipma says. "At one point I was asked to work for the Guess Who. and it was at that point where I had to decide whether I was going to be a photographer or work in music. And my decision was to stick with photography."

In 1970, Sipma would become locally famous for his photographs of another monumental event.

"Someone mentioned my name to a reporter from *Macleans* magazine, who contacted me and said, 'There's this Niverville Pop Festival and, if you're going to be there, could you get some shots that we might use in an article?'"

Sipma did just that, distributing these famous black-and-whites to Canadian magazines and local newspapers.

In 1973, Sipma was sent to do a shoot for Eaton's in Vancouver.

Sipma never left.

"I loved this place," Sipma recalls. "It was February, and in Winnipeg the snow was brown. Out here, everything was green and lovely, and I knew this would be the place to be."

Sipma continued on with Eaton's at the Vancouver location. He also set up a photography studio in the basement of his small rented home.

His friend Randy Bachman of the Guess Who had introduced Sipma to Vancouver-based talent agents Bruce Allen and Sam Feldman. Through them, Sipma was called in to photograph many more up-and-coming Canadian rock legends.

"The budgets were small, the hair was big, and digital didn't exist, so... it took a lot of late nights and a lot of ingenuity."

In the early 1980s, Vancouver's Eaton's location shut its doors. Sipma and a few colleagues bought out the photography equipment and set up their own professional advertising photography studio.

Later Sipma went solo with his Hans Sipma Photography brand. He retired in 2013.

"When I started in photography, you really had to know your stuff," Sipma says. "You had to be very technically proficient. Nowadays, with digital, you can look at the back of the camera and see whether you got the shot. But as things got more sophisticated, the expectations got way higher for the type of photography people want. But the budgets haven't gone up accordingly."

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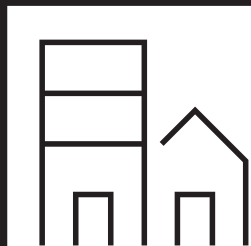
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