

# The Citizen

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### LOCAL NEWS

#### Niverville Jump to Top of DSFM Queue

■ A French-language school may soon be coming to Niverville, as the DSFM gives it priority in latest request to province.

Details on Page 3



### LOCAL NEWS

#### Meat-Processing Plant Approved for Ste. Agathe

■ After a contentious public meeting, and despite heavy opposition, Ritchot's council has voted to approve an abattoir to set up shop in the Riel Industrial Park.

Details on Pages 10-11

### SPORTS & REC

#### Local Woman Named Bisons #1 Teammate

■ Keziah Hoepfner of Niverville has been recognized as the Bisons Teammate of the Year, an enormous honour.

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### COMMENTARY

#### Let's Talk About Drag...

■ Controversy has swirled in recent months over the appropriateness of drag performances. We look into what it is—and what it isn't.

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# Jade Eagleson to Headline Niverville Fair

» READ MORE ON PAGE 22

▶ JADE EAGLESON

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# HAPPY Mother's Day



**Ron R. Schuler**  
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# Niverville Jumps to Top of List for DSFM School

By **Brenda Sawatzky**

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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While it might be too soon to celebrate just yet, local Francophone parents with school-age children may want to start planning the party.

According to the Division Scolaire Franco-Manitobaine's (DSFM) board of trustees, a French school for Niverville has been bumped to the very top of the division's request list to the province.

Bernard Lesage is chairperson for the DSFM board and has been a trustee with the division for the past 20 years.

He says that the province has recently approved new DSFM schools in the Sage Creek neighbourhood of Winnipeg and another in Brandon. Sage Creek has gone to tender for the build and plans are under development for the Brandon school.

At the end of this month, the DSFM board will submit their newest capital plan list to the province.

Niverville, Lesage says, tops that wish list.

In November 2022, *The Citizen* published an article entitled "A French School for Niverville, S'il Vous Plait?" At the time, the general director for the DSFM, Alain Laberge, shared the DSFM's five-year capital plan, which put Niverville second in line, following the proposal for a new build in Île-des-Chênes (IDC).

Since then, priorities for the DSFM board have changed.

Now the hope is that the province will approve a Kindergarten to Grade Eight school in Niverville first and, shortly afterward, a new French high school for IDC.

"Right now, there's a lot of kids from Niverville already going to Gab-Roy," Lesage says. "But there's a lot more kids that have the right to be in a Francophone school and when you have a school of proximity, that will be why parents choose

a school. So that's why we've put École Niverville [first] and then we're going to work on the high school [in IDC]."

Once the new IDC school has been completed, it will serve as a regional French high school, inclusive of students from the surrounding communities, including Niverville.

The current École Régional Gabrielle-Roy will transition to an elementary and middle school.

The reason for this strategy, Lesage says, is because high school students generally appreciate the idea of switching to a larger school with amenities and social structures that focus solely on their own demographic.

Regardless of priority, though,

*"The whole region around Niverville, Île-des-Chênes, and Grande Pointe is really growing fast. We've been adding portables at Gab-Roy for the past few years, so obviously there's already a strain."*

**Bernard Lesage** | DSFM Board Chairman

Lesage says the need is great everywhere right now.

"We know that the whole region around Niverville, Île-des-Chênes, and Grande Pointe is really growing fast," Lesage says. "We've been adding portables at Gab-Roy for the past few years, so obviously there's already a strain."

With the most recent census data, Lesage says they've been much more successful in determining exactly how many Francophone families live in each region of the province.

He adds, though, that even when there are French school options in nearby communities, many parents opt to send their children to the school that's closest in proximity to their home.

So while the DSFM could choose to expand on École Régional Gabrielle-Roy in IDC and keep bussing

Niverville students there, they know, based on census numbers, that there are enough Francophone residents in Niverville to expect stronger support if there was a local school.

"Just like in Winnipeg, instead of looking at doing a major renovation or a major addition, we're trying to find out where the kids are and give them that school of proximity," Lesage says.

What didn't hurt, he adds, is communication he's recently received from five Niverville parents who made a formal request for a French school in Niverville.

For this reason, the DSFM expects to hold an informational meeting in the coming weeks, inviting all right-holder parents to attend. Right-holders are those families where at least one parent can identify as a French minority.

Any way you cut it, though, new schools for Niverville and IDC are at the mercy of the province for approval, and it's anyone's guess as to when or if they'll agree with the DSFM's analysis.

"Parents should know that... all Francophone students across the province are entitled to French education and we work hard to make sure that can happen," Lesage says.

If Niverville is approved for a new French school, Lesage says he'd anticipate an enrollment of around 300 students.

A Francophone daycare would also be included in the plan.

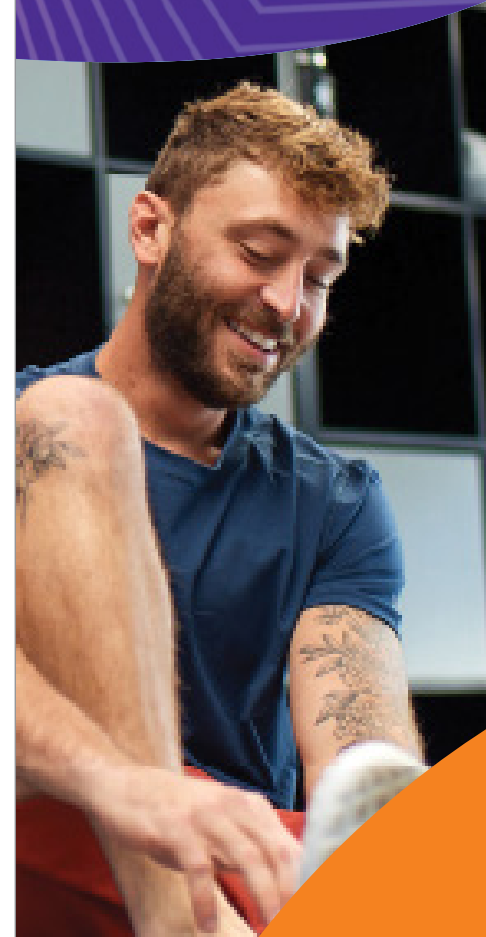
As well, they'd consider building the school in such a way that it would cater to the entire local Francophone community, not just students. This could mean the inclusion of a larger-than-typical library or gymnasium space.

"We like to build a sort of a community hub inside those new places where we have a Francophone community," Lesage adds. "So it's a cultural place where they can all get together."

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# Presenting Alternatives for Manitoba's Fossil Fuel Addiction

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On April 20, the Manitoba Climate Action Team launched volume three of Manitoba's Road to Resilience (MRR) at a stakeholder gathering held at the Bill and Helen Norrie Library in Winnipeg. Members of the business community and members of government were invited to attend.

The MRR is a series of reports which outlines a pathway to get Manitoba moving toward a future free of fossil fuels. Volume three of the report lays out governmental policy solutions which would get the province on track to reach its climate goals through the use of clean, affordable energy, all while saving the taxpayer money.

Molly McCracken, director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, opened the event.

"We are here, in 2023, to say that we have seven years to cut emissions in Manitoba in half in order to prevent climate catastrophe," said McCracken. "This is a startling fact but also one that can be positive as we have the knowledge, expertise, and know-how right here in Manitoba to do so."

McCracken is referring to the federal government's 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan, which has set a target for Canada to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 40 percent below 2005 levels by 2030, with net-zero emissions by 2050.

With the ever-rising cost of gas and oil, McCracken says that there's no better time for a complete transition away from fossil fuels.

## TRANSITIONING TO NEW ENERGY SOURCES

Curt Hull is a researcher and the lead author for the MRR project. According to Hull, the United Nations Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its latest report just last month, calling the climate issue a ticking time bomb. They implored all industrialized nations, such as Canada, to arrive at net-zero



Curt Hull, Ed Lohrenz, and Molly McCracken speak at a Manitoba Climate Action event.

© MATHEW SCAMMEL

emissions ten years earlier, by 2040.

"How are we doing?" Hull asked event attendees. "Well, not so well. Manitoba is the only province, other than Alberta, now sending more greenhouse gas (GG) pollution into the air... than we did in 2005."

Here at home, he says, the burning of fossil fuels in our furnaces and vehicles accounts for almost 60 percent of our GG emissions. Additionally, the import of these fossil fuels is costing the local economy \$2 billion to \$3 billion per year.

To eliminate this imported resource in a cost-effective way, though, we would need to find cheaper, locally made renewable energy alternatives.

Hull believes the MRR has done just that.

In recent years, Manitoba Hydro published estimates for its required energy output if a ubiquitous move away from fossil fuel were imminent. That report calls for the creation of 200 percent more power over the course of a year.

"That's a big challenge," said Hull. "We believe that our numbers... show that it can be done. And it can be done without experimental technology, new dams, or nuclear [power]."

What's needed to make that happen, he adds, is improved government regulation, better incentives for uptick, and investment in renewable energy infrastructure.

"Addressing climate change in Manitoba should be good for our economy and our pocketbooks," said Hull. "[But] the current approach of

a scattering of small incentives is not working. Manitobans are paying too much for fossil fuels at the pump and on their heating bills, and our emissions continue to make climate change worse."

While it may sound monumental in scope, Hull says that we only need to look to the generations before us. In 1939, Canada's ship, plane, and gun manufacturing capability was almost non-existent. Within three years, he says, Canada became a key player in this wartime industry.

"They knew they had an emergency and they reacted with courage and ingenuity," Hull said. "We are calling for some of that... but this time, we aren't putting our efforts into a war of destruction. This time it's [a war of] construction."

## A GEOTHERMAL SOLUTION

Ed Lohrenz of GEOptimize Inc. also addressed those gathered. Lohrenz is a world-renowned expert and proponent of geothermal energy. His goal, he says, is to run natural gas companies out of business.

For the audience to better understand the impact of geothermal on the climate, Lohrenz ran comparisons using three different scenarios.

The first scenario included two homes, one heated by electricity and one heated by natural gas, with the addition of one gas-fuelled car per household. This sample demonstrates that your average Manitoba neighbourhood today and is responsible for 16,000 tonnes of CO2 emission annually.

Sample two converts both homes to geothermal energy while still running gas-fuelled vehicles. Emissions are effectively cut in half, he says, to 10,000 tonnes annually.

Finally, if both households traded in their vehicles for electric models, CO2 emissions would be eliminated completely, without the addition of any extra load to the electrical grid.

This can all be done, he adds, without massive costs to the individual.

Just like other utilities run as district systems with a main line connecting to a series of households, so too geothermal can become a district utility. And like the other utilities, the cost can be amortized over many years, making the installation of infrastructure affordable from the start.

"What it means is running one pipe down the street and you can connect to it, take some heat from it, or dump some heat into it when you're cooling [your home], and you're using electricity to do that," Lohrenz said. "About one-quarter as much as you would with electric heat."

But there's even more to be benefited from geothermal systems. Lohrenz references the Jonathan Toews Community Centre (JTCC) in St. Vital with its two ice rinks that expel three to four million kilowatt (kW) hours' worth of energy every year.

"Right now it's just dissipating into the atmosphere," he said. "It's blown away by the wind. We're not recovering it. That energy, if it was stored in the ground, it could be pulled out by the other buildings around it."

Case in point: in the surrounding

neighbourhood of the JTCC is a library, a school, a personal care home, and about 110 homes.

Together, these buildings consume about as much energy as the JTCC sends into the atmosphere every year, Lohrenz says. On a collective geothermal system, the JTCC would feed the entire neighbourhood's energy needs.

"It's free energy and right now we're wasting it," said Lohrenz. "We could recycle that and use it again and again."

## HOW DO WE GET STARTED?

Hull says that it can't be done without first creating a climate emergency agency whose responsibility it would be to coordinate the energy transition effort across the entire province.

Next, he said, the federal government's carbon tax rebates, currently received by most Manitobans, would need to be redirected into a provincial fund. From this fund, zero-interest loans would be offered to incentivize Manitoba homeowners and business owners to retrofit for geothermal.

"But also, we should take a portion of that fund and continue to rebate it to the lowest income households so that folks that really depend on those funds continue to receive them," Hull added.

It would also mean that crown corporations like Efficiency Manitoba would need to refocus their incentivization packages based on the elimination of GG emissions as opposed to energy and fossil fuel reduction.

Finally, a broadscale geothermal utility needs to begin development as soon as possible.

"We must do this, we can do this, and we should do this, for both environmental and economic reasons," Hull said. "By taking serious action on climate change, we could keep billions of dollars here in our economy and create significant savings for businesses and households alike. Even for those Manitobans on the fringes, who aren't yet convinced that climate change is real, they know all too well that their energy bills are real and will only get worse if nothing changes."



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- Imaginarium Camp** | July 4-8, Ages 6-9 & Ages 9-13
- Kinder Camp - Mini Chefs Week** | July 10-14
- Culinary Camp** | July 10-14, Ages 7-13
- Kinder Camp - Princess & Heroes Week** | July 17-21
- Nature Explorers Camp** | July 17-21, Ages 6-9 & Ages 9-13
- Kinder Camp - Dance & Music Week** | July 24-28
- Sports Camp** | July 24-28, Ages 6-9
- Volleyball Camp** | July 24-28, Ages 9-13
- Kinder Camp - Princess & Heroes Week** | July 31-August 4
- Culinary Camp** | July 31-August 4, Ages 7-13
- Kinder Camp - Sports Week** | August 8-11
- Imaginarium Camp** | August 8-11, Ages 6-9
- Basketball Camp** | August 8-11, Ages 9-13
- Kinder Camp - Animal Adventures Week** | August 14-18
- Girls Adventure Camp** | August 14-18, Ages 6-9 & Ages 9-13
- Boys Adventure Camp** | August 14-18, Ages 6-9 & Ages 9-13
- Kinder Camp - Cozy Crafts Week** | August 21-25
- Science & Space Camp** | August 21-25, Ages 6-9 & Ages 9-13
- Kinder Camp - Camping & Nature Week** | August 28-31
- Around the World Camp** | August 28-31, Ages 6-9
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## IN BRIEF

## New Aging in Place Strategies Announced

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
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If you're among the many Manitoba seniors vying to remain in your home as long as possible, the province wants to help.

The government says \$1.5 million will be spent to help provide seniors with financial assistance for home modifications.

To be eligible for funding, seniors must be over the age of 65 with a household income of \$60,000 or less.

"This new and innovative program will provide an affordable housing option to support seniors to remain in the community longer, which is important to the health and well-being of Manitoba seniors," says Families Minister Rochelle Squires.

Another \$1.5 million is dedicated to stabilizing the existing supportive housing program, with its 750 units across the province. It aims to provide residents living in community-based facilities with access to additional support including meals, laundry, and light housekeeping services.

With this provincial investment, qualifying seniors will receive a 19 percent increase in their current per diem rate.

"This increase in the per diem rate for supportive housing is a step in the right direction and welcomed by operators," said Julie Turenne-Maynard, executive director of the Manitoba Association of Residential and Community Care Homes for the Elderly. "We hope the Manitoba government will continue to invest in this program as evidence has proven that supportive housing is used and needed by seniors who need additional support."



The Raise the Stick fundraising committee.

SYLVAIN LEMOINE

# Fundraising Social to Boost Ste. Agathe Arena

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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A community social is being held at the Ste. Agathe Arena on May 13 for the Raise the Stick campaign, which is raising money for facility repairs.

The upcoming event is part of a campaign that has set its sights on raising \$750,000 toward a new ice plant, which will include a condenser, a chiller, compressors, and pumps.

Starting at 8:00 p.m., the social will feature music by DJ Derek, refreshments, community fun,

and a raffle for prizes.

"Come out and support a great cause, and have a drink with friends. There will be a late lunch of pizza and the prizes are absolutely amazing," says Sylvain Lemoine, vice-president of the Ste. Agathe Arena's board of directors and one of the fundraising coordinators. "There's a kids prize, a pampering prize, a BBQ prize, a jets prize, and much more."

According to the RM of Ritchot, the Ste. Agathe Arena has been an integral part of the community since it first opened in 1978.

Countless residents from Ste.

Adolphe, Niverville, Aubigny, Rosenort, and many other surrounding towns and villages have utilized the rink in varying capacities over the years of its continued operation.

Due to regular maintenance and careful consideration, only operating the ice plant under proper environmental conditions, the plant has already greatly outlasted its expected service life.

For many years, volunteer members of the board have applied for a variety of grants to sustain and improve operations, but the time has come to make a

major effort toward a full replacement of the equipment.

"The ice plant retrofit means that we need to completely replace our current ice plant," says Lemoine. "Normal life expectancy for an ice plant is around 25 years and we have reached year 40. Though it has been rebuilt a couple times, it is on its last leg. So we are looking at completely replacing it."

Tickets cost \$20 and can be purchased at the Ste. Agathe Service Centre in Ste. Agathe or at BSI Insurance in Niverville.

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# Ritchot Council Unveils 2023 Financial Plan

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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The RM of Ritchot's council recently revealed their 2023 financial plan and residents can anticipate nothing of great note this year apart from stationary tax rates.

According to Muhammad Zaman, the municipality's chief financial officer, council has set the municipal mill rate at the same level as last year.

"If residents see an increase in their property taxes from last year, it will likely be due to their home having been reassessed by the province," Zaman says.

Zaman refers to the fact that 2023 is the year for property reassessments, carried out every two years by the Manitoba Assessment branch.

"Property values change over time," says the province's website. "Regular reassessments help to ensure that your property assessment reflects more recent market values. For the 2023 reassessment, property values reflect April 1, 2021 market values."<sup>1</sup>

While Ritchot's budgeted revenue for the coming year reflects numbers very close to last year's, some shuffle in expenditures has taken place.

General government services, for one, has seen a 10 percent increase from last year. According to Zaman, much of this is due to inflation and a significant increase in RM staff wages since the government legislated higher minimum wages in October 2022.

"Salaries is one factor of that [increase]," says Zaman. "And, consequently, when the wage goes up, your deductions for municipal employee benefits and workers compensation also goes up. All of these things are linked with the salaries."

Also seeing a significant increase this year, at 12 percent, is protective services. Much of this is a result of bylaw compliance/enforcement, which is currently budgeted at \$105,000, up from last year's budget of \$70,000.

"We are doubling up on the weekend patrols," says CAO Mitch Duval. "Instead of one person per car, we are proceeding with two persons per car."

This, he adds, is to provide more Commissionaire visibility within the RM going forward.

Understandably, transportation costs are up. This is reflected in the 2023 budget as a 20 percent increase.

According to Duval, it's not all fuel-related, though.

"[This] budget includes extra staff as well," says Duval. "Ditches and road drainage [are included as] ongoing regular maintenance programs... Culverts are [also] included in the project."

Finally, recreation and culture expenditures have jumped this year by 21 percent.

The major player in this category are the community libraries, which have more than doubled in cost since last year, going from \$30,000 to \$63,450 in the course of one year.

"The municipality has seen population growth and council wanted to match the provincial funding of \$8.50 per capita for the library," Duval says.

As for capital projects budgeted for 2023, the list is extensive, including numerous upgrades and additions to Public Works equipment.

The municipal office expansion takes the biggest bite out of the budget at \$2.4 million. As well, the Île-des-Chênes lagoon project has been budgeted at \$1.9 million.

Duval says that a new lagoon cell is required in that area to keep up with growth. Municipal funding here is expected to be matched by the Manitoba Water Services Branch.

Smaller projects on the roster

include remedial work planned for the Pembina Trail pathway in Ste. Agathe, coming in at \$91,000.

Finally, \$50,000 has been set aside to investigate the feasibility of seniors housing projects in the municipality.

"The study is to look at seniors living needs within the RM, whether age-in-place, life lease, or assisted [living]," says Ryan Faucher, the municipality's economic development officer. "No consultants [have been] identified at this point."

Faucher adds that he's applied for a \$25,000 provincial grant to help offset the cost of the study.

The 2023 proposed financial plan is available on the RM website in its entirety. Residents are invited to attend a financial plan public hearing on April 19 at 5:30 p.m. at the RM office. Council will be available to answer questions or register objections as presented.

A link for virtual attendance will also be provided on the website on the day of the hearing.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> "Property Assessment," Government of Manitoba. Date of access: April 13, 2023 (<https://www.gov.mb.ca/mao/public/default.aspx>).

## Ambassador Canadian Reformed Church

### The Gentle King

In Matthew 11:28 and 29, the Lord Jesus Christ tells his audience. "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." We tend to hear such promises with skepticism. What's in it for him? We look at the church. Look at all their rules! How is that a light burden?

I can tell you that for those who genuinely come to Christ and seek to rid themselves of their burdens will receive his gentleness. The hard realism of atheism does not give us any joy. The promises of the sexual revolution are empty and lead to misery.

But what about the rules? The reason Jesus' burden is lighter than all other burdens is that he begins by granting freedom from the sins that weigh us down. The punishment for my sexual immorality, the punishment for my unbelief, and the punishment for the relationships that I ruined are paid for on the cross of Christ.

And when I come and take the yoke of Christ upon me, not only are my sins removed, but I receive the Holy Spirit. By His Spirit, the Lord is with me training me in obedience to those rules so that I continue to put away the destruction within me and embrace the life of Christ that is in me. The Lord remains gentle and kind. As the scriptures say, "Your gentleness makes me great."

**Pastor James Zekveld**  
pastor.ambassador@gmail.com  
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## Location Approved for New St. Adolphe Daycare

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

St. Adolphe's new daycare facility is one step closer to becoming reality as council approved its location at their April 19 public hearing. Council members voted unanimously in favor of allowing the build to take place within an area currently zoned as Commercial General.

"This is in regards to land within the ring dike of St. Adolphe, at the southwest corner," CAO Mitch Duval said. "For those of you that are familiar with the Île-des-Chênes (IDC) project, it will be the same project occurring in St. Adolphe. The concept of

the building is basically to have prefabricated components built onsite."

The ready-to-move daycare project is a collaborative funding initiative between the federal and provincial governments and facilitated through the Winnipeg Metro Region.

The daycare already under construction in IDC was part of phase one of the initiative. In February of this year, the St. Adolphe facility was announced as part of phase two.

Like IDC, the St. Adolphe daycare will provide a total of 74 new daycare spots for the RM. Infants will fill 16 of these spots and the final 58 will be reserved for pre-school children.

Staff of the RM are already talking to local trades for completion of the facility once the ready-built components reach the St. Adolphe destination.

Conversations are also underway with Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure regarding the proposed Highway 200 access to the facility immediately across from the existing turnoff into the Tourond Creek development.

Along with the facility itself, the site will include 27 to 30 parking spots and a dedicated pickup and drop-off zone.

"We're going to try and keep as many trees onsite as possible with the understanding that we may have to take down one or two depending on road access,

building location, and fencing for the playground," Duval said.

No daycare provider has been established as of yet. In due time, the RM will put out a request for proposal to all certified providers.

One letter of concern about the proposed location was received by council from a Brodeur Boulevard resident living just south of the community ring dike.

"The question [he asked] is, 'How will this affect my property tax?' Duval said. "The answer is, 'It will not.'"

According to Duval, living next to a daycare may in fact increase the value of property when choosing to sell, especially in terms of the young family market.



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# Niverville Becomes Reluctant Member of Winnipeg Metro Region

**By Brenda Sawatzky**

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
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This April, Niverville officially became a member of the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region (WMR). It was not an active decision on the part of council, but rather the result of new provincial regulations mandating that the town join the regional partnership.

In general, capital regions such as the WMR are formed as collaborative bodies between a province's capital city and the surrounding municipalities. The goal is to form networking partnerships so that local governments can work cohesively on land use planning, economic development, environmental initiatives, and many other regional concerns.

The WMR includes political constituents from Winnipeg as well as mayors, Reeves, and representatives from the 18 municipalities circling its perimeter.

Niverville's representative on the WMR board is Mayor Myron Dyck.

"It still gives individual autonomy to each municipality for their own needs, but they really encourage people to look at macro projects... so that you're truly working hand in hand as a region," Dyck says.

So why the hesitancy on the part of the Niverville mayor and his council?

It's not for a lack of interest in networking for the collective good. Dyck says that he's glad to be able to rub



shoulders with other mayors and Reeves in this way.

Neither is the hesitancy related to the additional fees the town will dole out for their membership this year.

In years past, when Niverville held a membership in the WMR, the dues ranged between \$3,000 and \$4,000 per year. In 2023, they will be closer to \$7,000, as expected in inflationary times like these.

One of the problems, Mayor Dyck says, is the ambiguous nature of the additional costs Niverville may have to face down the road.

Firstly, the province has indicated their intention to subsidize the WMR to keep fees down for municipalities. But Dyck says that the funding will be up for review every year.

"The province says they'd be willing to fund it on a

year-by-year basis," Dyck says. "So what if a government one day pulls the funding? Then what?"

There's a bit of a disparity in reasoning, he says, when a provincial government can legislate that a municipality must be represented on a certain board but create for themselves a backdoor clause to end funding. This could mean higher costs for municipalities when and if the province ever does stop funding the WMR, without recourse for the represented municipalities.

These fees collected by the WMR, Dyck says, will partly cover remuneration for chairpersons and executives of the board. Mayors, Reeves, and representatives receive no remuneration from the province for their participation.

As well, membership dues help subsidize the cost of

projects that the WMR members vote to undertake.

"There will be different studies done so engineers and consultants will be hired for certain projects," Dyck says. "The fees will go for things like that."

But Dyck has other financial concerns, too, and these were cause for Niverville's council to withdraw from the WMR years ago.

This year's budget for the WMR is around \$1 million. Considering the magnitude of costs that could be incurred on larger regional projects, it's not a large sum.

For Dyck, there is some concern over regular cash calls for funds that council just doesn't have.

"If the executive director is doing their job by applying for every grant under the sun, the issue is that, when that funding comes through with a requirement to match the funds, how do we budget for that?"

This is especially concerning, Dyck adds, when there's already so many costly projects closer to home that Niverville residents would like to see happen.

At this point, he says that he's just trying to stay optimistic. Dyck and other mayors and Reeves are doing their homework, contacting leaders from other provinces to see how their capital regions function.

"We're going in with eyes wide open and the best of intentions. We are not just jumping in blindly," Dyck says. "There's work to be done."

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# Ritchot Council Approves Meat-Processing Plant Despite Major Opposition

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

At a public meeting on April 19, Ritchot's council approved an application to open a meat-processing plant in Ste. Agathe. The decision was made in front of a particularly full house.

The proposal was for a conditional use permit to establish an abattoir (slaughterhouse) and meat-packing facility in the Riel Industrial Park.

A second request was also made by the applicant for a variation to the municipality's 10-acre requirement, reducing it to 5.4 acres on two lots on Batoche Way.

Prior to the meeting, council received 57 letters and emails demonstrating opposition to the abattoir setting up shop here.

Over the course of the Wednesday evening meeting, council heard from 13 attendees, all there to voice adamant opposition.

There was one individual who approached council in a demonstration of support, citing the upstanding character of the applicant, Muuxi



✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

Adam. This attendee was not a resident of Ste. Agathe.

After much deliberation, council voted in favour of accepting the conditional use permit.

However, the vote was divided, with three in favour and two against.

A second vote followed for the land variation request. It was also approved by council

with the same division of votes.

## THE APPLICANT AND HIS REQUEST

Muuxi Adam attended the meeting via video in order to delineate every detail of his proposal for the proposed plant, Iman Freshest Meat.

The facility is expected to comprise 3,000 square feet

of space with the potential to expand to 5,000 square feet sometime in the future.

Here, Adam and his five to eight employees intend to process, from start to finish, approximately 3,000 chickens per week for bulk sale.

Adam's poultry will cater to a distinct local market, as the birds will be processed as halal meat, which

requires a specific butchering technique.

Adam says he's been running his halal meat distribution business for years.

Unfortunately, he's been unable to source halal chickens from any meat processors in the province. So far, Adam's company has had to ship halal meat from Maple Leaf in Alberta.

"The issue is, we like to buy local," Adam told those gathered. "We like to support the local farmers."

Adam assured those in attendance that no live animals would be stored on site at any time and no other animals, apart from poultry, would be processed at the Ste. Agathe plant.

"The highest levels of animal welfare will be maintained," said Adam. "Poultry will be processed as received and there'll be no holding of live birds onsite for future processing."

According to Adam, the facility will be equipped with high-tech automation, allowing them to process 500 to 600 chickens per hour, from the delivery truck right to the freezer.

All organic waste resulting from the process, including blood and condemned birds, will be stored indoors in leak-proof containers and picked up by a rendering company or disposal truck headed for the Brady Landfill, usually on the same day that the butchering takes place.

"We intend to run a very clean and neat operation," Adam said.

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New technologies will be used and practices put in place to ensure that odours are contained within the facility.

Finally, he added, a provincial inspector will be onsite every time a butchering process takes place.

"In order for us to receive the license, we have to apply to the province of Manitoba for a class-two facility," Adam said. "On top of that, we have to comply... with the Canadian Food and Inspection agency... Our facility will not only meet but it will exceed all the requirements for the environment and food processing."

### OBJECTIONS, REBUTTALS, AND RESPONSES

More than one person in attendance argued with Adam's claim that only three litres of water will be required to process each bird.

Concerned for the community's resources, another resident told council that he's done his own research and the actual water consumption for poultry processing is anywhere from 20 to 37 litres per chicken.

"That is [a lot] of water going into the sewer system," he said. "He has a plan of starting with 3,000 chickens per week, granting up to 3,000 chickens per day. That's over 100,000 litres of water going into the sewer system, which is the same as approximately 225 average households. Can the lagoon handle that?"

He questioned, too, whether an environmental impact study would be prudent before approval of such a plant. His concerns revolved around unpleasant odours, airborne pathogens, pests, and the like. All these things, he added, would affect property values in the area. Based on his research, every community with a similar abattoir business has experienced a reduction in resale value.

In response, Councillor Shane Pelletier cited the Granny's Poultry facility in Blumenort. That, he said, is an exponentially larger operation, and to date there is no evidence that property values have been negatively affected or that odours are a concern to locals.

Regarding water consumption, Adam added some further clarity. His facility, he said, would be equipped with an air-chilling process as opposed to water-chilling,

preventing the overuse of this natural resource.

Aleah Nelson of Ste. Agathe made her plea to council, too, asking them to consider the sheer volume of community opposition.

Prior to the meeting, Nelson began a social media page to inform residents of the abattoir permit request.

According to Nelson, more than 100 people responded with their opposition.

"It is a resounding no from the community," she told council. "Over a hundred people [represents] roughly 23 percent of our population that are saying no to this. And that's not counting all of the people who are unaware of it."

*"We've had many discussions in the past where the residents were opposed. Whether we agreed with them or not... we look out for the entire community here. In the seven years that we've been here, I haven't seen this strong of an opposition. I can't ignore that."*

**Janine Boulanger** | Ritchot Councillor

She echoed some of the previous concerns over noxious odours and environmental impacts. She had other worries about the proposed future expansion of the facility, questioning the applicant's intent based on the obscurity of the details provided.

"I just don't want this to be a short-sighted decision... when it comes to keeping people in the community happy and enjoying their quality of life," Nelson said in closing.

A resident named Joan approached the council table on behalf of her autistic son. Her boy, she informed council, lives with extremely heightened senses.

"As a mom, this [proposal] is really scary for me," she said. "This plant may say that there is not going to be a smell. But if there is, we can't stay there. So I implore you to really do your due diligence. I am just speaking for the people that can't speak for themselves."

Yet another resident

pleaded with council to consider the potential environmental impacts of placing this kind of facility in a flood zone, which could result in unintended hazardous runoff during a bad year.

She also echoed worries over the strains that the abattoir could cause to the community water and sewer system.

"If they're just using a bunch of our resources and that's it, then what's the benefit to us?" she asked council. "To me, this will just be a big economic loss."

Pelletier responded to the concerns over odour and the lack of information provided about its control.

admitted that she has doubts about the potential risks this kind of facility might pose to the community.

As well, the overwhelming objection, she said, couldn't be ignored.

"We've had many discussions in the past where the residents were opposed," said Boulanger. "Whether we agreed with them or not... we look out for the entire community. I see the entire community here. In the seven years that we've been here, I haven't seen this strong of an opposition. I can't ignore that."

Pelletier came to another conclusion. "This isn't Maple Leaf," he said. "This isn't the corner of Marion and Lagimodiere. It's a different thing altogether. The regulations right now are way different for this kind of facility."

### SECOND VARIATION

Following council's split decision to accept the abattoir, many disgruntled residents chose to exit council chambers.

One resident hung back, making a further inquiry into the second motion which council had yet to vote on: the variation application.

"Not only is this something that we don't want, but now they want to do it on less land," she told council. "That should just not be allowed. Especially if they intend to expand."

This prompted further council debate over the reasoning behind the 10-acre requirement. In Adam's case, it's almost double the acreage needed for his proposed facility.

"I think you have to pick an overall size for these businesses," CAO Mitch Duval said. "We would more than likely have patterned ourselves from other surrounding municipalities that have these types of industries."

"The zoning is because abattoirs and slaughterhouses cover a wide range of varying industries," Pelletier added. "[But] slaughtering a pig [compared to] a chicken is a totally different game."

Prior to council's vote, one final condition was added to the variation agreement. In the future, if the applicant chooses to expand beyond 4,500 square feet of space, another application for a conditional use permit would be required.

### CITIZEN POLL

## In the wake of public outcry against an abattoir in Ste. Agathe, to what degree do you think council members should allow public sentiment to influence their decisions?

- Very much. We helped elect them, and their votes should reflect our interests—given enough opposition.
- Not at all. Our council members should act in good faith and make hard decisions without feeling obligated to please the majority.

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### YOUR COMMENTS:

This will require attention to our security in our community. The large drug bust recently is a warning that we must keep pace with changes in our community. I look forward to more services being offered in Niverville and surrounding communities. - **Holly Rafferty**

The traffic will be crazy, we dont need to build up the town, smaller is better.

I think it is great for the community, however I would like to see a more proactive approach as opposed to the normal reactive approach we are all so used to. Having plans and infrastructure in place before it is needed, rather than reacting to the growing needs of the community years after the needs exist. The need for better traffic control has existed in this community for many years and we are only now seeing some reaction / action to address it. With this continued growth, we need to do better and need to be more proactive.

# SRSD Educational Assistants Call Off Strike

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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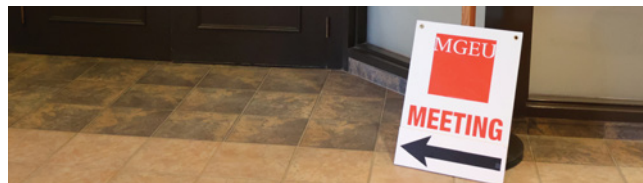
Approximately 200 educational assistants (EAs) were poised to go hit the picket lines first thing in the morning on April 17.

However, late on Saturday, April 15, a tentative agreement was reached between the Seine River School Division (SRSD) and the Manitoba Government and General Employees Union (MGEU), representing the EAs at the

bargaining table.

"Educational assistants in the SRSD are amongst the lowest paid in the province," stated a MGEU's promotional leaflet, "making it difficult to attract and retain experienced staff and forcing many EAs in our division to leave for other careers or better pay in other school divisions."

The promotional material further claimed that bargaining attempts for a new contract with improved salaries had been ongoing for more than a year.



Ritchot has two schools within SRSD's boundaries, including École St. Adolphe School and École Île-des-Chênes School.

## UNION PRESIDENT SPEAKS OUT

MGEU president Kyle Ross says that striking is always a

last resort, but the EAs felt that they had few alternatives.

Even so, Ross adds, many were concerned for the students who would be affected by their decision.

"It's been a difficult round of bargaining," Ross says. "The key issue is that they were feeling left behind. Other divisions around them have better [wage] packages and we were working with them to catch up and keep up. We have to actively work to get them to a place where they feel respected."

For comparison's sake, he says, there's a \$4 per hour wage disparity between SRSD EAs and those in the Sunrise School Division immediately to the north.

While the strike was called off, at the time of this writing both parties still needed to vote to ratify the agreement.

"We're recommending acceptance because we believe that the bargaining committee did a great job on getting this deal," Ross says.

The last wage increase seen by the SRSD EAs, he adds, was in June 2020 when their previous contract was signed. The contract expired on July 1, 2021.

Even so, he says, that contract provided only a nominal one percent wage increase.

## SRSD RESPONDS

Ryan Anderson, the superintendent and CEO of SRSD, has been involved in negotiations with the EAs and MGEU over the past months.

To the best of his memory, a request was first made by the EAs to join them at the bargaining table around the end of the 2022 school year. From Anderson's perspective, both parties were amicable in their decision to put off the commencement of negotiations until January of this year.

There were a number of solid reasons for the delay in commencing negotiations, he says. Not the least of these was the fact that SRSD's senior administrative team recently underwent a major restructuring. Anderson himself only assumed the position of superintendent/CEO last spring.

By fall, the board of trustees was faced with a similar restructuring since it was an election year.

"There were several factors that led to why the division and the union were not able to come to the bargaining table until January," Anderson says. "Having a complete turnover in your senior administration and having a turnover in your board [of trustees] are generally pretty solid rationales for why you'd want to delay that process by a couple of months. Especially if retroactivity is a component of the compensation package in the negotiation."

Adding insult to injury, he

says, SRSD was faced with the upheaval of a pandemic, followed shortly after by the province's push for Bill 64, which was set to completely dismantle the public school board model and replace it with a central education authority.

Anderson admits that SRSD has always been in agreement that their EAs wages were below market value and needed to be addressed. Now, with a deal finally on the table, Anderson is hopeful that a new contract can be agreed upon quickly.

"When you engage at the bargaining table, there's back-and-forth negotiations and I think you do the best you can to get to a place where everybody's satisfied with what that outcome looks like," Anderson says.

Had they not been able to reach a tentative agreement on Saturday, he adds, the division had already created a contingency plan in case of a labour disruption.

"We were taking steps to ensure that... the programs and services would continue to be offered to students," he says.

According to Ross, an EA strike would have made a significant impact on the division.

"When you pull 200 people out of the schools that help maintain some of the difficult students and the kids that need more supports, I think it would have been really challenging for all the students in the classroom," Ross says.



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# Outgoing Chamber President Reflects on COVID and Other Challenges

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

If anything can be said of Niverville's businesses over the last few years, it's that they're a resilient bunch.

Bearing testimony to that is the lack of *Closed* signs following two years of pandemic restrictions.

While the community did, unfortunately, lose a couple of good ones, the general growth trend once again demonstrates a steep upward trajectory. This includes some long-term businesses currently undertaking major expansions.

Not all communities will boast the same optimistic outcome.

According to Statistics Canada, business insolvencies across the country rose by 37 percent in late 2021.

At the same time, one-third of businesses reported concern for their survival in the absence of government support, especially as input costs began to spike.

Without question, the local Chamber has played a role in helping Niverville business owners navigate those tough times.

Amanda Wiens, outgoing Niverville Chamber president, is keen to reflect back on some of the initiatives her board undertook during the tumultuous COVID years.

In 2020, just as it became clear that the pandemic was here for the long haul, the Niverville Chamber board decided to create their own relief program, exclusive to their local members.

"Businesses were asked to send in a short paragraph of how COVID [was impacting] their business," Wiens says. "In our first round, we had four members apply and all were approved to receive \$500 each. In our second round, we distributed \$2,500 in additional COVID relief between all businesses that applied."

Around the same time, the board set to work applying for grants. In the end, they received \$28,500 in funding which helped



Amanda Wiens of the Niverville Chamber of Commerce.

BY BRENDA SAWATZKY

finance a number of campaigns intended to encourage residents to shop locally.

Shoppers showing proof of purchase at one of Niverville's many businesses were entered into a draw for a gift card that was redeemable at other local businesses.

"These were done at the height of restrictions, over Christmas 2020, and the following first quarter of 2021," says Wiens. "The campaigns were targeted at increasing community support of their local businesses at a time when it was easier to just shop online."

A few months later, the Chamber board ran a new campaign, called Make a Day of It. A one-minute promotional video was developed for the new tourism website, created by the Chamber.

This campaign was targeted at attracting shoppers from the communities around Niverville.

As COVID infections spiked

throughout the southeast in 2021, the provincial government imposed a 50 percent capacity restriction on all retail in the Southern Health-Sante Sud region.

Since Niverville had demonstrated a vaccination rate far higher than other communities in the southeast, the Chamber board, along with Mayor Myron Dyck, became vocal advocates for local businesses.

"Mayor Myron Dyck started doing interviews to garner attention and was able to get Dr. Roussin's phone number to speak to him about the fairness of the mandates and the impacts they would have on our business community," Wiens says. "The Niverville Chamber was happy to take on a supportive role in this and also called Dr. Roussin to relay a message of support for having the mandates reviewed."

The Chamber drafted their

own letter to Roussin, chief provincial health officer, delivered and submitted it via the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce.

As a result of this advocacy, mandates were lifted for the Town of Niverville within two weeks of their imposition.

In September 2022, the Niverville Chamber hosted Chuck Davidson, president and CEO of the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce.

Davidson spent an entire day touring Niverville businesses, listening as owners and managers recounted their various struggles, successes, and visions for the future.

In October, the Chamber partnered with *The Citizen* to host a candidate's forum in advance of the municipal election, providing an opportunity for candidates to speak on topics of local importance. Wiens served as a co-moderator.

Around the same time, the Chamber board worked with Niverville's council to find solutions for lost recycling options in the wake of Eastman Recycling Services closing down. After months of negotiation, a deal was struck with Bristol Hauling for a special rate, subsidized by the town, to make recycling options affordable once again.

In March of this year, the Chamber board launched their educational breakfast series, connecting members with professionals from a variety of specialties relevant to entrepreneurs.

And in April, the first-ever AGM, Awards, and Business Growth dinner was held at White-tail Meadow.

"It was a fantastic night," says Wiens. "But seeing the launch of the new events schedule that our board has been working very hard on for the past year [has been a highlight for me]. This new event schedule is opening up opportunities for us to elevate the services we can provide our members and create more opportunities for our business community to get involved with us."

## IN BRIEF

### Hospital Adds Operating Rooms

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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This year, three new surgical theatres are being added to the Bethesda Regional Health Centre in Steinbach.

"These very long-awaited operating suites will greatly add to the surgical capacity in the region and in the province," said MLA Kelvin Goertzen.

The nearly \$30 million project will also include 12 patient care treatment spots for pre- and post-op care, an expanded lab, a dedicated reception and waiting area for patients and family, and a cultural space.

"The surgery upgrade, along with many related enhancements, will replace the existing two suites which are going on 60 years of age," said Garth Reimer, board chair of the Bethesda Foundation. "I think they were built when this hospital was constructed in 1964."

Also on site for Friday's surgical room announcement was Dr. Christo Minnaar, chief of staff at the BRHC.

"As physician here at Bethesda, I was very encouraged to hear that this expansion will also support physician and resident services, including the addition of three new on-call sleep rooms," said Minnaar.

Phase one of the expansion began in 2021 with the announcement of 15 new acute care beds to be used for a variety of needs such as palliative care and chronic and cardiopulmonary disease. As well, eight surgical beds were added.

In August 2022, construction began on six treatment bays for renal dialysis.



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IN BRIEF

## Niverville Chamber Hosts Awards Dinner

By Brenda Sawatzky

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On April 14, the Niverville Chamber of Commerce hosted an upscale celebration at Whitetail Meadow emceed by Manitoba Chambers president Chuck Davidson.

The night included the much-anticipated annual business award presentations.

This year's winner of the New Business Award was Talk to the Tail.

The Outstanding Customer Service Award went to Guardian, Niverville Pharmacy.

Niverville's Tim Horton's was pleased to accept the Alex Fast Sr. Memorial Award.

Finally, Wm. Dyck & Sons took the award for Business of the Year.

Niverville Chamber president Amanda Wiens was honoured with a bouquet and special tribute for her five years of exceptional dedication to the betterment of the local business community.

Wiens is stepping down from her position. Nominated for Chamber presidency is Elvin Krahn, acting Chamber vice-president, Niverville resident, and rural markets manager for the Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC).

Krahn has already served as a Chamber member for the past five years.

His role with the BDC has set him up well for the presidency since his company's mandate is to provide financial and advisory support to entrepreneurs.

"The community of Niverville is very special to me, and my passion for this community is strong," Krahn says. "Business development is at the heart of what I love, and what excites me in my career. Being able to work with entrepreneurs... is an amazing journey to be a part of."

# HSD Anticipates Continued Climb in Enrollment

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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While recent provincial funding announcements have provided a tough blow for the administration of the Hanover School Division (HSD) this year, it wasn't all bad news in the end.

At the division's March public meeting, superintendent Shelley Amos announced that enrollment this year is up by 242 students beyond what the division had budgeted for.

For any Manitoba school division, that's good news, since higher enrollment is synonymous with increased government funding.

"It's good news as we continue to experience growth," Amos said. "We are not quite caught back up to what we were pre-pandemic with student enrollment... As we continue to catch up, then we'll continue to see additional funding from the province."

On September 30, 2019, just months prior to the pandemic crossing Manitoba borders, HSD enrollment was at 8,353 students across its 19 schools.

One year later, in September 2020, enrollment dropped to 7,760 students, a loss of almost 600 students division-wide.



The Hanover School Division administration offices in Steinbach.

HSD

Amos says there are likely a few factors involved, including parents' choices to homeschool based on health concerns, family relocations, or simply a change in demographics.

Now things are looking up.

As of March 2023, enrollment is up to 8,480 students. Recent immigration to the region is responsible for about 235 of these new students.

Amos adds that, according to all indications, the division will see at least the same number of new immigrant students again in the coming months, and possibly more.

Each year, the division receives added base funding from the province based on the number of students enrolled who require English language support.

Beyond that, divisions can

apply for funding through the Newcomer Support grant. According to Amos, a school division can use this funding in whichever way it deems fit. HSD chose to apply their grant funding toward additional teaching staff.

"We asked for two additional teachers to be funded to support divisionally the growth that we've had in immigration in particular," Amos said. "We did receive half of [the \$200,000] we asked for... so that's allowed us to put in a half-time teacher at the SRSS with their large immigration enrollment and a half-time divisional teacher who supports all of our schools."

And thanks to a recent provincial government decision to increase immigration opportunity this year through the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program (MPNP), the province will be

eligible for almost 3,200 more nomination spaces over last year.


As part of the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada multi-year allocation plan, a total of 9,500 immigration nominations will be allocated to Manitoba in 2023.

"The Manitoba government advocated strongly for this increase, which will enable us to further leverage immigration to grow Manitoba's economy and meet labour market needs in critical sectors, including health care," said Labour and Immigration Minister Jon Reyes earlier this month.

According to Reyes, the MPNP accounted for 64 percent of Manitoba's newcomers last year. Since the program was introduced in 1998, a total of 185,000 nominees have arrived on Manitoba soil from around the world.

In recent years, the top immigration destinations for immigrant nominees were Brandon, Neepawa, Winkler, Thompson, Portage, and Steinbach.

Regardless of the cause, HSD is glad to see that enrollment numbers are trending upwards. Current enrollment across HSD's Grade 12 classes equals 570 students. Comparing that to the 607 students enrolled in Kindergarten, things appear to be looking up.



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# Pizza 311 Expands to IDC

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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The owners of Pizza 311 are pleased to announce the opening of their second location, officially turning the Niverville-based business into a locally owned franchise. The new location is located in the strip mall at 597 Meadowlark Blvd in Île-des-Chênes.

Owner Varinder Ghuman says they've had such a good experience serving the community of Niverville that they decided to expand. They learned what people enjoyed and want to bring the same level of service to Île-des-Chênes.

"This is the second location of our first franchise," says Ghuman. "We opened on April 20 with limited hours, but now we are open full-time."

New to the restaurant scene, owners Pabheen Saini and Jonty Vashisht are excited to have bought into the Pizza 311 franchise.

"This is our first business we've bought and we wanted a restaurant business because we love all kinds of food," says Saini. "As we are Indian, we were looking into an Indian restaurant, but could not find a good option. Then we learned about the opportunity with Pizza 311 and it was the right fit for us."

The couple had recently been on a trip to Italy and enjoyed the food immensely. They said they had always liked pizza, but Italian pizza made them realize how good pizza could be with the right ingredients.

"Then we tried the pizza in Niverville [from Pizza 311] and it was so good," Saint says. "We could tell the crust was really fresh. And the toppings. Everything is made fresh and we liked that. It's made with olive oil and the original recipe, all the recipes, are family recipes."

Saini will be bringing her



Owners Varinder and Mandeep Ghuman, with new franchisees Pabheen Saini and Jonty Vashisht.

SARA BETH DACOMBE

experience working in accounting, and Vashisht has worked as a conductor with CN.

But it was Vashisht's experience working at the front counter of Tim Hortons that gave him customer service experience and a love for a fast-paced environment.

"I just love working with people," says Vashisht. "I like meeting new people and then seeing how much they love our pizza and are happy to have it here in town. That makes me happy."

After one week at reduced hours, the Île-des-Chênes location is now open six days a week, as of April 27.

They are still serving a reduced

menu compared to the Niverville location, but they plan to offer the full menu once their convection ovens are installed. They will also be looking to hire a few more positions, including a delivery driver.

The soft launch is enabling the staff to train at a pace that prepares them for the high number of orders that come in at peak times, but Ghuman says that they plan to celebrate with a grand opening soon.

"It was a soft launch, but we are planning an event sometime when the weather is nicer," he says. "So we can do something nice, maybe in the parking lot, and really welcome the community."

When asked if there are more locations planned to expand this franchise, Ghuman gave a definite yes, but he would not say where.

"We would like to bring quality pizza with quality ingredients to other rural locations," he says. "So we are looking, yes. We are looking at anywhere we can find a decent spot. We are trying to grow our brand to smaller communities and provide them with better options."

Ghuman says that Pizza 311 is known for its high-quality ingredients, such as using extra virgin olive oil in their dough, New Bothwell cheese, and pink Himalayan salt.

IN BRIEF

## Storage Bros Opens in Ste. Agathe

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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Storage Bros has opened their doors in Ste. Agathe, offering storage units for personal and commercial goods for residents of the southeast. The business is located on Voyageur Road and offers units sized from 6-by-6 to 12-by-18, as well as barbed-wire security fencing, 24-hour customer access, and 24-hour camera surveillance.

Greg and Derek McKnight are the brothers behind the operation.

With Greg's business sense and Derek's accounting expertise, they realized that they were in a position to serve more rural locations in rapidly growing communities.

"We first noticed a self-storage business for sale in Lac du Bonnet and bought it. It became a good investment and we decided to expand," says Greg.

Now, with rural locations across Manitoba and northwestern Ontario, the brothers say they're excited to serve Ste. Agathe.

"We're here to serve Ste. Agathe, and a lot of the surrounding towns really," says Greg.

He says they are excited to bring jobs to the area, as they will need to fill maintenance and other support positions.

They are also happy to be part of the exciting things happening south of Winnipeg. For example, they are going to be providing an inflatable attraction at the Niverville Olde Tyme Country Fair this summer.



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# Updated Development Plan Satisfies Some, Not Others

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On Wednesday, March 29, the Macdonald-Ritchot Planning District (MRPD) board held an open house in the RM of Ritchot's council chambers.

Once approved by both councils and the province, the new development plan will officially replace the previous one, now 13 years old.

Plans such as these are instrumental in helping municipal councils make decisions in terms of residential and commercial development, transportation routes, the protection of agricultural land, preserving the rural character of the communities, and managing local waterways.

Round one of public hearings took place last October. Following numerous objections voiced at the time, the board made revisions.

WSP is the land management company commissioned by the MRPD to undertake development of the new plan. Kari Schulz, senior planner for WSP, was on hand at the Ritchot meeting to provide an overview.

"The board has carefully considered all submissions, revised the development plan, and resubmitted to the province for review," says Schultz.

## PROPOSED CHANGES

The first alteration made to the plan was in response to a rejection from the province over the redesignation of 64 acres of land in Île-des-Chênes west, which would have shifted it from agricultural to settlement area.

The goal for the MRPD was to focus residential growth toward this section just west of Highway 59. Since the provincial municipal board declined the proposal, this acreage will continue under agricultural designation.

For residents of St. Adolphe, the second alteration to the plan was of significant importance.

An especially key aspect of the new development plan is the



A public hearing for the new Macdonald-Ritchot development plan.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

categorization of each community in a region into one of two designations: rural centres and settlement centres.

Under these categorizations, municipal councils would have guidance as to which of their communities would be established as the principal growth centres, or rural centres.

Under the original plan, Île-des-Chênes was the only community in Ritchot to be designated a rural centre. Here would be the location of most of the municipality's recreation services, the bulk of the commercial sector, and the biggest diversity in housing options.

Settlement communities like Grande Pointe, St. Adolphe, and Ste. Agathe, on the other hand, would maintain the larger-lot rural community feel.

Brandon Powell of Lombard North, on behalf of SALCO, pled to the MRPD at the 2022 meeting to reconsider St. Adolphe's designation.

To classify St. Adolphe as settlement, he said, would undermine the vision of Tourond Creek as a higher density, mixed-use development and make it difficult to compete in a demanding housing market.

St. Adolphe resident Robert Doiron also aired concerns, asking council to consider the limitations a settlement centre designation would pose to potential development.

"I don't like to have St. Adolphe designated as [just] a place to live," Doiron told the MRPD at the original meeting. "When businesses within the planning area are looking for a place to locate, I think St. Adolphe should be included."

In response to those arguments,

the MRPD changed their tune.

"The board agreed with their argument," said Schulz at the 2023 meeting. "So, in this version of the development plan, we have designated St. Adolphe as a rural centre."

One further change was made in terms of land designation, due to objections from the Town of Niverville related to nine quarter-sections of Ritchot land that border the Niverville to the west and north.

These sections, under the original plan, were designated livestock management policy areas.

"Basically, this dictates whether new livestock operations can be established," said Schultz.

In order to appease Niverville's appeal for a restriction on new or expanding livestock operations in this area, the MRPD changed the designation of these lands to limited livestock management areas.

## STE. AGATHE RESIDENT UNSATISFIED WITH NEW PLAN

One Ste. Agathe resident is still disappointed with the revised plan.

Guy St. Hilaire owns approximately 22 acres of land along the riverbank in Ste. Agathe, on both sides of the dike. He's owned the property for 30 years and it's also the location of his home.

St. Hilaire attended the original meeting in 2022 to plead his case for a redesignation of a portion of his acreage from environmental policy area, which prevents development for the sake of environmental protection, to a designation which would allow for development on his land.

At the 2022 meeting, then-councillor Curtis Claydon came to St. Hilaire's defence.

"I want to challenge the environmental policy on the draft of the development plan," Claydon told the board. "We've seen exponential growth in Ritchot. We've seen St. Adolphe flourish, we've seen Île-des-Chênes flourish, and we've seen Grande Pointe flourish. But Ste. Agathe is stagnant."

St. Hilaire made another personal appearance at the 2023 public hearing, making one final appeal to the MRPD for the policy change which didn't make the cut the first time.

"You want to designate [all my land] as park space [even though] the province knew what our intentions were," St. Hilaire told the MRPD. "We have an opportunity right now to remedy what was possibly an error... by the RM and the province."

St. Hilaire spoke with *The Citizen* following the 2023 meeting. From the get-go, he says, his acreage was purchased with residential development in mind. In the early years, he contends that the province was amenable to his plans.

When the community dike was built after the 1997 flood, and the south portion was turned into a dike road, he says the province provided him with four approaches from the dike road to his property.

St. Hilaire was always led to believe that if he maintained the appropriate elevations for a flood zone, residential development should not be a problem.

For his land outside the dike, he considered taking extra precautions by developing basement-free homes which would further help prevent losses for the homeowners.

Even so, he says it's probably an unnecessary precaution since all of

this land stayed high and dry during the worst flood the area had seen in over a century.

Over the years, St. Hilaire has spent countless thousands of dollars doing what the province required to get his land development-ready. He knew about the land's environmental policy designation all along, but it's only been in the last couple of years that anyone's determined what that designation actually means.

"It's been a constant battle," St. Hilaire says. "[Early on], all they did is colour it in green with no explanation as to what environmental policy [designation] even was. This time all of a sudden it's considered as park."

St. Hilaire agrees that the slope along the riverbank, which he owns, should remain under environmental protection. Still, he says, this leaves a large section of his land which would be perfect for the development of pristine river view lots without causing disturbance to the riverbank.

"I've always felt that land like this, even under environmental policy [designation], is better under private custodianship," says St. Hilaire. "You'll pay more for a piece of property like that, so you'll take care of it."

## WHERE DO THEY GO FROM HERE?

At the conclusion of these public meetings, Ritchot and Macdonald councils will need to decide whether to take the plan back to the drawing board or consider it complete. If the latter happens, both councils will need to vote to approve it.

From there, the plan goes back to the province for their final stamp of approval.

For St. Hilaire, his sentiment remains the same as one he originally shared with the MRPD at the 2022 meeting.

"My contention is simple," St. Hilaire said. "Allow us to develop this land as we deem appropriate, while following the rules and regulations pertaining to building in such areas. Or purchase the lands [from us] and do with it as the provincial authority wishes and let us get on with our lives."

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## IN BRIEF

## Province Invests in Surgery Aftercare

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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As of April 1, many Manitoba residents will benefit from subsidized physiotherapy and rehabilitation services following knee and hip surgery.

“The Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force, and agreements such as this, will help patients access the care they need now as the Manitoba government expands capacity and builds a more resilient public health system for the future,” says Health Minister Audrey Gordon.

The provincial investment of \$2.5 million is anticipated to assist an estimated 6,100 patients in receiving post-surgical recovery care. Billing services will be managed by the Manitoba Physiotherapy Association (MPA) as an interim solution until a more permanent billing solution is created in the coming months.

“The MPA is well positioned and eager to provide interim billing services for all Manitoba physiotherapy clinics until alternative, permanent third-party billing arrangements are put in place,” says Anna DiMarco, president of MPA.

The Diagnostic and Surgical Recovery Task Force was established in late 2021 as a means of addressing the growing number of people on diagnostic and surgical waitlists in the midst of the pandemic.

In the fall of 2022, the province took the first step by approving direct-bill options for post-surgery care through three private clinics. Today, wait times and travel time has been reduced further with the inclusion of the provider-of-choice option.

Eligible patients can qualify for up to six individual physiotherapy sessions or ten group sessions. Connecting patients with their appropriate provider is now included in the hospital discharge process.

# Niverville Council to Add School Zone Speed Reduction on Fifth

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Parents of children attending the Niverville Middle School can soon breathe a bit easier thanks to additional safety measures the town hopes to implement along Fifth Avenue South in the coming months.

At a public meeting held on April 4, council passed a resolution to reduce the speed limit along Fifth Avenue South between Third and Fourth Streets to 30 kilometres per hour.

The goal is to slow traffic along the busy street which marks the middle school's east boundary.

At the same time, this speed reduction will assist drivers in improving their stopping time as they approach the two new pedestrian crosswalks being proposed for this area.

Earlier this year, council applied to the province for the addition of two new controlled crosswalks here.

If approved, one crosswalk will be installed at the north entrance of Hampton Drive, enhancing the student crossing zone that already exists at the uncontrolled crosswalk at the corner of Spruce Drive.

A second controlled crosswalk has been proposed for the intersection of Hampton Drive South where it intersects with Hespeler Park Drive.

“The Hampton South one



Niverville Middle School.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

won't happen before sports season, because we need the traffic [count],” says Eric King, the town's CAO. “If the pedestrian traffic count is high enough, the province will pay for it.”

Thinking strategically, council will initiate pedestrian traffic counts into Hespeler Park in May, at the height of soccer season. If foot traffic is as high as expected, King is confident that the province will see fit to install a fully

controlled crosswalk there.

It's a similar strategy employed by council for the new flashing crosswalk at Main Street and Second Avenue. Due to pedestrian traffic counts, this crosswalk infrastructure was installed on the province's dime.

“If we do [the Fifth Avenue traffic counts] in May, the goal is to save us \$100,000, potentially,” King says. “If both intersections meet the minimum [pedestrian]

threshold, then the province installs them themselves.”

As for timing, King says it's impossible to say. He's hopeful that both crosswalks will be ready by the fall of this year, or by the spring of 2024 at the latest.

With all this change in store for Fifth Avenue South, council is recommending one more traffic control strategy that should further enhance safety.

On April 4, council voted in favour of appealing to Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure (MTI) to move the 60 kilometre per hour zone, which currently begins at Fifth Street South, to a more southerly location along Fifth Avenue.

“There isn't room for adequate spacing to properly transition between the 30 kilometres per hour zone to the 60 kilometres per hour zone,” King said. “Therefore, council will respectfully request that MTI contemplate moving the 60 kilometre zone... to 20 meters south of Hespeler Park Drive.”

A secondary benefit to this move, he says, is that it will regulate traffic speed at 50 kilometres per hour as it approaches the Hampton Drive South crosswalk.

Because Fifth Avenue South falls under provincial jurisdiction, this final speed zone change will require provincial approval. Alternatively, school zone speed changes on provincially regulated streets can be authorized on a municipal level, says King.



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# Commentary

## Understanding Drag Queen Story Hour: What It Is (and Isn't)

By Daniel Dacombe

On April 22, Australian actor and comedian Barry Humphries passed away at the age of 89.

Few Canadians would recognize this prolific actor, but perhaps a few more of them would recognize his most famous character, Dame Edna Everage.

From 1956 until 2019, Humphries performed this character on stage and on the small screen to critical and fan acclaim, appearing alongside Billy Crystal, Mel Gibson, and many other celebrities.

Dame Edna delivered humorous monologues and told tall tales of her wild younger days and “close friendships” with the likes of Queen Elizabeth and President Ronald Reagan.

Beloved by audiences, Humphries was arguably the most famous drag performer in modern times.

Reflecting back on his career is a stark contrast to the current controversies regarding Drag Queen Story Hour, a series of events being held at public libraries across both Canada and the United States.

The events began in 2015 as part of an effort to promote empathy and diversity through acting, storytelling, and singalongs. A drag queen—in this context, defined as a male dressing in female clothing and portraying a female persona—takes on the role of the storyteller.

Drag Queen Story Hours are voluntary occasions attended only by those parents and children who wish to be there. The events are family-friendly, the drag queens are subjected to a vetting process, and the stories read are age-appropriate for the children in attendance.

Despite all that, we've seen growing outrage directed at these events.

Drag queens are accused of being child predators and using these events to “groom” children for future abuses.

Public libraries which host these events have been subjected to protests and their staff targets of harassment, with threats of violence



DEPOSITPHOTOS

becoming increasingly common.

Recently in Calgary, a prolific street preacher—a man with ties to Manitoba who has a criminal record and history of violence—was arrested after repeated warnings to cease harassing and threatening drag queen volunteers, library staff, and families.

With such heated public discourse, it would seem prudent to examine the history of drag performances and to learn more about the people behind them.

Dressing in drag, or dressing in a way more typical of the opposite gender for dramatic and comedic purposes, precedes even Dame Edna by centuries. In ancient Greece, female roles in the theatre were portrayed by males, a practice that continued even to the days of Shakespeare.

This custom was not unique to Western cultures. For instance, seventeenth-century Japan had a prolific practice of crossdressing in kabuki theatre.

It was only in the 1950s that drag became more closely associated with the LGBTQ community, bringing with it fresh condemnation.

In modern times, while a minority of drag performances are intended for adult entertainment, drag has typically been used for comedic effect. Films like *Tootsie* and *Mrs. Doubtfire* have been wildly popular.

But for those performers who dress in drag more frequently, some level of criticism clearly exists, and the recent accusations of sexualization and grooming demonstrate the nature of the concerns.

So how concerned should we be?

Researchers have been examining the drag phenomenon for decades. While some who act in drag identify as transgender, the majority consider themselves to be cisgender. Of these cisgender individuals, a significant portion are gay—but not all. Many drag performers are straight males who simply enjoy playing a role or expressing parts of their personality or interests that our culture has decided are not masculine.

Others, such as Humphries in the guise of Dame Edna, simply play the role for the fun of it.

As an aside, it should be pointed out that the gendering of clothing is deeply arbitrary. What makes clothing “male” or “female” is not only cultural but subject to rapid changes from year to year. Pink silk, lace, and makeup may seem feminine to us now, but a mere few hundred years ago they were the height of masculine fashion in Renaissance Europe.

In other countries, men would wear skirts, or bright colours, or even clothing identical to the women alongside them.

There is nothing inherently masculine about a tuxedo, nor inherently

feminine about a pair of pumps, despite what we've been telling each other in the recent past in this small corner of our planet.

What about the claims of grooming, sexualization, or child abuse?

Many of these claims come from confusion about the nature of homosexuality, with public perception often equating it with paedophilia.

This is a baseless claim. Homosexuality is merely the same-sex attraction to people of an appropriate age; the average gay person is no more likely to be attracted to children than the average straight person.

Research repeatedly indicates that the vast majority of child molesters are cisgendered males who pursue heterosexual adult relationships, and they are overwhelmingly people in positions of trust with children—such as coaches, pastors/priests, or relatives.

Individuals in the LGBTQ community, and drag queens in particular, are no more likely to molest children than any other adult.

There is also some concern that exposing a child to a drag queen is somehow the same as “recruiting” them into the LGBTQ community.

Yet again, the data does not support this fear. Decades of research show that sexual orientation is an inherent trait, not something that a child can be convinced to pursue.

These fears represent a misunderstanding about the nature of human sexuality—and only education can cure this. It behoves us as a rational society to have these conversations openly and share what we learn from ongoing research into human nature through psychology and the social sciences.

Due to their history as a very public face of the LGBTQ community, as well as the exaggerated femininity and eccentric personas they present, drag queens have often been a target for hate from the more conservative elements of society. Some research over the last decade suggests that this is intentional.

By playing a formidable yet positive female role, drag queens signal to audiences who may be uncertain about their own identities that they are in a safe and welcoming space to explore their thoughts and feelings.

For this reason, drag queens have been an integral part of the civil rights movement for decades, and involvement in drag has been shown to improve one's mental health.

Despite what we've been hearing from some quarters as of late, being a drag queen is about courage more than it is about clothing or gender. Why would we prevent our children from learning about the importance of staying strong in the face of adversity?

Protecting children in our society is a deeply important issue, and we should take advantage of the information we have learned about real grooming and abuse.

What will protect our children best is not outrage but factual information. Not misdirected anger but age-appropriate sex education. Not treating members of the LGBTQ community as second-class citizens but cultivating awareness that our children are most at risk from people in positions of trust in our lives.

All of this can be done with an attitude of empathy towards those who may be different from ourselves.

If we can do that, Dame Edna would be proud.

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# Sports & Recreation

## Hoepfner Wins Prestigious Bisons Award

By Ty Dilello

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The University of Manitoba Bisons handed out its year-end awards on April 1 at the annual Brown and Gold Banquet, held at the Fort Garry campus. Niverville's Keziah Hoepfner of the women's volleyball team was the recipient of the Bisons Teammate of the Year award.

Nominated by her teammates Simone Crevier and Ella Gray, Hoepfner was lauded for her mentorship and support all season after suffering a season-ending ACL injury prior to the start of the 2022-23 campaign. She travelled with the team to nationals and was a leader behind the scenes all year.

It's been a long road for Keziah Hoepfner, who first started playing volleyball at her school in Niverville in Grade Seven and later started playing club volleyball at age 15.

"I never really thought that I was going to play at the university level. It seemed like a cool idea. However, I never reached out to universities or made recruitment videos," says Hoepfner. "I thought that I would just go to school for academics. So when Bisons' volleyball coach Ken Bentley asked me to play for the University of Manitoba, I was rather surprised."

The Niverville High School volleyball program has been competitive for AA provincial athletics, but her greatest preparation for play at the university level came when she started playing club volleyball for the Junior Bisons.

"Junior Bisons volleyball is run professionally, and the coaches are



Keziah Hoepfner won the Teammate of the Year award at this year's Brown and Gold Banquet.

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA BISONNS

very knowledgeable," says Hoepfner. "In my older years, I played for the assistant coach of the women's team at the time, Sydney Purvis. She is one of the main reasons why I am here today. She was a great coach and always believed in me."

In Hoepfner's three-year tenure with the Bisons, this past season was the first time they made it through

the first round of the playoffs and had a chance to go to the USports National Championships. However, because of her ACL injury, she did not play at all this season due to recovering from surgery.

Instead she got to spend the year learning and watching the game from the bench.

"I learnt many new things and

broadened my perspective of the game, which will help me out in the coming seasons," she says. "The team had a great season. We grew so much. I think our team defied everyone's expectations except our own. It was a very exciting and valuable experience. I think that we stepped up to the challenge and showed people who we are as Bisons."

The Bisons had to win a hard-fought game against the Winnipeg Wesmen just to make it to nationals. Once the Bisons arrived at nationals, their first game pitted them against Mount Royal, who they had knocked out in the second round of the Can-West playoffs.

The Bisons battled and ended up winning that game, propelling them to the semifinals, where their run ultimately ended.

Hoepfner was as surprised as anyone to be named the winner of the Teammate of the Year award. It pegs her as the top teammate of the entire University of Manitoba Bisons sports program.

"It was very heartwarming being recognized by my teammates in this way," she says. "Spending the past year on the sidelines wasn't easy. However, early on in recovery, I decided to view this as an opportunity to support my teammates and learn the game from them. I spent the year trying to do everything I could to help the team succeed. As much as this award is amazing and nice, I must say there is no way I could have gotten this without the support of my team. They made it easy for me to show up every day and give what I could to the team."

After overcoming her injury, Hoepfner is very much looking forward to getting back onto the court and contributing to her team's success.

"After a year off, I can't wait to play again. I think our team is only getting better as we aren't losing any players. Our goal is to steadily improve and make our way back to nationals."



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U14AA Team Manitoba

DARRYL GERSHMAN

# Local Ringette Players Represent Manitoba at Western Championship

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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Local ringette is thriving in southeastern Manitoba. Recently, many young players had the opportunity to represent Team Manitoba in the Western Canadian and Canadian Ringette Championships.

The Eastman area was pleased to show a total of seven players on the U14AA provincial team. The high-performance team was the youngest, and only, group in its age range to register as a AA team and head to the Western Canadian championships.

Additionally, the Eastman Heat U16A and Eastman Heat U19A both won their provincials. In doing so, they were able to represent Manitoba at nationals.

Many outstanding ringette players who made

the elite teams hailed from Niverville, St. Adolphe, and St. Agathe, as well as St. Pierre, Grunthal, Beau-sejour, and Oakbank.

Niverville's own Natalie Harder, 13 years old, had the opportunity to try out for the provincial U14AA team and was thrilled to secure a spot on the provincial team.

From March 29 to April 1, the team played in the Western Canadian Ringette Championship, coming in eighth out of ten teams.

For many of the young players, it was their first experience playing at an AA level. Harder says that despite how challenging the experience was, it was extremely rewarding.

"The tryout process was stressful because I was trying out for my province and not just an A team," says Harder. "It was really fun to meet some of the girls I was

potentially going to play with on Team Manitoba. It was an exciting moment when I found out that I had made the team."

The young players worked hard to develop teamwork. Harder says that all her teammates were able to be supportive of one another, especially under such positive coaching.

"The atmosphere was really good with the girls," she says. "We all bonded closely in the short time we had together. We were very open and chatty with each other—and the coaches were really positive to all of the girls. They helped push me to be the best player I could be."

Harder says that one of the highlights of the tournament was the opportunity to compete with other teams from all around Western Canada, not to mention

getting to spend each and every day with her teammates and coaches.

As a young athlete, the opportunity to be exposed to a high level of competition at such a young age can come with risk, but the opportunity can also give a massive boost in the areas of communication, in-game intelligence, and increasing stamina and athleticism.

As for Harder, she enjoyed the fierce competition. She also has some advice for anyone thinking about trying out for high-level teams.

"I would probably say to remember to have fun and try your hardest at every shift," says Harder. "For someone that wants to play at higher levels—work hard, never give up on yourself, and remember what the sport is about. The sport is about fun, friendship, and determination."

## IN BRIEF



Logan Beer of Niverville High School.

C/O LOGAN BEER

## Beer Named to Manitoba High School All-Star Team

By Ty Dilello

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Niverville High School's Logan Beer was recently named to Basketball Manitoba's graduating all-star basketball team, which picked the top Grade 12 high school players over the course of this season from A, AA, and AAA schools in Manitoba.

On April 15, Beer played in the graduating all-star game that was held at the Sport Manitoba Courts in Winnipeg.

Beer first started playing club basketball in Winnipeg in Grade Two and has played school basketball since Grade Seven.

Beer's recent season for the Niverville Panthers, which just wrapped up, went well by his account. The Varsity boys team won the Zone 13 playoffs and made it to the provincial qualifiers.

However, once there, they came up short in qualifying for provincials after consecutive losses to Transcona and Westwood.

"I was definitely surprised to be selected to the graduating all-star team,"

says Beer. "But it was also pretty cool because both of my older siblings were also selected to the graduating all-star game."

At the game on Saturday, there were players selected from A, AA, and AAA schools from across Manitoba, many of whom Beer had played against over the last four years of high school.

"The game itself was fun and very high-scoring," says Beer. "Our team was down by three points at the very end, and my coach put me in to try and make a three-pointer to try and tie it up, because I managed to make a couple of three-pointers earlier in the game. I had a chance to hit the game-tying shot, but it rimmed in and out just prior to the buzzer."

Beer has an interest in potentially continuing his basketball at the university level after he graduates from Niverville High School in June.

"I would love to play post-secondary basketball somewhere, but I'm really not sure where that would be. We'll see if something works out."

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# Arts & Entertainment

## Jade Eagleson to Headline Niverville Fair

Two opening acts, Tim & The Glory Boys and The Heels, will kick off the party at the annual Saturday night concert.

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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The organizers of the Niverville Olde Tyme Country Fair have announced the mainstage acts for this year's big Saturday night concert. International, double-platinum country music star Jade Eagleson will be the main event, along with opening acts from Tim & The Glory Boys and queens of country pop The Heels.

One of the planners on the organizing committee, Dustin Krahn, is eager to talk about how the acts are selected each year.

"We are always keeping our ears to the ground, and we often try to catch artists that are on the rise and really breaking out," says Krahn. "Jade Eagleson had a very big year in 2022 and was actually the top-played Canadian country artist, so that definitely says something as to where he is headed. Tim & The Glory Boys also had a really big year, for that matter."

Krahn says that he's seen Eagleson live as recently as last summer and is excited to bring the neo-traditional country artist to his hometown.

"He has a really unique and captivating voice paired with an upbeat and more classic country sound, so that will be a very good show to catch!"

Some may wonder, why another country artist?

Krahn is quick to answer this question, which seems to come every year.

"People often ask why it is always country," he says. "That is the brand we've established and the audience that follows us and has grown to appreciate what we offer for entertainment."

Though the committee's goal is to attract a significant audience for Saturday night's entertainment, they wouldn't necessarily say they are setting out to book bigger and bigger names each year.

"Bigger names obviously come with more buzz and more excitement, but they also come with more risk and more cost," Krahn explains.



Jade Eagleson will headline this year's Niverville Olde Tyme Country Fair.

C/O JADE EAGLESON

"So it isn't as simple as just booking a bigger name. There is a good balance we try to find. We operate within our means and we do the best we can with the budget we have."

The Saturday night concert requires a lot of planning to ensure that it is a fun and safe night for all. The committee says the effort is very much worthwhile because the music has become a highlight for many fairgoers.

This is a key component when attracting other smaller attractions and entertainers. The combination is what makes the overall event successful.

"For a lot of people, [the concert] would absolutely be the highlight, whereas for other people it wouldn't be," says Krahn. "That said, it is a big part of what makes our fair work. Getting people through the gates is a very big part of what allows us to be able to bring in all the other kinds of great entertainment that we offer. The main concert always creates a lot of buzz and that is definitely something that helps us in the bigger picture."

Krahn promises that crowds will also see local entertainment featured on the mainstage.

"Yes, there will be local bands on Friday and local bands in the beer gardens throughout the entire weekend. More info will be available on the full line-up in the coming weeks."

### JADE EAGLESON

Originally from Ontario, Jade Eagleson stepped away from some of his duties on the family farm to pursue a long-time dream as a country music artist in 2017.

With the 2018 release of his debut single "Got Your Name On It," Eagleson was featured as a YouTube trending Artist On The Rise and appeared on the website's homepage, marking the first time a Canadian-signed artist in any genre received that honour.

Today, Eagleson's songs have reached more than 270 million global streams and over 105 million views on YouTube. The music video for "Got Your Name On It" has been seen more than 80 million times, and counting. It's become the first debut single by a Canadian artist to go platinum.

His self-titled album was released in 2020 and went on to achieve three gold- and two platinum-certified singles.

The 28-year-old Eagleson landed

another three gold-certified tracks on his sophomore album *Honkytonk Revival*.

*Honkytonk Revival* also helped Eagleson kick off 2023 with his second Juno nomination for Country Album of the Year. In 2022, he received six nominations for the CCMA awards and took home the award for Top Selling Canadian Album.

In total, he's had four songs hit number one on Canadian country radio and his 2022 single "She Don't Know" recently reached number one on the Canadian country radio charts. A new single, "Shakin' in Them Boots," is currently climbing the charts.

### TIM & THE GLORY BOYS

Tim & The Glory Boys are a "Canadian gang of backwoods hillbillies with world-class facial hair and infectious on-stage energy," according to their website. They have toured the world for more than a decade and have shared the stage with countless country, roots, and gospel artists.

In 2021, the two-time Juno award-winners achieved two CCMA nominations in the Group of the Year

and Rising Star categories.

They have been entertaining live audiences around the world since 2013 with their unique blend of boot-stompin' country, front porch jams, and a healthy dose of blue-collar humour.

### THE HEELS

Known for their high-energy live shows and larger-than-life stage presence, The Heels are a trio from Vancouver who have earned a unique title: the Queens of Canadian Country Pop.

Together, Bobbi Smith, Brittini Dominelli, and Kyla Rawlins have a signature sound that is equal parts sassy and bold, as well as positive and empowering. Inspired by contemporary female artists such as Sheryl Crow, Carrie Underwood, and Whitney Houston, they combine classic country, gospel, and Motown styles to create a style of their own.

Their debut album *Love, Heels* was released in 2017 and the lead single, "Come Around," propelled the band to prominence in western Canada.

In 2018, they performed at festivals including the Calgary Stampede and Sunfest Country Music Festival, and they received six nominations at the BC Country Music Awards, winning two.

The single "Hush Money" on their third album, *I Am*, has reached over a million views on TikTok while another single features Canadian country superstar Aaron Pritchett.

In 2022, they won a Josie Music Award for Best Country Trio and had the honour of performing on-stage at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville.

Collectively and individually, music and healing have always been inseparable for The Heels, and in 2023 they were inspired to revolutionize their country sound, resulting in the recently released EP, *Work of Heart*. The album delivers chill-inducing vocal performances, with lyrics and hooks underpinned by perfectly balanced tones designed in keeping with the techniques of wellness sound therapy.

Altogether, The Heels deliver an energetic performance with characteristic enthusiasm and humour, attitude, and playfulness every time.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Tickets for this year's fair are on sale now at [www.nivervillefair.com](http://www.nivervillefair.com)



The cast of *High School Musical Jr.*

■ SARA BETH DACOMBE

# Niverville Stages a High School Musical

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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On April 12–14, students and volunteers at Niverville High School presented their first-ever full-length musical since the construction of the new school in 2019.

The group's production of *High School Musical Jr.* played to sold-out audiences all three nights and received standing ovations from the enthusiastic crowds.

Janelle Malech, drama teacher at NHS, had the original idea to put on a musical and directed the students in their efforts. She said the students were very excited to perform for their community. Many of them were already familiar with *High School Musical*, which made it a particularly fitting choice.

"*High School Musical* seemed like a good fit because we had students very excited about this musical, particularly our two Grade 12 leads," says Malech. "We wanted to pick a musical that

would get kids excited to participate and that is known enough to entice the community to come watch."

The show involved a complex network of students, staff, and volunteers to pull off. It drew a total of 33 student performers, and dozens more taking part with the stage crew, set painting, hair and make-up, and set building.

Choreography was a major aspect of this particular musical and the intricate numbers were tricky to tackle, but a talented crew stepped up and brought each energetic number to life.

The choreographers included teacher Jennifer Hashmeir and students Nick Johnson, Emmeryson Fixe, and Brittany Collette.

"They really put together amazing choreography and we couldn't wait to show it off," Malech says.

Parents, along with local professionals, rallied to help as needed. Malech specifically noted

how much community support went into the production.

"Many, many parents have also helped out with set-building, providing snacks, and planning our after party," she says. "I think there are 11 teachers actively involved as well."

She says that the community support helped build confidence in students, resulting in energetic and confident performances.

The shows even featured a "talkback" element, giving the audience a chance to discuss the play with the director, cast, and crew. Many questions were asked and students fielded them with competence and charisma.

Malech says that the supportive team atmosphere helped everyone to have a great time and thrive throughout the challenges they faced in putting on such a large and complicated production.

"We have a fantastic team here," she says. "Everyone is so willing to help out, and our admin

have been very supportive. The biggest challenge was getting everyone to rehearsal, as kids are super busy these days! But they have been committed and worked hard. Having two snow days the week before the show was not ideal, but we pushed through!"

The organizers also acknowledged the challenge of building a stage big enough to hold a large cast, along with the sets and on-stage props. Malech notes that the school was not built for this, but art teacher Tony Clark put in a lot of effort, along with a team of volunteers, to make it work.

The large audience made an impact on the students, too.

"As good as it sounds and looks without an audience, it always comes to life better than ever once in front of people," Malech says. "The students were excited to hear the laughs, and most of all to showcase all the impressive singing and dancing!"

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