

The Citizen

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VOLUME 9 - ISSUE 6

JUNE 2023

www.nivervillecitizen.com

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LOCAL NEWS

Niverville Says Yes to Food Trucks

■ A recent decision by Niverville's council has opened the door for food trucks to set up shop in town. However, there are some key limitations as to where they are allowed to operate. Even so, not everyone is happy about this latest development, including some restaurateurs who are concerned about how it could affect business.

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LOCAL NEWS

The Local Challenges of Raising Kids with Autism

■ Raising children with autism in our local health region is unnecessarily difficult, according to many parents seeking change.

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SPORTS & REC

Local Player Reps Manitoba at NAHC

■ Ginger Fast of Niverville helped lift Manitoba to a silver medal at the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships.

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Writing Workshops Boost Local Authors

■ A new business in Niverville aims to turbo-charge writers through a mix of encouragement and inspiration.

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Niverville's Emergency Medical Services May Beat Risk

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BY BRENDA SAWATZKY

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Niverville fire chief Keith Bueckert.

BY BRENDA SAWATZKY

Niverville's Emergency Medical Services May Be at Risk

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
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It's fair to say that residents of Niverville find themselves in a most fortunate situation. At a time when medical services everywhere are run ragged, Niverville has access to top-notch emergency medical services (EMS) daily. These local paramedics and emergency medical responders (EMR) operate as part of the Niverville Fire and Emergency Services (NFES) team.

In the rural southeast, only the community of Emerson can boast the same level of localized medical service. Many other municipalities have no paramedic or EMR teams to arrive quickly on scene, stabilizing a patient until the ambulance arrives.

But thanks to new regulations introduced by the College of Paramedics one year ago, Niverville's 22-year EMS program may soon be nothing but a memory.

In 2022, the College of Paramedics, the governing body regulating EMS in Manitoba, increased the training requirements for EMR

students from 150 hours to more than 300 hours.

The hours required to become a paramedic, which is a level up from EMRs in medical qualifications, have also doubled.

"That's why you're seeing struggles with staffing levels in the ambulance services in rural Manitoba," says Niverville fire chief Keith Bueckert.

According to Bueckert, every ambulance needs at least two licensed medical personnel in the truck to be dispatched to an emergency.

While the paramedics and EMRs who are already certified won't need to take the additional training, all new recruits will.

Bueckert says that this may not affect Niverville's EMS in the short term, but it will, without a doubt, impede the availability of new trainees as the community grows or current members age out.

This excessive training to be a rural EMS provider is simply too much to ask, he says.

Since the announcement was first made early last year, rural mayors, Reeves, and fire chiefs

have been advocating for the College to reconsider their blanket ruling.

Niverville's mayor, Myron Dyck, along with other community leaders, sought support from the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM). Fire chiefs and other rural medical organizations have advocated on their own behalf in the hopes that a middle ground can be found.

In late April 2023, a meeting was held in Portage la Prairie to address an alternative. Mayor Dyck and Niverville's deputy fire chief were in attendance along with members of Shared Health, St. John's Ambulance, the Canadian Red Cross, the Office of the Fire Commissioner, and others.

Mayor Dyck says, after a year of advocating for a compromise, the outcome was disappointing.

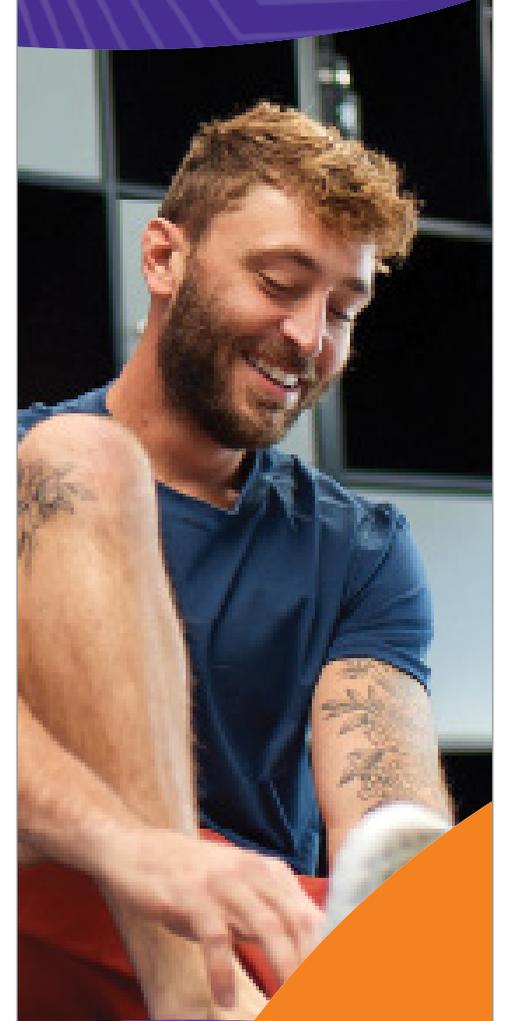
"At times it was frustrating because everyone wants to talk about regulation and legislation, and I think sometimes we legislate ourselves into a box where we can do nothing," says Dyck.

(continued on page 4)

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

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

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

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IN BRIEF

Ritchot Council Talks X-ing Safety and Daycare

By Brenda Sawatzky

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In May, Ritchot's council voted to apply to the province for flashing beacons at the corner of Highways 200 and 210 in St. Adolphe. "I wanted to really push this because the school is having issues [putting] crossing guards there," Councillor Jason Bodnarchuk said. "[We need] more visibility at that corner. There's definitely a lot more traffic going through there lately."

At the same time, council moved to approve the new daycare provider for the upcoming facility which will be located at the south end of Main Street.

"The St. Adolphe Childcare Centre did make it known that they were interested, so the RM would like to move forward with appointing them as the provider," said CAO assistant Dominique Lemoine.

Lana Redmond is the director of the St. Adolphe Childcare Centre (SACC). She says it's too soon to provide any details on the new facility, but she's hoping that more information will become available in the coming weeks.

"This is really great for the community," Redmond says. "Obviously, childcare is really needed here."

(continued from page 3)

In the end, the College didn't budge from their position.

"The municipalities in attendance find that onerous," Dyck says. "There's training that a surgeon must have and there's training that a nurse practitioner must have. The nurse practitioner is not a surgeon, so why now are we asking our EMR to take surgeon-like training?"

What has transpired in the way of a compromise is a proposal made by Shared Health, the medical arm of the provincial government.

If rural municipalities choose to continue to offer the quality of EMS care they do now, they will continue to be accountable to the College, paying dues and remaining hopeful that new recruits will sign up under the new training guidelines.

If they choose not to participate, the only alternative is to switch rural EMS teams to a fire-based first aid option, significantly reducing the duties that a paramedic or EMR can perform when attending a call.

This program would be overseen by an entity under Shared Health's control.

It's unclear whether annual dues would be required.

There were other recommendations made by Mayor Dyck and others at the April meeting. So far, they have yet to be addressed.

The first is that the College provide online training options so rural students can save many hours of driving time to evening classes.

Secondly, a modular approach could be applied to medical services, similar to how fire services operate, so that more levels of EMRs are recognized.

This way, students completing different levels of the course can practice at those levels instead of having only one benchmark for achievement.

"There's only 13 municipalities with EMS services," Dyck says. "It'll require an Excel spreadsheet [to manage]."

THE PROS OF THE CURRENT MEDICAL EMERGENCY SYSTEM

In order to understand the pros of keeping EMS services the same in Niverville, one has to realize what they've got.

Niverville has a total of 38 volunteer firefighters. Twenty of them are dually trained as paramedics or EMRs.

As recognized by the College of Paramedics, EMRs have the very valuable ability to administer symptom-relief medications to patients in distress. These may include medications to ease asthma attacks, diabetic emergencies, or even reverse an opiate overdose.

They can administer ASA and nitro in situations involving the heart or epinephrine shots in the case of a severe allergic reaction.

EMRs can secure a person to the proper equipment when there's a risk of spinal injury, making quick work of transferring that patient to the ambulance when it arrives.

They also have the training to assess each situation and determine whether a typical ambulance service is sufficient or if helicopter air ambulance needs to be called in.

Equally important is the response time of a paramedic and EMR team.

Thanks to a local EMS program, the average wait time for a medical professional to be on the site of an emergency is mere minutes.

Compare that to the average 30-plus minutes it takes for an ambulance to arrive. In these extra minutes, lives can be saved and the impacts of an injury minimized.

"For ambulance service to Niverville, it's about 30 minutes, but talking to some of these other

communities, they say it's an hour to an hour and a half," Mayor Dyck says. "And [the administrators of our medical system] feel that that's acceptable."

Moving to a fire-based first aid model, the response time wouldn't change. However, the level of service would, essentially restricting all emergency personnel to little better than basic first aid and CPR application.

According to Bueckert, the Niverville Fire and Emergency Services crew attended to nearly 350 calls in 2022. That's almost one call per day. More than 200 of them were medical calls.

In recent months, the NFES has decided to restrict their services to the community of Niverville, with the exception of the area to the community's east which is being proposed for annexation.

In light of rapid community growth, the aim is to continue providing quality services without overextending the volunteers who offer them.

THE CONS OF THE CURRENT MEDICAL EMERGENCY SYSTEM

Since Niverville began its EMR service in 2000, much has changed in terms of the cost to operate such a program.

There are no subsidies available from the province. All costs are borne by the municipality.

Even so, the College requires that EMS programs pay annual dues.

According to Bueckert, this came to about \$2,000 in total until recently when the fees were increased to \$750 per EMS member per year, regardless of their volunteer status.

And whereas members were once covered under the town's insurance umbrella, that is no longer an option. Now each member must carry their own insurance. This is another extra cost that the town chooses to carry rather than expect volunteers to

bear the burden.

Additionally, the town provides remuneration on an hourly basis when volunteers are called out.

There is no remuneration for being on call.

Despite these mounting costs, the cost of going backwards to a time when no EMS providers serviced the community may, in fact, be too great to consider, especially when the overall medical system is in such desperate straits.

IN A PERFECT WORLD

Bueckert says that, if he had his druthers, everything would just stay the way it was.

The only change that's needed, he adds, is for oversight bodies like the College to view the program differently.

"It would be nice for them to be able to look at us more as a group of people that are trying to help our community," Bueckert says. "We're not doing this for the money. I don't think the system was broken. If it needed tweaking, we could have done that."

In the end, he's thankful for the team of 38 volunteers that make up the NFES. Each of them work full-time jobs elsewhere and offer their services in their off-time, often at a cost to their families and social lives.

"We have such a special group of people doing this in our community," Bueckert says. "I'm so proud of them. The people that often don't get recognized are the families that they leave on a moment's notice when they're called out."

The coming months will be interesting, he adds, as the department and town council determine where to go from here.

"We're fighting to try and keep what we have, but there comes a point where there are some hard decisions that will have to be made," Bueckert concludes.



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Niverville Council Welcomes Food Trucks, with Limits

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On May 16, Niverville's council approved the first reading of a new bylaw which places regulations on mobile food trucks in the community.

The goal in creating this policy, council says, is to ensure that brick-and-mortar businesses aren't negatively impacted.

"The city of Steinbach [requires mobile food vendors to park] a certain distance from eateries," Mayor Myron Dyck said at the meeting. "We kind of did something similar to that, which basically eliminates Main Street as far as where food trucks can go."

Prior to the bylaw creation, council sought the Chamber of Commerce's input.

"The Niverville Chamber of Commerce supports local businesses and sustainable economic development," says Chamber president Elvin Krahn. "We appreciate the town's consultation on food trucks and gathered feedback from existing businesses. Fairness in proximity to established businesses is crucial. We also submitted feedback and findings from other communities for consideration. We thank the Town of Niverville for valuing our input where it impacts our business members."

THE BYLAW

According to the new bylaw, mobile food truck operators are allowed to set up shop in town from May 1 to October 1—but, as before, only once a license has been issued by the town.

The bylaw makes an exception for operators selling Manitoba-grown produce as long as the seller is also the direct grower. These vendors require no license to sell their wares.

Where major events or festivals are involved, such as the Olde Tyme Country Fair, those food vendors requiring a town-issued license are not allowed to operate in town during the event without also procuring a second license to do so by the event organizer.

Private events held on private property may be allowed to host a food truck on site under the condition that



the property owner has submitted written request for the town's permission in advance.

Even here, some limits apply.

The main commercial corridor, which includes Main Street as well as stretches of Highway 311 on the east and west side of town, are off-limits to food vendors.

Allowances will be made for vendors authorized by the organizers of the Olde Tyme Country fair—and only on fair weekend.

Other streets in the commercial areas are open, but only where a setback of 200 meters can be achieved from an existing business that deals in the consumable goods market. This applies to restaurants but not grocery and convenience stores.

Council has narrowed down a couple of specific locations where food trucks would be welcome.

One of these is the Centennial Arena overflow parking lot, which can accommodate eight trucks. These trucks would be visible from Main Street and accessed via Arena Road.

In order to enhance food services at Hespeler Park, council has also deemed specific areas of the north and south parking lots as appropriate for food trucks. A total of 19 food trucks could be hosted here.

To level the playing field, licensing fees will apply to all food truck operators, which vary based on resident or non-resident status. Weekly, monthly, or seasonal rates are available depending on the length of time a vendor wishes to reserve a spot.

These fees range from \$250 on the low end to \$1,500 at the top end.

Comparatively, the city of Steinbach has no food truck bylaw. They do, however, have a policy which is much

looser than Niverville's.

Adam Thiessen works in corporate services for the city of Steinbach. Like Niverville, he says, they require food trucks to procure a license from the city before setting up. Similarly, they also have a restaurant setback requirement which is 122 meters.

Apart from setbacks, council sets no specific limits on where a food truck can locate. During the summer, the city hosts a food truck fair every Thursday near the curling rink.

The cost for a food vendor license is where Steinbach really differs. There, the fees are \$50 for a 72-hour period and \$300 for the year.

Niverville's food truck bylaw will not be completely in effect until, and if, council passes the second and third readings in June.

Until that meeting, council welcomes feedback from residents and business owners.

LOCAL RESTAURANTEURS SPEAK

Nick Hagidiakow is the Niverville franchisee of Dairy Queen and the soon-to-open Pita Pit. He stands firmly opposed to council's decision to make provisions for food trucks.

He makes an exception, though, for large events like the fair that draw in thousands of people at a time.

"[The new bylaw] directly takes money from and is a slap in the face to every restaurateur in Niverville that contributes to [the local economy]," says Hagidiakow. "That food truck is going to pack up shop at the end of the day, after he's made a couple of thousand dollars that could have otherwise gone to a local business, taking 100 percent of the profits [to spend elsewhere]."

He fears that local businesses

won't just be impacted by the sales from one truck. He's seen what happens in other communities when the door is opened and a steady flow of food trucks fill all the prime locations at all the prime times.

For Hagidiakow and other restauranteurs along Drivers Run, the Arena Road location is too close in proximity to one of their biggest customer bases: high school students.

When school lets out for the season and families head out of town on vacation, businesses like his experience a slump in sales. Providing an opportunity for food trucks to extract a portion of those already lean profits, he adds, is unthinkable.

In the end, it's not about competition, he adds. It's about what's fair. If food trucks were required to pay equitable taxes and jump through legal hoops, they'd earn the right to be there.

"For me to open my Pita Pit and my Dairy Queen, I had to go sit in front of a [council] panel at a public hearing," he says. "But a food truck gets to come in and serve burgers and ice cream, taking money out of my pocket, and they don't have to go through a public hearing."

He hopes local customers will consider what the brick-and-mortar restaurants do for the community which food truck vendors do not.

"I support everything that I can in town, which is almost everything I'm approached about," says Hagidiakow. "I pay property tax and I employ the [local] youth and adults here."

At the end of the day, he says, the town is just not big enough to support food trucks yet.

Paul Ghuman, owner of Pizza 311, is also disappointed with council's

new bylaw. He worries that with food trucks taking a bite out of his business, he may be forced to close his doors on slow days.

As for making allowances for food trucks at Hespeler Park, he says even that takes opportunity away that local entrepreneurs might have had.

The franchisee of Smitty's Restaurant, Brian Funk, is less concerned about the direct impact on his business since he caters to a clientele looking for a sit-down dining experience.

Even so, he feels food trucks are given an unfair advantage when it comes to bylaws affecting restaurants. Food vendors don't need to provide washrooms for their patrons, provide a certain number of parking stalls, or meet umpteen other stipulations that regular restaurants are subject to.

COMPETITION BUREAU

The government of Canada's Competition Bureau encourages fair competition between restaurants and the mobile food industry.

"While Canadian consumers have been quick to embrace the food truck movement, the response from municipalities and incumbent food service providers has not always been so welcoming," their website states. "Municipal regulations often limit where food trucks can be located, the number of continuous hours they can operate and the number of providers permitted in a given area. While these regulations can serve legitimate urban planning or other policy goals, some restrictions may go further than necessary. Restricting the ability of food trucks to compete in the food service industry can reduce consumer choice and stifle innovation."

The Bureau suggests that mobile food vendors improve street vitality and provide environments for neighbourhood interaction. They offer affordable and convenient food options and employment.

As for the competition they bring, the Bureau adds that food trucks may have a positive impact on fixed businesses in the area as the street vendors can draw in new customers.

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Some Things are Best Left to the Professionals!

Rescuing Food to Feed Hunger and Save the Environment

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Living in Manitoba's land of plenty, surrounded by abundant grain fields and heavily stocked grocery store shelves, means that the issue of food waste barely registers on our radar.

However, a study performed in 2022 found that 63 percent of the food Canadians throw away was still safe for consumption.

The Manitoba-based Leftovers Foundation aims to change our attitude toward food waste. They are one of Canada's largest food rescue charities and they work towards reducing food poverty by relocating goods that would otherwise be destined for the landfill.

Julia Kraemer is the Manitoba coordinator for Leftovers. She's also the only paid employee.

"Last year, we redirected just shy of 540,000 pounds of food," says Kraemer.

Kraemer joined the Leftovers team when the branch moved to Winnipeg just over two years ago. The only other Canadian cities with operations under the Leftover umbrella are Edmonton and Calgary.

In 2021 alone, the organization as a whole served almost 670,000 meals from food that had been redirected.

The organization doesn't just satisfy hungry tummies. Keeping food from the landfill helps prevent the unnecessary creation of methane, a type of greenhouse gas.

According to the Leftovers website, Canada's food waste is responsible for creating 21 million tonnes of greenhouse gasses every year.

Kraemer's job consists primarily of creating a link between those with excess food, such as grocery stores and restaurants, and the service agencies that need food. In March,



Leftovers delivered food to 66 different service agencies around the city.

These agencies include food kitchens, drop-in centres, seniors living facilities, rehab centres, group homes, outreach groups, and mental health service groups.

Kraemer also establishes relationships with commercial businesses that need to get rid of their excess, typically the food that has reached its labelled best before date.

The Red River Co-op grocery chain, she says, is their biggest food donor to date.

Other food pickup arrangements have been established with small bakeries and cafes. Some warehouses that store food destined for convenience stores make regular donations of ready-made food that's no longer at its freshest.

"We also have a connection with several different Hutterite colonies," she adds. "We get thousands and thousands of pounds of produce on pallets."

Still, the need is not yet matched by donations.

THE TRUTH ABOUT "BEST BEFORE" DATES

The prolific use of best before dates on food has helped to create a grand

misconception that food is unfit for consumption after that date.

Canada only requires the use of best before dates on foods that have a limited shelf life of 90 days or less, such as milk, eggs, and bread.

"According to Second Harvest, dairy and eggs can last up to two weeks past their best before dates, while dry cereal, packaged snacks and canned goods can all remain edible for up to a year beyond their best before dates," writes Jessica Huras for *The Food Network*.¹

Huras goes on to explain that our senses can generally be relied upon to determine when a product should be trashed, such as an off-smell, discoloration, or presence of mould.

Leftovers sets their own food safety guidelines. Volunteer drivers are instructed on what to accept and what to decline.

Another misconception is that restaurants and grocery stores are obligated by law to trash anything that's beyond the best before date.

Kraemer says that nothing could be further from the truth.

"There's something called the Good Samaritan Act that protects donors from any liability as long as things are done in good faith," she says.

THE FOOD RESCUE PROGRAM

The Leftovers website offers an app, called Rescue Food, to make life easy for everyone. Donors can sign up for food pickups and service agencies reach out with their food needs.

In many cases, donors provide consistent pickup days and Leftovers only needs to ensure that a driver is there to collect on the requested day.

Leftovers relies heavily on its dedicated team of volunteer drivers. They range in age from high school students to retired senior citizens.

Kraemer says that one of her volunteers is a woman in her sixties who uses a walker. She and her small vehicle are a valuable resource to the organization.

"We bank on the kindness of people who believe in our mission to reduce food waste and increase food access."

While most donated food is delivered directly to a service agency, other food gets put in storage and delivered little by little to the people on the front lines.

"We work with a lot of grassroots organizations, folks who go out on Main Street and give out sandwiches and do harm reduction," Kraemer says. "Since bread is one of the things that we get the most of, we store

bread for these groups so that they can turn it into meals they can serve to the most in need."

Kraemer adds that they're willing to make food pickups in rural communities as well.

Before they do, though, they check to see if there's a local organization that can benefit from it.

In the coming weeks, Kraemer is hoping to implement a program being used in Calgary and Edmonton called Home Harvest. The idea is to rescue homegrown fruit and vegetables from residential yards and gardens.

"If your yield from your home-grown food is in excess of what you can use, we don't want it to end up in landfill," she says. "We want to see it shared with community."

Kraemer is not misguided into thinking that her program will achieve food security on a vast scale anytime soon.

But for now, she says, it's a pretty darn good Band-Aid solution.

"At some point, food goes from having an extreme dollar value to zero-dollar value, essentially garbage. Leftovers chooses to see it as valuable in its entire lifespan. Not only in the value that you would pay for it, but also the value that comes from the labour it took to grow it, harvest it, package, process, and transport it. We try to honour all of that."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

■ To learn more about the Leftovers Foundation and its Rescue Food app: www.rescuefood.ca

¹ Jessica Huras, "A Guide to Best Before and Expiry Dates in Canada," *The Food Network*. October 31, 2022 (<https://www.food-network.ca/article/guide-to-best-before-and-expiry-dates-canada>).

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The Challenges of Living with Autism in Southeast Manitoba

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), or simply autism, is not new, but it remains poorly understood. That's true even for many parents who are raising autistic children.

Understanding their child's needs, getting a firm diagnosis, and accessing resources to help them raise their child in a meaningful way is anything but simple, especially for families living in the Southern Health-Santé Sud (SHSS) region.

In fairness, autism presents with a diverse range of neurological symptoms that make diagnosis difficult. Autism can affect the way a child behaves, communicates, interacts with others, and learns.

Complicating this further is the fact that autism is a spectrum disorder, meaning that the range and degree of developmental concerns can differ from one child to the next.

For example, people with autism can demonstrate advanced communication skills or, on the other hand, be rendered nonverbal. Some require a lot of help with day-to-day function while others manage well independently.

However, according to the Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN), there are some truisms for most autistic people.

For the most part, they think in ways that are different than others. Routine is highly important. They often experience an oversensitivity to light, sound, or smell.

They can become easily overwhelmed, but as they develop they may discover mechanisms called "stimming" which help regulate their emotions. Stimming might manifest as rocking back and forth, playing with their hands, or humming. There are a host of other calming and techniques.

Socializing and interacting with others can prove difficult, especially when they're thrust into a world with social constructs that cater to the non-autistic.

"Autism is a developmental disability that affects how we experience the world around us," the ASAN website states. "Because of myths about autism, it can be harder for autistic adults, autistic girls, and autistic people of color to get a diagnosis. But



anyone can be autistic, regardless of race, gender, or age."

HOW PREVALENT IS AUTISM TODAY?

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funds a program called the Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network. Through their 11 ADDM sites around the United States, the CDC has derived some statistics about autism by tracking children between four and 16.

According to their data, about one in every 36 children in America was detected as having autism in 2020. This is up from one in 150 in 2002.

About one in six kids in the U.S. have been diagnosed with one form of developmental impairment or another. These include autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and cerebral palsy.

According to the CDC, evaluation for autism decreased during the COVID-19 pandemic, causing delays in early testing and treatment.

Delayed testing means delayed access for parents to the supports, resources, and services they need to raise a healthy, happy child.

THE CHALLENGE OF FINDING SUPPORTS

The Citizen interviewed seven parents living in the SHSS region. Each has a child who struggles with a variety of developmental and/or behavioural issues that make life challenging.

Most, if not all, of these parents have left full-time jobs in order to spend their days advocating on their child's behalf. All will say that their advocacy has been a full-time job.

Some bring in a part-time income, when possible, to try covering the many costs they incur. These might include paid therapy for the child or, better still, the whole family. It may mean purchasing items that calm the child, such as weighted blankets or a trained therapy pet.

In some cases, it means investing in specialized aids such as glasses that reduce the glare of overstimulating lights.

Another thing each parent has in common is the struggle just to get a diagnosis through the SHSS. It's a hamster wheel, they say. Once you get on, you're always in motion, but you never get anywhere.

To make matters worse, they have been turned away from provincially funded clinics in other health regions that have the resources to help.

Only by getting a diagnosis do the doors begin to open in terms of professional help and child disability tax credits to ease the financial burden.

All of the parents quoted have been given pseudonyms so that, as one put it, speaking out won't jeopardize the headway they're making in getting support through the SHSS.

SANDY

Sandy lives with her family in St. Adolphe. She has two sons, the youngest of which is 12. She and her husband had concerns over their son's development from early on.

"At a really young age we saw signs of depression," Sandy says. "He had a really hard time handling his emotions... Everything just felt harder for him than it needed to be. He had lots of issues with transitions and change."

Eventually, his behaviour developed into uncontrollable rage.

Around age six, Sandy was referred to a child therapist through the SHSS. The therapist simply told her that proper discipline was needed.

Through seeking a paid counsellor, the parents discovered that childhood aggression is often a response to anxiety. Their son was demonstrating the fight part of the fight-or-flight response.

The alternative response which others may experience—flight—can result in depression and bouts of crying.

The family continued to seek help through local paediatricians. Some paediatricians sought advice from psychiatric professionals who assess and prescribe drugs to a child client without ever seeing the child firsthand. Nothing helped.

Four years later, their son's behaviour was escalating out of control. This time the paediatrician gave them a referral to the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre (MATC).

MATC, operating under the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA), provides some of Manitoba's top services and psychiatric professionals in the field of childhood mental health disorders.

Sandy called for an appointment, only to be let down.

"Our referral was denied because we live outside of Winnipeg," she says. "So then [our paediatrician] referred us to Southern Health to have a psychiatric assessment. We waited for almost a year."

By this time, Sandy's son had become violent, putting the family at risk. Sending him to school was no longer an option.

"We were told that our best resource at this point was to pack him up and take him to the Health Sciences

Centre ER and just throw up our hands and say, 'We need help.'"

Stressed and defeated, that's exactly what they did. Even so, they had to beg and plead at HSC for a rapid assessment on their son so they could get help before he hurt somebody.

He was diagnosed with anxiety and ADHD, but the in-house psychiatrist that day was unable to make a firm autism diagnosis in just one appointment, which is all they were granted.

"We got that assessment and said, 'Great! We can share this with Southern Health and say, 'Hey, look, she's done part of your job.' We know the next step is an autism assessment,'" Sandy said. "And then I was told that Southern Health doesn't do autism assessments... They gave me a list of private places that I could go where you're looking to spend \$2,000 to \$5,000 just to get your child assessed."

Months and many phone calls later, Sandy found support through a Winnipeg-based non-profit called Inspire Community Outreach. With the additional pressure, Sandy's son was accepted into MATC's Intensive Community Re-Integration Services (ICRS) program at the HSC.

"It's basically a mini school [for children like my son]," she says. "There's only about ten kids there... It's taught by teachers who have extra mental health training so they can really watch a kid to know which medication is working or whether they need to tweak it because they see it all the time and they know what they're looking for."

Psychiatrists, psychologists, and occupational therapists are on staff every day.

After six months at the ICRS, her son demonstrated such a marked improvement that he could be transitioned back to regular school along with what Sandy calls a "user manual" to instruct teachers and school admin on how to accommodate his special needs.

"[My son] now knows all of the things that he needs as well so we're now seeing him advocating for himself."

Sandy says that requiring parents to go through such an intense degree of advocacy, energy, determination, and sacrifice is absurd. If services weren't available, that would be one thing. But when they are available to some families and not others, that's a problem that needs to be fixed.



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Sandy's son is now making daily strides in the right direction. The trauma it took to get him there, though, means the whole family is in therapy, at their own expense.

DANA

Dana, another mom from St. Adolphe, has been fighting to get a diagnosis for her 11-year-old daughter. After years of trying, she finally got a diagnosis and her suspicions were confirmed: her daughter is autistic.

"We had to go to a child health advocate just to get Southern Health and MATC to actually see our daughter," says Dana. "To get the autism diagnosis, I had to pay out of pocket because Southern Health wouldn't give us one."

It would've been a free diagnosis for a Winnipeg family.

"I know of a couple of families just in St. Adolphe that are going through the exact same thing where they're having to pay out of pocket. Or, if they don't have the money, their kids are just suffering because they don't have access to services."

Prior to 2020, Dana's daughter struggled in ways that many autistic children do. But she was able to attend school.

During the pandemic, however, her daughter was afflicted with such severe anxiety that the slightest trigger threw her into panic attacks. Soon her fears got the better of her and she couldn't leave the house.

Dana is now at home full-time with her daughter, trying to provide home-schooling. The Seine River School Division has told her there's nothing they can do if her daughter can't physically attend classes.

"[If we lived] in the city, they would actually provide us with someone that would come to our home and form a relationship with her and slowly help get her back to school," says Dana. "But because we live ten minutes outside of the city, there are no resources for that."

When not home-schooling, Dana is on the phone. Thanks to an advocacy organization she found, a local psychiatrist is fighting to get her help through the services provided by MATC.

"He did say it may not happen because of so much bureaucratic red tape," says Dana. "If they won't see her, we don't know what the next steps would be. There's really no one else [in the public system]. It will likely cost us a fortune through the private system."

LINDSAY

Lindsay, also of St. Adolphe, has a son whose mental health struggles began around the time he started Kindergarten. The situation progressed to the point where, at age ten, he's beginning to self-harm.

For years, she too has fought to have her son diagnosed so he can receive treatment to ease his depression. Unfortunately, the paediatrician referred him for psychiatric assessment but indicated on the boy's chart that autism may play a factor.

Lindsay doesn't believe her son is autistic. Because of that footnote on the file, the psychiatrist declined to see her son. She's been unsuccessful in getting treatment in the SSHS.

"It seems like as soon as you say the A-word, they want nothing to do with you," Lindsay says. "At one point we just threw our hands up and said, 'We're just going to have to figure this out on our own.'"

Then the pandemic struck.

Along with depression, her son developed certain ticks and could no longer deal with the idea of attending school.

Luckily, she happened upon a program offering free therapy for children struggling with reintegration to school due to anxiety. It was a short-term program provided by the government through an organization called Kid Think.

"It was the most amazing thing at the best possible time."

Just one therapeutic evaluation, Lindsay adds, resulted in a prescription for medication that is helping. But the program ended after a couple of sessions and the family was expected to pay out of pocket after that.

"All my son wanted was someone to talk to. At some point you just feel defeated as a parent. I'm now worried about my own mental health."

HAILEY

Hailey is a Niverville mom with a 13-year-old son who was diagnosed with autism at age three in the U.S. She's thankful they received the diagnosis before moving into the SHSS region.

Another factor that plays to Hailey's advantage is that her husband is also autistic, giving the couple some knowledge of what they were in for.

To better understand autistic people, she relates their brains to computer systems.

"Autism is not a processing error," she says. "It's just a different operating system."

Hailey knew her child was different within days of his birth. At times she found herself in the local emergency department, unravelling because her newborn had gone 26 hours without sleep.

As he matured, he was mostly mute. With access to quality speech therapy, he began building on his vocabulary—until, just weeks in, he exploded into full sentences. Hailey says it was the therapist who recommended they quit therapy, as the boy's vocabulary quickly rose well above average for children his age.

Interestingly, the ability to verbalize his thoughts put an end to his regular outbursts. As a young teen, he now frequently demonstrates brilliance.

"My son could tell you the gross domestic product of virtually every country in the world, their capital city, and their population density," Hailey says. "When you have a special interest that powerful, you absorb everything. If I watched a video that included the gross domestic product of ten countries, I wouldn't remember a single one of them when I was done. But he'll remember them all, forever."

He's also a math genius, she says, but that doesn't reflect in his grades at school because he finds the stress of writing a test so overwhelming that he can't complete one.

Like many autistic children, Hailey's son is easily overstimulated and had to develop strategies to process his emotions. It's something most children learn to do naturally, she says. From a young age, the average child will turn to soothers, special blankets, or stuffed animals.

For Hailey's son, stimming is the answer. When overstimulated, he jumps up and down and flaps his arms. It works so well that most of the time he's not even aware he's doing it.

"I think it's adorable when he flaps," says Hailey. "When I watch him through the window as he goes to school, he almost never walks. He gallops. I see him gallop and I know that means he's happy."

Even with an autism diagnosis, Hailey says that getting support for her son in the SHSS has been like pulling teeth.

"I can't count the number of times I've heard about a service and looked into it. And they say, 'Oh yes, we do this and we do that.' And then they ask where I live and say, 'Oh, sorry, it only applies if you live in Winnipeg.'"

The system forces parents to become pushy, as that's the only way to get anywhere.

Recently, Hailey says she was lucky enough to be offered free therapy sessions for her son, thanks to an acquaintance.

"The ten sessions that we were lucky enough to get, he loved. He's been asking for therapy since he was eight."

But therapy for autistic clients can run upwards of \$300 per hour, she says, not something her family can afford.

She says a few things should be provided to every family with children with developmental problems, without cost and without delay. This includes therapy for the entire family.

"For us, there wasn't that grieving process when our son was diagnosed because we don't see autism that way," Hailey says. "But for many people, they're grieving the loss of what they expected."

Secondly, she says, information should be provided to parents with all the resources available, rather than leaving them on their own to fight their way through a messy system.

Finally, schools and daycares should be automatically equipped with sensory rooms. These safe spaces have walls in neutral colours, are dimly lit, and provide a calm atmosphere, giving autistic children an opportunity to self-regulate.

Some shopping centres are catching on by providing sensory-friendly times when the glaring lights are dimmed and canned music is turned off.

"Those things are huge," Hailey says. "They make all the difference in the world."

SOUTHERN HEALTH AND SHARED HEALTH RESPOND

Jessica Deckert, an SHSS spokesperson, says they have developed the Child and Adolescent Community Mental Health Program (CACMHP), which provides assessment and treatment to school-age children between six and 18.

Many childhood specialists in the SHSS are trained to teach adaptive skills by way of cognitive behavioural therapy, exposure and response prevention therapy, and dialectical behavioural therapy, which teaches mindfulness, distress tolerance, and emotion regulation.

"Psychology and psychiatry consultations can be arranged when they are determined to be necessary," Deckert says, adding that, in the SHSS, they won't diagnose for autism.

The SHSS doesn't offer mental health services for children of

preschool age. Prior to age six, parents need to visit their family physician for a diagnosis.

Every physician, she says, has access to a service called Rapid Access to Consultative Expertise where they can receive advice and assistance from psychiatric specialists.

Even so, Deckert admits, many physicians are out of their comfort zone in providing diagnoses, even with outside guidance. In these cases, parents may need to seek other physicians until they find one who is willing to take that step.

But physicians also have the ability to make referrals, which is often what they choose to do. Generally speaking, Deckert says clients would be referred to Specialized Services for Children and Youth (SSCY) in Winnipeg. SSCY falls under the jurisdiction of the WRHA.

"On a case-by-case basis, we have been able to advocate with families to access certain services," says Deckert. "[Parents] are always welcome to call into the access helpline and our access clinicians are able to pre-screen to help them identify areas where those things might be best served."

As for wait lists that stretch over years at a time, Deckert says the SHSS is working on it.

The Citizen also contacted Shared Health, which oversees the regional health authorities.

"We recognize the high and increasing demand for mental health services across the province, and that resources need to be enhanced and expanded to help meet demand," the spokesperson said. "This is also true when it comes to the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment for children with neurodevelopmental disorders, including autism spectrum disorder."

While MATC specializes in this field, they say, alternative supports may be found at the Strongest Families Institute, Learning Disabilities Association of Manitoba, or Canadian Mental Health Association Manitoba.

"Often treatment for children with the symptoms and behaviour common in ASD can start without a diagnosis, by providing strategies to parents, school staff, other care providers and to children themselves. This will typically start with information and education and build to more intensive therapies or services."

But why can't parents access resources cross-regionally, since they are all funded by Shared Health?

No answer was provided.

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Super Citizen: Gerald Loeppky, Community Devotee

By Jennifer Lavin

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In this series, The Citizen profiles locals who strive to make our little corner of Manitoba a better place. Each month, we feature a person, family, or organization that helps brighten the world in some way. If you have someone in mind for a future month, please nominate them: jlavin@nivervillecitizen.com.

This month's Super Citizen is Gerald Loeppky, born and raised in and around Niverville—and throughout his life he's remained here, volunteering and helping to make the community a better place.

Loeppky started his career working for Manitoba Agriculture, an organization he remained with for more than 17 years. Afterward, he owned a furniture store in St. Pierre for a decade.

At that point he was involved in a serious motorcycle accident that dramatically changed the course of his life. He sold his business, unable to work due to nerve damage and pain in his legs.

The next two years saw him make a slow recovery.

That's when the board of the MCC Thrift Store in Niverville asked if he would like to join their team.

"I decided to commit to one year of helping the store while I was still trying to figure out what my recovery would be like," Loeppky says. "So I did that for one year and fell in love with working with all the



Gerald Loeppky of Niverville.

✉ MARISKA LOEPPKY

volunteers. Then I went back to the board and told them I could continue. I continued to work at the store for 15 years until my retirement."

Merris Dyck, who worked with Loeppky at the MCC before taking over as manager of the store in recent years, speaks highly of him.

"His love of people is evident in how he interacted with the customers and volunteers alike," Dyck says. "He just loves people."

Throughout Loeppky's changes in vocation over the years, he never lost his passion for volunteerism.

After six years as youth leader at his church, he went on to serve on its board, then as vice-chairperson, and finally as chairperson. He also served as Elder of Education and Elder of Missions.

Loeppky remembers his years as Elder of Education as being particularly rewarding. During that time, he helped create new programs which

proved so popular that the church had to recruit volunteers from other churches to run them.

"All of that was not because of my doing," he stresses. "It was because of the people working with me. And that is true for everything I've touched. It's never one person. It's the team that comes around you. I've been very blessed to have had good teams around me."

Dan Macloskie, the pastor of care and discipleship at Niverville Community Fellowship, says that Loeppky is the sort of person whom anyone would want to have as a part of their group.

"When he is committed to something, he is dependable to see it through," says Macloskie. "He has a strong sense of loyalty and will consistently step up to help when there is need. This is attested to by a long list of people who have been impacted by his generosity."

Loeppky also points to his work with Niverville's baseball program as representing a major accomplishment.

When his children were young, he was asked to preside over the Niverville Baseball Association. Under his leadership, the organization grew from one or two teams to 16 or more teams. A booming T-ball league also developed.

Again, though, he stresses that despite his position in leadership, it was thanks to the volunteers that the sport thrived in Niverville. The growth was the result of efforts made by the entire community.

During these years, Loeppky also coached hockey for 15 years.

He is proud of this long period of involvement with local sports, primarily because it allowed him to help kids—both his own kids and others.

"I'm a dad who believes that parents need to be where their kids are," he says. "If my kids are there, I need to be involved."

Now adults, his children seem to want to be where he is too. At Loeppky's retirement party a few months back, many people sang his praises—including his children and grandchildren.

"It was an honour to attend the party," says his daughter-in-law Mariska. "It was an opportunity for my kids and niece and nephew to witness the impact that the years of service their grandpa gave to the community had on so many."



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Rendering of the expanded municipal office in St. Adolphe.

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Ritchot Municipal Office Expansion Ready to Roll

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
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On May 17, Ritchot's council voted unanimously in favour of entering into a contractual agreement with Pretium Projects Ltd for the \$2.6 million expansion of the municipal office and community outdoor space.

According to CAO Mitch Duval, the work may begin later this month.

The 4,200-square-foot addition will connect to the east end of the existing building and branch northward.

Once complete, it will more than double the municipal building's existing space.

The addition will include a completely new board room, council chambers, and reception area. Office space will be sufficient to accommodate an increase in staff as the municipality grows.

"The RM is incredibly excited over this long overdue and much-needed overhaul

of the municipal office," says Mayor Chris Ewen. "We will now have dedicated space for all of our employees, plus the old board room and council chambers will be repurposed for business incubation and smaller events to support the needs of the community."

The grounds surrounding the municipal building are also earmarked for a major facelift.

An outdoor community gathering space is planned for the area, joining the municipal building to the neighbouring St. Adolphe Childcare Centre. Here, residents will enjoy a section of greenspace, pickleball and basketball courts, an outdoor stage, and a market area.

A total of four tenders were received for the construction of the multimillion-dollar facility. Pretium Projects Ltd delivered the lowest bid.

"It was slightly higher than our anticipated budget of \$2.4 to \$2.5 million, but [these] are the original budgeted

numbers back from two or three years ago," Duval told council at the May 17 meeting. "And, of course, due to inflation and everything going on in the world, I think we're very fortunate to have the \$2.6 number come forward."

Their low bid, he says, may in part be a result of the fact that they are the same company tendered to work on both the St. Adolphe and IDC daycare facilities.

Plans for the municipal building expansion began back in 2020 and were presented to the public as part of the 2022 financial plan.

The entire cost of the build will be funded through the RM's reserves, eliminating the need for any increase in taxes or borrowing.

Partnering with the RM on the project are the Canada Community Revitalization Fund, the Building Sustainable Communities Program, the Ritchot CDC, and the CDEM.

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If you have any concerns related to menopause, pelvic floor therapy could be the right answer or you



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IN BRIEF

Southeast Under Fire Restrictions

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
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As of May 26, parts of southeastern Manitoba are under fire and off-road travel restrictions. Extreme temperatures, wind, and drought conditions are the cause.

The area under restriction includes cottage country and the forested areas in the extreme southeast.

Level one travel restrictions apply to motorized backcountry travel, including ATVs and other off-road vehicles. Travel is prohibited between noon and 7:00 p.m.

“Burn permits for essential agricultural, municipal, or industrial operations may be considered with the approval of a conservation officer and will include a site inspection with strict conditions,” the province says.

The RM of Tache has implemented burn restrictions. So far, the RMs of Hanover and Ritchot, as well as Niverville, have yet to set additional burning restrictions beyond their usual regulations.

New Niverville Shop Offers Computer and Electronics Support

By Sara Beth Dacombe

sdacombe@nivervillecitizen.com

Kade Babiak is pleased to announce the opening of his new business, Compufix Solutions, in Niverville.

Located at 61 Main Street, the office includes a service desk, a small worktable with magnifying lamp and other specialized equipment for fixing tiny electronic parts, and a retail section featuring a modest laptop selection and aftermarket computer supplies.

From laptops and PCs to game systems, components, small electronics, cables, security cameras, and office supplies, Babiak says he can help with almost any computer and electronic need imaginable.

Babiak is local to southeastern Manitoba, having lived in St. Malo for most of his life. He has a computer services technician certificate from CDI College and has been operating a computer-building and repair shop out of his home in St. Malo for more than seven years.

He has an appreciation for small-town living and has already enjoyed serving many customers throughout the region. When he began looking for commercial space, he took his time before finding the right spot.

“Me and my dad would come to Niverville and we’d go fishing where the Rat River meets the Red down here, and we’d stop at the Chinese restaurant,” says Babiak. “Over the years, I always had a good feeling about Niverville. I had a



Kade Babiak has opened a computer repair business in Niverville. SARA BETH DACOMBE

good vibe and it always seemed like a great town. In the past few years, I wanted to open a storefront and I had a few opportunities in other towns, but I told myself, ‘I’m going to wait. If I’m going to open a store, it has to be in Niverville and it has to be in a good location.’ And I think I’ve nailed it.”

As a client of Niverville Physiotherapy, a previous tenant at 61 Main Street, Babiak was familiar with the space. When he saw it had become available, he was immediately interested. He calls it a great location with lots of foot traffic, positioned across from the bank and right next door to the post office.

“This has become my primary workspace,” he says. “It’s a nice, new, bright space and I feel at home here. Niverville is so welcoming.”

Babiak, who says that he’d already built a reputation for being the go-to guy for computer fixes in St. Malo, offers many services. Whatever people need for their home or business, he is confident he can meet it.

“It is fun building gaming

computers, but it’s just as satisfying getting something fixed than making something new,” says Babiak. “Solving a problem is just as exciting to me as building something new with no problems. If someone walks in and says, ‘I know what’s wrong,’ then I say, ‘Well, that’s why I’m here.’”

Babiak describes himself as a hard worker and self-made businessperson. He says that his passion for computers and electronics drives him to stay up to date on the latest technology. He also calls himself a critical, meticulous thinker and tenacious problem-solver.

He appreciates working independently and looks forward to getting to know other business owners in the area.

Babiak says he will continue to serve customers from St. Malo, largely by operating a drop-off and pick-up arrangement while he focuses on providing service out of his new location.

Walk-in traffic is also welcome—and if he can’t get a job done immediately, he will provide

an estimate as to when it can be completed.

As interest in his business picks up, Babiak also seeks to inform customers about the parking situation. The units at 61 Main Street have had several commercial and residential units over the years. In an effort to distinguish between customer parking and tenant or visitor parking, the space in front of the building is now defined as business parking. Several large boulders form the boundary between each parking area and Babiak says he understands that his customers are welcome to park in the lot on the south side of the building.

Babiak has also added his own signage to the front of 61 Main Street to help inform customers looking for parking.

He adds that he plans to hold a grand opening soon. And given his location on Main Street, he looks forward to participating in the upcoming fair.

Babiak had one free tip to offer for anyone with a broken phone or computer and is wondering what to do.

“If you’re not sure about something and want to try to fix it yourself, there are a lot of online tutorials that are pretty good,” he says. “If you like to repair things and give it a try, that could work. Sometimes, though, trying to fix it yourself can make things worse. My advice is to stop before that happens. Stop fiddling and come and see me.”

Whichever type of customer you are, Babiak says he’s here to help.

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FRIDAY JUNE 9 | SCHEDULE

DAY OF GATE ADMISSION: GENERAL \$20.00 | YOUTH \$5.00
KIDS UNDER 5 ARE FREE | YOUTH - AGES 5-11

TIME	DESCRIPTION	TIME	DESCRIPTION
5:30 P.M.	Admission Gates Opens	6:45 P.M.	4 Fabuki Daiko
	J Kids Zone Opens	7:00 P.M.	A Men in Cheap Suits
	1 Show 'n' Shine Car Show	8:30 P.M.	5 Extreme Motocross
	2 Wonder Shows Midway Opens		J Kids Zone Closes
	Street Market Opens	8:45 P.M.	5 Globe of Death
	H Liquor Sales Open	9:00 P.M.	A Revenge of the 80's
5:45 P.M.	5 Extreme Motocross	11:00 P.M.	3 Blackout Fireworks
6:00 P.M.	5 Globe of Death	11:15 P.M.	G The Coveralls
6:15 P.M.	4 Prairie Soul Dance Co & The Dancin' Dads	12:30 A.M.	H Liquor Sales Close

SATURDAY JUNE 10 | SCHEDULE

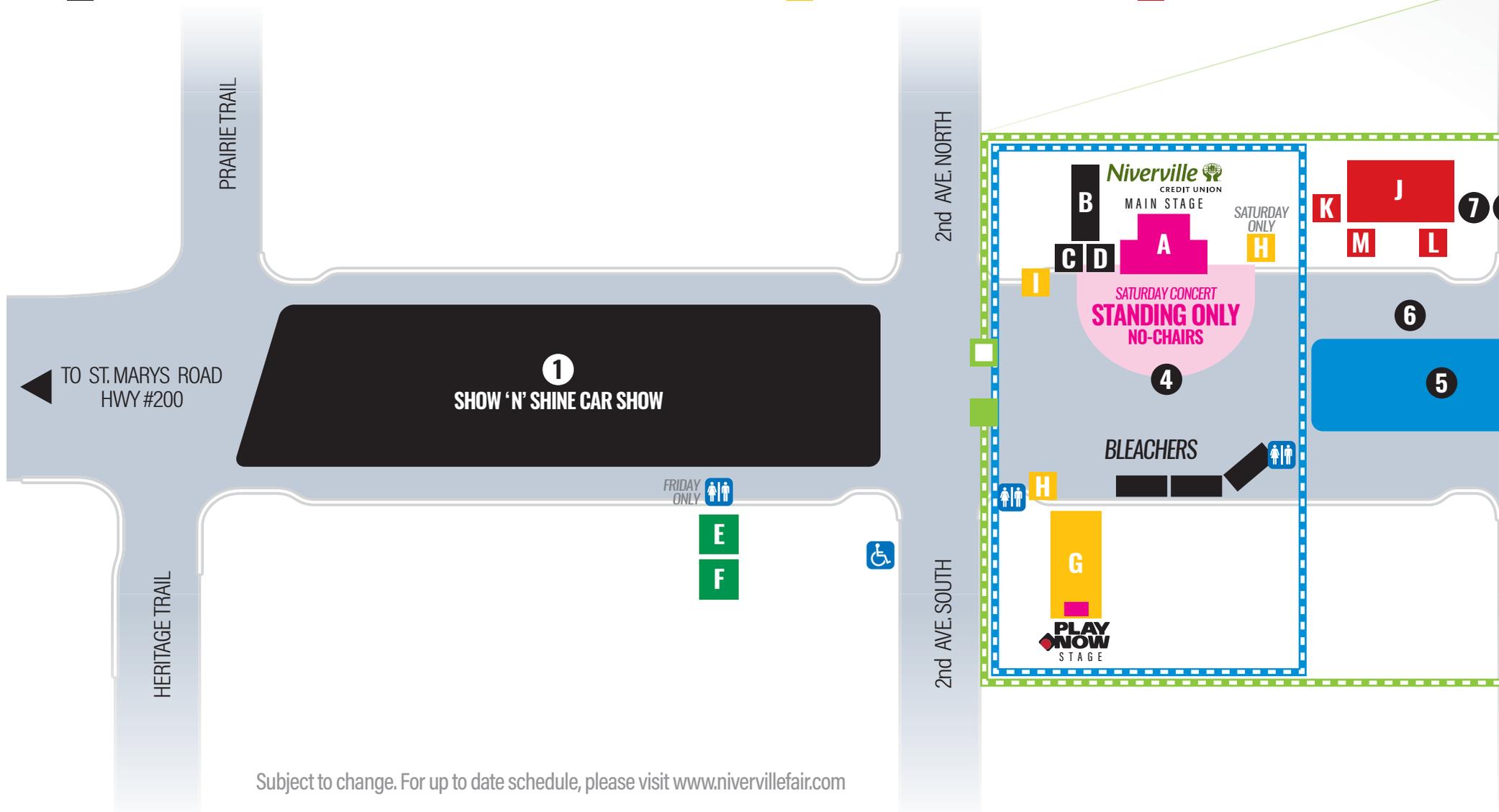
DAY OF GATE ADMISSION: GENERAL \$20.00 | YOUTH \$5.00
KIDS UNDER 5 ARE FREE | YOUTH - AGES 5-11

TIME	DESCRIPTION	TIME	DESCRIPTION
8:00 A.M.	E Niverville Firefighter Pancake Breakfast	5:15 P.M.	5 Extreme Motocross
11:00 A.M.	F Niverville Credit Union BBQ	5:30 P.M.	5 Globe of Death
	Admission Gates Open	5:45 P.M.	G Billie Irish
12:00 P.M.	Parade	7:00 P.M.	A The Heels
	2 Wonder Shows Midway Opens		J Kids Zone Closes
	Street Market Opens	7:30 P.M.	5 Extreme Motocross
1:00 P.M.	J Kids Zone Opens	7:45 P.M.	5 Globe of Death
	H Liquor Sales Open	8:00 P.M.	A Tim & The Glory Boys
2:00 P.M.	G The Dumpster Fires	9:00 P.M.	5 Extreme Motocross
3:00 P.M.	5 Extreme Motocross	9:15 P.M.	5 Globe of Death
3:15 P.M.	5 Globe of Death	9:30 P.M.	A JADE EAGLESON
3:30 P.M.	A Matt Falk	11:00 P.M.	G Last Call
4:00 P.M.	G Dept. of Human Resources	12:30 A.M.	H Liquor Sales Close

- A** NIVERVILLE CREDIT UNION MAIN STAGE
- T** TICKET BOOTH
- P** PRE-PURCHASED TICKET ENTRANCE
- B** COMMAND CENTRE / OFFICE
- C** VOLUNTEER REGISTRATION
- D** SECURITY/LOST & FOUND

- F** FAIRGROUNDS / FENCING
- E** TOONIE PANCAKE BREAKFAST
- F** NIVERVILLE CREDIT UNION BBQ
- S** STREET MARKET
- W** WASHROOMS
- H** HANDICAPPED PARKING

- L** LICENSED AREA
- G** TRANS CANADA BREWING BEER GARDEN
- H** BEER / COOLER BAR
- I** BEER / COOLER TICKET SALES
- J** KIDS ZONE
- K** KIDDIE RIDE
- L** JUMBO GAMES
- M** CLIMBING WALL

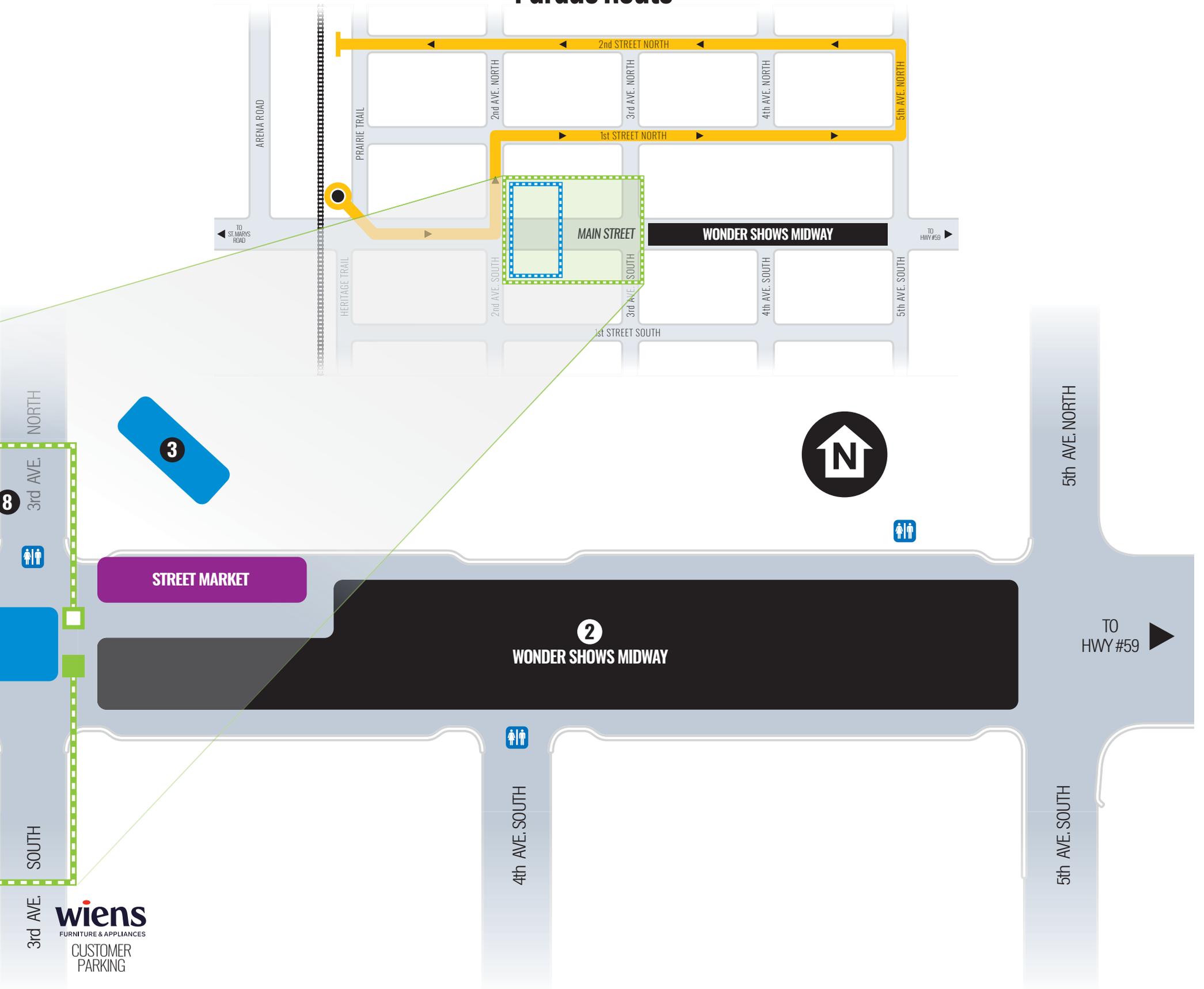


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Ste. Agathe Resident Appeals for Dike Relocation

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

Since October 2022, one Ste. Agathe resident has been vigilantly working to save his land from being deemed forever idle and unproductive.

On May 17, Guy St. Hilaire made a heartfelt appeal to Ritchot's council for help in his battle.

His request was that council petition the provincial government on his behalf to relocate the southeast corner of the community dike, moving it 160 feet outward in order to absorb a section of his land within the protected area.

With the province's recent proposal to rebuild the ring dike to meet a one-in-200-year flood standard, St. Hilaire believes this may be the most opportune time to make his request.

St. Hilaire, who owns more than 18 acres of land outside the dike, has been planning for decades to develop a small section of his land into 24 residential lots. So far he's been met with roadblocks and frustration the whole way.

"Considering what we are up against for the development of our property as rural residential [located] outside of the dike, we find ourselves with no other option but to request that the dike be moved," St. Hilaire told council, "thus providing for the future development of the inside of the flood protected system of Ste. Agathe and recapturing some very usable



Ste. Agathe, Manitoba.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

property."

In October 2022, St. Hilaire first sat before the Macdonald-Ritchot Planning District, asking them to reconsider the classification of his parcel of land. The land, according to the new development plan draft, would be deemed protected under an Environmental Policy (EP) designation.

"It elaborates on what EP should be, basically [reducing it] to park space for wildlife and as a blending of nature with the community," said St. Hilaire. "It basically states, in not so many words, that there will be no development on the southeast side of the dike on our property... The draft has removed any possibility of exceptions in its intent."

In response to requests from St. Hilaire and others to revise the draft, the MRPD

returned with a second public meeting in March 2023.

For St. Hilaire, however, nothing had changed.

According to St. Hilaire, what the MRPD did was change the designation of someone else's river lot which abutted his own.

"The MRPD and provincial authorities have approved the removal of river lot 507 [from the EP] designation," St. Hilaire said. "We do not object to this, but I'm only mentioning it for the purpose of fairness."

To make his case, St. Hilaire told council that the small parcel of land he's trying to develop has stood well above flood levels even in the worst flood years.

While it lies near the riverbank, its development would not negatively affect the riverbank, as this stretch of the river is well protected

by trees and has no snaking curves, which would make it more susceptible to erosion.

"Anyone that has spent the time to examine this information would agree that some part of this land is suitable for rural residential," St. Hilaire said. "Rural residential has recently been allowed in much more flood-prone areas within the MRPD [region]. This [development plan] shuts the door... to us ever developing this land."

Feeling that his appeals to the MRPD have fallen on deaf ears, St. Hilaire acknowledged that the relocation of the dike may be his last chance at providing the community of Ste. Agathe with some much-needed development space.

When the original ring dike was built after the flood of 1997, St. Hilaire requested that his property remain outside the dike. The hope was to create rural residential properties at the time.

Over the years, he says that his development plans have always been looked upon favourably by councils and MRPD boards.

Everything changed for him when the new development plan was drafted in 2022.

"If we have erred in the past due to our decision on the location of the dike, it was with the blessing of the RM and the province at the time," St. Hilaire told council. "Due to the upgrade of the dike to the 200-year flood protection level, we now have the opportunity to correct past errors."



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We see how patient our Lord is in the life of Christ. Christ’s disciples did not understand what he was coming to do, even though he reminded them repeatedly, confronting them with who he was. The disciples did not see until after Jesus was raised from the dead. We who believe in the Christ who rose from the dead have the same experience. Christians remain sinful, but God is working in each life so that we die to sin and live for God. “A broken reed He will not break and a dimly burning wick he will not extinguish.”

Pastor James Zekveld
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Public Libraries Face Accusations of Promoting Pornography

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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For nearly a year, a battle has been waging in the city of Winkler, and the local public library is at the heart of it.

On the offensive is a group of passionate parents who are facing off with their city council, demanding that they deny funding to the South Central Regional Library (SCRL) which oversees branches in Altona, Manitou, Miami, Morden, and Winkler.

The reason, they argue, is that the SCRL has declined to remove children’s books from their shelves that fall into the category of sexual and gender education.

The parent group claims that their motive is not censorship but rather to have the books removed on the basis that they represent pornography.

THE BOOKS AND THE ARGUMENTS

The specific books under fire include two written by award-winning Canadian author Cory Silverberg called *What Makes a Baby* and *Sex Is a Funny Word*.

The first is written and illustrated with young children in mind and the topic of intercourse is not discussed in its pages.

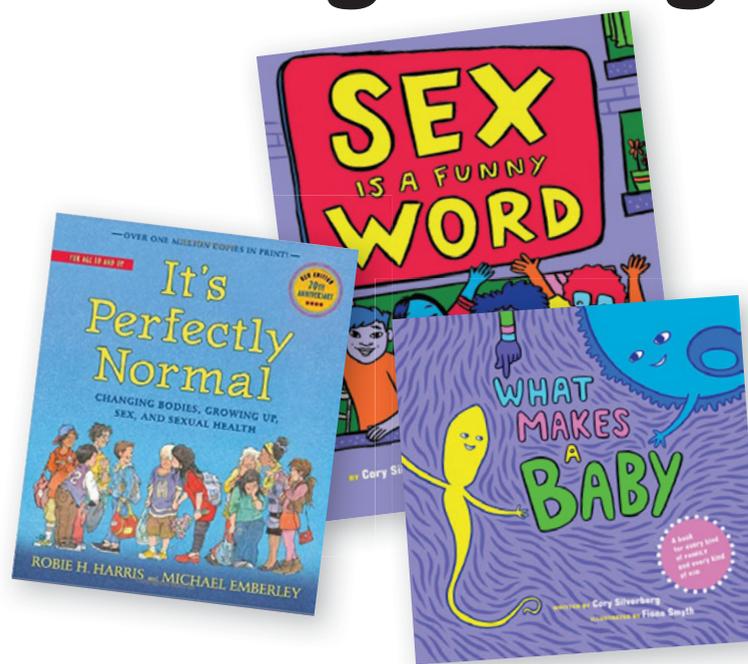
The second, illustrated in comic book style, is intended for a slightly older audience and covers topics such as gender differences and establishing boundaries for touching.

Finally, the third book, called *It’s Perfectly Normal: Changing Bodies, Growing Up, Sex, Gender, and Sexual Health*, was written by award-winning children’s author Robie H. Harris for pre- and early teens.

First released more than 25 years ago, Harris’s updated version now includes current topics such as abortion, sexual abuse, and how to stay safe in an online world.

Winkler resident Karin Banman has been a vocal advocate for the parent group from the beginning. Frustrated with the SCRL’s decision to keep the books on their shelves, even though they are kept in the age-appropriate sections, Banman attended Winkler council’s budget public hearing on March 14 to plead for a SCRL defunding.

She also presented a petition



with more than 1,700 signatures from local residents who concur with her resolution.

“To keep books such as these in the library is to create an unsafe environment for children and to place them at undue risk,” Banman told council.

A second resident, also referencing the books as porn, took to the podium presenting council with an alternative to defunding.

“Withholding money in order to achieve a purpose creates conflict,” he said. “The library that we have here in Winkler is a very valuable place for a lot of people... I do want all of us to be careful when we demand something that maybe will come back to haunt us.”

An alternative, he said, would be to require the local library board to implement a policy change so that books containing sexual content need to be signed out by an adult. Encouragement for this approach would need to come from council.

According to one news source, Winkler’s mayor took that to heart, sending a request to the SCRL board to review their policy on how books like these are displayed.

A LOCAL REGIONAL LIBRARY AND HSD WEIGH IN

Without a doubt, library directors across southern Manitoba have been watching the spectacle with rapt attention, wondering if the movement will come this way.

The Ritchot library director declined comment to *The Citizen* on the subject.

material.

They also adhere to a Collection Development Policy created specifically for the JEL.

“The presence of an item in the Jake Epp Library’s collection is an affirmation of the principle of intellectual freedom,” the policy states. “The following will not cause an item to be removed or excluded from the collection: race, religion, nationality or political views of an author, frankness or coarseness of language, controversial content, endorsement or disapproval from an individual or group.”

The superintendent of the Hanover School Division (HSD), Shelley Amos, says that the responsibility of book selection for school libraries in the division falls to the personnel within each school, although the division may look to the public or the division for recommendations.

Even so, she says, significant care is taken to make sure that materials are presented in ways that will match the child’s age and emotional maturity, among other factors.

“The selection of learning resources on controversial issues is directed toward maintaining a balanced collection representing various views,” Amos says. “The input of parents in these matters is welcomed. However, no parent has the right to determine reading, viewing, or listening matter for students other than their [own] children.”

THE PROTECTION OF INTELLECTUAL FREEDOM IN CANADA

Endorsed by the JEL and libraries across the nation are the principles laid out by the Canadian Federation of Library Associations in its statement on intellectual freedom and libraries.

The statement states: “Libraries have a core responsibility to safeguard and facilitate access to constitutionally protected expressions of knowledge, imagination, ideas, and opinion, including those which some individuals and groups consider unconventional, unpopular or unacceptable. To this end, in accordance with their mandates and professional values and standards, libraries provide, defend and promote equitable access to the widest possible variety of expressive content and resist calls for censorship

However, Chrystie Kroeker Boggs, library director for the Jake Epp Library (JEL) in Steinbach, had a few things to say.

“I haven’t personally seen or read the books that are being challenged in Winkler, so I won’t make a statement on those three specifically,” says Boggs. “However, I wholeheartedly support the Canadian Library Association’s statement on intellectual freedom and believe it to be imperative that public libraries make information of all legal forms available to patrons. I support SCRL’s similar stance and the effort they’re putting in to ensuring the members of their community have pertinent resources available to them. Freedom and access for one group means freedom and access for all groups.”

Boggs adds that the books being challenged in Winkler aren’t stocked at the JEL but would be considered, like any other special request, if someone were to ask for them.

Other age-appropriate materials pertaining to the human body and sexuality are carried in their juvenile non-fiction section, aimed at readers from eight years old and up.

An administrative team looks after the acquisition of new books for the library’s shelves.

To help guide their decision-making process, Boggs says they consult reviews from verified sources and other libraries as well as take into consideration the reputation of the publisher who stands behind the written

and the adoption of systems that deny or restrict access to resources.”¹

WHAT LOCAL PARENTS SAY

The Citizen put out a call to local parents to share their opinion regarding public library availability of children’s books on sexuality and the human body.

Some parents voiced support for the decision made by the SCRL.

Another agreed but felt restrictions on books pertaining to sex and the human body were needed.

This particular parent requested anonymity given the sensitivity of the subject. She is the mother of middle-school-age children.

“In my opinion, these books should be in the adult section of a library, where an actively curious preteen would still be able to find them but would remove the chance of a child who is not ready to be exposed to them,” this mom says.

She admits to not appreciating books on sexual education targeted at children but doesn’t believe in banning them either. Their placement in a library, she says, is crucial so that children who aren’t ready won’t be unnecessarily exposed.

“These books teach one perspective, and it is not one that is accepted by all,” she adds. “I personally want to be able to have open conversations with my kids about sex and relationships and I don’t want them to read a book like this without being aware [first].”

Rebecca Bilsky says that she wants sex education for her kids to be different than it was for her as a child.

For Bilsky, sex education focused primarily on warnings not to get pregnant.

“I have a nine-year-old boy,” Bilsky says. “I would absolutely prefer that my kid secretly went to the library and read one of those books without me knowing than secretly went on the internet to find God knows what. Or talked to other kids on the playground.”

Bilsky borrowed the book *It’s Perfectly Normal* from her public library about a year ago and used it as a tool to discuss sexuality with her child.

“As well as consulting experts in health, the [author] consults other voices in the sex ed conversation, including religious leaders,” says

Bilsky. “I was surprised and impressed. That seemed to me like a very accommodating inclusion.”

Another benefit of using the book as a parental tool, she adds, is that it opened up conversations about things she’d never thought about, as well as issues and questions she had no experience in, like risk management of sexually transmitted disease.

Jessica Galli is a mom to three children under four years of age.

“I think it is extremely important for children to learn all parts of the body and how it functions,” Galli says. “These ‘sensitive’ topics need to be shared with our children so they are aware. It is better that they have literature they can understand along with parent-provided information rather than finding out this information through different channels that may not provide accurate details. The alternative channels do not educate on the relationships and do not provide information on consent and healthy bodily habits and relationships.”

Sara Dacombe’s kids are 11 and 14. She’s been following the news regarding what’s happening in Winkler and has heard that similar parental requests for the removal of books from public libraries are growing in this area as well.

“The book-banning requests that have escalated in southern Manitoba are very concerning to me,” Dacombe says. “Censorship of regional public libraries is wrong.”

She says that she understands that many parents are just struggling to try and maintain their child’s innocence in a world with overly sexualized messaging all around them.

“Learning about sex does not make children less innocent,” she argues. “It does, however, keep them [from being] naive and unsuspecting. To that point, there is an overwhelming amount of research supporting how sex ed keeps kids safer from exploitation, reduces the age of first sexual experience, and drastically reduces teen pregnancy.”

Dacombe says that by the time a child encounters these kinds of books within their age-appropriate section of the library, those conversations should already be happening at home.

“If our children encounter

information outside of what they are developmentally ready to understand, which is unavoidable in any healthy societal context, it is a parent’s responsibility to facilitate a relationship with their children in which the child can ask questions and receive good information,” she concludes. “If the parent relationship is insufficient to provide this, I am in full support of children asking questions and receiving good information from another appropriate role model.”

THE BOOK-BANNING PHENOMENON SOUTH OF THE BORDER

Since the summer of 2021, the demand to ban books in American libraries and schools has grown into a full-on movement that’s sweeping across states like Texas, Florida, Missouri, Utah, and South Carolina.

This literary culling, dubbed “wholesome bans,” began as a grassroots movement led by parent groups.

PEN America is an advocacy group established in 1922 to protect literary freedom of expression.

“We champion the freedom to write, recognizing the power of the word to transform the world,” PEN America’s website states. “Our mission is to unite writers and their allies to celebrate creative expression and defend the liberties that make it possible.”²

Alarmed by this recent drive to ban books, PEN America has been closely tracking how the movement has affected America’s literary world over the course of the past two years.

From July 2021 to June 2022, PEN America lists 2,532 instances of individual books being banned, affecting 1,648 unique book titles.

In the six-month cycle following, they say, that number has climbed exponentially.

Not surprisingly, 22 percent of the book titles removed from library shelves in the first wave were those containing sexual content of one form or another.

These books included stories that contain details on sexual experiences, stories about teen pregnancy, sexual assault and abortion, as well as non-fiction books on the subjects of puberty, sex, and relationships.

Battle cries have echoed out over what these groups

were calling “pornography geared towards children.”

Another 41 percent of the books banned during that period had LGBTQ+ themes or characters in the story who identified as LGBTQ+ or transgender.

Books with themes revolving around race or racism, or feature characters of colour, are also among those being culled from many public libraries in some U.S. states.

These include memoirs and autobiographies.

According to *BBC News*, a Florida school removed 16 books pending review, including award-winning novels such as *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, citing obscene content.³

A school district near Seattle removed Harper Lee’s classic novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* from the curriculum on the basis of its racial themes and use of racist language.

“The full impact of the book ban movement is greater than can be counted, as ‘wholesale bans’ are restricting access to untold numbers of books in classrooms and school libraries,” the PEN America website states. “This school year, numerous states enacted ‘wholesale bans’ in which entire classrooms and school libraries have been suspended, closed, or emptied of books, either permanently or temporarily. This is largely because teachers and librarians in several states have been directed to catalog entire collections for public scrutiny within short timeframes, under threat of punishment from new, vague laws.”

REFERENCES

¹ “Statement on Intellectual Freedom and Libraries,” Canadian Federation of Library Associations. April 12, 2019 (<https://cfla-fcab.ca/en/guidelines-and-position-papers/statement-on-intellectual-freedom-and-libraries>).

² Kasey Meehan and Jonathan Friedman, “Banned in the USA: State Laws Supercharge Book Suppression in Schools,” PEN America. April 20, 2023 (<https://pen.org/report/banned-in-the-usa-state-laws-supercharge-book-suppression-in-schools>).

³ Anthony Zurcher, “Why Are Certain School Books Being Banned in U.S.?” *BBC News*. February 7, 2022 (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-60261660>).

CITIZEN POLL

Do you support the practice of banning books in schools and public libraries that some parents may find objectionable?

- Yes. If a book contains controversial subject matter, a parent should be able to demand its removal.
- No. Decisions about which books are made available should be left to school officials and librarians.

Have a more nuanced opinion?
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LAST MONTH'S RESULTS:

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.

63%

Not at all. Our council members should act in good faith and make hard decisions without feeling obligated to please the majority.

37%

YOUR COMMENTS:

Public sentiments have their place, but the council process shouldn't stop there. During the public hearing, many of the arguments lacked concrete facts. Studies were cited here and there, but at the end of it just all sorta seemed wishy-washy to me... You have to realize that the proposed abattoir is relatively small, it's certainly nowhere near a full scale operation, with only 5 to 8 employees. In Ritchot's only industrial park, shouldn't we be welcoming businesses with open arms?

I think there is a reasonable balance that should exist, almost naturally. If people find themselves not being represented, then they can vote differently at the next election. Council makes decisions on much more than just public opinion, and generally have a much more comprehensive understanding of an issue than an average citizen will. The public should also respect that council is making decisions with a lot more considerations than public opinion alone, and their job is, literally, to take all of the information and make those tough decisions.

Highway 311 Bridge Fire Deemed Accidental

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On Wednesday, May 10, fire crews in the RM of Hanover were called to two separate bridge fires on the same night, each just miles from New Bothwell. Both bridges were completely destroyed in the process.

Since then, the Office of the Fire Commissioner has concluded its investigation, determining that the fires are deemed to have been “accidental in nature.”

While Hanover fire chief Paul Wiebe was not in a position to comment on the cause, he says there were stubble fires burning in the area of these bridges on Wednesday night when his crews attended to the fires.

Earlier that evening, these field fires were responsible for a hydro pole and shed catching fire near New Bothwell.

One of the bridges is located on Highway 311,



A detour is in effect along Highway 311.

▣ BRENDA SAWATZKY

about two miles east of the New Bothwell turnoff. Three miles of highway have now been cordoned off and a detour created that takes drivers into New Bothwell and along Crown Valley Road to Highway 206.

This blocked-off busy stretch of highway will be an

inconvenience to commuters and emergency vehicles for some time to come.

Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure (MTI) staff were at both burn sites on May 11 in order to assess the damage and create a plan for replacement.

“The costs of damages

will be determined after the assessments are completed,” an MTI spokesperson told *The Citizen*. “MTI anticipates that assessments will be completed in summer 2023.”

The spokesperson was unwilling to comment on how long it may take the province to replace the bridges or whether alternate materials will be used to construct them. As well, no indications were made as to whether the person responsible for the stubble fire will be held liable in any way.

Wiebe says that it took all three of Hanover’s fire crews to attend to the bridge fires. As well, they called in water tankers from Tache and Steinbach to assist Hanover’s four tankers already on site.

The thick black smoke that erupted from the bridges as they burned, he says, was caused by off-gassing from the substances that the timbers were coated with.

“These are wooden bridges that are made of treated timbers,” Wiebe says. “That treated material and creosote that’s on there, it’ll just burn up all that stuff on the outside quickly. It doesn’t mean that it’s immediately not structurally sound. It takes a long time to burn.”

Twenty-four hours after the fire crews were called in, the bridges continued to burn, partly as a result of the many structural joints where embers can smolder and not be doused. As well, Wiebe says, water in the canal made some areas of the bridges’ underbelly difficult for them to reach.

“We could cool it down, but we couldn’t completely extinguish it,” Wiebe says. “We had crews there from Wednesday night when the fires started all the way through to Thursday evening just to keep putting out hotspots. We can’t do that indefinitely.”

When MTI staff arrived on Thursday, the decision was made to dismantle the bridge structures completely to allow oxygen to reach every cranny and rapidly complete the inevitable burn process.

One incident in particular caught the attention of the media and many social media sites the next day. On Wednesday, while the fires raged, a nearby onlooker captured an unusual sight on video: a dark-coloured vehicle entered the burning bridge, disappeared behind a black curtain of smoke, and re-emerged on the other side.

Wiebe says he can’t speak with certainty regarding the identity of the driver of that vehicle, but it would be safe to assume that it was, in fact, one of his fire crew members.

“We drive through a lot of smoke sometimes to get to a fire. So if it was one of our guys, it was within the duty of his job,” Wiebe says. “Anytime we have grass fires, we have to drive through smoke. And sometimes we can’t see at all.”

The Office of the Fire Commissioner would like to issue a reminder to Manitobans not to leave fires burning unattended.

“Check with municipalities if burning restrictions are in place,” they say. “The province will not issue burning permits within areas bordering any municipality where municipal burning restrictions are already in place.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about burn conditions, visit: www.manitoba.ca/wildfire/burn_conditions.html

Current research reinforces that positive father involvement is strongly associated with positive outcomes for children

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF JEANNE MARIE BAUDRY
late of the Town of Niverville in Manitoba, Deceased.

All Claims against the above estate, duly verified by Statutory Declaration, must be filed with the undersigned at their offices, Box 811, 164 Boyne Avenue, Morris, Manitoba, R0G 1K0, on or before the 26th day of July, 2023.

DATED at the Town of Morris, in Manitoba, this 26th day of May, 2023.

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Commentary

Does Shame Help or Hurt?

By Daniel Dacombe

“You should be ashamed of yourself.”

For some people, just reading that brings on painful memories.

Parents, teachers, and other authority figures may have trotted this out at various points for a variety of reasons, but with one general purpose: to make you change.

It might be about a way you behaved in public, or a word you used, or perhaps goofing off in class.

Whatever it was, the intent was to make you feel bad.

Using shame in this way is so common that it's an almost unquestioned tactic in motivating people to change. This use of shame occurs across countries, cultures, and religions. It seems to be part of the human experience.

But does shame actually help us? Does it make it easier for us to stop unwanted behaviours and do better?

The research on shame over the last several decades has been mixed. Some studies have found that feelings of shame can motivate positive behaviour change. When we feel ashamed of our behaviour, we tend to be motivated to change it. People have cited feelings of shame as factors that helped them quit smoking, lose weight, and treat their loved ones better.

In studies that examined factors that help people develop and strengthen good habits, participants have identified shame as a trigger to do things differently in their lives.

This would seem to support the practice of employing shame to produce personal change. If these results stood on their own, it might be safe to conclude that shame is a useful, even necessary tool.

However, there are conflicting reports about the long-term usefulness of shame.

While shame can sometimes drive a change in behaviour, there



are consequences. These have been well-established in the social science literature and include depression, anxiety, uncharacteristic anger, and even some reduced function of the immune system.

In other words, a shamed person may get sick more frequently and for longer periods of time.

The negative impact of shame on the immune system especially might seem bizarre, even unbelievable, until we realize that our thoughts can influence our brain chemistry.

This includes increasing our level of stress hormones. While they can be useful in short bursts, they can cause our minds and bodies to degrade over time.

In addition, because shame typically results from people blaming themselves for personal characteristics that may not be their fault, it can actually cause perceived negative behaviours to increase. Individuals may lose hope that they will ever “be

better.”

For some, experiences of shame can even trigger an externalizing reaction. That is to say that the experience of shame can be so powerfully negative that people look outside themselves to blame others for their own discomfort.

This has been found to be true in a number of interesting research studies, including some that examine the re-offence rates of prisoners after they complete their sentences. When feelings of shame cause them to externalize blame, they are significantly more likely to reoffend.

In these ways, shame may not be a motivator of change. It can actually be a demotivator, becoming a risk factor for the very behaviours that trigger feelings of shame to increase.

Why are the results of shame research so diverse? One issue in studying shame is that there is no single definition of the word that every social scientist has agreed on.

Words like shame, guilt, regret, or embarrassment may be used interchangeably by different social scientists but actually refer to distinct emotional experiences.

The research on shame has suffered as a result, with few researchers able to land on a consistent definition and informed perspective.

Few researchers, that is, until Dr. Brené Brown.

It would be hard to overstate the impact that Brown has had on shame research.

Her 2010 TED Talk, “The Power of Vulnerability,” is one of the most viewed TED Talks of all time. In it, she spoke of shame as an internal expression of self-worth, a running dialogue that tells us: “I’m not good enough... I’m not blank enough. I’m not thin enough, rich enough, beautiful enough, smart enough, promoted enough.” These self-beliefs are the core of shame.

Unlike the dissatisfaction we may

feel regarding our health, past behaviour, and current circumstances, these feelings are connected to a person’s sense of value.

According to Brown, the shame we feel about ourselves can become problematic and self-destructive.

Why? Because these negative and disparaging beliefs about ourselves, at their core, are really about fear—fear that we aren’t good enough to be in connection with others, and fear that we will be alone.

Brown’s work was about more than shame, though. She also uncovered the opposite of shame. She determined that people who weren’t bound by shame were people who had the courage and vulnerability to be wholehearted with themselves and others. These people could reach out to others for connection, and reach towards themselves with understanding and compassion.

Having the courage and vulnerability to show compassion for ourselves, by practicing self-kindness over self-judgment, stops negative shame talk in its tracks.

It takes a great deal of courage to look at ourselves and say, “I’m enough.”

But doing so may be the motivation we need to make the desired changes in our lives, not out of shame but because we deserve to have good and wholehearted lives.

For those who have been trapped by shame, both in their internal dialogue and how they treat others, know this: you needn’t feel ashamed for this. You didn’t choose it.

Simply put, we use shame as a motivator for change in others and ourselves because we learned to do so, just as humans have learned to do for thousands of years.

There is no reason why we cannot unlearn it, and learn to motivate ourselves, our children, and everyone else in our lives through better, healthier means.



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Sports & Recreation

Local Player Wins Silver at Indigenous Hockey Nationals

By Ty Dilello

✉ tdilello@nivervillecitizen.com

Niverville's Ginger Fast has won a silver medal with Team Manitoba at the 2023 National Aboriginal Hockey Championships (NAHC), held this past month at the Seven Oaks Arena in Winnipeg.

The NAHC is the premier forum for elite U18 Indigenous hockey players.

It is the only annual national hockey championship that showcases and celebrates the top male and female Indigenous hockey players from across the country while fostering cultural unity and pride.

The 16-year-old Fast started playing hockey at the Timbits level in Niverville and played all of her hockey in town until she got to the age where she could try out for the Eastman Selects.

Fast has now wrapped up her fourth year of hockey with the Selects.

She was ecstatic when she got the



Ginger Fast takes a shot at the 2023 National Aboriginal Hockey Championships.

NAHC HOCKEY

call confirming that she would have the opportunity to play for Team Manitoba at the National Aboriginal Hockey Championships.

"I was beyond excited and proud to represent my province," Fast says. "It was a crazy experience playing

in this tournament, as the compete level is very fast and there wasn't much downtime in the day. So we were always on the go."

Fast notes that she and her teammates felt closer to their Indigenous heritage after competing in the

tournament.

"We did so many activities that represented our culture," she says. "It was definitely a great tournament, and I'm blessed to be able to play for Indigenous heritage."

Fast and her Team Manitoba

squad rolled through the round-robin portion of the tournament with a record of 4-0, outscoring their opponents 29-2 in the process.

The tournament really kicked off for Manitoba in the semifinals when they dispatched Alberta by a 4-1 score to reach the final.

The gold medal game versus Ontario came down to the wire. It was a back-and-forth affair, with Ontario ultimately winning 2-1. Manitoba was awarded the silver medal for their tight performance.

Fast scored two goals and four assists for six points over the course of the tournament.

"We had an amazing week as a team, and it all came down to the championship game," says Fast. "It was a great competition and a very fun game to play in. We didn't pull off the win in the end, but it's definitely something I will never forget. It was a great atmosphere to play in and I'm hoping to be back next year and hopefully win gold."

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Prov Hosts Annual Athletics Award Banquet

By Jennifer Lavin

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The Providence Pilots's annual athletic awards banquet took place on April 12, and this year the organization had a bevy of people to recognize.

The event honoured the coaching careers of three staff members: Kyle Guenther, Cody Quiring, and long-time athletic director Scott Master-son, who has stepped into a larger leadership role at the school.

The banquet also acknowledged the 56 of 95 student athletes who earned a 3.0 or higher grade point average, the graduating seniors, the women's volleyball team (which achieved the overall highest team GPA), and the women's soccer team (who won the NCCAA championship).

The Scholar Athlete of the Year award was presented to women's soccer player Paige Heide.

Heide's head coach, Tory Walker, praised the athlete.

"Paige goes about life giving her best each and every day," says Walker. "It is because of her strong character she is being recognized as Providence's Scholar Athlete of the year. She not only works tremendously hard on the soccer field and futsal court, Paige works just as hard, if not harder, in the classroom. Paige is an elite athlete, as well as an elite student. She is a true example of what a great work-sport-life balance should look like."

The Female Rookie Pilot of the



Providence gave out hardware to several athletes at its annual awards banquet in April.

GRACE DRIEDGER

Year award was given to women's basketball player Amver Navarro.

Navarro's head coach, Joel Coursey, says that she exemplifies what Providence looks for in a recruit.

"Amver works harder than anyone every second she is on the court," says Coursey. "She really understands the concept of giving maximum effort at all times. If you came to one of our games, you could expect to see Amver dive out of bounds to save a ball, fly into the bleachers, or lose a shoe and not give up on the play.

She has the heart of a competitor and refuses to quit. Off the court, Amver is one of the kindest players you will come across. She loves each of her teammates and loves Prov! She is a positive contributor to our campus community and has grown to be a leader in our community. I am incredibly proud that she has been recognized tonight as the Female Rookie Pilot of the Year, and I can't wait to see what comes next!"

The Male Rookie Pilot of the Year award was granted to men's

volleyball player Noah Boschman.

Coach Cody Quiring describes Boschman as a player who consistently displays an exceptional level of skill and athleticism.

"Noah has been a dominant force for the program all year, both at the conference level and at the national level and was acknowledged as player of the year for the MCAC and national CCAA all Canadian," says Quiring. "Noah led the entire conference in six statistical categories and was close to the conference leader

in three other categories. He led the entire country in service aces per set and points per set and was second in kills per set. He continues to always grow to be a better version of himself on and off the court. He is a prime example of what it takes to be Rookie Pilot of the Year."

The Female Pilot of the Year award was given to Paige Heide, taking home her second award of the night.

Quiring gushed about Heide's character and skill. "Paige's strong Christian character, leadership on the team, and impact on the Providence community are why she is well-deserving of this award. She is what we call here at Providence a true difference maker. I have no doubt that in her remaining time as a Pilot, and in years to come, she will continue to shine God's light to those around her."

The Male Pilot of the Year award went to men's basketball player Kevin Martinez.

Martinez's head coach, Pierre Dubreuil, shared his pride and gratitude about his team captain.

"Kevin has been an amazing leader and member of the Providence community for two years now," says Dubreuil. "I have seen him develop and mature as a young man on and off the court. With the basketball in his hands, Kevin brings control and pace to our team, leading us on both ends of the court with passion and energy. A vocal leader, he always keeps his teammates engaged and ready."

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Nighthawks Makes Two Hires

By Ty Dilello

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The Niverville Nighthawks are pleased to announce the hires of Kevin Pauls as the team's new marketing and game day director and Michael Saloniuss as senior sales associate.

Kevin Pauls has been involved with the Nighthawks from day one as the official voice of the Nighthawks. He starts immediately with his new responsibilities, which will be in addition to his role as Hockey TV commentator.

Born in Winnipeg and raised in Morden, Pauls grew up watching hockey and has spent more than 15 years coaching. He has also served on the Pembina Valley Minor Hockey Association executive. Since getting into broadcasting in 2009, Pauls has called games for Manitoba AAAU18, the South Eastern Manitoba Hockey League, high school hockey, and now the MJHL.

"My kids all played hockey," says Pauls. "I enjoyed being a part of their hockey careers, and spending time



Kevin Pauls with his daughter Lua.

RAY DOWSE



Michael Saloniuss.

MICHAEL SALONIUS

with them at the rink is something I will always cherish."

Pauls feels that the Nighthawks' first season was really special from his vantage point. Much of it was spent commentating games alongside his daughter, Lua.

"It was cool to be a fly on the wall for all of the firsts, like the first goal, first win, and all of the fantastic

games," he adds. "Making the play-offs was really cool, and being able to bring the emotion of those events to people on TV and radio was unreal for my daughter and me."

With a new season coming up and a new role, Pauls is very excited to get things started come the end of summer.

"Being able to contribute in the

capacity of Marketing and Game Operations, as well as my broadcasting duties, is such an exciting thing for not only myself but my family as well," says Pauls. "They know this is something I've always wanted to do, so this has all just been so cool. The first season was indeed special, but there are so many great things to come. We are just getting started. I

cannot wait for what's next."

Also hired this week was Michael Saloniuss, who has already started in his position as senior sales associate.

He was instrumental in lining up corporate sponsorships during the team's inaugural season, and the club looks forward to him building on that success in an official capacity.

Originally from Toronto, Saloniuss moved to Niverville in 2014. Although he doesn't have much history with the sport of hockey, and by his own admission can't skate, he does proudly boast the achievement of having seen a game in each and every one of Canada's NHL arenas.

Saloniuss has more than 20 years of experience in sales in the telecommunications industry. Community was the main reason he wanted to get involved with the Nighthawks.

"Sitting in the arena watching the excitement and smiles of families as they come together to cheer on their team is incredible to see," says Saloniuss. "It's important to help the team thrive so we can have many years of family enjoyment."

Providence Hires New Athletics Director

By Jennifer Lavin

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An alumnus of Providence University College has returned to the school as their new Director of Athletics. Russell Willms is set to replace Scott Masteron as head of the Providence Pilots.

Willms graduated from Providence in 2001 and then graduated from the seminary in 2004. While studying at Providence, he was a member of the men's soccer team.

After graduation, Willms began a career in the world of sport. From 2003 to 2007, he was an assistant coach for the women's soccer program at the University of Manitoba.

In 2008, Willms moved to Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) to take over as their Director of Athletics and head coach of the men's soccer team.

During his time at CMU, Willms launched the 2014 Copa de la Paz Futsal tournament. This tournament served as the introduction of futsal to the Manitoba Colleges Athletic Conference (MCAC). The sport has now become an officially sponsored MCAC sport.

Willms was also part of the leadership team that brought the MCAC conference to the Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA). After navigating this union, he took on the role as an MCAC representative on

the CCAA board of directors and served as the VP Technical in the MCAC from 2016 to 2021.

In 2017, Willms entered the CMU Blazers basketball teams into the Northern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (NIAC). Both the Blazers and the Providence Pilots remain part of the NIAC to this day.

In 2021, Willms left CMU to return to his home province and a position at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus (UBCO). While at UBCO, Willms oversaw all aspects of the student-athlete experience, including athletic therapy, strength and conditioning, nutrition, mental performance, and sport scheduling.

"I am happy and proud to have the opportunity to return to Providence and to step into this role," Willms says. "As a Providence alumnus, I have keenly watched the growth and success of the Pilots programs, especially over the past decade, and I am excited to contribute to the Providence tradition and the wide-stretching community impact that the Pilots have."

Masteron is just as happy to see Willms take over the position.

"We are thrilled to have someone with Russell's experience and proven success to lead our athletics program," says Masteron. "Russell is very familiar with our institution and athletics program and will bring a lot of

energy and vision to the department. His experience within the MCAC, CCAA, and USports will also make this a seamless transition and we are looking forward to the positive impact and leadership that Russell will bring to the Providence Pilots."

Masteron, who has taken over as the school's Vice-President of Operations, will oversee Willms and the entire athletics program.

Masteron and Willms have worked closely together in the past and are each widely respected in their leadership across collegiate sport in Manitoba. Together they believe they can grow Providence athletics into a leading program in the CCAA.

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Arts & Entertainment

Workshops Look to Encourage and Inspire Local Writers

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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After moving to Niverville, writer and editor Trevor Martens found himself personally employed and working from home after leaving a teaching career in Winnipeg.

Like many people, during the COVID-19 pandemic he needed to adjust his work-life balance in order to improve his mental health.

As an English teacher, creating and delivering lesson plans, grading papers, and acting as a positive role model for young people took up most of his waking moments—and creative energy.

When post-COVID budget cuts culled some of his preferred programming that served underprivileged students, he knew he needed to make a change.

Without a business plan, he took the plunge and left teaching to work from home—or rather, from the newly opened Smitty's restaurant in Niverville.

After a period of self-reflection, he felt his passion for creative writing returning. He writes works of prose based on personal reflection after observing day-to-day life.

"I like to show what's going on inside of me, what's going on underneath," says Martens. "And if I see something or have a conversation with someone, then I sometimes see rich imagery there. It's like a tempest-in-a-teacup sort of approach, where I take something small and blow it up."

As a professional writer, he is yet to be published, but he says he's working on it.

"I was going to be half-writing and half-editing, but other things happened," says Martens.

The "other thing" is the business Martens started, called I Help You Write Things. He saw potential in combining his professional teaching skills and love of creative writing to organize events and workshops that would give other writers an atmosphere to grow, just like the one he had benefitted from.

For the past seven years, Martens himself has been attending a writing group led by Winnipeg author and



Presenters at a recent event, *From the Inkwell*, to showcase local writing talent.

▣ TREVOR MARTENS

editor Majorie Anderson, who has worked with both Carol Shields and Margaret Atwood. It was Anderson who suggested that Martens start his own editing and writing workshop business after observing Martens's skills in group participation and leadership.

The workshops were the first thing to take off. In the fall, Martens ran two rounds of workshops for a group of approximately eight. The first one ran weekly for five weeks on Monday nights at Hespeler's Cookhouse & Tavern in Niverville. The second round began immediately afterward.

"We just had a table in there on a quieter Monday night and it was, you know, bring your writing, bring your laptop, we're doing writing," says Martens.

It's always been about motivation and inspiration. In the introductory level courses, one exercise he runs is called quick writing.

"We show up and I say a topic, like, 'Tell me about the kitchen.' For people who like to edit as they go, it's very hard to just let go and let a process flow. It gets you out of your head and eliminates all of those voices saying, 'It's gotta be good.' No, you've got four minutes."

The entry-level workshops also

often discuss a writing skill, like characterization, and then Martens assigns a writing task for the next workshop.

Martens says that one of his strengths is instantaneous feedback, where he can tell very quickly what is working or what needs improvement in a piece of writing. He sees what works and what doesn't and can articulate it calmly and clearly.

"I say, 'Hey, I can see you're doing great at this and you're trying at this.' And I ask other people, 'What are you seeing?' so we can get feedback."

Last fall, he also ran another workshop group simultaneously at McNally Robinson in Winnipeg, which continued until March 2023. The Winnipeg-based group was able to extend its focus to more in-depth skill development and critical feedback.

In either group, Martens says a large part of what makes things work is the positive atmosphere.

"It may feel like tire-pumping," he says. "People are amazed there is a group that is happy to listen to their writing. Your confidence skyrockets. It's like rocket fuel."

COMMUNITY

Community is a byproduct of Martens' workshops, although it's some-

thing he only realized as the classes went on.

"I remember our first class, everyone reading and clapping for each other. You can put these people anywhere in the world after that and they'll be friends. There's just something community-building in that. It's so powerful."

Martens has seen his students' work become intentionally vulnerable about some really serious true-to-life events, which has a tendency to create bonds among group members.

The self-reflection and writing happens, then it is shared in a safe space, and what's happens next is hard to quantify.

"When someone goes through a traumatic event, we know that trauma is still alive in us. The visceral feelings, the details are still there, they're just on the tip of your tongue... It is so detailed. It is so revealing."

Martens believes that everyone has a storyteller inside them.

"I think everyone is a writer, if you're willing to go to those honest places in yourself," he says. "We've all got the stuff of storytelling in us. It's just that not everyone is willing to or able to, and that's okay. But I haven't met anyone who's not a writer yet,

especially if the story is meaningful to you. Who cares about the language or the grammar? It comes out in their style, in the way they say it, and it makes sense and it resonates and people can imagine it—and bam. Is it going to win an award? Maybe not, but there's something so good about it all."

Martens was also the organizer behind a recent *From the Inkwell* event designed to encourage local storytellers to share their work. He calls every one of the 12 presenters brave, whether or not they were experienced writers and speakers.

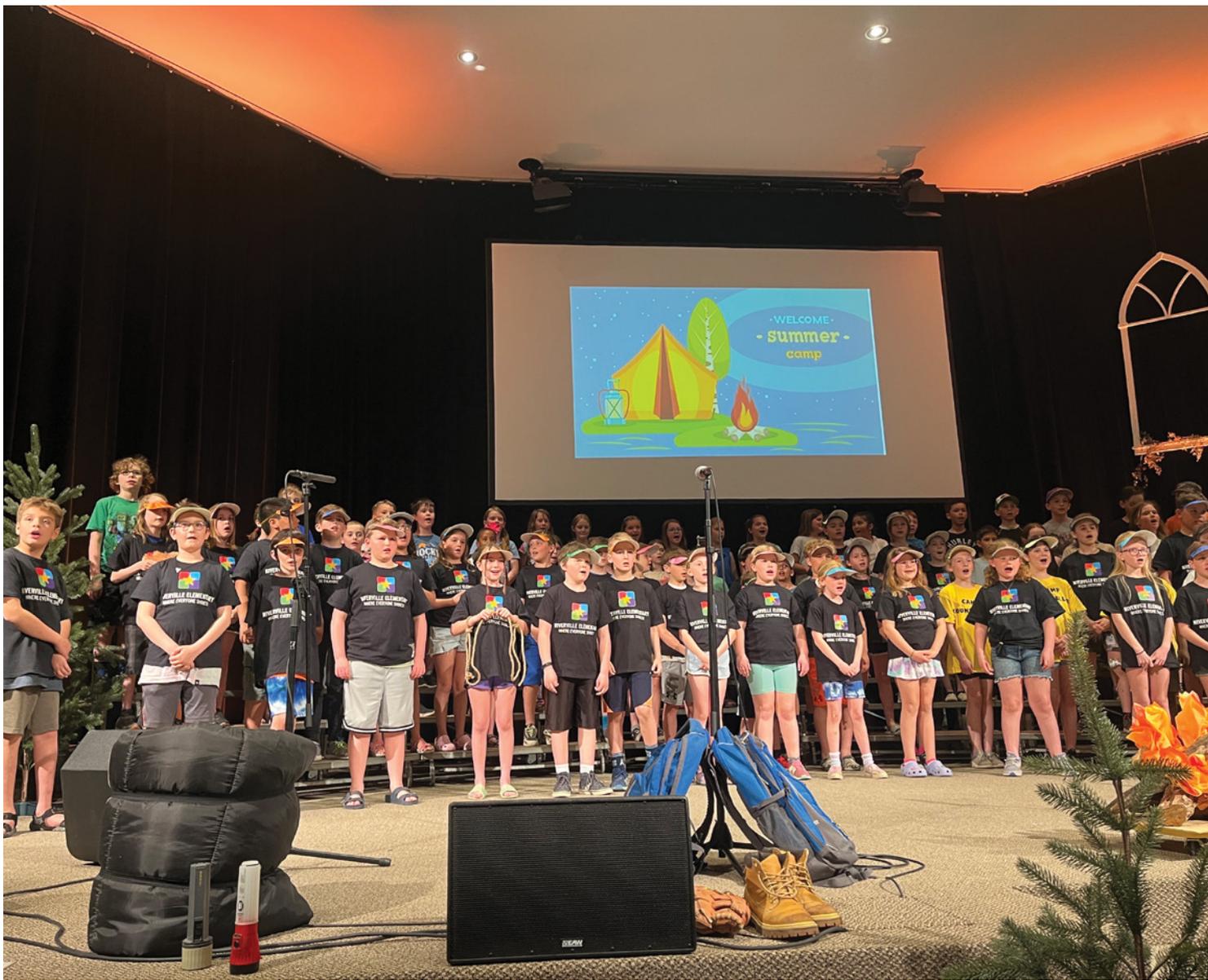
"Some of them had never written before. Some of them are new to town. That's something that really stuck out to me," says Martens. "I had three new people who had just moved to town that signed up for my workshop and it was a chance to connect with something within the town. It's been really good for community-building. Because they can say, 'Oh, I actually know somebody now.' And they can say hi to each other in the coffee shop because they made a connection."

Even though Martens hadn't thought much past the writing, editing, and presenting aspects of these workshops, he sees the possibility to continue to grow community here in Niverville with more live storytelling events.

"Afterward, people asked me, have you thought about doing this as a regular thing? Because there isn't this style of entertainment anymore where you just sit and just listen, listening to story like you'd listen to music, listening to people's actual stories. That's why Vinyl Café was so huge, right? Having someone read to you... it's interesting. There's something else going on here that might have some value."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The next I Help You Write Things workshop group will start on May 29 and they plan to meet at Smitty's in Niverville. For times and availability, you can visit the website at www.ihelpyouwritethings.com or email trevor@ihelpyouwritethings.com.



The cast of the year's production of Summer Camp.

NIVERVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

NES Goes to Summer Camp

By Jennifer Lavin

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The third and fourth grade students of Niverville Elementary School (NES) performed their spring concert on May 10-11 at the Niverville Community Fellowship.

This year's production was *Summer Camp*, by John Jacobson and Mac Huff.

Music teacher Louise Redekop says that many factors go into choosing what to perform, but

this particular musical was performed by students at the school a few years ago and it was very successful.

She was excited to let a new group of kids take on the roles.

Summer Camp revolves around the adventures that a group of kids have at Camp Runamok and the friendships they develop over the course of the summer.

The play's speaking parts were handed out just before spring break and rehearsals began right afterwards.

"The students worked on

memorizing lines at home, classroom teachers worked on lines/acting in the classroom, and students worked on learning the songs in music class," Redekop says of the process. "All the students worked extremely hard at getting ready for these concerts."

The other students, as well as members of the public, were able to watch the dress rehearsals on Wednesday and Thursday afternoon, with the big performances being held in the evenings.

In addition, the shows were also live-streamed.

Redekop says that all the performances this year were quite well-attended.

"Putting on a musical like this is a group effort," she says, acknowledging the contributions of the many teachers, administrators, and educational assistants who had a hand in bringing about the show.

"Many thanks also to the Community Fellowship church for the use of their facility and help with sound and tech. Congratulations to all the students for putting on a great performance!"

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