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LOCAL NEWS

Annexation Denied

■ The proposal for Niverville to annex 2,600 acres from the RM of Hanover is going back to the drawing board after the province says no, at least for now.

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LOCAL NEWS

A Local Christian Private School?

■ The Steinbach Christian School is gauging interest in establishing a new Niverville campus, citing rising enrollment from families in this area. The school is hosting informational sessions in early December at the CRRC.

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SPORTS & REC

NHS Panthers Off to Competitive Start

■ The new high school hockey program in Niverville is eight games into its first season and posting promising results.

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Docudrama Explores Mennonite History

■ A new film from independent filmmaker Dale Hildebrand digs into the early years of Mennonite settlement in Manitoba.

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Body Cams Coming to Local RCMP

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» BRENDA SAWATZKY

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Hanover School Division Loses EAs to Funding Cuts

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On November 27, the Hanover School Division (HSD) announced the sudden layoff of approximately 93 educational assistants (EAs). The division's remaining EA positions, numbering almost 250, will not be affected.

"This difficult decision arose from circumstances beyond our immediate control," the division said in a public statement. "Specifically, the unexpected loss of federal funding for Jordan's Principle programming in the 2024-25 school year."

Jordan's Principle is a federal program established in 2016 to ensure that all First Nations children have equitable access to medical, educational, and other supports.

The program was a response to a ruling by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal which determined that the federal government's approach to services for First Nations children was discriminatory.

The program was named after five-year-old Jordan River Anderson, a Norway House Cree Nation boy who died in 2005 while waiting for medical care.

This is the third year that HSD applied for Jordan's Principle funding to aid in the hiring of EAs for students who qualified for the program.

"In early summer, the regional office for Indigenous Services Canada informed us that, based upon our renewal application for Jordan's Principle funding, we could proceed with hiring staff for the start of the new school year," HSD superintendent-CEO Joe Thiessen says. "With this information, we proceeded in good faith that funding was secured.



Hanover School Division office in Steinbach.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

However, over the past few months, responsibility for administering the funding shifted to the federal office of Indigenous Services Canada. This change was introduced without our knowledge and now requires us to reapply for funding, which we intend to do."

Thiessen says that, at the time of the layoffs, \$1 million had already been spent on EA salaries which should have been covered by this funding. Now they are looking to recover these costs and also receive acknowledgement of a continuation of the funding for the balance of the school year.

In the meantime, Thiessen says it will take a shared effort between principals, teachers, support staff, and other EAs to fill the gaps.

In recent months, Indigenous Services Canada has come under fire for its growing backlog in requests for aid and slow-moving funds through the Jordan's Principle program. Some call it a systemic failure within the federal government to follow through with their mandate.

The Keewatin Tribal Council, representing 11 northern Manitoba

First Nations communities, says they've had to provide \$8 million in bridge funding over the last couple of years while waiting for the federal government to come through with Jordan's Principle reimbursements.

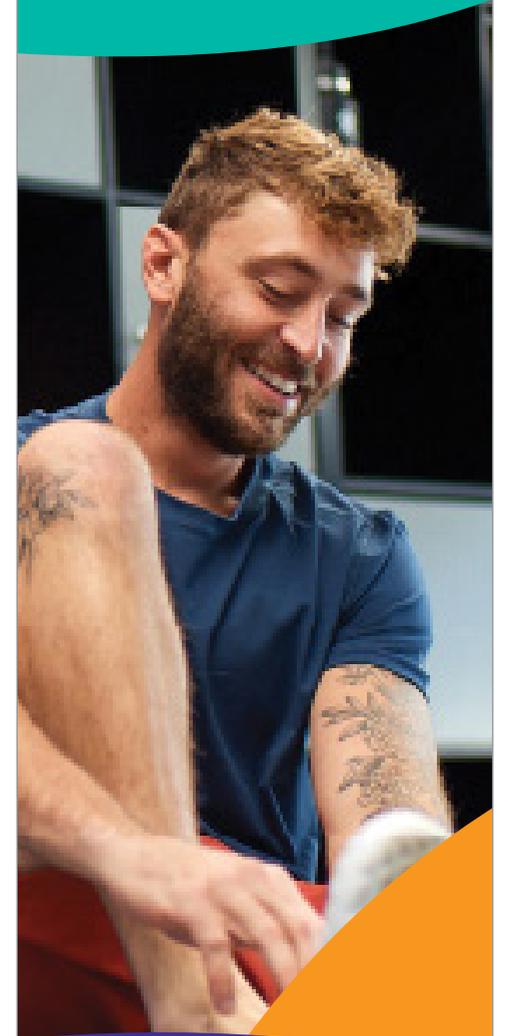
Thiessen says that the HSD will continue to engage in discussions with both the federal and regional levels of Indigenous Services Canada.

Until things change, he adds, the division will do its best to move ahead.

"The loss of these educational assistants will no doubt have some impact on families, schools, teachers, and the division as a whole," he says. "That being said, we have full confidence in the incredible dedication, adaptability, and professionalism of our staff to fill the gaps and meet the needs of our students. The division remains deeply committed to ensuring every student has the support they need to thrive. Through strategic reallocation of resources, thoughtful planning, and the teamwork of our staff, we will continue to provide high-quality support for students."

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IN BRIEF

Niverville Council Approves Subdivision of Agricultural Land

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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At their November 5 public meeting, Niverville's council approved a request from Artel Farms Land Co Ltd. to subdivide approximately 260 acres of land bordering Highway 311 from Krahn Road to Sood Road.

This parcel of land, owned by Grant and Colleen Dyck of Niverville, is currently under agricultural use. As per the landowner's request, the section is now eligible for subdivision into five separate parcels.

If the Dycks proceed with the subdivision, the new boundaries will allow them to cordon off their homestead at the southeast corner.

According to CAO Eric King, the only requirement left is for the couple to obtain variance orders as needed to meet zoning compliance.

"This is land that has been inside of Niverville since the time that the dike [was built], so roughly 1997 or '98," say Mayor Myron Dyck. "[The owner] has yet to reveal their intention. We look forward to working with this landowner to see what role they may wish for us to play."

Considering council's previously expressed intention to grow Niverville's commercial to the west boundary of town, the land along Highway 311 offers great commercial potential should the landowners choose to sell.

Grant Dyck has owned this section of land since 2000, and his father owned it before that. Dyck says they've been anticipating the need to transition this parcel of land for the past 25 years.

"For more than 50 years, Artel Farms has been proud to operate within the community, but the realities of our location within the town limits have become increasingly challenging," Dyck says. "Operating a grain farm on land that is now adjacent to a growing town has raised numerous logistical and safety concerns. As much as we recognize the importance of Niverville's growth, we are also acutely aware of the difficulties our farm faces in balancing its operations with the safety and well-being of the growing population."

For now, he says, the move to subdivide the land is a matter of being proactive. There is no current buyer waiting in the wings. To relocate his current homestead and outbuildings to a new location would be an expensive endeavor, so he's hopeful that, when the time comes, the sale of this land will help offset some of those costs.

Operation Red Nose Gearing Up for Holiday Season

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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For the St. Malo chapter of Operation Red Nose (ORN), 2024 marks the fifth year that they've been providing safe rides throughout south-east Manitoba, helping keep everyone safer on the roads.

The annual ORN safe ride campaign will begin on November 29 and run each Friday and Saturday night for a total of six weeks, ending with New Year's Eve.

The goal of the program is to give people the opportunity to enjoy a few holiday drinks at events throughout the festive season and still arrive home safe and sound.

ORN operates as a simple, guiltless designated driver system. There is no cost for its use, but donations are gladly accepted.

Charmaine Gosselin is the coordinator of the ORN St. Malo chapter, which covers a swath of the southeast between Dominion City and Grande Pointe, running north to south, as well as Vita and Lowe Farm, running east to west.

"We are able to fill all the rides that get called in," Gosselin says. "If folks are thinking, 'Awe, they're too busy to pick me up,' no, we're not. We'll make it work."

Dispatch lines at ORN open at 9:00 p.m. on designated nights. Individuals or groups can contact ORN when they are ready to leave their event. ORN volunteers arrive in teams of three or four to drive the client and their vehicle home as well as the volunteer vehicle in which they arrive.

If the event pickup is anywhere outside of ORN St. Malo's district, dispatchers collaborate with other ORN districts to help create a fluid transition for the client.

So, for instance, if an Île-des-Chênes resident needs a pickup from a downtown Winnipeg location, one phone call to ORN will result in pickup by Winnipeg-based ORN volunteers to a location in Sage Creek where St.



BRENDA SAWATZKY

Malo volunteers will be waiting to seamlessly complete the journey.

While ORN doesn't take advance bookings for pickups, Gosselin says a phone call to the dispatch in advance of the event never hurts. On the contrary, it helps ORN to put them in a queue for later.

The client should then contact ORN dispatch again at the time the pickup is needed.

"Everybody has to connect with our dispatchers after our phone lines open at 9:00 p.m.," says Gosselin. "Our dispatchers need that communication to be able to find out the make and model of the vehicle, the client's cell phone number, etc."

Gosselin says there are almost no circumstances in which their volunteers won't accommodate a pickup.

For instance, if a client has a unique dropoff situation where they'd like to be picked up at one event and taken to another event, then later delivered home, ORN will do that.

"You could be at your party and realize [you need more alcohol]," says Gosselin. "You want to go to the vendor and get another six pack. We can do that, too. We'll pick you up at your party, bring you to the vendor, and drive you back to the party again."

ORN drivers will even bring the babysitter home on the condition that the client stays with the volunteers until the babysitter is safely delivered.

Groups as well as individuals

can be accommodated. ORN volunteers will be dispatched based on the number of vehicles the group arrived in at their party.

As if providing safe transport isn't a big enough gift during the holidays, ORN St. Malo has special gifts in store for each passenger who uses their services this season. This is thanks to generous donors and supporters such as One Insurance.

To provide this amazing program, though, means ORN St. Malo needs upwards of 200 volunteers. So far, Gosselin says they've had no trouble finding enough people for the first few weeks of December. It's the week between Christmas and New Year's Eve that is still lacking.

"On New Year's Eve, we would ideally need eight teams," says Gosselin. "Right now, we only have one team."

Volunteers must be ready to show up for their shift at the St. Malo headquarters at 7:45. They'll be equipped with an hour of training, a two-way radio, and a packed lunch to sustain them.

In teams of three or four, volunteer drivers then head off to wait for dispatch instructions from the comfort of a warm space in one of several communities in the region.

"So instead of just sitting around at headquarters, we typically send a team to Lorette, Île-des-Chênes, St. Adolphe, Ste. Agathe, Niverville, Morris, and St. Pierre if we need to."

When dispatched to a call, volunteers drive together to the pickup location. En route back to

the client's home, two of the volunteers ride together in the client's vehicle along with the client.

"We always want to have a [second volunteer] with the driver because people have been drinking and you want that extra witness for liability reasons."

The third and possibly fourth volunteers follow behind in the vehicle that is owned by one of the volunteers. According to Gosselin, the owner is reimbursed for wear and tear on their vehicle as well as the gas.

Each shift, two more volunteers are also needed to run dispatch for the night.

"They are essentially the quarterbacks of the evening. They oversee headquarters, the snacks, the coffee, and the radio and communication to all of the teams all night long."

Volunteer shifts run until 2:00 a.m.

"Don't let the [late night] scare you," Gosselin says. "The evening goes by really quick because it's so much fun. You're on an adrenaline rush and you don't even realize how late it is."

For the volunteers, there is much satisfaction in knowing that they may well be responsible for saving lives during the holiday season.

Not to be dismissed, though, is the gratification they'll receive when they get to choose a favourite non-profit organization to benefit from ORN's charitable donations this year.

"We divide our funds according to the organizations our volunteers choose," Gosselin says. "Last year we gave back \$6,000 to 13 different organizations."

ODR is always glad to have organizations send out their own volunteers in order to benefit from the donations at the close of the season, too.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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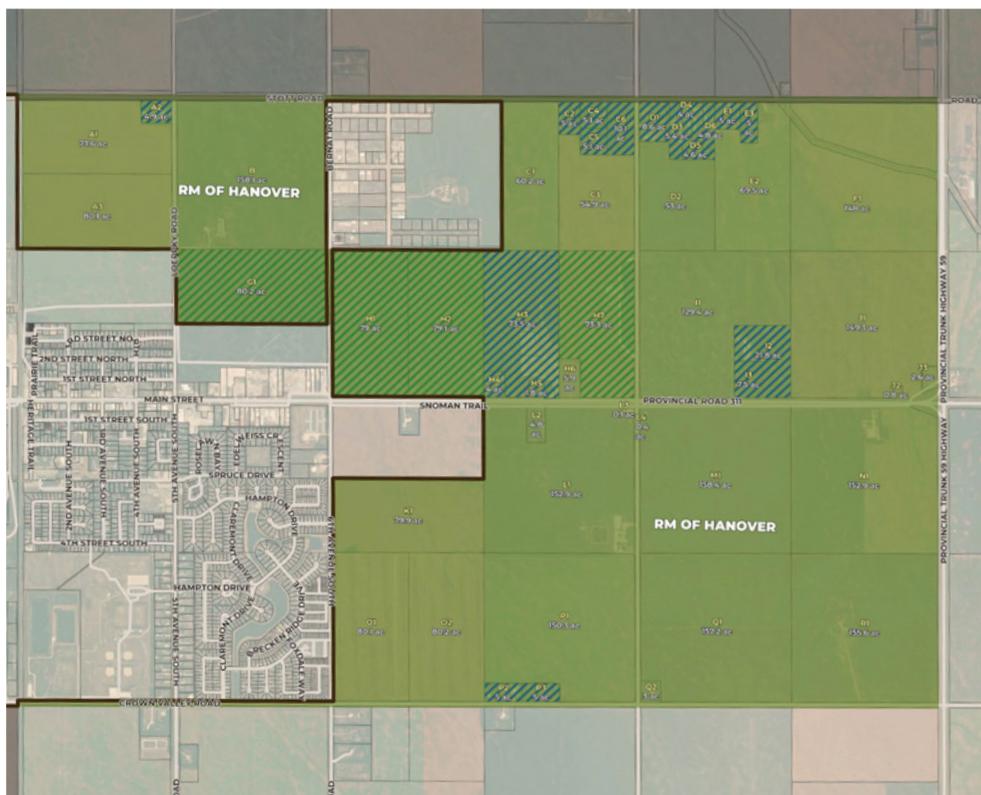


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In green, the land that was proposed to be annexed by Niverville from the RM of Hanover. **URBAN SYSTEMS**

Province Declines Niverville's Land Annexation Request

By Brenda Sawatzky
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
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It's been two years since Niverville's town council officially put forward a request to the province for the annexation of nearly 2,600 acres of land to the community's east.

On November 5, Mayor Myron Dyck announced that the request, as it was initially proposed, has been declined.

The annexation proposal was a collaborative effort between the Town of Niverville and RM of Hanover, under whose jurisdiction the land currently lies.

If approved, the annexation would have more than doubled Niverville's current footprint.

Roughly 50 parcels of land bordering both sides of Highway 311 east from Niverville to Highway 59 were listed on the application.

Based on Niverville's future growth predictions, this additional land would have carried Niverville well into the future.

"The Municipal Board has not recommended to the

Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations that the annexation be approved... as it assumes a 50-year growth timespan," says Mayor Dyck.

Instead the Municipal Board is recommending that the Town of Niverville and RM of Hanover go back to the drawing board and create a new proposal that reflects land needs based on a 25-year growth period.

Despite the bad news, Dyck says that council is buoyed by the fact that the Municipal Board does seem to recognize Niverville's need to expand its boundaries if growth is to continue.

"Over the coming months, the town will be working with its consultants and the RM of Hanover on deciding how best to proceed with the revised proposal," Dyck says. "These efforts would include addressing the Municipal Board's concerns and identifying shared interests between the municipalities."

Dyck says his council wasn't overly surprised by the province's decision. It's a fairly common occurrence, he says,

for the province to require amendments to annexation requests.

Council has already requested a meeting with Minister Ian Bushie in the hopes of finding out what it would take to create a proposal that is more amenable to the province.

In preparation, council will defer to the sustainable growth strategy report that was prepared for them in 2022 by Urban Systems, community planning consultants.

That report projected that, based on Niverville's recent rate of high, steady growth, the community would run out of developable residential land in 15 to 20 years.

"Although 20 years may seem like a long time, it is important to plan proactively for the future to ensure sustainable growth for Niverville," stated a 2022 council press release. "Transferring lands now will ensure that [the parcels] do not become fragmented or developed with incompatible uses, and more difficult to transfer or develop in the future."



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On behalf of the Hanover School Division, the Board of Trustees wishes you and your loved ones an enjoyable holiday season filled with joy and cherished moments.



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IN BRIEF



Canada Post Strike Disrupts Mail Delivery

By Brenda Sawatzky
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On Friday, November 15, approximately 55,000 postal workers across Canada Post walked off the job, bringing mail and parcel deliveries to a virtual standstill.

More than two weeks later, the strike continues.

Only government benefit cheques such as Canada Child Benefit, Old Age Security, and Canada Pension Plan are continuing to arrive as usual throughout the strike period.

"Mail and parcels will not be processed or delivered for the duration of the national strike, and some post offices will be closed," reads a statement on the Canada Post website. "Service guarantees will be impacted for items already in the postal network. No new items will be accepted until the national disruption is over."

Once operations resume, Canada Post says the mail will go out on a first-in, first-out basis.

They warn customers it will take some time for processing and delivery to get back to normal.

The strike comes at a bad time, with the holidays already underway and online shopping at an all-time high.

The last Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) strike took place in late October 2018 and lasted 31 days.

Negotiations between Canada Post and its unionized employees began in November 2023. This past October, the federal

government appointed a mediator to assist the two parties in reaching a new collective agreement.

The negotiations haven't led to a deal, likely owing to the vast disparity between the CUPW's proposal and Canada Post's stated financial position.

On account of inflation in recent years, the CUPW is asking for a 22 percent wage hike for its members over the next four years. At the last negotiation, Canada Post was offering 11.5 percent.

Additionally, the CUPW is looking for increases to short-term disability payouts and ten paid sick days. For rural and suburban mail carriers, the union also seeks to include corporate vehicles for mail-carriers as well as paid meals and breaks.

According to Canada Post, its financial situation is already dire and meeting the union's demands would break the bank. In the first half of 2024, Canada Post has lost nearly a half-billion dollars. The crown corporation has reported \$3 billion in losses since 2018.

CUPW counters this position by suggesting that the corporation reconsider its ongoing executive bonuses, as well as expand its services to manage higher costs.

Previous postal strikes held in 2011 and 2018 ended when the federal government passed legislation sending employees back to work.

The Minister of Labour, Steven MacKinnon, has not yet indicated whether the same approach is a possibility this time around.



The Steinbach Christian School.

AL SAWATZKY

Private Christian School Gauging Interest in Niverville Campus

By Brenda Sawatzky
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Administrators at Steinbach Christian School (SCS) are seeking input from parents in Niverville and the surrounding area to help determine the level of interest in a private satellite school for this region.

Representatives of the school, including Principal Thor Barkman, educator Dylan Zacharias, and other administration, will host an informational town hall at the CRRC on December 3.

For convenience, two separate sessions are being offered, one at 4:30 p.m. and the other at 7:00 p.m.

Barkman says that the first step in this process began with engaging members of the local ministerial.

"We are exploring the feasibility of small-scale Christian education options that can exist farther away from a

large campus," says Barkman. "We have the organizational stability and administrative expertise to support satellite locations if other communities have sufficient interest."

For a variety of reasons, Barkman says, interest in faith-based education seems to be growing throughout the southeast region.

The appeal for parents, he says, is in knowing their child's school shares the same system of values and encourages participation from parents.

"[SCS] has grown by 46 percent over the last two years," Barkman says. "We get applications from families within a 50-kilometre radius of the school, with a solid number from the Niverville area. The limiting factor for younger students is transportation. Our mandate is to be useful to our community, so if families in Niverville decide that a closer location would be useful to them then we will work with

the churches and parents to make it happen."

But Barkman says there are more benefits to private schooling than faith development.

In general, he says, schools like SCS can provide smaller class sizes, resulting in calmer classroom experiences.

The opportunities for participation in co-curricular activities are also greater, he says.

"Public schools have changed significantly in the last 25 years," Barkman says. "Parents are noticing changes in academic achievement, a dip in student ambition, and a rise in students self-reporting aimlessness. Parents are looking for ways to shift the margins of opportunity for their kids, to improve the odds of success. We step in to support families who are committed to an education that shares a worldview with meaning and purpose."

SCS has a long-standing history in southeast Manitoba. Founded in 1949, the school celebrated its seventy-fifth anniversary this past October.

Previously operating under the name Steinbach Bible College, SCS changed its name and purpose when it evolved into a full Kindergarten to Grade 12 learning centre in recent years.

The student body currently stands at 441 and enrolment grows at an average rate of 15 percent per year.

This has required the addition of more classrooms each year.

Together, the staff and student body represent more than 45 churches. Pastors from the area provide theological teaching at weekly chapel gatherings.

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Ritchot's Energy Efficiency Advocate Promotes Provincial Programs, Rebates

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Uriel Jelin is a relatively new face at the RM of Ritchot's municipal office and he's there to fill the role of Energy Efficiency Advocate. His position began in early summer.

"This is something new that Efficiency Manitoba is doing in partnership with some municipalities," Jelin says. "It's a two-year program and the idea is to have someone with a local connection [help residents] get in touch with their programs."

Efficiency Manitoba (EM) is a crown corporation whose mandate is to find ways to reach long-term energy savings targets. They do this by offering cost-effective programs to residents and business owners across the province.

Their projected goal is to reduce provincial consumption of electricity by 1.5 percent and natural gas by 0.75 percent annually. Ultimately, these reductions will not just save consumers money. They will help drive down the greenhouse gas emissions created in this province.

"We're a committed team that's come together to reach a purpose greater than each of us," reads a statement on the EM website, "and your participation is going to drive our collective success."

To aid in buy-in, they have developed a broad list of programs and rebate initiatives under the Energy Efficiency Manitoba umbrella to encourage home and business owners to make energy-efficient upgrades.

Further, they've encouraged Manitoba's municipalities to partner with them by employing energy efficiency advocates such as Jelin. In the case of Ritchot, EM provides 80 percent of Jelin's salary while the RM covers the remaining 20 percent.

Jelin is ready to assist Ritchot's property owners find the provincial rebate and financing that best suits their needs.

"I want you to save energy, but I also want you to save money," Jelin



Uriel Jelin, Ritchot's Energy Efficiency Advocate.

▣ BRENDA SAWATZKY

says. "So [these initiatives] have to make sense for you."

According to Jelin, EM has a lot of great initiatives right now, most of which need to be preapproved by EM before rebates will be issued.

Financial incentives can be applied to something as minor as a window replacement and as major as a complete retrofit of a home or business.

In some cases, rebates of up to 70 percent are available.

Rebates of \$100 per window are available if they are replaced

with high-efficiency triple pane. If replacing multiple windows, Manitoba Hydro provides financing options for up to a five-year term.

Insulation is another important factor when it comes to a home's energy efficiency. Around 1999, Jelin says that building codes became much stricter.

This means that many older homes are far less efficient than they could be.

"Approximately 60 percent of your hydro bill goes into heating," Jelin says. "You have two components to

this. One component is the energy you use to generate the heat and the other component is the energy you lose because of [poor] insulation."

To receive virtually all the provincial rebates, consumers must use one of EM's vetted and highly qualified service providers. In most cases, they offer free home assessments prior to the submission of an application. These home audits usually include a thorough overview of the home's overall efficiency in order to prioritize upgrades.

"This is super important because

the assessment [tells you] what you need and what will have more impact," says Jelin. "And I would say [it gives] you extra peace of mind."

Jelin knows this firsthand. A recent attic inspection on his 75-year-old home revealed that although his insulation wasn't ideal, his money would be better spent on other improvements.

These energy audits are especially important for homeowners who want to undertake major retrofits. In cases like that, an audit can advise on how to maximize the programs and rebates available.

Homeowner rebates exist for solar panel and heat pump installations, which help save energy when heating and cooling a home. Manitoba Hydro also offers low-interest financing options which cover up to \$20,000 for a 15-year term.

For lower income families who need a little extra financial help, EM has created the Energy Efficiency Assistance Program.

"So if you are a couple that is retired and on a fixed income, or a young family with three kids, you may qualify," Jelin adds.

Many of the same rebates available to homeowners are also available to small business owners. Additional financial supports are available for First Nations and Metis-owned businesses.

The New Buildings program offers incentives on new construction while the In-Suite Energy Efficiency program helps landlords of multifamily units make energy improvements to individual rental suites.

Recognizing that education is key to affecting change, Jelin has a wide variety of pamphlets in his Ritchot office for anyone to pick up. Included in these resources is an interactive, fact-filled workbook developed especially with children in mind. Energy Ed and Jenny Jay's Manitoba Adventure is available to teachers and parents upon request.

"As a parent, I know that if the kids are interested in energy efficiency, recycling, etc., it's more likely that we are going to adopt it faster."

Happy Holidays

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Heritage Centre Gala Attendees Invited to Join the Collective Challenge

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

On Monday, November 4, attendees of the annual Heritage Centre (HC) gala were wine, dine, and inspired to join the collective challenge of providing ongoing support for this unique aging-in-place campus.

HC executive director Ron Parent opened the elegant affair with a reminder to everyone that supporting this community-owned social enterprise is like supporting their favourite hockey teams, such as the Winnipeg Jets and the Niverville Nighthawks.

"We chant, we cheer, we celebrate goals, and each hurdle we overcome," Parent said to those gathered. "It's not just about the game. It's about belonging. Each victory feels like shared triumph and every setback a collective challenge."

John Olfert and Mark Chipman were added to the HC's long lineup of prestigious keynote speakers this year.

Olfert is the chief operating officer of True North Sports and Entertainment (TNSE). He bears the legacy of being one of the key people responsible for the acquisition of the Winnipeg Jets franchise in 2011.

Joining Olfert later for a question-and-answer period was Mark Chipman, executive chairman of the board of TNSE and the Winnipeg Jets Hockey Club.

For the sake of those gathered, Olfert delved into history, regaling the audience with stories of the daunting challenges TNSE faced in the deconstruction of an old arena and the building of a new state-of-the-art 15,000-seat arena in downtown Winnipeg.

"Over the next seven years, our



Mark Chipman, John Olfert, and Ron Parent speak at this year's Heritage Centre fundraising gala.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

team [at TNSE] learned how to operate an arena and an NHL team," Olfert said. "Trips to other NHL cities occurred. We learned the requirements and mechanics associated with operating an NHL team."

Along with high levels of dedication on the organization's part, Olfert says it's thanks to fan support that the Jets franchise has been as successful as it has.

"Our True North Youth Foundation matured from raising about a quarter million dollars per year to give away to other charities, to now becoming a \$2.5-million-dollar a year annual operation, running three programs."

The Winnipeg Jets Hockey Academy employs university students who run a weekly hockey program for younger students.

Camp Manitou is a facility offering children a place to build confidence and strong relationships through a variety of outdoor programming.

Finally, Project 11 is a cross-cultural program offering lessons and activities designed to support students and teachers on mental health awareness and positive coping skills.

"Much of True North's journey has been guided by long-standing relationships with friends and partners who share our vision, mission, values, and culture," Olfert said. "The work of True North and the Niverville Heritage Centre are very similar. While True North serves the community by offering venues and teams, you are serving your community by offering this beautiful gathering place."

Like True North's journey, the Heritage Centre has indeed been one

of incredible vision, passion, dedication, and triumph over challenge. It remains to this day a crown jewel of the province and a shining example of the dreams that are possible when a community like Niverville rallies together for the greater good.

The challenges faced by the HC in 2024 are those of maintenance, repairs, and upgrades to the various seniors facilities that make up the campus. This year's gala fundraising dollars have been designated for a completion of the roof on the Niverville Credit Union Manor.

If funding permits, residents of the Heritage Life Personal Care Home (HLPCH) will also benefit through the addition of a virtual interactive projection device which allows mobility-restricted residents to play virtual games without the need for

a remote.

Improvements to lighting, resident showers, and the campus's industrial fridge and freezer are also high on the list.

A lofty goal was set this year for \$181,000 in new funding.

Unfortunately, ticket sales for this year's gala were significantly down from previous years. Parent says that a number of factors contributed to that, including the burden of an increased cost of living and the gala's move to a Monday night.

The choice of a Monday night, he adds, allowed the HC team to accommodate Olfert and Chipman's busy schedules.

But there's one more reason Parent believes numbers were down this year: "[There's a] perception that the HC receives grants and funding from the town and government, so why keep donating?"

The reality, though, is that operating and capital costs to run this community-owned enterprise will always rely on the generous support of donors who value the amenities the HC brings to the community. This includes but is not limited to housing so our seniors can remain in the community they call home. Additionally, the daycare facility improves life for many Niverville families every day.

At the time of this writing, \$50,000 in donations have been realized. Parent says that donations are still trickling in and his team will put to good use any amount, however large or small.

Tax deductible receipts are available upon request.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more or to donate, visit: www.heritagecentre.ca



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Exciting Community Investments Coming in 2025!

Over the weekend of Nov. 22nd to 23rd, 2024, Town Council met with staff and delegations to discuss the achievements of 2024, and to see what investments can be made in 2025 to continue the vibrant growth of the community while keeping that small-town feel. Below are just some of the exciting developments in store for 2025:

- A new Fire Hall and Operations Shop, projected to be completed by 2027, with the goal of paying for the \$4 to \$5 million total project scope completely by self-funding.
- Looking forward to the opening of the Town's "Take One, Leave One" library space in the Centennial Arena South End.
- Breaking ground for the RSR Wastewater Treatment Facility is projected to begin in 2025, bringing with it new jobs, expanded services, and continued vibrant growth to the community.
- The completion of Opa's Park and Station Park in 2025, a \$50,000 investment into upgrades for the Splash Pad to lessen downtime and ensure access to this community resource for decades to come, and undertaking the design of an RV park in Hespeler Park.
- Updates to the Centennial Arena in 2025 with new players' benches, penalty box, and west sideboards, as well as a new Zamboni.
- Expanding the footprint of Open Health Niverville to include space for 4 new doctors, on top of the 13 currently employed by the clinic.
- And much more!

The Town is able to accomplish these projects and goals with a modest four percent tax increase for 2025. Council weighed the need to keep up with infrastructure investments and renewal, the need for additional services, and the ability of the community to pay in making this decision.

The Town is looking forward to seeing the momentum continue in the community and the work of residents, business owners, investors and even visitors leading Niverville into the evolution to being Manitoba's next city, while still ensuring we retain the small-town community we all call home.





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Manitoba RCMP Introducing Body Cams

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

In 18 months or less, RCMP staff across the country will have one more tool to help solve crime: body cameras. Manitoba's official rollout of the new device began on November 22 with the Steinbach detachment. In that city, 33 officers already use the cameras.

Officers with the St. Pierre-Jolys detachment are expected to be similarly outfitted within the next two months.

The body camera is a small black box that clips to the officer's vest in one of two locations in the abdominal area. It can capture both video and audio recordings.

Each camera has an impressive 12- to 14-hour battery life, extending well beyond most officers' individual shifts.

It operates in two modes. When not manually activated by the officer, the camera still records, but only for 30-second increments which continually overwrite the previous 30-second increment.

When the officer initiates activation, it begins a continuous recording until it is manually deactivated again. This lengthier recording will include the 30-second clip taken just prior to activation.

Audio is only initiated when the camera has been manually activated.

Sargent Paul Manaire is the media relations officer for the Manitoba RCMP.

"I can have it on for two minutes or I can have it on for six hours, depending on what I'm dealing with," says Manaire. "The policy in Manitoba is [for] any encounters with the public, the officer has to record."

The body cam is not a pilot



Sargent Paul Manaire with the new RCMP body cam. **BRENDA SAWATZKY**

project, he adds. It's here to stay.

First initiated by the federal government four years ago, it's taken this long to approve a prototype, establish a manufacturer, and build policy around the device's use.

The idea of the body cam for law enforcement use is not new. Manaire says police in the United States have been using them for a long time.

"When you're watching U.S. news and you see police body cam footage, chances are this is what they're using. They've been doing it for years."

A big benefit of using the device is to provide RCMP officers with an added level of personal protection and accountability.

"RCMP get a lot of frivolous complaints," Manaire says. "In my 29 years, I've seen a lot of that. But some of them are legitimate, so it keeps officers accountable. Hopefully we can reduce the number of complaints against officers."

The company providing the cameras is also the one providing the federal government with data storage services.

When an RCMP officer returns his camera to the charging port at the end of their shift, any data on that device is uploaded into safe storage.

"Once it's [uploaded], it all

goes to our servers in Winnipeg. The officer has the ability to ask to see and review it. He doesn't have the ability to manipulate or edit it."

Manaire says seven new full-time civil servant jobs were created to manage the video and audio data, and to curate it all.

Audio for important data will be transcribed onto documents that are easily sharable between departments.

Manaire says he ran a trial video on his own camera. Approximately one and a half minutes of recording required almost 50 megabytes of data storage.

"You can imagine what six to eight hours [of recording] per shift per member would require. I don't think the federal government could even manage [that level of data]."

All of this stored audio and video, Manaire says, will be admissible in court, which means the seven human data processors will have their work cut out for them.

"Eventually, once all of the officer training is done, their job is going to be focused on data [management]. You can imagine how many requests we're going to get for disclosures for Crown defence. 'For court purposes' will probably be the biggest [request]."

The body camera is not an inexpensive tool to add to the RCMP toolkit. Manaire says the total project rollout cost the federal government around \$240 million.

The cameras are being leased from an American-based company and not purchased outright. Manaire says the lease comes to about \$3,000 per camera.

On top of that, he says it will take about \$50 million annually to keep the program running. He anticipates that the feds will look to provinces and municipalities to help subsidize these costs.

But Manaire says it's important that the general public recognize the role these new devices will play in their own safety and well-being.

"People may become fearful of interacting with police. But that's not why the camera is there. It's there to be an evidence-recording tool, to gather statements, to keep the person we're talking to safe and to keep us safe."

Unlike cellphone cameras used by the public, Manaire says the RCMP body cam is not bound by privacy laws when the officer is acting within the scope of his duties. In this case, the officer does not require anyone's express permission to record them.

While most Manitobans can expect to see the camera devices being worn over the coming weeks and months, there are some areas where rollout will take a little longer. Regions of northern Manitoba, for instance, will require major internet infrastructure improvements before the cameras will be useful.

As far as Manaire is aware, the city of Winnipeg will not be investing in a similar body cam program for their urban police department at this point.

CITIZEN POLL

Do you think the RCMP's use of body cams will be enough of an effective tool to justify a \$50 million per year cost?

- Yes. The footage will earn that money back through expediting court proceedings and simplifying investigations.
- No. I don't have faith that these devices will change the system enough to make any great difference.

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

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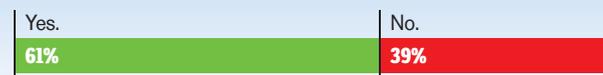
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LAST MONTH'S RESULTS:

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



YOUR COMMENTS:

I am in my late 60s. I expect I would have a different answer in the next ten years or so. This this may be a great opportunity to serve the elder folks in our community. Medical appointments and social events could be much more accessible. - Holly Rafferty

Absolutely! With the lack of local job opportunities available, this would be an incredible service for those of us who are unable to find employment in town, but who still need to find a way to support our families.

It would also help employ several people, as well as provide a reliable and safe mode of transportation (especially during the winter months).

A lot of people, myself included, don't drive, so a bus system would benefit everyone. I live in Niverville and don't drive and would love a way to the city.

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Forgotten Flavours Expands to Winnipeg But Niverville Café Coming Soon

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

When news broke in late November that Niverville's hometown bakery had opened its first retail storefront in Winnipeg, some locals may have been inclined to worry. After all, the greatly anticipated promise of a bakery storefront and café at 69 Main Street in Niverville has yet to materialize.

But Chris and Maria Holbrow of Forgotten Flavours say they haven't forgotten. Within weeks, they hope, it'll be Niverville's time to shine.

In the meantime, a small storefront along Corydon Avenue's upscale business sector, a place once known as Pennyloaf Bakery, is showcasing Forgotten Flavours baked goods under Chris's watchful eye.

For the better part of ten months now, the Holbrows' wild yeast breads and artisan sweets have been heating up the rear section of 69 Main Street, pumping out upwards of 800 loaves of bread per week.

The couple has hired three local production workers to work alongside the head baker, Maria. Chris has quit his job in the corporate world to manage the business end of the company.

But as successful as the couple has been in their first two years of operating the business, not everything's gone as swimmingly.

The 60-year-old building they purchased in Niverville earlier this year, once the community's post office, required major structural improvements. This significantly slowed the couple's dream of getting the retail outlet and café open by summer.

It was a building they purchased from James Fiebelkorn, the same person who owns Pennyloaf Bakery on Corydon.

Chris says they developed a good relationship with Fiebelkorn from the start. When their own business took



The busy Forgotten Flavours commercial kitchen at 69 Main Street.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

off, Fiebelkorn came to the Holbrows for help in saving his own struggling business.

"Maria, being the expert in production and me with my business [acumen], we understand the bakery business very well," Chris says. "Especially considering the volume we were doing with two people [compared to] the 12 people they had [at Pennyloaf]. Even now, with the few people we have here, we're able to produce four times what they were doing."

When Fiebelkorn finally closed Pennyloaf in December 2023, he approached the Holbrows about opening a second location at his store. But the couple was in a time of major transition, working hard to complete the expansion into their new space in Niverville.

Opening a second location was the last thing on their minds.

With production in full swing at 69 Main, the couple's next goal was to build brand awareness in order to grow their market.

To do this, they set up booths at almost every farmers' market in the area, working seven days per week throughout the summer, over and above their production time in their commercial kitchen.

"At the St. Norbert Market, for example, we were selling about 450 loaves [of bread each Saturday], never mind our pastry and pasta sales," Chris says.

It was an exhausting endeavour, though, and one they're glad to be done with. Now, says Chris, it's time to focus on retail outlets where people will come to them.

Cue the Corydon Avenue location, which Fiebelkorn proposed to them for a second time.

"[James] is a wonderful man and he's been so supportive of us," Chris says. "He said to me, 'Listen, if I'm going to lose money on a space, I might as well lose it while doing a good deed.'"

The team made a deal and the Holbrows opened the doors of their newly leased location on Corydon on

November 18.

If their first week in business says anything, the Holbrows' product will be a great success in this bustling neighbourhood. On each of their first three days in business, the Forgotten Flavours product sold out within hours.

It's not like the Niverville location, though, Chris adds. Corydon Avenue won't have a café or production area. It's simply a sales depot for products made in Niverville.

Chris has trained three staff to run the Winnipeg location and expects to spend some time there himself. Still, most of his time will be dedicated to completing the storefront and café right here at home.

In the meantime, Forgotten Flavours' wild yeast breads can be found at Your Grocery People.

However, it should be said that large grocery chains like Sobey's and Superstore are not the kind of retail that the Holbrows are after.

"Our product is more of a niche," says Chris. "It's for people with

moderate to severe digestive issues due to the fact that it's healthier. But it's also considered a more premium bread, and you don't go to the grocery store for premium product."

The Holbrows are also keenly interested in building face-to-face relationships with their customers, which you can't do in what Chris calls the "blind consumerism model."

If the business continues to burgeon the way it has so far, Chris says they are not opposed to opening more satellite shops like the one on Corydon in the future.

"Winnipeg really needs quality bakery [storefronts]," Chris says. "When we go to markets like Scattered Seeds, they are complete sell-outs [for us]."

With expansion comes risk, though, and the Holbrows are already planning on how to best mitigate that.

"When you grow quickly, how do you ensure that you don't lose [product quality], that one thing that makes you special?" Chris asks. "That's why this space in Niverville becomes more and more relevant, because Maria can maintain quality here."

Keeping production all in one location is key, he says. The next step will be to hire more people for their Niverville location. Eventually, Chris envisions a bakery kitchen where Maria is not shaping the dough but actively working out new recipes as the creative genius she is.

"We haven't seen anything yet," Chris muses. "What she is capable of will put us on the map."

In the end, the Holbrows want to reassure their Niverville neighbours and supporters that this community is not being forgotten.

"Niverville has always been our priority," Chris says. "We've had some delays [on the storefront and café], but we're doing everything we can to make sure we service our community. This is where our roots are. This is where our home is."

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The Niverville Chamber of Commerce had a good year of active events and engaged membership. We are pleased and grateful for the continued growth of our membership.

One significant accomplishment is the launch of our new website with features that include online membership management, job posting board, and a wealth of resources.

We refined our internal processes, bylaws and systems which streamlined operations and improved efficiency.

The Advocacy Team worked with businesses to advocate for changes, The Membership Team kicked off Final Friday Coffee Chats at Negash, and the Events Team hosted educational, networking, and promotional opportunities for members. Of particular note is our Golf Tournament and AGM Awards Dinner.

Overall, the year 2024 was successful for the Niverville Chamber of Commerce, and we look forward to continuing to serve members and the community with excellence and dedication.

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Niverville Plans for New Fire Hall, Highway 311 Upgrades

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

On November 5, Niverville's council set in motion the process of getting the community a new fire hall, as well as major upgrades to Highway 311 west.

FIRE HALL

A bid of \$369,500 has been accepted from an architecture and engineering firm who will draw up a plan for a new fire hall which will be located immediately next to the civic building, on the same spot where the existing fire hall stands.

This is the same firm that was hired to design Niverville's new RCMP detachment.

"When the town office was bought, it was also for the purpose of increasing emergency services," says Mayor Dyck. "So we've done the



Niverville's council meets in early November.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

RCMP [detachment] and now we're working on fire [services]."

Dyck estimates that the old fire hall has been on the site since the late 1950s.

In planning for the new fire hall, he says that council has had much communication with the Niverville Fire Department's executive team regarding what their needs will be

and how a reconstruction can be carried out on the site without disrupting current services.

HIGHWAY 311 RENEWAL

With all the commercial action taking place on Niverville's west side, council will be applying to the province for an \$8 million grant from the Manitoba Growth, Renewal and Oppor-

tunities program.

"It is designed to help Manitoba municipalities advance critical infrastructure that will support growing and sustainable communities," CAO Eric King told council.

The grant funds will cover up to 50 percent of a project. The balance must be managed by the municipality.

If received, the grant has been earmarked for Highway 311 west, specifically the section of highway between Krahn Road and Wallace Road.

Architectural drawings have already been created that show intersection improvements, including roundabouts and traffic lights.

"It's going to be kind of a three-way thing where the province will hopefully pay some, the developer will have to pay some, and then the town would have a share," says Dyck.

In March 2023, the former Transportation and Infrastructure Minister, Doyle Piwniuk, made a funding promise to the Town of Niverville to the tune of \$40.6 million for the renewal of this section of highway.

As governments change, so do funding promises, though. In order to see the project through, the town remains hopeful that grant monies will be forthcoming.

The owners and staff of The Citizen would like to express our sincere gratitude to the people and businesses in and around our region. It is you who have made this publication possible through your advertising, contributions, and positive feedback.

We encourage our readers to recognize and support those people and businesses who continue to help make this region a great place to live, work, and play!

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Planning Sessions Give Niverville Council Direction

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Niverville's town council and CAO convened for their 2025 budget planning sessions on November 22–23. It's an intensive couple of days, requiring almost 20 hours to complete the agenda.

"It takes a lot of time to get briefed," says Mayor Myron Dyck. "The fire department came in and had a chance to speak with council. The Chamber [as well], and all of the department managers come in to speak with council."

The team of five covered a lot of ground pertaining to the upcoming budget. The discussions began with a review of some of council's accomplishments in 2024.

These included a major rebuild of the street, ditches, and drainage along Fourth Avenue South. More recently, a new water tanker truck has been delivered at a cost of almost \$600,000.

Nearing the close of 2024, the construction of Niverville's RCMP detachment came to an end. This space inside the municipal building is move-in ready.

"For all intents and purposes, it is complete," Dyck says. "We understand from the RCMP that there are one or two more items they are waiting for and then they will be moving in. We do look forward to them taking occupancy in 2025."

Four constables have been assigned to the Niverville detachment and are currently working out of the St. Pierre-Jolys office until they make the move.

Currently in progress is the construction of four new clinical rooms at Niverville Open Health, making use of borrowed space from the Heritage Centre.

These rooms will go a long way to accommodate the 13 doctors who already practice at the clinic.

"We are already working on where future space [will come from] because we are now out of space [at the Heritage Centre]," says Dyck.

Finally, the new take-one, leave-one library is getting close to completion at the south end of the Centennial Arena. The goal is to find volunteer staff to help manage the operations.

The community space will provide furnishings for a comfortable library experience, a selection of books, as well as computers for public use.

WHAT'S NEW FOR 2025?

Looking forward to the coming year, council has pencilled in many priorities.

One of the largest of these budget items is the plan for a deconstruction and complete rebuild of Niverville's Fire and EMS department with a shared space for Public Works and Operations. The total projected cost of this endeavour is between \$4 and \$5 million.

"We want to pay for it cash," Dyck says. "We're taking [the next three years] to set a million or a million and a half aside each year so that by the time it's built in 2027, the money is there to pay for it."

The primary objective, he adds, is to see this project through without having to borrow money. They will, however, pursue any federal or provincial grants that may be available.

Upgrades will continue in the new year to the Centennial Arena. The west sideboards, penalty boxes, and player benches will be rebuilt and a new Zamboni purchased.

According to Dyck, construction will soon get underway for the new regional wastewater treatment plant.

Most recent projections bring the plant in at a cost of almost \$200 million, to be shared between the four municipalities who will benefit from it, along with funding from both the provincial and federal governments.

The facility is expected to be built just north of Niverville in the RM of Ritchoy.

Finally, there are some changes coming to Hespeler Park in 2025.

Parents and grandparents will be glad to know that council has set aside \$50,000 to bring some needed upgrades to the splash pad.

"We had a number of alarms going off this year that had to do with chemical imbalance," Dyck says. "The UV filtration system has not been working properly for a while. So if the alarms aren't going off, the staff don't have to go there three or four times a weekend to determine what needs to be done."

The new funding will provide for a replacement of the existing UV system which, in turn, will take some pressure off the chemical backup system. Completion of the project will depend on the supply of parts and availability of service.

Also new to Hespeler Park this year will be the introduction of an RV park in the southwest corner.

"We have a lodging shortage

in town, so this is one way we can increase opportunities for people to have overnight stays," Dyck says.

Once complete, the RV park will include 16 parking sites as well as a dump station.

The location was chosen very specifically for its access to the trail system as well as proximity to soccer pitches, baseball diamonds, play structures, and the splash pad.

Of course, this all comes at a cost.

In order to accomplish these initiatives, council has deemed that a four percent increase in property

taxes will be necessary in 2025.

"Council weighed the need to keep up with infrastructure investments and renewal, the need for additional services, and the ability of the community to pay in making this decision," reads a news release from council.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

Among other developments to look forward to in 2025, council says, are the grand opening of Jette Studios upon its completion and another round of Pizza Wars held by the Niverville

Chamber of Commerce.

In March, players and visitors will converge on Niverville for the CCAA Men's National Volleyball Championship in conjunction with Providence College.

"The town is looking forward to seeing the momentum continue in the community and the work of residents, business owners, investors and even visitors leading Niverville into the evolution to being Manitoba's next city, while still ensuring we retain the small-town community we all call home."



Niverville has received a new water tanker truck.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

Niverville Fire and EMS Receive New Tanker Truck

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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As of November 26, a shiny new water tanker truck awaits its first use at the Niverville Fire and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) department.

The new tanker was delivered to for a cost of \$580,000 and will replace the old, aging truck that had run its course.

"This [truck] is larger in capacity," says Mayor Myron Dyck. "So anytime we have an opportunity

to throw more water at a fire, it just gives us greater opportunity to save homes, lives, and even pets."

The tanker, built by Seahawk and Acres Industries, will assist the fire department in servicing areas of Niverville which don't have the advantage of fire hydrants.

This includes areas beyond the older residential sections of Niverville.

The entire industrial park, too, is not serviced by hydrants at this time.

In fact, it's not uncommon for even the largest fire departments to own tanker trucks.

Dyck says that the City of Winnipeg, for example, owns tanker trucks in order to service for some of their outlying areas where hydrants don't exist.

"One of the factors in the decision to purchase the new tanker and retire the old was simply age," says Cyrus Reimer, the town's communications director. "There is also the need for increased tanker capacity due to the growth that Niverville has experienced over the past few years, especially with the growth of larger industrial businesses in the business park."



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Niverville High School Reports Positive Response to Cellphone Ban

By Brenda Sawatzky
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
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It's been just over two months since the province banned student cellphone use in schools and Niverville High School's principal, Paul Grosskopf, reports that the transition is going remarkably well.

While school administration has been vigilant in implementing the new policy, Grosskopf says the real measure of success has been the student response.

"We have had minimal pushback from students," says Grosskopf. "When you are able to walk into a classroom and see students and staff being able to get right to the learning process at the start of class instead of needing to address cellphone usage, that is always a positive."

Based on teacher feedback, he says that a marked difference is already being witnessed both in and out of the classroom.

"Teachers have reported more engaged students, and students conversing with one another more often, especially during downtimes," says Grosskopf. "Now, when students have that free moment, they are able to turn to a peer or a teacher and can form those very important educational and relational connections. In the past, that has not always been the case, where students would often resort to their devices during those downtimes."

The province's sweeping ban on cellphones begs the question, though, whether some schools will have the



BRENDA SAWATZKY

resources to fill the gap. While cellphones in the classroom do pose a distraction, they can also serve as a valuable internet research tool.

For Grosskopf, this is not a concern since the Hanover School Division (HSD) has provided his school with enough Chromebooks to make cellphone use unnecessary.

When the province announced their cellphone ban announcement this summer, a few school divisions had already implemented phone restrictions of their own.

The DSFM adopted a pilot program that follows the same model as the province.

Kindergarten to Grade Eight students are restricted from bringing cellphones into the school under any circumstance. At the high school level, students may use cellphones during break periods and outside the classroom only.

Teachers in the senior years have the autonomy to allow phones in their classes when they pertain to learning.

In the spring of 2024, prior to the provincial announcement, HSD had been developing a similar cellphone ban

which was to be implemented in the coming school year. Their new policy affected elementary and middle schools only. High school administrators would have had the freedom to continue to develop their own internal policies.

The new provincial legislation makes Manitoba the seventh province to ban phones.

Others include Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, Quebec, Ontario, and Nova Scotia.

At NHS, the policy seems to be having its intended affect.

"Students have been able to own their mistakes," Grosskopf says. "[They] acknowledge when they have used their phones and can often self-correct. [They] are more engaged, interacting with each other, problem-solving and starting to build connections again. It will not all be perfect and we recognize there are still challenges ahead, but overall the impact has been very positive. We are thankful for a supportive community and want to celebrate these successes with our students and families."

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Hundreds Moved by Tales of Auschwitz Survivor

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
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True to tradition, the Niverville Heritage Centre ballroom was once again full to capacity this Remembrance Day, bringing out about 800 people for the annual service.

Attendees this year were treated to a filmed interview with Angela Orosz, funded by the Remembrance Day committee and conducted by *The Citizen's* Brenda Sawatzky.

The event also saw the playing of Terry Kelly's "A Pittance of Time" and Melanie Bergen's soulful rendition of the wartime classic "We'll Meet Again." Local veteran Jack Stott returned posthumously by video, reading "For the Fallen" in a recording taken at Niverville's cenotaph years ago.

Wreath-layers, escorted to the stage by the 3234 Manitoba Horse Army Cadets and local chapter of the Girl Guides Embers, included Ted Falk on behalf of Canada, Joan Golebioski on behalf of Manitoba, and various representatives from the Canadian Armed Forces, the RCMP, and survivors of conflict.

YOUNGEST SURVIVOR

Hailing from Montreal, Angela Orosz has become known as one of Auschwitz's youngest

and last remaining survivors. She was born in the Nazi concentration camp in December 1944 weighing only 2.2 pounds.

Orosz's parents were newlywed Hungarian Jews when the Nazis infiltrated Hungary in 1943. Her father was an esteemed lawyer and her mother dreamed of becoming a teacher.

Her mother, Vera, discovered herself three months pregnant just as the German and Hungarian armies set out to eliminate the Jews from Hungary.

Orosz described conditions in the cattle cars on which thousands of Jews were transported either to their death or years of hard labour.

"There was one pail for water for all of these 70 or 80 people and one pail as a washroom," Orosz says. "You know when the train moves? So did the water and [the contents of] the washroom. You couldn't imagine the smell. And there was big kids and little kids and old people and, as my mother said, it was standing room only."

For three long days these men, women, and children travelled without food. Many died en route. And throughout the journey, they were unaware that their final destination was the infamous



Angela Orosz survived the Auschwitz camp as a baby. ■ BRENDA SAWATZKY

concentration camp known as Auschwitz.

Upon their arrival, the train car occupants were divided to the left and right by Joseph Mengele, a man who history remembers as the "angel of death." Seniors, the infirm, young children, and pregnant women were relegated to the gas chambers. The rest were subjected to hard labour.

"My mother, being so naïve, she said to Mengele, 'I'm pregnant,' and he yelled at her, 'You stupid goose!' He waved her to the working group, and later my mother said, 'What a miracle that was.' She wasn't sent to the gas chamber."

Miracles continued to manifest amidst the unspeakable hardship of life in the concentration camp. When

she became too weak for the heavy work of roadbuilding, Vera was sent to kitchen duty instead of being shot, as was typical at the camp.

In the kitchens, she supplemented her diet with raw potato peelings, castoffs from the Nazi soldiers' meals. It gave her and her unborn child a little extra nutrition in addition to the rotten vegetables or poison ivy soup that was served to the prisoners.

Unfortunately, Vera was unable to escape the sadistic experiments carried out by Mengele. At his hands, she was subjected to weeks of barbaric and inhumane treatment, as were so many others during the Auschwitz years.

"My mother said he gave an injection into her uterus and

that was very painful," Orosz says. "And when he gave the injection on the right side, I moved to the other side. Then the next day he repeated on the other side, and I moved the other way."

Orosz says her mother was never told the purpose of the experiment, but she was rendered sterile following her time with Mengele.

On a chilly winter day in late December, Vera went into labour. Yet another miracle presented itself when a barrack overseer was able to help find clean water and a few rudimentary instruments to assist in the birth.

Orosz was born in secret, too weak and fragile to cry. Two hours following the birth, Vera headed outside into extreme winter temperatures to stand for rollcall by the Nazi guards.

"Can you imagine giving birth and then going outside in minus 21 degrees, standing there for hours and hours?" Orosz asks. "She didn't have shoes because all they [were given] were wooden clogs and, on the ice, those are slippery. If they fell, they got shot. Therefore, they chose to go barefoot and stay alive."

Despite these impossible conditions, Vera had a bigger reason to fight. In the barracks, on the top bunk, was

a newborn child covered in rugs to prevent her from being eaten by hungry rats.

Six weeks after Orosz's birth, the Russian army descended on occupied Poland, prompting the Germans to effect a retreat. The survivors or Auschwitz were liberated at last.

Vera eventually returned to her native Hungary, but her home had been taken over by strangers. As an infant, Orosz barely clung to life, weighing a mere six pounds even at the age of one.

Nuns, doctors, and even Vera's own mother tried to convince her to give up on the child and let her die. But Vera persisted, eventually finding a doctor who would help strengthen the weak child.

Vera went on to remarry a fellow Auschwitz survivor who'd lost his wife and daughter at the camp. He took Orosz on as his own, and Vera went on to live to a ripe old age.

This December, Orosz will celebrate her eightieth birthday.

In 2015 and 2016, Orosz was able to testify against two former concentration camp guards at trials held in Germany. In recent years, she's become an active speaker at the Montreal Holocaust Museum, bringing her story to thousands of young students.

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Commentary

Deconstructing Christmas: An Interfaith Celebration of the Holidays

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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Christians celebrate Christmas on December 25 as the anniversary of the birth of Jesus. This is the season they focus on the “incarnation,” which means that God became human in the form of Jesus Christ.

Like many people here in southeast Manitoba, I grew up celebrating Christmas with my extended family and church community.

But since our family left our religion, Christmas has felt different. My husband and I both explored a deconstruction of our faith.

While he deconverted and turned to secular humanism as a rational philosophy for life, I settled into contemplative Christian practices that have their basis in hospitality and nonreligious spirituality.

So how do we celebrate traditional holidays as a faith-blended family?

Our household left evangelical Christianity intentionally after 2020 and we have no plans to return. It was important to us to do so mindfully and process the complicated feelings that can come with such major life changes.

Having two children heading into the teenage years, it was also a concern for us to navigate belief changes with transparency and what stability we could offer them.

As we shifted toward a combination of secular humanism and spiritual but non-religious faith, our kids were able to understand the reasons for the changes we were making as a family.

Time passed and helped to showcase that while some of our

Sunday morning and church-related activities had changed, our family remained committed to love and belonging for all of us.

One of the major building blocks for making our marriage and family work was that even though our belief systems were quite different—my husband no longer believes in God and I do—we still had a shared value system. In this shared system, we realized we could each articulate our values without attaching spiritual language to them and find common ground in the process.

And I learned that, as humans, our actions spring from our values, which can be informed by our beliefs, but they are not dependent on our beliefs.

So my husband and I find little value in each other’s “rightness” or “wrongness.” What we do value is familial relationship and continuing to support and find joy in one another.

How we celebrate personal milestones and communal traditions that mark the passage of time continue to be areas in which we are learning more about what works for us and what doesn’t.

As for Christmas, it had become a date on a religious calendar we no longer looked forward to—at least, not in the same way.

I’m still interested in celebrating Christmas, but not quite all “Jesus is the reason for the season” like I was taught. There are new ways in which this season is still meaningful to me.

Since it was important to me, my husband has supported the idea of exploring themes for the holidays

from our different but still valid perspectives.

I’ve found that Advent is still a seasonal tradition that holds inspiration and meaning for me.

Traditionally, Advent marks the four weeks before Christmas during which we anticipate the arrival (advent) of Jesus.

During this period, Christians from many backgrounds choose to celebrate with reflections on hope, peace, love, and joy.

If hope, peace, love, and joy sound like themes that can span religious divides, it’s because they can!

Our family found no reason not to embrace what this season means, and last year I wrote a lengthy reflection on each theme in order to spend time with the importance of each one from an interfaith perspective.

I want to revisit a few of those thoughts.

Hope is something my husband and I chose as one of our shared values. With our lived experience, along with our history in Christian ministry and working with those facing life’s greatest challenges, we’ve both seen and experienced how hardship is harder, and dangerously so, without hope.

Recently our family received some medical news—and with it, as it often does, came a prognosis with an uncertain outcome. In the words of Tom Petty, the waiting is the hardest part.

That evening, I lit a candle and set it in our window. Out in the country, our house faces south across miles of prairie fields. With no streetlights to speak of, the light

of a candle goes a long way, unchallenged into the night.

It wasn’t a beacon for anyone else’s benefit but my own. It seemed like a hopeful thing to do.

Monk and mystic Br. David Steindl-Rast has said, “There is a close connection between hope and hopes, but we must not confuse the two. We set our hopes on something we can imagine. But hope is open for the unimaginable. The opposite of hopes is hopelessness. The opposite of hope is despair. One can cling desperately to one’s hopes. But even in a hopeless situation hope remains open for surprise. It is surprise that links hope with gratefulness. To the grateful heart every gift is surprising. Hope is openness for surprise.”

The practice of mindfulness acknowledges that all we have is this moment and we are not in control of the future. It begs us to come to terms with the vulnerable joy we experience when holding our favourite mug and our children close.

We also become more fully aware of love’s potential grief or the atrocities happening in our world.

So if we are not in control, and bad things happen, where do we find our ability to hope? Is it enough that we can reason that good things happen too? What does this reasoning feel like to you? Where do you find the roots of your reason to continue to hope?

Positive psychologist C.R. Snyder says that hope is a cognitive function and can be learned.

In his paper *Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind*, he writes, “Hope is defined as the perceived

capability to derive pathways to desired goals, and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways.”

A verse from the Bible, found in 1 Peter 1:3 of the New King James Version, says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope...”

Christians believe that Jesus embodies this living hope.

Experts agree that a mindset of active hope is the antithesis of despair.

As each week of Advent passes, our family lights a candle. Countless others will do the same. And this action gives me hope. We may not all bring the same theology to our values or practices, and that’s okay.

Another hopeful thing my family still does at Christmas is give gifts. We choose to do this on the winter solstice, the date when pre-Christian Europeans celebrated the darkest day of the year, looking forward with hope to brighter days to come.

We are not the first interfaith family out there and my husband and I are both committed to learning from others who have gone before.

Similarly, what we have learned may be of value to others finding their way.

May all of us find safety and belonging somewhere this season. And may we all find a way to have hope, peace, love, and joy this Christmas.

Sara Dacombe is a spiritual director and her writing can be found at www.prairiethistle.ca.



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Nighthawks Fight for Position in Tough Division

By Ty Dilello

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If October was a month of offensive struggles for the Niverville Nighthawks, November was a month for the team to bounce back and prove they could hang in with the league's best teams.

As we near midseason, the picture in the MJHL's East Division is starting to clarify.

There are five very talented teams in a white-knuckled fight to clinch only four playoff spots—and at 16-9-1, Niverville is currently in fifth place.

OCTOBER 31 WINNIPEG BLUES, AWAY

The Nighthawks earned a big 6-2 win over the Winnipeg Blues on this Thursday night on the road.

It was a dominant game from start to finish, with the Nighthawks outshooting the Blues 43-22.

Niverville got on the board with a pair of early first period goals from Merik Boles. After Winnipeg got one back, Niverville scored again

with Matteo Speranza's fourth of the season.

In the second period, the Nighthawks had tallies from Adam Vigfusson and Evan Panzer.

Vigfusson scored again late in the third period.

"It was another night with great offensive production," said head coach Dwight Hirst. "We had a quick start, as getting things up ice quickly was imperative for us tonight. I want us to push the pace and keep things moving into the offensive zone in our next games."

Hirst was especially pleased with the play of Boles and Vigfusson.

"Those two were really great again tonight as they were playing below it in our own defensive zone, which gave them opportunities to get things up ice," said Hirst. "Capitalizing on those chances is key and those two boys have been cashing in."

NOVEMBER 2 WINNIPEG BLUES, AWAY

The Nighthawks made it four straight wins on Saturday evening, beating

the Blues for the second game in a row.

The Nighthawks got on the board midway through the first period with Boles's fifth goal of the season.

Luke Mackenzie made it 2-0 in the second period, and that's how the game would end as the team's played to a scoreless third period.

"Winning [four] straight games in this league is always great," said Hirst. "The score could have been even more in our favour, but Winnipeg's goalie played great, so hats off to him. It was a great game by us and more of what we like to see in a team game that will make us more consistent and successful down the road."

The Nighthawks would be back in action at home the next Friday versus Swan Valley.

NOVEMBER 8 SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDEERS, HOME

The Nighthawks made it five in a row with a Friday evening win over the Stampedeers, beating them 5-3.

It was a back-and-forth affair all night long.

Boles got the Nighthawks on the board just 20 seconds into the contest. Then Swan Valley tied it.

The Nighthawks went back ahead with a goal from Dawson Zeller. Then Swan Valley tied it.

But the home team pulled away in the third period with three goals, one of them short-handed and one into an empty net, from Avery Laliberte and two from Matteo Speranza.

"It was another great game by us in terms of just sticking with it and getting results," said Hirst. "We're working on playing a full 60 minutes, and this was a good example of that. We stuck with it all night long and got rewarded in the third period."

NOVEMBER 11 NEEPAWA TITANS, AWAY

The Nighthawks earned a franchise record on this Monday evening tilt versus the Titans, winning their sixth straight game.

The Nighthawks came out strong, with first period goals coming from Matthew Bertolin and Vigfusson. Those tallies set the pace for the

rest of the game.

Carter Spirig scored his fourth goal of the year early in the second period to make it 3-0. Although Neepawa got one back later in the period, Boles replied with a goal of his own.

Boles added one more goal in the third period to seal the deal.

"We played with pace and played with team speed tonight," said Hirst. "We got the puck moving north quickly and got the pucks deep to sustain the cycle game."

Hirst said he was pleased with the new look of his team over the course of the win streak.

"We're playing fast," he added. "And when everyone in our lineup knows that's the agenda, it promotes the trust in our players to play free and know that pucks are going up the ice now. When players know that's what makes us successful, we start to develop those habits."

NOVEMBER 16 NEEPAWA TITANS, AWAY

The Nighthawks came back down to earth on Saturday night. After a

six-game winning streak, they got whacked 7-2 on the road by the Titans.

Neepawa jumped out to a quick lead by scoring four times in the first period.

They extended that lead to 5-0 early in the second period before Bryce Warkentine scored his third goal of the season for Niverville.

The Titans continued their onslaught, scoring twice more in the second period, although Zeller got one back midway through the third period.

"It was a tough game for the entire group tonight," said Hirst. "We were not ready mentally and it reflected in our efforts. There was poor passing and poor decision-making, and being second to pucks will do that to a team on the scoreboard."

It would be a quick turnaround as the Nighthawks had to get back in fighting shape to face the Winkler Flyers at home.

"We just need to flush tonight's game and move on quickly," said Hirst.

NOVEMBER 17 WINKLER FLYERS, HOME

The Nighthawks earned a valuable point on Sunday night after an overtime loss to the Flyers, a game in which they fought hard to come back from a slow start.

Winkler scored twice in the first period to put the home team on its heels.

The game tightened up from there, though, with no more goals scored for the next 30 minutes, including a scoreless second period.

In the third, Niverville clawed their way back to even.

Aiden Corbett found the back of the net to make it 2-1. Then, with seven minutes remaining, Warkentine jammed home the equalizer.

The game remained tied through much of overtime. But with just 30

seconds left on the clock, Winkler got the game-winner.

"I'm very proud of the team and the effort not to quit," said Hirst. "It's very upsetting that I have to say this, but the referees missed an absolutely clear as day interference call that led to the game-winning goal in overtime. The missed call tainted a very good game."

The Nighthawks would regroup and hit the ice three days later versus the Portage Terriers.

"You can't give any team respect and an opportunity to establish their game plan," said Hirst. "We need to start owning the game from the start to be successful against a team like Portage."

NOVEMBER 20 PORTAGE TERRIERS, HOME

The Nighthawks gave the home crowd a real treat at the CRRC with a massive 6-2 victory over the Portage Terriers, one the league's top-ranked teams.

Warkentine set the tone by scoring for Niverville just three minutes into the contest. Portage tied it late in the first period.

In the second period, the Nighthawks went up again with a goal from Luke Wagner.

That's when Vigfusson took over the game, notching a hat trick. This brought him up to 14 goals on the season.

Hayden Wheddon added the other Nighthawks goal to end the game 6-2 in the home team's favour.

"We played aggressive in all three zones, and we didn't give them much room to make decisions," said Hirst. "We pushed the pace to give no space for them. That's been our agenda since day one and our club is starting to trust each other now that there is some camaraderie in the team. It's about all five players on the ice doing what's needed to play this way."

The Nighthawks were forced

to say goodbye to star netminder Raiden Legall, who signed with the WHL's Everett Silvertips for the remainder of the season.

"Raiden's been called up on assignment to the WHL to cover for Everett's two injured goalies," said Hirst. "We wish him success for his time there."

NOVEMBER 22 STEINBACH PISTONS, HOME

Riding high from their win over Portage, Nighthawks carried that momentum onto the ice, edging out their rivals, the number-one-ranked Steinbach Piston.

Vigfusson got the game going in Niverville's favour just three minutes in, only for Steinbach to tie it up later in the period.

For the rest of the game, both teams put on a defensive clinic.

The deadlock was broken by Boles, who scored to put the home team up 2-1 midway through the second period.

Both teams' exceptional goaltending locked the game down after that. Niverville's Austin Dubinsky was particularly strong, stopping 31 shots in the win.

"The progression we've shown is gaining momentum and it's a step at a time," said Hirst. "It's not so much about confidence, but it's about attacking the day and the game with the right mindset. Pace, tenacity, and hard pucks in every zone. That's how we were able to shut down Steinbach's offence tonight."

NOVEMBER 27 SELKIRK STEELERS, HOME

For a while, it looked like the Nighthawks were going to prevail against the Selkirk Steelers on this wild night at the CRRC.

Instead, frustratingly, the home team came out on the losing end.

With the score tied 1-1 after the first period, all hell broke loose in

the second frame. Of the five goals scored, three came from the Nighthawks, who led 4-3 heading into the final period.

Then Selkirk blitzed them and scored four of the next five to take over the game.

The Nighthawks had goals from all across their lineup, including Alex Ballard, Laliberte, Bertolin, Vigfusson, Zeller, and Boles.

Hirst was less than pleased with how run-and-gun the game became in the final two periods.

"It wasn't a style that we want to get caught in, that's for sure," he said. "It's uncharacteristic of the way we have been progressing in the last stretch of hockey here. We played too loose and without any urgency over the course of the entire game."

The Nighthawks would need to regroup in time for a Friday night tilt all the way up north in The Pas, taking on the Northern Manitoba Blizzard.

"We've got to get back to our basics," Hirst said. "Tonight was another step forward in our development process in understanding what drives our success and what doesn't. Tonight was a mental learning experience for the team. We just have to learn from it."

NOVEMBER 29 NORTHERN MANITOBA BLIZZARD, AWAY

The Nighthawks started off their road trip with a big 5-1 win over the Blizzard, always a tough barn to play in.

Niverville carried the pace of play from early on, scoring twice in the first period, once in the second period, and twice in the third period to pick up the win.

Spirig led the way with a pair of goals while Speranza, Vigfusson, and Zeller had the other tallies.

"We played a smart game and took what's available when it was available," said Hirst. "We were great at riding the momentums of a

game and being conscious of those decisions."

With a strong start to the season, Vigfusson was leading the club with 17 goals and 14 assists for 31 points in 25 games.

"He's great at working at the things that have made him successful, and this is the case with Viggy," said Hirst. "He's playing a style that is his trademark and it's showing on the scoreboard."

NOVEMBER 30 SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDEERS, HOME

The Nighthawks closed out November in style with another lopsided 4-1 win, this time over the Stampedeers.

Although Swan Valley opened the scoring late in the first period, the Nighthawks came out firing in the second.

Laliberte scored twice in nine minutes. Ty Kennett also scored.

Zeller added an insurance goal in the third period.

Niverville's latest addition to the roster, goalie Connor Graham, was excellent in his team debut, stopping 22 shots in the win.

A day earlier, on November 29, the Nighthawks had traded defenceman Brock Assailly in order to acquire Graham, forward Reid McIntyre, as well as future considerations from the Winnipeg Blues.

"It was a successful road trip up north," said Hirst. "It's tough at times to play back-to-back nights. And when the decisions are coming slow, it's a sign of mental fatigue. So it was a matter of shaking the fog out of our heads and getting things rolling with our physical attributes."

Hirst said the players were chomping at the bit to get back at it and face the Selkirk Steelers on the road three nights later.

"We can't be caught up in the comparable games, as everyone is good in this league. We have to stay focused on the tasks ahead of us and the next game on the schedule."



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IN BRIEF

Niverville Unveils Winter Leisure Guide

By Jennifer Lavin

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Each season, Niverville Recreation & Wellness creates a comprehensive leisure guide outlining the programs, events, and classes that will be available for the coming season. The winter guide is out now.

On December 8, the CRRC will host their Community Christmas. From 9:30 a.m. until 1:00 p.m., you can take a photo with Santa.

ROC Eastman (Recreation Opportunities for Children) will be onsite with a trailer to accept donations of money or lightly used sporting equipment. Cash donations will also be accepted.

The event will also feature an opportunity to go for a skate with the brand-new Niverville High School Panthers hockey team.

Many exciting opportunities are featured this season. From February 19 until April 23, Niverville Rec will offer baseball programs for those between the ages of 8 and 10, and 11 and 13, as well as softball for the 11-13 group.

From January 15 until March 12, the little ones can get wild in the Mymo's Mixer program.

"It's a parent-child program for children aged one to three that includes elements of gymnastics,

songs, and puppets for a fun, play-based movement program that teaches fundamental movement skills and cooperative play," says Teresa Mistelbacher, supervisor of camps and recreation programming.

New golf programming will be available this winter as well. Girls in Golf for ages 6 to 8 and 9 to 13 is a two-week program held once per month in January, February, and March.

From January 13 until February 17, the CRRC will offer Adult Golf Mondays.

Pickleball skill clinics for all ages will run throughout January and a winter pickleball tournament will take place on December 18.

On January 3, just before the kids head back to school, there will be a day camp for those between the ages of 6 and 13. The theme of this year's camp is Arctic Adventures.

Spring break will feature a whole week of fun day camps for kids. These camps will run from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. and will have themes like Athletic Anarchy, Jurassic Adventure, and Totally Gross Science.

For more information about any of these events, residents can pick up a copy of the Winter Leisure Guide at the CRRC or town office.



Behind the bench at the NHS Panthers home-opener in late October.

EVAN BRAUN

NHS Hockey Team Off to Strong Start

By Ty Dilello

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The Niverville High School's new Panthers hockey team is enjoying a strong and promising start to their inaugural season as a member of the Winnipeg High School Hockey League.

As the league sits now at the beginning of December, the

Panthers boast an even 4-4 record in league play, which puts them in seventh place in their 12-team division.

"As a first-year program, we had hoped to be competitive in our games, and we have been thus far," says head coach Brandon Lockerby. "It's been a lot of fun coaching these talented young players and we've had a great start to the year."

The Panthers are now finished tournament play for the season. The last tournament was held in Carman from November 15-16, where they lost in the final to the Carman Cougars.

The Panthers have an enviable home stand coming up in December, with four of their five games being played at home.

They will be back in action next on December 10 at the CRRC, going up against the Edward Schreyer Barons. The puck drops at 4:00 p.m.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the Niverville Panthers, visit: <https://www.winnipegshl.ca/division/0/25569/standings>

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Avery Laliberte on the ice for the Nighthawks.

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Laliberte Earns Scholarship at Northern Michigan

By Ty Dilello

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This past month, Niverville Nighthawks stud defenceman Avery Laliberte made a commitment to play NCAA Division 1 men's hockey next year at Northern Michigan University.

The 18-year-old from Lorette, Manitoba is fresh off his rookie season in the MJHL where he scored 2 goals and 18 assists in 53 games.

The six-foot-two, 200-pound defender also suited up in four playoff games for

the Nighthawks last season.

Laliberte grew up playing with the Eastman Selects AAA program in addition to the Rink Hockey Academy.

Several college programs were interested in his service before he ultimately settled on Northern Michigan.

The Northern Michigan University Wildcats play NCAA Division 1 in the Central Collegiate Hockey Association (CCHA).

"I settled on Northern Michigan for multiple reasons," says Laliberte. "My dad and I went for a visit and got

a great feeling meeting their staff. Their head coach is from Brandon, Manitoba—Dave Shyiak—and he welcomed us with open arms as we toured the facility and were extremely impressed."

He adds that the university location in Marquett, Michigan is perfect. Not being a big city, he doesn't find it overwhelming.

"It reminded us a lot of the Canadian Shield," he says. "I was talking to other schools, but Northern Michigan was first to give me an offer. And after learning more about their

program, we deemed it too good to pass up on."

In the meantime, Laliberte is focused on having a big season with the Nighthawks this year before heading off to college.

"I am extremely excited to be able to play college hockey one day, as it will be a dream come true," says Laliberte. "How I am approaching this year is just by trying to get better in all aspects of the game, more time in the gym, and more focus with my on-ice skills, as well as taking better care of my body."



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New Docudrama Commemorates Mennonite Migration to Manitoba

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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It's been exactly 150 years since the first wave of Mennonites arrived in Manitoba back in 1874. Over the course of the next few years, around 7,000 of these people of faith left imperial Russia on the promise of religious freedom and military exemption overseas.

To commemorate this milestone year, a new 70-minute docudrama, *Where the Cottonwoods Grow*, is being released for early screenings.

From independent filmmaker Dale Hildebrand, the film chronicles the hardships and struggles faced by the Mennonites as they started their lives anew in a foreign land.

Hildebrand grew up Mennonite in southern Manitoba, in communities like Halbstadt and Edenburg near the U.S. border.

Today he lives in Toronto and works as a producer, director, writer, and cinematographer. He has been the recipient of more than 50 awards and nominations.

He's also shot films far afield, in places like the war zones of Afghanistan, the peaks of the Himalayas, and the plains of Africa. But *Where the Cottonwoods Grow* brought him back to his rural roots.

The opening scene is shot in Neuberghal, Manitoba.

"We start the film with a woman walking across the cold, barren, frozen land of Manitoba in 1924," says Hildebrand. "She's carrying a book and walking past these cottonwoods and arriving at a house barn. There's a gathering of women who are there for a day of quilting."

The woman sits down with her peers and proceeds to read from the book, regaling the women with



Director Dale Hildebrand on set at *The Volume* in Toronto.

© C/O DALE HILDEBRAND

stories drawn from journals and letters written by their ancestors 50 years earlier. This scene lays the foundation for the balance of the film.

"Each quilt patch is another chapter of the story," he says. "And so by the end of the film, the story has been told and the quilt has been made."

As for the title, Hildebrand says he drew inspiration from the cottonwood trees that surrounded his property when he was a child.

Despite his roots, Hildebrand admits to learning much about his ancestral background in the year and a half it took to produce the film.

Some of his best sources were local historians well-versed in Mennonite history. A few of them appear in the film, much of which was shot at the Mennonite Heritage Museum in Steinbach.

It was here, as well, where the film's musical score found inspiration.

"We recorded actual *vāa senja* (before singers) in Steinbach in one of the old churches in the museum," says Hildebrand. "We also recorded some choir singers in

the Sommerfelder church, and then we scored it with many different elements, like a string section and all of that. It sounds stunning."

But not every scene could be shot on location. Take, for example, the seven-week journey by ship across the Atlantic. These sequences have been realized through computer-generated imaging (CGI).

In an effort to maintain historical accuracy, Hildebrand says he visited a shipyard in England where he was able to obtain the original blueprints for the sister ship to the one the Mennonites in his film would have travelled on.

The film seeks to be honest in its telling of this arduous journey. Many of those aboard the ship died en route.

"The Mennonites that were in Russia were very secluded," he explains. "Most of them had never before seen a train or a ship, never mind travelling 20,000 kilometres on one."

Landing on Canadian soil also exposed them to sicknesses to which they'd built no immunity. For this reason, many Mennonite immigrants didn't make it through their first year in Manitoba.

But their arrival wasn't all clouded with hardship.

Thanks to help from the Indigenous and Métis peoples, the new arrivals were quickly taught the skills and practicality of sod houses, as well as the use of native herbs for medicines and balms.

Hildebrand doesn't gloss over the historical reality that the arrival of European immigrants such as the Mennonites brought colonialism along with it, displacing many Indigenous and Métis from their ancestral lands.

Instead he has weaved their stories right into the film's fabric by including interviews with the great-great-grandnephew of Louis Riel, as well as Chief Yellowquill, the descendent of a chief signatory to Treaty 1.

"We filmed them at the place where Treaty 1 was signed in Lower Fort Garry... We went to the source for so many of these scenes and they just took on a life of their own."

For the scripted portions of the film, Hildebrand had a unique partner: his sister, Eleanor Chornoboy. Chornoboy is the author of several Mennonite books, as well as an actor. In the film, she takes

on the role of the story reader at the quilting table.

The idea of casting the story from the viewpoint of women, Hildebrand says, was no accident.

"Most of the journals in the time [of the migration] were written by men or boys," he says. "There weren't many written by women. After the movie *Women Talking*, I didn't want to turn this film into 'men man-splaining,' so that's why I brought in all of these women, quilting and storytelling. It's almost the women that are carrying forward the history."

As a Canadian filmmaker, Hildebrand is aware of Manitoba's bid to become a film production hub.

He's also very familiar with the state-of-the-art production technology which will soon come to Jette Studios in Niverville, where a 270-degree LED screen, colloquially known as "The Volume," is set to go up next year.

There are only a handful of such studios in North America today.

"The Directors Guild of Canada chose eight directors to be the first to shoot with The Volume here in Toronto. I happened to be one of them," says Hildebrand. "I did a whole castle rampart thing on The Volume and it was just phenomenal shooting."

Manitoba is hosting four early screenings of *Where the Cottonwoods Grow*, including at the Steinbach Christian Mennonite Conference Church on December 1, the P.W. Enns Centennial Concert Hall in Winkler on December 4, the First Mennonite Church on Notre Dame Avenue in Winnipeg on December 15, and the Buhler Hall in Gretna on December 19.

In the new year, Hildebrand hopes to pitch the film to buyers for further digital distribution.



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Last year's NYE in Niverville party.

HOLLY DUNPHY, HOLD LIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY

Celebrate New Year's Eve in Style

By Jennifer Lavin

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For the second year in a row, the Niverville Heritage Centre will play host to a New Year's Eve party for the community.

The event will take place in the full ballroom, which can hold up to 400 people. All that space will likely be needed, since last year's inaugural party had 359 attendees.

Trevor Lux, the creator of the event, says that he used to hear frequent rumblings in Niverville about why there was nothing fun going on in the area for New Year's Eve.

So he decided to take on the task of creating something himself.

"Last year was the inaugural event. It went well, and I hope everyone had a great time!" Lux says. "I took all the feedback from last year and tried my best to address everything I could for this year to make it bigger and better."

Lux's band, The Dept. of Human Resources (DOHR), will be performing at the party. DOHR is already well known in Niverville as a popular choice for high-energy rock and country cover songs.

The headline act will be Club Wagon Creek (CWC), another popular band from

southeastern Manitoba. CWC describes their sound as folk, rock, and Americana.

Both featured bands will have perform on stage alongside a professional light show.

After midnight, a deejay will take over the music responsibilities and launch into a party-like-it's-1999 dance set.

As far as food and drink, there will be two cash bars and an exclusive beer-only line to help keep the wait times short. There will be chips at the tables.

This year will also feature a poutine bar.

The night will feature a midnight balloon drop, a photo booth, a glow necklace or bracelet for every attendee, and a 50/50 raffle, among other surprises.

"As the bands, we have some extra special surprises up our sleeves," he adds. "There will be more food, more chairs, more decorations, more surprises... more of everything!"

Lux says that the event is insured and will have security onsite. He also notes that they will accept donations of canned goods for Niverville Helping Hands. He hopes guests will remember to bring a tin for the bin.

This year's event is open to all ages and kids are welcome to attend.

"However, the caution I use is that it's up to parents' discretion," Lux says. "It's a concert and social/party. The focus group is adults and teens. But if parents are comfy bringing younger kids, they are welcome! Last year, our six-year-old had a great time rocking out."

The entire NYE party is organized and funded privately without any assistance from the town.

Lux says that the event is a potentially expensive endeavour, but it's one he thinks is worthwhile.

"We are bringing high-quality entertainment to town along with a safe and fun atmosphere. I can hardly wait to show you all what we have been working on. So get dressed up and let's celebrate New Year's Eve in style!"

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Tickets for NYE in Niverville are \$30 each and are available online: niverville-nye.eventbrite.ca
Those who wish to purchase physical tickets can reach out to the bands via their Instagram pages: www.instagram.com/dohrmusic, www.instagram.clubwagoncreek

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