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VOLUME 11 - ISSUE 2

FEBRUARY 2025

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The **Citizen**

LOCAL NEWS

Recapping Crime and Fire Stats from 2024

■ The previous year was a busy one for police officers and fire-fighters. This month, we look back to review their operations.

Details on Pages 3, 6



LOCAL NEWS

An Overwhelming Diagnosis

■ As prevalent as Alzheimer's disease has become in society, it is still poorly understood by many. In this feature, we explore the challenging and complicated stories of several locals who have experienced its ravages firsthand.

Details on Pages 10-11

SPORTS & REC

Gold for Eastman Heat

■ The U14 Eastman Heat ringette team struck gold on a recent trip to Calgary to compete at the annual Esse Gold Ring tournament.

Details on Page 17

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Local Author Serves Up Delicious Chicken Soup

■ Robert Stermscheg, a novelist from Niverville, has a new story published in the latest *Chicken Soup for the Soul* anthology.

Details on Page 18



Local Skips Win Berths to Scotties, Brier

» READ MORE ON PAGE 13

C/O KATE CAMERON



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Save The Date

Mark your calendars, because we have an exciting lineup of events coming your way! Whether you're interested in networking, learning, or just having a great time, there's something for everyone. Check out our upcoming events and make sure to save these dates!

MAR
4

Spring Education Breakfast

Kickstart your spring with a morning of learning and networking! Join us for insightful discussions and a delicious breakfast. Perfect for professionals and educators alike!

APR
11

AGM and Dinner

Join us for our Annual General Meeting followed by a delightful dinner. This is a wonderful opportunity to connect with fellow members and discuss the future of our community.

MAY
1

Pizza Wars

Get ready for a week of cheesy goodness! Vote for your favorite local pizzeria as they compete for the title of Niverville's Best Pizza. May the best slice win!

AUG
21

Golf Tournament

Tee off with us at our annual Golf Tournament! Enjoy a day on the greens, followed by dinner and awards. Perfect for golf enthusiasts and beginners alike. Stay tuned for more details on each event. We can't wait to see you there!



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The

Citizen

Box 266, Niverville, MB R0A 1E0
www.nivervillecitizen.com

Managing Editor:

Evan Braun

Sales Manager:

Ray Dowse

Operations Manager:

Cara Dowse

Design/Production Manager:

Dustin Krahn

Contributors:

Evan Braun, Brenda Sawatzky,
Ty Dilello, Jennifer Lavin

CONTACT US

Letters to the Editor:

editor@nivervillecitizen.com

Advertising Sales:

sales@nivervillecitizen.com

Classifieds/General Information:

info@nivervillecitizen.com

Artwork/Ad Proofs/Graphics:

ads@nivervillecitizen.com

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

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

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

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Niverville and Ritchot Crime Stats: A 2024 Overview

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

The last year was eventful for both Niverville and Ritchot. That is also true of the reported crime.

The stats can be broken down into categories such as traffic crime, crimes against persons, and crimes against property.

According to Sargent Paul Manaire, media relations officer for the Manitoba RCMP, this speaks to the level of local safety and importance of having a vigilant police service.

THE TOWN OF NIVERVILLE

In town limits, a total of 208 traffic violation complaints were received by the St. Pierre-Jolys RCMP detachment, including reports of speeding and intersection violations.

According to Manaire, charges were laid as a result of these reports more than half the time. Also, 33 vehicle collisions were reported.

"Probably the bulk of these are hit-and-runs, is my guess," Manaire says. "[Somebody] was parked somewhere, saw the incident, and said, 'I'm going to call that in.'"

Seventeen impaired driving events occurred in Niverville. Eleven drivers were charged by police.

In total, 30 traffic-related warnings were issued in Niverville.

As to crimes against persons, there are several subcategories.

One is harassment, intimidation, and uttering threats. A total of 33 files were opened, 24 of which involved uttered threats. Charges ended up being laid in 16 of these cases.

The next category is assault but doesn't include sexual assault. In total, 59 incidents were reported and 36 charges laid. Thirteen of these included assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm. Two people were charged with assaulting a police officer.

Interestingly, the stats note 13 "prisoners held in police custody."

"I'm going to say this is mostly from the Niverville fair," Manaire says. "You make an arrest and take

them to St. Pierre to lodge them."

There was only one report of drug trafficking, although Manaire questions the legitimacy of this stat since it seems exceptionally low.

Eleven people from Niverville reported being scammed for amounts over \$5,000. An additional ten reported fraud under \$5,000.

Next up is crimes against property. Here, there were 34 incidents of theft under \$5,000. This generally includes minor property theft and shoplifting.

When it comes to theft over \$5,000, 12 incidents occurred. Manaire says these are almost always related to motor vehicle thefts.

The year saw 73 reports of mischief. This breaks down into 44 cases of vandalism and 29 cases of obstruction of enjoyment of property, which Manaire explains usually concerns noise complaints.

Seven break-and-enters were reported. Four took place at businesses and two at residences. There was one incident of arson.

The RCMP responded to 93 false alarms, and there were 52 reports of suspicious activity in Niverville.

There were also eleven people reported missing over the course of the year.

RM OF RITCHOT

In Ritchot, crime stats were dramatically higher in some categories compared to Niverville.

This stands to reason, in a way, since Ritchot has a somewhat larger population spread out over a larger area.

As well, two major provincial highways pass through Ritchot. This results in more traffic violations, many by non-local residents.

Case in point, a whopping 3,264 traffic-related incidences were reported. Almost 2,800 traffic charges were laid.

Of these, 116 were vehicle accidents. There was one fatality and 15 reported cases of serious injuries.

The report shows that 29 people failed to remain at the scene of an accident until the RCMP arrived.

Another 2,143 speeding

violations were reported.

"This is most likely because of our Traffic Services writing tickets in Ritchot," Manaire says. "This isn't just about complaints. Out of that number, 2,006 were charged, so that's mostly tickets [given]."

Eighty-six intersection violations were reported as well as another 583 reports of non-registered vehicles or suspended drivers on the roadways.

There were 30 reports of driving without due care or attention, 18 of which related to cell phone use while driving. Fifty drivers were reported as impaired and, from these, 15 charges were laid.

For crimes against persons, 46 reports were made relating to uttering threats and harassment in Ritchot.

Twenty-six assaults took place, two of which are labelled as aggravated. Seven Ritchot area people were reported missing last year.

A total of 36 Ritchot residents reported being scammed for more than \$5,000 and 23 for under \$5,000.

In terms of crimes against property, the RCMP report shows 66 cases of theft under \$5,000 and another 45 of theft over \$5,000.

There were 35 reports of mischief, 28 reports of obstruction of enjoyment of property.

The report includes 39 breaking-and-enters, 24 of which were in connection to local business while eight were reported as residential.

There were no cases of arson.

"We have another category that's called [a] fire prevention act," Manaire says. "If we can't prove it as an arson, we won't score it as an arson. The proof is the hard part, so a lot of times we'll just [categorize] it under fire prevention act."

Weapons-related offenses also kept the RCMP busy.

Nine of these offences were reported last year and included three incidents termed as possession of weapon for dangerous purposes.

Another two were for unauthorized possession of a firearm and a final two for unlawful possession of a firearm in a motor vehicle.

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Remembering Y2K: 25 Years Since the Millennium Bug

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Adults in the year 1999 will remember, perhaps with some amusement, the great debacle that preceded the transition to the year 2000.

The so-called Y2K “millennium bug” that many people predicted led to endless doomsday hype. We were told that this bug would affect computers, computerized electronics, and anything that relied on them to function.

If computers failed to operate after midnight on December 31, 1999, self-professed experts warned that the entire electrical grid could collapse.

Airplanes in midflight could potentially malfunction and fall from the sky.

Banks would have no more record of your savings and investments.

Hospital diagnostic systems would abruptly quit.

Fear over these worst-case scenarios grew as 2000 neared. In the final months of 1999, stores shelves began to empty as essential groceries, generators, propane and propane cookers, and first-aid supplies were scooped up. Some even rushed to the bank and withdrew their life savings.

Not everyone fell for the hype. Even so, uncertainty as to what the exact fallout would be left everyone scrambling to ensure their computer systems were Y2K-ready.

At minimum, people were advised to unplug their computers before midnight on December 31 to avoid a full system crash.

THE MILLENNIUM BUG

Computerization only appreciably came into full mainstream use in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

As technology replaced paper, data was gradually collected and stored electronically. Backup systems mostly consisted of computer hard drives and unreliable floppy discs.

Even with its popularization, computers weren't well understood to the average person.

For reasons of economics, many twentieth-century computer programmers coded date years in only two digits, thus saving computer memory and storage space.



DEPOSITPHOTOS

For example, entering the number 95 would indicate to a computer that the year was 1995.

The question no one seemed to ask until 1999, though, was what would happen when the year transitioned to 00. Conceivably, computer programs either wouldn't recognize this as a legitimate date and malfunction, or they would revert backwards to the year 1900.

Anyone in banking or credit could see the immediate problem with the second scenario. Clients being charged interest based on the date could have one hundred years of interest suddenly calculated into their financial file on January 1, 2000.

Y2K MEMORIES

Chad Ringstrom of Niverville is the owner of an information technology (IT) company. In 1999, he was 17 years of age and working as a salesperson at Radio Shack.

“I was working in Portage la Prairie and we were one of the only stores

you could buy a computer from,” Ringstrom says of those simpler days. “I remember we had these stickers that we had to put on the computers that said, ‘Remember to turn your computer off before midnight.’ We even sold these add-on cards that you could plug into the motherboard of the personal computer and it would offer an auxiliary real-time clock for Windows to use.”

Towards the end of 1999, new games and hardware coming into the store was labelled Y2K-ready.

“I mainly saw it being used as a way to try and scare people into thinking that if they didn't have a Y2K-ready device, it would become useless,” says Ringstrom. “The reality of it was that there was a good chance that [older] pieces of technology would do just fine.”

Ringstrom put this theory to the test prior to the new year when he tested his own personal computer and it made the transition without issue.

According to Ringstrom, the main concern revolved around a computer's BIOS (basic input/output system). This system, located in the motherboard, allows for hardware initialization when a computer is powered up.

“There was speculation that the computer's BIOS would hang and programs would start to overwrite data,” Ringstrom recalls. “When a BIOS hangs, it freezes all input and output, like crashing a computer from a blue screen of death. Luckily, that never happened.”

Like everyone, Ringstrom questions why more foresight wasn't applied in the 80s when computers were being created with two-digit dates.

It may have been a case of planned obsolescence, he says, or the belief that the hardware wouldn't be in use anymore by the turn of the century.

Also from Niverville, Kim Gallant was the charge technologist and radiation safety officer in the nuclear

medicine department at Seven Oaks General Hospital in 1999.

“The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority took Y2K very seriously, as they were not certain what would happen to our high-tech equipment at the stroke of midnight,” Gallant says.

In the worst-case scenario, she says, diagnostic imaging would have been unavailable for patients with breast cancer who required a heart scan between chemotherapy rounds. This would have put additional strain on the oncology department's surgical and chemotherapy teams.

Renal scans to test kidney function would have also been affected.

Gallant remembers that meetings were held by leading hospital staff months in advance of the end of the year in order to create an action plan.

Part of that plan included transferring archived nuclear medicine scans onto floppy disks.

“My processing equipment was older and it was a big question as to whether we could enter the year 2000,” Gallant says. “If my memory is serving me correctly, I could not enter the year 2000, so I used a workaround by using the date 1000.”

At 1:00 a.m. on January 1, 2000, Gallant left the new year's party she was attending and went straight to her workplace in heels and a ballgown.

She was joined that night by the charge technologists in X-ray, CT scan, and ultrasound, having assembled to put all the equipment through a rigorous test.

Once confirmed, a report was sent to the diagnostic imaging Y2K coordinator.

As it turned out, only the gamma camera failed the test and was later replaced with new equipment.

AFTER Y2K

As history attests, the sky didn't fall on January 1, 2000. But some would say that the alarmists that year still served an essential purpose, highlighting a problem that prompted proactive action from government and the business world alike.

Canada's prime minister at the time, Jean Chretien, spoke to Canadians in 1999 to assure them that Y2K was both serious business and a national priority, ensuring a safe transition into the next century.



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IN BRIEF

DSFM Develops Policy on AI in Schools

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Administrators at the division scolaire Franco-Manitobaine (DSFM) have been busy over the past few years developing new policy to keep up with technologically changing times.

Their 2023–24 school year brought in student cell phone use restrictions, a full year before the province came around and initiated the same measures.

In 2024, the DSFM chose to implement a restriction on the number of school hours dedicated to student screentime, the goal of which was to instil a sense of life balance and interpersonal socialization.

The next step for this division has been to take a hard look at how artificial intelligence (AI) can be similarly managed at school in ways that promote its safe and effective use without vilifying the tool altogether.

"We have started a committee consisting of school principals, assistant superintendents, tech managers, secretary-treasurers, directors of student services and pedagogy, a communication manager and myself to create what we call an umbrella directive," says Alain Laberge, DSFM's superintendent.

Assessment of the new policy, he says, includes addressing several different ways in which AI might affect their schools.

The first will look at how AI can be used to assist in the human resources department without actually replacing human workers. This might involve the use

of AI in helping with clerical jobs, sorting through resumés, and classifying salary grids, to cite a few examples.

Next is to address how AI can be effectively used as a classroom tool without becoming a deterrent to learning. The committee will assess the risks and benefits of AI in the classroom in terms of personalized learning and engagement of students.

Serious considerations will also be given to the ethical use of AI.

"Many people are insisting on the negative side of AI in education, mostly regarding cheating, not remembering that cheating has been in classrooms since Horace Mann invented schools," Laberge says. "Instead AI can be used to enhance learning and be used similarly to the scientific method in order to avoid spreading fake information."

There may also be a place for AI, he says, when it comes to enhancing special education and counselling services.

The team will look at AI as a companion as well as virtual reality therapies.

Not to be dismissed is the topic of AI as it relates to protecting students' private information through the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA).

Finally comes the question of how best to mitigate the risks of future cyberthreats.

"It will be a long process, but we hope to have at least one or two directives [in place] before June 2025," Laberge concludes.

Local Fire Chiefs Reflect on Busy 2024

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

If not for the dedication of volunteer firefighters, residents in municipalities like Ritchot and Niverville would have one more reason to worry. These volunteers put in many hours of service to make us all safer. They train and educate in exchange for the opportunity to drop everything at a moment's notice and rush out to save a life, home, or business.

The Citizen reached out to the fire chiefs of Ritchot and Niverville to find out what 2024 meant for their dedicated emergency crews.

RITCHOT FIRE DEPARTMENT

Scott Weir, acting fire chief for the Ritchot department, has been with the department for more than 25 years. He oversees about 60 volunteer firefighters in the municipality's three fire halls.

In 2024, he says, his members responded to almost 150 calls. On average, this equates to more than 12 calls per month or a whopping three calls per week.

This past year, the department was able to add a large new water tanker truck to their inventory, thanks to grants from the municipality and higher levels of government.

"We have used our new tanker several times with large structure fires which were outside the water area," Weir says. "We would have called for mutual aid for a tanker from a neighbouring department, most likely Niverville or Tache,

if we didn't have both of ours."

The Ritchot fire department also provided assistance to the RCMP on three occasions and to the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) six times.

They provided mutual aid to Niverville's fire department on three occasions when it came to larger structure fires. No other municipality called on Ritchot for aid last year.

On 43 occasions in 2024, the department responded to what turned out to be false alarms. These are typically related to kitchen fires or

the [home's] exhaust vents don't get plugged up with snow and to run vehicles outside the garage so the exhaust doesn't enter the home."

NIVERVILLE FIRE AND EMS

Keith Bueckert is the long-time fire chief for Niverville's Fire and EMS department. His fire crew responded to 82 calls last year, mostly within town limits. The EMS crew was busier, being called out on 210 separate occasions.

This equates to about 25 emergency calls per month,

hours an emergency worker dedicates while in this role.

In 2024, he says, Niverville's emergency workers had 234 events in which they gave freely of their time. These included training or truck equipment checks on a biweekly basis. Others provided regular fire safety inspections in businesses, seniors housing units, and public buildings. Volunteer workers also provide public education on an ongoing basis, such as in the town's schools.

"Our members accumulated 3,837 hours for the Town of Niverville in 2024," Bueckert says. "Our members come from all walks of life and careers. I would like to thank their families for the time they allow our members to be away, and also our local businesses which allow their employees to respond to calls."

Finally, Bueckert says it's important for Niverville residents to understand who their fire and EMS members are and the benefits they bring to the community.

"We are a paid on-call service which has 35 members currently," says Bueckert. "All members are trained to National Fire Protection Association standards for both level one and two firefighters. Our members also have [training in] pump operation, vehicle extrication, hazmat operation, and water rescue."

Eighteen of Niverville's members are licensed paramedics or emergency medical responders. Another thirteen have emergency first aid training, which requires 75 to 100 hours of time for certification.

"Our members come from all walks of life and careers. I would like to thank their families for the time they allow our members to be away, and also our local businesses which allow their employees to respond to calls."

Keith Bueckert | Niverville Fire & EMS Chief

smoke detector activations. Three separate times, they were called to check out strange odours.

Weir isn't aware of a single incident of arson within the RM last year.

To prepare for all these calls, Weir says his department runs through fire drills twice per month with the exception of two months in summer.

There are several things residents can do to help keep their families safer, according to Weir.

"You can make sure to check your carbon monoxide detectors, especially with the cold weather we have had," he says. "You want to make sure

or just over six per week.

To Bueckert's knowledge, there were no incidences of suspected arson, although mutual aid was needed on a number of occasions.

"We did have a couple calls outside of our area," Bueckert says. "One call was to help with a serious accident on Highway 59 with our [rescue tools]. Another call was where our water tanker was needed in Ritchot for a large barn fire."

As for false alarms, Bueckert chooses not to comment.

Apart from actual emergency callouts, though, he says it's important for any community to recognize the sheer number of additional



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Back row: Lehanne Parker, Corey Blad, Abe Rempel, Jeromy Rempel, and Luc Vermette.
Front row: Justin Brezden, Zach Enns, and Austin Douglas.

by JAYMIE REMPEL

Rooted in Agriculture: The Shur-Gro Team

By Jennifer Lavin

✉ jlavinn@nivervillecitizen.com

Back in 1968, Shur-Gro Farm Services began in Brandon, Manitoba. Forty years later, in 2008, the future Niverville and Dugald branches of Shur-Gro started life as their own company, called South East Seeds, started by Jeromy Rempel. They began by selling corn, soybeans, and sunflowers.

In the fall of 2017, though, Shur-Gro bought a piece of South East Seeds and built a crop protection warehouse and fertilizer plant, turning the operation into a full-service agriculture retailer.

And it was around this time that Corey Blad was asked to join the Shur-Gro Niverville team.

"Jeromy needed a full-time agronomist to help run the yard, and I was just graduating from the University of Manitoba with a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture," says Blad about that period of change. "I started in the spring of 2018 as a sales agronomist and have since transitioned into managing both Dugald and Niverville locations."

Blad says that he stands

proudly behind the company's mission to offer the high-quality agricultural products expected of a full-service retailer, as well as expert agronomy advice.

Another important component of Shur-Gro Niverville's success may be their team of close-knit, homegrown employees.

"We have seven amazing staff working for us," Blad says. "They're all passionate about agriculture and doing the best job servicing farms in south-eastern Manitoba."

Blad is married to Dr. Erica Blad, one of the doctors at Open Health Niverville. The pair live in the country and enjoy traveling and gardening.

Another member of the team, Lehanne Parker, started at the same time as Blad and now runs the Shur-Gro office. Her family lives in Ste. Agathe, where they operate a grain farm.

Abe Rempel, Jeromy Rempel's father, began working at Shur-Gro in 2019 and is in charge of making sure the yard is in good shape and the operation runs smoothly.

Continuing the family affair is Abe's wife Wendy, who keeps the lunch room stocked

with homemade sweet treats.

Luc Vermette only recently started with Shur-Gro. He and his family live in Ste Agathe and he has been involved in the agriculture retail field for 25 years.

"We are very excited to have [Vermette] start working for us," says Blad. "It's been great having someone who has so much experience."

Zach Enns is the assistant manager of Shur-Gro Niverville and has worked at the company since 2019. Enns, his wife, and two daughters live in Sarto. Blad calls Enns a true "people person."

Justin Brezden joined the Niverville team in the spring of 2024. Although he lives in Winnipeg and is new to agriculture, he says he has really enjoyed getting outside the city and getting to work in the great outdoors.

As for Shur-Gro's founder, Jeromy Rempel lives with his family just outside Niverville. He says that he truly enjoys the people and the farms he works with. He and his family spend a lot of time at the lake fishing.

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IN BRIEF



Labour Market Programs Strengthen Ritchot Businesses

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Businesses in Ritchot can expect some additional help in the coming months when it comes to beefing up their labour force, thanks to the municipality's collaborative relationships with the Association of Manitoba Bilingual Municipalities (AMBM) and CDEM, Manitoba's bilingual economic development council.

On January 21, representatives of the CDEM provided council with updates on an initiative they call Strengthening of the Labour Market. This project is a part of a bigger challenge known as the French immigration strategy.

"Today we are here to share with you what the opportunities are and how we are linking the needs of your employers to our programs at CDEM," said Madeleine Arbez, executive director of CDEM. "We can help them at no cost because you are a member of AMBM."

The project was initially launched in May 2023. Over the past 18 months, CDEM has been collecting data on Ritchot's business sector.

Going forward, CDEM will work alongside participating employers to help them build and diversify their labour force.

In 2024, 241 Ritchot employers were contacted by the CDEM, resulting in 28 choosing to participate in the labour market program. The industries they represent include agriculture, construction, and other services. A good number were small businesses employing between two and ten people.

Forty percent of the businesses surveyed said they struggle with employee retention. Another 53 percent reported difficulty in finding qualified personnel. Their recruitment challenges include a lack of available housing in the RM, transportation concerns, and few training opportunities.

About half of the survey respondents said they prefer to hire local when they can and prioritize diversity with a focus on bilingualism. Almost 60 percent shared a desire to participate in CDEM workshops.

The first workshop took place at Ritchot's business expo at the TC Energy Centre on January 22. It was led by Nina Condo, an expert in diversity and inclusion.

Research from the CDEM in 2024 paved the way to developing a database of employers along with a list of their unique challenges.

"This is really an important step for CDEM because it gives us one of the most enviable lists and programs which can help employers," said Arbez.



A group of new French-speaking immigrants from Africa take a tour of Île-des-Chênes.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

New Immigrants Tour Île-des-Chênes

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

On January 15, approximately 40 new immigrants descended on the community of Île-des-Chênes. For some, it was an opportunity to consider relocating their family to a community outside of Winnipeg. For others, it was simply a chance to see more of what Manitoba has to offer.

For every one of these French-speaking, African-born newcomers aboard a charter bus, it was an opportunity to see and do something completely new.

The rural community tour program is a creation of the Société de la Francophonie Manitobaine (SFM) through an initiative they call "à la découverte du rural"—or, discovering rural Manitoba. Partnering with the SFM is Accueil Francophone, a nonprofit organization whose mandate is to act as a welcoming arm to French-speaking new arrivals.

Janelle Howatt has been an agent for Accueil Francophone

for the past two years. Her job is to plan a monthly tour to one of Manitoba's many francophone communities.

"Basically, it's to show them life outside of Winnipeg," Howatt says. "When they arrive here, most of them are settled in Winnipeg and they don't get to see outside of [the city]."

Since she's been involved in the program, a significant number of the newcomers on her tours have relocated to rural areas.

These newcomers have typically been living in Manitoba for only a few weeks or months. They're curious, eager, and excited to learn how to integrate.

Every one of Howatt's excursions includes a guided tour around the community, a visit to the local division scolaire Franco-Manitobaine (DSFM) school, and a tour of a local bilingual business.

Attendees of the Île-des-Chênes (IDC) tour were treated to lunch at the TC Energy Centre where presentations were made by the St. Pierre-Jolys employment and

bilingual centres as well as a local rural realtor.

"We do a bus tour of the town, so we have a [local] ambassador that shows us around," Howatt says. "On this tour, we had two high school students jump on the bus and give us a tour of the town."

The tour ended at Fleuriste XO Flowers, IDC's bilingual flower and gift shop.

Brenda Chaput is the owner and head florist at the shop located on Meadowlark Boulevard. She says she was thrilled when Howatt asked her to be part of the tour.

Tour guests piled into Chaput's premises, where she offered them a formal welcome. She indulged them with details of her business's history and why it was important to her to offer bilingual services to the region.

"It's so important for our clients to know that they can access bilingual services here, because the clients we have are not only passionate about their French history, but they want to be able to express themselves in French in the communities where they live

and work," says Chaput.

She was very intentional when choosing her business name back in 2019, when she first opened shop in IDC. In fact, it was the use of the word *fleuriste* that led Howatt to reach out in the first place.

Chaput says she's excited about programs like the SFM tours. Not only do they help familiarize newcomers with rural Manitoba, but they also encourage growth and prosperity in the province's francophone towns.

"It's important in rural Manitoba to live community," Chaput says. "To be a part of the growth, the trials, the events, and the celebrations. Business ownership in a rural community means supporting other small rural businesses and making the effort to promote each other."

The Accueil Francophone tour program is funded by Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada, a branch of the federal government.

Large Commercial and Residential Development Proposed for Niverville

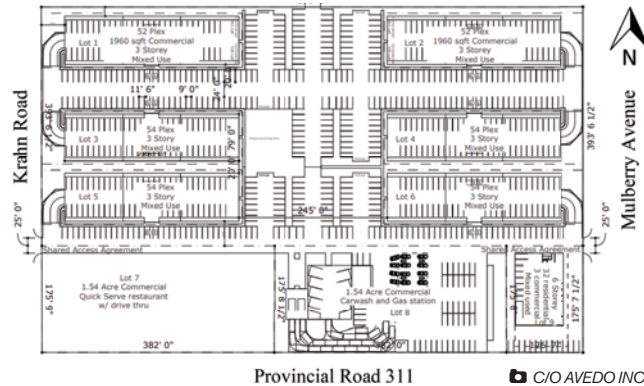
By Brenda Sawatzky
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

For Niverville's town council, it's becoming fairly commonplace to consider requests for the creation of new developments. On February 4 at 7:00 p.m., council will open a discussion on the latest proposal by Avedo Inc.

The area under consideration includes a significant section of land bordered from the east and west by Mulberry Avenue and Krahn Road, and Highway 311 and Centre Street to the south and north.

What's being proposed is the construction of more than 350 residential units to be contained in seven multiuse buildings ranging in height from three to six storeys. Nearly 4,000 square feet is designated commercial.

The land immediately abutting the highway, and running the full length of the development, is dedicated almost primarily to



commercial use. The exception is a proposal for a six-storey housing unit that will accommodate some commercial as well.

Should council approve the project as proposed, Niverville could see its third gas station, including a commercial car wash. West of that, another 1.5 acres is being set aside for a quick-serve restaurant.

A service road running parallel to the highway will provide access to the housing units on the north side and commercial development on

the south.

Avedo Inc. is a Steinbach-based business that is already familiar to Niverville. In recent years, a multi-storey rental unit was constructed by Avedo Inc. on the opposite side of Highway 311 near the railway tracks. A second apartment building is already under construction nearby.

Council was open to receiving objections, support, or comments until January 31 from individuals who believed they would be affected.



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To register your child for September 2025, please visit our website at HSD.ca. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to register their children now for September enrollment to assist schools in planning and scheduling for the upcoming school year. Early registration also provides an opportunity to participate in orientation events in the spring.

If you do not have access to the Internet, please contact the school nearest your residence. School staff will assist you with the first step of the registration process over the phone.

Eligibility

Children must be five years of age on or before December 31, 2025, to be eligible for registration. Students are required to attend the school within the catchment area of their residence to ensure balanced enrollment across the division. Catchment maps are available at HSD.ca.

Questions? Please email info@hsd.ca or call 204-326-6471.



An Overwhelming Diagnosis: Living with Alzheimer's Disease

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

January was Alzheimer's awareness month—but as prevalent as this disease has become in society, it is still poorly understood by most. For many, all that's known is that it's a progressive and incurable terminal disease affecting a person's memory.

Another well-known fact: it can have a profound effect on family members and caregivers.

Alzheimer's is a cruel and unforgiving disease which causes changes in a person's personality. Sufferers may experience long-term and short-term memory loss, even to the point of not recognizing loved ones. They may experience confusion and disorientation, changes in mood and behaviour, anger, and delusions.

According to the Alzheimer's Society of Manitoba (ASM), more than 20,000 Manitobans are currently diagnosed with either Alzheimer's or another type of dementia. By 2050, they tell us, that number will have virtually doubled.

In 2025, approximately 3,600 Manitobans are expected to develop the disease.

Apart from memory loss, there are other early symptoms. For example, sufferers may struggle to perform day-to-day tasks or fumble for the right words to complete a simple sentence. They may demonstrate poor judgment or problems with abstract thinking. They are quite likely to regularly misplace things like keys or a wallet.

The ASM was founded as a non-profit 40 years ago to provide family and caregivers with a wealth of educational and emotional support when dealing with dementia, of which Alzheimer's is the most prevalent form. ASM also provides research funding and awareness about reducing one's risk of contracting the disease.

A LIVING HELL

Sheri Mahara and her husband are residents of Niverville. Two years ago,

they moved Sheri's mother Iris to the Niverville Credit Union Manor after years of struggling against the effects of Alzheimer's. Mahara describes that struggle as "a living hell."

There was no family history of Alzheimer's, which is why it took Mahara by complete surprise when her mother began to display symptoms.

Iris was in her seventies at the time, a widow living on her own in a Winnipeg apartment. Until the COVID-19 pandemic, she still worked as a part-time salesperson at a Nygard International clothing store.

"A money problem came to my attention that made me realize that something was very wrong," Mahara says of the early warning signs.

The first clue was when her mother's phone went dead sometime in December 2019.

"She said there was something wrong with the phone, but it turned out that she wasn't paying the bill," Mahara says. "She didn't even know that she wasn't paying the bill. As I dug into it, I saw that there had been something wrong with her for a lot longer than I'd realized."

Mahara also discovered that her mother was dangerously close to being evicted for her failure to pay rent. A quick assessment of Iris's bank statements indicated that the financial problems had been compounding for quite some time.

"Her chequing account was so far into overdraft," Mahara says. "It was obvious that she'd been going to a bank machine and taking out \$20—and if it gave her the money, she took out another \$20, not having any wherewithal to consider that rent was due in five days."

Her credit card debt had also been growing and collection agencies were making monthly withdrawals from her mother's bank account. Presumably, they'd gotten her mother's approval at some point to do this.

"This monthly [debt collection] payment plus her rent added up to

more money than she made," Mahara says. "It was a completely impossible [situation]."

Mahara began to question the underlying financial system that didn't seem to be set up to recognize these red flags of an aging client with lifelong good credit suddenly running into massive and unexplained debt.

To Mahara, it felt like things couldn't get much worse.

Until they did.

Iris ended up losing her job when the Nygard stores were forced to close due to bankruptcy. At the same time, Manitoba fell into the first waves of the pandemic. The situation further deteriorated when it became difficult to secure in-person access to banks and medical clinics.

Mahara's first move was to see a lawyer in order to become her moth-

er's legal power of attorney. Thankfully, her mother was having a good day in terms of cognitive clarity and was able to convince the lawyer that she was competent enough to make that decision. Had it been otherwise, Mahara would have had to jump through major hoops.

She closed her mother's bank account and instantly began fielding daily harassment calls from collection agencies.

"I had her phone number changed, because I'm sure she must have been bombarded by them too," Mahara says. "I couldn't risk her saying or telling them something [they shouldn't know]."

The next move was to get a medical diagnosis. "She couldn't remember who her doctor was, even though I know she had one," Mahara says, since the

memory loss was compounding very quickly. This, too, proved more difficult than expected.

"I had a very hard time finding a doctor who believed me," Mahara says. "My mother was a master of hiding [her symptoms]. She would say to the doctor, 'I don't know what's wrong with Sheri because there's nothing wrong with me.'"

Through a friend of a friend, Mahara was finally led to a geriatric health nurse who was able to open some doors. This led to a new doctor, an MRI, and an Alzheimer's confirmation.

With a diagnosis in place, Mahara reached out to the ASM, who provided help by way of resources and group support.

She soon met with more roadblocks, though, when obtaining homecare through the WRHA proved difficult due to lack of staffing. The homecare she did get regularly cancelled, requiring Mahara to run to Winnipeg to assist her mother.

The situation came to a head when Iris began getting lost in the hallways of her apartment building. Mahara discovered this problem when she received a phone call one day from her mother's grocery delivery person, who was unable to leave the order with no one home to accept it.

In 2022, Mahara moved her mother to the assisted living facility in Niverville. With only Iris's meagre pension, the move required Mahara and her husband to subsidize the cost.

It was the first time, though, that Mahara truly breathed a sigh of relief, knowing that her mother was finally safe and in good hands.

Iris's disease continues to cripple. She now experiences seizures which cause her to fall but not lose consciousness. She's been transitioned to the supportive living floor and now awaits a transfer to the personal care

home.

"For me, my mother really died several years ago, and I grieved it then," says Mahara. "It's a weird sort of place to be, but I don't know if I'll even go through a grieving process once she passes."

Through the experiences of the past four years, Mahara has one primary piece of advice for those entering similar circumstances.

"Do not delay in getting them to a doctor and getting a diagnosis," Mahara says. "You have to take authority, put your foot down, and say, 'We are doing this!'"

INEVITABLE DECLINE

Another Niverville resident, Cameron Rennie, lost his mother to Alzheimer's on December 15, 2024. She was 80 years of age.

Rennie says that he started to see signs of cognitive dysfunction in his mother, Norma, tens years earlier, before his own father recognized it. It began with Norma's repetitive storytelling and questioning.

His father soon acknowledged it, too, when Norma became lost while driving and had to call for help.

In this family's case, it came as no real surprise. Alzheimer's ran in Norma's family. She'd cared for her own mother through the course of the disease.

The family convinced her to go for testing.

"There is a geriatric mental health assessment that goes beyond that of daily living," Rennie says. "There are a few key tests that they do."

One of those tests challenges the patient to draw the face of a clock. While it sounds like a simple task, it is not simple for an Alzheimer's patient.

"Sometimes the hands [of the clock] don't end up in the right spot," Rennie says. "Sometimes they're outside of the circle. Sometimes the numbers are out of order. It's remarkable, but it's still one of the best tests you can do for an initial non-medical test."

Tests like these, along with an MRI, confirmed the diagnosis. Still,

"My heart is to let people know that they're not alone. The more we share with one another, the less stigma there is attached to it."

Sierra Dueck | ASM Regional Coordinator



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it wasn't easy for Norma to accept her inevitable fate.

"Patients that go through Alzheimer's will typically reach a level of frustration with it, where they're still trying to cover it up and make themselves seem normal," Rennie says. "That can result in a lot of anger and, sadly, Dad had to deal with that."

These outbursts of anger and continual repetition of questions bore down on Norma's husband. He finally reached a point of exhaustion and caregiver burnout. Eventually he agreed to move Norma to Rosewood Supportive Housing, a decision marked with both guilt and relief.

Immediately, they saw further regression in Norma's condition.

"Any significant disruption to a dementia patient's life will lead to another phase of rapid decline," Rennie says.

At one point, it was agreed that Norma would be administered a drug shown to have positive effects for some Alzheimer's patients.

"In Mom's case, I would say her decline more or less plateaued for two to three years," says Rennie. "It by no means reversed it, but to see Mom not declining was incredible."

Unfortunately, her condition plummeted once again. Norma no longer recognized Rennie, his brother, or her grandchildren when they visited. Even so, they never stopped paying her visits.

"Mom was the most caring individual you can imagine," Rennie says. "She cared for us and we cared for her until the last day. We still made birthdays and Mother's Day as special as we possibly could for her."

To help stimulate her memory, they ensured that family photos filled her room and she had constant access to the music she loved.

"Music and visual imagery do incredible things for dementia care patients," says Rennie.

Still, she had good days and bad days. The disease continued to evolve in different



Iris and Jack Tanner, parents of Sheri Mahara.

© C/O SHERI MAHARA

ways.

"There's quite commonly a period when dreams can be very lucid and the brain loses the ability to determine if that was real life or a dream," Rennie says.

At times, Norma's response to these lucid dreams was to lash out at loved ones, believing they'd done the terrible things that she'd earlier dreamt about.

In November of last year, Norma was admitted to the hospital for palliative care. In the first two weeks, she suffered terribly. For Rennie and his family, it was difficult to witness.

In desperation, Rennie began to research Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD), but by Canadian law a patient must be of sound mind to choose this option.

"Why in the world, if somebody is clearly end-stage dementia, could her power of attorney not elect [to end it]?" Rennie says. "I hate to say it—in fact, it makes me nauseous—but at that point, it's no way to live."

Two weeks before she died, Norma was put on comfort care, ensuring that her pain was alleviated.

But no further interventions were made. She was given no food or water to unnecessarily sustain her life.

Ironically, it was during this state of deprivation that Rennie says his mother's cognitive function suddenly improved.

Rennie cites some recent research that likens Alzheimer's to type-3 diabetes.

"They've started to see some interesting results with fasting," he says. "I'm sure that Mom knew who all of us were in the room at the end and that gave me such comfort."

In the aftermath of his family's experience, Rennie has one bit of advice to offer others: lean heavily on the support provided by ASM.

ASM SUPPORT

Sierra Dueck is the South Eastman Regional Coordinator for the ASM. Her office is located at the Pat Porter Active Living Centre in Steinbach.

Dueck's role with the

organization is to create Alzheimer's awareness through educational workshops and connect locals with supports and resources.

"We have a first-link referral system, so we get referrals from Southern Health, doctors, and others," Dueck says. "We reach out to clients and offer one-to-one check-ins and support. That could look like me just being a listening ear. We know that dementia diagnosis can be very overwhelming for families. We can offer guidance on how to go forward after a diagnosis."

Dueck also organizes the Minds in Motion program, providing gentle chair fitness and socializing and stimulating activities for dementia patients and their caregivers.

"Anything that's good for your heart is also going to be good for your brain," Dueck says. "That's sort of the slogan we use when it comes to Alzheimer's."

In terms of prevention, Dueck says that hearing loss is believed to put people at higher risk for dementia.

"When people have hearing loss, their brain doesn't have to process that information because it's not coming in," Dueck says. "So we always suggest to get that checked and get those hearing aids to allow your brain to continue working through that stimuli."

Along with exercise, cognitive stimulation, and healthy eating, there are other things the ASM recommends to prevent or slow the progression of the disease. These include lifestyle changes or medication as well as music, dance, and pet or aroma therapy.

"My heart is to let people know that they're not alone," Dueck says. "Sixty-two percent of Manitobans have had a close family member or friend living with the disease. Plus, the more we share with one another, the less stigma there is attached to it."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To reach Sierra Dueck of ASM: 204-326-5771, or sierradueck@alzheim-mer.mb.ca

CITIZEN POLL

When we refer to a place as having a "small town" feel, in your opinion is that feeling created more by the size of the population or by the friendliness of its residents?

- ☐ Population. A small town is exactly what it sounds like. Fewer residents generally means safer, quieter neighbourhoods.
- ☐ Friendly people. Getting to know your neighbours goes a long way toward building community and creating the feeling of a small town.

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Yes.	No.
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Drive down Centre Street in Bridgwater south to north and see the three roundabouts where traffic flows smooth and the fourth intersection with a stop sign has people stopped and waiting. Great local example of the effectiveness of roundabouts.

Instead of "diamond intersections," which are dangerous and confusing (the way they have been done on the South Perimeter and St. Mary's Road), cloverleaves are safer, easy to use, and I'm sure less expensive. Who on earth are the engineers designing these diamond intersections?



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IN BRIEF

Niverville Unveils Results of Needs Assessment Survey

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Last September, the Town of Niverville provided an opportunity for residents to voice their opinions on what it would take to make their town a better place to live.

More than 375 people responded to the online survey, all but five of whom currently live in Niverville. Two-thirds had lived in Niverville for ten years or less.

The results of the survey were used in town council's latest planning sessions.

"I want to thank everyone who took the time to fill out this survey," says Mayor Myron Dyck. "The information collected during this survey will help us in future planning, decision-making, and where to direct our efforts in advocacy, especially in the area of seeing businesses bring greater amenities to the community."

As a measurement of the town's success, council was happy to discover that the majority of respondents feel a sense of pride and would recommend Niverville to those looking to relocate.

The survey reveals that many respondents chose Niverville for its small-town vibe, with a lower level of noise and tension compared to city life. A deeper sense of safety, too, was noted.

One subject of the survey concerns local job opportunities, which would lead to shorter commute times, more time with family, and less money spent on fuel. Fifteen percent of respondents said they'd appreciate the opportunity to offer their expertise to their home community.

Some respondents still desire to continue commuting to Winnipeg, despite the inconvenience and cost. Almost half would do so because of the greater variety

of jobs available. Other reasons include better wages and a greater customer base.

For many, the decision to commute wouldn't change even if the same job was offered locally. Twenty-two percent of respondents feel loyal to their current employer and another 19 percent said the hassle of changing jobs is too great.

Some people live in Niverville but operate a business in Winnipeg, and would continue to do so rather than relocate. They cited the need to be close to their customer base, a lack of good locations in Niverville, and poorer access to qualified help.

If residents could change one thing about the community, many said they'd like to see a greater number of amenities and services.

Respondents noted the top seven services that are currently missing in Niverville—more retail, casual dining, other grocery options, more daycare spots, a bowling alley or arcade, a bakery, and a butcher shop.

In fact, the general lack of amenities is cited as the main reason why the average family might not choose to make Niverville home. Others cited the distance from Winnipeg as an inhibitor.

While many see room for improvement, most respondents agree on the exceptionalist of one thing: the small-town feel.

It's not the population size or number of amenities, Mayor Dyck argues, that gives Niverville that small-town quality. It's the people helping people and neighbours being neighbourly.

"I want to commend our community members for the effort they put into looking after one another," says Dyck. "As long as we continue to do this, we will always have that small-town feel."



DEPOSITPHOTOS

Students and Teachers in Niverville and Ritchot Affected by Cybersecurity Breach

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

On January 9, parents and caregivers with students attending schools in Niverville and Ritchot were notified of a cybersecurity breach which affects the personal information of children.

The data breach similarly affected staff at each of the seven public schools in this region. The Hanover School Division (HSD), division scolaire Franco-Manitobaine (DSFM), and Seine River School Division (SRSD) all posted similarly worded notifications on their respective websites.

All of these divisions, as well as many others across Canada and the United States, use a student information system service provider called PowerSchool. It was PowerSchool's system that was the target of the cyberattack.

Reassurances from the affected school divisions indicated that no financial information or photos had

been put at risk in the breach. As well, all internal school data collection systems was intact and unaffected.

"To this point, PowerSchool has worked with cybersecurity experts to resolve the situation," read a notice on the HSD website. "PowerSchool has deactivated accounts and initiated enhanced processes for passwords and access. PowerSchool has provided us with assurances that the accessed data has now been deleted. Furthermore, PowerSchool has confidence that the data was not copied or uploaded elsewhere. PowerSchool is actively engaged with cybersecurity professionals to continue to monitor this event."

According to the SRSD website, there is some confidence in the type of information that may be at risk. This includes names, phone numbers, and email addresses for all students and staff.

Staff data extends to include their employee ID and school location ID.

For students, the list is a bit longer. Collected personal

information may also include their date of birth, home address, doctor's name, sibling information, gender, grade level, and parent/guardian names.

The divisions likewise indicate that they were made aware of the breach by PowerSchool administration on January 7. According to the HSD notice, the event occurred in late December.

The Citizen reached out to PowerSchool for explanation.

"On December 28, 2024, we became aware of a potential cybersecurity incident involving unauthorized access to certain PowerSchool Student Information System [data] through one of our community-focused customer portals, PowerSource," the company responded through a spokesperson. "PowerSchool is not experiencing, nor expects to experience, any operational disruption and continues to provide services as normal to our customers. As soon as we learned of the incident, we immediately engaged our cybersecurity response

protocols and mobilized a cross-functional response team, including senior leadership and third-party cybersecurity experts."

At the time of this writing, both HSD and DSFM had declined further response until more information became available to them.

Wendy Bloomfield, chairperson of the SRSD board of trustees, did respond to *The Citizen* indicating that she was unaware of any delay in notification from PowerSchool. She currently had no new information to share.

"Please note that our school division does not store sensitive data such as social insurance numbers, banking information, login and password information in PowerSchool, and this data was not involved in the incident," the SRSD website states. "Additionally, any information related to student specific planning (IEPs, behaviour plans, assessment records, medical information, etc.) was not included in the data export."

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Sports & Recreation

Local Skips Win Berths to Scotties, Brier

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

Our corner of southeastern Manitoba will be well-represented this winter at Canada's national curling finals, on both the men's and women's sides.

Niverville's Ty Dilello will make his very first appearance at the Brier, skipping a team out of Newfoundland, while Kate Cameron of Grande Pointe will skip Team Manitoba at the Scotties Tournament of Hearts.

TY DILELLO

For the past three seasons, Dilello played third for Team Ryan Wiebe out of the Fort Rouge Curling Club in Winnipeg. They had tremendous success and competed at a high level.

"We were ranked top ten in Canada and got to play in some of the world's biggest tour events, including Grand Slams and the Pointsbet Invitational, but we never advanced to the Brier," he says. "In Manitoba, we had to get by teams like McEwen, Dunstone, and Carruthers."

The Wiebe team disbanded last season, giving Dilello the chance to consider his next move. Having fought in the trenches for years in Manitoba, he turned his eye to opportunities in other provinces where the road to the Brier isn't quite as narrow.

He found exactly what he was looking for in Newfoundland, where a team of talented young players—Ryan McNeil, Lamswood, Daniel Bruce, and Aaron Feltham—were in search of a new skip.

"Two of them had been to a Canadian junior final before and the group had lost the Newfoundland provincial

men's semifinal the past few years," Dilello says. "I joined the team to be the skip and hopefully lead us all to the Brier for the first time."

They met up for a bonspiel in late October in Halifax. From the very start, the chemistry was apparent and they made a run to the playoffs.

Dilello then travelled to St. Catharines, Ontario to represent Team Manitoba at the Canadian Mixed Championships. He finished fourth. "After that, I just practiced on my own back in Winnipeg while my teammates practiced together whenever they got the chance."

Dilello spent the Christmas break in Italy and only returned home to Niverville a few days before he needed to jump back on a plane for the Newfoundland provincials.

"So I practiced a few times and spared in the Manitoba Open for a few days," he says. "Then it was right back on a plane to St. John's. It's a miracle I was able to play so well after taking such a big break from the ice!"

The Newfoundland provincials was a 12-team triple knockout.

"The final had us basically in a best-of-five series with last year's champ, Andrew Symonds... All three games went down to the final rock, and each had their own set of challenges that we were able to overcome."

In the first game, tied with hammer in the final end, Dilello made a nice draw to the button to win.

In the second, they were down early and had to fight their way back to tie the score heading into the last end, where they eked out the victory.



Ty Dilello and his Newfoundland team.

PRYOR PHOTOGRAPHY

"In the third game, my team was really feeling the nerves of being so close to their first Brier," Dilello says. "They struggled out of the gate and we trailed the entire game."

But in the eighth end, Dilello made a long angle runback to score one and chip away at the Symonds' lead, getting it down to 5-3.

"In the ninth end, we stole two to tie the game after I made a thin double and they missed a hit through a port. Then in the tenth end, we had some good placement of our stones and we were able to steal the winning point after they missed a very difficult tap back on their last rock."

The crowd of 500 erupted in pure pandemonium, Dilello says.

"That night, I got 'screeched in,' which made me an honorary Newfoundlander," he recalls. "You'll have to look that one up if you don't know what it means!"

Now the countdown is on to the Brier, which will take place February 28-March 9 at Prospera Place in Kelowna, British Columbia.

"After getting so close on a number of occasions, you wonder if you'll ever get there," says Dilello. "So for it to happen like this with this group of guys, it's definitely very special and we're going to take in the whole Brier experience. We can't wait!"

KATE CAMERON

Cameron has been curling at the elite level for more than a decade, mixing it up with the very best teams in the world. She made her first appearance at the Manitoba provincials in 2013.

Four years later, she joined a rink skipped by Michelle Englot. That team tore through the competition at provincials, defeating perennial favourite Jennifer Jones and going on to represent Manitoba at the national Scotties.

Although Englot's team settled for silver that year, falling to Rachel Homan in the final, Cameron and the rest of Team Englot found themselves back at the Scotties the following year, this time wearing the maple leaf when Homan's team was unable to appear due to their preparations to represent Canada at the 2018 Olympics.

Cameron soon joined Team Laura Walker out of Alberta, playing third. They stampeded to three straight Alberta titles and represented at the Scotties in 2020, 2021, and 2022. The team won bronze in 2021.

In 2023, Cameron was back at the Scotties playing third for Casey Scheidegger, again out of Alberta.

The following season, Cameron came home to skip a new team in Manitoba. Although they didn't win provincials, they accumulated enough

points in season play to qualify for the 2024 Scotties as a wild card.

But this year was a different story.

Alongside third Taylor McDonald, second Brianna Cullen, and lead Mackenzie Elias, Cameron is heading to the Scotties for the first time skipping her home province of Manitoba—and she says it's an incredible honour.

"In the preliminary round, we had a round robin of five and finished 3-2," Cameron says. "Those losses were unexpected and we really didn't think that we would maybe find ourselves with our backs against the wall going into the championship round."

She says their opponents were shooting really well that week. In a game against Lisa McLeod, Cameron recalls that her team had full control and somehow managed to let it slip away in the extra end.

But they made it into the championship round and knew they weren't dead, even if the road looked steep. They'd need to win all three games of the championship round.

That's exactly what they did, dispatching Darcy Robertson 8-6, Kristy Watling 7-5, and Beth Peterson 7-6.

"The way it all kind of worked out on the last day is that every team was still alive," she says. "It was a little bit crazy and there were so many scenarios that could happen with the playoff picture. I think it was great that our team was just able to control what we could control."

When the playoff dust settled, Cameron's team found themselves with a berth straight to the final, earning them a bit of a break.

"I think the rest we got

between Saturday and Sunday was much needed, and much deserved, after a hard-fought championship round," Cameron says. "I think that helped us bring a better game in the final."

In the final, Cameron faced off against Beth Peterson for the right to represent Manitoba at the nationals. It was a tight game from start to finish.

The teams traded singles for the first three ends before Cameron stole one in the fourth.

That lead was short-lived, however, with Peterson storming back with three points in the fifth.

Cameron stole again in the eighth end, this time taking two points, and went into the final end tied with hammer. Having given herself control, she made her final shot to walk away with arguably the biggest win of her career.

"Wearing the buffalo is always exciting," she says. "You know, I've only won one other Manitoba provincials and it's crazy to think it was my first and that was so long ago. I think it was about nine years ago... If you would have told me ten years ago I'd even win one, I would say you were crazy. The strength of the field here in Manitoba is just top-notch and always has been."

In addition to her own excitement to be back at the Scotties, this time skipping a team out of Manitoba, she says she's equally excited to be going there with her lead Mackenzie Elias and second Brianna Cullen, who will experience the event for the first time.

"It's such a special event and I'm so glad those girls get to keep building their own careers."

How it started



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How it's going

Nighthawks Close Out January in Fourth Place

By Ty Dilello

tdilello@nivervillecitizen.com

The Niverville Nighthawks returned to the ice in the new year with confidence. Although they lost a few disappointing games in January, they also demonstrated that they can hang in with the league's very best teams.

JANUARY 5 WINKLER FLYERS, AWAY

The Nighthawks fell behind early and couldn't get back in the game on this Friday night tilt versus Winkler.

The Flyers scored just one minute into the game. They then scored again early in the second period to make it 2-0.

Niverville's Avery Laliberte scored later in the period to make it 2-1, but that's as close as the Nighthawks ever got on the night.

Winkler scored three times in the third period, while only Bryce Warkentine scored for Niverville.

When the final buzzer sounded, the score was unfortunately 5-2 in Winkler's favour.

Niverville's Connor Graham stopped 20 shots in goal for the loss.

"It was one of those games where three of those five goals for Winkler go off a player's shinpad or body. So our urgency to pucks and management cost us on those three, I would say," said head coach Dwight Hirst. "It was just one of those games, but we'll be sure to give Steinbach a better game on Tuesday."

In fact, both of the next two games would pit Niverville against number-one-ranked Steinbach Pistons.

JANUARY 9 STEINBACH PISTONS, HOME

In this uncharacteristically high-scoring affair, the Nighthawks finished one goal short against their Steinbach rivals.

This was a rescheduled game. Originally intended for the previous Tuesday night, unexpected rink conditions at the CRRC had forced the teams to postpone.

When contest finally got underway, it was all offence and no defence. The game saw five goals in the first period alone, followed by three more in the second and another three in the third.

Back and forth all night long, Steinbach jumped out to a 3-2 lead



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after the first period, but the Nighthawks rallied in the second period to tie the score at 4-4 after two periods.

With this nailbiter tied 5-5 midway through the third period, Steinbach scored the go-ahead goal to make it 6-5... and that's how the game would ultimately end.

Dawson Zeller and Hayden Wheddon led the way for the Nighthawks' offence with a pair of goals each, while Adam Vigfusson had the other tally.

Niverville's Austin Dubinsky stopped 27 shots in goal for the loss.

JANUARY 11 STEINBACH PISTONS, AWAY

In a bit of payback, the Nighthawks defeated the Pistons on Saturday night with a monumental 3-2 victory over their rivals on the road.

Steinbach opened the scoring halfway through the first period to lead. Just a few minutes later, Vigfusson hit paydirt to tie the contest.

In the second period, the Pistons scored to once again jump ahead.

And again the Nighthawks replied, this time with Matteo Speranza potting his eleventh goal of the season.

In the closing minutes of the second period, Vigfusson scored his team-leading twenty-fourth goal of the year to put the Nighthawks ahead.

Steinbach fought hard in the third period and peppered Dubinsky, in goal for the Nighthawks, with shot after shot—but it was to no avail, and

when the clock wound down to zero Niverville had managed to hold on for the win.

Dubinsky heroically stopped 46 shots in goal. In total, the Nighthawks were outshot 48-32.

"Our goalie played superb in the net," said Hirst. "He won us that game with his strong play, but our team also played hard and stuck with Steinbach all night. It was a great team win against a very good team that will hopefully help us gain confidence."

This was the last time these two teams would meet in the regular season.

In six meetings, the Nighthawks beat Steinbach twice, a good enough record to give Niverville some self-assurance that they can hang in with the league's very best.

JANUARY 12 VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS, HOME

The Nighthawks earned a point on Sunday night but weren't able to pull through in extra time, falling in a shootout to the Virden Oil Capitals.

After a scoreless opening 20 minutes, Virden got on the board midway through the second frame to open the scoring.

In the third period, Niverville scored twice early on to jump out to a 2-1 lead with goals from Matthew Bertolin and Speranza.

However, the Oil Capitals would not be dismayed and tied the game shortly after to send the match to

overtime.

Overtime solved nothing. In the shootout, Virden scored once to win the game 3-2.

"I was happy that we clawed out a point in a night when we are clearly a step behind, as it was our third game in four nights," said Hirst. "We were not only physically tired, but mentally tired as well. We need to mature into what makes us better when our feet are not matching the mental approach. Puck management and clarity in our structure needs to step up at times when our physical and mental readiness isn't there. And learning to be uncomfortable when you're not comfortable is where we need to find ways to win when we can't bring the energy needed to play our game."

Next up on the schedule was a rematch against Virden, a game which to date still needs to be rescheduled on account of weather.

JANUARY 19 WINNIPEG FREEZE, AWAY

The Nighthawks earned a 5-2 win on this Sunday night over the Winnipeg Freeze to maintain their position in the playoff race.

Niverville opened the scoring early with a goal from Speranza, followed later in the period with a tally from Wheddon to put the team up 2-0.

Vigfusson scored his twenty-fifth goal of the season to make it 3-0

in the second period before Winnipeg scored to get one back. The Freeze then scored early in the third period to make it 3-2.

That's when Wheddon scored twice more to make it a hat trick.

Niverville's new netminder, Jake Torget, stopped 20 shots in goal for the win in his Nighthawks debut.

"It was another good game for us tonight," said Hirst. "I was pleased with how we played, and we also had some great performances with the three-goal game from Hayden, who is a very hard-working player. And Jake was able to get the win in his first game with us."

JANUARY 22 PORTAGE TERRIERS, AWAY

In their last game of the month, the Nighthawks managed to score in the final minutes of the game to complete an epic comeback and defeat the Portage Terriers by a 4-3 score.

With this much-needed win, the Nighthawks closed out January in fourth place in the MJHL's East Division with a record of 24-13-3.

They started off the game very slowly, with Portage jumping out to a 2-0 lead after the first period.

Niverville got one back early in the second period with a goal from Merik Boles before the Terriers replied once again make it a two-goal game.

But the Nighthawks found a way to rally and tied the game later in the second period with goals from Sean Williams and Aiden Corbett.

The third period was hotly contested, but it was Boles who played hero of the night by scoring his second goal of the game in the dying minutes.

"It was a big win tonight, but I wasn't pleased with the first period," said Hirst. "We were second to pucks and couldn't get pucks out at our blue line and turned them over at their blue line. It wasn't our style, and we knew it."

As for Boles, the veteran Nighthawks had a banner game.

"He's a defencemen's biggest support and we all know he is a very defensive player," Hirst added. "Last season's exit meeting with him was focused on his offensive game. Get better with your shot and strength training, and now he's the best 200-foot player in this league. No one is close to his three-zone play."

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Nighthawks Fundraising Gala a Royal Flush

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Casino Royale was the theme for the 2025 Niverville Nighthawks fundraising gala held at the Heritage Centre on January 25. And from a poker player's perspective, this year's event was a royal flush.

The event attracted nearly 330 well-dressed guests. From beginning to end, the night was alive with energy.

Attendees had an opportunity to meet the local players, coaches, and support staff and cozy up for a photo op with a real live nighthawk.

Big-ticket items were live auctioned, including a diamond pendant going for \$5,000, a diamond tennis bracelet for \$2,700, a Tag Heuer watch for \$3,350, and a full kitchen renovation package for \$7,600. All these items were donated by local businesses and individuals.

The evening closed with live music from The Disruptors and a chance at the poker, roulette, and blackjack tables.

This year's Nighthawks lineup includes 24 talented young players. While some are born and bred Manitoban, others hail from places like Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, North Dakota, and Minnesota.

This is the first year, as well, for Nighthawks head coach Dwight Hirst. The Manitoba native has a long career playing with Minnesota State, North Dakota, and the USHL's Fargo-Moorehead Ice Sharks.

Prior to minding the Nighthawks bench, Hirst coached



the U18AAA Eastman Selects.

Mike McAulay, the team's general manager, regaled the audience on the team's brief but illustrious accomplishments in the past three years.

"We've had three Division 1 college commitments and had three players go through Niverville and commit to a Division 1 school while playing with another team," McAulay said. "This season marks the first Niverville Nighthawk to play Division 1 college hockey, with Carson Reed playing for the University of Alaska Fairbanks. We've also had two players move on to the WHL and one reach the USHL. Thirteen of the fifteen players that have aged out of our program are currently playing hockey at the next level, be it NCAA Division 3, ACHA club hockey, or USports."

Additionally, two of Niverville's players were sent to represent at the World Junior A Championships. One has participated in an NHL development camp and two made an appearance on an NHL central scouting list.

"Acquiring, scouting, and developing Manitoba talent is a priority for us," McAulay concluded. "We currently have

12 Manitoba players rostered with the Nighthawks. Now remember, when we came into the league, we weren't granted an expansion draft and 12 teams had 50 player protected lists. Six hundred hockey players were spoken for. For context and comparison, the other playoff teams in our division have an average of six and a half Manitoba players on their roster."

Clarence Braun, president of the Nighthawks board of directors, stepped up to acknowledge the many dedicated locals who show support in a variety of ways throughout the year. These include the billet families who host out-of-town players, the dozens of Nighthawks volunteers, as well as the administrative staff, not to mention the fans.

Of course, there wouldn't be a Nighthawks team without the talented young players.

"To each of the players who are a part of the 2024-2025 Niverville Nighthawks, we're looking forward to the last seven weeks of the season," Braun said. "We have every belief that every one of you, bringing your best every day, will enable this team to succeed."



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Baudry Trail Hosts Cross-Country Ski Event

By Jennifer Lavin

jlavin@nivervillecitizen.com

On January 11, Ritchot Recreation and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) partnered up to host a cross-country skiing event at the Baudry Trail in Ste. Agathe.

Approximately 20 members of the CPAWS Nature Club participated in the ski-up, which included free ski rentals. CPAWS staff and volunteers led two separate groups and helped the participants along the trail.

Katie Borgfjord, Digital Marketing Coordinator of the Manitoba chapter of CPAWS, says that this was their first time at Baudry Trail and the group was impressed by the experience.

"The 1.26-kilometre loop trail offers an easy and enjoyable experience, making it ideal for all skill levels," says Borgfjord. "If you're up to explore more, there are 1.8 kilometres total of trails, and all of it is groomed to cross-country ski."

Claire Woodbury, campaign manager for CPAWS Conservation, also calls the day a big success.

"The weather was perfect



Baudry Trail, groomed for cross-country skiing.

KATIE BORGFIJORD

for cross-country skiing," Woodbury says. "It was a little chilly before we got going, but once we were on the trails, nestled between the trees out of the wind and working up a sweat, it was perfect! The trails were wonderfully

groomed and we had a good time remembering how to ski and chatting as a group."

CPAWS is Canada's only charity dedicated to the protection of public land, freshwater, and ocean. For 60 years, they have been working

towards their goal to permanently protect at least half of Canada's lands and waters for future generations of people and wildlife.

CPAWS Manitoba's Nature Club launched in December 2020, but more than 19,000 people have already registered for their group hikes, paddle nights, and various classes and webinars.

The Baudry Trail event was hosted in partnership with Ritchot Recreation.

"We always love partnering with CPAWS Manitoba, and this event was no exception," says Danielle Peters, community engagement coordinator for Ritchot Recreation. "We were thrilled to have the opportunity to bring our skis for people to borrow for free, which aligns perfectly with our motto at Ritchot Recreation: low cost or no cost. Baudry Trail is one of the most beautiful trails in Manitoba, in our opinion, and it was so exciting to host this event and welcome people to our neck of the woods, many of whom had never been here before."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.cpawsmb.org/nature-club/events

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The U14 Eastman Heat recently won a gold medal in Calgary.

C/O CRAIG TOMLINSON

U14 Eastman Heat Take Gold in Calgary

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

The weekend of January 17–19 ended in a proud moment for the U14 Eastman Heat ringette team when they experienced their very own gold medal moment.

According to the team's head coach, Mark Ratz, it was an exceptional accomplishment.

"This was really special because this team is only the second Manitoba team in 24 years to ever win a gold medal here," says Ratz.

Calgary's annual competition is known as the Esso Golden Ring tournament, a prestigious affair that brings out around 170 ringette teams from across Canada to compete.

"Alberta has produced, year after year, some of the top players who actually end up playing for Team Canada ringette," Ratz says. "Playing out there helps us, when we're developing and young, to see where we can work on stuff and how we [measure up]."

U14 Eastman Heat played five games throughout the weekend, including the championship. Each one, Ratz says, kept the coaches and parents on the edge of their seats.

"We had one loss in the round robin, but every game that we won was won by one goal," Ratz muses.

Ironically, it was a rival team from Regina that took the silver medal in the end.

"We met them twice for gold medal matches in other tournaments and, each time,

we've only come away with silver. So beating them in [Calgary] for the gold medal was a real challenge for the girls."

The U14 Eastman Heat are made up of exceptional ringette players from across eastern Manitoba. Seven of the players hail from Niverville and the rest come from places like Lorette, Beausejour, and Oakbank.

Ratz hails from the Dufresne area and has been coaching ringette for the better part of 12 years. He coaches alongside his daughter Taylor and a couple of her teammates from their own Eastman Heat days.

The fact that Ratz is still coaching long after his daughter aged out of the program is a testament to the kind of dad he is. While he could walk

away feeling accomplished, he stays on to enjoy the rewards of watching his daughter become a successful coach in her own right.

For years now, the Eastman Heat have had a special way of paying tribute to the teammate chosen player of the game. It's a faux fur coat the player gets to don during post-game celebrations.

The U14 team's goalie, Layne Wallace from Niverville, had the honour of wearing the fur coat following the team's gold medal win.

"We're very proud of this team because it's a pretty powerful accomplishment for them," Ratz concludes. "It demonstrates for them in real life how, if you put in that effort and work, it can lead to some magical things."

IN BRIEF



EVAN BRAUN

Niverville Panthers Start Year on Winning Streak

By Ty Dilello

tdilello@nivervillecitizen.com

The Niverville High School's new Panthers hockey team is having a lot of fun while also managing to put together some great results on the ice in its inaugural season in the Winnipeg High School Hockey League.

"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."

When the team paused for the Christmas break, their record was 7–6.

Since returning from the break, they have been playing exceptionally well, winning six games in a row in January to improve their record to 13–6.

The team currently occupies fifth place in the division.

"We have five games remaining in the regular season, so we look to continue to play well and hopefully

pass the teams ahead of us in the standings for a better position when the playoffs begin," Lockerby says.

The Niverville Panthers are back in action with a road game on February 4 against the Kildonan East Reivers at Gateway Recreation Centre Blue.

The puck drops at 4:00 p.m.

"The team has been playing to the expectations of what any team goes through," he says, "with players coming together from various teams and age levels, new concepts and systems being learned this season, and also they're balancing school, practice, and game schedules, as well as their work and personal interests outside of school. And of course they're adjusting to the league and the pace of play compared to the leagues the players have played in the past."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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



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Arts & Entertainment

Niverville Author Serves Up Some Delicious Chicken Soup

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

"I walked up to the front door and rang the bell. As I stood there, I felt apprehensive. What would he say or do? How would he react to my impromptu presence? Would he scowl, swear, even close the door in my face? It was the moment of truth. He opened the door and in his first glance I read apprehension. But then he must have spotted the pizza box in my hands, held out in front like a peace offering."

Thus goes a story told by Niverville author Robert Stermscheg in his brief memoir, titled "The Power of Apology." The piece is one of 101 such personalized stories published in this year's edition of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*. The theme of the collection revolves around positive thinking.

The *Chicken Soup* series has been in continuous publication for 30 years, making it a household name. More than 500 million copies of these anthologies have been sold worldwide.

Indeed, it's the best-selling trade paperback series of all time.

According to Stermscheg, the criteria for getting your story published in a *Chicken Soup* anthology is first to ensure that it reflects a true-to-life event. Second, it must be told in the first person—specifically, from the author's point of view.

Of course, another key to having your story published is to win the *Chicken Soup* lottery, so to speak.

"I've been very fortunate," Stermscheg says. "They have a gamut of story topics to choose from, so there could be a couple of thousand [submissions]."

This is the third time Stermscheg



Robert Stermscheg has a new piece published in a *Chicken Soup for the Soul* anthology.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

has garnered a spot.

But from a bigger picture perspective, it's the third out of probably 15 submissions he's made over the years.

His first successful submission came out in 2012 with the series's *Hooked on Hockey* anthology. For this theme, Stermscheg drew from childhood memories and his love of the sport.

The next came in 2014 with *The Power of Forgiveness*. Stermscheg was inspired by an incident that

occurred during his many years working as a police officer.

In preparing to submit a piece for the most recent edition, *101 Ways to Think Positive*, Stermscheg says that it wasn't difficult. He's generally a positive thinker, influenced by his father, who had a perpetually positive outlook on life.

"My story is about a situation involving my brother," Stermscheg says. "We had a party at our house and invited family, including my brother. What I wasn't expecting is

that he'd bring his dog."

Stermscheg describes the dog as a young Irish setter with boundless energy. Pair that scenario with Stermscheg's pristine new home and toddlers at play and Stermscheg imagined trouble.

In the beginning, the situation could be managed by taking the party outside, giving the dog an entire backyard in which to run amok.

But when the weather turned and the guests headed indoors,

Stermscheg's brother left in a huff, realizing that his dog wasn't welcome inside.

Their brotherly love was eventually reinstated when Stermscheg showed up at his brother's door unannounced, bearing hot pizza and an apology.

"In so many situations, people leave the anger to fester and grow, and nothing gets resolved," he says. "The animosity just sits there, often over something small and insignificant. Making amends is the positive outlook. The negative way would be to ignore it."

Stermscheg admits that it can be tricky to tell stories involving family members, so he forewarned his brother of his intent and received his approval prior to publishing.

Apart from short story writing, Stermscheg has also published several books. One is a memoir of his father's life in a German prisoner of war camp. Published in 2009, it's called *POW #74324*.

Afterward Stermscheg went on to write his first original novel, called *Stealth*, a work of historical fiction that takes place during World War II. Stermscheg also produced an audio version of that book.

But Stermscheg's love of fiction stems all the way back to his childhood, meandering through a particularly powerful influence: author Karl May. Stermscheg was so moved by May's writing that, years later, he took it upon himself to translate six of May's novels into English from their original German.

Today, Stermscheg is happily invested in the life of his two-year old granddaughter, leaving less time for writing. That passion will return, though, because the call to write, for a writer, is always beckoning.

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