

# The Citizen

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### LOCAL NEWS

## Going to the Polls

■ Canadians will head to the ballot box to elect a new federal government on April 28. We profile all of the local candidates.

Details on Pages 3-6



### LOCAL NEWS

## Jette Studios Opens Its Doors

■ A new era for Niverville is here with the grand opening of Jette Studios, a state-of-the-art film soundstage on the west side of town. It won't be long before the new facility becomes a destination for production crews.

Details on Page 19

### SPORTS & REC

## Nighthawks Challenge Winkler in Playoffs

■ The Niverville Nighthawks are pushing hard versus the Winkler Flyers during the first round of the MJHL playoffs.

Details on Pages 24-25

### ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

## Headliners Announced for Niverville Fair

■ A constellation of major country music stars are set to descend on Niverville at this year's Olde Tyme Country Fair.

Details on Page 26



# Family Fights for Healthcare Waiting List Transparency

» READ MORE ON PAGES 12-13

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# Canada Heads to Polls on April 28

**By Brenda Sawatzky**  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
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It's official. On Sunday, March 23, Canada's newly appointed prime minister, Mark Carney, called a spring federal election.

Canadians will go to the polls on April 28 to determine whether Carney and his Liberal Party will maintain control of Parliament or end nearly ten years in power.

The nation was already primed for a federal election this year, but Justin Trudeau's resignation on January 6 prompted those plans to quicken.

That gives Canada's major parties, and their slate of candidates, just five short weeks to win over voters.

The Liberals are led by Mark Carney, the Conservatives by Pierre Poilievre, the New Democrats by Jagmeet Singh, the People's Party of Canada by Maxime Bernier, and

the Greens by joint leaders Jonathan Pedneault and Elizabeth May.

Two leader debates have been scheduled. A French language edition will be held on April 16, with the English language edition airing the very next evening.

Polls indicate a close two-way race between the governing Liberals and opposition Conservatives.

Prior to Trudeau's resignation, most polls agreed that Poilievre held a substantial 24-point lead. Rising inflation and the carbon tax were cited as sore spots for many Canadians.

Since January, though, the Liberals have bounced back substantially and now lead in national polls. Their change in fortunes in largely attributed to soured relations with the United States, including the ongoing trade war and threats to Canadian sovereignty.

If the Liberals win, it will be Carney's first time being elected to public office after having served in

other capacities. Until his selection to succeed Trudeau, he served as the governor of both the Bank of England and the Bank of Canada.

Poilievre first took federal office in 2004 when he was elected to represent the Conservatives in his Ontario riding of Nepean-Carleton. He became leader of the opposition in 2022.

Locally, voters throughout Niverville, Ritchot, and the neighbouring municipalities fall into the Provencher riding. The current Member of Parliament is Ted Falk, representing the Conservatives.

Running against Falk are Trevor Kirczenow (Liberals), Blair Mahaffy (Green), and Noel Gautron (People's Party).

Provencher has long been a stronghold for the Conservatives, who have held the seat 16 times over the past 18 elections.

If re-elected, this will mark Falk's fifth term in office.

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## BALLOT BREAKDOWN

# What Do Our Local Candidates Stand For?

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Canada is heading to the polls on April 28 after a snap spring election was called by Prime Minister Mark Carney at the end of March.

With campaigning already underway and election signs popping up on roadsides and our neighbours' lawns, we reached out to the local candidates who will be appearing on the ballot in Provencher.



## TED FALK, CONSERVATIVE

The name Ted Falk is nothing new to local voters. Falk has represented Provencher for the past 12 years. The full-time politician lives in Steinbach with his wife Irene, and at almost 65 years of age he says he's not ready to retire from politics just yet.

"I'm blessed to still be in good shape and feel energized by the opportunity to serve the people of Provencher and Canada," Falk says. "Our country is in rough shape after a decade of disastrous Liberal rule and I'm eager to be part of fixing what they have broken."

Falk says that his decision to run again was motivated by his belief that a change in government is not

only good but imperative.

"If you thought Trudeau was bad, buckle up. Because Mark Carney would be so much worse."

Falk says that Canada just can't afford another four years under Liberal leadership. Thankfully, he adds, there's hope for the country under the Conservatives.

According to Falk, Canadians are facing four primary threats right now: the cost of living, the economy, rising crime rates, and the protection of freedom.

"We have a common-sense plan to axe the tax, build the homes, fix the budget, and stop the crime," says Falk. "And after a decade of globalist leadership, we'll finally put Canada first."

Falk points to the Conservative plan to cut income tax by 15 percent for the average Canadian.

As well, he says a Conservative government won't reintroduce the carbon tax, and they'll eliminate the GST on new home purchases. His party will lower business taxes, cut red tape, and end "corporate welfare" to create a fairer playing field for startups.

Further, the Conservatives plan to repeal a range of Liberal energy laws, build pipelines, and find a market beyond America for Canada's energy resources.

To address crime, Falk says they'll look at longer jail terms for repeat offenders, increase border security, and bring back gun laws that target criminals, not law-abiding Canadians.

"We will [also] shrink the size and scope of government," he says. "Our goal is to make Canada the freest country on earth, a democracy where government is the servant and the people are the masters."

Closer to home, Falk says he sees

constituents who are struggling to get by on their paycheques. American tariffs are only compounding their fears.

He's also disturbed by government interference in the lives of his constituents.

"Trudeau has grown the size of government by nearly 50 percent. Government has gotten so big and so invasive, people are weary of it. They want freedom. They want to be free to worship, to hold the beliefs they do, and to not be told what to think, feel, and believe."

While Falk says that he appreciates the overwhelming support the Conservatives have enjoyed in Provencher over the past decades, he doesn't ever take an election win for granted.

"We still work hard to win every vote," Falk insists. "What's especially nice this time around is all the new support. For two years, I've been getting calls and emails from folks who are lifetime Liberal and NDP voters saying, 'Enough is enough. You and Pierre [Poilievre] are the only ones making sense. I'm voting for you.'"

Falk says that it's just not true to suggest, as some have, that the Conservative ethos aligns with that of the Trump administration south of the border.

"There's no doubt President Trump invokes very strong feelings. However, to equate Pierre Poilievre and Canada's Conservatives with Donald Trump and use that as a pretext to justify voting Liberal is, frankly, absurd. To those people I'd say, 'You may not like Trump, but by voting for the Liberals you would be giving Trump exactly what he wants: a weak, woke government he can walk all over.'"

During Falk's years in office, he's maintained his positions on

abortion and gender diversity. That won't change, he says, if he's re-elected.

"I am pro-life, full stop. I believe there are two genders: male and female, full stop."

Even so, he supports the freedom of every adult to their own choice of lifestyle while also supporting the freedom of others to agree or disagree with them, within reason.

Falk is proud of his track record at the federal level. He points out that two of his private members bills have been brought before Parliament. The Fairness in Charitable Gifts Act would have levelled the playing field between charitable donations and political donations. More recently, he introduced a bill intended to prevent the elimination of physical currency and the development of a central bank digital currency by the Bank of Canada.

"I've had the opportunity to bring forward many local issues to Parliament and affect change," Falk says. "One big one was getting the drug Trikafta approved by Health Canada to help Canadians suffering from cystic fibrosis. I was also proud to have been one of the few public officials to stand up for Canadians and call out government overreach and corruption during COVID."

More than anything, he says that he's proud of the work that gets done through his constituency office on behalf of Provencher residents every day of the year.

"It's been my honour to serve the people of Provencher the past 12 years. I am so grateful for all of the support and encouragement I receive from folks. I look forward to continuing to serve as their MP if re-elected."



## TREVOR KIRCZENOW, LIBERAL

Challenging in Provencher for the third time is Trevor Kirczenow, running for the Liberals. He holds a degree in political science and is an accomplished violinist and author. He lives with his family near Dugald.

With a few elections under his belt, Kirczenow feels like the constituents of Provencher have had plenty of time to get familiar with him and what he represents.

This election, he says, is a critical one thanks to recent trade disruptions between Canada and the U.S.

"The threats from Donald Trump are really scary and the on-again, off-again tariffs just create so much economic instability," Kirczenow says. "It's absolutely brutal for our businesses. They can't plan with all that going on."

Despite this, he feels an equal level of hope under the leadership of Prime Minister Mark Carney, who brings with him a wealth of experience as an economist.

"He's smart, he's steady, and he's dependable," Kirczenow says. "I just think he's very much the right person for the job."

He says it's imperative to see a return to Liberal leadership because of the rhetoric of Conservative



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leader Pierre Poilievre, who Kirczenow says sounds eerily similar to his conservative counterparts in the south.

"He sounds so much like Donald Trump and Elon Musk, in terms of his language and rhetoric. I just don't see how he could stand up to those guys and protect Canada."

Kirczenow adds that the timing of this election is essential, with so much going on in the wider world.

"During an election campaign, the government is basically supposed to be in what's called caretaker mode," he says. "They're not supposed to be making a ton of big decisions because they're not elected yet. But right now we are facing this crisis with our large neighbour to the south. And when Trump suddenly announces more tariffs, there has to be a Canadian response."

Those tariffs, he says, will lead to higher costs across the board.

So far in this campaign, Kirczenow has made an effort to actively engage with Provencher constituents. In particular, he's heard from a lot of French-speaking residents who want to ensure their language and culture is protected. He says that others have indicated discontent with Conservative incumbent Ted Falk.

"They've been telling me they feel like he's not responsive. And I think our area really deserves a Member of Parliament who listens and who cares. They want to talk about the issues, and they want to know what's being done about those issues."

Falk's open stance on hot-button issues like abortion and gender equality, Kirczenow says, means there's a large segment of the population here who simply are not represented.

"We are a very diverse area," Kirczenow says. "There's a large French-speaking population, we have First Nations living here, and we have 2SLGBTQ people living here, myself included. It's very frustrating that our representative has not been supportive."

He says this lack of respect for diversity ripples throughout the entire Conservative party, right up to Poilievre.

Kirczenow is also concerned over the loss of important social services if the Conservatives take power, such as \$10 per day childcare, pharmacare, and the new dental care plan.

Over the years, he has been a vocal advocate for provincial pharmacare to help people cover the costs of medications and medical devices.

"I learned that Manitoba had the very worst diabetes coverage in the whole country," he says. "I started working with a group of individuals affected by type-1 diabetes when the Conservatives were in power. We were successful in making change and I was able to help make that change without even being elected."

In order to help the provinces align their approach to pharmacare, Kirczenow says the Liberals hope to create a federal plan similar to the one set up for universal dental.

Many Canadians have pointed a finger at the Liberals for creating programs they don't support. For example, the carbon tax applied to fuel and natural gas.

Kirczenow says that, as of April 1, the consumer carbon taxes have been eliminated. Instead Carney's government wants to incentivize Canadians to make greener choices.

Industrial carbon pricing, though, will remain in place under the Liberals.

"Industrial carbon pricing was pioneered in Alberta in 2007 when Stephen Harper was prime minister and Ed Stelmach was premier," Kirczenow says. "That pricing works based on a credit system where low emitters can sell their credits to high emitters [and] then avoid paying some of their carbon taxes... This system has worked well for the industry for many years and has helped reduce emissions intensity."

Having such a policy is also important, Kirczenow says, when it comes to trade with other countries, such as the European Union, which requires trade partners to institute environmental programs.

"Pierre Poilievre suggests that we can either have a clean environment or a thriving economy, but that's a false dichotomy, a false choice. It is possible to invest in green technology and help Canadians to make greener choices while also supporting the economy."

Kirczenow is hopeful that voters will turn out to the polls in greater numbers, thanks to the gravity of the current political climate.

"When I see what's been happening in the States, I worry about the health of that country's democracy. I really want to see Canada remain a strong and health democracy."



#### BLAIR MAHAFFY, GREEN

The Green Party of Canada is being represented in Provencher this election by Blair Mahaffy, who lived for many years with his family in Lorette. He now makes his home in West Hawk Lake. He's both a software developer and riding guide at the Falcon Beach horse stables.

Mahaffy says that his loyalties used to lie with the Conservatives. When the Reform Party rose to prominence under Preston Manning in the 1990s, he shifted his allegiance to them.

In later years, Mahaffy felt drawn to the Greens.

"I liked Preston's approach to democracy," says Mahaffy. "You know, the elected Senate, the right of recall, those kinds of ideas. And that led me to learning about proportional representation."

For Mahaffy, democratic reform has long been a driving passion, so much so that he was integral in the founding of Fair Vote Manitoba, an affiliate of Fair Vote Canada, which advocates for proportional representation in government.

In brief, proportional representation guarantees that a party will hold the number of seats in Parliament that are directly proportional to the number of votes they receive. So if the Green Party were to garner 10 percent of Canada's votes, they'd hold 10 percent of the 334 seats in the House of Commons.

"More importantly, if 40 percent of the population vote for the Conservatives or Liberals, they would get 40 percent of the seats," Mahaffy says. "Not 100 percent of the power, like it is right now."

But Canada's electoral system is based on a first-past-the-post model which allows the winner to take all.

Former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made electoral reform one of his leading campaign platforms

in the 2015 election. Once elected, the Liberals appointed an all-party parliamentary committee to review a number of systems, including proportional representation.

A thorough report was released in December 2016, but the Trudeau government failed to follow through. The first-past-the-post system remains in place to this day.

In his resignation speech in January, Trudeau admitted that not following through on electoral reform was one of his greatest leadership regrets.

According to Mahaffy, most European countries use proportional representation in their electoral systems, as well as New Zealand.

"New Zealand is a Westminster Parliament, just like Canada," says Mahaffy. "Quite a number of years ago, that government said, 'We're going to try proportional representation for two election cycles and then have a referendum. When that referendum came up, [New Zealanders were] overwhelmingly in support of keeping the proportional representation.'"

Beyond electoral reform, Mahaffy says that the Greens put a strong emphasis on sustainability. Social justice is a big part of that, which includes finding ways to create affordable housing for Canadians.

"There's a huge inequity in our culture where the rich own so much, making it harder for people to get ahead. It doesn't matter how hard they work. If they can't afford rent and food, that's a problem."

For this reason, the Green Party just announced a plan to push for the elimination of income taxes for any Canadian earning under \$40,000 per year. Mahaffy says that represents a shocking one-third of the population.

Putting these tax dollars back in the hands of lower-income earners inevitably allows it to flow back into the economy via greater spending ability, which would benefit all Canadians.

The Green Party has announced strategies to address affordable housing, such as the question of foreign property ownership.

"It's a big problem all across Canada," says Mahaffy. "My mom and dad's assisted living place in Winnipeg is owned by a Saudi Arabian company. When you've got these massive corporations just taking profits, who are they [answerable] to?"

He says immigration policies also need some restructuring to ensure that social systems remain intact for

Canadians.

Like income tax elimination, Mahaffy and his party are also proponents of the guaranteed liveable basic income, which would see a complete revamping of Canada's health and income supports, making them more equitable for all while reducing administrative waste.

Of course, building sustainability in Canada has never been more important than it is right now in the face of shaky trade relations with our neighbours to the south.

"There's a lot of talk about building pipelines to deal with the American challenge, but I think that's the wrong direction. Let's build renewable energy across Canada because Europe and China are going to take off ahead of us in renewables and we are going to be left behind."

Mahaffy says that Canada should be amping up its position as leaders in the field of scientific research. As well, we should work towards gaining independence from our reliance on American military might.

Bringing the election closer to home, Mahaffy is all too aware that he is running a tough campaign in a Conservative stronghold. When asked why he's okay with representing a party that likely won't win, he thinks of the words of Green Party co-leader Elizabeth May.

"Every time another party steals an idea of ours, we've won. Because the Green Party, to some degree, is an activist party. We want to bring new ideas to the table... and we want to give people another option."



#### NOEL GAUTRON, PPC

For Noel Gautron of Ritchot, the 2025 election will mark his third time running for the People's Party of Canada (PPC). Gautron is a small business owner, logistics professional, and family man.

(continued on page 6)



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## CITIZEN POLL

## As Canadians get ready to head back to the ballot box, what is the most important election issue to you?

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relations with the United States.   | <input type="checkbox"/> Affordability and cost of living.     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> The state of immigration.           | <input type="checkbox"/> National defence and border security. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Climate change and the environment. | <input type="checkbox"/> Another issue.                        |

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Yes. It is more important than ever to support local companies and keep our dollars close to home, even if it means paying more or forgoing certain purchases.

78%

No. It is not possible to source many of the products I need from Canada, and I have to consider the lower price more than where an item is made.

22%

### YOUR COMMENTS:

I really hate to say it, but it's true: with the expense of everything these days, is it really feasible to spend more on any product unless you have to? I purchase based on price and quality... and I certainly hope the Canadian producers realize this when pricing their products accordingly.

I think that we still have to remember that even though it may be an American chain, it is a Canadian franchisee and Canadian employees that are earning their livings. Shopping directly from the U.S. with no Canadians receiving benefits should be evaluated, taking into account alternate sourcing of those products.

I am trying. It is a bit challenging, but I am doing research and my best to buy Canadian first, then other countries before buying U.S.

The U.S. has demonstrated that they are no longer friendly to Canada. I am a citizen of both the U.S. and Canada and I am ashamed of my U.S. ancestry.

As an American who has recently become a Canadian citizen, I could not be more ashamed of my country of birth. The attacks on allies is absolutely disgusting.

(continued from page 5)

He's also a firearms collector, as was his father before him. The Liberal Party's restrictions on firearm ownership in recent years served as an impetus, at least in part, for Gautron's decision to join the PPC.

In the 2021 election, Gautron was successful in securing more than 16 percent of the Provencher vote. He says that voters' emotions ran high that year—not unlike 2025, although now there are different issues on the table.

Despite the fact that the PPC is relatively new on the ballot, having been formed in 2018, Gautron says that they've got candidates in almost every riding in Canada.

The PPC have four basic tenets guiding their philosophy: freedom, responsibility, fairness, and respect.

Gautron says that Canada's current governmental system has a heavy-handed top-down leadership style that overlooks the rights and freedoms of many citizens.

"So let's say, for southern Manitoba, we have what I'd refer to as the Bible Belt," Gautron says. "We have a lot of Christians. So obviously their needs are going to be a little bit different than Toronto. And because of how our political system functions, it doesn't, in my mind, serve those regional cultures appropriately."

Gautron feels passionately

about the need to create a freer society by giving regions across the nation more autonomy.

"You want to have your people have the most ability to conduct their lives as they see fit under the law. I think most people could acknowledge that, over the last 40 or 50 years, there's been something of an erosion there... where government has made their lives more difficult."

Based on the way other parties are structured, including the Conservative Party, Gautron says that regional leaders are very much constrained by federal party policy, giving them little opportunity to affect local change based on values that are important to their constituents.

According to Gautron, the PPC would put a lot more power in the hands of locally elected officials. For examples, he believes that each province should have the autonomy to devise the social healthcare strategies that work best for them.

"If they want to dump even more money into a single-payer system, by all means. But it [should be] funded provincially. If you want to go completely private, do that."

In a similar way, he says that each province should have autonomy over their own natural resources. He gives the example of east coast fisheries which have

had to deal with federal fishing caps, limiting the ability of everyday people to earn a living.

Immigration is another hot issue for the PPC. They believe that a complete reform of the system is needed. To start, they'd put an indefinite moratorium on new immigrants.

"[When] you're letting in two and a half million people in very rapid succession, you exacerbate an already hot housing market to the point where most people, even into their late thirties, aren't able to afford housing."

In Gautron's opinion, the focus of the Liberal government on immigration likely stems from the fact that Canada's young people are choosing to have fewer children, or none at all, compared to decades earlier. He says that we need an increase in young working families to strengthen the economy and support existing social programs.

From Gautron's perspective, immigration isn't the only—or even the ideal—answer to address the problem of a shrinking population. He wants to encourage an uptick in the birthrate.

Another concern for Gautron and the PPC is that when immigrants come in by the millions, it changes the social fabric of the nation.

Canada's approach to environmental issues would also come under scrutiny with

a PPC government. The party would eliminate the carbon tax and, likely, reconsider Canada's affiliation with international governance bodies operating under leadership that Canadians didn't elect.

"We would challenge the notion of global warming as it's currently perceived," Gautron says. "It's the type of thing where you don't want to affect people's lives [based] on theories because that's a bit of a dangerous concept."

Improving trade relations with the U.S. is also of great importance to Gautron.

"The most important trade relationship Canada has is with the United States. We unfortunately have geographical constraints that make it very difficult to get our product to other places in the world."

Gautron isn't deluded into thinking that the PPC are likely to take the reins of power in Ottawa after this election, seeing as they've never been elected to a seat in Parliament.

Still, he says, a vote for them can affect change for a better future.

"So long as the PPC exists, we provide balance to the entire system," he says. "[For the major parties], it's in their best interest, because of cities like Toronto and Montreal and Vancouver, for them to drift further to the left over time... we have a very heavily weighted left-of-centre system."

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# A Personal Look at Medical Assistance in Dying

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

On June 17, 2016, medical assistance in dying (MAID) became a legal option in Canada for the first time. This milestone was realized more than 20 years after Sue Rodrigues, a B.C. woman living with ALS, challenged Canada's Criminal Code prohibition on assisted suicide under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Since that time, individuals and organizations such as Dying with Dignity Canada have carried the banner, supporting the right of the incurably ill to receive medical assistance that hastens death.

The criteria by which MAID can legally be carried out, though, is highly regulated. The option is only available to mentally competent adult Canadians who make the choice from an unpressured state.

In order to qualify, they must suffer from a grievous and irremediable medical condition which causes them unbearable physical or mental suffering that cannot be relieved under terms they deem acceptable.

Currently, under Canadian law, mental illness does not qualify as a reason for MAID.

Strict safeguards have been put in place for those seeking MAID. First, the applicant must have two independent medical assessments proving their eligibility. At that point, they can submit a written request for MAID that must be signed by an independent witness.

Once approved, the applicant is welcome to withdraw their request at any time. They will need to indicate final consent immediately prior to undergoing the treatment.

Under Canadian law, MAID can be administered by a physician or nurse practitioner orally or with an injection. Alternatively, the patient can self-administer if a prescription is granted.



Debbie Colley of Niverville.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

Without question, the legalization of MAID has been and continues to be a deeply sensitive and controversial topic.

In this article, *The Citizen* does not seek to investigate the ethical arguments for or against MAID. The goal is to share the stories of those who have in some way been touched by MAID, or those who at some stage in their own lives wish to have such options available to them.

## MAID AS AN ADVANCE MEDICAL DIRECTIVE

Since MAID received royal assent in 2016, one major amendment to the criteria has taken place. Originally, to be eligible for MAID, one had to be assured by a medical professional that they were facing a reasonably foreseeable death.

As of 2021, the condition no longer needs to be fatal or terminal. Still, there are some who believe this legislation needs further amendment in order to set the stage for true

autonomy in a person's right to die with dignity.

Debbie Colley of Niverville is hopeful that, in the coming years, MAID can become an option on a person's healthcare directive.

Based on Manitoba law, every adult has the right to accept or refuse medical treatment at any time. By completing a form called a healthcare directive, a person's wishes about treatments and interventions can be expressed should they be unable to communicate it for themselves.

The healthcare directive also allows for a proxy to be named. This is a person who has the power to make medical decisions on another's behalf.

At 73, Colley is already facing certain health challenges that make her future feel worrisome. She lived an incredibly active life, participating in every sport possible, and now doctors tell her this might be the very reason things are breaking down.

Colley underwent hip surgery

a few years ago. Ever since, she's suffered chronic lower back pain. Neurologists tell her there's nerve damage in her lower spine requiring a fusion surgery. Unfortunately, she's on a wait list that never seems to come around to her turn.

"Here I am, years later, still waiting on surgery," Colley says. "Because they didn't deal with this problem in the beginning, it's getting worse and worse. These doctors are waiting until the ambulance brings me in as opposed to fixing the problem before that. And if they can do that, I should have a choice too."

The choice Colley refers to is the choice to apply for MAID long before her mental faculties give way or depression sets in.

The longer her physical condition goes unaddressed, the more her symptoms spread. She now experiences shooting pain in her upper back and shoulders. Migraines have also become common.

"And this is the other thing,"

Colley says. "When you're dealing with chronic pain and the inability to function, it impacts your mental health."

Colley is all too familiar with the harsh realities of aging. She was there for both her mother and father as they progressed through the physical and mental challenges of getting old.

She saw, all too often, seniors living in personal care homes whose greatest wish was to die, yet their only option was to wait for their bodies to finally give out.

"Hundreds of years ago, if something happened to you and it wasn't easily fixable, you died naturally," Colley says. "And now we keep people alive indefinitely, but they're not [necessarily] functioning better and they're not happy."

For more than 30 years, Colley worked as a psychiatric nurse. She recalls a patient who was once delivered to the psych ward at the hospital in which Colley worked. This older man had been paralysed for the personal care home.

He ended up in the psych ward because he'd decided to quit eating. He was done with life and couldn't bear the future he faced.

Colley and her colleagues were to try and convince him to eat. It was hard, Colley says, knowing that he was exercising the only means he had to expedite his own death, however harsh.

Another advantage to legalizing the MAID option on one's healthcare directive, Colley says, is that people could direct their wishes to die in advance of developing Alzheimer's or other forms of dementia.

## NO HOPE FOR A HAPPY LIFE

Another Niverville resident feels confident that MAID is an option she'd like to exercise when her circumstances become too unbearable. Because of the stigma still surrounding this medical intervention, she's asked for anonymity. We'll refer to her as Sherry.

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At just 42 years of age, Sherry has already spent most of her life dealing with the consequences of type-1 diabetes. However, she's since been diagnosed with a rarer version, called brittle diabetes.

It's gotten so bad that Sherry had to quit her job as a paralegal two years ago. She stays at home now, dealing with daily symptoms of shaking and weakness that make it difficult to stand or walk.

She also has gastroparesis, a condition of the stomach that causes nausea and vomiting all day long. More recently, she's gained a new irreversible medical problem: a chiari malformation, where part of the brain extends into the spinal canal, causing headaches and balance issues.

"I've lost any desire to want to deal with this anymore," Sherry says.

Occasionally, her symptoms get so bad that she must be hospitalized. The last time she went in, her situation was so dire that she had a seizure and fell into a coma.

Sherry has vivid memories from her comatose experience. It was the first time in years, she says, that she felt such peace and comfort. It's the kind of sensation that she's sure comes from a near-death experience. And she's no longer afraid of dying.

Ironically, Sherry worked in estate planning during her career as a paralegal and she was also commissioned

to proofread the legislation on MAID when it came into Canadian law.

In February of this year, Sherry decided to start the process of MAID for herself. She's not ready yet, she says, but she wants all the red tape out of the way by the time she is.

When and if she decides to follow through, she looks forward to having a few close family members and friends at her side to share in the experience.

#### A PARENT WHO CHOSE MAID

Paul, a resident of New Bothwell, also agreed to share his experiences on the condition of anonymity. This March stands as the four-year anniversary of his dad's passing by MAID.

For Paul, MAID was the right choice for his father, who had been diagnosed with a malignant brain tumour nine months earlier.

"The funny thing with Dad is that he knew he would choose MAID under certain conditions before he was ever diagnosed," Paul says. "He never wanted to be a burden. He took care of others, not the other way around."

Paul's family knew that respecting their dad's end-of-life wishes was to respect him. There were other areas, too, where his dad was specific about how he'd like to be memorialized when it was all over.

"I think it's really important that

people's wishes, especially in terms of their quality of life, are honored," Paul says. "It matters. That's somebody's legacy. It's how you remember them."

Many years prior, Paul's grandfather experienced the ravages of cancer to his own body, so Paul's not surprised that his father chose MAID. Paul's mother supported him from the beginning.

His dad was very clear about how he wanted things to go.

"We talked well beforehand and he essentially said, 'When I'm no longer myself, if I behave in ways that are not me, if I don't know who you are, I want it to be over,'" Paul says.

Nine months later, Paul's mom knew that the time had come. Even so, Paul's dad was able to indicate his support of that decision with a clear thumb's up. The whole family was either in the room or nearby when Paul's dad said his final goodbye.

What impacted Paul was the professionalism and compassion demonstrated by the medical personnel towards their father.

"I've seen other people go slowly and it's not [good]," says Paul. "I know now that I would make very similar choices to my dad's."

Paul, too, hopes that MAID will someday be an option on an advance healthcare directive.

"You could set it up in advance. That way, nobody feels like they have

to make those difficult decisions for you," Paul says. "And the family isn't torn apart [over] what your decisions would have been."

Neeltje de Jong's story isn't far from Paul's. Her mother was diagnosed with a rare cancer called cholangiocarcinoma and passed away just weeks before this writing.

Upon her diagnosis, de Jong's mother began to research her MAID options.

But by the time she was ready to set the ball into motion, mental confusion was setting in and doctors were no longer willing to assume she was of sound enough mind to make the decision.

"So the lesson here is to apply for it even if you're not sure you will go ahead with it," de Jong says. "It would've been nice for my mother if she could've had it lined up for when she wanted it."

De Jong's mother was only 69 at the time of her passing. Because her heart and lungs were still strong, de Jong says that her body fought harder than usual in the final days and it was difficult to watch.

"We knew it wasn't how she would have wanted to go, over three days like that," de Jong says.

#### CAREGIVER IN THE SYSTEM

Julie served as a caregiver in a professional capacity to an adult patient

dealing with severe physical disabilities late in life.

Due to these disabilities, Julie's client needed round-the-clock assistance with even the most basic needs.

"While hospitalized, they sought information about MAID as part of considering their options and own mortality," Julie says. "I had the rare opportunity to witness that initial conversation, which was conducted with great care and compassion. The team provided detailed information without any pressure or discussion of end-of-life planning in that first meeting."

Later, Julie says that there were instances when her client went through bouts of deep anger and distress.

During these times, they would occasionally make impulsive demands for MAID.

"Each time, those requests were declined, reinforcing that the process is not influenced by temporary emotions or external pressures," says Julie. "Even in cases where a person requires extensive care beyond what the healthcare system can fully support, MAID did not allow for the services to be used reactively. I was relieved to see that there are safeguards in place that prioritize patient autonomy while ensuring decisions are made thoughtfully and without coercion."



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# Five Years After Takeover by Town, Open Health Niverville Expands

By Sara Beth Dacombe  
sdacombe@nivervillecitizen.com

The Town of Niverville is celebrating the fifth anniversary of its purchase of Open Health Niverville, the medical clinic located on the Heritage Centre campus.

The town purchased the clinic on March 2, 2020, expanding the practice and offering more services and healthcare practitioners to support the needs of the rapidly growing population in Niverville and the surrounding area.

Today, the clinic hosts 12 providers with 11 exam rooms, an onsite lab, and collaboration between various health professionals and organizations.

The clinic continues to expand. Renovations began at Open Health in May 2024 to create four more exam rooms and a minor procedures room. The town hopes to have the expansion completed by the end of July 2025.

However, they say that deadline could change without warning due to unforeseen circumstances.

Representatives for the town say that it has been an exciting year of expansion as they continue to grow the hard work of founding doctors Chris and Mairi Burnett. They look forward to completing this expansion of the primary



Mayor Myron Dyck, Councillor Nathan Dueck, and Deputy Mayor Chris Wiebe tour the expansion underway at Open Health Niverville. TOWN OF NIVERVILLE

care clinic.

“Niverville has always been a forward-facing community that never takes no for an answer, and the growth that Open Health Niverville has experienced over the past five years is indicative of that,” says Myron Dyck, mayor of Niverville. “As we look forward as a community to 2030, I think I speak for all of council to say that we are excited to see how this expansion of Open Health will contribute to the vibrant growth of both the clinic and our community.”

Sheyna Andries, the town’s director of health services, agrees.

“This expansion has been a long time coming, and the clinic is excited to see it fully in use,” says Andries. “With an increasing number of people looking for healthcare in their local community and the growth Niverville has experienced, adding these extra rooms, including a minor procedures room, will allow Open Health to meet that need.”

This expansion was made possible when two guest suites became vacant at the Heritage Centre. The town adds that Open Health is always looking for new healthcare providers to join their team, and the expansion to 15 rooms will ensure that the clinic has the space needed to continue to grow.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**  
While Open Health is excited to offer space for more providers in the community, the clinic is unable to add new patients over the phone, by email, or by face-to-face contact. Those interested in applying for a healthcare provider at the clinic must apply through Family Doctor Finder, which can be reached by phone at 1-866-690-8260, or online at www.gov.mb.ca/health/familydoctorfinder.

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# Family Fights for Healthcare Wait List Transparency

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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It's always difficult losing a loved one to a sudden heart attack, but it's so much more tragic when the loss was preventable. It's been a bitter pill to swallow for the kids and grandkids of long-time Niverville resident Debbie Fewster.

Debbie's story isn't new. Every year, Canadians die before they make it to their life-saving surgery date. But as in Debbie's case, they also die because the wait list to get surgery far exceeds what's reasonable given their condition.

On October 13, 2024, at 69 years of age, Debbie breathed her last. It was two full months after her cardiologist diagnosed her with three blocked arteries.

She was in need of quick intervention and told she should expect a wait time of about three weeks.

Debbie's son Daniel Fewster says that Manitoba's healthcare system boasts even shorter average wait times than that.

"According to the Province of Manitoba website, the median wait time [for surgery like this] is 12 days," Fewster says. "From the time that she failed the stress test to her death was more than 60 days."

Since then, both Fewster and his sister, Colleen Dyck, have made it their mission to try and bring change to a system that is failing so many Canadians.

They're not interested in litigation. They're not even looking for an apology. What they are looking for is the enactment of something they call



Colleen Dyck and Daniel Fewster are calling for change after the untimely passing of their mother, Debbie.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

Debbie's Law.

Working together with SecondStreet.org, a nonprofit Canadian public policy think tank, Debbie's Law would compel health authorities to ensure that patients are informed when life-saving treatment cannot be provided within the medically recommended timeframe. Doctors and specialists would then be at liberty to advise alternatives, such as out-of-province treatment.

It's an option that Debbie's kids say they would have jumped at had they known their mom's surgery wait time would be so long.

After numerous meetings with SecondStreet.org, Fewster and Dyck hosted a press conference on Wednesday, March 12 in Winnipeg. Each sibling made a heartfelt presentation to the media.

"We know we are not alone," Dyck

said. "Many others have lost loved ones, not because their conditions were untreatable but because they were waiting... Debbie's Law won't fix everything, but it will introduce something that is desperately needed: radical honesty."

Fewster's testimony was equally pointed.

"My mom paid into healthcare her whole life," he said. "When she needed them, they weren't there. There's no refund, no money-back guarantee. They didn't even offer alternatives—nothing to bridge the gap when they knew they couldn't respond in time... We trusted the system to save her, but it failed her. It failed us. It's failing too many others... If the government is going to monopolize healthcare, then they need to come up with a model and product that can meet the needs of

the Canadians paying for it, when they need it."

Since that press conference, the Fewster siblings say they've been hearing from complete strangers whose stories of premature loss echo their own.

Kathleen Cook, a Winnipeg MLA and the Progressive Conservative's healthcare critic, has promised to push for debate on Debbie's Law at question period in the Legislature in the coming weeks. Fewster and Dyck hope to be present when that happens.

Immediately prior to their interview with *The Citizen*, the pair received a phone call from a patient relations representative at the St. Boniface Hospital, where Debbie's surgery should have taken place. They have offered to set up a meeting between Fewster, Dyck, and the CEO

of the hospital.

It was the first communication they'd received from anyone in the healthcare system since Debbie's passing, with the exception of an invoice that came in the mail from Southern Health-Sante Sud, charging them for the ambulance transport.

## DEBBIE'S STORY

Debbie wasn't the first in her family to deal with the sudden onset of heart disease. Her father died of a heart attack decades earlier. Debbie's older brother was diagnosed with angina, just like Debbie, about 20 years prior.

Thankfully for him, surgery was quick and he lives a vibrant, active life today.

Debbie's mother died at the age of 102, proving that longevity was also in the family genes.

For Debbie's kids, there was no reason to believe she wouldn't make it to a ripe old age. She was an avid hiker and lifelong participant in sports. She ate a clean diet and never took her health for granted.

"As recently as last April, she was hiking for two hours per day on Vancouver Island with my sister," Dyck says.

Not long after, though, Debbie began to feel pressure in her chest. She thought it was heartburn.

By July, she saw her family doctor, who fast-tracked her for testing. In August, Debbie was put through the rigours of a cardio stress test. She made it only three minutes into a 20-minute exercise before they determined that her condition was severe enough to be considered urgent.

She was given medication and a post-surgery checkup for November,

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then instructed to wait for a call from the hospital.

That's when things seemed to come to a standstill.

After weeks of waiting, Debbie grew worried. She contacted the hospital, wondering why she wasn't receiving news. According to the family, she was told that the delay was a result of "catchup" after summer vacation.

Leap-forward to October and she still had no indication that her surgery was imminent. Enjoying a Thanksgiving meal with her kids, she left the gathering early, feeling poorly.

Not long after, she called her daughter for help. Dyck and Fewster were at her side when the paramedics arrived. Unfortunately, they couldn't keep Debbie's heart pumping.

Fewster says the medical responders on site that night weren't surprised to hear that Debbie had died while waiting for surgery.

"One police officer interrupted me and said, 'Hey, I've lost two family members to this as well, waiting on a list,'" Fewster says. "And she said, 'You would not believe how many calls we respond to where this is the situation... It happens constantly.'"

## EVERYONE FOR THEMSELVES

In the brief time since Dyck and Fewster began this journey, they've heard of countless others who faced interminably long wait lists in Manitoba—indeed, across Canada.

In some cases, the individual is confident that the only reason they're alive today is because of advice given them by their doctor: go straight to the emergency room and don't leave until they're given a surgery date.

Debbie never received that advice. On her own, it wouldn't have come naturally to push herself to the front of a line of people all needing life-saving intervention.

For Dyck and Fewster, this new knowledge of how our healthcare system operates is a telling example of a broken system.

"It feels sick to think that that's how we're being forced to use the system," says Dyck. "You literally have to elbow your way in."

Fuelling the siblings' determination was the response from Uzoma Asagwara, Manitoba's Minister of Health. Asagwara was quoted by press as saying that if a resident in Manitoba needs life-saving

surgery, they will get it.

"It's just not true," Dyck says. "They don't even have the data to determine if it's true because they don't track these things. It's a very defensive position for a health minister to take. That's really worrying on a lot of levels. Are we supposed to trust our leadership?"

Proper data tracking and public transparency of that data is another aspect of Manitoba healthcare the siblings would like to see changed through Debbie's Law.

Through their affiliation with SecondStreet, it has become painfully evident to Dyck and Fewster that the local healthcare system takes a lax approach to recording reasons for death while on a waiting list.

In Dyck's opinion, if you don't have an adequate way of tracking patients who die while awaiting life-saving surgery, the system has no report card to tell them how they're doing.

"Some healthcare regions track it some years, then they don't other years, and then they sort of track it," Dyck says. "It's just a gong show... It would be as simple as having a dropdown menu that would indicate why a person's name is being taken off the waiting list."

According to SecondStreet data, nearly 75,000 patients died across Canada while waiting on various surgeries and diagnostic scans since the 2018–2019 fiscal year.

"That number, staggering as it is, does not cover every jurisdiction," says a SecondStreet policy brief. "Because many provinces simply don't track the problem, the true figure is likely much higher."

The public healthcare system should not be excluded when it comes to accurately tracking, recording, and sharing important data, says SecondStreet. In fact, it's exactly what the government expects of every private business and corporation.

For instance, if an automaker sees a potentially dangerous issue arise with any of their products on the market, they are required to both recall the product and then inform every single person who owns the impacted vehicle.

For food producers and importers, the legal requirements are the same and punishable by severe fines if they don't comply.

For organizations like SecondStreet, retrieving the

existing healthcare data on waitinglist deaths hasn't been easy. To do so, they needed to first apply for its release through a Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act request, and in some cases they paid a fee.

This lack of public transparency, Dyck says, needs to change. If the healthcare system is doing so well, as Asagwara suggests, the evidence should be available to prove it.

But it wasn't always this way, Dyck and Fewster believe. There was a time, they say, under previous governments, when patients were regularly sent out of province or even to other countries in order to ensure a rapid response to the need for surgery and diagnostics.

According to Fewster, this is also how the healthcare system operates throughout the European Union.

"If you live in Brussels and you can't get hip surgery, you can fly to Dublin and get the surgery done and the Brussels [healthcare system] will pay for it," says Fewster.

Dyck and Fewster want to make it perfectly clear, though, that this is not a reflection on the province's hard-working doctors, nurses, and surgeons. They're giving their all. It's the system that's failing.

"We're spending more than we ever have [on healthcare]," Dyck says. "What we're spending per patient outpaces inflation and we're getting worse care. And our wait times are through the roof."

The trickle-down effect of long medical wait times goes beyond the people who die and those who love them, adds Dyck. There are countless Manitobans who cannot work or live well without diagnostics and surgery.

The siblings tell of an acquaintance who has been forced to collect employment insurance for upwards of 18 months while waiting on surgery to repair an injury. It's taking a toll on his mental well-being.

Is there anything the public can do? Fewster and Dyck believe so. They encourage every taxpayer to write to the provincial health minister requesting that Debbie's Law be put into action.

"We really want to do justice in representing the unheard voices, because there are thousands of them," Fewster says. "Right now, we have an opportunity to be a voice for them."

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## Public Hearing 2025 Financial Plan

On April 15th, 2025, at 7:00 p.m., the public is invited to join Council at the **Niverville Community Resource & Recreation Centre**, 501 Centre Street, Niverville, for a Public Hearing where Council will hear any person who would like to make a presentation, ask questions, or register an objection to the 2025 Financial Plan as presented.

A copy of the 2025 Financial Plan is available for review and may be examined by any person during regular office hours at the Town Office, 329 Bronstone Drive, or online here:

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**Eric King, CPA CGA**  
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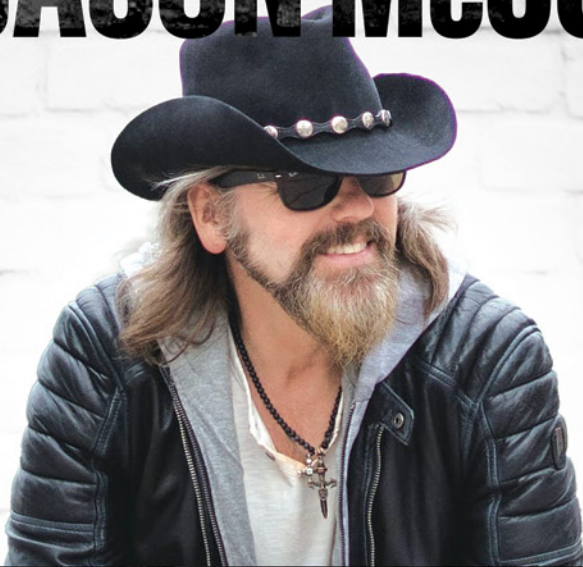
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# King Charles III Coronation Medal Presented to Local Citizens

By Kim Kielley

As voices swelled with pride during the singing of *O Canada*, 34 citizens from Steinbach and the surrounding area were recognized for service to their country, province, communities, and outstanding achievements abroad bringing credit to Canada. Six of these citizens were from Niverville and Ste. Agathe.

They were presented with the distinguished King Charles III Coronation Medal in an awards ceremony held at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach on March 4 by local MP Ted Falk.

"It's a privilege to be here this evening with so many giants from our community," Falk told the crowd. "That's really what you are. You are the giants in our community that are being recognized... It's a privilege to be here and welcome you to give you these medals on the coronation of the king. It's about service. It's about people. Nobody knows it better than the folks in this room who have dedicated their lives to helping their communities, their country. Everyone here understands what it means to serve."

According to the federal government's website, the medal program was initially proclaimed on May 3, 2023 by the prime minister. That was just three days before the king's coronation.

A year later, on May 6, 2024, the design of the medal and program details were announced by Rideau Hall.

The first medals were presented by the governor general during a virtual event on May 6, 2024 to the country's lieutenant governors and territorial commissioners. On the same day,



Roger Armbruster, Joel Lemoine, Ron Schuler, Ted Falk, Ray Dowse, Myron Dyck, Paul Rhodes, and Shirley Hoult

KIM KIELLEY

the first military recipients received their medals from their provinces' respective lieutenant governors.

In total, 30,000 Canadians will be awarded the medal. Of that number, 4,000 will be members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Here are the local residents who were presented with the prestigious medal.

**Roger Armbruster** is the founder of Canada Awakening Ministries. For more than four decades, he has promoted healing the land through restoration and facilitated reconciliation initiatives with Indigenous peoples.

During the past year, Armbruster has also founded the Canada Awakening Healing the Land TV podcast, which address the social, economic, environmental, and cultural issues facing Indigenous people in the remote communities of northern Canada.

He's also been involved in helping facilitate sponsorships and care for refugees and displaced people,

helping them come to Canada. He advocates for Indigenous peoples and refugees with all levels of government in Canada.

**Ray Dowse** has played a significant role in Niverville's recent commercial development, bringing many businesses to town including Main Street Storage, *The Citizen*, Old Drovers Run, Tim Hortons, Shell, the Great Canadian Dollar Store, Negash Coffee, Dairy Queen, Anytime Fitness, CRU Barber, Smitty's, HUB Insurance, Pita Pit, Domino's, Almond Nail, BSI Insurance, Urban Flavours, Santa Lucia, and Niverville Physio.

He has also been heavily involved in bringing the MJHL to Niverville. Dowse has served as a volunteer with the Olde Tyme Country Fair, the Chamber of Commerce, and a variety of other organizations.

**Shirley Hoult** has worked with Niverville Communities in Bloom, an organization committed to nurturing environmental sustainability, the enhancement of greenspaces,

and heritage conservation. She has worked to preserve local history through photography.

Hoult also works with Service to Seniors to provide recreation, support programs, and other needs for seniors in the community.

**Joel Edmond Lemoine** of Ste. Agathe has helped both local and immigrant entrepreneurs start their businesses, with an emphasis on doing so in bilingual communities.

Lemoine has helped launch more than 1,580 new businesses, creating nearly 4,000 jobs in the process.

He also volunteers with numerous affordable housing initiatives, seniors group projects, daycares, recreational facilities, and tourism attractions across Manitoba and has served on a number of local, provincial, and national boards.

He has been a school trustee and councillor for the RM of Ritchot.

**Paul (Dusty) Rhodes** served Canada for three decades—specifically, 33 years—in the Canadian Armed

Forces, including overseas peace-keeping missions.

Throughout his career, Rhodes has served in various capacities as community leader and organizer, sports coach, and camp director. Upon retirement, he has gotten substantially involved with the Royal Canadian Legion and other veterans support services.

Since moving to Niverville, he has begun collecting aluminum tabs for wheelchair parts and prosthetic limbs.

**Myron Dyck** is Niverville's mayor, in his third term, not to mention a businessman. He has served on council for nearly two decades.

Under his leadership, Dyck presided over the town's purchase of the Open Health medical clinic, negotiations for a new water treatment and wastewater treatment facilities, the construction a new high school, and the opening of the CRRC.

Another career highlight is the RCMP station which will open in Niverville this fall.

**Ron Schuler**, although not a local resident, currently serves as a provincial MLA. He has served in this capacity, although not for this specific constituency, for 25 years.

Prior to his first election to the Legislature, Schuler served two terms as a school trustee with the River East School Division. As an opposition MLA, he has taken on a variety of roles. While the PCs were in power, he was Minister of Infrastructure.

He is an active volunteer, giving his time to Big Brothers, Citizens on Patrol, the Kidney Foundation, Max Reinhardt Theatre Canada, the German Canadian Heritage Foundation, and the Manitoba Intercultural Council.

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# Council Denies St. Adolphe Developer for Second Time

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

For the second time in less than two years, Ritchot council denied the application of Kingdom Home Building Inc. to rezone a plot of land in St. Adolphe for the purpose of constructing multifamily housing.

At the public meeting held on March 19, developer Luke Wiebe spoke in support of his request to rezone the property at the southwest corner of the community from commercial designation to RG8 (residential general 8000).

This is the third time Wiebe has approached council regarding zoning changes to his property located next to the new daycare and across from Tourond Creek.

Shortly after Wiebe's purchase of the 2.8-acre property in 2021, council complied with Wiebe's request to rezone the area from AL (agriculture limited) to CG (commercial general).

Wiebe's stated goal, at the time, was to construct a professional centre with retail shops and, possibly, industrial spaces, depending on demand.

Wiebe never followed through with these plans.

Instead, in July 2023, Wiebe approached council again, this time with a request to rezone the property to an RG8 designation. A brand-new plan was presented, this time for 100 residential apartment units in two buildings. No commercial spaces appeared in the plan.

Residents turned up in large numbers for this meeting, most of them to cite concerns over losing one of the town's last remaining Main Street lots to housing.

Many referred to the condo units at St. Adolphe's core, which had been approved by a previous council years earlier. This move significantly reduced prime commercial real estate options along Main Street.

## NEW DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR 2025

All things considered, it appeared that Wiebe had been listening to resident and council concerns and was seeking a compromise. His newest proposal revolved around a mixed-use theme.

If approved, Wiebe would have been allowed to proceed with a plan



Developer Luke Wiebe address Ritchot's council about a revised multifamily housing proposal.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

for two multifamily residential complexes. The difference this time was that it included approximately 3,000 square feet of commercial space located at ground level in one of the two buildings.

This, he says, could accommodate anywhere from two to seven businesses. His vision included hair salons, dental offices, massage therapy services, or even a bakery and café.

There would have been no risk of this space being converted to residential down the road if he couldn't find businesses to fill those spots.

"We will 100 percent commit a certain amount of main floor space to commercial," Wiebe told council. "If they sit empty for a while, that's my loss. So I'll be motivated to provide good options. It's actually a small enough portion of the entire investment that the residential aspect helps me have competitive rates on commercial space. At the end of the day, if these commercial spaces are full, all of my residential tenants will be happy there."

As for the residential rental units, Wiebe assured council that there would be a variety of price points to meet different income levels as well as mobility-accessible units for aging residents.

Since Wiebe's last proposal, there was another major change. With an Imperial Oil pipeline running through his property, he is required by the oil company to ensure that the land directly above the pipeline

remains free and clear of obstructions such as buildings or pavement.

This essentially splits the property into two sections and prevents access to the more northerly building (phase two of the plan) without the creation of a second and separate highway access. This second access driveway would need to be approved by Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure.

When queried by council as to his intentions should MTI say no, Wiebe said that he would be forced to forfeit his plan for a second residential complex and leave the area as greenspace.

Only phase one of the build would have been possible right away because highway access on one end already exists—and it's phase one of Wiebe's proposal that included the commercial spaces.

## RESIDENTS OBJECT

Similar to the 2023 public hearing, residents filled council chambers to weigh in.

Eight of those in attendance stepped forward to relay their concerns. Two others chimed in virtually. A total of 13 letters of objection were received prior to the meeting.

For the second time, Ron Rochon laid out for council many of the same concerns he'd shared in previous years.

"I think Luke's building concept is great," Rochon began. "The location is the issue."

Because there is a residential

aspect to Wiebe's plan, he said, it would be better suited for the Tourond Creek development. He reiterated what so many residents were there to say.

"Historically, small communities thrive when their main streets are bustling with commerce," Rochon told council. "Unfortunately, past decisions to rezone commercial properties to residential have crippled our Main Street business potential."

Others stepped forward too, looking at issues related to traffic congestion if higher-density housing were allowed. Others worried how the additional housing would affect schools and daycares, which are already at capacity.

Still others believed that, if this housing were allowed, its focus should be on keeping seniors in the community.

"I don't think we have a long-range vision," one resident told council. "I think we should really find ways to keep our people in town, otherwise we are just a bedroom community."

Councillor Joel Lemoine said that the community has been invited into the conversation of St. Adolphe's development plan on numerous occasions. Unfortunately, he added, commercial properties were lost to residential development despite those well-laid plans.

"We've got to stick to our guns when the community gets together and says, 'We need space for

residential, commercial, industrial, or whatnot,'" Lemoine said.

Tourond Creek developer Brandon Powell joined the meeting virtually to point out that gaining MTI approval for a second access point may be overly optimistic.

"When I saw [Wiebe's] site plan, I saw the multiple access points and, in my experience, those have been challenging to deal with when it comes to MTI," Powell said, "just because they want to reduce potential for traffic conflicts."

Prior to council's deliberation, Wiebe returned to the podium for a final rebuttal. In his opinion, he has worked hard to comply with whatever council and the community has asked for. To reject residential housing here, he said, is simply unreasonable because it's the backbone by which commercial space is possible.

"Why has somebody not contacted me asking for... commercial [space] in the last couple of years?" Wiebe asked. "I've owned the property for four years and nobody asked me, 'Hey, could we consider building a business there?'"

Council closed public input to enter debate. Councillor Jason Bodnarchuk admitted to struggling with the idea of residential housing here and worried about traffic congestion.

Councillor Shane Pelletier disagreed in part, pointing out that a gas station or grocery store on this site could result in the same traffic flows or worse. He added that it would be difficult to accommodate a large business on this lot due to the pipeline that runs down the centre of it.

While some of Mayor Chris Ewen's concerns had been allayed through assurances that the commercial designations would not be lost to residential, he also struggled with the decision.

"There's something in my mind that's telling me that we should go with this," Ewen told council. "I think there's some business opportunity here. Maybe we can designate more than 30 percent of the space [to commercial]... but that's part of the planning agreement. It's not something we'd do here."

Still, when put to a vote, council voted unanimously in favour of defeating the application as proposed.

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Kuldeep Randhawa is the owner of Niverville's new barBURRITO..

EVAN BRAUN

## BarBURRITO Spices Up Niverville's Restaurant Scene

By Evan Braun

✉ [editor@nivervillecitizen.com](mailto:editor@nivervillecitizen.com)

Niverville may have a reputation for pizza, but there's a new game in town.

If you're in the mood for some mouth-watering Tex-Mex, then the new barBURRITO location at 31 Main Street has you covered with a packed menu of burritos, bowls, tacos, quesadillas, loaded fries, and chips and salsa. There's a little something for everyone.

The franchise is owned by Kuldeep Randhawa, a newcomer to Niverville who's eager to get to know his community better.

"I don't come from a restaurant background, but my love for food started at a young age," says Randhawa. "While other kids were outside playing, I would be in the kitchen helping my mom cook. It was our special time together, and that bond over food has stayed with me ever since."

Owning a barBURRITO now feels like he's come full

circle, giving him a chance to share his passion with his neighbours.

So what sets barBURRITO apart from other Mexican-style fast-casual restaurants?

"BarBURRITO is all about fresh, high-quality ingredients, and bold flavours," he explains. "What really sets us apart is our commitment to customization—customers can build their meals exactly the way they like. Plus, we offer a variety of protein options, including plant-based choices, which makes our menu accessible to everyone."

The doors are open and business has been brisk so far.

To mark the restaurant's grand opening on Monday, March 10, they offered \$5.99 burritos and giveaways throughout the day.

The day also included a ribbon-cutting, attended by Mayor Myron Dyck.

For those who may be new to barBURRITO and unsure of what to try, Randhawa has some suggestions for to start with the extensive menu.

"I'd recommend trying our Bang Bang Shrimp Burrito. It's a fan favourite with a perfect balance of spice and crunch. Our Extreme Fries are also a must-try, especially if you're looking for a great shareable option. And if you have a sweet tooth, don't leave without trying our churros."

In the meantime, he says that he is extremely grateful so far for the warm welcome he's received from everyone who's stopped by.

"The response has been incredible!" he says of customer feedback. "The community has been so welcoming and excited to have a barBURRITO in Niverville. Being located near the community centre, where so many tournaments take place, as well as the high school and elementary school, we've already had a lot of interest from families, students, and athletes looking for a great meal on the go. Our goal is to not just serve great food, but to become a part of the community. We can't wait to see you all!"



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# Jette Studios Opens Its Doors

By Brenda Sawatzky

On Friday, March 28, the new 25,000-square-foot film soundstage located on the corner of Highway 311 and Wallace Road was alight with activity.

The event? None other than the studio's much anticipated grand opening of Jette Studios.

The festivities kicked off at 11:00 a.m. with a ribbon-cutting ceremony from within the vast 40-foot-high concrete building.

By special invitation, dignitaries of every stripe came to celebrate the occasion, alongside virtually everyone who had a hand in the creation of the soundstage, including the studio's president and founder, Juliette Hagopian.

The ceremony kicked off with a message and prayer offered by Anishinaabe elder and activist Gramma Shingoose.

Shingoose shared hope for the studio's success and the many good and educational stories that might be created there.

She'd recently been contacted by an Indigenous filmmaker, she said, who hoped to create a documentary about Manitoba's land-fill search for the bodies of the four murdered women, a story which has been all over the news for several years now.

Project facilitator Gord Daman emceed the morning event.

Daman publicly acknowledged the importance that the provincial government



The ribbon-cutting at Jette Studios.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

has played in terms of rolling out the red carpet for the film industry.

As for Jette Studios specifically, Daman credits Niverville's town council for being proactive in helping to make the project happen.

"It's the local government that knows how to get things done," Daman told the crowd. "[I've] witnessed firsthand the support Niverville council has provided to Jette Studios and the hours of work town staff have contributed to facilitating Juliette's passion, vision, and dream."

Mayor Myron Dyck took a moment to cite the economic benefits he believes the studio will bring to the community. He also shared his vision of a collaboration between the studio and the local high school.

"I dream about having the performing arts and other trades and support services to the film industry taught at our high school," Dyck said. "And that one day a high school grad would walk across the stage and receive the highest marks in the field of film... And then, with that

training completed, he's able to come with a resume and ask Juliette for a job, thus fulfilling their dream of being able to live and work in their hometown."

Chuck Davidson, CEO of the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce, also shared words of encouragement and support.

"The Manitoba Chamber of Commerce represents 65 Chambers of Commerce in Manitoba and close to 10,000 businesses," Davidson said. "I'm not sure what's in the water here, but I spend more time at announcements in Niverville than any other Chamber in the province."

Close to \$435 million dollars is spent by the movie industry in Manitoba on an annual basis, he said.

"Juliette is one of Canada's premier film producers," Daman added. "Her production excellence has been recognized by the Canadian Screen Awards numerous times. Juliette is known in the film industry not only for her passion but her ability to cultivate relationships industry-wide, along with a

deep commitment to sustainability and the betterment of the film industry as a whole."

This brand-new facility represents only the first phase of what's to become a fully integrated filmmaking campus.

In the spirit of supporting local industry, Hagopian applauded the efforts of Niverville resident Kyle Bially, who worked as consultant and general contractor on the project.

Local companies Forgotten Flavours and Negash Coffee were also represented through the croissants and coffee being served to guests.

Hagopian couldn't help but recognize her long-time friend Henok Negash Gebre of Negash Coffee and Queen Sheba Coffee Roasters.

"Thank you, Henok, for inviting me to Niverville and for introducing me to all these people who have made a difference," she said. "The future goal of the Manitoba film industry is to grow. I am looking so forward to this building allowing Manitoba to grow even bigger in the film industry. Build it and they will come."

The event continued into the afternoon with a public meet-and-greet, giving curiosity-seekers a chance to peek inside and rub shoulders with Hagopian and her crew.

As for the high-tech LED screen and state-of-the-art production equipment, all that is still to come. Hagopian is so far unable to offer any insight as to its arrival or when the first film shoot would take place.

## IN BRIEF

### South Floodway Bridge Set for Reconstruction and Closure

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Commuters travelling via Highway 200 may well be looking for another route in the next six months. This spring, a major reconstruction of the Red River Floodway bridge will begin.

By late summer, the bridge will be closed to all traffic and is expected to remain unpassable for a year.

The bridge was built in 1965 when the Red River Floodway was first created. Sixty years later, Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure (MTI) reports that its condition has deteriorated.

They anticipate the newly rebuilt bridge to last another 25 to 40 years once complete.

The project involves upgrades in design which will widen the roadway. At the same time, a parking area will be created to provide access to the nearby Duff Roblin Parkway Trail.

The existing narrow roadway makes staged construction impossible. MTI says that detour routes will be announced soon.

#### FLOODWAY HISTORY

The ambitious Red River Floodway took five years to complete, from 1962 to 1968. It was created under the leadership of Premier Duff Roblin and Prime Minister John Diefenbaker.

It took \$62.7 million to complete, the cost of which was split 60/40 between the federal and provincial governments.

During its 150-year history, the city of Winnipeg experienced partial and severe floodwaters many times. The devastating flood of 1950 finally inspired serious conversations around flood mitigation efforts.

At the height of that flood, nearly one-tenth of the city was underwater. More than 10,000 homes were inundated, some with heights of up to 15 feet of water. More than 100,000 residents were forced to evacuate.

The event went down in history as one of the greatest natural disasters in Canada. Over \$22 million dollars was needed of the Manitoba Flood Relief Fund to aid flood victims, and another \$126 million was spent to respond to flood damages.

The Red River Floodway, colloquially known as "Duff's Ditch," became the largest excavation project to be undertaken in Canada at that time. On a global scale, it was recognized as one of the most significant man-made channels to be found anywhere.

While the creation of the Red River Floodway ensured lower-risk flood events for the province's city dwellers, it put certain communities near the Red River south of Winnipeg at greater risk of flooding.

For this reason, ring dikes were constructed around seven communities south of Winnipeg, including St. Adolphe and Morris, between 1966 and 1972. A similar federal and provincial split occurred to cover this \$9.3 million cost.

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Incoming CAO Shane Ray alongside outgoing CAO Mitch Duval.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

# Ritchot Council Announces New CAO

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

After 11 years of service to the residents of Ritchot, Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Mitch Duval is hanging up his hat. His replacement, announced at the March 19 council meeting, is Shane Ray.

Ray currently serves as Director of Recreation Services for the RM, so council didn't have to go far to find him.

Still, the role shift wasn't an obvious one to council at first.

Councillor Shane Pelletier was on the selection committee. The key to finding just the right person, he says, is to hire a good head-hunting consultant.

After some due diligence, the consultant submitted 12 applications to the selection committee. From that group, four were singled out for in-person interviews.

Applications for the position were not limited to Ritchot residents.

"For that kind of role, you can't limit it that much," Pelletier says. "There's probably about 40 open spots for CAOs in Manitoba."

That Ray, as an RM employee, rose to the top of their selection list was a pleasant surprise, Pelletier says.

"We weren't aware of [Ray's eligibility]," Pelletier says. "We had never had any conversations where that came up. He interviewed well and he's got a lot of leadership experience."

Ray's start date as CAO will be April 30.

"I'm excited to take on this role and work alongside council, staff, and the community to build on Ritchot's many strengths and create opportunities for sustainable growth," says Ray. "This is a vibrant and evolving municipality, and I look forward to supporting initiatives that enhance the quality of life for all residents."

According to the RM, Ray comes with more than 25 years of experience in municipal administration, financial management, and community development. Prior to Ritchot, Ray worked with organizations such as Recreation Manitoba, Red River College, and CurlManitoba.

For Duval, stepping away from his CAO position doesn't necessarily mean full-time

retirement. In the beginning, he says he'll take a few months to consider what comes next.

He certainly won't rule out the possibility of using his skills and years of experience to offer consulting services to municipalities where they're needed.

"The future is mine to control," Duval says. "I'd be happy to... help municipalities [work through] certain projects."

Still, he admits, there will be aspects of his position in the RM of Ritchot that he'll miss.

"What I will miss the most are the great staff at this municipality, other municipalities, and the many connections I've made with council members, developers, and provincial departments," Duval says. "It's been an incredible journey."

In total, Duval has spent 29 years of his career working in municipal services. Prior to Ritchot, he worked as CAO in the RM of Montcalm and as Municipal Services Officer for the province before that.

"[The CAO role] is the foundation of community and it is near and dear to my heart," Duval says.

Duval was instrumental in seeing the RM through many

projects over his years of service. Some of the most memorable include the project that expanded St. Adolphe's ring dike to make room for growth.

The Ste. Agathe firehall project helped to improve emergency services in the municipality.

Duval was there to help council find innovative ways to expand on the area's childcare services. And most recently, he helped orchestrate the expansion and modernization of the municipality's civic office.

Almost any council member will tell you that the position of CAO is arguably one of the most important in municipal government.

The CAO provides an imperative resource for council members due to their knowledge and understanding of municipal law.

At the same time, the CAO exercises overall municipal management to ensure government operates effectively and efficiently.

The CAO, too, needs to be a visionary in terms of finding innovative ways to enhance resident services while at the same time managing public expectations.



# School Divisions Announce New Budgets and Tax Rates

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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In mid-March, both the Hanover School Division (HSD) and Seine River School Division (SRSD) released their budget proposals for the 2025–26 school year.

As budgets become finalized, so do indications of changes to the education mill rates that affect people's property taxes.

Thanks to the fact that 2025 is a property assessment year, as well as the promise of additional funding by the provincial government, neither school division will be raising their mill rates.

According to the SRSD trustee board, the mill rate will remain the same as last year at 12.67.

Property owners in the HSD catchment area will actually see a bit of a drop this year, with a mill rate of 12.36, down from last year's 12.74.

Still, residential and commercial properties will likely be assessed at higher valuations than they were two years ago, last time an assessment took place.

Another school tax development this year is the NDP government's introduction of the Homeowner's Affordability Tax Credit (HATC), which is set to replace the School Tax Rebate and Education Property Tax Credit for residential property owners.

The HATC will be applied directly to property tax bills in the fall and provide relief of up to \$1,500 on primary residences only.

When considering both



BRENDASAWATZKY

the 2025 property assessment along with the HATC, a residential property assessed at \$350,000 in either of these school divisions should anticipate their school tax portion to come in under \$500.

A home assessed at \$450,000 could expect double that amount.

In 2025, farm properties will continue to receive the Manitoba School Tax Rebate, which is maintained at 50 percent. There are no provincial property tax credits or rebates for commercial properties.

## HSD BUDGET BRIEF

Based on HSD's new budget announcement, \$136.6 million is being allocated for operating and capital expenditures in the new school year.

This is up by nearly six percent over last year's budget.

The province's promise of an extra 2.2 percent in funding amounts to nearly \$72 million

in additional wiggle room for HSD.

Priorities for the trustee board during this year's budget planning included enrollment growth and staffing needs.

The budget will provide funding for an additional 12 teachers and 14 educational assistants.

## SRSD BUDGET BRIEF

From the province this coming year, SRSD is anticipating a boost of 5.7 percent in funding, equalling an extra \$11.4 million in their coffers.

Total expenses budgeted for the coming school year add up to approximately \$77 million, up 15 percent over the last budget.

With the additional funding, the SRSD board hopes to prioritize staffing to meet student needs while reducing class sizes.

As well, they hope to do some operational catch-up

after the very difficult budget cuts they've undergone over the past 18 months.

Reducing the deficit, though, will remain important as they work through the three-year plan as approved by the province.

The division expects to hire 27 full-time equivalent teaching positions this year, as well as 35 full-time equivalent support staff.

More funding will be allocated toward professional development and technology hardware.

The board will look at eliminating fees for the mandatory band program and instrument purchases, as well as increasing support for school teams and investing in specialized equipment.

Four new buses and two new bus routes will be added, not to mention a variety of investments in school infrastructure.

## Niverville Foundation to Present Financial Awards

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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May 1 will mark the third annual wine and cheese event hosted by The Niverville Foundation. This year's evening corresponds with the charitable organization's annual general meeting and, additionally, will be a celebration of local artists.

With the purchase of a \$25 ticket, anyone may attend. The highlight will be the presentation of three financial awards.

Grants of \$2,000 each will be presented to the Mobility Van Project, whose organizers are working towards the purchase of a community mobility van, and the upcoming Niverville lending library. The library will use the grant for the purchase of a computer and audiobook licensing.

A further \$1,284 will be presented to Open Health Niverville for the acquisition of a bariatric weigh scale.

The evening is hosted at the Golden Friendship Centre, with the AGM formalities beginning at 6:30. The agenda will include the election of a new board member to replace outgoing member Andrew Neufeld.

Paul Dufour and Ludolf Grollé have both let their names stand for the open position. Those who have donated to The Niverville Foundation in the past are eligible to cast a vote.

Other board members include Ken Rempel, Annette Fast, Mariska Loeppky, Rachel Niessen, Keith Bueckert, and Libby Hanna.

Beginning at 7:00 p.m., attendees will have an opportunity to brush shoulders with board members and discover all the great things happening through The Niverville Foundation.

Of course, there will be wine and cheese. Additionally, the evening will feature silent auction prizes and displays of art. Six local artists will be on hand to talk about their work, which will also be offered for sale.

The artists include Jenn Lundy, Lois Neufeld, Elaine Krahn, Jolene Pauls, Helene

Dyck, and Cody Sawatzky.

"This [event] will offer an affordable evening for all... in a different format from the gala dinners that have been the hallmark of fundraising to date," says board member Libby Hanna. "It brings awareness to the benefits of the growing Niverville Foundation [as we] disperse grants to community projects. We also wanted to highlight the artistic talent in our community and give them an opportunity to show and sell their work to the public."

The Niverville Foundation is a not-for-profit organization which got its start in 1992 through community champions like Norman Wittick and George Sawatzky.

The premise of the foundation is to provide an avenue for people to make charitable donations to local causes of their choice. The Niverville Foundation is there for those who are in the midst of estate planning, as well as those who have sold capital and are looking to ease their tax burden while benefiting their community.

Donors can direct their donations anonymously or choose to be recognized for their contributions.

Either way, the foundation promises to take care of all the administrative work and reporting to the Canada Revenue Agency so the donor doesn't have to worry about such details.

Since its inception, more than \$1.3 million in donations have been made, dollars which have gone on to boost community projects in Niverville and the surrounding area.

In the coming months, the foundation plans to include grant applications on their website, making it easier for groups to apply for funding.

"Supporting The Niverville Foundation and the building of our endowment fund will go to supporting many community projects and groups in the year to come," says Hanna.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

To purchase tickets or to learn more, visit: [www.nivervillefoundation.ca](http://www.nivervillefoundation.ca)



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1. To control noxious weeds on road allowances, public preserves and parks within the municipality, the Town may use the herbicides Fiesta, Round Up, and 2-4-D Ester 700. The Program will run from May 1st, 2025, to October 31st, 2025, using a ground sprayer.


2. To control populations of nuisance mosquitos, the Town may larvicide using Vectobac 200g.

This Program will commence from May 1st, 2025 to October 31st, 2025.

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**The public may send written submissions or objections within 15 days of the publication of this notice to the department below:**

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# Sports & Recreation



The Niverville Middle School's Grade Eight boys basketball team.

by CRAIG CUMMING

## Middle School Basketball Team Captures Division Final

By Gord Armstrong

The Niverville Middle School's Grade Eight boys basketball recently wrapped up an exceptionally successful season. Earlier this month, the team won their division championship, defeating Steinbach Middle School (Black) in the final.

Niverville's season ended with a 13-5 record over 10 games. The league was divided into two divisions, white and blue, and Niverville Middle ended up winning the blue division.

The team was made up of players

of all skill levels, including those who had never played before and those who had already played at the club level.

"The amount of talent we had was incredible," says the team's coach, Shannon Cameron-Boychuk. "I helped coach the team last year, so I was familiar with most of the boys. They are all in extracurricular activities outside of the basketball team."

Cameron-Boychuk has a long history of coaching basketball, going all the way back to 1991.

However, this was her first year

as a head coach.

She says that she had great confidence in their ability to win going into the finals.

A key factor for the team's success, she adds, was reiterating that every player makes their own unique contribution. It is ultimately a team game.

"We have a special needs person on our team," says Cameron-Boychuk. "So at some of the games, if we are up, we got him the ball. That's one of the highlights. Everybody got super excited when he got the ball and was able

to score. That really brought the team together... I really loved to see that teamwork. When it all comes together for them, that's pure joy for me."

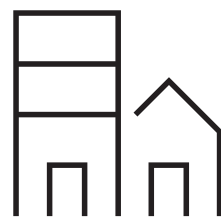
She has always been impressed with the parental support she sees, knowing that it extends to the players' lives at home.

"Our school community is extremely proud of what the boys and their coach have accomplished," says Craig Cumming, the school's principal. "There were a few challenges during the season, but with adult support and support

from one another, they persevered and were able to realize their ultimate goal, which was winning a banner that could be displayed on our gym walls for many years to come."

He also extended thanks to the coaching effort that went into the big win.

"I would like to thank Coach Shannon for her dedication and commitment to these boys. She not only wanted to help them grow as basketball players, [but] she also wanted to help them grow as individuals. And she did exactly that on both accounts."



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# Nighthawks Challenge Flyers in Round One Standoff

By Ty Dilello

tdilello@nivervillecitizen.com

After clinching the fourth playoff spot in the MJHL's East Division, the Niverville Nighthawks have gone on to make franchise history, winning two playoff games at home and extending their round one series with the Winkler Flyers to at least six games.

## MARCH 4 VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS, AWAY

The Nighthawks climbed out of a three-game losing skid with a big road win over Virden on this Tuesday evening. It was a game in which the Nighthawks had to claw their way back after Virden jumped out to a 2-0 lead.

The Nighthawks came alive in the second period, though, tying it up late in the frame with goals from Bryce Warkentine and Dawson Zeller.

In the third period, the Nighthawks added two more goals from Alex Ballard and Lucas Bertolin—and that's how the game ended.

"It was good to get a win like that over a good team like Virden," said head coach Dwight Hirst. "We fought hard to get back in the game and then to pull away in the third period just showed how resilient this team can be."

## MARCH 5 WINNIPEG FREEZE, AWAY

The Nighthawks continued their winning ways with an impressive 7-1 win on the road over the Winnipeg Freeze.

Notably, Niverville officially clinched a playoff spot.



Caption.

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They were the superior team all night, outshooting the Freeze 55-18.

Niverville scored twice in the first period, three times in the second period, and two more times in the final period on their way to securing the rout.

Merik Boles led the way with a pair of goals, while Ballard, Sean Williams, Henry Smith, Bertolin, and Warkentine had the other tallies.

"It can be challenging as a coach to try keeping the habits right and not let any cheating come into the system," said Hirst. "Our players overall played well tonight with mitigating opportunities in general. There were some breakdowns too, but nothing of real sustained pressure and we moved on from it quickly."

## MARCH 8 SELKIRK STEELERS, AWAY

The Nighthawks stumbled out of the gate, taking a tough 5-2 loss on the road to the Selkirk Steelers.

It was a chippy affair with a whole whack of penalties. Selkirk jumped out to a 2-0 lead midway through the contest before the Nighthawks' Warkentine scored with eight minutes remaining in the second period to cut the lead.

Selkirk then took over the game in the third period, scoring three times. Two of them were empty-netters.

Niverville got one goal from Matteo Speranza, but in the end it was the Steelers who ran away with it.

"It was an undisciplined roller-coaster kind of a night," said Hirst. "We need to learn how to play a disciplined game, as it's now three

games in a row of selfish penalties. So we need to know how to control our emotions and play with them."

Hirst didn't mince words, displeased with his club's performance.

"It feels like we took the foot off the gas tonight and played selfishly in all aspects," he said. "Some players on our club need to understand that winning involves doing something that they might not want to do, but they understand that it helps the team."

## MARCH 9 NEEPAWA TITANS, HOME

The Nighthawks continued their on-ice struggle, looking bad in another loss, this time dropping another 5-2 outcome.

Neepawa jumped out to a 2-0 lead before Boles scored in the second period to cut it to down to

one score.

The Titans scored three more times in the third, while the Nighthawks only got a goal from Aiden Corbett.

"It looked like more of the same tonight as the other night," said Hirst. "It was better in general, I guess, as we only had three penalties tonight. However, special teams were not good tonight. The power play and penalty kill were not good enough... We were better structured tonight, as we only gave up 11 shots after two periods and put ourselves in a good spot. Then the penalties caught up to us and the penalty kill didn't hold up. Discipline and consistency with our composure is what we need to find our strong game again."

## MARCH 12 PORTAGE TERRIERS, HOME

The Nighthawks returned to form, dismantling the Portage Terriers by a 6-3 count on Wednesday night in the team's final home game of the regular season.

After giving up the first goal just a minute into the contest, the Nighthawks stormed back to score two goals in quick succession to take the lead. They exploded with offence in the second period, scoring four times.

Adam Vigfusson and Hayden Wheddon led the charge for the Nighthawks with two goals apiece, while Boles and Zeller had the others.

"It was a game that we needed to get back to finding our game," said Hirst. "We were playing unmotivated hockey as of late, ever since

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we clinched our playoff spot. It was another example of what our club is capable of when we play with energy, resiliency, and pace. We obviously had taken our foot off the gas in the third period to focus on getting through the game clean."

### MARCH 15 PORTAGE TERRIERS, AWAY

The Nighthawks were once again able to get the upper hand on the Terriers with a vital 4-2 win on the road.

The two teams traded goals in both the first and second period in what was a tightly played contest. In the final frame, the Nighthawks pulled away with a pair of goals, including an empty-netter, to sneak out of Portage with a second consecutive win against the higher-ranked club.

It was the Vigfusson show all night long. The sniper scored a hat trick for the Nighthawks to make it 31 goals on the season. Smith had the other Niverville tally.

"It was a great road win," said Hirst. "Viggy was the difference tonight as his tenacity and pace to loose pucks was infectious to our group."

The Nighthawks were getting ready to close out their regular season with a final road game the following night against the Winnipeg Freeze.

"We're all getting very excited to prepare for the playoffs with Winkler," says Hirst. "So planning and preparation is the task this week."

### MARCH 16 WINNIPEG FREEZE, AWAY

Niverville got the best of the Freeze in a 6-1 win on the road on Sunday evening to close out their regular season, asserting dominance over the last-place Winnipeg team right from the opening faceoff. The Nighthawks scored twice in the first period, once in the second period, and three times in the third period.

Bertolin led the charge for Niverville with a pair of goals, while Williams, Lane Apperley, Speranza, and Ryden Duchon had the other

Nighthawks goals.

It was Duchon's first MJHL goal. "It was very good to close the regular season on the winning side of things," said Hirst. "I believe our two previous games with Portage were more of what we'd like to see structurally and fundamentally. But it's nice to see the players play well individually in the games like tonight. However, at the end of the day, you want to just come out of the last game clean, healthy, and ready for the playoffs."

### ROUND ONE

Going into the first round of the playoffs, the Nighthawks would have to square off against the Winkler Flyers, ranked first place in the league. Winkler had the best record at 46-8-4 while the Nighthawks ended the season at 35-20-3.

The Nighthawks have been dumped in the first round of the playoffs in each of the past two seasons, winning only one game between the two series.

This year has played out differently, with Niverville surprising Winkler with their ferocity of play.

"Against Winkler, it will be about consistency and resiliency for our team," said Hirst prior to game one. "This will be a series that will have its ups and downs. It's going to happen. So it's all about how you react to those highs and lows."

Another key, he said, would be the play of starting netminder Austin Dubinsky.

The 19- accumulated a 22-11-1 record in the regular season with a 2.53 goals-against average and a .925 save percentage.

"I think any team's success depends on the strength of the goaltender," said Hirst. "Austin is our team MVP for a reason, and I have no doubt he will be ready for this challenge."

### MARCH 21 WINKLER FLYERS, AWAY

The Nighthawks kept it close in game one, but fell 1-0 in a tightly played contest. It was a game in which Winkler dominated on the stat sheet, out-

shooting Nighthawks 38-14.

But strong goaltending from Dubinsky kept the Nighthawks in the hunt right to the end.

The teams were both held scoreless in the first and second period.

In the final frame, Winkler broke the deadlock with a goal with under eight minutes remaining in regulation.

The Nighthawks pressed but couldn't get the tying goal.

"It was a great road game by our group and was a real chess match," said Hirst. "They had a third of their shots off the power play, so it was a great job by our penalty kill tonight."

He added that the team was feeling energized to take the series onto home ice.

"To score some goals in the series, it's going to be more of a process of getting our game north more efficiently. Puck possession is going to have to be more important in the offensive zone and sustaining our offensive zone time."

### MARCH 23 WINKLER FLYERS, HOME

The Nighthawks put together one of their biggest wins in franchise history, defeating the Winkler Flyers by a 6-1 score at home at a packed home crowd at the CRRC on Sunday night.

It was also the very first time the Nighthawks managed to tie a playoff series.

The home team was opportunistic all night long and found ways to score on their best chances. On the defensive side, Dubinsky stood on his head.

Niverville scored twice in the first period, including a shorthanded tally to kick things off. They went on to score one more time in the second period and three times in the third period.

Williams led the offensive charge with a pair of goals, while Speranza, Zeller, Holdin Getzlaf, and Wheddon added the team's other counters.

"After getting shut out in game one, it was beautiful that we were

able to find our offence tonight and take the game north," said Hirst. "Our team played a fantastic home game, and the crowd really helped us along as we played a great game to get back in this series... Hopefully we can keep up that intensity from tonight and come into their building and play a great road game in Winkler. If we do that, we can continue to be successful."

### MARCH 25 WINKLER FLYERS, AWAY

The Nighthawks came close to taking a series lead but fell late in the game instead while on the road in Winkler.

Niverville fought hard. After ending the first period of a 1-1 tie, Winkler scored twice early in the second period to jump out to a 3-1 lead. The Nighthawks then clawed their way back into the game with a pair of goals to tie up the contest once again early in the third period.

Then, with five minutes remaining in regulation, Winkler got on the board again and went on to win.

"Nothing really shifted to Winkler at all tonight, as they got the bounce tonight and we didn't," said Hirst. "Our power play has to start producing and the after-whistle play needs to end. The things we can improve upon are the things we can control. Our team is in a good spot right now with the structure and game plan. It's a new day tomorrow and we will be ready for Thursday night at home."

### MARCH 27 WINKLER FLYERS, HOME

In another franchise first, the Nighthawks stunned Winkler to tie the series again with a massive 3-2 win on home ice.

Niverville led early after a goal just three minutes into the contest by Corbett. Winkler then scored twice in quick succession to take the lead before Wheddon tied the game for the Nighthawks late in the first period again.

The teams played to a scoreless second period, and it took until the midway point of the final frame for

someone to break the deadlock.

Speranza played hero by finding the back of the net at a critical moment.

"We took care of business at home," said Hirst. "The crowd tonight was amazing, as they are the adrenaline we need. I'm very happy with the resiliency of our group and the focus on the little details. It was a great effort tonight in taking care of the defensive side of things first."

### MARCH 29 WINKLER FLYERS, AWAY

The Nighthawks rallied throughout the course of game five but eventually fell 4-3 in double overtime. The Flyers dominated throughout much of the night, jumping out to a 3-0 lead in the first period and outshooting the Nighthawks by 49-21 in total.

It looked like it might be an easy night for Winkler, but Niverville has shown a lot of resiliency all year long—and it came through in a big during the second period when they scored three unanswered goals to the tie the game. Those tallies came from Boles, Parker Carrier, and Getzlaf.

After a scoreless third period, the teams headed to overtime for the first time in this series.

With seven minutes remaining in double overtime, Winkler scored the back-breaker to put Niverville on the brink of elimination.

Niverville's Austin Dubinsky was tremendous on the night, stopping 45 shots.

"Our group has shown all year that we won't back down or give up," said Hirst. "It's one of the pillars that make this group what they are, and they sure showed that tonight."

All was not lost, of course. The series would continue in game six on March 31 at the CRRC.

"Home ice has been great for both teams in this series and our home crowd will be needed once again to give our group that shot of adrenaline," said Hirst. "The toughest thing to do in any series is win the fourth game of a best-of-seven. Our group will be ready."



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# Arts & Culture

## Country Music Stars to Descend on Niverville

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

The mainstage at this year's Niverville Olde Tyme Country Fair is going to be bigger and better than ever, with a constellation of country music stars touching down to put on a show that won't soon be forgotten.

The evening will open with a set from Quinton Blair and his up-tempo country style.

In recent years, Blair has released five singles to Canadian radio, granting him a large national audience and loyal following in the prairie provinces. He has toured all across the country, from British Columbia to Prince Edward Island.

His awards so far are numerous, including the 2023 Manitoba Country Music Association Fans Choice Award. He's won multiple other MCMA's, including for "20 Dollar Bottle," a collaboration with Jason Blaine.

"The country music family is so fantastic in this country, and it's an honour to have your peers recognize all the hard work and energy that goes into every song and every show," Blair says.

The first of the Saturday night co-headliners is the Great Canadian Road Trip—an ensemble of three acts set to light up Main Street: Doc Walker, Michelle Wright, and Jason McCoy.

Niverville country music fans will likely remember the last time Doc Walker came to town, headlining the fair in 2008. This songwriting duo, comprised by Chris Thorsteinson and Dave Wasyliv, is among Canada's most successful country acts of all time, boasting a Juno Award, 14 CCMA's, a couple dozen top-10 radio singles, and a number one video on Country Music Television.

Doc Walker is excited to be touring and playing live for fans, something that wasn't possible for a while during the pandemic. Both Thorsteinson and Wasyliv agree there's something special about the



Doc Walker.



Michelle Wright.



Jason McCoy.



Jess Moskaluke.

energy of a live show.

"That's how everything starts. The more we play together, the more we talk and plan and write and record," says Wasyliv. "The snowball gets big quickly."

Michelle Wright has been recording and touring since the 1980s. Getting her start in Canada, she released her first U.S. album in 1990 and American fans responded immediately. In 1992, her song "Take It Like a Man" changed the course of her career and launched her to new heights of superstardom.

"Growing up in Merlin, Ontario, I spent many Saturday nights watching my mother and father playing music in their country bands. We

would also spend long hours working the farm and listening to the sounds of R&B and Motown coming across the border from Detroit on our transistor radio," she says. "Blending these influences is a natural, authentic way to express me in my music. It always has been that way and always will be."

Wright has released 12 albums and 24 top-ten radio hits. She has toured the world, performing on every continent, and accepted more than 40 major awards.

Jason McCoy, another major artist who's no stranger to Niverville, previously played here with The RoadHammers in 2010. As the frontman of that group, the

best-selling country music act in Canadian history, McCoy has picked up a platinum album, a platinum single, three CCMA's for Group of the Year, and a Juno.

Most of his childhood was spent in Ontario, where he first developed his musical talents.

"The cowboy culture really stuck with me," McCoy says. "I just fell in love with the music. For some reason, as a little kid, I had some sort of connection with these guys who were singing about these depressing things."

In 2023, McCoy was inducted into the Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame. In addition to continuing to tour, he is in demand as a

radio deejay and has hosted shows in front of the television camera as well.

The main show in Niverville will finish with Jess Moskaluke, an internationally celebrated artist with a powerful voice. Ten years ago, she became the first Canadian woman since Shania Twain to release a platinum single, with "Cheap Wine and Cigarettes."

In 2017, she won the Juno for Country Album of the Year. She's also racked up many CCMA's, along with a 2017 SOCAN Award and a 2020 WCM Award. She went on her first headlining tour of Canada in 2022, then went on to play at festivals in Australia and the U.K.

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*Easter Blessings to You  
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