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A DIVISION OF NIVERVILLE TOWING

LOCAL NEWS

Fifth Avenue West Green Lit in Niverville

■ A new residential development on the west side of Niverville has gotten approval from council to begin its first phase.

Details on Page 3



LOCAL NEWS

Looking Back on One Year of Solar

■ Todd and Lisa Wiebe of Niverville, who installed a rooftop full of solar panels one and a half years ago, talk about their experience with Manitoba Hydro's solar incentive program and what it means for their energy future.

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SPORTS & RECREATION

Ringette Star Heads to Winter Games

■ Josée Roy from Ste. Agathe has skated her way straight to the Canada Winter Games.

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Local Author Unveils Her Debut Novel

■ Sabrina Falk has just seen the publication of her first novel, a well-reviewed coming of age story, from a Winnipeg press.

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The Windrow Controversy: Who Should Take Responsibility?


»» DETAILS ON PAGE 5

by DUSTIN KRAHN

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HANOVER SCHOOL DIVISION

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Registration is now open for the 2019-20 School Year.



Kindergarten registration follows a two-step process:

1. Complete the online registration form located at HSD.ca
2. Bring supporting documentation to the designated school.

Register Online

Kindergarten registration will take place online at HSD.ca. If you do not have access to the Internet, please visit the school nearest your place of residence for assistance. Staff will assist you in completing the registration form on a school computer.

Parents/Guardians are encouraged to register their children as soon as possible upon the opening of registration (January 7, 2019), or by mid-February at the latest. Registering early will assist schools in preparation and planning for the upcoming school year. Early registration also provides parents/guardians with the opportunity to participate in upcoming 2019-20 orientation activities.

Children must be five years of age on or before December 31, 2019 to be eligible for 2019-20 registration, and are required to attend the school within the catchment area in which they reside. To confirm your designated catchment, please view HSD catchment maps on our website.

If you have questions, please email info@hsd.ca or call 204-326-6471.

Online-Anmeldung

Die Online-Anmeldung der Kindergartenschüler finden Sie auf der HSD.ca Webseite. Falls Sie keinen Zugang zum Internet haben, möchten wir Sie bitten die nächstgelegene Schule aufzusuchen um diesbezüglich Hilfe zu bekommen. Jemand vom Schulpersonal wird Ihnen bei der Anmeldung behilflich sein.

Die Eltern bzw Erziehungsberechtigte sind aufgefordert Ihre Kinder so bald wie möglich ab dem Anmeldedatum anzumelden (7.Januar 2019). Bis Mitte Februar sollten Sie Ihr Kind angemeldet haben. Ihre frühe Anmeldung hilft den Schulen in der Vorbereitung für das folgende Schuljahr. Außerdem gibt es Ihnen die Möglichkeit an den Orientierungs-Aktivitäten, die für das Jahr 2019-20 angeboten werden, teilzunehmen.

Für die Anmeldung des Schuljahres 2019-20 muss Ihr Kind bis zum 31.Dezember 2019 fünf Jahre alt sein. Schüler des Kindergartens müssen in der Schule Ihres Wohnbezirks angemeldet werden. Um die Schule Ihres Wohnbezirks ausfindig zu machen, wenden Sie sich bitte an die "HSD catchment maps" (HSD Schulbezirk Karte) auf der HSD Webseite.

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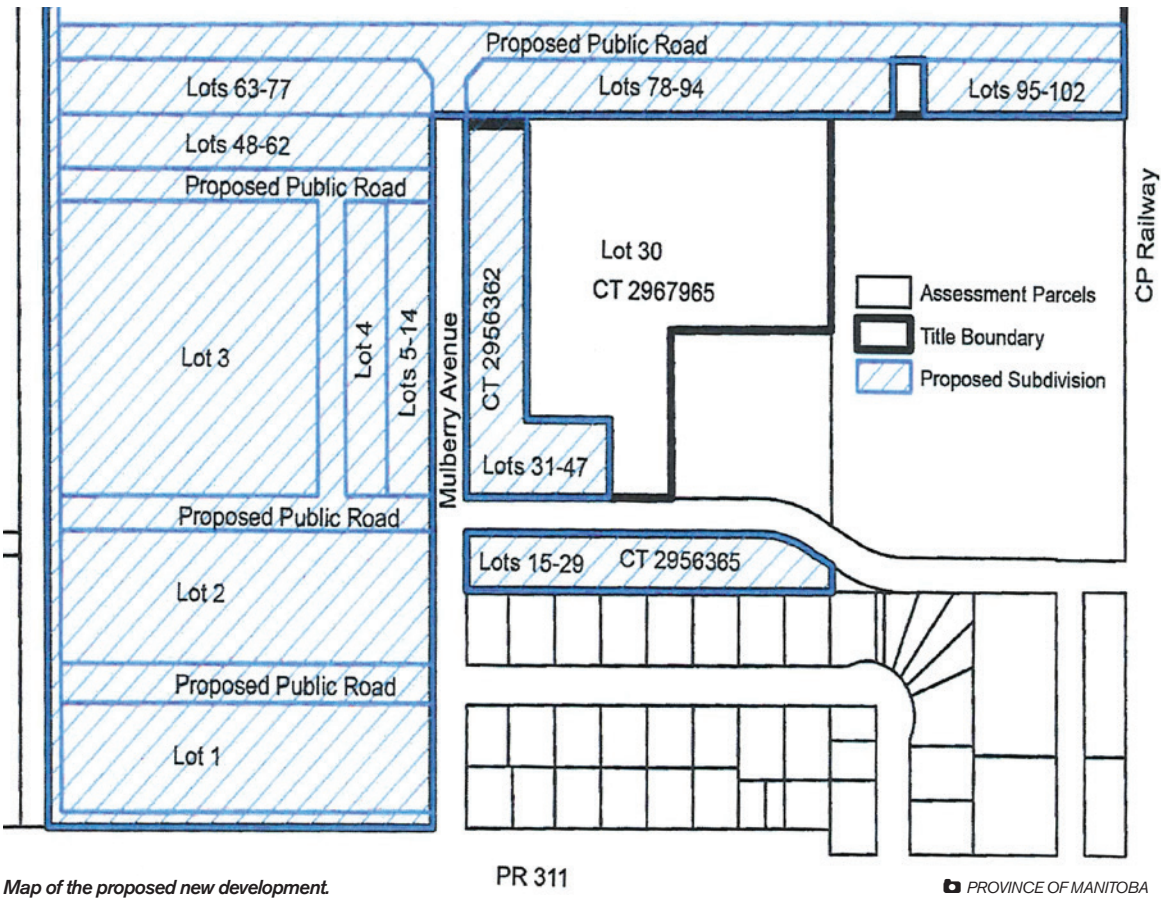
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Map of the proposed new development.

Niverville Council Approves Fifth Avenue Estates West



At a public meeting on Tuesday, January 22, Niverville's town council took a look at a subdivision plan proposed for the first phase of Fifth Avenue Estates West, a new development to be located in the area surrounding the new high school. The proposed plan would lead to the creation of 103 lots on 111 acres of land.

A conceptual drawing was provided, indicating the various residential and commercial lots being planned. As per the drawing, lots 1 and 2 would be designated for commercial development while lots 3 and 4, immediately west of the high school grounds, are proposed to contain multi-family homes. Lots 5 through 29 and 31 to 102 would be zoned low-density residential while lot 30 is to be allocated as school greenspace.

Further to this, the developer requested the opening of five new public roads within phase one of the development, as well as the extension of Mulberry Avenue to connect with the most northerly public road.

While this hearing was not intended to address eventual road closures, the provincial government has determined that one access

along this stretch of Highway 311 will need to be closed in order to mitigate traffic hazards caused by too many highway accesses. Provincial authorities are advising council to consider an access closure before approving the new development.

Current highway accesses include Arena Road, Ritchot Drive, Church Street, and Mulberry Avenue. After much consideration, council made a recommendation to close the Ritchot Drive and Church Street accesses on the east end where they connect with the highway.

Should the development plan proceed as proposed, two accesses would still be available to residents of these streets—one off Mulberry Avenue and another off Krahn Road. Closing the east highway accesses, though, would turn them into dead-end streets. While the purpose of the public meeting was to vote on the subdivision and public roads, council allowed for residents to speak to all the issues in play.

Numerous residents came forward to inquire about plans for adequate sidewalk access for students walking to the new high school, as well as the town's plan for a pedestrian railway crossing. Council assured residents that both are being planned and negotiations are currently taking place with CP Rail and Transport Canada on a safe

railway crossing for pedestrians. Due to costs and feasibility, council is considering only one access at this point, located where the railway tracks cross Main Street.

Residents of Church Street and Ritchot Drive shared concerns regarding the implications of having a dead end on their streets, which would make school bus access, snow-clearing, and garbage pickup more difficult. Another resident indicated that drainage in this area has long been a problem. Council reassured him that Mulberry Street would be completely rebuilt with drainage in mind and that the developer is required to install an underground drainage system to keep the water moving north to a retention pond within the development.

Frustrations were also shared about having to make decisions on only a portion of the proposed development rather than the whole plan, which at this time has not been made available to the public.

After considering all concerns, council voted unanimously in favour of the subdivision as proposed, which would include conditions laid out in the development agreement. The proposed road access closures of Ritchot Drive and Church Street will be addressed in another public hearing down the road.

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- It ensures that the person handling your affairs gets compensated;
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Highway 59 near Île-des-Chênes.

JOEY VILLANUEVA

Highway 59 Twinning Still Not on Province's Radar

By Brenda Sawatzky

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It's been four years and has taken much prodding from local municipal leaders to see action on the twinning of Highway 59 from Île-des-Chênes to Highway 52.

To date, the project hasn't even reached the functional design study stage.

"There's more and more traffic in the southeast and, to make things safer, we just have to start adding more roadways," says Hanover Reeve Stan Toews.

On January 14, Toews submitted a letter to the Honourable Ron Schuler, Minister of Infrastructure for the province, making a formal request that funding for the study be included in the upcoming 2019 budget, to be released this spring.

"Our municipality, along with our neighbouring municipal governments, has been seeking the province's assurances to have capital funds set aside to undertake this study as the starting block for this provincial infrastructure investment,"

Toews told Schuler. "As your department's recent 2017 traffic study had concluded, Highway 59 continues to be one of the province's highways that sees the most increase in vehicular count increases year after year."

The initiative for the twinning of Highway 59 south of Île-des-Chênes began in 2015 when representatives from five municipalities along with the towns of Niverville and St. Pierre-Jolys formed a group called the Highway 59 Partners. Their objective was to address the needs of all communities in the southeast in terms of twinning the highway.

"First it's a functional study to see where the highway would go, where it would make sense for all the municipalities involved and where it would cause the least amount of disruption to residents who already live there," said Mona Fallis, former St. Pierre-Jolys mayor and spokesperson for Partners, back in 2016.

In 2015, the Partners met with Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation (MIT) to encourage the twinning

project, as well as to promote conversation with the province before a plan is acted on. Fallis was hopeful after that meeting, suggesting that once dialogue has begun, progress can be made.

The Citizen reached out to the executive director of construction and maintenance for MIT, Larry Halayko, in January 2016. He responded at the time by saying that the province was planning a functional design study of this stretch of highway in 2017. This study would provide them with information regarding highway alignment, right-of-way requirements, and cost estimates.

Now, three years later, the project is still in limbo.

"We're just asking that they set aside money to start the process of twinning 59 highway," Toews says. "They first have to do a study before they'll do the twinning and, at this point, they haven't set money aside to do the study. We have to keep asking. Hopefully they'll do that study one of these years."



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The Windrow Controversy: Who Should Take Responsibility?

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

It happens every winter. Whether it takes us by complete surprise or blows in just as the meteorologists predicted, winter storms and heavy snowfalls are far more commonplace in Manitoba than hurricanes off the Florida coast. The only thing that's less predictable is the frequency of these events from one winter to the next.

Understanding that snowfall is a certainty, councils budget for snow-clearing every year. It's a service that residents have come to expect. It is, after all, one of the things we pay taxes for.

But there's a fine line between what is the town or RM's responsibility and what is left to the homeowner. To many residents, this fine line comes in the form of a windrow, and it's a point of contention that surfaces after every major snow clean-up event.

A windrow is a ridge of snow that's left behind after a snow plough or grader passes by. Often-times these windrows stretch across the end of residential driveways, requiring homeowners to dig themselves out. The frustration for residents is that these windrows are often pushed there hours—or sometimes days—after they have already cleared their driveway. At times the ridges are dense and high enough to make shovelling difficult.

Both Niverville and Ritchot's snow-clearing policies deem windrows on private driveways the responsibility of the property owner, except under very specific circumstances.

"Private driveways will not be cleared of snow deposited by municipal equipment," states Ritchot's snow-clearing policy. "Operators are to use their best judgement and ability to limit the size of windrows left on driveways.



Windrows obstruct driveways after a recent snow event.

DUSTIN KRAHN

During the procedure of widening and/or cutting accumulation of snow or ice from the streets, windrows will be removed from all driveways."

Niverville's policy, too, provides for private property windrow clearing only in cases of "street widening." An example of this is when a grader removes packed snow from the asphalt surface of a road and blades it to the curbs, resulting in large chunks of ice and snow blocking driveways.

Likewise, the City of Winnipeg doesn't clear windrows unless they reach eight inches in height, which according to their policy is the average height of snow left by the city's ploughs. Their policy also states that windrow clean-up may be delayed until satisfactory resources are available.

"Town council reviews the policy annually and considers other options," says Eric King, Niverville's chief administrative officer. "For Niverville as a whole, [windrow clearing] would represent an estimated cost increase of \$30,000 to \$40,000 per year in time and wear and tear on our equipment."

According to King, this could average out to about \$70 in additional taxes per household per

year. This number would vary based on a home's assessed value. Some would pay more, others would pay less.

Mayor Myron Dyck says there are a lot of variables that would affect that extra cost, though, causing it to go potentially even higher depending on residents' expectations.

"Is there the expectation that some machine is following the grader?" Dyck asks. "That cost may be more."

Doing this would require hiring more staff and buying more equipment or contracting the job out to another company. Dyck says that if residents wanted to save on those costs, the town's existing resources could be used for windrows, but only after all of the streets are cleared, which means residents could be waiting a day or two for the service.

Further to that is the question of liability for driveway damage during windrow clearing with heavy equipment. Who would be responsible for the repair? If it's the town, then repair costs would come out of everyone's taxes.

Without question, windrow clearing will come at an additional cost unless residents are willing to shovel their way through. But for

those willing to pay the extra cost, Dyck suggests that hiring private companies might be a better solution anyway.

"If people were to hire businesses that provide snow-clearing services, the cost to the resident could very well be the same. However, money in a business owner's pocket [funnels] back into the community. Employees are hired, equipment is purchased, the money buys groceries, building supplies, and restaurant visits right here in our own community. Thus, the economic spinoff is greater by hiring a business owner than simply paying more taxes."

While it may be fair to envy residents of Winnipeg who are only forced to shovel windrows of eight inches or less, it should also be noted that clean-up of residential streets there can take exponentially longer than they do in most rural communities.

Winnipeg's streets are designated by priority level. Residential streets take third priority, following major high-traffic thoroughfares and bus routes. Once city street cleaners finally get to residential areas, Winnipeg's policy states that clearing operations can take up to five days to complete. Work on weekends and holidays is limited if streets are considered passable.

"In Niverville, the [entire] town is mostly done within two days," says Dyck. "The first pass on one day and the second pass up to the curb on day two. I wonder how many take this for granted after living here for a few years. I would say that our community is likely done quicker than almost any other in the capital region. People should remember, when they say 'I pay my taxes,' the excellent and superior service they get compared to other communities that also pay their taxes and get less efficient service."

CITIZEN POLL

Do you think your local government should be responsible for clearing windrows?

- ☐ Yes. Although it may result in higher taxes, I think my town should clear windrows.
- ☐ No. Clearing windrows should be the homeowner's responsibility.
- ☐ Have another opinion? Share your thoughts in a comment online.

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LAST MONTH'S RESULTS:

To combat climate change, will you personally embrace initiatives to help your local government divert waste from landfills?

Yes. Climate change is real and I want to make a difference that will positively impact the future.

93%

No. I don't believe my individual efforts will matter in terms of the global problem.

7%

YOUR COMMENTS:

I think we should implement a waste sharing program. Much of the items that are thrown out currently are reusable or recyclable in the lives of others. Back in Poland, we had a successful waste sharing program.

A.Q. Rogulzinski

Yes I will do my part in caring for my part of the world. But climate change is a bogus claim made by liberal scientists as they have such a limited scope that they see through. They have only been keeping track of weather for such a short time and blame rising temps, water levels on this generation.

Every contribution will impact the outcome. If no one takes action on pollution control, nothing will happen. It starts with you, you can be the difference.

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Some Things are Best Left to the Professionals!

Firefighters Kick Off New Year with New Equipment

By Brenda Sawatzky

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Niverville Fire and Emergency Services has been busy rolling in some new and innovative equipment this year—and much of it, they say, is thanks to the dedicated support of the community.

As a result of years of perogy supper fundraisers and donations from the Olde Tyme Country Fair committee and the Niverville Health and Community Foundation, the department saw the addition of new breathing apparatuses along with a Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) air pack and new defibrillators.

Since they began their fundraising efforts in 2011, the department has been able to raise \$100,000, which has enabled them to purchase equipment and vehicles their annual budget otherwise wouldn't allow for.

"This is stuff that goes outside of the norm," says Fire Chief Keith Bueckert. "The town's been very good at giving us what we need, but there's only so much money to go around, of course, and so we've put [these fundraisers] together to help meet needs within the department."

The most recent purchases included four state-of-the-art self-contained breathing apparatuses (SCBA) along with two additional replacement air tanks.



Niverville Fire Chief Keith Bueckert alongside the town's newest emergency equipment.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

An SCBA is a device that straps to the firefighter's back and looks much like a scuba tank used by divers. The tank provides a full hour of fresh air support for firefighters as they enter smoky buildings, unlike the old SCBAs which contained a half-hour worth

of air and weighed more.

The new units contain rechargeable lithium batteries, speaking diaphragms for better radio communication, and thermal imaging systems to allow firefighters to see hot spots inside a dark and smoky building. The new units and

extra tanks came at a cost of about \$30,000.

These four new units act as a supplement to the ten existing units the department was able to purchase a few years back. The number of SCBAs they now own will outfit about half of the department's 33

firefighters. The tanks can be filled right at the Niverville fire hall with the Cascade system, a large four-by-six unit containing compressed air that came at a cost of \$60,000. Previously, the department needed to go out of town to fill their air tanks.

"This unit has really helped us move forward in the quality of our training when we're using our SCBAs," says Bueckert. "We never really wanted to burn through too many bottles, because then we had to drive all the way to La Broquerie to fill them."

The SCBAs can now be mounted inside the new 2018 Rescue 1 vehicle, which is another recent addition to the emergency fleet this year. Purchased primarily through the town's emergency budget surplus, the demo truck out of Brampton, Ontario will adequately carry four to five members to an emergency scene and will store much of the equipment needed at any call.

"It's a huge accomplishment to get this truck and it's exceeded everything we expected," Bueckert says. "When [the members] went to pick it up, they were blown

away. They said it was everything and more. A new truck like this that we were pricing out was somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$160,000. We picked this up for under \$140,000."

The truck also came with a unique feature—a telescoping 12-foot LED command light that Bueckert says is about a \$20,000 add on and will run off of the truck's inverter rather than a separate generator.

Last year, the department was able to add two new defibrillators to their inventory as a result of monies received from the Niverville Health and Community Foundation's 2018 fundraising gala.

"We're very lucky to have the [community's] support through the fundraising [donations] and also the support of council itself," Bueckert adds.

And, without question, the community should also feel grateful for the investment the local volunteer emergency team is making on its behalf. Just last year, the town's emergency crews attended 207 calls. They regularly expect about 16 calls per month.

Bueckert says that 90 percent of the calls come from within the community while the other 10 percent are to neighbouring municipalities within the mutual aid area.

The calls included fire, accident, and health-related incidences requiring an ambulance.

"Generally speaking, we can be at a call in under ten minutes in Niverville," Bueckert says. "The ambulance is coming from Île-des-Chênes, so we're starting the treatment and the ambulance can then carry on the treatment and transport of that patient."

Nineteen of Niverville's firefighters are cross-trained in emergency response. Ten members, including Bueckert, work full-time as firefighters or EMS outside of Niverville.

For each member, their service to the Niverville department goes above and beyond their regular jobs and family schedules.

"A lot of [our members] go well beyond the stuff they need to do," adds Bueckert. "We are a very blessed community with the volunteers we have."

Local Boy Wins Provincial Firefighting Award

By Lorelei Leona

lleona@nivervillecitizen.com

A local boy has been recognized by the province for his exceptional work in fire safety awareness.

Colin Johnston, a Kindergarten student at Niverville Elementary School, was selected from over 1,200 entries from Kindergarten to Grade Four students, with each grade getting one winner.

The award recognizes participation by the student and family to plan and practice a home fire escape plan for their family during Fire Prevention Week in October and is presented every year to four different schools in Manitoba.



Peter Bowyer, Keith Bueckert, Colin Johnston, Sparky the Fire Dog, and Tammie McConnell.

Emergency Services (NFES) has been participating in Fire Prevention Week with Niverville Elementary for years, according to Bueckert. Classes are encouraged to complete and return their home fire safety plans, with

the class who has the most entries winning a pizza party lunch courtesy of NFES. Once all the material is collected from the school, NFES sends the entries to the province, where the students are individually entered for the award.

The elementary school was surprised with an assembly on January 25, where Johnston was presented with his award by Tammie McConnell from the Office of the Fire Commissioner, Bueckert and firefighter Peter Bowyer, as well as Sparky the Fire Dog. Johnston won a gift bag and a \$250 gift card to the Lego store, and his classmates and teacher were given gift bags for their participation.

Niverville Looks to Restart Citizens on Patrol Program

By Lorelei Leona

✉ lleona@nivervillecitizen.com

Niverville citizens are fighting back against crime in their neighbourhoods by bringing back the Citizens on Patrol Program (COPP). This isn't the first time the town has enacted COPP, with the original COPP program running for more than 20 years from 1991 until 2014, and revisions of the program popping up in 2017 with the Niverville Crime Prevention Program and Neighbourhood Watch.

While it's unconfirmed whether rural crime is on the rise or if social media has shed more light on crimes, many Niverville citizens think the town could benefit from a greater police presence. Whether or not that's on the horizon, residents have been vocal on social media about wanting an interim solution.

Thus was birthed the creation of the new COPP.

In 2014, Lindsay Unrau ran for town council. Her main platform was to consider the development of an independent police department. While she lost that election, her passion for providing a safer community hasn't wavered. Nearly four years later, she is taking an active role as Niverville's COPP Coordinator.

"On a personal level, I've been looking for ways to make our town a safer place," Unrau says. "In the summer of 2017, a local resident and I came together and travelled to as many houses as we could in

a span of two weeks with a petition asking for the support of residents in asking council to put an independent study together to determine if a police department would be effective and financially efficient. We received more than 500 signatures in support. Since then, the town has hired on the consultation services of a retired police officer to create a study to determine the effectiveness of a police department. However, we're still waiting for this study to conclude."

The COPP is an accredited program through MPI which focuses on deterrence, education, and awareness for residents. It's important to note that the intention of the program is not for residents to step in during crime-related activity. Instead patrollers will report suspicious activity to the RCMP and act as another set of eyes and ears.

Due to the nature of the program, all volunteers must go through a mandatory two-hour training session in order to learn personal safety, observation skills, note-taking, priority-setting, and when to report to the RCMP, according to Unrau.

"We hope to encourage volunteers to patrol at least once a month," she says. "Of course, this will all depend on how many volunteers are willing to take up the challenge."

For the program to be successful and achieve longevity, a volunteer base of 20 or more volunteers is necessary. Currently the program has ten.

On January 15, Unrau, Kenzie

McGarry, and Ritchot COPP coordinator Marianne Curtis held a meeting at Bistro 290 in Niverville where they met with residents who were interested in the program. Through this meeting, they were able to gain insight into what has worked in the past, what hasn't, and what is currently working for another community.

Although they hope to get feet on the ground by spring at the latest, there is still a lot of grunt work that needs to be done, including officially registering with MPI.

"Following that, we look to create an official COPP council made up of residents who intend to patrol and others who would just like to be involved in the organization of the program," explains Unrau. "Next we will plan our two-hour training session and get out volunteers applying for their criminal record check, at no cost to the volunteer... The more help we have, the sooner we can accomplish some of these steps."

While Niverville's town council is aware that this program is underway, so far they have taken no direct involvement, something Unrau would like to see.

"We would love for town council to get involved!" she says. "We will be much more successful if we have their 100 percent support and if they are open to helping us create incentives to encourage residents to volunteer. Members of council are also welcome to join our COPP council so that they have a direct insight into our

progress."

One of the ways in which Unrau intends to get more bodies on the ground is to offer incentives to volunteers, whether it's through prizes and draws or by creating competitions with other COPP programs nearby. Either way, Unrau wants to make sure that all the volunteers are looking forward to working their patrol shift and feel energized to keep the community safe.

The community will be kept abreast of any changes or updates, as well as the COPP presence in neighbourhoods, through social media, so as to avoid feelings of scepticism or fear. Residents are encouraged to follow the Niverville COPP Facebook page for updates, as well as take part in community events.

It's not just homeowners who will reap the benefits of regular patrols. Businesses will benefit as well.

"We would like to invite local businesses to get involved in this endeavour," Unrau says. "We will be asking local businesses to help in the creation of incentives for volunteers. We also want to hear from business owners about how we can be the best of service to them... We would also like to invite local business owners to join our COPP council so that we can keep a close ear to their needs."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

■ nivervilleCOPP@outlook.com

■ www.facebook.com/groups/

383541712381802

IN BRIEF

Ritchot Council Approves Livestock Farm Expansion

By Brenda Sawatzky

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On January 23, Ritchot council addressed an application made by Paul Loeppky of Red Plain Farms Ltd. Loeppky's request was to expand his existing hog livestock operation, located approximately two miles south of Niverville, from the 2,500 animals he currently raises to 5,000 animals.

A Manitoba Municipal Relations (MMR) representative provided council with a technical review on the applicant's proposal. The representative was able to give council all assurances that the proposal meets with the province's stringent laws relating to agricultural livestock operations. He indicated that MMR sent out notices of the proposal through various media sources and direct mail.

"We have come with a team from the province who have contributed to the [technical review] report," the representative told council. "The proponent has given us what we asked for so that we can produce a genuine report... Should council say yes to the proposal, the proponent then has to come back to the province for licensing, for permits, and for other things. So there are other safeguards in play that the proponent would have to meet... We're actually very highly regulated. In fact, I've heard that Manitoba is one of the highest regulated jurisdictions in North America when it comes to livestock operation."

Loeppky, who lives just north of the farm, told council that the farm began operations in his name in 2003 but the land has been in his family for three generations.

His hope is to add another barn to the property, to supplement the barn that exists there now. Bad smells, he says, is part of the nature of a hog operation, but he uses current farming practices that help mitigate the smell as much as possible.

Two residents from neighbouring farms came forward to offer their support for Loeppky's proposal. No objections were heard or received.

Councillor Claydon shared some concerns about setting a precedent for more hog barns in the area due to the smells they produce. As council debated, they concurred that residents living in an agricultural area should expect farm smells occasionally, just as some Winnipeg residents can expect smells from the Brady landfill or urban factories.

Council approved the proposal by acclamation with the understanding that the MMR is there for support should any details have been missed.



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IN BRIEF

Time to Hit the Ski Trails

By Lorelei Leona

lleona@nivervillecitizen.com

Winter is here to stay for the next couple of months, but in the meantime Niverville and the RM of Ritchot have a variety of activities to keep you and your family occupied.

Volunteers were hard at work last month grooming the cross-country skiing path at Hespeler Park in Niverville. With the recent influx of snow, there's plenty of white stuff to help keep you moving.

While the town doesn't offer ski rentals, they do offer snowshoe rentals, which can provide a great workout. Snowshoes can be rented from the town office. However, those who do are asked to reserve the groomed paths for those who are cross-country skiing.

"When we do the [ski] clinic, we would be providing a number of pairs [of skis] for people to use when doing the clinic—just the one time," says Angela Janz, Niverville's Recreation Director.

The RM of Ritchot has had at least one ski trail groomed since January 11 at Parc Cartier Park in Ste. Agathe. The trail spans over two kilometres.

In addition, many surrounding communities offer free public skating on their outdoor rinks. While some community rinks may require adults and children to wear helmets, others do not, so be sure to check with your local rink before heading over.

Multi-Family Developer Receives Second Council Rejection

By Brenda Sawatzky

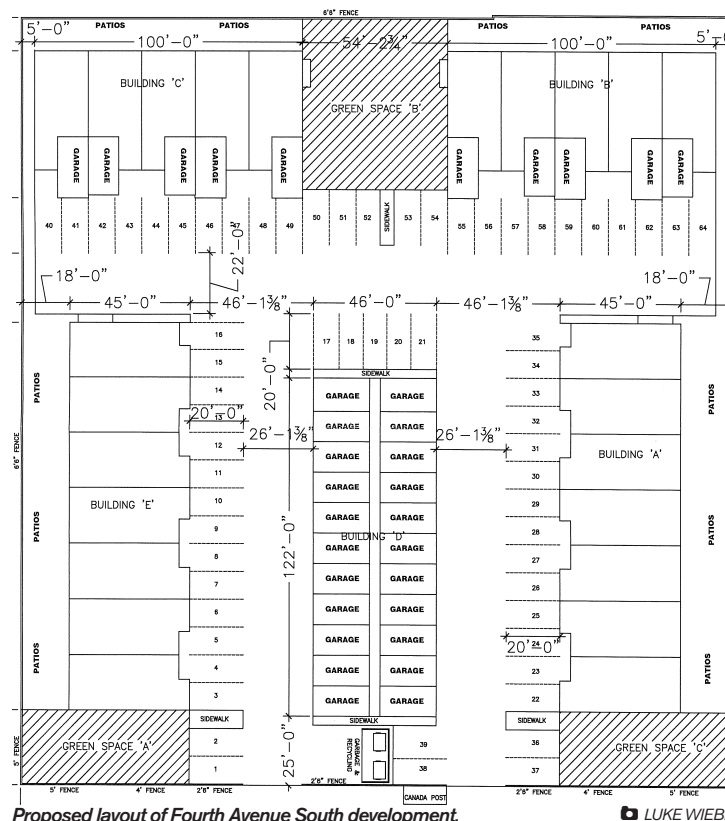
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Developer Luke Wiebe was given a second go on his application to create a new multi-family housing development on Fourth Avenue South in Niverville. At a public meeting held on Tuesday, January 22, Wiebe addressed council with a new proposal after his first one had been denied in early December. The new development is being planned for the properties immediately south of Wiebe's existing multi-family development on this street.

The December proposal included a 60-unit development comprised of five townhouse sections. He also requested that street width requirements be reduced from 25 feet to 22 feet and that variances be allowed on front and backyard square footage to accommodate the extra housing units. This request, in essence, meant the development would contain 12 more housing units contained in one more townhouse section than his first development, on a similarly sized lot. Council turned down that proposal.

At Tuesday's meeting, Wiebe suggested that he'd listened to the concerns of council and residents and created an updated plan which reduced the number of housing units to 48, requiring only four townhouse sections. Additionally, the previously proposed 12-unit townhouse section at the center of the development would be turned into 22 parking garages. The housing units would be one- and two-bedroom homes without basements. Three-quarters of the streets in the development were to be 25 feet wide, with the remaining portion being 22 feet wide.

Council heard concerns from three residents present at the meeting as well as one resident



Proposed layout of Fourth Avenue South development.

LUKE WIEBE

who submitted a letter of objection prior to the meeting. Public concerns continue to revolve around the creation of high-traffic areas on a densely populated street. Special attention was drawn to the many schoolchildren who walk this busy street on a daily basis.

"There obviously will be more traffic than what people are used to," Wiebe told council. "In almost any city or community, if you go look right by the schools, that's where some of the biggest apartment buildings and townhouses are. Kids are looking for the shortest distance to get to school. Infill housing is becoming more and more important because not everyone wants to live a mile or a mile and a half from school."

Council proceeded to review their own concerns regarding the new proposal. They suggested that, based on experience, the 22 garages will be used as storage units which would reduce available parking spots to 74 instead of the required 96. Without a minimum of two parking spots per unit, resident vehicles would end up on the adjoining street.

"What we're trying to find here is a balance between the developer and the residents of the community," Mayor Dyck told Wiebe. "We're trying for a win-win. We've got at least two developments where residents are calling [us and saying], 'My street is backing up.' Why? The developers have provided the spots, but because they are not a part of the

purchase or rental of that unit then people are saying, 'I'm not going to pay the extra money. I'll just go park on the street.' That's what we're trying to balance here."

Wiebe countered council's arguments, saying that he felt they were being unrealistic in their expectations. He then indicated that he would be prepared to remove the garages and replace them with parking stalls.

Councillor John Funk made a motion to accept the proposal if the developer agreed to reduce the number of units from 48 to 40, that he replace the garage concept with open parking, and that he allow for a minimum roadway width of 25 feet. These conditions would then meet recommendations made in an administrative review, which follow the town's development bylaw guidelines and had been sent to Wiebe prior to the meeting.

Wiebe debated further with council, suggesting that their motion for revision was a punitive measure which treated him differently from other developers in the community. He suggested that he'd rather have the proposal declined than changed to 40 units.

"I think you're coming [to us] unprepared," Funk told Wiebe. "You got the [administrative review] on December 19 and you're coming up with something that [does not line up with it]. The review is taking into consideration all of the questions that we had last time and therefore trying to make sure that this is something that we can pass."

With that, Funk withdrew his motion. Councillor Nathan Dueck made a new motion to decline the proposal as presented. Council voted unanimously in favour of the new motion and the proposal was denied.

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Niverville Scouts: Building Tomorrow's Leaders

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Leaders aren't born, they're created. For the past 100 years, Scouts Canada has been actively engaging children and youth in programs that build character, teamwork, and leadership skills. In 2017, Niverville saw its first troop in many years. They're called the 1st Niverville Scouts Troop.

While the national organization's mission is to help youth develop into confident, well-rounded, successful adults, they also provide a strong push towards teaching youth that they can make meaningful and positive contributions which will help create a better world for everyone to live in.

Since its inception, Niverville Scouts has been developing a strong program. Early on, they created their own unique badge to identify their new troop using symbols which represent the community, including a grain elevator, train tracks, and a fox.

The troop now includes 32 children and youth led by a pair of local administrators and eight volunteer leaders. But their numbers haven't nearly reached capacity and they are encouraging more adults to get involved in a leadership role and more parents to enroll their kids.

"All volunteers complete a criminal records check and are supported with ongoing leadership development courses through Scouts Canada," says Denise Poettcker, Commissioner for the Niverville troop. "Ensuring that children are allowed to grow in their own leadership journey in a safe environment is important to Scouts Canada."



Members of the Scouts troop at this year's Remembrance Day ceremony in Niverville.

CRYSTAL DUECK

The program caters to youth between the ages of five and 24 and is open to boys and girls alike. The children are divided into age-relevant categories called Beavers, Cubs, and Scouts and each group participates in activities unique to their maturity levels.

"The children involved will discover adventures like camping and hiking and learn skills like cooking at camp and how to build a fire," says Poettcker. "They will develop great friendships and together learn... skills that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. We are wanting to [teach] environmental stewardship, healthy, active living, and leadership development."

One of the techniques used to foster these values is referred to as "learning by doing," which allows children to learn at their own pace, not at a pace set out for them as is normal in so many of society's overly structured programs. In this setting, children are encouraged to lead the group while the adult

leaders oversee the process. The kids determine the age-appropriate activities they participate in, help in the preparation for each activity, and are actively involved in carrying it out.

"Leaders [are there to] help youth achieve goals, build confidence, and discover their limits and embrace new adventures," Poettcker adds. "We focus on trying to do as much as we can outside. For example, learning to camp. [The children] set up a tent, plan meals, and budget for the meal. [They learn] how to pack for camping, what to bring camping, what to wear, and how to plan for the weather... how to tie knots and first aid."

This past year, Niverville Scouts built their own wooden race cars to compete in local and provincially held events. They've already competed in the Klondike Derby, which gave them an opportunity to put their teamwork and communications skills to good use. This year, the troop is involved in planning an event called Kub Kar

Races to be held at Steinbach's Clearspring Mall in the spring. Scouts and cubs from all over southern Manitoba are expected to participate.

Poettcker says that Scouts are also encouraged to invest in their local community, which she believes fosters a desire in them to become the champions and leaders of their own hometowns.

"Scouts helped wrap packages for the Christmas hampers with Helping Hands for the past couple of years," Poettcker says. "We received a wonderful tour of the Helping Hands facility. We had the children help with the Remembrance Day service this fall. The children also baked for people in our community and delivered the baked goods to show appreciation for what they do for us."

The Niverville Scouts program runs from September to May but might also include a few summer-time camping and canoe trips. The annual cost for enrollment is \$240 per child, although Poettcker says kids can enroll anytime throughout the year and the fees will be determined based on the number of months left in the annual program at the time of registration. To register right now, parents can expect a cost of \$190, which will see them through until the end of the season.

Scouts Canada also provides a program called No Child Left Behind, which offers membership subsidies to lower-income families. Poettcker believes that every child should have the opportunity to be involved in a Scouts program. As a mother of Scouters herself, she says there are few events that they get more excited about.

IN BRIEF



Gabrielle-Roy in Île-des-Chênes. BRENDA SAWATZKY

IDC Schools Welcome Provincially Funded Upgrades

By Brenda Sawatzky

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Gabrielle-Roy and Île-des-Chênes School are two of three schools in the Dawson Trail riding to benefit from new provincial funding. The funding initiative includes new school facilities, infrastructure renewal, major additions and renovations, and new childcare centres around the province.

"Our Progressive Conservative government is committed to ensuring Manitoba students are able to learn in safe and well-functioning environments," said MLA Bob Lagassé in a January 2019 press release. "I am pleased that we are delivering to support the needs of families in our communities."

The schools benefited from the available funding to the tune of approximately \$1.6 million. The project included the renewal of the aging roof and walls of the classroom wing and gymnasium of Île-des-Chênes School on parts of the school that were constructed in 1975. Structural upgrades were completed on a portion of the roof along with thermal upgrades to both the roof and walls. Mechanical upgrades were also done in four of the classrooms.

The project also includes the addition of two newly constructed modular classroom units at Gabrielle-Roy, which will address that school's current year enrollment needs. The units are valued at approximately \$800,000.

Apart from a few finishing details, the work is now complete.

"The investment demonstrates that our government understands the needs of a growing region like ours and is working hard to meet those needs," Lagassé adds.

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Updates from the Ritchot Chamber

2019 Board of Directors Is Welcomed

On January 24, a group of familiar and new faces sat around a table to represent the incoming 2019 Board of Directors of the Ritchot Chamber of Commerce. These year's board includes:

Executive Board

- Marc Palud, Rev Gen Apps, President (second term)
- Trina Brulé, Seine River Safety, Vice President (second term)
- Derek Roth, Adventure Power Products, Vice President (second term)
- The position of Treasurer is still waiting to be fulfilled; Roger Brodeur of Renovations Plus will carry on with the position in the interim.

Board Members

- Larry Nickel, LDN Auto
- Mike Allison, Mike Allison Windows & Doors
- Yvette Bernat, TransCanada Centre
- Chris Ewen, Ritchot RM Mayor
- Roger Brodeur, Renovations Plus
- Yann Boissonneault, Tache CDC
- Dave Audette, Lorette Home Hardware
- Leanne Moore, Affinity Insurance Brokers
- Natasha Laperie, St. G's General Store
- Nicole Devloo, The Body Repair Shop

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Insurers and Local Residents Join Forces on CRC Donation

By Brenda Sawatzky

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Niverville's Community Resource Centre (CRC) is getting one step closer to reality thanks to insurance giants HUB International and Wawanesa Insurance, and local business owners Ray and Cara Dowse.

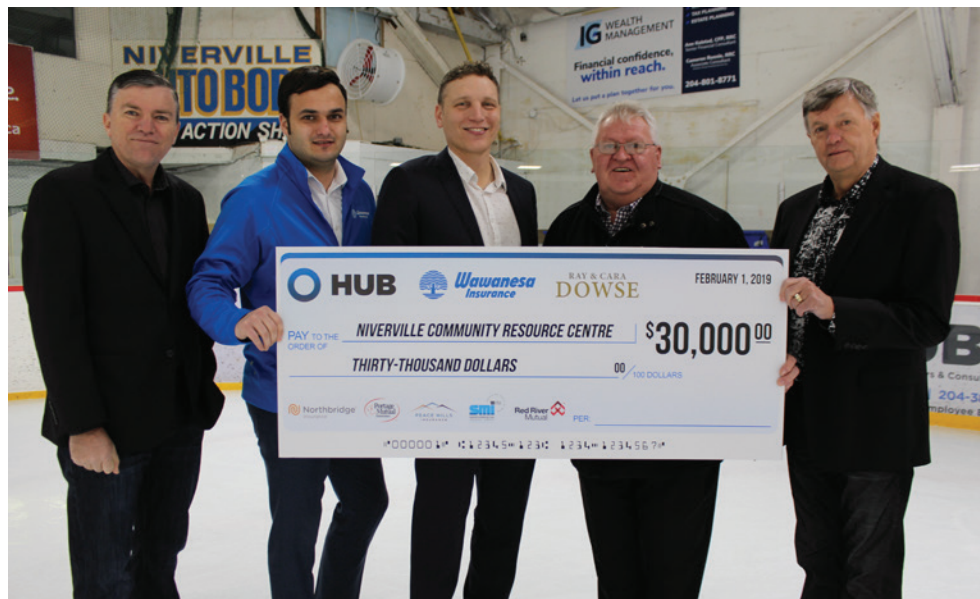
On Friday, February 1, representatives from the insurance companies lined up alongside Ray Dowse to present a combined cheque for \$30,000 to CRC committee chairperson Clarence Braun.

"I have had the pleasure of working in the insurance industry for many years and was eager to come together with these organizations for this contribution," Dowse says. "Community is something my wife Cara and I are passionate about, and the positive impact the CRC will have on Niverville and the surrounding region is significant. It's a very exciting time for the community, and by working together exciting projects such as this can become a reality."

The initiative was spearheaded by HUB International's Niverville location, which ran a fundraising campaign alongside their grand opening. From May through October 2018, HUB promised a \$25 CRC donation for every insurance quote made from the local branch.

On completion of the branch initiative, HUB's corporate office made the decision to boost the total donation to \$10,000, which was then matched by Wawanesa Insurance as well as by Ray and Cara Dowse, bringing the total donation to \$30,000.

"We have a program called HUB Gives and it's about giving back to the communities that [we are located in]," says Keith Jordan, president of HUB International Manitoba. "The community supports us and we want to support the



Mayor Myron Dyck, Vedran Hodzic, Ray Dowse, Clarence Braun, and Keith Jordan.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

community and that's really what it's all about. [The CRC] is a terrific project... I mean, look what it's going to give back to the community."

Vedran Hodzic works on the national business development team for Wawanesa Insurance.

"HUB occasionally reaches out to us when there's these kinds of community initiatives," says Hodzic. "We thought that it's a great opportunity for us to take part in because we are a Manitoba-based company and we like to be involved in small communities and help out in these sorts of initiatives."

Four years ago, when the vision for the CRC was first realized, a planning and fundraising committee was formed. The committee included community residents and business people along with members of town council and staff. Right out of the gate, council committed \$5 million to the project.

Clarence Braun, co-chairperson of the committee, says the initial years required a lot of legwork—preparing a scientific study, visiting other cutting-edge community

centres in Winnipeg and around the province, and surveying 300 residents to get a good cross-section of ideas for the new CRC. Since then, local builder Von Ast has been commissioned to create the preliminary drawings.

When the province made their surprise announcement to fund a new high school in Niverville, council set to work to see how these two initiatives could be combined into one mutually beneficial project. Town staff began applying for federal and provincial grants which, if awarded, could provide an additional \$11 million in funding for the almost \$20 million project.

Council and the CRC committee are hopeful that an announcement from both levels of government is forthcoming. At that point, the committee will dig their heels in on a fundraising campaign for the remaining \$3.5 million. Braun is grateful to residents like the Dowses and corporations who are stepping forward in this financial leap of faith.

"This represents local, and HUB's a new business in our community," Braun says. "To

see them come on board will be an encouragement to many others. We're really excited about the immediacy of where we're at right now. The way the town has approached this, the opportunity with the school has created something bigger than a school. From what I've heard, the concept of community centres [that] combine education and culture together in one big building has become something that's important."

Mayor Myron Dyck also weighed in on the recent \$30,000 donation. "We're excited about the imminent CRC project and today we have some individuals and some corporations that have stepped up to provide the donations [because] they believe in the project. We want to thank them for investing in our community."

IN BRIEF

Comedy Fundraiser to Boost Local Dog Park

By Lorelei Leona

lleona@nivervillecitizen.com

One Niverville resident is hoping this summer will see upgrades to the Niverville Dog Park. Barry Piasta has worked hard to upgrade the dog park in the past, and now he's taking the initiative once again to enlist the help of local businesses and volunteers.

"When I did the first round of improvements by getting the agility equipment, I had some great people who are truly the ones who made it happen," Piasta says. "They donated [their] time, skill, and connections [to] make it happen."

This year he has something special planned in order to raise funds—a comedy troupe called Raise the Woof, which performs in support of animal-based fundraisers. Raise the Woof has worked with dozens of organizations across North America and raised \$1 million in ten years.

The February 23 event, which takes place at 7:30 p.m. at the Golden Friendship Centre, will feature not only the comedy show but also a silent auction, a 50/50 draw, and a donation draw in which the winner takes home ten times their donation amount (up to \$200). Tickets for the evening, sponsored by Ruff Mutts, cost \$15.

"I believe it's the least I can do with my time to give back to our community and show my daughter about giving back to others," Piasta says of why he has organized the fundraiser.

While Piasta doesn't have a specific dollar amount in mind that he would like to raise, he says his main focus is raising enough money for the improvements that don't come out of the town budget. He hopes to sell out the event and see people have a great time while supporting something dear to his heart.

In addition to some facelift work such as fence repair and painting, he would like to add some solar lighting and create a new double gate entrance and some new sections within the park.

"The dog park has on average 30 visits throughout each day. It has people from surrounding community's bringing their dogs," he explains. "A group called Tour of Winnipeg Dog Parks come out regularly with 15 to 20 dogs [per] visit. With our dog park being the only one of its kind, Winnipeg officials and officials from other communities get ideas from ours. I hope we can be a destination spot for dog owners of all kinds. Those who come out to the dog park also visit businesses in Niverville. They eat at our restaurants, buy gas and snacks, [and] even become residents of Niverville. As far as dog parks in Manitoba, we are the jewel, so let's make it a diamond."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

■ Tickets available are available at Ruff Mutts, through Christane Leclerc (crbrule@hotmail.com), or Barry Piasta (afeica@mymts.net).

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55+ Housing Development Gets Green Light in St. Adolphe

By Brenda Sawatzky

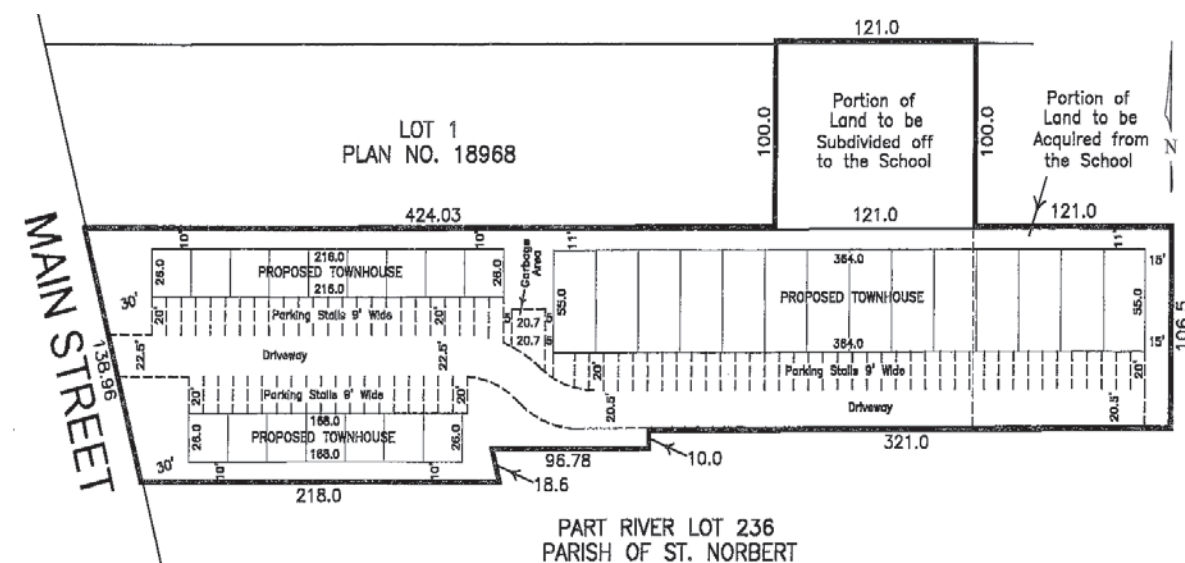
✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

A contingent of residents turned up at Ritchot council's January 23 public meeting to speak to a multi-family housing project proposed for the property at 420 Main Street in St. Adolphe, the former location of the community's personal care home. Ken Tallaire of the River Trail Development Corp is requesting that council allow for 14 1,200-square-foot units and 16 660-square-foot units geared toward people in the 55+ age bracket.

"The plan has two types of units that will be created," Chris Goertzen, representative of Tallaire, told council. "Some larger... and some smaller units that will allow for the type of living and rental arrangements for the [seniors] that live in this area."

The 30 townhouses, as proposed, will be single-storey units to accommodate seniors who don't want to climb stairs.

Each unit would have a nominal backyard, and some would have garages. An aesthetically pleasing model will be used which includes brickwork and other interior and exterior construction



Proposed layout of the 55+ housing development at 420 Main Street in St. Adolphe.

RED RIVER DEVELOPMENT CORP.

materials that provide a quality living space which blends well with the neighbourhood.

Because they are rental units, all yard maintenance would be taken care of by the ownership company.

Councillor Mamchuk made Goertzen aware of a fountain on the property that has historical significance in the community and asked that, if possible, it be preserved.

Five residents stepped forward to show support for the proposal, some suggesting that they would be interested in renting such a unit. Two of these residents indicated that they would be in favour of adding a commercial aspect to the development to keep the proposal more in line with Main Street's needs. Another suggested that it would be unfortunate to saddle the developer with

commercial space he can't lease, since, in this resident's opinion, St. Adolphe's proximity to Winnipeg means it will always remain a bedroom community.

The municipality's former community economic development officer, Lesley Gaudry, submitted an email prior to the meeting.

While Gaudry is in favour of such a residential development,

she listed numerous objections to the proposal as planned. Those included a concern with the number of units being proposed for the size of the lot, which will reduce parking availability and greenspace, the lack of a common area for resident use for social activities, and the lack of commercial space which could provide for amenities that would benefit seniors, such as professional health-related services.

Council addressed some of the concerns shared. They suggested that there is currently enough senior space in the community available for use or rent and see it as imprudent to insist on more when these facilities are already underutilized.

Councillor Pelletier suggested that there appears to be more than enough parking in the design, but creating wider parking stalls would be advisable.

As for commercial, it was agreed that space could be found should the demand arise.

Council unanimously approved the proposal subject to compliance with a development agreement. The plan is also subject to the approval of a subdivision of the L-shaped lot.



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Senior's Spotlight: George Hodgins

This is the first in a series of articles created to pay homage to the senior citizens living among us. They are our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, and they have much to teach us through their colloquial storytelling and colourful life experiences.

By Brenda Sawatzky

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George Hodgins is 98 years young and a senior living at the Niverville Credit Union Manor. He's a soft-spoken, gentle-spirited man whose greatest joy comes from the visits of family and friends. He keeps boredom at bay by socializing with neighbours through weekly card games of Bug Your Neighbour, monthly birthday celebrations for manor residents, movie nights, and interacting with the inquisitive daycare children.

George moved to Niverville four years ago when he and his wife Eleanor gave up their home in Kennedy, Saskatchewan to be closer to their daughter, Ellen Byggdin, and her family. In August 2018, the love of his life was taken from him, the scars of which are still tender and raw. They'd been partners through thick and thin for 67 years.

George met Eleanor in his small farming community of Fairmede, Saskatchewan. She was a pretty young schoolteacher who'd been boarding with his brother while teaching in the area's tiny rural school. She stole his heart immediately and, before long, the pair were partnered in a lifelong union.

They settled on his family's farmland, raising four children in a 600-square-foot home with only meagre amenities to get by on. But they were rich in love and family ties, sharing land, farm equipment, horses, and resources with parents and grandparents all around them.



George Hodgins and daughter Ellen Byggdin.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

As a father, one of his greatest hardships was keeping the children adequately clothed through the tough winter months. At times, he says, they needed to rely on help from their parents.

"Two of my brothers slept in a porch and their bedding froze to the wall," muses daughter Ellen. "I slept with my mom and Bruce and dad pulled a hide-a-bed from the wall to sleep on. For six years, Dad never got to sleep with his wife. It was quite a thing when we got the new house when I was 12."

Their primary income was derived from selling cream from their livestock and grain from their 1,200 acres of field. The family survived on the food they raised: chickens, ducks, beef, vegetables and fruit from their own orchard. George carried in drinking water and carried out the makeshift toilet every day. He dedicated long days to farming through the heat of summer and frigid temperatures of a northern winter without the amenities of electric heat, light, and air conditioning. He remembers the thrill of electricity lines reaching his rural area in 1954. For the family, it was life-altering.

Even so, travel was difficult in the winter months. The family car was

put on blocks in the fall to preserve the tires. Occasional trips into the local townships and to neighbouring farms required hooking a team of horses to an open "stone boat," or a closed caboose, when they needed to travel as a family. Telephone lines were wont to break during heavy snowfalls and George and his neighbours regularly found themselves out repairing these lines to keep communications going.

But it wasn't all hardship all the time. George and Eleanor invested their time in keeping the family active and entertained too, playing games of jam-pail curling, cards, and crokinole with neighbours at the local school. Occasionally they'd head to Kennedy for some old-time waltz and pattern dancing accompanied by local musicians on the accordion, violin, and guitar. These are the memories that still bring a smile to his face.

Ellen has memories of her dad clearing a nearby dugout throughout the winter months where he taught each of the kids how to skate and play hockey.

As a youngster in the early twentieth century, George grew up the middle child of seven in the same area in which he later farmed. He fondly recalls close intergenerational

connections as both sets of grandparents lived on either side of the family farm.

From a young age, he was responsible for feeding the chickens, collecting eggs, and carrying in firewood. Later he would be put to work harnessing up to 21 horses before breakfast in order to ready them for the day's fieldwork. In fall he'd be in the fields stooking straw to be loaded into the threshing machine.

If times were hard, he wasn't overly aware of it. He shared a straw mattress with two brothers. By springtime, the mattress was so compressed that it had to be restuffed once new straw came in off the fields. He was one of the lucky farm kids, though, allowed to attend school until Grade 10.

"I remember it was lots of fun going to school, but I just foolishly goofed around," says George. "I didn't even get my Grade 10. I thought it would be great to help on the farm, but it wasn't all roses in 1937."

He recalls losing a brother to illness, a fairly common occurrence during those times. It was winter and the child died en route to the nearest hospital, just 21 miles away. It took four hours to get there on that frigid winter day. Much later, George and Eleanor would

lose their second son to a rare disease which would introduce a whole new level of loss and heartache to their lives.

By the time George was 20, World War II had broken out and men were being conscripted. Two of his brothers headed off to war. George's parents appealed to the government to keep him at home to help on the family farm.

"They both came back, but my oldest brother, his mind was bad," George recalls. "He was in Italy at the worst part. He rode a motorbike to take messages to the front lines in the dark. When he came back he wasn't the same at all. He was schizophrenic and always quite different."

One of George's fondest memories of growing up will always be that of the local 4-H Club, showing his prize calves and attending events with the area's families.

"Way back in 1934, they formed the 4-H Calf Club and I'm the only living member of that now," George says proudly. "I've been to 80 different 4-H fairs since then."

The same 4-H Club still runs today. "We took Dad home one year and we bought a new sign for the school that Mom had taught at," says Ellen. "There were 40 kids at the 4-H fair that year and they circled around Dad and took a picture and gave him a plaque."

For 12 years running, George also participated in the Terry Fox Run.

"I liked what he stood for," says George.

A cancer survivor himself, George always encouraged family participation. One year, he and his granddaughter Abby joined the run on horseback.

Looking back on her dad's life, Ellen will always have fond memories of George as a father and husband. "I think one thing that's cool was that his land included land that had never seen a plough, so it was virgin prairie," Ellen says. "Every spring he picked Mom crocuses. He never missed, even when he walked with a cane."

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IN BRIEF

IDC Playgroup Will Help Families and Neighbours Connect

By Lorelei Leona

lleona@nivervillecitizen.com

A local mom has started a playgroup in Île-des-Chênes to help connect rural parents.

Soon after moving to Grande Pointe with her husband and 14-month-old son, Erin Cummings-Henry realized there are limited ways for parents in the community to connect.

"We have a second baby on the way this spring and I would like to meet other parents," she says. "I thought a stay-and-play would be a great way to provide parents and their kids with a safe environment where we can play, socialize, share, and support each other."

The playgroup, called Oaks n' Acorns, meets at the TransCanada Centre every Thursday from 9:00 to 10:30 a.m. Catering to children up to age six and their guardians, it offers welcoming environment with a collection of toys and a large open space for kids to play in. Snacks and beverages are provided.

"The playgroup is working with the Healthy Child Coalition to develop a resource centre with information about local services and supports, healthy meals recipe cards, ideas for crafts and games to play at home with kids aged zero to six months, a reading nook, and more," says Cummings-Henry.

In addition to offering community connections, Cummings-Henry also intends to plan guest speakers who can share their knowledge and expertise on child-rearing topics.

The playgroup operates with the support of the RM of Ritchot, but they welcome families from the whole southeast region to join in the fun.

Looking Back on a Year of Solar Energy

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

A year and a half after installing solar panels on their Niverville home, Todd and Lisa Wiebe are getting the results they were hoping for. In August 2017, the Wiebes took advantage of Manitoba Hydro's Power Smart Solar Energy Program, which offered rebates of up to 25 percent on solar panel installations.

The couple contracted the job to Solar Manitoba, who installed 28 panels on their roof, effectively designing a system that was anticipated to nullify their electricity bill payments. Now, with well over a year under their belt, the Wiebes can confirm that not only are the solar panels generating enough energy to pay for their electricity use, they are in fact coming out ahead. They're seeing credits on their utility bill that help cover the cost of their gas consumption, too.

"When they did our calculations, they estimated that we use around 9,000 kilowatt hours per year and the system's designed to produce roughly 11,000, so we're producing more than we're using," Todd says.

From September 2017 to September 2018, they used 5,709 kilowatt hours, but they put 7,300 kilowatt hours back into the grid. This equalled \$135 of credit which they could apply toward their gas bill.

The Manitoba Hydro incentive program, which is no longer available, required that recipients use an on-the-grid solar system, meaning that any excess solar energy produced returns into the grid. With the installation of a bi-directional meter, the utility company can monitor the energy produced, allowing them to sell the excess energy elsewhere. In turn, they apply a monetary credit to the Wiebes' utility bill based on the excess kilowatt hours according to the current rate charge for Manitobans.

Even though their furnace,



Todd and Lisa Wiebe of Niverville.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

water heater, and cooktop run on gas, Wiebe says their electricity consumption is still pretty significant, especially in the summer months when the A/C unit runs steady. When calculated over 20 years—the time they estimate for the system to pay for itself—they say they expect to be way ahead in the energy game.

"In 20 years, it's just going to be the two of us here," says Lisa. "Right now we have a two-year-old, a four-year-old, and an eight-year-old. I do two loads of laundry every day and run the dishwasher. We use a lot with gaming systems and whatever."

While their highest energy producing period is from April to October, the panels are still effective in winter since a lot of sunlight is still available—just for shorter periods of time. In the end, higher months balance out lower months, making longer-term monitoring the best way to know

just how well the system is doing.

And with hydro rates expected to continue to climb, the Wiebes feel lucky to be locked in at a one-to-one rate with Manitoba Hydro. So for the next 20 years they will be credited at the same price for kilowatts produced and used.

The Wiebes are concerned, though, for applicants signing onto a solar panel program going forward.

During the time they were having their solar panels installed, the Wiebes say that Manitoba Hydro was already trying to change the rules. The contract they and others signed clearly stated a one-to-one benefit for the applicant. Shortly after, Manitoba Hydro introduced a new plan to refund users for their excess kilowatts based on a .035 percent export rate while still charging .085 cents on the usage rate. Under this plan, the Wiebes' excess kilowatts would have been valued at half of what they used

kilowatts would be. Solar installers went to bat for their customers, fighting against the hydro company to secure the contract as it was originally drawn up.

"So, the problem is that anyone who's signing up now is not going to get that contract," Todd says. "It doesn't make sense because [someone's] going to sell to Hydro for three cents, but then buy it right back for eight cents after [they invested in the expensive system]."

Wiebe says that Solar Manitoba is now changing their recommendations for new customers, advising them to put in battery systems to store the excess energy produced for use during times of lower energy production. The Wiebes' revised one-to-one contract with Manitoba Hydro prevents them from installing batteries or additional panels throughout the course of their 20-year contract period.

And without batteries, the Wiebes' hydro will work like everyone else's. In times of power outage, their electricity will be off as well due to a kill switch which prevents power from entering the grid, putting Hydro workers at risk as they work on damaged lines.

Even so, a recent professional house assessment indicated that the solar panels had increased the Wiebes' home value by the same amount as the installation costs. As well, a proactive measure early on in the program saw the Wiebes turn down the high-interest financing option Manitoba Hydro was offering for a lower interest plan through their financial institution. Because of this, the Wiebes feel that they will pay off their solar package loan well before they otherwise would have.

"At the end of the day, every year we're saving money on our hydro," says Todd. "And when it comes to retirement and we're still in [our house] and on more of a fixed income, that's where we'll really start pulling in the benefits of it."

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Who's your choice for outstanding customer service?

The following businesses have been nominated for the **2018 Outstanding Customer Service Award**. Congratulations to them.

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What makes outstanding customer service? Consider whether the nominees are:

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- knowledgeable
- capable of providing service when they say they will or in a timely manner
- willing to stand behind their product /service

A panel of three judges will consider the votes and comments as well as a completed business background form provided by each nominee.

Send your vote and comments by February 15 to chamber@niverville.com. Please no votes from employees of the businesses nominated.

Congratulations to nominees for Outstanding Business of the Year

The following businesses have been nominated for outstanding business of the year. Judges will review the background information provided by each business and determine the recipient.

- Heritage Lane Builders
- Peak Renovations
- The Citizen

You're invited to our bold annual meeting

Come find out what the chamber does, Thursday, March 7, 7:00 p.m., The Heritage Centre. **Non-members are welcome.** This year we are particularly excited to have Stefan Maynard, Chief Brand Officer and Co-founder of Bold, a leading e-commerce company with its roots in Ritchot. Bold is one of the fastest growing companies in Canada, and the company has just secured \$22 million in venture capital to help it continue to grow. For more information, contact the Niverville chamber.

Need help with business? The Niverville Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the Town of Niverville has a program to help potential, new and developing business owners. For information, please contact the chamber: chamber@niverville.com.

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Niverville's council sits on January 22.

■ BRENDA SAWATZKY

Niverville Council Introduces 2019 Budget

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

On January 22, Niverville's town council revealed details of their 2019 budget at a public open house held at the Heritage Centre.

This year, residents will see a two percent increase on their property taxes, amounting to an extra \$35 in taxes on the average home. Waste collection levies will remain the same for the third consecutive year.

All but one municipal department saw an increase in their allotted budgets this year, ranging from five to 97 percent. Environment Development was reduced by almost three percent. One department seeing a significant increase is Public Health and Welfare. Council has budgeted an additional \$23,000 toward improved landscaping and long-term planning of the Hespeler Cemetery.

Economic Development also saw a marked increase of nearly \$45,000. This funding will be used to continue

investing in sponsorship and marketing tools to draw attention to the community as a commercial and industrial hub in the southeast. Some of these monies have also been set aside for the fiftieth anniversary celebration of Niverville's incorporation as a town. Eric King, Niverville's CAO, says they expect to release details of the upcoming celebrations shortly.

The biggest increase, by far, is the addition of almost \$20 million for recreation expenditures, virtually doubling the department's annual budget. Recreation initiatives for 2019 include hiring another recreation programmer, building the first phase of the Hespeler Park playground, and working towards a pedestrian corridor across the CP rail tracks.

Should higher-level government grants be approved for the proposed Community Resource Centre, the budget will further allow for the construction of the facility, as well as the reconstruction and paving of Arena Road and Centre Street.

"If we get a grant from the Province and Feds, we intend to build in 2019 with our money, donated money, and theirs," says King. "If no grant funding comes available to us, then we need to re-evaluate."

In the area of Protective Services, council hopes to see the re-opening of the Niverville RCMP Office and expand the role of bylaw enforcement in the community. Council is also working to invest in their emergency preparedness plan.

The development of a permanent compost facility is in the works. Town utilities will receive some budget funding with the installation of additional fire hydrants in the under-served areas of Niverville, bringing these areas closer to meeting fire protection standards. Funds will also be set aside for future lagoon expansion and the new 13-year sewer renewal program for the core area of town, set to begin construction in 2020. Finally, restoration work will begin on the Fifth Avenue lakes to repair damage from erosion.

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Commentary



DEPOSITPHOTOS

Consider the Angel of Justice

By Greg Fehr

There is no doubt that the bus crash that took the lives of the Humboldt Bronco junior hockey team was a tragedy. The 16 lives lost and the additional 13 lives forever altered by injury are a tragedy beyond words, and they elicit powerful emotional responses from anyone who hears about them.

If you, like me, were moved by the story, you're not alone. More than 140,000 donors from more than 80 countries contributed to the second most successful GoFundMe campaign in history, raising in excess of \$15 million in just 12 days.

This brings up some interesting questions about how

we act and react to tragic events. Tragedy is a regular occurrence in this world; lives are lost needlessly every minute of every day.

Yet how we react to an individual event varies greatly, from the outpouring seen for our Saskatchewan neighbours to complete indifference for countless others.

Let's be clear: this is not to say that the disparity is either wrong or right, and it certainly doesn't take away from the trauma so many of us have felt since the Humboldt tragedy. But we should simply be able to explore the question.

It is curious to wonder why certain events trigger such profound reactions while

others don't. We may feel worse when a child dies than when a senior citizen passes. Collectively, we donated large sums of money after the earthquake in Haiti, but we've virtually ignored the ongoing crisis in Yemen.

The Humboldt bus accident resonates with us for many reasons. Perhaps it's the young age of many of those lost. Perhaps it's the team aspect, or that they were a hockey team specifically, which we regard as our national sport.

This is not wrong. We are entitled to invest our emotions and care in whatever way feels right to us as individuals.

But should our courts be afforded the same

entitlement? By nature of our judicial system, is there room for the courts to take into account the strong public emotional reaction the event has engendered? Should the judge in this case consider all these emotions when deciding on a sentence for the driver of the truck? Likely, that judge is not immune to the same thoughts and feelings we all have, and it seems sure that the intense public profile of this case has produced a political component that must weigh heavily on the judge.

This is where we tread into waters that may be uncomfortably cold.

The angel of justice, as depicted in Greco-Roman art, is often shown holding

the scales of justice... but she is saddled with a blindfold. The idea here is simple: justice must be impartial and consider the facts of the case only. There is no room for emotion, only room for facts and the consequences; even the consequences take a back seat to the facts. This is fundamental when it comes to ensuring true justice in our system.

Few of us could envy the position of Judge Inez Cardinal, whose duty it is to impose a fair sentence on the driver, Mr. Sidhu. The concept of proportional sentencing means that the judge must take into account the impact of the action, but actions themselves are the charge. The judge's decision,

regardless of what it is, will likely be seen as too light by many, and too heavy by others.

For the public, we will view the sentence through the lens of our own emotions, as well as through our personal biases and experiences.

Though it will be difficult, I would encourage us all to read beyond the sentence itself and think upon the judge's rationale in this case. This is important, because the integrity of our justice system is also at stake.

We have given our support and our prayers to the families of Humboldt. Perhaps it's time to turn our support to Judge Cardinal and our prayers to her wisdom and discernment.

Sports & Recreation



Josée Roy takes the ice as part of Team Manitoba.

DARRYL GERSHMAN

Ringette Star Skates Her Way to Canada Games

By Lorelei Leona

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Josée Roy is making her mark in ringette and will represent Team Manitoba at the upcoming Canada Winter Games. The Games take place in Red Deer, Alberta from February 15–March 3 and will feature 19 sports over 150 events along with a major arts and cultural festival. It will draw up to 3,600 athletes, managers, and coaches and more than 20,000 visitors, according to the Games' official site.

Among them will be Roy, a 17-year-old high-schooler from Ste. Agathe. Roy has played ringette since she was six and has excelled each year, leading to invitations for prestigious tryouts and ultimately

making those teams.

Roy played for the Red River Rage, based out of Niverville, for six years, before qualifying for Team Manitoba in 2013. The following year, she qualified to try out for the AA Eastman Flames, which is the highest level of ringette in the province. In April 2018, the Flames advanced to the Canadian Ringette Championships Nationals, where they took home bronze in the U19 category. In October 2018, Roy joined Team Manitoba to participate in a pre-Canada Winter Games tournament with the other U20 qualifying teams.

Now Roy, who plays defence, has qualified for the Canada Winter Games with Team Manitoba.

"This is a different level. It was an exhilarating feeling... it was unlike

any other tryouts I've ever done," she says of finding out that she made the team. "I've been training for two years knowing [the Games] were coming up."

The Canada Winter Games only come around ever four years, and since ringette isn't part of the Olympics, the Games has become like the Olympics to its athletes. Competition to make the team is fierce, with 120 players participating in phase one of the tryouts, with only 55 making it to phase two. In the end, only 18 players made Team Manitoba in the U20 category.

"It's awesome," adds her father, Luc Roy. "She's put a lot of work into it. I've watched her gain some confidence in the last couple of years and want to participate in the Winter

Games, so we set some goals.... with her workouts and training, which she did. We are so proud of her as a family that she was able to accomplish that. She's one of three players her age that made the team... it's been a very positive experience."

The road has not been easy for Roy, who suffered her first concussion during phase one of the tryouts. Still, with limited opportunities to continue with ringette at a professional level, the teenager knew she could not let the injury sideline her.

"There's no future for ringette," she explains of what her future holds. "You can only play six years in AA during your lifetime. I could try out for the National Ringette League in two years, or I could possibly coach the AA level in the future."

For now, though, the 17-year-old is eager to compete in the Games and experience a higher level of play than she has been used to, and to make her mark. Team Manitoba is taking their task seriously, practicing with the 2015 Team Manitoba girls and preparing to elevate their game.

"I'm expecting it to be a lot harder than Nationals," Roy says. "We're playing the best of the best at the U20 level. We've been practicing three times per week and training three times per week as well. We only have a game per day, so when we don't have a game, we will be watching all the other sports that are there too."

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Equestrian 4-H Club Teaches Riding and Life Skills

By Lorelei Leona

✉ lleona@nivervillecitizen.com

If you grew up in rural Manitoba, you may have heard about the 4-H Club. What you might not know, however, is that not only is the club an international not-for-profit organization, but it also creates curriculums that tailor to unique interests.

A local club has taken advantage of this opportunity, offering an equestrian-based program called the Steinbach Sunset Riders 4-H Light Horse and Pony Club. The club, which is based out of Cloud 9 Ranch, is led by Tara Reimer, who created the club based on her own interests and skillset, as well as the demands of the community.

"4-H is an international youth and volunteer organization that began in Roland, Manitoba in 1913," she says of the program's history. "It's a program that provides members with the resources and activities to build self-confidence, communication, and leadership skills while learning about a topic of their choice. Each member picks a project and works with a volunteer leader to develop his/her skills related to the project of choice. In Manitoba, there are over 80 interesting hands-on projects."

Reimer grew up with a family who was involved in 4-H, with herself being the first in her family to join at the age of eight in the mid-1980s, with her three siblings eventually following suit and her mother becoming a leader. Once she aged out of the program at 25 years old, she became a leader at the Grunthal Sunset Riders 4-H Club, where she remained for the next six years.

"After taking a break, I decided to start our new club



The Steinbach Sunset Riders 4H Light horse and Pony Club, with members from all over the southeast region.

■ TARA REIMER

so that my sons and our Cloud 9 Ranch riding students could take advantage of all that 4-H offers," she says. "We are a unique light horse 4-H club because we don't require members to own their own horses. We allow members to use our Cloud 9 Ranch lesson horses for no charge in our riding sessions and for record-keeping."

Individual 4-H clubs can structure their year as they see fit, based on the needs of their members. Steinbach Sunset Riders 4-H Light Horse and Pony Club has members from all over the southeast region and meets monthly from September until June on Saturdays for four and half hours at Cloud 9 Ranch.

The meeting is run by the members and begins by discussing upcoming events, sponsorships, or other topics that may require a vote. After 30 minutes, members are split off into groups based on riding level and work through the workbooks provided by the Manitoba 4-H council.

"Members can work

through the levels at their own pace and there is no limit or time frame to do this," Reimer says. "Around noon, members eat snacks brought by other members and donated by Sobey's Steinbach. In the last two hours of our meeting, we generally have guests teaching on topics such as Feeds and

Feeding, Farrier (Hoof Care), Vet (Horse Health), Saddle Fitting, or we ride horses. Our club aims to teach about the many aspects of owning and working with horses while also developing life skills, including responsibility, courage, confidence, organization, compassion, public speaking,

respect, and more!"

This year the club has had 42 members ranging in age from six to 21, as well as a dozen leaders who teach various activities.

One of the biggest parts of 4-H is the communications event and is a requirement in order to complete and be

recognized for your 4-H year.

"The communications event itself begins at the club level where all members write and deliver either a speech, one-person, or two-person visual presentation according to rules and a standard, on a topic of their choice," Reimer explains.

The event will take place on Saturday, February 9 at Steinbach MB Church at 10:00 a.m. sharp, with judging expected to be complete by noon. It is open to the public. According to Reimer, first and second place winners in each age and category will then compete at Zones, which Reimer's club is hosting on Saturday, February 16 at the Steinbach Bible College at 10:00 a.m. Other clubs from the South Zone include Piney, Woodmore, and Grunthal. Zones will occur in Piney, with Provincials to follow in Portage la Prairie on March 9.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

■ www.4h.mb.ca

Varsity Girls Panthers Make Provincials Push

By Lorelei Leona

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The Niverville Varsity Girls basketball team may have had a rocky season so far, but everyone loves a good dark horse story.

The team has played in five tournaments this season. They placed fourth in a recent tournament in Gimli, losing their last game to the Springs Christian Eagles by 35-26.

The latest tournament, hosted by NCI on February 2-3, saw them face the Eagles in the opening game,

in what NCI hoped would be a redemption match. The score ended with the home team losing 35-31, placing the Panthers on the consolation side. In their second matchup, the team beat the Green Valley Pirates 33-30, advancing them to the consolation final, where they faced off against the Pierre Elliot-Trudeau Canadiens on Saturday morning. Unfortunately, the Panthers fell 57-37 and finished in sixth place.

"We hoped to have better shooting, so we had been practicing our form shooting,"

says head coach Nathan Dyck. "Our defence was okay and doesn't need much for adjustment. Overall, we just need to play with more pressure in general."

The Panthers are in third place in the Zone 13 South division, utilizing their veterans to lead the team with strong gameplay as they make a push for Provincials.

"Annika Wolfe is our point guard, who has shown great leadership and has become more vocal on the court," says Dyck. "Rhyanne Pauls has been great on defence and

helps out our offense down in the post a lot."

As the season nears its end, the Varsity girls hope to win their last two regular season games. Their final game will be against the Steinbach Christian School Flames, who sit second in the division and have ranked in the top three in all tournaments this season.

Meanwhile, the Varsity boys were also in tournament play February 2-3, emerging victorious in their first and second games. In the finals, they lost a tight match to the Ste. Anne Lync, 66-62.

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IN BRIEF

Clippers Firing on All Cylinders

By Travis Mason

A month into the new year, the Niverville Clippers have picked up right where they left off at the end of 2018.

Continuing with their success, the Novice Blue and Novice White teams hosted a successful home tournament, winning gold in each of their pools. Niverville Novice Blue dominated their pool, remaining undefeated and beating Mitchell Blue 14-3 in the finals.

"The whole team was awarded player of the game by their coaches for their hard work," says Travis Mason of Clipper Ice Sports. "Griffin Strain received his first career shutout as he was between the pipes for all the games."

Exciting things are happening on the Atom side as well, with the Atom C hockey teams playing host to the 2019 Hockey Manitoba Provincials in Ste. Agathe from March 15-17. Opening ceremonies will take place on the Friday evening. The teams will face competition from Steinbach, Winkler, Brandon, MacDonald, and Thompson.

The hosting committee has been hard at work planning a memorable weekend and will be releasing more details in the weeks to come.



The Atom B group headed to Grand Forks, North Dakota for a tournament on January 18-20.

Mason says the competition there was fierce.

"Fun was had by all players, coaches, family, and friends, and it made us realize that not all victories show up on the scoreboard," he says. "Good teams never lose—they either win or learn, and with a current first place standing in the Eastman Atom B division, our team is looking forward to wrapping up our regular season strongly and heading into playoffs with much enthusiasm!"

All the Clippers teams are gearing up for the playoffs after seeing success in the regular season.

"As you walk through the rinks or schools, it's a joy to see all of the kids so proud of their team as they rock the Clipper logo," adds Mason.

The Jets Should Go All-In on a Marquee Forward

By Nicholas Anderson

With less than three weeks to go before the NHL's trade deadline on February 25, action has already begun to pick up in front offices around the league.

Following the all-star weekend, we've seen two deals involving quality players. Derrick Brassard, who I originally thought the Jets should target, was moved from the Penguins to the Panthers, and Jake Muzzin moved from the Kings to the Maple Leafs.

Meanwhile in Ottawa, tension abounds when it comes to unrestricted free agents Mark Stone and Matt Duchene, who continue to garner trade talks. The Jets have been mentioned as potential contenders to land at least one of them.

More on Matt Duchene in a moment.

Of course, we all remember last year's trade deadline, when out of the blue—no pun intended—Kevin Cheveldayoff snagged Paul Stastny from a floundering divisional rival in exchange for Erik Foley, and first- and fourth-round draft picks.

Only to have Stastny walk away for nothing in the offseason...

There may still be a little salt in the wound, and some fans may be hesitant for the team to trade for another "rental" option. However, I would argue that the Jets are in an even better position to add a marquee forward this year than they were last season, for three key reasons.

1. This year's market is flooded with talent, and many people believe this will drive down the value of star talent.

2. With Kyle Connor and Patrik Laine in the final year of their entry-level contracts, this may be Cheveldayoff's last chance to build the best team possible.

3. With such a young core, the Jets can afford to give up a couple of future assets for some help right now.

The Jets, as currently constructed, sit fifth in the league in goals for, behind the likes of the Lightning, Flames, Sharks, and Leafs. A playoff series against any of these teams could come down to whoever scores the last goal.

What do these four teams have in common? They each

have depth at the centre position.

That isn't to say the Jets don't, but if you were to put Bryan Little on any of these teams, he would be their third line centre, not their second.

Now, I'm not a Bryan Little hater. Many might remember that I defended him last season when the Jets signed him to a deal set to pay him nearly \$5.3 million per year through 2024-25.

But getting an upgrade at the centre position to play alongside Laine would completely change the season for this Jets team.

We've seen coach Paul Maurice try a series of different players in this position, with Jack Roslovic, Matthieu Perrault, Kyle Connor, and Nikolaj Ehlers each taking turns throughout the season. Historically Ehlers and Laine have proven to have lots of chemistry, but the two struggled at the beginning of the season, leading to Connor being shifted to the second line.

One interesting aside: since losing Ehlers to injury, the Jets rank first in the league in goals for, but that

number is a bit inflated right now thanks to the 9-3 obliteration of the Anaheim Mighty Ducks.

So just who is the best option, and what will the Jets have to give up? It remains to be seen—and I'm sure we'll be discussing it further in this space in the coming weeks and months.

The ideal fit right now, in my opinion, is Matt Duchene, currently with the Senators. The Sens are already without their first-round pick this year, and with contract talks reportedly not really moving the needle, they may want to move the 28-year-old before he leaves them for nothing.

With 48 points on the season, Duchene—along with Winnipeg native Mark Stone, who I would also like to see moved to the Jets—has been one of the few reasons to tune into Senators broadcasts this season. And he seems to have gotten better as the league has gotten faster.

Combining his speed up the middle and playmaking ability with Patrik Laine's ability to shoot the puck and create space just by standing somewhere would be very fun to watch.

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Arts & Entertainment



Joey Villanueva at the Pinoy Pop Star semi-finals.

EVAN BRAUN

Local Singer Headed to Pinoy Pop Star Finals

By Evan Braun

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Joey Villanueva of Niverville has booked his ticket to the Pinoy Pop Star finals, to be held on March 2 at the McPhillips Street Casino in Winnipeg, with a strong performance this weekend at the event's semi-finals. Pinoy Pop Star is an amateur singing competition for Filipino Manitobans held once every couple of years. The current season is the competition's fourth outing.

This is Villanueva's second run at the Pinoy Pop Star title, having also made the finals during the competition's debut in 2009. That year, he lost out to Elsaída Alerta, who went on to achieve international acclaim by winning the World Karaoke Championships in Singapore in 2015. Alerta, a powerful vocalist, will be a familiar name to many residents of the rural southeast. Alerta headlines

Last Call, a cover band which has recently performed at the Niverville Olde Tyme Country Fair and a handful of dance parties at Whitetail Meadow.

"It was a nerve-racking experience for me, the first time I joined," says Villanueva of the 2009 competition. "But at the same time, I was excited because I got to meet a lot of talented people. After the competition, it opened a lot of performance opportunities for me in and around the community."

In this year's opening round, back in October, Villanueva performed "Killing Me Softly" by the Fugees. On the strength of that performance, he was selected to join 39 other singers in the semi-finals.

"At the semis, I chose a song by Sisqo called 'Incomplete,'" he says. "I like R&B and I felt like it was the right song to showcase my vocal skills."

Villanueva had a couple of months to prepare for his

semi-final performance, a time filled with "practice, practice, and more practice." However, the road to the semis certainly wasn't a smooth one.

"I got really sick days before the semis, and I was still sick while the contest was going on," Villanueva adds. "I was losing my voice and I almost had to drop out of the competition because of it. But I'm glad I didn't, and I somehow managed to perform well enough to secure my spot in the finals."

The semi-finals played over two consecutive nights to a packed house on the second floor of the McPhillips Street Casino, with several hundred people showing up to watch this year's talented crop of singers. The event, hosted by CKJS radio personality Lucille Nolasco, was also live-streamed.

Four judges presided over the two-night show, including Paul Ong, Anita Lubosch,

Frank Urbano, and Michelle Majul-Ibarra, all of whom are well-regarded in the local music scene and Filipino community.

The remaining 14 contestants will perform once again at the finals on March 2. The winner will receive \$2,000, and the first and second runner-ups will receive \$750 and \$500 respectively. The top three performers will also be given trophies to commemorate their accomplishment.

"The other contestants are amazing!" says Villanueva of his competitors. "Each contestant has their own style and interpretation to showcase their vocal ability. And everyone will give their best at the finals. I was definitely a little nervous, and I'm just relieved that the semis are over now. I hoped that my performance would be good enough to win the judges over—and it was."

Tickets to the finals are available now on Ticketmaster for \$21.

IN BRIEF

Music Innovator Named Finalist for Entrepreneur Award

By Lorelei Leona

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A local entrepreneur was in the running last month to be recognized as a finalist in the Just Watch Me! video contest, which celebrates the success of entrepreneurs with health conditions or disabilities in rural Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Season Kirkwood of Otterburne owns Sound Lab Manitoba, a mobile music and events company. This year, Kirkwood entered the contest in the Seasoned Entrepreneur category, which requires entrants to be in business for more than a year.

"I became an entrepreneur after the tragic death of my brother," Kirkwood says in her entrance video. "I realized that the lack of services for vulnerable people was even greater for rural Manitoba. I want to provide resources to help keep families closer to home and closer together."

Sound Lab offers music programs and lessons, giving rural kids the opportunity to be exposed to different kind of musical instruments and opportunities to create music. During the program, kids are given the ability to try multiple instruments and equipment, such as the piano, guitar, and drums. In addition to offering classes

for kids, Sound Lab also offers classes for seniors and families, including Tea and Jam and Sound Lab Gym, the latter of which is a silent program where participants can explore music through headphones.

The Just Watch Me! competition began in 2011 to recognize entrepreneurs such as Kirkwood, and to showcase their success. According to a press release, the contest also gives business owners the opportunity to tell their own story, which in turn may inspire like-minded individuals with disabilities or health conditions.

The top four finalists from this category were selected on January 28, but Kirkwood did not make the cut this year. The first place winner in the Seasoned Entrepreneur category will win cash and prizes totaling \$1,000, and those who come in second to fourth place will win cash and prizes ranging from \$250 to \$750.

"The future goal for Sound Lab is to create a social hub," says Kirkwood, "to attract other mobile services and increase accessible resources to the region."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

■ www.soundlabmanitoba.ca

■ www.justwatchmecontest.ca

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Author Publishes Debut Novel

By Brenda Sawatzky

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First-time author Sabrina Falk of Niverville is excited to announce the debut of her new adult fiction novel, *Not Far from the Peach Tree*. The story follows the life of 22-year-old Abigail Hartley, a young woman with not much going for her. When tragedy strikes the Hartley household, Abigail sets out, alongside her younger sister, to uncover the answers to years of family secrets that have just begun to surface.

Published by Peasantry Press, Falk's novel hit bookstore shelves on February 1. The book launch followed on February 2 at 7:00 p.m. at McNally Robinson in Winnipeg.

Falk is no stranger to the limelight. Her husband Matt Falk has made a name for himself as a stand-up comic on the national scene. While Matt's career was getting jumpstarted, Sabrina has been hard at work on her own creative endeavours.

Seven years ago, Sabrina put pen to paper and produced the first pages of a novel she says was inspired to write while her life was

in limbo, living away from home and far from family and friends.

"I had lots of time on my hands, so one day I started writing just to keep busy," says Falk, an English Language Arts scholarship recipient. "I never even pictured myself as a fiction writer. I didn't think I was much of a storyteller, but I guess I was wrong. As far as I can remember, it was an idea that came to mind as I was falling asleep one night."

The story took a full five years of writing and editing before it was ready to send out to prospective publishers. It took another two years for her manuscript to finally be accepted by Peasantry Press. Through it all, her husband Matt believed in her and encouraged her to keep going.

"At times, I wasn't sure if the book would ever get finished, or if it was any good," Falk says. "And I felt crazy for committing so much time to it, but I couldn't bear the idea of it not being something after all that hard work."

Falk says the publisher has been really supportive throughout the process and



Novelist Sabrina Falk.

KAELEB VISRAM

she's feeling pretty lucky to be chosen from amongst the large number of manuscript submissions they receive in

a year.

"I got a few nibbles and a lot of rejections before I finally got an acceptance

letter from Peasantry Press," adds Falk. "And not only were they willing to publish my work, but they were really excited, which is one of the greatest feelings. They made every part of the publishing process so easy. And they crafted the most beautiful cover for my book. You can really feel the warmth and whimsy in their design."

While Falk's book ventures into events and circumstances that were relatively foreign to her own life experiences, she admits there are a lot of elements she can relate to in terms of small-town living and interesting family dynamics. For the most part, she says, writing became an escape for her vivid imagination—although the book's main character resembles herself in many ways.

"I definitely relate with my protagonist, Abigail, most of all. She's not me, but her struggles with anxiety hit close to home. I've

always been a quiet, introverted type with social anxiety. I can get really in my head at times, so it was kind of cathartic writing that out."

With a storyline revolving around a young adult and her preteen sidekick, the book could well be viewed as catering to the young adult demographic. But Falk is confident that the theme, which demonstrates the power of forgiveness and the strength of family, is ubiquitous enough to interest readers of any age.

As a young mom with an active toddler, Falk intends to focus her energy on her son for the time being, but she believes that another book is just waiting to be written. For now, she hopes that readers will find something of value to take away from her novel.

"I would love for people to know that it's okay not to have your life figured out. Life is challenging and messy, but there's always a reason to hold onto hope."

St. Cyr Wins Five Covenant Awards

By Lorelei Leona

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Jordan St. Cyr left the fortieth annual GMA Covenant Awards with a lot more than he arrived with, walking away with five awards.

The evening opened with him winning Male Vocalist of the Year, where St. Cyr had been nominated against four other artists. The win set the tone for the rest of the evening.

"It was surreal," St. Cyr says. "At the beginning of the evening I was hoping to win one, but even then, you never know what to expect. When they called my name, it was so weird. Once I had that win, I thought maybe I wanted to win a few more."

With over 40 awards handed out that night, St. Cyr was determined to make the most of the evening and enjoy basking in the company of a roomful of some of Canada's most talented



Brenton Penner, Micah Zacharias, Jordan St. Cyr, Manuel Unrau, and Ross Klassen at the Covenant Awards. JORDAN ST. CYR

musicians and artists.

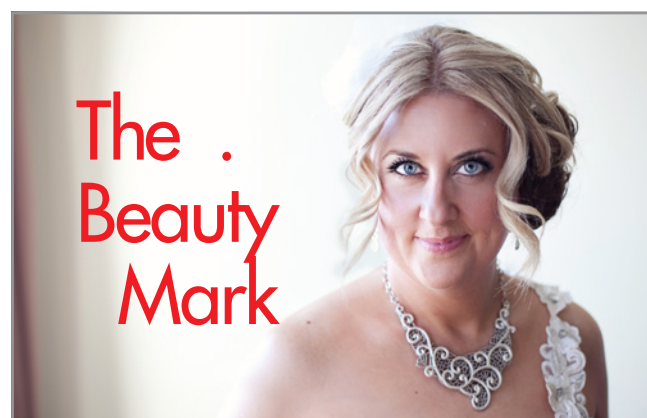
"It's long," he says of the ceremony. "So it really gave me an opportunity to hang out with my peers in the industry that I don't get to see all the time... radio hosts, DJs, music directors... people that I don't normally get to connect with."

Nominated for eight

awards, St. Cyr won five throughout the evening, including Song of the Year ("In My Lifetime") with Ben Calhoun, Recorded Song of the Year ("In My Lifetime"), New Artist of the Year, and Pop Song of the Year ("In My Lifetime"), in addition to the Male Vocalist of the Year nod.

Grateful for every

opportunity to play and create music, St. Cyr is looking forward to a busy year ahead, including the upcoming release of a new single to Canadian and U.S. radio, writing songs in Nashville for a new album, and heading out on the road for a few tour dates and music festivals.



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Applicant should have working knowledge of Softplan and a minimum of 1 year experience. Responsible to ensure that the production of plans & drawings are implemented and comply with current building code specifications. Construction background and/or with multi-unit dwellings experience would be an asset.

ELECTRICAL DEPARTMENT MANAGER

Position will be responsible for sales, purchasing, and merchandising within the department. The position will also need to provide backup sales support in other departments as needed. Experience within the retail industry in a sales capacity, and/or purchasing, would be an asset.

FULL TIME & PART TIME CASHIER/SALES

Candidate must be team oriented and work well within a team. Excellent customer service skills are a must. Retail cash experience an asset.

PLEASE SEND RESUMES (WITH INTERESTED POSITION) TO:

WM. DYCK & SONS, BOX 100 NIVERVILLE, MB ROA 1E0 | PHONE: 204-388-4727 | FAX: 204-388-4171 | EMAIL: resumes@wmdyck.com



STORE HOURS:
MON, TUES & FRI: 8 a.m. - 6 p.m.
WEDS & THURS: 8 a.m. - 9 p.m.
SAT: 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. **NEW EXTENDED HOURS**

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