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LOCAL NEWS

Middle School Principal Retires

■ Michael Koester has announced his plans to retire this spring following a 36-year teaching career in Niverville.

Details on Page 5



LOCAL NEWS

Tree-Planters Out in Force

■ Volunteers took to the streets in Niverville in late May to plant dozens of new trees along residential streets throughout the community. Those involved in the successful event harbour hopes that further tree-planting initiatives could take root in the coming months and years.

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COMMENTARY

Why Do We So Rarely Change Our Minds?

■ In this day and age, with so much going on in the world, we can be better at recognizing our own cognitive biases.

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Award-Winning Writer Releases New Book

■ Angeline Schellenberg, formerly of Niverville, has released a new book focusing on her relationship with her grandparents.

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Niverville Traffic Lights in Operation

»» DETAILS ON PAGE 3

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The

Citizen

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The moment when Ron Schuler flicked the traffic signals into operation for the first time. EVAN BRAUN

Niverville Traffic Lights in Operation

By Evan Braun
✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

Drivers along Niverville's Main Street are now contending with a new set of long-awaited traffic lights. As of 11:00 a.m. on Monday, May 25, the new signals at the corner of Main Street and Fifth Avenue have been turned on.

In addition to controlling traffic, the newly installed crosswalk signals will help pedestrians navigate the busy intersection.

To mark the occasion, Mayor Myron Dyck, Deputy Mayor John Funk, and Councillor Chris Wiebe were joined by MLA Ron Schuler. Schuler had the honour of flicking the switch to turn on the signals for the first time.

"You really put your shoulder to do this and did it in very fast order," Schuler said to the gathered construction crew. "For all the things you do, and everyone else who was involved, thanks a lot to Manitoba Infrastructure for the work that you did. I am really impressed. This is exciting!"

Mayor Dyck took a moment to thank Schuler and the provincial government for fast-tracking the

project, which had originally been announced on April 13.

"I don't know how you get more hours in your day than the rest of us get," Dyck joked, referring to the fact that Schuler has been active on COVID-19 subcommittees at the same time as working on infrastructure initiatives and dealing with spring flooding. "We've seen the expediency by which a project like this has been done, and it just goes to show the hard work that you do. Here in Niverville and our constituency, we are very grateful."

Manitoba Infrastructure began installing the traffic signal cables and poles the week of May 4 and completed installation, configuration, and programming of all traffic signal components the week of May 18.

Schuler noted that the new traffic signals were a response to increased traffic in the area, and will increase safety while reducing delays for traffic attempting to access PR 311 from 5th Avenue.

"Safety is our government's number one priority," said Schuler. "Our government always puts safety first. This is truly about safety."

HOW THE LIGHTS WORK

The main question on the minds of local residents will be about how the lights are configured. One of the construction workers took a moment to explain the technology and how the lights have been timed.

"[The lights] utilize Wavetronics," he explained. "The little white box at the top of the pole, that's actually radar. The lights are programmed to rest green 24/7 on Main Street, unless a pedestrian presses the cross street button or a vehicle triggers the radar, and then it will cycle to the cross street. So if there's no vehicles on the cross street, it will be green on the main street."

The installation of these traffic lights is bound to be viewed by residents and commuters as a symbol of strong regional growth.

"It is a privilege to represent growing communities, and that's what we have throughout our region," said Schuler. "These are really interesting times for growing communities... This is a great place to live. Just driving out again this morning, it is so beautiful. I'm so pleased to always be partnering with council."

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IN BRIEF

RuffMutt's Moves, Expands to Dog Daycare and Boarding

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

If you're a dog owner in Niverville or the surrounding area, take note that RuffMutt's has both moved and expanded its services this month. But they haven't gone far—just across the parking lot from their old location, to 290 Main Street, Unit D.

The business started out primarily as a home-based dog-grooming operation, then expanded into retail a year and a half ago. Husband-and-wife owners Guy Britten and Amanda MacLean also added a self-serve pet-washing station in early 2019.

Britten says the most recent move has been planned since January, and the retail side of their business, including a large selection of dog foods and pet accessories, has been up and running in their new space for the last two weeks.

"We had the move planned in January to allow for the expansion into boarding and dog daycare," Britten says. "We also have more room for retail, which we needed."

Their new dog daycare and boarding services will be open for business in the next couple of weeks, and the self-washing station will be ready to go by early next week.

"Our daycare and boarding is not typical of many other pet businesses you see in the city," Britten explains. "We will maintain a low number of dogs onsite and have stringent assessments and requirements for dogs

to be accepted. Our ratio of dogs to attendants will be very low, typically 1:7, with a maximum of 10 dogs. This allows us to ensure the safety of all the dogs we have onsite and make the experience a positive and fun one. Our goal is to have an intimate, safe, and well-balanced pack that looks to us as their home away home."

Like so many other small businesses, they've had a challenging spring due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"RuffMutt's has been luckier than many businesses," Britten says. "We closed grooming services, nail trims, and self-wash for a period of time, but by offering free delivery, curbside pickup, and maintaining in-store sales, our pet food sales remained strong."

Britten also has a lot to say about the local community and customer base that RuffMutt's has built over the last few years.

"The community and our customers have been tremendous," he says. "We are a family-owned and -operated business and have grown a relationship with a lot of our customers... we want to maintain the trust and quality of service we've developed with [them]. We look at our customers more as friends and neighbours."

Although most of the business's customers come from Niverville, Britten says that they have attracted a lot of dog owners from neighbouring towns.

For grooming, he says people come from as far as Winnipeg.

Metro Centre Relocates to Niverville

By Sara Beth Dacombe

When Don and Maggie Pearson decided to move their business, Metro Centre Ltd, to Niverville in May 2020, they never could have guessed the transition would coincide with a pandemic. While people have been facing upheaval, their small family-run business has been bracing for the impact.

Now, having moved their operation, they're starting to feel settled again.

Originally Winnipeggers, Maggie and Don moved south of the city to St. Pierre in 1991, where they worked for Don's dad at Metro Eavestroughing Ltd, later taking over the business and changing the name. Their focus switched from gutters and downspouts to trailers, aluminum docks, boat lifts, and after-market truck and RV parts.

In all, they've been married 38 years and worked together for 27 of those.

The business had been on Nairn Avenue in Winnipeg, but after so many years, the building needed repairs and the Pearsons needed a break from high taxes.

"The taxes are just so much lower here out of the city. You can't compare," says Maggie. "And you can't beat the drive. We're saving hours and hours of driving per week. I can be home in just 15 or 20 minutes every night."

They also downsized the operation to streamline what they offer. So while they will still source and sell trailers to specific customers, they don't stock new trailers onsite.

One unique aspect of the business is its connection



Maggie and Don Pearson of Metro Centre Ltd. in their new Niverville digs.

✉ SARA BETH DACOMBE

to the popular vintage-style Boler camper trailers. A few years ago, Don and Maggie were approached by a customer with a broken-down Boler who was passing through Winnipeg from B.C. The tongue had detached from the frame and Don managed to recreate the frame that supports the shell. Now Metro manufactures replacement Boler frames for customers across Canada.

COMING TO NIVERVILLE

The Pearsons became convinced Niverville was their new business home after they connected with local real estate agent Clarence Braun. They then realized they also had a previous personal connection with Dan Harder, owner of In-Ex Panel Systems Ltd. as well as the building now leased by Metro.

As the leaseholder, In-Ex helped with renovations to transform the warehouse into a well-lit shop with two large service bays, a welcoming

reception and product area, and a large storage space.

"We knew this was a good investment and a turnkey business opportunity if [In-Ex] wants to someday turn the business over to someone else," said Don. "This building lends itself, the way it's set up, that any other business could come in here if we're done."

BACK TO BUSINESS

Confident in their investment, the Pearsons are anxious to get back to helping customers.

Other than the slightly delayed renovations, the biggest challenge occurred before the move even began. While looking for a buyer for their Winnipeg space, the couple was approached with an offer that had them scrambling to be out by March 31.

The couple agreed to the deal and had to find space for their machinery, stock, and supplies before their space in Niverville was ready to move into. With help from fellow local business Bristol Hauling,

who helped with the move when it was down to the wire, Maggie and Don were able to meet the deadline.

Another consequence of being "homeless" leading up to their possession date was that Maggie was able to project the effects of the business being shut down for a while, prior to the shutdowns that became mandatory by COVID-19. This gave Metro a bit of an edge, even if just in the mindset of preparedness.

FAMILY FOCUS

Family-owned and -operated since 1969, their team feels like a family, and that's how they run things. Don handles the mechanics of their operation, as well as estimating on jobs and selling trailers, parts, and products. Maggie handles the office, accounting, and advertising. Their son works in sales, maintenance, and yard management. Maggie's brother works part-time as a mechanic and the office employs a full-time administrative assistant.

"The other thing we wanted from moving the business away from Winnipeg is that we wanted to get away from the hustle and bustle," says Maggie. "We knew we wanted a change—and now we have a new grandson. He's eight months old. They live at home with us and I am enjoying every single additional moment."

The couple looks forward to getting involved in the community.

"It will be a soft opening on June 5, but after July long weekend, we will be planning for a grand opening," Maggie adds. "So stay tuned."

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Middle School Principal Announces Retirement

By Liz Byron

When Niverville Collegiate Institute split into Niverville Middle School (NMS) and Niverville High School (NHS) last year, it marked the end of an era.

Now another big change is coming, with middle school principal Michael Koester announcing his retirement at the end of the current school year.

Since coming to Niverville in 1984, Koester has taught everything from physical education to history to math, and he spent several years as vice principal before being promoted to principal.

Koester grew up in Thompson, then attended the University of Manitoba. After graduating in 1980, he accepted a job in Leaf Rapids, teaching physical education, although his training was in math, science, and German.

When that town's population began to shrink rapidly, Koester and his wife decided to relocate.

"Back then, all the jobs were posted in the paper," says Koester, recalling the day in 1984 when he read an ad in the *Winnipeg Free Press* for a job in Niverville. When the school board invited him for an in-person interview, he went for it. "I had to fly from Leaf Rapids to Thompson, flew from Thompson to Winnipeg, then rented a car and drove to Steinbach," he says.

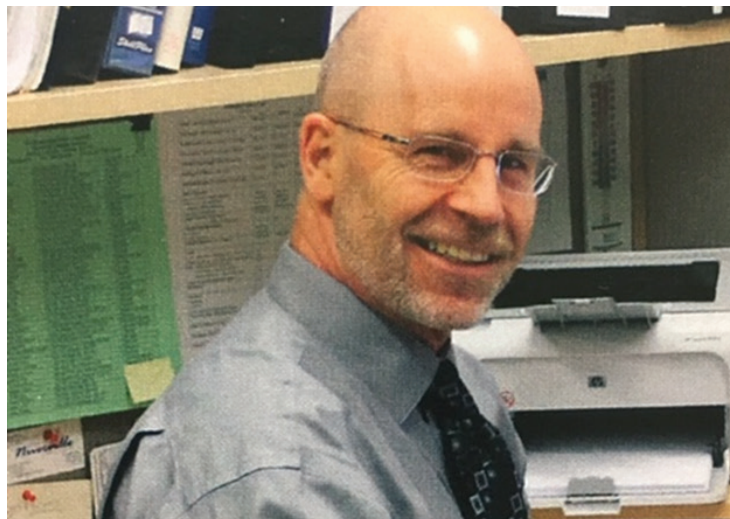
That fall, he began what would become a 36-year career at Niverville Collegiate.

His first year was a challenging one, because he had eight different classes to prepare for. He recalls teaching German, history, and science, among other things. Eventually he focused on teaching math and science.

THE CHANGING TIMES

Looking back, Koester notes many changes in schools—not just in Niverville, but across the province in general.

"It was a male-dominated staff, whereas today we have more women teaching," he says of that bygone era. "We wore very formal



Michael Koester.

HANOVER SCHOOL DIVISION

attire, suits and ties."

But the biggest change he's seen is the technology used in the classroom.

He explains that he started out using an overhead projector, transparencies, and a Gestetner—a duplicating machine that preceded photocopiers.

Today, NMS has a set of Chromebooks in every classroom and teachers are trained in using Google products. Koester is grateful that the school division has invested so much in technological infrastructure and training, especially in light of current distance learning.

"Not every school has benefited from what our students have," he notes.

While he admits a love of paper-and-pencil work, Koester has long supported the use of technology in school. In his first years, he and then-principal Vern Hildebrand started collecting TRS-80s, early desktop computers sold by RadioShack.

"We would look in the paper for anyone selling them, and we bought them up to develop a computer lab," he says, recalling that when a machine needed servicing, he would haul it off Friday evening to take to be repaired, then pick it up Sunday afternoon to bring it back to the school.

TRANSITION TO ADMINISTRATION

In the fall of 2000, Koester felt ready for a change and became vice principal part-time, while still teaching a few classes. Then, when the principal at the time went on medical leave, Koester stepped in as acting principal of the school.

"For a short period of time I was teaching, I was vice principal, and I was acting principal. That was a little crazy. I was fortunate that I had a strong staff," he says. "A lot of teachers had been here for many years and were very supportive."

Eventually the division hired a teacher to take over his classes, but there were still challenges.

"Overnight I had to learn things, and take courses on the weekend to get my principal's certificate while I also had a young family. I didn't know if or when my predecessor would be back. I was trying to make decisions the way he would have."

In 2003, he became the permanent principal and started to put his own stamp on the school. He still recalls one of the first decisions he made without consultation.

"I was approached by Coca-Cola about switching our vending machine from Pepsi. They were offering some great benefits, so I set up a presentation with both the Pepsi and Coke representatives, and the Pepsi guy didn't show up," he recalls. "So I went with Coke,

and that was the first thing I did without consulting my predecessor. You've got to start somewhere!"

SPLITTING SCHOOLS

More recently, Koester oversaw NCI's transition from a Grades Seven to Twelve school to a middle school. It was a years-long process that involved visiting other middle schools to research best practices.

After putting so much work into the transition, he enjoyed the opportunity to stay on as principal of the middle school for its first year so that he could see the results of that work and experience the new school's culture.

Although he enjoyed teaching, especially math, Koester grew to love his role as principal.

"I get to go into every classroom," he remarks. "I get to see the good stuff in every room, the caring interactions between teachers and students, and I get a feel for the culture of the entire building."

One of the things that has kept him in Niverville all these years is the support and respect he sees in the school and the community. He always felt that families respected him even when they didn't agree with him. He's also enjoyed seeing many former students remain in the community, watching them grow up, and seeing their own children walk through the school doors.

Post-retirement, Koester and his wife hope to travel. They want to spend more time with family, including their two children—both of them educators—and their baby granddaughter. They also hope to visit Europe and spend some extended time in Germany exploring family roots. Current restrictions have put these travel plans on hold, of course, so in the meantime Koester plans to focus on volunteer work.

As for the future of Niverville Middle School, Koester says, "I have no doubt that there will be a lot of good news coming from this building. It has been an honour and a privilege to be here."

IN BRIEF

HSD Hires Assistant Superintendent

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

The Hanover School Division has settled on a new assistant superintendent. The board of trustees announced that Leanne Peter, Ed.D., will begin her term as of September 1.

Peters brings with her 21 years of experience, including a two-year stint as assistant superintendent of the Sunrise School Division, which includes communities northeast of Winnipeg such as Oakbank, Beausejour, and Lac du Bonnet. Before that, she served an additional seven years as an assistant superintendent in the Lakeshore School Division, which oversees 12 schools in the Interlake, and seven earlier years as a principal and teacher in the Rolling River School Division in western Manitoba.

In 2011, she completed a Master of Education in Educational Administration, and in 2019 she earned a Doctor of Education in K-12 Leadership. Peters is currently the chairperson of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents Professional Learning Committee.

This news follows the announcement in early May that the HSD board also hired a new superintendent. Both positions are deemed interim—at least, for the time being.

"That's what Manitoba Education and the province said we could do," said Rick Peters, the school division's board chair, last month. "We couldn't hire anything permanent in any of the management positions, nor could any other school division," he adds. "So we're not unique in that. That's why it's interim."



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IN BRIEF



BEN FUNK

Resource Centre Construction Update

By Evan Braun

editor@nivervillecitizen.com

As the weather warms up, construction on the Community Resource and Recreation Centre (CRRC) in Niverville has been continuing apace—although according to one town official, the build has run into a few delays.

“Construction is seeing a slight delay, so opening probably will be in the March to April [2021] window,” says Eric King, CAO for the Town of Niverville. “COVID-19 and wind are the two major factors at play there.”

Those who have driven by the site in recent days will have noticed that the roof has been completed, and workers are in the process now of erecting the exterior walls. Electricians and plumbers are also at work inside. Other completed features so far include the elevator shaft and the geothermal field.

“Inside the building, some concrete and servicing of the building is ongoing to lay out the sewer and such,” King adds.

The CRRC itself isn’t the only construction project underway right now at the site. The old arena is also receiving a few much-needed upgrades.

“Council is moving forward with a new west arena entrance,” King says. This entrance will allow people to access the arena from the new paved parking lot without walking through the mud. “New plumbing for the ice surface is ongoing, and shortly new tin work will begin on the outside. Following that we are working with the high school on an art installation on the west side of the building.”

Dog Daycare to Move onto Main Street

By Sara Beth Dacombe

Sara Matwychuk moved to Niverville six months ago and is gearing up to open a new dog daycare, Talk to the Tail, that will occupy the former town office at 86 Main Street.

Still in the works of being incorporated, Matwychuk says owning her own business is a dream of hers that combines her experience in management with her love of dogs.

“I have a lot of business knowledge,” says Matwychuk, who worked for Enterprise Rent-A-Car for five years and was promoted to management. “When you manage, you have to know a lot about doing everything from the ground up, payroll, customer service, human resources, and more. Then I worked in three different daycares, all very different, and for two years in a reputable and large daycare in Winnipeg that took in up to 80–90 dogs a day. They featured a dog behaviourist, specializing in dog mannerisms, dog play, dog science. I tried to work very closely alongside him as I was working there, learning as much as I could about dog behaviour.”

Dogs and their care became Matwychuk’s passion after taking on pet ownership for personal reasons. After rescuing a dog in 2017, she began to realize that her particular pet required a lot more intentional understanding and work than anticipated. Duke, a three-and-a-half-year-old Shepherd-cross, had both health and behaviour issues.

“Duke came in quite sick and his fosters had done a great job of healing him up to great health,” says Matwychuk. “But he was wild. He was a lot more dog than I expected when I set out to adopt a dog. He became a handful and I needed to learn a lot about dog behaviour to keep him happy and healthy and it became my passion. I woke up each day thinking about what I could do to help Duke and help him integrate with his friends. I took him to the daycare I was



Sara Matwychuk is getting ready to open a new dog daycare.

SARA MATWYCHUK

working at and it really helped. I am passionate about how to work with dogs, I am open-minded, and learn about the unique ways to keep dogs as happy and healthy as I possibly can, with the safety of everyone around them in mind.”

In their home, Matwychuk and her partner also have an 11-year-old Boston terrier named Dante who is old and quiet. They call him the “cat” of the family.

It’s been a crazy few months, according to Matwychuk, as she is working with the building’s owner to renovate the space to accommodate up to 50 dogs. Significant renovations are required to bring the former office building up to industry standards for animals.

The new business has also faced some scrutiny over noise, smell, and parking concerns. After a April 24 conditional use hearing where Matwychuk and her prospective business neighbours were present, Niverville town council pointed out that animal-based businesses are restricted in Niverville’s core downtown area.

After a diligent hearing, the business was approved, with council setting conditions that prohibit dogs from being outside between 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m., a minimum fence height of seven feet, and the possibility of covering the outside exercise area with a roof. Parking will be intended on

Main Street only, but Matwychuk says she has verbal agreement from adjacent businesses who will allow some additional parking in their side lots if needed.

“We have begun renovations to accommodate a custom dog daycare to the specifications I believe will be the most efficient and great for the dogs,” says Matwychuk. “We are taking into consideration employee safety as well as dog safety. Cleanliness is top of mind and also separating groups into dog ages and behaviours, temperaments, and needs.”

There will be a large outdoor space, fully fenced in, with lots of room for dogs to move around.

“We are super excited about this outdoor area,” she adds. “Dogs are like kids, so if they have a change of scenery, that’s how they’re happy. Having that change of space and hang out with their friends, that’s how they keep healthy. It’s not good for them to sit inside all day.”

Matwychuk acknowledges that there are existing pet services in town, such as a pet store and grooming, but that her business has room to grow in other ways.

“Should things evolve, we do have the space to expand. I am looking into what other services we could provide, such as overnight stays. Grooming and dog-walking would be in the future.”

Matwychuk plans to finish renovations in August and open in September 2020. Before then, Talk to the Tail will be looking for employees and volunteers.

“There will be some paid and some volunteer opportunities,” she says. “We will be looking for a general manager, kind of like a team lead, and a receptionist who will be responsible for the front end, greeting clients, and bringing in and out the dogs. We could also use a dog daycare attendant. Volunteer opportunities will exist for doing the fun stuff, like feeding and walking.”

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Volunteers Plant Dozens of Trees in Niverville

By Sara Beth Dacombe

On Saturday, March 23, volunteers took to the streets to plant 40 new trees along Carnoustie and Troon Coves in Niverville.

The local chapter of Communities in Bloom plans annual Arbor Day celebrations, and this year TC Energy donated trees and the Town of Niverville donated water, mulch, and soil to plant additional trees throughout the town. The Niverville Fire Department was also on hand to provide volunteer support and water from the town's fire tanker.

The tree-planting event was made possible after Niverville resident Shaun Macsymic wondered about how to bring more trees to the community. He brought the idea to his employer, TC Energy in Île-des-Chênes. The company has a corporate community investment campaign that donates funds to local projects just like this one. When the idea was approved, Macsymic brought the idea to council back in November.

"I had a vision one day of what it would look like driving through Niverville if there were more trees present along the boulevards in the residential areas," says Macsymic. "Giving back to communities where we live, work, and operate is important to all of us. With the fast rate of development in town, this will be nice to see in years to come. And if this is adopted year after year it will make for a vibrant community."

After the idea was

planted, Communities in Bloom stepped up, ready and willing to work with TC Energy to help the idea take root.

Communities in Bloom is comprised of passionate volunteers who believe trees help with energy conservation, improved air and water quality, increased property value, and economic vitality.

"We are currently a mix of retirees and business people, seven committee members in total," says Shirley Hoult of the Communities in Bloom committee. "All have varied interests and skillsets and we work together to find projects and funding that improve the appearance of the community."

The committee worked together to decide on which types of trees should be planted in which locations. For the Arbor Day planting, they looked for two streets in need of additional trees that would have good residential interest and support for the care of the trees. Four varieties of hardy trees were selected and residents were contacted to confirm their interest, availability to help on planting day, and commitment to provide ongoing care.

On planting day, not all residents were able to be present, but volunteers said they saw about 80 percent of residents on Troon help out and about 95 percent on Carnoustie.

"Overall, the residents appeared to welcome the opportunity to participate in the project," says Hoult. "Planting was a well-coordinated effort with many of



Volunteers plant trees on residential streets.

NATHAN DUECK

the residents, TC Energy, the town, and community volunteers working together to get the 40 trees planted in three hours. The coffee and doughnuts provided by TC Energy helped to fuel the efforts."

The original Arbor Day celebration had included a town-wide barbecue, which had to be cancelled due to COVID-19. Despite this, the committee decided to proceed with the tree-planting.

"We paid attention to social distancing as much as we could and had hand sanitizer and gloves available," says Macsymic. "People were happy to get out... [they] are bored and anxious to do something good. Everything went really well and really smoothly."

Macsymic volunteered his time on Saturday along with three other TC Energy employees. But he gives credit to the hard work

put in by Hoult and other volunteers.

"A lot of the legwork was done by Shirley, who brought the trees and came up with the plan," he says. "To me, the event went extremely well and was very organized. I was very pleased with the

determination of everyone to get this done."

FUTURE TREE-PLANTING EVENTS?

Nathan Dueck, town councillor and tree-planting volunteer, was on hand to help on planting day. He says he'd like to see this type of event happen again.

"If there was another corporate entity interested in street beautification, then I think the town would be interested in being involved in discussions at that time," says Dueck. "We just really appreciate TC Energy for their corporate donation and Communities in Bloom for their organizational skills behind all this. Personally, I'd like to get our streets looking really nice—nicer even than a community like Morden or Blumenort. When you see a community where trees have been growing for 75 years, you see how much life is actually going on in the whole community."

They go hand in hand and are somehow representative of a healthy community as a whole. Being involved in tree-planting and street beautification and ending up with a thriving canopy of trees makes the whole community so much more enjoyable for you, your kids, and for your grandkids."

Hoult points out that further tree-planting initiatives are possible but will be dependent on the availability of sponsorship.

"We would love to see this initiative taken throughout the community," says Hoult. "A diverse, robust natural world is an investment in the health, vitality, and well-being of individuals and communities, now and into the future."

Communities in Bloom would welcome contact from new members or anyone who would like to take an interest in helping bring more initiatives like this to Niverville.



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An Immigration Case Study

By Sara Beth Dacombe

Tiffany grew up in Landmark and met Juan in the Dominican Republic while teaching English as a second language in the town of Montecristi. While Tiffany didn't know Spanish and Juan didn't know English, the two found a connection—and with lots of patience, practice, and the help of Google Translate, they learned how to communicate.

After they married, the two lived in the Dominican for a few years until they decided to start a family and weighed where to live. The newly emergent Zika virus, which causes serious birth defects including microcephaly, was threatening the region at the time and, with Tiffany seven months pregnant, they decided to move to Canada.

The Minayas have been married for five years and now live in southeast Manitoba with their two children. Their story demonstrates the challenges faced by immigrant families who move here and the support they need.

Before Canada, Juan lived with his family in the Dominican Republic, a small Spanish-speaking country on the island of Hispaniola, which is also home to Haiti. It is a very hot and humid, and the culture is very community-oriented.

"People in the Dominican Republic are amazing, kind, and full of life," says Juan. "Our streets are always filled with music, laughter, and very loud conversations. Family connection is very important and it is very common to find multiple generations living together in the same house."



Tiffany and Juan Minaya, with their two children.

TIFFANY MINAYA

The process of moving to Canada was difficult. The first time Juan had applied for a visitor's visa, shortly after the couple married, he was coming to meet Tiffany's family. Unfortunately, he was denied.

Two years later, when Tiffany became pregnant, they reapplied. This time, the visa was approved.

"We had a lot of support from Tiffany's family, who met with settlement workers at various places such as Eastman Immigrant Services (EIS) and Immigrant Centre Manitoba," he says. "They advised us to include a letter with the second application stating my intentions of applying for permanent residency, as that may improve my chances. Tiffany's parents also met with [MP] Ted Falk on our behalf, and he provided a letter of support."

After arriving in Canada with a visitor's visa, Juan did apply for permanent residency. It can take months to collect all the required

information and proof of an existing relationship, which for the Minayas included pages and pages of date-stamped pictures, emails, as well as Facebook posts and conversations.

For Juan, the biggest challenge was making sure every detail was in order while enduring a fear of rejection due to missing information or making a small mistake.

The Minayas took their application back to EIS, where they looked it over and pointed out anything that needed to be fixed. It took eight months for Immigration Canada to process the permanent residency application, during which time Juan applied for a temporary work visa.

"Waiting those eight months was also very hard," he says. "We were hoping and praying that all of the time, work, and money invested wouldn't be for nothing. Thankfully, I was approved and we were able to start establishing our family here."

SUPPORT FOR LOCAL IMMIGRATION

Tiffany and Juan had the benefit of a strong family network to support them through their move, but they also utilized local services to ease the burden caused by language barriers, culture shock, and red tape.

Steinbach-based EIS offers one-on-one and group information sessions to assist newcomers in settling in the Eastman region. They help to make the transition a positive experience, both for the newcomer and the receiving community. They assist with renewing or applying for visas or citizenship, Manitoba Health documentation, provincial child benefits, and pension.

Newcomers with children can connect with Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS), who help the kids adjust to their new school community and help families navigate the school system. Coordinators also connect these newcomers

with employment and volunteer initiatives, as well as organize special events that allow newcomers to connect with one another.

According to Marina Klassen of EIS, the majority of recent immigrants here come from the Philippines, Germany, India, Paraguay, and Bolivia. Upon arrival, they settle in Steinbach and its surrounding communities, including Niverville.

Klassen says some newcomers have existing Canadian families, like Tiffany and Juan, but others arrive without any support system. This can make an already challenging transition even more difficult.

"The struggles of newcomers are very diverse," says Klassen. "And how they approach challenges may also be different from culture to culture. They may struggle with loneliness, especially when they have no family in the area. That leads to the feeling of being isolated from community. Lack of English, not being able to communicate, is a huge struggle for some. Unemployment is another factor newcomers face."

Well-established residents, as well as previously settled immigrants, can help newer immigrants in a variety of ways. Reaching out with time and relationship can help newcomers feel welcome. And EIS offers programs in which volunteers can make a difference helping newcomers practice speaking English.

"A 'language buddy' is an informal way to give the newcomer an opportunity to communicate in English," says Klassen. "And if you know of a newcomer in your area, [you can] refer them to EIS to meet one of our settlement workers."

Another service is the Eastman Region Immigration Partnerships (ERIP). ERIP builds bridges between organizations and governments to develop inclusive communities.

Guillaume Schirru is the ERIP project coordinator. He spends his time reaching out to community leaders to establish Local Immigration Partnerships (LIPs). There are currently 77 LIPs operating in Canada. In Manitoba, there are four—in Winnipeg, Pembina Valley, Portage la Prairie, and Steinbach.

"The overall objective of an LIP is to build welcoming and inclusive communities for newcomers, where the host community plays an active role in adapting to ensure their settlement and integration," says Schirru.

Newcomers to our area produce a host of positive effects, Schirru points out. They strengthen rural communities, increase the number of taxpayers, and enhance the workforce to fill vacant positions.

Have a Safe and Happy Father's Day

Ron R. Schuler
MLA for Springfield-Ritchot
 Ron@RonSchuler.com



When Schirru develops a partnership, it means he's working to ensure immigrants receive equal employment and education opportunities, affordable and decent homes, opportunities for social engagement, and municipal features and services that are sensitive to them. Overall, the goal is to establish them in communities with a positive attitude toward immigrants and cultural diversification.

Schirru recently made a presentation to the RM of Ritchot's municipal council and was well received. Council went on to pass a motion to support a Welcoming Communities Initiative.

A similar presentation was made to the Town of Niverville, and Mayor Myron Dyck was invited to emcee a banquet in Niverville hosted by ERIP for immigrants in our area.

Unfortunately, that banquet had to be cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. But Dyck says that he and the rest of Niverville's council welcome future engagement with ERIP.

"We have more and more immigrants moving to our country, our province, and our community every year," says Mayor Dyck. "Eastman Immigration helps support those who move to our community and council would welcome the opportunity to sit down with them to hear what their vision for a partnership would look like."

IMMIGRATION CHALLENGES PERSIST

Though the presence of services like EIS and ERIP deliver tangible help, persistent challenges seem unavoidable, such as language.

Juan primarily spoke Spanish until coming to Canada and attending English classes through Red River College's Language Training Centre in Steinbach. These classes are free for permanent residents and refugees.

Juan says he has always felt welcome in Canada, although he admits he feels that the biggest challenge facing immigrants is the language barrier.

"I can't begin to express how incredibly welcoming and accepting everyone has been," he says. "The people I have met have always expressed interest in talking with me, knowing how I am doing, inviting me to events and being of service in so many ways. [But even though]

many people did their best to include me in their conversations, it is hard to feel included when you don't understand much of what is being said. Beyond that, it is very hard to find a job when you are learning English."

Even with a basic understanding of English, most work environments require a person to quickly learn a whole new set of vocabulary specific to that job. Similarly, the mere act of buying groceries or making an appointment at a bank is difficult and filled with words that require a contextual awareness of finance in Canada.

"While my experience with the people here in Canada has been nothing but good, many of them don't realize that they need to slow down when speaking to a newcomer," Juan adds. "The fast pace of speaking can be extremely intimidating."

Another challenge of immigration, perhaps specific to people coming from countries nearer the equator, is the climate. The long months of extreme cold mean that people keep to themselves.

Even seasoned Canadians can identify with the feeling of being trapped and lonely, as people in our part of the world don't go out as much in winter.

Rural communities where the people and services are already intimate and well established can add a chill even more poignant than the intimidating cold.

"The towns [here] are small and there is less of a sense of community compared to where I am from," Juan says. "Being a recent immigrant is never easy, no matter where you live. Manitobans are a very welcoming and helpful people, but I would encourage Manitobans to continue to be so and to continuously reach out to their immigrant neighbours. Invite them for coffee, to parties or other activities. Do what you can to connect them to the community around them."

IMMIGRANTS FEEL PAN-DEMIC ANXIETY DIFFERENTLY

Despite cultural and geographical differences, human-kind the world over is in the midst of sharing an undesired yet unifying experience. Almost no one can claim immunity to the anxiety brought on by COVID-19.

Immigrants, however, feel a unique anxiety. Like everyone, they have an awareness

of their immediate circumstances and public health orders, but they also feel connected to what's going on in the country they left behind.

The Minayas have been in close contact with family and friends in the Dominican Republic. Tiffany explains that fear has impacted society in the Dominican Republic in a different way, since the national infrastructure isn't as developed as Canada's.

"It didn't take long for panic and fear of the coronavirus to quickly turn into hoarding, just as it did here in Canada," she says. "Such actions, however, are far more dangerous and impactful in a country such as the DR. The shelves in supermarkets and pharmacies quickly emptied, but with little stock to replenish them. The majority of the population rarely keeps more than a day's, or a few days' worth of food stocked in their houses. Even medicine and clean drinking water are often bought on a daily or weekly basis."

The Dominican Republic struggles with food supply shortages and lack of clean water, so closing businesses and shops isn't a reasonable option when most survive on their day-to-day income with no help from the government. Public hospitals are poorly funded and poorly equipped. While private clinics are in better shape, few people can afford their costly care.

"I have been in contact more with my family and friends in the Dominican Republic since the first case of COVID-19 was detected there, mostly through video chat," says Juan. "One of the things that worries me the most is that someone from my family could get sick and that I won't be able to be present to help and support them. Because of the distance, it is hard to find practical ways to help, but we do try to support them both financially and emotionally as best as we can."

And the social distancing that comes with COVID-19 doesn't help much with the inevitable feelings of isolation.

"We are thankful to be in a place where we have access to good healthcare and where the government is being proactive to protect the people who live here," says Juan. "We know that the social distancing is for a good purpose, and knowing that we are helping make a positive difference makes it easier to do."

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Niverville Health Foundation Diversifies to Create Endowment Fund

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

For decades, the Niverville Health Foundation has been an important part of Niverville's fabric and the reason so many medical and essential services in the community have come into existence and stayed at the top of their game.

Thanks to annual fundraising efforts, the foundation has been instrumental in raising much of the necessary funds to build and maintain the aging-in-place facilities at the Heritage Centre. As well, the Niverville Fire and EMS teams have for years enjoyed financial assistance provided by the foundation, which has helped them purchase new state-of-the-art equipment.

But this year, the foundation is undergoing some important changes that will ensure its viability long into the future as well as open new opportunities for community groups to benefit from the donations collected.

Beginning in 2020, the foundation will become known as the Community Endowed Foundation Fund (CEFF) and will be operated by a group of volunteer board members representing a variety of community interest groups.

"We have been discussing this coalition for probably two years," says Libby Hanna, a Niverville resident and community champion who first proposed the idea of developing an endowment fund. "This all came together in time to make the announcement at the Health Foundation banquet on March 6."

Hanna will sit on the initial

advisory committee along with Niverville Health Foundation volunteers Ken Rempel and George Sawatzky, as well as three other community members who have yet to be selected. The committee's goal will be to review the current Health Foundation charter and make recommendations for oversight and administration of the new foundation.

Generally speaking, foundations operate in one of two ways.

Under one mode of operation, the mode employed by the Niverville Health Foundation until now, administrators collect donations and pay the funds out to designated organizations as requests come in until the collected funds are used up. With this model, the foundation's ability to provide financial assistance is always dependent on incoming donations.

Endowment funds operate differently. Here, funds collected make up investment capital and become an asset of the foundation. Once invested, the capital generates interest income. Grant monies are paid out solely from the income generated by the investment, allowing the capital investment to continue to grow over time. Donations to the fund then act as a tool, with these donations from individuals continuing to pay out to the community indefinitely.

"That capital money never disappears," Hanna says. "The money you give grows and the foundation disperses the growth. That foundation then is ever-growing, and the more it grows, the more money the foundation will have coming back to it every year."

Hanna imagines that both models may still be used by the CEFF as it is established. To build capital for the endowment side of things, the committee will encourage residents to consider bequeathing a portion of their estate or life insurance policy to the fund. Businesses may choose to make end-of-year donations to defer income tax while giving back to the community.

"The endowment fund is starting from the beginning," Hanna says. "We have a great deal of interest in creating this fund and I believe there will be growth from those looking at tax and estate planning. There are advantages to donating that many people aren't aware of. It will be the job of the new endowment board to hold events and make the public aware of advantages that are available."

Hanna anticipates a minimum of a year before the community at large will begin to reap the benefits of the interest garnered by the endowment fund. At that point, the board will advertise to the various community groups who may wish to apply for funding.

"It [can be] for the organizations, small or large, in the community that don't already have charitable status," says Hanna. These might include the Scouts, Brownies, sports teams, or school organizations.

Hanna adds that making this financial aid accessible to all local non-profits should help alleviate the need for these organizations to solicit homeowners and businesses for operating funds on an annual basis.



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Chamber News



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Updates from the Ritchot Chamber

Breaking New Ground

On May 14th, 2020 the Ritchot Regional Chamber of Commerce board of directors was proud to announce their plans to transition to the Manitoba Southeast Commerce Group Inc. A move that has been a year in the making, the Ritchot Chamber has decided to take the leap to expand our boundaries and create new opportunities for business owners and entrepreneurs in southeastern Manitoba.

During our AGM on May 28th, 2020, the Ritchot Chamber of Commerce dissolved to make room for the much anticipated expansion and formation of the Southeast Commerce Group. The NEW chamber, Southeast Commerce Group, will remain a part of the RM of Ritchot but will also cover the RM of Taché as well as the RM of Ste. Anne and Town of Ste. Anne, excluding the town of Landmark.

"The first 6 years of the Ritchot Regional Chamber of Commerce was a learning experience on implementing a business support organization in a smaller rural market. Our current board agreed that to provide more value to local area businesses, a larger regional approach to representation would be needed along with a dedicated staff person to run the day to day affairs of the Chamber. The result was the creation of the Manitoba SouthEast Commerce Group, which now includes the RM of Ritchot, RM of Tache, RM of Ste. Anne and Town of Ste. Anne as the greater represented region for local area businesses." – Marc Palud, Past President of the Ritchot Regional Chamber of Commerce.

What does this mean for your current Ritchot Chamber membership?

All paid and up-to-date memberships with the Ritchot Chamber of Commerce will automatically be transferred over to the Southeast Commerce Group. You will maintain all your membership benefits and will receive an email containing information about the Southeast Commerce Group and any new membership benefits that you have gained due to the transfer. Looking to become a member of the Southeast Commerce Group?

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IN BRIEF



Province Increases Size of Annual Community Grants

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

On May 29, the province announced a series of grants to local community organizations and development projects. These grants are funded through the Building Sustainable Communities program.

MLA Ron Schuler says that more than \$519,000 has been set aside for projects in the Springfield-Ritchot constituency, which includes Niverville. The level of grant support was increased this year, as part of the government's efforts to kickstart the economy.

"While we are protecting ourselves, protecting others, and protecting our community during this COVID-19 pandemic, we will not stop working together to make our communities better and stronger," says Schuler.

Three Île-des-Chênes projects received support. Wildlife Haven Rehabilitation Centre Inc. has been given \$75,000 for its outdoor

wildlife enclosures, the TC Energy Centre will get \$19,078 for the purchase of new kitchen equipment, and \$8,485 will go towards equipment upgrades at Club Île-des-Chênes.

Elsewhere in the RM of Ritchot, the Ste. Agathe Community Development Corp will receive \$10,556 for dugout upgrades, and \$4,875 will be spent on heating system upgrades at the Ste. Agathe Arena.

In Niverville, the town has received \$75,000 for pipe replacements at the Centennial Arena, and an additional \$35,000 will be spent on improvements at Hespeler Park. Also, Niverville Heritage Holdings Inc. has been granted \$40,162 to build a new pavilion.

Through the Building Sustainable Communities program, more than \$10 million in grants has been set aside for 344 individual projects province-wide. The maximum allowable grant amount per project is \$75,000.

Churches Turn Their Focus to Local Outreach

By Brenda Sawatzky

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Like other public gatherings, churches have temporarily closed their doors during the pandemic, but a couple of local spiritual leaders have been hard at work on a new initiative to help the less fortunate.

At Easter of this year, Roger Armbruster of Niverville was moved by the words of a Hamilton, Ontario emergency room physician, Dr. Spencer MacDonald: "Instead of holding a church service, spend your time strategizing about who needs help in your community and developing a plan to get it to them."

This got the ball rolling on Love Niverville, a project spearheaded by the Niverville Ministerial Association, along with Gordon Kroeker of Niverville Youth for Christ.

"With the advent of 'COVID churches,' we're working hard on how to provide meaningful engagement and support for the community without the ability to host events or serve in large groups," says Kroeker. "Roger Armbruster managed to tie all the threads together with a suggestion to partner with Niverville Helping Hands [to address people's] physical needs and create a network to meet spiritual and emotional needs, each piece doing its part."

Kroeker describes Love Niverville as an initiative designed to broaden and deepen the work already being done by Helping Hands. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of local churches, Helping Hands can expand its existing foodbank and offer more far-reaching support to people in our communities.

"No matter your structure of belief, it is a truism to say that man does not live on bread alone," Kroeker says.

To receive aid, residents



The pantry shelves are full at Niverville Helping Hands.

HELPING HANDS

of Niverville, New Bothwell, Otterburne, and Ste. Agathe can reach out to any one of the eight Niverville churches or the Bothwell Christian Fellowship. Care packages can also be obtained directly through Helping Hands.

Applicants will be required to fill out a simple requisition form, providing their name, contact information, the size of their household, and details for package pickup. Hamper distribution days are currently set for the second and fourth Thursday of every month, and applicants are asked to make their request by the Monday prior to delivery.

Kroeker says that people should feel no shame in reaching out for help. "Needing help doesn't make you a worse person than anyone else, it makes you human. Volunteers sign a confidentiality agreement and every effort is made to show appropriate respect and care for people."

He adds that there's nothing wrong with reaching out to Love Niverville on someone else's behalf, although he strongly encourages having a

conversation with the recipient in advance in order to confirm whether such support would be welcome.

In order to keep the shelves stocked, organizers are relying on generous donations of food and cash. Cash donations over \$20 are eligible for a tax-deductible receipt through the Maranatha Church. Those who want to donate food can check the Helping Hands website for an ongoing list of current needs.

In its early stages, Kroeker says Love Niverville has garnered tangible support from local businesses, including Niverville Bigway, the Niverville Credit Union, and at least one local real estate agent.

"The Niverville Bigway has been a huge supporter of Helping Hands for many years," Kroeker says. "John and his staff provide a level of service and assistance that most food banks can only dream of. For the Love Niverville initiative, along with donations of food and money, John is helping us navigate a disrupted supply chain and locate essential foods for

our hampers. Bigway is also instrumental in providing access to fresh milk and eggs for our hampers, which due to their perishable nature are usually left out."

MORE THAN FOOD

For those in need of emotional support, each church has a person on staff ready to pray, lend an ear, or refer them to a qualified professional.

"Everyone has different needs," Kroeker says. "Some people may just need someone to talk to, some a person to help them organize their thoughts, while others may need sound medical advice. Pastors have years of experience and have received training in counselling and conflict resolution."

While Niverville and its neighbouring communities may not be in the same situation as larger cities, Kroeker says people here are still faced with most of the same pandemic burdens: navigating work and family responsibility, isolation, layoffs and future uncertainties, as well as a constant barrage of conflicting information.

"Meaningful community is an essential component of a worthwhile life," he says. "In a crisis, this is doubly true. Our society, for all of its fantastic tools of connectivity, often fails to meaningfully connect the hearts of people. Many of us have a tendency to suffer in silence, trapped in shame, without supportive relationships, or trying to maintain a false sense of self-sufficiency. For those that are at their wits' end, whatever the reason, the value of a listening ear or meaningful support can change the trajectory of their life."

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Some Things are Best Left to the Professionals!

Local Growers Thrive Despite Pandemic

By Sara Beth Dacombe

The season is off to a good start for CSA farmers, and they're largely unaffected by the COVID-19 situation in Manitoba. With many Manitobans spending more time in their own homes and yards, interest in gardening and buying local is higher than ever.

Community Shared Agriculture (CSA) farms pre-sell their vegetables through allotments called shares and two local operations have already been sold out for weeks.

"Demand has been higher this year than it ever has been and we're already sold out," says Nick Rempel from Natural Collective CSA, a five-acre farm on Crown Valley Road. "I think people are nervous about their food sources, nervous about supply chain breakdowns. Or maybe they have an extra dose of civic pride and responsibility this year, so they want to support local."

Last year Natural Collective sold 80 shares to individuals or families, while also supplying a considerable amount of produce to restaurants and a few farmers markets.

This year, they expected a downturn in demand due to the extra constraints currently in place for restaurants. So they decided to plant the same amount of food but double the amount of shares they usually make available to the public.

Rempel reports that even after they made an additional 70 shares available, they sold out quickly.

Now they just need to grow the food.

"We had a little bit of a false start in April," says Rempel. "We had started some onions and then it got freezing cold for two weeks and germination rates dropped off completely for a little while, but now it's good. It's warm and things are coming up really nicely, so I think it's going to be a good season."



The team at Natural Collective CSA.

SARA BETH DACOMBE

Chantal Wieler from Niverville Homegrown runs a CSA farm five miles south of Niverville. She also had no trouble selling all the shares allocated for the season and plans to set up her stand at Niverville Bigway grocery store like she does every year.

"Everything's right on schedule, despite a very wet spring and seeding time. I was concerned we wouldn't be on schedule," says Wieler. "The shares sold very well and quickly, and slightly above last year. So I'm sold out of shares, but I always have produce for my stand. I'm anticipating a great yield this year."

Wieler doesn't want to speculate on why more people may be interested in CSA shares this year, but she says that a lot more people are interested in local farming and gardening overall.

"People are home and, let's face it, they don't know when they're going back to work. Maybe they're buying more local, but they also have time to plant their own gardens this year,"

says Wieler. "Greenhouses are sold out of more things than ever. I have had trouble finding plants that I can usually wait and get a discount on this time of year. But I think it's great. The more people that learn how to grow their own food, the better. It doesn't hurt my feelings by any stretch."

Natural Collective is staffed by the four farmers who own it as well as three seasonal workers this year. Rempel isn't concerned about COVID-19 affecting how they all work together at the acreage, but he says they will take extra precautions and act immediately if someone on their team becomes ill.

"We're pretty distant while we work, but if someone at our place gets COVID, then we will assume we would all have been exposed and we should shut down for two weeks," says Rempel. "Customers do have contact with us when they pick up at the farm or the farmers markets so we'll be pre-packaging more produce than we usually do and

sanitizing things at regular intervals, and between every customer we'll be washing hands and sanitizing things they've touched if need be, just a lot of the things that regular grocery stores now are doing. It will add some time to our process for sure. We'll work out the exact protocols closer to selling time."

Wieler says her operation is smaller and even though she has a small amount of seasonal staff, they should be able to maintain social distancing pretty well. They will also conduct business a little differently than usual later this year when they open up their vegetable stand.

"What I have is essentially a two-acre garden and every row is a minimum of four feet apart," explains Wieler. "We're outdoors and we are definitely working more than six feet apart, if not 60 feet apart. When it's time, I've decided I might put some fencing around my stand so you can enter at one side and exit at another. I'll provide hand sanitizer at the beginning and end of the line. And

I'll pre-portion a lot of the products people will normally just grab, like peas or beans, just so there's less contact. Not everyone will like that. Some people like to pick their own produce."

Both farms now have all of their seeds planted and sprouted, with a few exceptions. Natural Collective explains that they usually wait a bit longer to plant brassica vegetables—such as kale, cauliflower, broccoli, and cabbage.

"We hold off on all the brassica vegetables because we find the flea beetles eat them when we plant them too early," says Rempel. "Once the canola is up everywhere else, the flea beetles migrate toward the canola fields, so then we don't have any pest issues... We do use a couple of bio-insecticides, but other than that we just use insect netting and other cultural practices."

Rempel also recommends using good compost while holding off on various fertilizers. "We do use lots of compost. We got a mushroom compost this year, it was really nice stuff, really hot," he says. "We use pelleted turkey manure, especially for heavy feeders like corn and tomatoes, but that's about it for fertilizers. We try to incorporate as much organic material back into the soil as we can."

For Niverville Homegrown, Wieler is hopeful for the right amount of moisture this year. She doesn't have an irrigation system and relies on garden hoses to reach her vegetables if they really need it, which is a lot of work. She says the soil is moist right now and the weather is notoriously a contentious issue for farmers.

"It's always too much rain or not enough rain, no matter what, but I'm not like that," laughs Wieler. "Heat and moisture is good, but if God takes his turn with watering this year, I'll be a very happy farmer."



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Swift High Speed and 3T Systems have merged operations.

SWIFT

Two Rural Internet Providers Merge

By Sara Beth Dacombe

Two rural internet providers, Swift High Speed from Steinbach and 3T Systems of Niverville, have merged. With much overlap in service areas, business philosophy, and even hardware, the businesses saw the merger as a natural fit.

Evan Schroeder and Chris Teetaert launched Swift High Speed in February 2014, whereas 3T Systems was founded in 2011 by Rob Dolinski and Jordan Hiebert. Both businesses have served the rural communities south-east of Winnipeg.

Swift didn't include much of Niverville proper or the areas 3T covered around Île-des-Chênes and Grande Pointe, as far west as the Perimeter Highway. This made it very attractive when 3T approached Swift to discuss a possible merger. 3T also owned many towers that filled existing gaps in Swift's rural coverage, allowing homeowners more options for radio signals.

Now that they are combined, the new company services Niverville and rural properties west to Highway 75, north to Winnipeg and along Highway 44 almost to Beausejour, east past La Broquerie, and south past St. Malo almost to Vita.

"We were interested in gaining access to the Niverville area through 3T," says Schroeder. "And we wanted 3T staff on board, because they were already established, they have expertise, and they were doing really well."

"The great thing about us

and Swift is that we primarily use the same hardware," says Ryan Bergen, Vice President for 3T. "It's a good fit and continues to give our customers even better service."

The team doesn't anticipate a disruption to customers who utilize either provider. Starting in May, 3T customers are being moved to Swift towers using a gradual process aimed at completion in July 2020. Customers' connections will be down for a minimal amount of time, between the hours of 2:00 and 4:00 a.m., to avoid disruptions to people's workday or daily home usage.

The Swift crew, which had been busier than ever with fibre optic initiatives, could not have projected they would be merging two companies into one right in the middle of a global pandemic. Staff from the 3T office has been relocated to the Swift office in Steinbach, although half of them are currently working from home to adhere to social distancing recommendations.

With recent public health orders requiring many to work from home and the shutdown of schools, the need for reliable internet has never been greater.

"It's a strange time, for sure, what with everyone at home and wanting internet," says Schroeder. "But our towers are holding up. Our install crews have strict guidelines as to who to talk to and how to deliver hardware. We are doing basically a curbside drop-off whenever possible and then provide virtual support."

ANOTHER CONSEQUENCE

The new combined team is experiencing disappointment over another consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. 3T had traditionally been supportive of local special events and Swift was looking forward to continuing to act as partner for the Niverville Olde Tyme Country Fair, which has since been cancelled.

"The fair was always a highlight for us," said Bergen. "We especially enjoyed being of service to all the local vendors who would come to the outdoor market and provide the WiFi for all the local sellers. One year, the mini doughnut truck was using the local LTE network and it was overloaded so they couldn't use debit to sell their doughnuts. We helped get them back up and running and they gifted us free doughnuts for the rest of the weekend. We love this community."

Schroeder agrees with this assessment. "We want to be involved in the community and are looking forward to new ways we can do that, and then to be involved in the fair again next year."

Looking ahead, the company will continue the fibre optic expansion Swift began in 2019 in collaboration with many rural municipalities in southeast Manitoba. Fibre optic construction will bring more capacity to their fixed wireless tower sites throughout the southeast and is projected to allow FTTH (Fiber to the Home) to those residing in rural Manitoba in the next few years.



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The Niverville Chamber of Commerce welcomes these new members



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Niverville Chamber of Commerce AGM

Notice is hereby given that the 2019 Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 17, 2020 at 2:00 pm. This meeting will be held virtually, via ZOOM, with no physical meeting location.

In order to gain access, eligible voting members are required to pre-register via e-mail chamber@niverville.com indicating your business name in the subject line, on or before midnight, June 16, 2020.

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Commentary

Why Do We So Rarely Change Our Minds?

By Daniel Dacombe

Finding answers to our questions has never been easier. We no longer have to go to a library, pick up an encyclopedia, or take a course to satisfy our curiosity. The internet makes available to us the answers to almost any question we could imagine.

With so much knowledge literally at our fingertips, it should be easy to change our minds when we discover one of our opinions or beliefs is incorrect.

Shouldn't it?

Unfortunately, changing our minds can be difficult, because our minds play a series of tricks on us in order to resist change.

In the field of psychology, the brain is commonly referred to as a "cognitive miser." This means that the brain tends to conserve mental resources by urging us to think, give attention to detail, and solve problems in ways that require the least amount of effort possible.

Holding an opinion requires little effort, but actually changing an opinion requires our brains to engage in difficult, sophisticated, and expensive processes—that is, expensive for our mental resources.

The result of this cognitive miserliness is a strong reluctance to change our minds.

We don't naturally gravitate towards information that challenges our perspectives, makes us uncomfortable, or requires us to grow. We do naturally gravitate towards information that confirms our perspectives and allows us to stay the same—even when that information may go against the best data we currently have available.

This is an example of what is called cognitive bias. Cognitive biases are errors in thinking that affect our ability to reason and solve problems.

Renowned psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman published their research on cognitive bias in the early 1970s,



DEPOSITPHOTOS

and the concept quickly became of extreme importance in many other fields, including philosophy, education, management, and economics.

In the years since Tversky and Kahneman's initial work, many different types of cognitive biases have been identified.

Here are some of the most common which you are almost certainly already running into with your friends, your family, and on the internet generally.

1. *Actor-observer bias.* This refers to our tendency to give more importance to external causes for our own bad behaviour while at the same time giving more importance to internal causes for others' bad behaviour. For example, "I was rude because I had a difficult day at work, but that person was rude because they are a naturally rude person."

2. *Anchoring bias.* This refers to our tendency to give the first piece of information we hear on a subject the most weight. For example, once we've heard an interesting theory on a subject, it may be more difficult for us to accept alternative theories, even if those alternatives are better supported by the evidence.

3. *Confirmation bias.* This refers to our tendency to favour information that supports what we already believe and discount information that disproves us. This is the most easily recognizable form of cognitive bias and causes people to only register the evidence they want to accept.

4. *Dunning-Kruger effect.* This

is our tendency to believe that we are smarter, more capable, and less likely to make mistakes in judgment than others. For example, we may be less likely to accept the findings of experts in a field, relying instead on our own research and reasoning even though we lack skill and training in that field. In other words, we're reluctant to acknowledge our own incompetence.

5. *Misinformation effect.* This refers to our tendency to alter our own memories based on new information, often in situations when our memories of an important life event change after we watch the news. Many people experienced this after 9/11, remembering that they had seen the second plane hit live on television when in reality they actually only saw it later on the news.

6. *Self-serving bias.* This refers to our tendency to give ourselves credit when we succeed, but to blame external causes when we fail. For example, "I won the first hand of poker because I'm amazing, but I lost the rest of the game because I had bad cards."

Falling prey to cognitive biases doesn't just happen to so-called "unintelligent" people. Scientists are vulnerable to these biases as well, which is why they generally rely on the scientific method—a rigorous, unforgiving rock against which many pet theories and hypotheses have been broken over the last few centuries.

A good scientist will abandon

a theory, even reluctantly, if it cannot pass the standards of evidence we have put in place to help root out and eliminate the biases we all have.

We can all be good scientists by doing the same.

Why then is it so important to learn about cognitive biases? Because in this current era, we have greater access to more information than ever before. The internet puts the sum total of all available human knowledge literally into our pockets.

Yet not all of this information is correct. Among it is misinformation, false advertising, and outright lies. Every day, bad science convinces people that the world is flat. Conspiracy theories abound. Consider the latest batch of conspiracy theories around the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the middle of all this, our biases lead us to reach for information that supports what we want to believe and discard the rest, leaving us vulnerable to being taken advantage of. Or, in the case of the anti-vaccination movement, we're left vulnerable to very real public health risks.

Again, each and every one of us is vulnerable to cognitive biases. It's in our nature.

But that doesn't mean we should give up trying to figure out the truth, nor does it mean we should stop trying to communicate what we have learned to others.

What it does mean is that we need to do the work to uncover our biases, set them aside, wrestle with uncomfortable facts, and (when necessary) change our opinions based on the best data available.

Most importantly, it means we ought to deal more kindly with those we find ourselves in disagreement with. We're all working to make sense of our world with the same cognitive tools, and we're all vulnerable to the same mental pitfalls.

That, at least, is something we all have in common.

CITIZEN POLL

Have you ever changed your mind on a subject because of a debate you had, or new information you encountered, while on the internet?

- ☐ Yes. When presented with new info, from time to time I change my views.
- ☐ No. I don't trust the info I find online and don't let it affect my judgment.
- ☐ Have another opinion? Let us know! We would love to hear about any real-life examples that relate to this question.

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LAST MONTH'S RESULTS:

Do you agree with the Province of Manitoba's decision to begin allowing certain types of businesses to reopen in early May?

Yes.	No.
77%	23%

YOUR COMMENTS:

The damage done due to shutting down the economy for an extended period is far greater than any potential risks in a province that has flattened the curve for some time now.

The sooner the better!

Arts & Entertainment

Former Nivervillian's Second Book Reflects on Grandparents

By Brenda Sawatzky

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Poet, author, and former Niverville area resident Angeline Schellenberg has released her second book. *Fields of Light and Stone*, a collection of poems, pays tribute to the lives and memories of her maternal and paternal grandparents.

Schellenberg first won acclaim with her debut book of poems, *Tell Them It Was Mozart*, in May 2017. The collection won in three separate categories at the Manitoba Book Awards. The poems in that first book reflect on Schellenberg's unique relationship with her two children, both of whom are on the autism spectrum.

Fields of Light and Stone establishes a similarly intimate mood as Schellenberg explores the relationship she had with her two sets of grandparents before their passing.

"I wrote about them for the same reason I wrote about my children," Schellenberg says. "Because I love them. My grandparents helped raise me. Parents of young children are busy with the day-to-day of earning a living, keeping house, policing homework; grandparents have time to just be. When my dad was in the barn and my mom was in the garden, Oma would be sitting beside me, shelling peas and telling stories. I missed them all terribly when they were gone. I processed that loss through

poetry."

Many will be able to relate to Schellenberg's thoughtful reminiscences on her Russian Mennonite forefathers, who immigrated to Canada near the turn of the twentieth century in search of freedom and a better life.

Her Oma and Opa were born in the villages of Lichtfelde and Steinfeld, which translates to "light field" and "stone field," from which the book's title was derived. They came to live in the Niverville area as young adults, where they met and married.

Schellenberg grew up on the property adjoining her grandparents' farm.

"I have many happy childhood memories of Christmas gatherings, shopping trips, Sunday lunches at Chicken Chef, shucking corn in the garden or roguing in the fields together," Schellenberg says. "My Oma was a matriarchal force to be reckoned with!"

Also farmers, her maternal grandparents lived in Boissevain and pastored churches in the area.

"Grandma had a hard childhood," says Schellenberg. "Her mother died in childbirth when my grandma was only two. My great-grandparents had a beautiful love story, but after his wife's death my great-grandpa married her sister, who was a cruel stepmother to my grandma. Despite being motherless and mistreated, my grandma was never harsh or bitter. She



Angeline Schellenberg, formerly of Niverville.

ANGELINE SCHELLENBERG

was one of the most gentle, maternal people I know."

While most of the book's poems are based on personal connections Schellenberg built with her grandparents over the years, she also explores topics of their ancestry, immigration, and courtship. This required digging into Mennonite heritage archives and sifting through early love letters and journals belonging to her grandparents.

Some of the poems touch on the poignant theme of loss, too, as each of the beloved grandparents left their mark on her heart as they departed this world.

"A lot of the poems are reflections on watching my grandparents die," she says.

into the world and, on the other hand, watching a grandparent leave it.

"This is a very personal book, but the people in it lived through both private sorrows, such as stillbirth or betrayal, and world-changing events like war and famine," she says. "And their immigration stories are still relevant to our global reality now. If we remind ourselves how our ancestors struggled to integrate to a new country, and even resisted integrating, we'll have more compassion for immigrants struggling to adjust to a new life in Canada while preserving their traditions today."

Unfortunately for Schellenberg, the book launch originally scheduled for McNally Robinson in April had to be indefinitely postponed due to COVID-19. Instead she took part in an online reading as part of the Pandemic Response Reading Series, hosted by Manitoba author Lauren Carter. The reading series was created to provide authors with a chance to celebrate and promote their new books during

lockdown.

"It was disappointing to not be able to see the audience, but the benefit was that people from across the country could share the experience," Schellenberg says. "And I could show them photos and artifacts from my grandparents' lives... Some 60 [people] logged in and were commenting on their favourite lines and poems in the chat sidebar."

In the end, she hopes others will be challenged to consider the treasure received through the sacrifice, resilience, and love of those who have gone before them.

"In a capitalistic society, I think it's important to celebrate people as they age," Schellenberg concludes. "Especially now, with some leaders speaking of sacrificing the elderly to the coronavirus for the sake of the economy. We do not cease to be human when our memory, strength, or productivity wane. My last months with my grandparents were some of the most precious times we shared and I felt that was an important story to tell."



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Niverville CREDIT UNION

This is Marcus

This is Allison

This is how Allison and Marcus feel about their New Home

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Colouring Contest

Kids 12 years of age and under are eligible to win a prize, to be provided by contest's sponsor. Drop off completed artwork at the sponsoring business by 5:00 p.m. on the 20th of the month. The winner will be notified on or before the 25th. Should the sponsor not hear back from the winner in a timely manner, a new winner will be selected.

Last Months Winner: Nolan Parsons, age 10



**EVERY SUBMISSION
WILL RECEIVE A GIFT!**

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NIAKWA PIZZA
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Name

Age

Contact phone number

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