

# The Citizen

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## LOCAL NEWS

### Ritchot Accepts Transfer of Old 59

■ After years of lobbying, the Old Highway 59 in Île-des-Chênes has been transferred to the control of the RM.

Details on Page 9



## LOCAL NEWS

### Retail Cannabis in Niverville: Where Do Things Stand?

■ Despite a plebiscite in November that opened the door to retail cannabis in Niverville, no movement has since taken place towards opening a store. People are wondering why.

Details on Page 8

## COMMENTARY

### Why Do Our Brains Struggle with Science?

■ In the COVID era, not everyone trusts science and expert opinion, at a time when that trust is more important than ever.

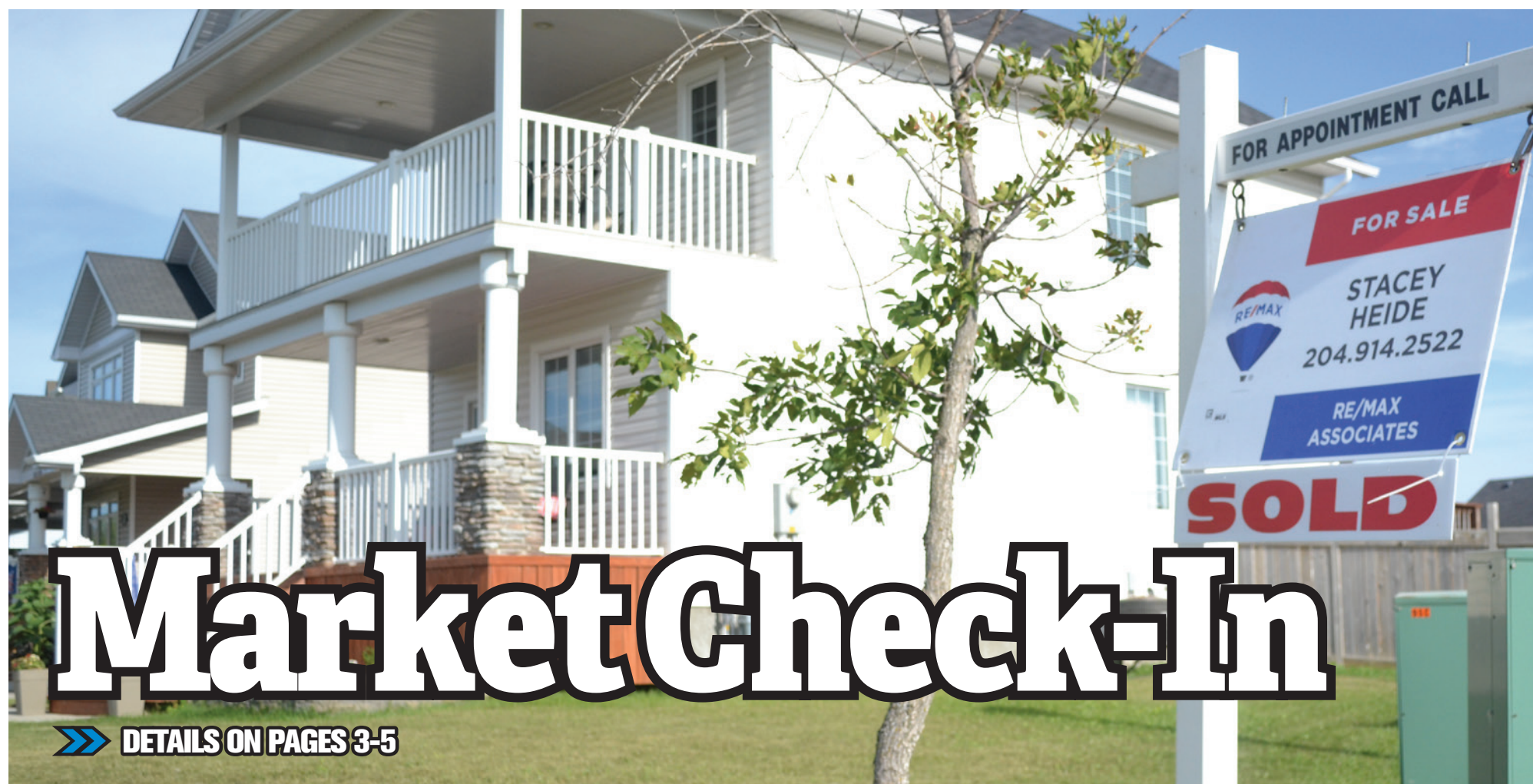
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## ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

### Movie Magic at Whitetail Meadow

■ Throughout July, a film crew descended on Whitetail Meadow to lens a Christmas movie that's coming out later this year.

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# Market Check-In

»» DETAILS ON PAGES 3-5

JOEY VILLANUEVA

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DEPOSITPHOTOS

# Market Check-In



editor@nivervillecitizen.com

The housing market is a constantly shifting thing. People are moving in, moving out, buying and selling, and looking for rentals in a never-ending scramble to simply put a roof over their heads or make a better life for themselves. Summers are especially chaotic.

This industry employs a huge number of people, from builders, contractors and tradesmen, real estate agents, appraisers, and property managers.

And this year everything's been thrown into flux.

## Part One: The Scarcity of Rentals

Finding rental housing in Niverville and the surrounding rural southeast has gotten increasingly difficult over the last several years. There are many factors behind this trend, including steady population growth, the introduction of new commercial and industrial employers, and an higher demand for real estate.

In the time of COVID-19, though, the hunt for rentals has gotten to be nearly impossible.

According to Greg Fehr of Red River Group, the pandemic has greatly accelerated a lot of pre-existing trends.

"People are talking about a decrease in demand for office space, for example," Fehr says. "They were announcing five years ago, 'Expect that in 10 to 15 years a 40 percent decrease in the need for

retail and office.' Well, now take that and just decrease [the timeframe] to three to four years. That's all that we've done. It's all accelerated."

Red River Group is one of the largest property management companies in the rural southeast, managing approximately 450 rental units in many towns throughout the region. The bulk of these properties, Fehr says, are in Niverville. St. Adolphe, Ste. Anne, Steinbach, and Grunthal, with a smattering of units in other communities, such as St. Malo, Vita, and Morris. They also own some property in Winnipeg.

"In March and April, we basically saw everyone staying put," Fehr says. "All our tenants were renewing. We'd send out a renewal to people at 30 days, and they were returning them in two or three days. Nobody wanted to move. Nobody wanted to even think about moving."

Fehr cites an example of a couple who had planned to move out of their rental suite and build a house. Although they'd signalled their intention to move out in the spring, the pandemic changed their thinking and they opted to stay put.

It was a common story in the late winter and early spring. But this trend began to turn around in May.

"In May and June, and a bit into July, we've had more turnover," Fehr says. "But it is still one of the lowest turnover rates that we've ever seen. From the rental management side, obviously that's great. But it's taken an existing problem that we had in the southeast, including Niverville, with historically low vacancy, and made it worse."

He says this problem is

especially prevalent in Niverville, where the vacancy rate is as low as two percent. Or lower.

"There's just nothing to rent," he points out. "Nothing. And it's going to stay that way for a while."

## IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

One of the measures brought in by the provincial government during the pandemic has been a moratorium on evictions and rent increases.

"That kind of had people freaked out, and we thought that maybe a lot of people would be taking advantage of it," Fehr says. "But really the impact we've seen is about maybe one and a half percent to three percent impact. Mostly that's an impact that we saw in April and May, until people kind of got settled into the CERB. Put it this way: of 450 rentals, I've maybe got four or five where the tenants are taking advantage of this whole non-eviction thing a little bit. But those are the sort of people who take advantage in any situation."

Overall, he says the government's quick actions, through measures like the CERB and wage subsidies, helped stabilize the market to a large degree.

"By April, the CERB was already coming out. By May, the [federal government] had filled in some additional blanks... and I think May and June is where they brought out some of the commercial incentives. So they basically stabilized everybody. There's almost nobody left that falls within the cracks. The biggest challenge now is weening people off."

(continued on page 4)

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(continued from page 3)

## FUTURE OUTLOOK

Fehr acknowledges that the gradual process of getting people back to work and off federal benefits is going to be a challenge through the rest of 2020, and it's hard to predict how it will affect the rental market.

"There's a significant amount of people when you talk about rentals that are making more money on CERB than they were made working," he says. "And with almost no cost, because they don't have to drive to work. So what I'm worried about is, as they start weening these people off—in September, October, November—not only will we likely see a bit more challenge again on the rent payments, with people potentially having to move, but we're also going to see probably the beginnings of foreclosures as well. I think the banks will be slow on it, but the reality is there's going to be some people struggling."

## IMPACT ON RELATIONSHIPS

One of the more difficult to foresee effects of the pandemic has been on the relationships of people who co-habitate. Fehr says people don't have to look far to hear stories of couples who have split up recently.

And as couples and roommates go their separate ways, it places further pressure on an already heavily burdened market. When a couple splits, they often end up looking for two rentals instead of one.

"On the appraisals side, I can back it up and say that [Red River Group's] divorce work is considerably higher than before," Fehr says. "Life is just different right now, and it does create a certain amount of pressure. If you had a relationship that was struggling, where you were able to escape from your partner a bit [by going to work or school], there's not as much escape anymore. So yeah, it is leading to a lot of relationship breakdown."

Fehr, who handles the application approvals across the entire company, says he is encountering two or three scenarios like this every week.

## MORE RENTALS NEEDED

Niverville and Ritchot have had an excellent year so far for housing starts, but they are mostly single-family homes.

"I don't know if anybody's building any significant rental housing or multifamily," Fehr says of Niverville in particular. "We really could use more. Maybe not just apartments, but townhouses... These projects take so long to put together. Even if you decide today you're going to do it, it's two years away often. The need is there."

Before his time with Red River Group, Fehr served on Niverville's town council, first as councillor from 2004–2006, and then as mayor for



Home construction underway on Aberdeen Drive in Niverville.

JOEY VILLANUEVA

two terms, from 2006–2013.

"We were talking about this problem years ago already. My next biggest worry was affordable housing in town," he says. "The next step is to get some actual industry here, beyond Spectis Moulders. But right now if I was a shop that was wanting to employ 50 to 100 people, I don't know if I'd come to Niverville, because the labour pool can't afford to live in town... there's really no place for a blue collar person to live. And even the rentals that are there, it's mostly new stock, and they're a little expensive. We haven't built economy [rentals] in a long time."

He points to the irony of workers living in south Winnipeg and reverse-commuting to Niverville for work.

"You know, it shouldn't ever be that you can find more affordable housing in the south of Winnipeg than you can in Niverville," he says. "The economics don't make sense for the marketplace. But it just is a completely pent-up demand right now."

Local real estate agent Clarence Braun says that some relief is on the way.

"We are expecting the addition of another 104 rental apartment units in 2021, with another 156 by 2023," Braun says, who agrees that the current vacancy rate is effectively at zero percent. "These new units are already designated and the site plans are completed."

But for the time being, if you're looking to rent a place, you're going to run into major supply problems.

Fehr points to an example of the current conundrum: Red River manages a rental complex in the rural southeast that has 110 units.

"Anytime you have a complex of that size, it's typical to see it in a constant rotation," Fehr says. "There's always one either empty or about to empty or close to being filled. For this complex, we've had a perpetual ad running ever since we've had it.

Well, we actually pulled down the ad two weeks ago and have had no need to put it back up—for the very first time ever. It's 100 percent full with no potential units coming up. The next one we may have is in November. It's just unheard of."

## Part Two: A Boom Year for Builders

Counterintuitively, 2020 hasn't been a bad year for everyone. In the midst of so much uncertainty, many local homebuilders are having banner years.

In the first six months of the year, the Town of Niverville approved 29 building permits, totalling \$9 million of construction value. The vast majority of these permits have been for new residential homes. This is about equal to the same period last year, the difference being that in 2019 these permits grew steadily month by month, and only came to \$7 million in construction value. In 2020, housing activity got off to a bang in February, then trailed off in March and April before sharply rebounding.

The RM of Ritchot has gotten even further ahead of last year. So far in 2020, they've issued 97 building permits, totalling \$18 million in construction value, 18 of which are new homes. This compares to 71 building permits of \$12 million in 2019.

Doug Dyck of Heritage Lane Builders says that in all his years in business, he has never seen the housing market so hot. But over the past six months, the outlook has been hard to predict.

"As far as our anticipation initially coming into the year, I thought, 'This is going to be a hot year. This is going to be an incredible year,'" says Dyck. "That was pre-COVID. So then COVID hit and there was so much uncertainty."

Heritage Lane Builders has established a strong presence in the rural southeast over the last decade. They're most active in Niverville's

newer subdivisions, Fifth Avenue Estates and The Highlands, but they also have homes in Tourond Creek in St. Adolphe, as well as in communities further north like Headingly, Garson, and Tyndall. They're gearing up to start a few homes in St. Francis Xavier.

In the early stages of the pandemic, the biggest question for Dyck and other homebuilders was whether their industry would be shut down by the government, like so many others.

Instead, residential homebuilding was deemed to be an essential service—and the impact of that decision has been large.

"Still, that first three weeks to a month [in March and April], we were very uncertain as to what was going to happen," he says. "I had some predictions during that time, although I had my hesitations, too—some cautions, I would say—as to how many homes to build, how far to extend myself."

Dyck says that his initial approach was to proceed carefully. But at the same time, he didn't want the threat of the pandemic to stop the company from being aggressive.

"My theory, and it was only a theory, because there was no data to back it up, because this is a completely new time in our lives, was that there were going to be builders that would hold back. So I decided to put *in* inventory, so that when [restrictions] would lift, and I believed somewhere along the line they would lift, I would be the one that would have inventory. So we kind of played it in the reverse."

That decision, to rev up construction at a time when others might pull back, meant he and his 14 staff took no downtime in the early spring.

This isn't the first time Dyck has taken such a risk.

"I remember some years ago, 13 or 14 years ago, we were struggling," he says. "The market was really down and I didn't lay anyone off. The costs

were still there, but the revenue wasn't. It was not a good two years. I lost several years of gain in a two-year time. But I kept everybody. I said, you know, when this lull is over I want to be out there... Even though it hurt, that wasn't a bad choice. It was a good choice going forward to just stay at it."

Once again, that approach seems to be paying off. In a good year, Dyck says, the highwater mark for Heritage Lane Builders would be constructing somewhere in the neighbourhood of 49 homes. In 2020, his company is poised to shatter that record. They've already got 32 homes in the ground, at various stages from just getting their building permits to nearing completion, and another eight or nine builds are about to get started.

"Last week, we had five meetings on custom builds," he adds. "I'm going to get some of those. And then this week we have another three custom build meetings. That's way, way more than I've ever experienced in my career. We're getting a lot more customs. Whether it's in Niverville or outside town, there's a lot of activity... We're well ahead. I don't know the numbers, but my staff was telling me the other day that their prediction was that we would hit 60 homes this year, [although] I think that's a little bit high."

## ALL-TIME HIGH DEMAND

Dyck says there are a lot of reasons customers are attracted to places like Niverville, Ritchot, and other communities at the fringes of Winnipeg.

"It's not a science, and I can only go by what I'm hearing from some of my customers, and of course from the realtors. I take my cue from them," Dyck says. "But what I'm seeing is that, first of all, in our areas, especially Niverville, you're buying for less. There's no question. And people want elbow room. You know, they were pent-up in the city and they needed room to breathe."

Another reason, he says, is that a lot of older people are retiring. As a result, they're getting out of larger homes in the city—particularly in the south and west ends of the city—and looking to downsize in a place where they can get the most bang for their buck.

"These people probably have good equity in their homes, so they're coming here for smaller homes, with less maintenance, more freedom. And they want brand-new. They might be spending less than what they got for their home in Island Lakes, for example. So those are all really positive [trends] for us."

Another trend is people moving to places like Niverville and Ritchot to be closer to family. Dyck says it starts with a young family being drawn to the rural southeast, and then the parents follow soon after.

"I'm now building homes for the parents of the kids that I previously

sold to,” he says. “Because they want to be close to their kids, they want to be close to their grandkids. So it’s the first generation coming after the second generation. We have a lot of this happening, more and more all the time.”

### COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT

According to Dyck, builders and developers in the region have been active in recent years responding to the latest trends and figuring out what customers are looking for. The result has been a spirit of collaboration.

“We have some great developers out here,” he says. “They’ve created such opportunity for us. We get a chance to sit down with them, to tell them what we want these lots to look like. We get a chance to give them the feedback. They want to know what people are buying, what people want... When does a builder get a chance to sit down with the developer and help them come up with their next phases, to try and keep up with market trends?”

He cites the houses going up right now on Aberdeen Drive in The Highlands in Niverville. The Highlands is developed by Sunset Estates, run by Len Peters.

“Aberdeen is a great example of that collaborative effort,” Dyck says. “I think on Aberdeen this year we’re going to have four [homes] going up. One other is with Gerald Stoez, and I know Connection’s got something up. I then have three more coming up on this street. So that’s faster than normal... and we’re just going to keep pushing. Len [Peters] is now got machinery at work carrying on the street, because we need more lots next spring.”

Connection Homes and Gerald Stoez Construction are two other prominent local builders. Others include Von Reisen Homes and Wallace, Wallace and Edwards.

Dyck is straightforward about the fact that these other builders are his competition, but he points out that the various builders offer different products—and they need each other, especially during boom years like 2020.

“We sit down with these guys, and it’s really good,” he says. “We all have different clients, we all build differently, and there’s a variation between one and the other. We need that. If you had only one [builder] in town, I think that would be the death of the neighbourhood. You need to round things out, for the diversification.”

Dyck says the same spirit of collaboration is alive with the builders and developers of Tourond Creek in St. Adolphe.

“We’re honest with each other, and I know this is an old cliché, but... together we are strong. I love these communities. This is where we got our start and this is where we’ll always be.”

### Part Three: Making Hay While the Sun Shines

Life for a real estate agent is always a bit like riding a rollercoaster. The housing market goes up, the market goes down, and it all happens due to forces well outside any agent’s control.

Even by the standards of real estate, 2020 has been a wild ride.

“At the very beginning, before the pandemic hit, it just looked like a normal year,” says Katie Knebel, an agent for Royal LePage who is very active in the Niverville market. “In January, you kind of get out of Christmas mode. Then in February you really start ramping everything back up, gearing up for what you hope to be another very good year. But it’s just a little bit unknown every year. That’s just the real estate game, right?”

February was a busy month for housing starts and home sales, a fact borne out by the numbers. Agents and builders were teed up for one of their best years ever.

“Just before [the pandemic] hit,” says Doug Dyck of Heritage Lane Builders, “I would tell you that if you had talked to any realtors that have been in business for any time, they probably would have said to you that they felt they were having their best month in five years. I’ve heard that from more than one realtor. Now, that was pre-COVID.”

Another local agent, Clarence Braun, agrees that this was certainly his experience.

“I believe the present growth was building into 2020 even without COVID-19,” Braun says. “However, what changed was the sudden lack of listings as many people became very hesitant to list their homes... they were being cautious and did not want people going into their homes and risking contamination.”

Without a doubt, the arrival of the coronavirus brought the market to a standstill.

“Immediately in late March, all the listings and sales basically dropped to about 50 percent, almost exactly,” says Greg Fehr of Red River Group. “The sales went down first, and then people just started pulling listings.”

Fehr says that Red River Group has been closely tracking these numbers more broadly than Niverville, since they operate in so many communities throughout the rural southeast.

“Around March 15, that’s when the world kind of stopped,” says Knebel. “And there was just this sense of ‘I don’t know what’s happening,’ where I had the fear

of thinking, ‘Okay, I may have to prepare myself for a very long year.’ Because we just have no idea what’s in store for us.”

### THE TURNAROUND

But then things started to turn around. Knebel says she noticed a bit of a sales spike in May.

Fehr noticed it, too.

“Around the second week of May, you start seeing sales going from 50 to 60 percent of the previous year to 70,” Fehr says. “But listings weren’t catching up, and they still haven’t quite caught up.”

As properties came back onto the market, it became a seller’s market, according to Braun. “The buyers were there, and with less inventory the prices for homes went up,” he says.

Knebel says that the usual surge of spring activity, in her opinion, didn’t hit as early as it normally does, but by late June it had arrived.

*“I think in real estate, there’s always a sense of just riding the wave. You put your head down, you push through, but at the end of the day it’s out of your control.”*

**Katie Knebel** | Real Estate Agent

“For me, the last couple weeks to a month have been very busy, and I don’t think it’s just me,” she says. “You can see it in the stats, in signs going up and signs coming down. I mean, the spring market has just exploded right now.”

In Niverville specifically, from January 1 until July 27, there were 81 houses sold. In the same period in 2019, that number was 71. For the market to have caught up, and then exceeded itself, means the recent surge has been very quick and very intense.

“There are pockets in Winnipeg where [properties] are going for ten different offers, with \$40,000 over asking, and it’s absolutely crazy,” says Knebel. “There was a stretch in Niverville where we had eight or nine houses around the \$300,000 mark, give or take, that were sitting there and then all sold within a week of each other. There was just this massive rush for homes in Niverville around that price point—and ever since then, it really hasn’t stopped.”

### DRIVING FORCES

Knebel believes a driving force has been the lack of mature homes—in other words, not new—in the range of \$275,000 to \$325,000. So when they do come on the market, they’re snapped up quickly.

Another reason for the surge, Knebel says, is a recent change to the CMHC (Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation) rules which govern which sellers can be preapproved for a mortgage. A rule change that came into effect at the beginning of July made it harder for people to qualify for mortgages.

“This wasn’t just a minor little change,” she says. “You had to be more qualified to go through CMHC, and it could have changed people’s preapprovals by \$30,000 to \$40,000. So we saw a push right before then, where people [thought], ‘If we don’t buy something before July 1, we may be significantly impacted on what we can actually buy, what our borrowing power is.’”

Yet another factor is historically low interest rates. The rates started to plunge at the beginning of the year, and there hasn’t been any indication they will head back up anytime in the near future.

“So I personally don’t think it’s been one thing that has affected the markets this year,” Knebel says. “I think it’s kind of been multiple things affecting it. And are they all generally related to COVID? Probably, yes. But I think Manitoba just steadily keeps moving along, like we typically always do. We have one of the most stable markets, and I think during COVID we’re proving that to be true.”

### FLEEING THE CITY

It’s always been true that a subsection of people living in cities have looked at rural communities and seen the appeal of larger lots, more space, and a quieter lifestyle. This has been true in southern Manitoba for quite some time.

But Fehr has a theory that this trend has been accelerated since the onset of the pandemic, that many people are seeking to escape dense population centres right now.

“In Toronto, they’ve got quite a bit more data, so they were able to prove this a little bit quicker,” Fehr says. “But there’s been probably about a 17 to 18 percent increase in the amount of people seeking rural properties, or at least very small urban areas, outside of Toronto. I think we saw that back in about April too. I don’t know if there’s quite enough data yet to prove it [in Manitoba], but there is definitely a higher demand for rural property right now than ever in the past, and some of this has got to be driven by a little bit of fear... I think people are just looking for these bigger rural lots where they can grow their own gardens again and be a little bit more self-sufficient.”

He says communities like St.

Adolphe, Ste. Agathe, Niverville, Île-des-Chênes, and to a certain extent even Steinbach are recovering faster than Winnipeg for this reason.

“Buyers have been wanting to move out of bigger urban areas and move to smaller communities,” agrees Braun. “COVID-19 really put the focus on staying away from tighter spaces and bigger urban centres. So any buyers who had an inkling to sell, maybe have been influenced by that.”

Knebel says Toronto could be a bellweather in terms of that trend, because the market is so much larger and the property is significantly more expensive. Because of this, their housing market is more susceptible to shocks.

“I’ll give you a for-instance,” Knebel says. “My brother builds houses in Toronto, and he has a house going on the market that he’s renovated. It’s a 750-square-foot bungalow, finished basement, but built in the 50s on a postage stamp lot... and he’s listing it for \$950,000. It’s insane.”

### SO WHAT’S NEXT?

The question becomes, what happens next? Few people in January would have predicted what happened in March. And perhaps people now in August will have just as much trouble predicting where things stand in October.

“It’s a difficult question to answer, as we haven’t yet seen the fallout of businesses being closed during COVID-19,” says Braun. “We have seen government supports remain in place for the most vulnerable in the labour force, and even for business owners. We have also seen banks support homeowners and businesses as they navigate through this period. There could be some difficult days ahead as governments and banks seek to gain back the money they have leveraged to protect the country and its economy. What will job retention look like? Will there be enough new jobs added to pick up to where we were in February 2020?”

Knebel agrees that predicting the future is a fool’s errand at this point.

“I think in real estate, there’s always a sense of just riding the wave,” Knebel reflects. “You put your head down, you push through, but at the end of the day it’s out of your control. And no matter how hard we work, how much effort we know we put into it, sometimes a pandemic comes along.”

For the time being anyway, the reality we’re seeing is fast growth.

There may be some wisdom to the old adage that says “Make hay while the sun shines.” Because despite the uncertainty, despite the threat of clouds on the horizon, at the moment the sun is shining over the real estate market as brightly as it ever has.



The design for the new Heritage Wall to be built along Main Street Niverville, next to the Niverville Credit Union.

■ NIVERVILLE COMMUNITIES IN BLOOM

# Beautification Projects Taking Shape in Niverville

By Sara Beth Dacombe

sdacombe@nivervillecitizen.com

A few highly visible beautification projects are taking shape around Niverville this summer: the Heritage Wall on Main Street, the Niverville Heritage Pavilion, a community mural at the post office, and more trees for residential streets. These projects are all being overseen by the Niverville Communities in Bloom (NCIB) committee.

## THE HERITAGE WALL

The largest project for NCIB for 2020 is the Heritage Wall on Main Street, in front of the Niverville Credit Union parking lot. The wooden fence currently located there will soon be replaced by 64 feet of metal panels measuring

four-feet high and designed to illustrate the town's heritage.

The wall art will tell the story as imagined by local resident Dustin Krahn, with input from the NCIB and the Heritage Wall committee, as well as Dr. Nigaan Sinclair, Professor of Native Studies at the University of Manitoba.

The wall will become a focal point along Main Street and is expected to attract visitors to the community.

Fundraising for this project is in its final stage. Since construction will not begin until the funds are secure, NCIB is doing a big push to see the final sum raised. Currently \$20,000 of the \$34,000 budget has been raised and NCIB is waiting to hear back from grant applications.

The hope is to get construction going by early August. The group is confident the project will begin this summer and be completed by September 30.

## THE HERITAGE PAVILION

Materials have been ordered for the Niverville Heritage Pavilion, and its build will begin in August and be complete by September 8. The pavilion will be constructed in the Niverville Community Gardens at the Heritage Centre and will incorporate wood planks from the town's original grain elevator, destroyed by fire long ago.

Cornerstone Timberframes has planned a circular wall design to represent the appearance of the original grain elevator. The front view

will be open to allow for special events to be held.

NCIB is already planning a community event to celebrate the completion of the pavilion, but it won't be held until next summer.

The group hopes to host a Winnipeg Pops Orchestra outdoor concert on June 7, 2021. Sponsorship for this concert has already been pledged by Heritage Lane Builders.

All funds have been raised to build the pavilion, and once completed people can get involved by visiting and enjoying the facility safely outdoors as social distancing allows.

## COMMUNITY MURAL

NCIB is also in the final stages of completing a community mural. The four local artists—Abigail Olfert, Elaine Krahn, Dustin Krahn, and CD Muckosky—have finished their collaborative design and are working toward transferring the design to the final medium.

Once complete, the mounted wooden mural will be positioned on the west side of the post office.

## MORE TREE-PLANTING

The last beautification project will see an expansion of the community's tree canopy.

After the success of the Arbor Day tree-planting initiative on May 23, NCIB

received a further donation from TC Energy to plan a second planting event for Niverville's residential streets.

The town is again stepping up to commit support and resources. Coordinated by NCIB, TC Energy will donate a minimum of 60 trees for planting in the spring of 2021.

Representatives for various streets in town are asked to contact NCIB to submit a request to receive the new trees.

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH VOLUNTEERISM

Leading the way on all of these projects is Shirley Hoult of NCIB. Hoult has long been a fixture in Niverville's volunteer community and has been integral in the development of many special projects around town.

In outlining this summer's projects, she has demonstrated that her excitement won't be deterred by the setbacks affecting so much of our society these days.

"It will be an amazing piece," says Hoult, who is particularly excited about the Heritage Wall. "This will be a visual celebration of the community, bringing art and heritage to Main Street. And I might be allowed to paint one little part of [the community mural] just so I can tell my grandkids I painted part of the mural in Niverville."

Hoult goes on to describe

the climate of Niverville volunteers as full of life and joy.

"The fact that we're getting so much support for these community projects, it's something community members are having fun with and they like to see these projects happen despite all that is going on [in the world]," says Hoult. "To see that things are still happening on Main Street, in the community, the businesses and residents here are still pulling together and actively involved. I was overwhelmed by the support that's been shown for all of these projects. I know it's been an anxious and difficult time for people, but we need something to look forward to as well. We need to see good things happening—and good things *are* happening."

She is also quick to thank the community and spread the credit wherever it is due, in particular to other dedicated volunteers, those who have donated to these causes, and a large grant from the Building Sustainable Communities Program.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

■ Any Niverville residents interested in requesting trees for their street or supporting NCIB with the Heritage Wall, pavilion, or any of these projects, can contact Hoult. Tax receipts for donations are available.



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## CITIZEN POLL

## Should the Town of Niverville go further in order to attract and/or accomodate a cannabis retailer?

- ☐ Yes. Council should consider bylaw variances that expand the number of viable commercial properties available to a cannabis retailer.
- ☐ No. A cannabis retailer should simply have to wait until a commercial property comes available that fits the current rules and regulations.
- ☐ Have another opinion? Visit our website to vote and leave us a comment.

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## The pandemic has negatively affected the mental health of a child I know.

I strongly agree.

25%

I agree.

20%

I neither agree nor disagree.

35%

I disagree.

20%

I strongly disagree.

0%

## Retail Cannabis: Where Do Things Stand?

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

Back in the fall of 2019, Niverville became consumed by the issue of retail cannabis.

Just over one year ago, Niverville was targeted by the province to open a retail store, and shortly thereafter Alberta-based Canna Cabana was selected to come to town. But when the company approached town council with their proposal to open a shop last summer, council turned them away at a contentious public meeting, voting 3-2 against them opening their business.

To settle the controversy, council decided to hold a plebiscite, allowing residents to have a say on whether retail should be allowed in Niverville. Fierce campaigning took place through the fall month, and on November 26 the people voted to allow it, by a vote of 863-719.

Some may have believed that settled the issue. However, since the plebiscite, Canna Cabana has not moved forward with opening a store. Although the doors should have been wide open for a shop to come to town, all has been quiet on the cannabis front.

What's been going on?

As of mid-July, the situation was still up in the air. On July 14, Niverville Mayor Myron Dyck said he was contacted by a representative company to give him an update on where things



DEPOSITPHOTOS

stand.

"Basically what he said is that their plans are on hold," says Dyck. "He says with the COVID situation, number one, they're short-staffed just to manage their Alberta and Ontario stores... And then he just said, simply, he hasn't had the time or the manpower to deal with, you know, Manitoba. We would be their only Manitoba store. So he says, 'We're on hold, and I really don't have a timeline for you going forward.'"

Dyck adds that the company has said they're still in touch with the province, talking about the regulatory process.

"They're still in conversation," Dyck says. "But there is no timeline for us. We're on pause. We're on hold."

No representative from

Canna Cabana was available to comment on this story.

One significant problem would seem to be that according to the rules set out by the province and the town, a cannabis store can't be located within 1,000 feet of a school or park. In Niverville, that means the only possible commercial locations are the few properties east of the town office on Bronstone Drive, none of which are currently available.

One of those properties, 379 Bronstone, is the one that Canna Cabana originally sought to lease. The vacancy in that building, owned by Bryan Trottier of Niverville, has since been leased to a different business.

Mayor Dyck says another possibility would be the industrial park. From a business perspective, however,

there are many reasons that this wouldn't be an attractive option. It would be off the beaten track and wouldn't have an appealing, accessible, or visible storefront.

The mayor further postulates that commercial real estate could open up further west of Krahn Drive at some point in the future, but that land currently sits undeveloped.

It could be, in the current environment, that a company like Canna Cabana would only be interested in opening a store in Niverville if the town were able to make a variance to its bylaws—something which doesn't seem to be on the table.

In the meantime, the people of Niverville will just have to keep waiting for answers.



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# Province Transfers Old 59 Highway to Ritchot

By Evan Braun  
and Sherry Peters

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

The province has official announced that it has transferred ownership of the Old Highway 59 South to the RM of Ritchot. All portions of the former highway in the municipality north of Highway 210 are part of the transfer.

This includes the stretch of highway running through Îles-des-Chênes, as well as Bernat Road in Grande Pointe. Another major route through Grande Point, Hallama Road, is part of the transfer. In total, more than 14 kilometres of roadway has been moved over to municipal control.

Public officials gathered at the corner of Old Highway 59 and Dumaine for the announcement. Present were MLA Ron Schuler, Ritchot Mayor Chris Ewen, councillors Shane Pelletier and Janine Boulanger, CAO Mitch Duval, and Chamber President Derek Roth.

"Mister Mayor, you have lobbied me a lot about what we call Old Highway 59," said Schuler, gesturing to Mayor Ewen. "Well, today I am pleased to announce, on

behalf of the government of Manitoba, that we are going to transfer the ownership and responsibility of Old Highway 59 to the RM of Ritchot—and I know the mayor and council will have a lot of great plans [for it]."

Schuler added that Ewen and the rest of council have been absolutely dogged in their lobbying efforts to make this happen over the years.

"I do lobby hard," acknowledged Mayor Ewen. "I don't ever stop until I get something that council and the municipality needs and wants... At the end of the day, Old 59 has been a want and need of ours for almost a decade now, and it really comes down to three factors: safety, the economic value, and the lifestyle value."

With this change in ownership, the RM's council will now be able to make decisions about the roadway that they wouldn't have been able to make before. Various improvements will begin to unfold along the road in the coming weeks and months.

One priority will involve installing a crosswalk from the east side of town to the Co-op gas station and commercial strip mall on

Meadowlark. This crosswalk will allow students from the nearby elementary school to get across the highway on their school breaks.

"We're going to see people getting to walk around town, getting to cross over and meet their neighbours and friends, and get to know a little bit more about their community by just venturing out to the businesses and feeling safe doing so," said Ewen about the prospective crosswalk.

A sidewalk along the road is also planned. Notably, there are no current plans to either investigate or petition for traffic lights to better control the intersection of Old 59 and Du-maine, which often experiences heavy traffic as motorists cross through to access Highway 59.

The route was taken out of service in 2005 upon completion of the new, twinned highway to accommodate increased traffic volumes in the area. At that time, the province and RM signed a memorandum of understanding that stated the RM would eventually take over responsibility of the road, including maintenance.

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Niverville's 2020 property tax bills have been mailed. If you have not received your bill you may request a copy. New property owners are reminded that they are responsible for the payment of the taxes whether or not they have received a tax notice in their name. If you would like to request a copy of the statement for your property or have questions regarding your property taxes you may email [taxes@whereyoubelong.ca](mailto:taxes@whereyoubelong.ca) or call 204-388-4600 ext. 106.

**All payments must be received in the Town Office by 5 p.m. on the due date.**

Cheques may be post-dated to the due date (Sept. 30, 2020) but must be received by the Town Office on or before September 30, 2020 by 5 p.m. or they will be considered late and will be subject to a penalty. Receipts may be emailed upon request or picked up at the Town Office.

All taxes remaining subsequently unpaid are subject by law to a penalty of 1.25% per month (compounded annually). STATEMENTS CURRENTLY SHOWING ARREARS WILL HAVE ADDITIONAL PENALTIES. Call the Town Office or log in to your eServices account for an updated balance on the day the payment will be remitted. Note that penalties are posted on the first of every month. (please allow at least 3 business days for bank processing)

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## IN BRIEF



Construction at Arena Road in Niverville.

EVAN BRAUN

## Arena Road to Be Made One-Way

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

Council has decided to change the flow of traffic along Arena Road, making it a one-way street with traffic moving north from Main Street. Arena Road is currently in the process of being reconstructed, and the change will take effect when the street reopens. New signage will be erected to advise motorists of the change.

Mayor Myron Dyck noted that this change to traffic flow was recommended by Manitoba Infrastructure at the time when the high school and CRRC projects were in the design phase. He noted that this is in keeping with the current trend of lessening access to

provincial highways.

“[Manitoba Infrastructure] saw that when people on a busy day would try and make a left turn and there’s a train, the traffic got backed up on Main Street westbound,” Dyck said. “And then traffic could be backed up going towards the arena... It just makes for a real bottleneck and it is a safety concern.”

For now, Arena Road will be the only street to become one-way, but the master plan for this part of the community also calls for Centre Street to become one-way, moving west. This will drive more traffic to the corner of Main Street and Krahn Road, which will see the construction of lights or a roundabout.



Concept art for the expanded Main Street Storage location in Niverville.

MAIN STREET STORAGE

# Main Street Storage Expands to Second Location

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

A local business, Main Street Storage, is on the cusp of a major expansion. Currently operating out of 226 Main Street in Niverville, the business offers heated, climate-controlled storage lockers.

The owners, Ray and Cara Dowse, say that the 18 lockers on site—each of which are 10-by-11 feet with roll-up doors—have been in high demand since the business first opened in 2013, with new customers having to join a waiting list.

That’s why they began planning a few years ago to expand to a new location—a time which has finally arrived.

The expanded facility, which has begun construction, will be located at 299 Main Street. When finished, the site will include a new 5,400-square-foot building offering 50 individual storage lockers, varying in size to fit customers’ needs. Approximately half of these new lockers will be climate-controlled.

Main Street Storage will

also have 60 designated outdoor parking stalls for vehicles and trailers. The stalls will be up to 12 feet wide and 38 feet long.

The Dowses say the site will be accessible 24 hours per day, seven days per week, and will be safe and well-lit. An automated gate will give customers keyfob entry. Video surveillance will also be in effect.

“Cara and I have been working on the plan for a couple of years, as our goal is to provide the community with a high-quality, secure facility providing most of the options and features that would be found at a self-storage facility in a major centre,” says Ray Dowse. “We recently finalized our site and building plans and have been working with Von Ast Construction.”

Dowse says construction is projected to begin in mid-July, with the building foundation going in next week and the steel structure and framing starting as early as July 15. The tentative completion date falls in early September.

He adds that they will continue to operate the current

mini-storage space at 226 Main Street. The new facility will merely provide additional lockers for customers.

“Cara and I are really excited for the finished product and to be able to offer this service to businesses and residents throughout the region,” Dowse says. “As the community and region continue to grow, having 1.5 acres on our site will allow us the opportunity to expand as needed.”

Dowse says he and Cara first purchased 226 Main Street as part of a larger ownership group in 2008. The 8,000-square-foot building was vacant at the time, and over the course of a few years they gutted it, removed an old freight elevator, and installed two residential apartment suites on the second floor.

The ownership group then found a tenant for the ground floor commercial space, Anya’s Hair Studio, which still operates there. After leasing the remaining office space on the second floor, they were left with 3,000 square feet of unused real estate.

“At that point, in 2010, we

decided to try installing a few self-storage units there to see if there would be an uptake, installing a few lockers at a time,” Dowse says. “In 2013, Cara and I bought out our other four partners in the building, who all had other aspirations, and we finished out the remainder of the back open area into more storage lockers.”

The Dowses were also part of a separate group of shareholders that owned 299 Main Street. Originally it was part of the same property as the old Puratone building immediately to the west. The Progressive Group purchased the building in 2017 but didn’t have any interest in the 1.5 acres of vacant land at 299 Main Street.

“Cara and I then decided to purchase it with our mini-storage company for potential long-term expansion of the storage business,” says Dowse. “Ever since, we have been planning for this day.”

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# Community General Store Opens Doors in Niverville

By Brenda Sawatzky

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Sales may be down for some retailers during these muggy summer days, but the Community General Store nonetheless had a big opening week in early July. The store's proprietor, Noella Andres, says traffic through her new Niverville store has been constant since she first opened the doors on June 26.

"There wasn't a single moment where our store wasn't at maximum capacity," Andres says of the store's early days, indicating that safe distancing practices meant having to limit the number of shoppers at any one time. "On opening day, we had approximately 150 people make purchases... and often there was a lineup to get in the store and in the building. It was such an exciting day for us."

The most popular items, she says, have been the fresh floral bouquets and Utofea, a locally created confection made with salted cashews, toffee, and chocolate.

It wouldn't be a general store without a broad selection of other knickknacks and collectibles—and a collection of home and skincare products too. Along with fresh flowers, a wide variety of potted house plants live up the store. For the outdoor chef, spice blends, meat rubs, and sauces line the shelves.

Andres hopes shoppers will appreciate her keen interest in supporting local artisans. This means the store carries unique jewelry, art prints, candles, soaps, pottery,



Noella Andres with daughter Peyton Robinson.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

essential oils, stained glass, and macramé, just for a start.

"Most of the makers in the store I have personally had the pleasure of meeting, and that was important to me," says Andres. "On opening weekend, a lot of these makers came down to meet some of our customers and see their products on our shelves... There is nothing better than... knowing that [our] purchases helped to take care of their family and fuel their passion."

In an effort to work towards a more environmentally sustainable future, the Community General Store also boasts a zero-waste

refilling station with a selection of soaps, household cleaners, bath products, and toothpaste tabs. Soon Andres anticipates adding bubble bath, shampoo, conditioner, and body lotion to the inventory. Clients can bring their own jars for filling or purchase a refillable glass bottle in store.

The popular Wolseley Kombucha, brewed in Winnipeg, will also eventually be a refillable item, served from a keg instead of individual bottles.

But Andres's interest in sustainability goes beyond the products she carries.

"Our bags for shopping are not branded and that's on purpose," says Andres. "We want people to use them as gift bags in the future. We also have tried our best to [be discriminating on] most packaging on products and have asked a lot of the makers... to try and avoid plastic shipping materials when sending their boxes to us. We also keep a lot of the boxes that are sent to us so that, when an online order comes through, we can reuse the boxes."

In keeping with this theme, Andres makes an effort to source products with friendly ingredients, too.

"All of our skincare and candles are made with essential oils rather than [unnatural] fragrances," adds Andres. "I have tried my best to keep everything in the store nontoxic and as green as possible. We have educated ourselves on the footprint left behind by the makers themselves, asking questions such as where they get their ingredients and materials."

Anupaya Quality Goods is one of Andres's favourite brands due to their dedication to the environment. For every product they sell, the company commits to cleaning up one pound of garbage. As a local ambassador, she expects to be organizing local clean-up initiatives to assist in turning the company's goal into a reality here at home.

In the near future, Andres's business plan will include an exciting addition: do-it-yourself workshops. Partnering with Shereen Rashwan of Bistro 290, the pair will provide opportunities for crafters to try their hands at making terrariums and painting watercolours. Customers will also be able to sign up for workshops on making homemade bodycare products, kombucha, and seasonal décor.

"Both Shereen and I have a huge heart for bringing the community together, and we are both very excited about these events."

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

■ The Community General Store is located at 10 Cedar Drive in Niverville. Hours run from Monday to Friday, 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

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## IN BRIEF

## Repairs Coming to PTH 59 South

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

The province is about to undertake an extensive round of highway repairs.

For residents of the southeast, the highway most affected by upcoming construction will be the southerly portions of Highway 59. Repairs will be made from Highway 52 all the way south to the United States border, a stretch of more than 60 kilometres.

Travellers to and from communities like St. Pierre-Jolys and St. Malo could see delays in the coming months.

"Our government is committed to improving Manitoba's transportation infrastructure to ensure the safe and reliable flow of both people and goods," says Ron Schuler, Minister of Infrastructure. "Investing in our highways supports economic growth and will have a positive impact on the province for years to come."

Some of the projects involve grading or grade widening, removing the existing surface, restoring the road base, and resurfacing multilayered pavement.

Schuler adds that some of the work is set to begin as early as August.

## Niverville Heritage Dental Unveils New Facility

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

After a rocky start to the year, Niverville Heritage Dental recently reopened their clinic—and pulled back the veil on their new and improved facility, which has been undergoing extensive renovations since the winter.

The clinic has more than doubled in size, increasing their square footage from 1,190 to 2,650. Two operatories have been added, meaning more patients can be attended to at the same time, as well as a state-of-the-art sterilization station. All the operatories now come equipped with new patient chairs as well, meaning your stay at the dentist will be a bit more comfortable. Also, a new medical-grade HVAC system has been installed to improve air quality throughout the facility.

There's also a larger waiting area, in addition to a check-in desk which will provide for better patient flow.

"I truly believe your environment enhances your experience," says Dr. Sunayna Gupta, the centre's principal dentist. "Since the very first day I began working in Niverville five years ago, I knew it was for me. I also knew the look of the practice did not reflect my or the [staff's] personality, but I loved that we were the 'little office that could.' We had heart, and I knew that's what counted."

With these latest renovations, Gupta says that everything you think you know about the clinic has changed—that no detail has been overlooked, from the paint colour and décor to the hardware



The team at Niverville Heritage Dental.

NIVERVILLE HERITAGE DENTAL

and dental equipment.

"When you walk in, I promise you automatically feel relaxed," she says. "We know the dentist isn't everyone's favourite place to be, which is why it was so important to create a space we can look forward to working in and where patients can look forward to coming."

More than three years of thought and preparation has gone into the new space. Construction began in February, about a month before the pandemic forced the clinic to temporarily shut its doors.

According to Gupta, it's been a really challenging time for everyone involved.

"As a healthcare provider, my first concern is always the well-being of my patients. It was a daily struggle not being able to physically be there for them, attempting to diagnose over the phone, and trying my best to provide care in the best way possible given the

circumstance."

Even more challenging was the need to lay off the team who she had been working with so long.

"That was heartbreaking," Gupta says. "I am so grateful for them, and they were so understanding, but it definitely wasn't easy when you care and know that you were putting them in a difficult situation. Truthfully, financially, on both a personal and professional level, it was stressful. With no revenue coming in and being in the middle of an extensive renovation was definitely not ideal, but at the end of the day I truly believe your mindset plays such an important role in how to handle situations. I chose to be grateful and stay positive."

Now that the clinic's doors are open again, Niverville Heritage Dental has put in place some key procedures to ensure that patients are able to expect a safe experience when they come in for their

appointments.

"The safety of our patients and team is our number one priority during this pandemic. We are strictly following all the regulations set out by the Manitoba Dental Association, as well as implementing our own extra procedures in order to add extra safety measures."

Those safety measures include screening patients over the phone prior to their appointment and when they arrive, requesting hand sanitization and taking their temperature upon arrival for their appointment, and limiting the number of patients in the office as well as the number of people in the operatory.

They also have patients undergo a pre-procedural rinse to decrease the microbial load in their mouths, and wear masks, face shields, scrub caps, and gowns.

"Yes, we look like a hybrid of an astronaut/beekeeper," Gupta jokes.

And although it's not required, she adds that they've also placed mobile air-filtering units in the operatories during aerosol-generating procedures to ensure above-average air quality and exchange.

"This new space is truly a dream come true. We couldn't have done it without the support of our amazing patients. Their trust is something we do not take for granted... We really do have something special here and I am so glad to be able to finally provide a service in a space that this community deserves."

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## Upcoming Events

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**Date:** August 12th, 2020**Time:** 5pm – 6pm**Location:** ZoomTo register your attendance please email [info@southeastcommerce.com](mailto:info@southeastcommerce.com)

### 2020 Southeast Commerce Group Golf Tournament

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**Date:** August 20th, 2020**Tee time:** 9:30am**Location:** Lorette Golf Course 150 Fairway Dr, Lorette, MB

Social distancing guidelines will be followed according to the public health order set out by the Province of Manitoba.

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## IN BRIEF

## Fibre Optics Coming to Ritchot

By Sara Beth Dacombe

✉ sdacombe@niverillecitizen.com

High-speed internet is one step closer to becoming a reality for residents of Ritchot.

The RM's council members are excited about the ongoing plans to bring fibre optic internet to Ritchot, an initiative which was first announced a year and a half ago.

In 2018, Ritchot Mayor Chris Ewen joined a collective of 13 reeves and mayors from the Winnipeg Metropolitan Region.

The RM is preparing to loan \$250,000 to JohnQ Public Inc. for the installation of a fibre optic network in their Strategic Fibre Corridor, which includes Ritchot.

The agreement will see the municipality loan the money for completing the infrastructure, but residents who desire the service will pay for their own individual installation and monthly fees.

Mayor Ewen says he is in ongoing communication with JohnQ as to the particulars of their coverage and has confirmed that they plan to expand their route to include the Howden area, where residents have chronically had poor internet access.

"If we approve this, I had made a decision with the JohnQ group to go to Howden," says Ewen. "With a bit of a delay in the summer months, we look to be lighting up internet in Howden come October. [JohnQ] will be looking to do community barbecues, obviously with practicing social distancing. They will be door-knocking come September to see who wants this quality internet."



The new sidewalks on the north side of Main Street through the railway crossing.

EVAN BRAUN

## Niverville Tackles Midsummer Improvements

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@niverillecitizen.com

As we approach midsummer, the Town of Niverville is in the process of making a number of improvements to its infrastructure.

Earlier this month, the town completed roadwork at the intersection of Main Street and Prairie Trail. In addition to road improvements, the main goal was to improve sidewalk access to the west side of town.

"The sidewalk there will get people to and from the community, and students to and from the high school," says Niverville Mayor Myron Dyck. "We had a sidewalk on the south side of Main Street, but we did not have one on the north side. And so that whole intersection enhancement was basically to get that sidewalk built so people can walk the north side of Main Street without having to cross the street to get to the CRRC,

the high school, and so on and so forth."

For the last four years, the town has also been undergoing major sidewalk upgrades along Main Street, completing one or two blocks per summer. This year, the money that would normally be spent on new Main Street sidewalks has been directed to sidewalk work along Arena Road, which will improve pedestrian connectivity to and from the high school and CRRC.

As for the progress of the CRRC, Dyck says construction is still on schedule and the facility should be ready to open in March or April of next year.

Motorists will also have noticed the roadwork at the corner of Main Street and Third Avenue South, which began in early July. Dyck says the work at that location mainly has to do with improving the culverts and drainage.

Meanwhile, in Hespeler Park,

changes are taking place to the main roundabout. The old configuration had traffic around the roundabout moving in two lanes, with people being able to park on the outside and traffic being able to drive on the inside.

"That'll now be restricted to one-lane and one-direction," says Dyck. "No parking in the roundabout anymore. And we're connecting the sidewalk to the picnic shelter. With the lights that we've been installing there, it's just, again, more for pedestrian traffic and moving people through the park and being able to enjoy it that way. We have adequate parking in two parking lots, so just no more parking on the roundabout."

Two other projects on the town's radar are an improved water treatment plant and a regional approach to wastewater management.

"We [recently] passed a couple hundred thousand dollars in

engineering to expand our water treatment plant," Dyck says. "We have the wells now to give us the water, but we need the production to be able to produce the reverse osmosis water."

The current reservoir allows for the storage of 1.8 million litres of water. As the town grows, Dyck says a larger reservoir will become necessary.

The other project is the proposed Red-Seine-Rat Wastewater Cooperative, a project which would merge Niverville, the RM of Hanover, the RM of Ritchot, and the RM of Tache into a single mechanized wastewater treatment system. The centralized wastewater treatment plant would be built at the site of Niverville's lagoon, north of town.

That proposal was announced last December, and the province hasn't yet made any decisions about it.

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# Commentary

## Why Our Brains Struggle with Science

By Daniel Dacombe

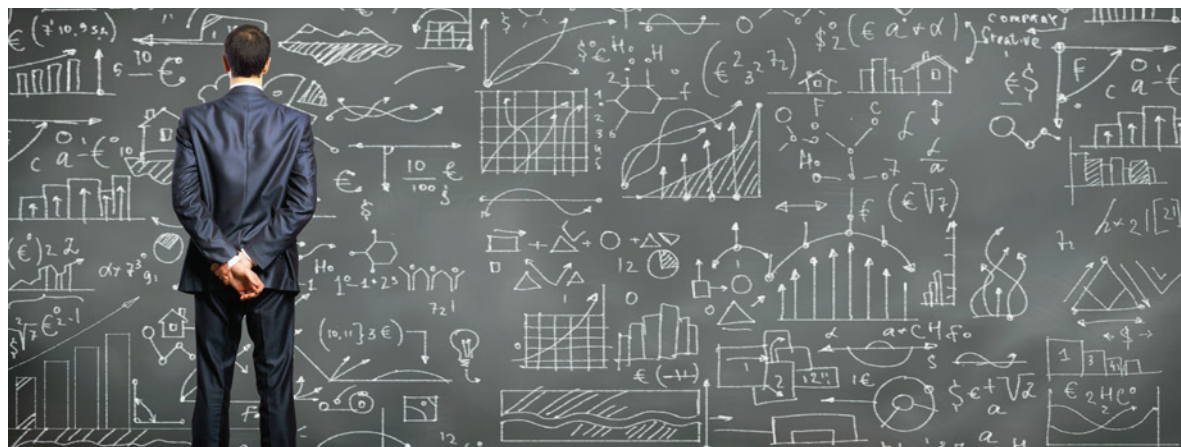
During this time of COVID-19, we've seen a broad range of responses to the quarantine, the economic crisis, and the uncertainty caused by the pandemic. In many cases, people have responded as those in the medical and scientific community have hoped: they quarantined, they social-distanced, they wore masks. And all of these interventions have helped to slow the spread of the virus. Especially in Manitoba, we've been very fortunate.

In other cases, unfortunately, we've seen the opposite: people have refused to socially distance, they've protested against the requirements to use masks, and they've even denied the existence of the virus itself while around the world intensive care units fill up and the death toll mounts.

These views have propagated and taken root in communities around the world thanks to social media. The internet, while clearly a force for education and progress, has simultaneously become a breeding ground for superstition, conspiracy, and anti-scientific idealism.

Anti-science rhetoric has become especially prominent over the last few years. YouTube in particular is home to a plethora of anti-scientific belief systems including anti-vax, flat earth, and now anti-mask or COVID-deniers.

These beliefs, and the lengths to which people go to try and make them intellectually palatable, can be humorous at first. However, while watching the experiments of flat-earthers as they try to disprove the earth's curvature "fall flat" (apologies) is wildly entertaining for some, for those in the scientific community these trends are a source of deep alarm.



DEPOSITPHOTOS

We have only to look at the current state of regions which have had anti-mask protests—and corresponding spikes in COVID-19 cases—to realize these are not harmless. They are a source of very real danger to public health.

The sudden increase in anti-science attitudes in our society leaves many asking: when did science become so unpopular?

This is an excellent question. As someone who tends to approach these issues from a psychological background, though, the question I would rather ask is this: what is it about science that makes it so hard for us to believe?

The truth is that the cards are stacked against us when it comes to science, because much of science is counterintuitive—meaning, it runs against common sense. More importantly, it goes against how our brains naturally process information and solve problems.

In the field of evolutionary psychology, researchers study how our brains have adapted over many generations to be the cunning machines they are. We're fascinating creatures with exquisite minds that process

information faster than we could ever believe. Just like a computer, these processes occur in the background, outside of our conscious awareness.

One of the ways our brains process information is through pattern recognition. If you've ever had the privilege of watching a hunter track their prey, you may have noticed how they seemed to be able to discern details about their target—weight, injuries, even biological sex—from almost invisible signs in the grass. When a sudden drop in temperature and air pressure occurs, we suddenly start packing up our picnic; it feels like rain. And who doesn't like to watch mysteries on Netflix and feel that "Aha!" moment as we put the pieces together and figure out the identity of the killer?

These adaptations of the human brain don't just help us solve mysteries, they have evolved in order to help keep us safe in an unsafe world—to see the tiger hiding in the bushes.

Unfortunately, these adaptations have resulted in brains that are vulnerable to two major problems.

The first problem is that we can have difficulty believing things that are counterintuitive, that don't seem to fit within the patterns we expect to see in the world around us. This impacts our natural inclination towards believing things we learn through science, because that information doesn't seem readily available in the world around us.

The second major problem these adaptations can cause is our vulnerability to perceiving patterns that aren't there. In other words, we draw false conclusions based on the information we receive from the world around us.

Much scientific knowledge is difficult to master, requiring years of study and practice to gain an entry-level understanding. By contrast, conspiracy theories are relatively simple, and they rely on our brains' abilities to recognize patterns that then take root and form beliefs.

Have you ever noticed that after you see airplane trails in the sky, you tend to catch a cold? Maybe this makes you think that these two things are related (the all-too-common chemtrail conspiracy). Did your child start acting differently

after they were vaccinated? Maybe this makes you think the vaccine damaged them somehow (the enduring MMR-autism conspiracy). Didn't the coronavirus scare start around the same time that those 5G towers were going up everywhere? Maybe you think those towers are causing the disease (the brand-new 5G conspiracy).

Our pattern-loving brains gravitate towards these beliefs, and it takes real effort—real, conscious thinking—to unpack them, judge them, and dismiss them.

Our brain's unfortunate tendency to gravitate towards simple patterns is one of the reasons that science is so tremendously important.

Despite what you may have heard, science is not a body of knowledge; it is a method of verifying information. We use the methodology of science to arrive at increasingly accurate conclusions, weed out bad theories, and constantly assess what we think we know. It's the reason that we have the lowest infant mortality rate in history, such a high quality of life, and the marvellous electronics that allow us to watch conspiracy videos claiming that Barack Obama was a lizard person.

The scientific method isn't perfect, but for all its faults, it is the best method humanity has discovered for learning the truth about the world around us.

So especially during this global pandemic, don't be afraid to listen to science. As astronomer Carl Sagan once put it, the scientific method is "democratic scepticism." This means that anyone with enough knowledge and expertise can examine evidence, test a theory, and share their findings with the world. And when the people with that knowledge and expertise speak up, the rest of us should listen.

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# Arts & Entertainment

## Movie Magic at Whitetail Meadow

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Manitoba temperatures have been soaring outside, but inside the halls of Whitetail Meadow something else has been smoldering—a steamy Christmas love story. Located at the corner of Highways 200 and 311, the event centre has been buzzing this summer with movie magic.

In mid-July, directors, actors, and set crews executed a complete takeover of the Whitetail Meadow grounds and facilities to create a new film. Entitled *Let's Meet Again at Christmas*, and produced by the Lifetime TV Network, the movie is set to air this Christmas Eve.

"The premise of the movie is that a couple come to Whitetail Meadow—yes, they are calling it Whitetail Meadow—to renew their vows," says Lori Neufeld, co-owner of the event centre.

Neufeld's husband, Dave, acted as film crew liaison during the two weeks of filming. He's still struck by the movie crew's ability to transform a hot summer night into a magical Christmas scene with the use of a simulated full



Inside the set of *Let's Meet Again at Christmas*.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

moon, artificial snow applied to the grassy landscape, and Christmas trees and warm fires to complete the festive backdrop.

"It's a beautiful location," says the film's producer, Juliette Hargopian. "It has everything we needed."

Hargopian says that much of the appeal was the variety of film shoot options in one location, including the interior and exterior of the event hall and the use of Marigold Cottage, the centre's charming honeymoon suite.

The expansive grounds

also provided ample space for a large tent so the entire cast and crew could dine and relax onsite between shoots.

The film stars actors Brooks Darnell and Kyla Pratt. Brooks has made his mark in movies like *Total Recall* alongside Colin Farrell and played the role of Dr. Nate Hastings in *The Young and the Restless*.

Pratt's acting career began as a child. She'll be remembered for her role as Eddie Murphy's daughter in the *Dr. Doolittle* movies and was the voice of Penny Proud in the Disney Channel animated series *The Proud Family*.

Neufeld says the production company's request to use Whitetail Meadow came as welcome news.

"Frankly, we were very happy when we got the email, because our July weddings all had to be rescheduled due to COVID," she says. "The timing could not have been better. In an average year, we could never have accommodated a summer movie shoot."

And just as the film crews packed up for their final day on July 31, the event centre jumped right back into swing, hosting two weddings over the August long weekend.

### IN BRIEF

## Local Artist Behind Manitoba 150 Time Capsule

By Liz Byron

One hundred years from now, Manitobans will be admiring the artwork of Niverville artist Darren Sakwi. That's because Sakwi, who creates sculptures out of stainless steel, was chosen to create the time capsule that marks the one hundred fiftieth anniversary of Manitoba joining Confederation, as well as the one hundredth anniversary of the opening of Manitoba's Legislature.

As a way to mark the occasion, the capsule was filled with 75 objects before being sealed for the next century. Items include a cell phone, a face mask, letters from government officials, items that represent Inuit, Métis, and First Nations cultures as well as the advancement of women's rights, and one mystery object that will remain secret until the capsule is opened in 2120.

"I jumped at the opportunity and offered to not only build the capsule but to feature some type of artwork," Sakwi says.

Sakwi has been using stainless steel to create art since 2012. His piece "The Gathering" can be seen at 287 Broadway in Winnipeg, and "Sky Spirit" was installed at the Sage Creek plaza in 2018.

"I don't push my art career, I just let it run its own

course," says the artist. "So when I'm approached with projects such as this, I definitely accept the challenge."

He was given some basic guidelines for the project, such as size and a need for the container to be airtight. He opted to use a simple design with one-eighth-inch brushed-finish stainless steel, with important dates, the province's crest, and the Manitoba 150 logo etched on one side.

The top of the box also features the images of the Assiniboine and Red Rivers, recessed and painted blue.

Sakwi says this project felt fitting for him as a person with an Indigenous background. He says he continues to learn about his background and enjoys using his art as a form of education.

Unlike many capsules, this one will not be buried and possibly forgotten. Instead it's on display at the Manitoba Legislature for people to view until it's opened.

When it is opened, one of the 75 items that future Manitobans will find is a biography of the artist. Knowing he won't be around when the capsule is opened, Sakwi finds it exciting to know that people will be handling his artwork and reading his biography in the next century.

## Comic Punch

Dear Mr. Braun,  
I think that kids should be excited about the newspaper. I always look forward for the colouring contests. So I think you should add comics.  
I made you one.  
And I hope you put it in the newspaper.

Love Lilyanne Reuter Age 9



## ANNOUNCEMENTS



**Save the Date – the 40th Anniversary Virtual Terry Fox Run is happening in NIVERVILLE on September 20th! This year we are uniting in spirit, not in person – One Day, Your Way! Join us wherever you are – in your neighbourhood, backyard, down the street or around the block. Walk, ride, swim or skateboard! Visit [terryfox.org/run](http://terryfox.org/run) to register your family to help raise funds for Canadian cancer research while honouring a Canadian hero.**

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More info: Anna  
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*Psalm 103*

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Colouring Contest



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Last Months Winner: Elliot Funk, age 9



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