

# The Citizen

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VOLUME 7 - ISSUE 1

JANUARY 2021

[www.nivervillecitizen.com](http://www.nivervillecitizen.com)

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### LOCAL NEWS

#### Cannabis Store Gets Approval in Niverville

■ A year after a plebiscite saying yes to cannabis sales, a group of businessmen get the okay to open a retail location.

Details on Pages 3-4



### LOCAL NEWS

#### Ritchot Switches to Cart-Based Waste Pickup Services

■ Over the next six weeks, residents of Ritchot will be receiving new carts, with the RM switching service providers for garbage and recycling pickup throughout the municipality.

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### SPORTS & REC

#### Countdown to 2022 Manitoba Winter Games

■ The Winter Games in Niverville are just one year away, and the local co-chairs are deep in the planning stages.

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### ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

#### Local Children's Author Tackles Tricky Subjects

■ Author Thom Van Dycke, along with a professional hockey player co-writer, takes on racism in new kids book series.

Details on Page 18

# COVID Exposure Announced at Niverville PCH

➤➤ READ MORE ON PAGE 5



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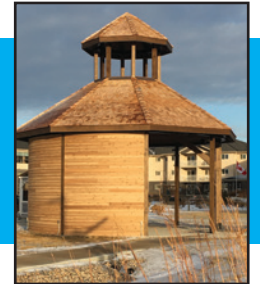
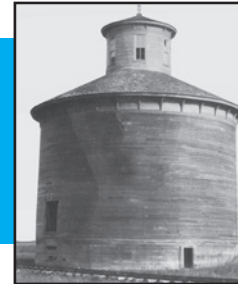
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**Thank you! We could not have done it without you!**

The Niverville Heritage Pavilion, located in the Niverville Heritage Community Gardens, reflects on the original circular wooden grain elevator, with a capacity of 25,000 bushels, that William Hespeler financed and built in Niverville in 1879.

Originally located on the north east side of the CPR rail line, this was the first circular grain elevator built in Western Canada. The elevator ceased operation in 1904.

The image of that original elevator is used today in the town crest of Niverville and remains a symbol of industry, resourcefulness, and vision for the people of Niverville.



**The Niverville Heritage Garden Committee and Niverville Communities in Bloom recognizes that without the support of the following this project could not have been completed.**

The volunteers who worked tirelessly over the past four years on fundraising events, the community residents who supported those efforts and: Manitoba Government Building Sustainable Communities Program, Niverville Heritage Holdings Inc., Maple Leaf Foods (Agri- Farm Division), Perimeter Concrete Ltd., Thomas Sill Foundation, Monsanto/Bayer Canada, Lorne Beaton, G. Snider, Bill and Roselyn Redekop, Annette and Alex Fast, Valley West Landscape, Southern Comfort Mechanical Inc, Moonfleet Layer Farm

Thanks also to Cornerstone Timberframes Inc., Ajax Roofing and Mennonite Heritage Museum for their contribution to the construction of the Pavilion.



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# Niverville's Town Council Approves Cannabis Retailer

By Sara Beth Dacombe  
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On the evening of December 15, Niverville's town council approved a variance request and conditional use application submitted by Urban Flavours, a group of cannabis entrepreneurs who seek to open a cannabis store in Niverville.

This variation will allow a retail cannabis store to develop at 41 Main Street, reducing the buffer zone requirement from within 1,000 feet of a school to within 744 feet of a school.

That location is currently under construction, so the store would, at the earliest, open some time in 2021.

Throughout the three-hour meeting, high levels of both support and opposition were read into the record from virtual attendees and written responses received by the town.

At one point, more than 30 attendees were logged in to view the virtual meeting. Ultimately, there were 56 publicly registered comments in favour of the Urban Flavours proposal, and 27 publicly registered comments against it.

From those in opposition to the measure, the obvious concern revolved around having an adult-only business like a cannabis store in relatively close proximity to both an elementary school and daycare.

Other concerns included public safety and a possible increase in crime, as well as parking issues.

Urban Flavours used the meeting and the large audience as an opportunity to introduce themselves to the community. They also explained their variance request, saying that the reason they were interested in the 41 Main Street location is because there are limited options for commercial development in town that fall outside the 1,000-foot buffer zone.

They also outlined the ways in which they are proactively targeting concerns from residents of the community.

## WHAT IS URBAN FLAVOURS?

Urban Flavours was created by Harsimran (Sim) Sandhu, along with his partners Harvinder Dhillon and Said Mohamed. The three businessmen were all raised in Manitoba.

"We are excited to be doing business in Niverville," said Sandhu. "We have various businesses in Winnipeg, such as gas stations, real estate development, and car washes. Our roots are in Manitoba and we look



The team behind Urban Flavours: Harvinder Dhillon, Said Mohamed, and Harsimran (Sim) Sandhu. 

forward to doing more business in the community. We've been looking at Niverville for business purposes for the last two years. We know Niverville is a growing community. It's a good place to do business... we love the community aspect of it and how everybody's coming together."

Sandhu said they have a combined total of 10 years of business experience between the three partners, with three of those years related to the cannabis industry.

The Liquor, Gaming, and Cannabis Authority (LGCA) oversees the sale of cannabis in Manitoba and Sandhu explained where they are at in the process of securing a license.

"It's a very long and detailed process with them and we've submitted our application to the LGCA, and approval of the space is one of the main things we have to get passed now," said Sandhu. "So in detail, when it comes to security and how the cannabis is stored, all those things are very regulated. We're doing the minimum as far as what is required by the LGCA, but we're also going to go a little bit beyond that just due to the sensitivity of the build in Niverville. We understand that this is a first for the community, and we want to say that, from a security standpoint, we're not leaving any stones unturned."

Urban Flavours expects to sell similar cannabis products to other stores of this type across the province, including cannabis-infused food products. The group also says they plan to employ locals and assist with job creation in the community.

"This is our first retail site, and at least for right now, this is the only cannabis store we are planning on doing," Sandhu added. "We're not planning on opening up in Winnipeg or other communities in the province. Down the road, that

might change, but as we're sitting here today, we're not planning on any other stores. We're also not a franchise. Nobody is controlling us. We want to work with the town council, with the developer, with the residents of the community, and take all the suggestions that we can possibly take and make this a good business that's well supported throughout the community."

## SUPPORT FOR THE PROPOSAL

Many residents made personal statements of support, such as Barry Piasta, a local community advocate.

"I can't see any difficulty with a few hundred feet, so I'm all for this," said Piasta. "It's 2020 now and I think everybody realizes that this is a less harmful product than once thought. And if they provide local employment... it would be nice to see actual Nivervilleans employed there."

One group of supportive residents supplied a form letter, signed by many people who live in Niverville, along with comments from parents who aren't concerned about their children being exposed to a cannabis retailer.

"I have no worries or concerns for [my children] when they walk past the liquor department at Bigway, nor when they see the sale of tobacco that can be purchased there and at the local gas stations," said Nicole Simard, the mother of two teenagers. "Likewise, I would have no worries or concerns for them if they were to walk, bike, or ride past the cannabis retailer. I trust that council will make the progressive-minded decision."

Leslie Bardal, a local teacher and mother of two children, also wrote in support of the new venture.

(continued on page 4)



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

The advertising deadline is 5:00 p.m. on the 15th of each month. The paper will be distributed the last week of every month.

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(continued from page 3)

"If my children can walk by or right up to a display of alcohol right next to the fruit section in our local grocery store, they can walk by a store selling it and other legal product for adult consumption," Bardal said. "I believe our town council and Chamber of Commerce has our town safety and integrity in our best interest while they work to build our commercial tax base and welcome all new businesses."

Bryan Trottier owns a piece of property in town that was previously considered by Canna Cabana when their application to develop in town ultimately failed.

"After the plebiscite, I believe the town has spoken clearly that this business is welcome in Niverville," he said. "The proposed location is an excellent choice for both the company wanting to come to Niverville and the citizens that will be using the store. As with any other store selling 18-plus-aged items, these stores are regulated by a government body and do not require the Town of Niverville to add more regulations to limit the chances of a private business's success. Having been denied as the owner of the original location, I am disappointed that this decision wasn't granted last year, but I welcome the addition of this new business to our town in the new location."

## RESIDENT CONCERNS

As expected, the primary objection was the location's proximity to Niverville Elementary School to the east and the Growing Minds daycare to the west.

"Cannabis is more dangerous for youth. We need to take extra efforts to protect them," said local resident Dwight Doell, who presented statistics from Health Canada. "Growing Minds is even closer to this location than the elementary school. The daycare has school-age children, not just infants. There's a traffic pattern there when the kids are being walked back and forth to the daycare centre and the school."

Troy Waldner owns the property on Main Street immediately adjacent to the new store. He has been a resident of Niverville for 43 years and knows the business community.

"I'm looking forward to a [new] place there, but being so close and right in downtown Niverville is probably just not the place," said Waldner. "I know the landlord and he has other options. This is probably not the best option."

Rod Downey believes the 1,000-foot rule should have been upheld, especially considering it is the buffer zone recommended by the province.

"In the research I did, through the province, that was based on research on other municipalities across Canada, and this was based on the early

days of medical marijuana locations," said Downey. "They [Urban Flavours] really need to be able to prove why the variance is justified, and on the face of the application, I can't see that evidence."

Patricia Dutchak, who is new to Niverville, believes the precedent is about more than a proximity to the schools; it's about the image of the town.

"I do object to the variance," Dutchak said. "I'm relatively new to Niverville and I'm really impressed with the town. It's very progressive. [People] perceive it as a good place to raise children. And I'm really afraid that having an adult-only business in that location will really compromise the town."

Other people were concerned that this store will negatively impact the ongoing efforts to revitalize Main Street.

"This is something new and something we shouldn't rush into," said Norman Klippenstein. "I am in opposition to the variance because of the limited distance to the school. Bylaws were put in place for a reason and I don't see why we're in any rush."

Some parents expressed that they don't want to see gummy or candy lookalike edibles sold in town.

## RESPONDING TO CONCERNS

Urban Flavours presented several points regarding people's concern over children viewing the store.

"The name is discreet," said Sandhu. "The name is Urban Flavours, so the signage and any branding on the outside of the building will not include the word cannabis or any cannabis graphics or anything like that. That is something we feel is necessary."

He also reminded people that the windows will be opaque so that passersby can't see into the store. This is an LGCA regulation for all cannabis shops in Manitoba.

Sandhu said that residents inquiring about local employment have already contacted them. He added that they also intend to be a supportive and active member of the community, in terms of supporting local events and sports teams, something they currently do with their other businesses.

Sandhu also elaborated about their plans for store security and how products will be stored and handled, in compliance with LGCA rules. In consultation with the RCMP, Urban Flavours has agreed to install high-quality video cameras for use in solving potential break-and-enter crimes.

"It will be a good system, something that will be able to read license

plates," said Sandhu. "We are taking it to the extreme when it comes to security cameras."

However, Sandhu made the point that any criminals who break into the store would have a very difficult time accessing actual products, which will be stored inside a secure vault—another LGCA rule. He doesn't believe any successful cannabis thefts from retail stores have happened in the province since cannabis was legalized.

He also addressed the question of edibles.

"Edibles are being sold in retail sites right now, but we haven't determined what type of edibles we would be carrying yet, to be honest," said Sandhu. "Everything being sold will not be sold to anyone underage. Everything is kept behind the counter. If it comes down to us not selling candy-looking edibles, it's definitely something we are open to."

## THE DEVELOPER

Dowse Ventures, the owner of 41 Main Street, spoke in favour of the incoming business.

*"Members of council have been very diligent in doing their own homework, and I think the residents of Niverville need to know that... To be frank, this was not one of the easier decisions, but it was an educated and heartfelt one."*

**Myron Dyck** | Mayor of Niverville

"We did spend some time with the applicant looking at various locations within the community, and this one was deemed to be a location that would be viable for retail," said Ray Dowse.

Dowse feels the business will be a good fit for Niverville. From a developer's standpoint, since he is currently preparing this location for a new commercial strip mall, he said he has already addressed issues related to parking, for example. He pointed out that no surrounding businesses registered any objections along these lines when the development went through its own public hearing.

## COUNCIL REACTIONS

Throughout the lengthy meeting, members of council engaged with the concerns raised by residents.

Mayor Myron Dyck reflected on the complexity of the issue. "At the end of the day, on any decision council makes, you have to weigh what is before you. Why this business in this location? It is a process we go through. We had a request, the process says what we must do, and we must have a public hearing and that is what we are obligated to do, and we would do the same for

any business and follow the same process."

Councillor Nathan Dueck provided a brief commentary on cannabis-related crimes and says that a case can be made that illegal cannabis sales have ties to organized crime, a problem which the federally regulated system in Canada works to prevent.

"Cannabis is important to have in the community to continue to make sure that specific sources of organized crime are removed from the community," said Councillor Dueck. "Any time you buy cannabis on the street... it is being funnelled through organized crime. One of the benefits of this is it's going toward a monitored source scenario at that point."

Dueck said that he and Mayor Dyck have attended a Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) program, held out of Steinbach.

"They've been asking to come to our community," Dueck said. "We've attended a few meetings. I also think this would be a really good point to introduce DARE to the community and I would also ask the applicant to maybe consider getting involved."

Mayor Dyck added that town safety is a high priority: "Council is looking into creating a larger police presence within the community. It is definitely on our agenda."

One member of council who voiced significant opposition to the proposal was Councillor John Funk. Funk reflected on the history of Niverville's councils disagreeing with the province, often taking the position that provincial safety standards weren't strong enough.

Funk gave the example of speed limits for drivers coming into town, saying that the province's safety review sets them too high. He then questioned why the town would consider lowering the buffer zone, which in his view contradicts the town's commitment to public safety.

"The province says 1,000 feet would be what we should be from the school, and lo and behold, the first thing we want to do is take safety out of there," Funk argued. "I don't think it should fall anywhere on Main Street between the tracks and Fifth... The safety standards are there for a reason."

Funk went on to say that some residents who voted in favour of cannabis retail during the plebiscite, assuming there would be a 1,000-foot buffer zone, might have instead voted no if they knew that the buffer zone would soon be lowered.

In fact, Funk went as far as to imply such residents could consider taking legal action against the town.

"When we had the plebiscite, we

said 1,000 feet... So is there legal action here?" Funk said. "Within one year, we want to break our own bylaw."

When Councillor Dueck called for a motion to approve the variance, bringing the matter to a vote, Councillor Kevin Stott suggested further amending the motion to lower the buffer zone to 400 feet—to prevent having to go through variance request hearings for these types of businesses in the future.

"I heard all the arguments and I don't like shoving it off to the backside of town or the industrial park," Stott said. "I do think that having it front and centre, in a public area, where it is viewed and watched, they are going to supply more security, and that is why I would push that then—and because the plebiscite said they wanted it in town. If a block is 400 feet, that's what I would like to see."

But the town's CAO, Eric King, pointed out that the suggestion to lessen the official buffer zone to 400 feet would have to be handled through a separate bylaw and couldn't be voted on that evening.

Before the vote, Councillor Dueck made a few closing remarks.

"When I was elected to this role, the citizens in the Chamber highly prioritized revitalizing Main Street," Dueck said. "Every single business that could have a cannabis business in it has been approached. Anywhere that a building is going to go is going to have to have this type of hearing. We're in a lose-lose type of situation on this—and because of the location of the school, it causes a very big problem. However, we do have an obligation to the plebiscite to find a space for [a cannabis retailer]. And therefore I believe this is probably one of the best options and solutions that we can deal with at this point."

## OUTCOME OF THE VOTE

The application was ultimately approved by a vote of 3–1, with only Councillor Funk voting against it.

The conditional use permit was also approved, with conditions: the installation of one-way windows, no cannabis advertising or signs on the exterior, shop admittance restricted to age 19 or older, adequate lighting, and an effort to mitigate parking concerns.

"We heard repeatedly from members from council as to the research that they've done," said Mayor Dyck. "Members of council have been very diligent in doing their own homework, and I think the residents of Niverville need to know that. There's been a lot of time and energy invested by council to learn about this industry and learn about the legalities of it and then put that information to work to make sense of what would be the best decision to make here... To be frank, it was not one of the easier decisions, but it was an educated and heartfelt one."





The Heritage Life Personal Care Home in Niverville.

DUSTIN KRAHN

# COVID Outbreak Declared at Niverville PCH

By Jennifer Lavin

A COVID-19 outbreak has been declared at the Heritage Life Personal Care Home in Niverville, although there has been only one positive test so far. The news broke as part of the province's daily press briefing on Monday, January 4.

Wes Hildebrand, CEO of the personal care home, says that the one positive case is a team member on campus who is currently at home self-isolating.

The Heritage Life PCH is divided into small neighbourhoods, and in this case only the residents in the Prairie Rose neighbourhood have been affected. All residents in this wing will be tested for COVID-19. Their families were contacted very soon after learning about the positive case.

"Team members have been

very diligent in their personal lives, as well as their work lives," Hildebrand says in praise of the facility's staff. "We have a tremendous team. They will continue to do what they have been doing and doing very well."

Visitation to all neighbourhoods at the PCH has been cancelled until the results of the Prairie Rose tests are determined. As well, any upcoming admissions to the PCH are on hold until the outbreak is declared over.

Even before the outbreak, the team at Heritage Life had been implementing measures to mitigate some of the opportunities for the virus to enter the campus.

"Many of the steps we have taken [at] the Niverville Heritage Centre campus have been as a result of the early information gathered from other provinces

such as Ontario, Quebec, and B.C., where long-term care outbreaks started."

Hildebrand states that Heritage Life's one-staff/one-site protocol was developed from carefully watching outbreaks in other long-term care facilities.

"Early on in the pandemic, we partitioned off part of our neighbourhoods in order to reduce the cohort size," he adds.

Hildebrand also lists several other procedures he believes will help nip this outbreak in the bud, including: screening all staff and visitors every day when entering the campus, connecting with Southern Health leadership for their guidance and assistance, and restricting staff from moving between cohorts.

Taking care of the residents' health and peace of mind are

naturally a high priority for Hildebrand. He points out that the Heritage Life PCH implemented virtual visits before most other facilities in Manitoba. He also praises his recreation staff, who have continued to provide activities for the residents on a daily basis.

"They have become very creative," Hildebrand says.

Niverville Mayor Myron Dyck has recommended that all requests for information be directed to Wes Hildebrand. He also says that regular updates will soon be made available on the facility's website.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

■ To check for updates on the Heritage Life PCH outbreak, visit their website: [www.heritagecentre.ca/personal-care-home](http://www.heritagecentre.ca/personal-care-home)

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# From Manitoba to Ecuador and Back Again

By Sara Beth Dacombe

✉ sdacombe@nivervillecitizen.com

On December 20, local school-teacher Mark Reimer flew to Ecuador to fulfill a promise he made almost 10 years ago.

Mark, who formerly taught at Niverville Collegiate, has spent quite a bit of time providing humanitarian aid in Ecuador—and in the process he inspired a student named Alex Cedeño to come to Canada to attend university.

Mark's earliest connection to Ecuador came when his parents took him there as part of their missionary work in 1965.

Later in life, when Mark found himself looking towards retirement from his teaching career, and during a period when he was realizing the toll that Manitoba's winters had begun to take on him, he decided that it might help to escape somewhere warm for a few months each year.

Being a teacher and an active-minded individual, he knew he would need to find a place where he could fully participate in the daily life of a community.

So in 2010, after a lot of research, Mark found a place called the City of Joy and decided it was exactly what he was looking for.

"I know that Manitoba winters and I are not on best friend terms," says Mark. "I have arthritis and troubles with my joints, and cold doesn't do much for me. I was looking for a more southern place to spend time. I found an ad for a place called City of Joy in Cancun that had humanitarian project opportunities, and they were looking for volunteers."

However, they needed people with at least a beginner-level understanding of Spanish, a qualification Mark didn't have.

The language barrier wasn't a dealbreaker, though, just a delay. He figured he would start by going somewhere with a school to help him learn the language.

First stop: learn Spanish. Second stop: City of Joy!

## MANITOBA TO ECUADOR PROJECT

And that's how he found Puerto Lopez, a sleepy little fishing village



Mark Reimer with brothers Luiggy and Alex Cedeño.

MARK REIMER

along Ecuador's coast, very close to the equator. The village had a Spanish program for travellers which Mark had set his eyes on.

When he arrived, he noticed that a lot of young kids there were suffering from the effects of poverty, both socially and economically. The Los Canarios Futbol Club had been established to help give young boys a chance to escape poverty while receiving an education and play soccer.

The people of the village, as well as its leaders, quickly became friends of Mark's. Before long, he realized he need look no further to find his city of joy.

Unexpectedly, he had stumbled across exactly what he'd been looking for all along.

As he connected more with the leaders of the Los Canarios Futbol Club, he became inspired by their mission and took action by creating the Manitoba to Ecuador Project, a cross-cultural exchange program, in 2011.

One of the families he counted among his friends was Manuel and Gloria Cedeño, who own a store called Tienda Gloria. It was here where Mark first met Alex, their son.

"Tienda Gloria is a convenience store across the street from Hostal Tuzco, where all Manitoba to Ecuador Project participants have stayed since 2011," says Mark. "Alex is Gloria's son, and in 2011 he was nine years old—timid, uncertain, and he usually stayed behind the metal bars enclosing their store. By the next year, he came out of the store, smiled often, and I played soccer on

the street with him. In fact, I delivered soccer cleats... his first-ever pair of cleats."

Over the years, Mark determined to pour positive attention into Alex. They played football in the street and interacted a lot, but the language barrier prevented a lot of connection.

But Mark's Spanish gradually improved, and their friendship grew.

Alex's childhood was enriched by the local school and the efforts of humanitarian aid to bring books and additional resources into the village, but his future was still uncertain.

Most people in Puerto Lopez had never left their hometown, and the population included many teenage parents who struggled to provide for their children. Alex's parents had been teenage parents themselves, and they told Mark that this wasn't the future they dreamed of for their son.

## PROVIDENCE SCHOLARSHIP

One day, when Alex was 15, Mark invited him and his brother Luiggy to come along on an outreach group activity. It was the first time the boys had ever seen something of life outside of Puerto Lopez.

"Our volunteer group organized a bus tour to the neighbouring town and Alex came along," says Mark. "[The next year] I invited Alex, who was now 16, and his brother to carnival celebrations in Banos and the mountains. Neither had ever been on a vacation in their life."

In the spring of 2019, Alex expressed interest in postsecondary education, but he was conflicted, knowing this would likely mean

having to leave the town where he'd grown up. Second-guessing his dream, he thought he might be satisfied staying home to work in his mother's store.

It was Alex's dad who eventually influenced him to reconsider university abroad.

"In October 2019, in a conversation I was having with Manuel, Alex's dad explained that Alex was beginning to think more seriously about which universities might be options for him," says Mark. "One week after my conversation with Manuel, I happened across a reminder about Providence University College's Partnership Program Scholarship. This university sets aside five spaces for international students from developing nations who could benefit from and give back to their home countries, and there was going to be an opening for September 2020."

Gary Schellenberg, vice president emeritus at Providence University College in Otterburne, had previously worked with Mark on other initiatives and was keen to work with him again to figure out how it might work for Alex to come to Manitoba.

Helping international students is an integral part of Providence's corporate and educational vision.

"At Providence, we find the more culture we can bring in, the better for our students," says Schellenberg. "We consider it a main part of our work to bring people in, and then they go back to their home, to their country, and make a difference... We have an international representative on campus that looks after international students. They take them under their

wings and show them the ropes. And we find the Ecuadorians integrate themselves very well to the ethos of Providence. That's where Mark is so passionate. He's worked very hard on behalf of many kids from Ecuador now. He sees it as a way to break the cycle of poverty in the towns they come from."

Alex applied for the Partnership Program Scholarship, and shortly thereafter received it.

## PANDEMIC AID

Unfortunately, just as they were making plans to apply for a visa and arrange for travel, COVID-19 changed the world.

"I had left here on Christmas Day 2019 to spend two and a half months in Puerto Lopez, and on March 14 someone told me that the Canadian ports of entry were closing because of COVID-19," says Mark. "So with the help of a local travel agent, they got me on a flight the next day. I had immense survivor's guilt, going to a country with medical help and food in the grocery stores, and I had left them behind, Alex and all my friends. But someone said, you can do more for them here than you can do there."

Knowing that the already lean economic provisions in Puerto Lopez were about to become even leaner, Mark came up with a way to continue his support of the village's families.

Reviving the Manitoba to Ecuador Project, after having put it on hiatus due to retirement, Mark circulated a fundraising ask, intending to organize food hampers.

"Malnutrition was starting to set in and the elderly population was struggling," Mark says. "When one family I was close with got sick, people here responded with, 'Yes, we'll pray, but is there more we can do?' And I said, 'Yes. If you donate some money, we will put together food hampers so they could have food to eat.'"

Friends from in and around Manitoba's rural southeast, including Niverville's Lisa Letkeman, saw Mark's request on Facebook and decided to get involved.

"I follow Mark on Facebook, so I'm always aware of what he's doing," says Letkeman. "I saw he had put out a call for help for Ecuador and he was

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organizing a craft sale or a bake sale... and we supported that."

Letkeman already had a connection to Ecuador, since her daughter Olivia had previously gotten involved in missions trips there.

"We saw he was looking for clothing, too, and we have helped in the past with that, so we helped donate items and clothing to fill up any space in his suitcases," she adds. "We're not full-time involved in what he does, but we definitely feel connected. We really think it's a valuable thing that he does for his family and friends out there, so whenever we hear about what he's doing we definitely want to help."

Due to the generosity of local Manitobans, Mark was able to send \$16,000 to Ecuador, which provided hampers to 1,500 families three separate times throughout the pandemic.

People who had not eaten for a number of days, or had been reduced to no more than a single bowl of rice per day, got a knock on the door and received a hamper full of food right when they needed it.

"I think Mark is very well known in Niverville, because he was a teacher here," Letkeman says. "He's gotten so many young people involved in thinking critically, and thinking outside of their own little world and outside of their own little box. It benefits Ecuador, but also us as well."

And so, instead of opening books and learning English in Otterburne this September, Alex became Mark's feet on the ground in Puerto Lopez, helping with the Manitoba to Ecuador COVID Relief Project, purchasing and delivering food hampers, and distributing other resources to people in need.

### DREAM COME TRUE

Throughout this flurry of important work, the dream of coming to Canada and studying at Providence was never far from Alex's mind, nor Mark's. It had been six months of wondering whether he would come to Canada after all, but when international travel up again, the pair jumped at the chance to make it happen.

And so Alex is now set to begin studying at Providence on January 8, 2021.

"When I asked Alex what he would like to study, he said, 'I want to learn English,'" Mark says. "I told him, 'Providence provides courses for that, but you also get to learn a lot more.' And he was amazed. When we talked about program options, and the benefits of different programs, I told him that Providence is quite well known for their business program, and he is registered in that. But he really can choose his direction for the first year he will be there."

Marks says the current plan is for Alex to focus during the first year on learning English. The best financial option back home will be for him to return equipped to teach English to the locals.

"He can pursue that," says Mark. "But he could combine teaching English with business knowledge, and even open a private English-teaching school and teach business people who are keen to learn English. The business community wants to learn English, because it makes you pretty prominent if you to know English in the business world in Ecuador."

Alex's desire to change his family's prospects can seem like a heavy weight to place on any teenager's shoulders, but Mark says this is no regular young man.

"When I asked him about the heavy responsibility presented to him, he nodded and said, 'Of course, this is my responsibility.' This is a kid who already knows responsibility, so it's nothing new. He just goes for it. The ripple effects of this one person's education will be felt long and far."

### CULMINATION OF A LONG JOURNEY

But first Alex had to get here, and the idea of traveling during the pandemic didn't sit well with Mark. Their travel plans had to change a few times, but he felt strongly that personally going back to Ecuador, to accompany Alex back to Canada, was the best way to get Alex here safely.

Mark left Winnipeg early on Sunday, December 20 and arrived at six o'clock that evening. The pair then got on the next available flight and stepped foot back in Canada on December 23, just before Christmas, where they immediately went into a two-week quarantine at Mark's home.

When school starts, Alex can move into the student dormitories at Providence.

To commemorate all the work that's been done to get him here, Providence is planning a drive-by welcome event for Alex, where Mark will drive him by the campus and the staff will come out and wave to him in greeting.

This welcome event will be the culmination of a long journey for Mark and Alex—and the beginning of a new one for Alex as he begins his studies.

"If I had to narrow it down to one line to describe Alex, it is that he has a heart of service," says Mark. "I have not met a lot of people like him."

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**Ron R. Schuler**

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## IN BRIEF



The winning homes of the Best Decked Houses of 2020 competition.

## Beautification Committee Picks Best Decked Houses

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

The Niverville Communities in Bloom committee is most active during the warmer months, for obvious reasons. But this year, for the first time, they decided to emerge in December to bring the community a little shot of extra Christmas cheer—by recognizing the Best Decked Houses of 2020.

Homeowners throughout town were given the opportunity to submit photos of their yard decorations to the NCIB committee for consideration, according to committee member Shirley Hoult.

"This is the first time we did it, though we had given it consideration in the past," says Hoult. "We thought, given the year, this might be a way to bring some cheer."

Although there were several honourable mentions, two homeowners were named winners. 47 Wyndham Court was chosen as

the Best Decked House, and 63 Claremont Drive was named the Best Decked Door.

In addition to the shot of recognition, those homeowners received a prize for their festive efforts—a gift bag containing a bottle of wine, a box of chocolates, Tim Hortons mugs, a Hespeler's Tavern gift card, Dairy Queen frozen cakes, and Little Flower Shop arrangements. Not to mention a whole lot of Town of Niverville swagger.

The honourable mentions also received a large box of Timbits and a Tim Hortons gift card.

Hoult says that the winners were chosen based on a vote of NCIB committee members.

"We appreciate the donations made at this time by the local businesses towards this initiative," she adds, "and the families who took the time to deck the streets, bringing some cheer to the community."

# Ste. Agathe Leader Recognized for Volunteerism and Leadership

By Brenda Sawatzky

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Jeannot Robert has been championing his hometown for as long as most Ste. Agathe residents will remember. He's spent years on countless committees, stood at the forefront of community growth, and has been quick to get his hands dirty any time a job needed doing.

So it comes as no surprise that he was selected by the province for the MB150 medal of volunteerism.

This fall, local MLA Ron Schuler made a personal appearance at Robert's Ste. Agathe residence to make the presentation.

"Jeannot is one of 150 people being recognized as outstanding Manitobans for their role in making Manitoba such an amazing province," says Schuler.

This year, Manitoba reached the important milestone of 150 years since becoming a province. It was the fifth province to do so.

"Manitobans are known for their generosity and community spirit," says the MB150 website. "In fact, our province has the second highest rate of volunteerism in Canada. In commemoration of Manitoba's 150th anniversary, it is fitting to celebrate Manitobans who are committed to giving back to and enriching the place we live, work, and play."

Without aspirations of recognition, Robert has epitomized just that, averaging 70-hour workweeks for much of his life to help bring positive change to his community.

"I don't sit on committees for the pleasure of attending meetings," Robert says of his



MLA Ron Schuler with Jeannot Robert and his wife Yvonne.

RON SCHULER

volunteer ethic. "I find a project and get it done."

In 1994, under Robert's guidance, the Ste. Agathe Community Development Inc. was formed. The committee's goal was to encourage economic and residential development in the once-tiny francophone village.

Ste. Agathe has since tripled in size, becoming home to a burgeoning business park and sprawling new housing developments filled with young families looking for a rural yet inclusive setting to call home.

Robert saw the value in a young, vibrant demographic, realizing they would bring the energy needed for continued growth and programming into the future.

Over the years, Robert also provided leadership as school trustee and municipal councillor. His tenure on council came to a satisfying close after the Ste. Agathe fire hall was finally built.

But probably one of Robert's most memorable

volunteer opportunities arose in 1997 when the small riverside community came face to face with the unforgettable flood of the century. Robert was instrumental in the fight to keep floodwaters from inundating his town, organizing hundreds of volunteers, assigning tasks, and instructing in the construction of long sandbag dikes.

While the bulk of the community was evacuated to higher ground, Robert stayed on along with a handful of others to operate pumps, repair breaches in the dike, and wait out the inevitable.

"Instead of accepting defeat by the floodwaters, Ste. Agathe experienced a boost of energy and we weren't giving up," says Robert of the experience. "We are small, but we turned that into a positive."

Today, there's probably not a square inch of Ste. Agathe land that hasn't seen Robert's footprints, full of optimism and community spirit. As cheers fill Cartier Park or families gather at the annual

Cheyenne Summer Festival, they do so because community-minded volunteers such as Robert helped paved the way.

On November 23, Minister Schuler also recognized Jeannot Robert in a Private Members Statement in front of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly. Along with the volunteerism award, Robert received the Association of Manitoba Municipalities' leadership award.

"I am very grateful and honoured to have been chosen," Robert says. "I loved volunteering, seeing our village improve, the comments from residents, and the sense of accomplishment. Bringing people together for common goals is my largest reward."

Now in retirement, he continues to encourage the younger generations to pick up the baton and keep the momentum going.

"I promise you rewards and a great feeling of belonging where you can work, relax, and celebrate together as a caring community."



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# Local Entrepreneur Wins National Insurance Award

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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Danielle Tkachyk, born and raised in Niverville, recently received the PAL Young Achiever of the Year award for her work in the insurance industry.

Back on Thursday, November 19, the Insurance Business Awards (IBA), a Canadian initiative to recognize leading companies and professionals, held their annual event virtually and recognized the top performers in the insurance industry across a number of key categories.

Awards of this nature are often a platform to share up-to-date industry news, opinions, and insight, and the IBA online event also featured panel discussions to grow the skills of participants before presenting the awards.

Nominations for the national awards are fielded from clients, co-workers, friends, and industry partners.

Tkachyk says that she believes she was selected for her industry involvement, rate of brokerage growth, and the high performance/rewards culture she fosters in the workplace.

"In the past, the PAL Young Achiever of the Year award has been named Young Broker of the Year and Young Gun," says Tkachyk. "Not only was I humbled to be selected from a crop of emerging leaders, I was even more flattered to make the 'young' cut."

Tkachyk has a high commitment to innovation, processes, personal volunteerism, and executive presence, such as participating with awards and industry

initiatives, publications, and speaking engagements.

## AN ENTREPRENEUR IS BORN

Her impressive drive is no surprise to those who know her personally or encounter her in her many roles in and around Niverville. But it's safe to say that becoming the president of her own company wasn't always her dream job.

"Didn't every kid dream of becoming an insurance broker when they grow up?" jokes Tkachyk. "After graduating from Niverville Collegiate, I pursued my education degree. I always blocked my classes so I could work to afford during post-secondary. I obtained my insurance license to have a professionally oriented, respectable profession while doing so. The rest is history."

With her passion for education and her insurance license, Tkachyk ended up teaching courses for Manitoba Public Insurance and was often recruited to work on government projects. She began to facilitate professional development sessions, which are mandatory for insurance brokers. This is often when she crossed paths with senior management and brokerage owners who inevitably offered her jobs.

Although she was flattered, she declined opportunities that distracted from her promising career as a training coordinator.

Then, in 2010, Tkachyk was given the opportunity to become a partner with PMC Insurance. She took a risk and bought in to the company.

"And I never looked back!"



Local entrepreneur Danielle Tkachyk.

■ DANIELLE TKACHYK

she says.

She went on to buy the remaining shares in 2017, making her president of PMC Insurance. In 2020, she put her own stamp on the business, rebranding the brokerage as Savante Insurance Inc.

"I do everything I can to be an effective leader, which often results in non-traditional nocturnal office hours as the mother to very busy two- and four-year-old girls, the spouse to a fellow entrepreneur, and did I mention I own a jewellery studio?" says Tkachyk. "My young family is in the midst of the building phase of life and it's reaffirming to know that our work is being recognized as exceptional."

She says that the team of experts at Savante make it look easy—and it's her

commitment to an atmosphere of teamwork that makes the recent national award so important to her. Indeed, to Tkachyk, the award isn't just a personal career achievement; it shines a light on the expertise that exists here in Manitoba.

"All too often awards of this magnitude are heavily represented by brokers from the largest provinces," she says. "To recognize the unrivalled skills that reside within the walls of Savante is awesome! It garners the attention of insurer partners, prospective clients, and future talent. This is recognition by the insurance industry of excellence."

## THRIVING DURING COVID

It's impossible to talk about business success today without acknowledging the chal-

lenges of operating during a global pandemic. As Savante's president, Tkachyk first ensured that they did the same things as every other business in Manitoba: meeting or exceeding new cleaning protocols, installing signage and decals to ensure distancing and safety, and implementing mask usage.

But her goal wasn't to survive the pandemic, but thrive.

One of the first things Savante did was overhaul their technological infrastructure to allow employees to work from home using a secure network connection. The new technology also enabled them to accommodate transaction requests from a distance via phone, text, email, and curbside pickup.

When so many industries find themselves cutting back on services, Savante added the issuance of marriage licenses. This service targeted those couples who were having difficulty accessing them due to the closure of Manitoba Vital Statistics.

Savante also separated its team into three cohorts—one based strictly out of Steinbach, and two from Winnipeg. Employees were given the option to either work from home or in the office, with the caveat that if the customer-facing team contracted COVID-19, the alternate cohort would staff the office while the former isolated.

In conjunction with SGI Canada—which serves Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, and Ontario—Savante organized a community food drive in support of Centre Flavie, a local organization providing

food and basic needs for immigrant families.

Savante nominated the emergency staff at the Bethesda Health Foundation for a Red River Mutual donation. Currently, the results are pending and they intend to use the funds toward the purchase of a massage chair for frontline workers.

They even have a soup fairy. What is a soup fairy?

"She drops off homemade soups, prepared by one of our small business hospitality clients, for customers and their family members recovering from COVID-19," explains Tkachyk.

Defending the psychology of the team when it's all too easy to feel isolated is important to Tkachyk—and for all these initiatives, she either shares the credit, or passes it along completely to her team.

"There are not befitting words in the English language to accurately relay the immense pride I have for my team and how Savante adds value during these unprecedented times," says Tkachyk.

As for the future, she says that Savante is currently licensed in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, with plans to expand into Alberta, British Columbia, and New Brunswick. In the new year, they'll open a new office off Highway 12 north of Steinbach.

"In my former big corporate life, my reward for hard work was more work, and although there was the ladder-climbing perception of progress, it was always leaning against someone else's building," adds Tkachyk. "Now I own the building."

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## IN BRIEF

**COVID Update: Has Manitoba Turned the Corner?**

By Evan Braun

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As the new year takes root and we say good riddance to 2020 and the pandemic that dominated it, we look to the data to ask an all-important question: has Manitoba turned the corner in its response to the fall surge?

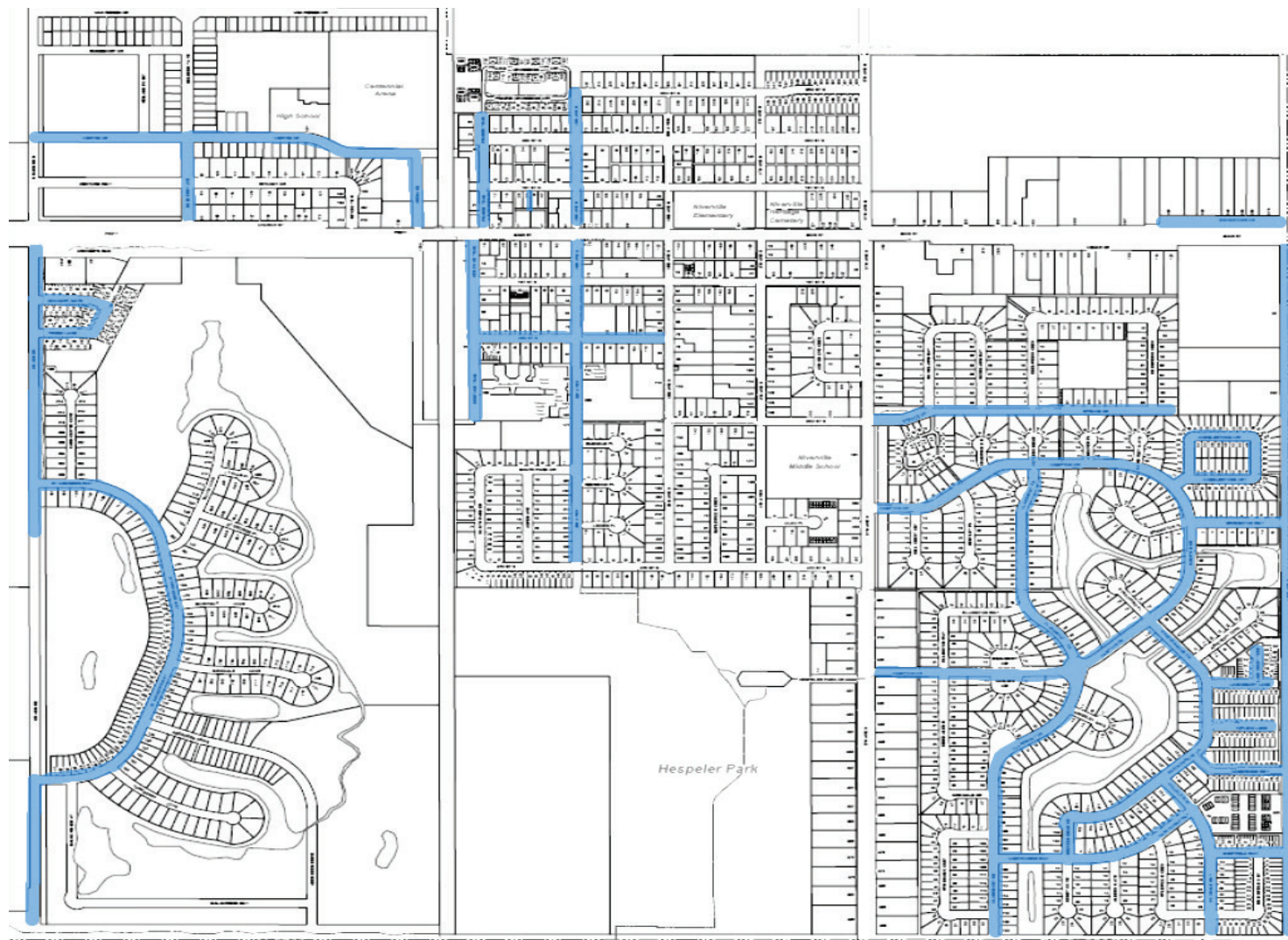
In the early days of January, it appears that the answer might be “Yes.” The new infection numbers have dropped and stabilized since their peak last year.

But it’s perhaps a bit too soon to say for sure, one way or the other, if the worst is behind us. Considering the virus’s two-week incubation period, it may take until mid-January to know for sure if there have been new spikes of infection following the holidays.

As of this writing, the entire province remains under code red restrictions, which have been in place since mid-November. The current restrictions come to an end on Friday, January 8, and indications are that while there may be some change to the public health orders, the province will embrace the status quo a little while longer.

One indication of concern remains the relatively high five-day positive rate, which is still in double-digit territory.

On Monday, January 4, the province announced that they were extending Manitoba’s state of emergency another 30 days. The state of emergency has been continuously in effect since March of last year.



# Niverville Expands Number of Snow Routes

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

As we head into January, the Town of Niverville wants to remind its residents about its snow route parking ban.

Several new streets have been added this year, broadly affecting three areas of town that have seen higher traffic flows. The first area affects the streets around the

Niverville High School: Arena Road, Centre Street, and Mulberry Avenue. The second affects Prairie Trail and Second Avenue North. The third is Bronstone Drive at the east end of town.

“After a snowfall has occurred where snow clearing is required, town staff will begin their initial clearing operation at 5:00 a.m. and will plough around any vehicles that are parked on the streets,”

reads a notice from the town. “The following day, the street parking ban will be in effect between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. and vehicles will not be permitted to park on the designated snow routes to enable town staff to complete snow clearing operations.”

Any vehicles remaining on these streets for the second day—as well as subsequent days, if needed—will be ticketed and

towed. This includes trailers. If a vehicle needs to be towed, the costs or fees associated with it will be the responsibility of the vehicle’s registered owner.

When the parking ban has been lifted, notices will appear on the town’s website, as well as on its official social media accounts.

The town’s snow route parking ban will remain in effect until the beginning of April.

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# Ritchot Moves to Cart-Based Garbage and Recycling Services

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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The RM of Ritchot begins their new four-year garbage and recycling contract with GFL Environmental on January 4, 2021. The urban areas of St. Adolphe, Ste. Agathe, Île-des-Chênes, and Grande Pointe are transitioning away from manual pickup and moving to automated pickup, which requires the use of approved garbage and recycling carts as provided by GFL. For those who live in rural areas, there will be no change.

Garbage carts will be delivered to residents in the new year as they become available. Until the carts are delivered, residents are asked to continue to use garbage bags as they have been doing.

A map of the new urban areas and a letter announcing the changes was issued to residents in the last week of December.

While some cart-based services have been used before, notably this model is new for residents of Grande Pointe. Where once their properties were considered rural, many are now considered urban.

The change has some residents in the Grande Pointe area concerned over the size of the new carts, as well as the timing of the announcement.

Robert Wiens says that the fall clean-up of his yard creates a fair amount of waste.

"We have a family of four and recycle a lot," he says. "My wife is also concerned that now we're going to be throwing out recycling, cause there's no room in the bins. But I have yet to see the size of them. They better be bigger bins than the city. Properties are way bigger out here. That's my only issue. And some knowledge beforehand would've been nice instead of a letter in the mail after it's done."

Debbie Kolaski, who also lives in Grande Pointe, says the new garbage and recycling program doesn't suit the needs of rural property owners.

"Those of us with acreage have more leaves and grass to dispose of," Kolaski says. "Those of us in rural areas should request we be left that way... and not be considered urban, because we aren't.



Sending a notice to some residents during Christmas, barely a week before the changes take effect, is suspect. We'd like to know why a change was made. It would be interesting to see the cost difference between the new and current contract."

According to the municipality, the timing of the decision was merely due to the previous garbage and recycling contract coming to an end on December 31.

Mitch Duval, Ritchot's chief administrative officer, says that the new contract will save money.

Duval clarifies that discussion of the matter began months ago, with a request for proposal going out in October. The final decision was made at a public council meeting in December.

"The municipality wanted to see pricing and options from other providers, including current, to see what was feasible," says Duval. "The elected councillor for each ward and the mayor went through the contract and as a whole made a decision for the betterment of the whole municipality."

Duval says the old program cost \$173 in 2020 for a single-family household, and the new program's costs will be lower.

"I don't quite have those numbers crunched yet, but it will be lower than the \$173," says Duval. "A new special service bylaw, to be approved by the municipal board, will be required and there will be a transition period for the new service provider as they will be familiarizing themselves with the

municipality and the routes. Carts are expected for delivery within the next six weeks, so there'll be a transition for that as well."

Richard McKenzie lives in St. Adolphe and learned about the new rules on December 26, only after reading about the issue on a community Facebook page. He, too, has concerns about large properties with yard waste, and wonders if the scope of the work contracted to GFL might be a bit smaller than what was offered under the previous collection company.

McKenzie notes that, under the new provider, only household waste and recycling will be accepted. Renovation garbage or anything that won't fit into the provided carts will not be picked up.

"Yard waste is not picked up separately and is going to fill the garbage bins with our large rural yards," McKenzie says. "If that was an option, that would alleviate a large portion of the problem with the single garbage bin concern."

He is also concerned about limits to the amount that a household can recycle. He argues that with online shopping being more popular now, and with more people working from home, there will be more packaging to get rid of.

"Such deliveries double the packaging materials in the community that require recycling," says McKenzie. "Add that to the regular weekly recyclables and I'll bet 70 percent of recycling bins are overflowing. What is one to do with larger recycling items, like boxes

from IKEA, or a new appliance box that does not fit in the recycle bin? The current contractor was great at picking up these items, which encouraged proper recycling. I look weekly at the recycle bins overflowing and can't help but ask, why are we bringing in these limits?"

Regarding yard waste and compost, Duval admits that the RM has never had a true compost program and residents had been putting their yard waste and compost at the curb to be brought to the landfill.

Duval indicates that the RM is open to considering a solution to composting.

"The municipality will investigate with the new provider to see what options we have and what we can bring to our residents," says Duval.

Laura Wiens lives on a half-acre property in Île-des-Chênes. She is not concerned about the size of the new carts or their ability to handle the waste created by her family of four.

"There is no way we could bag everything. We currently have a compost heap in our yard for leaves and have been using them to fill in low spots on the yard and for compost in our garden to improve the soil. We have a good trailer load of leaves each spring," says Wiens. "If the RM had a composting facility, I would consider using it in the future since we won't always need all of our leaves. Grass, we simply mulch and leave or collect to use as mulch in our garden."

Wiens says she and her husband have previously held lawn care and mowing contracts with another RM and understand what contractors have to go through to secure a contract with a municipality.

"I understand the process of tendering and signing service contracts," says Wiens. "I trust the RM to look at the bids and choose options that make sense. I don't know if the old company bid or what both bids looked like, so without that information I don't think I can offer a solid opinion. I personally am very excited to have a bin for garbage and feel it is more than enough for our household of four."

## CITIZEN POLL

**Are you satisfied with the way your municipal government handles garbage/recycling pickup services?**

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**24%**

No.

**76%**

## YOUR COMMENTS:

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# Niverville Council Releases Details of Annual Planning Sessions

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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In late November, Niverville's town council and staff met for their annual planning session.

In 2021, the town intends to take on major capital projects that will change the landscape of Niverville significantly.

## LANDSCAPING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

First up, the Community Resource and Recreation Centre is scheduled to be complete as of June 2021. After the building is finished, the surrounding landscaping will be targeted. This work will include improving the nearby dog park and bringing some finishing touches to grounds around the old arena.

In preparation for Niverville to host the 2022 Manitoba Winter Games, and in conjunction with Sport Manitoba, the town is purchasing a cross-country ski trail groomer. The equipment will help maintain the three-kilometre trail in Hespeler Park. Maintaining the ski trails also helps promote active healthy living.

Hespeler Park will continue to see development with a continuation of the pathway lighting project. Power will be brought to the southwest corner of the park, in anticipation of the RV park which is planned to be built there. The possibility also exists for lights to be erected at the soccer fields and baseball diamonds.

Earlier this fall, council received a completed study conducted by Native Plant Solutions, with suggestions for how to manage the water quality in the Fifth Avenue Estates ponds. The low water quality, which is below



acceptable levels in terms of both phosphorus and blue/green algae, poses a risk to pets and children.

One solution council will pursue to manage the growth in the ponds is to install bulrushes for the first retention pond in Fifth Avenue Estates.

The planning sessions highlighted this choice as the best possible option.

"While options like aerators, fountains, and other means would have been council's first choice, science indicates that bulrushes are the better option as they absorb phosphorus and minimize algae growth," reads a report from council. "Council realizes there is no perfect option, but in this instance, based on the science and health of our residents and their pets, it is the best value and option available to improve our lakes."

The last major project for landscaping and infrastructure will tackle the next length of new sidewalk along Main Street. The town's tree budget will also be increased.

## WATER AND SEWER

Council will continue to advance two key utility projects: the expansion of the water treatment plant and a regional wastewater treatment plant.

"Money is being set aside in savings accounts or reserves for the completion of these projects, with construction planned to begin in the next couple of years," reads council's report.

The town originally had planned to begin a significant renewal of sewer infrastructure, hoping to complete it over 15 years. However, due to Niverville's rapid residential growth, coupled with increased interest from commercial businesses wanting to move into the area, these plans had to be re-evaluated. Instead, plans for a larger water treatment plan and increased septic capacity have been moved up the priority list.

"Sewer renewal will still happen," says council, "but will have to be stretched out over a longer period of time."

## POLICING

Another topic addressed at this year's planning sessions was public safety. Though the report is light on details, council is mentioned to be "looking at policing options and will have more information in the next couple of months."

Council has initiated discussions with the RCMP about securing additional police resources for Niverville.

One of the ideas put forth would involve reaching out to Public Safety Canada, a branch of the federal government, about organizing a municipal police service agreement.

## BUDGET

The results of the annual planning sessions, along with its preliminary budget, are typically presented at a town-wide open house event, but so far no date for such a presentation has been announced.

Due to COVID restrictions, the presentation will instead be made available on the town website, [www.wheretheyoube-long.ca](http://www.wheretheyoube-long.ca), later in December.

**Happy New Year**

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# Providence Appoints New President

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

On December 1, the Board of Governors of Providence University College and Theological Seminary announced its new president. Dr. Kenton C. Anderson will take over the position following David Johnson's semi-retirement on June 1, 2021.

Anderson comes to Providence from Northwest Baptist Seminary in Langley, British Columbia, where he served for 25 years as both president and professor of homiletics. He is also a member of the board of directors of the Association of Theological Schools and the Fellowship of Evangelical Seminary Presidents, as well as a founder and executive partner of Symporus, providing leading technology and services to schools and missional organizations throughout North America.

He has preached and taught in hundreds of churches across North America and the world, and published four books, including *Integrative Preaching* in 2017.

"Dr. Anderson comes with a wealth of experience as an educator, author, pastor, dean, and president," says outgoing president David Johnson. "I look forward to all of us giving Dr. Anderson our best for the advancement of Christian higher education in Canada. May God grant us the Spirit of grace and peace during this time of transition and into the future."

By the end of his term, Johnson will have served as Providence's president for nine years, advancing new academic programs and a



Dr. Kenton C. Anderson, new President of Providence University College.

PROVIDENCE

better work environment, fostering an institutional living and learning philosophy, and focusing on the student experience and their well-being.

Following his presidency, Johnson anticipates completing some long-postponed research and writing projects and doing some teaching on the side.

The presidential transition will take place over the next seven months.

"Upon meeting Dr. Anderson for the first time, our

committee knew there was something special about this man," says Jeff Pries, member of the Presidential Search Committee. "Dr. Anderson's passion, leadership ability, and entrepreneurial spirit is just what Providence needs as we embark on a post-pandemic era for our school."

Anderson and his wife Karen have three grown children and four grandchildren. They enjoy music, the arts, and the outdoors.

"I am greatly pleased to answer God's call to serve the

mission of Christian higher education at Providence," Anderson says. "The multiplication of leaders for God's Kingdom has been my lifelong mission and I look forward to pursuing that vision across the multiple and varied life applications and ministries that this university and theological school represents. People need what Providence offers, and by God's grace, I anticipate new and larger possibilities as we take this treasure to the world."

IN BRIEF

## HSD Superintendent Discusses January School Plans

By Jennifer Lavin

A month ago, back on December 2, the provincial government announced new remote learning expectations for Manitobans. For many parents and educators, the news brought welcome clarity in a time of confusion.

But for the Hanover School Division, the only school division in the province that's currently in the critical (red) level of the pandemic response, many parents were left with only more questions.

That uncertainty was laid to rest on Wednesday, December 9 when HSD superintendent Shelley Amos issued her own update on the local situation.

Before the winter break, all students in HSD, with the exception of the children of essential workers and some students with special learning needs, were being taught remotely.

However, the return to school in January has brought changes for many local families.

As of Monday, January 4, students in Grades Seven to 12 are continuing their remote learning. Children in Kindergarten to Grade Six, on the other hand, now have the option to voluntarily return to in-school classes—or, alternatively, they can continue with remote learning.

Amos encourages caregivers to keep in mind the emotional well-being of their

children.

"As parents/guardians, you know what is best for your child, and we are here to support you and your choice to keep your child in school or at home for January remote learning," says Amos.

Parents and guardians of K-6 students have received regular communication from the schools advising them of their options.

One important caveat, says Amos, is that whether a student attends class in-person or stays home to learn remotely, that decision needs to remain consistent. Students cannot go to school for part of the time and then revert back to remote learning.

The school division has resumed its regular bussing schedule. However, it is hoped that those parents who can drive their children to school will do so.

"Reducing the number of students on our buses will minimize virus exposure to riders," urges Amos. "We believe students learn best in the classroom, among their peers, supported by their teachers, and we hope that all students will be able to return to in-class learning soon. In the meantime, we appreciate your patience and understanding. We are committed to providing your child with the education they deserve regardless of if they are at home or in their classroom."



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# Commentary



## Eventually You Get Where You're Going

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

One year ago, I was packing for a big trip—the biggest trip of my life.

For a couple of years, my husband and I had planned to travel to the Philippines, so he could introduce me to the country of his birth, visit family and friends, and also do a bit of island-hopping.

So on New Year's Day 2020, our condo was filled with half-packed luggage, clothing piled up on the furniture, as we decided what we absolutely needed to bring, and what we could do without during our three-and-a-half week excursion.

On January 3, we took off.

On January 4, we landed.

On January 5, I read in the news that a mysterious new virus was raising some alarm in central China. Events in China suddenly seemed important now that we were practically next door to it.

And so we proceeded with our trip, touring through the provinces and visiting my husband's relatives. This was a vacation, certainly—but we weren't beachcombing. We spent the first week in his hometown, staying in the neighbourhood where he grew up, where the locals wash clothes by hand in washbasins, cook their meals over simple gas-burners, and just in general live life out in

the open air.

Even in January, the dead of winter, the heat and humidity could get oppressive—but I dared not complain about it too much, for fear the locals might hear; as a nearly 300-pound white guy who didn't speak the language, I already stood out well enough, thank you very much.

Yes, there was culture shock, but despite the inconveniences of life in this small town, I thoroughly enjoyed myself. It was the chance of a lifetime to experience life at ground level in a part of the world where people live very differently from what I'm used to.

In fact, the inconveniences became, in a way, the highlight of the trip.

Let me explain that. The aspect of life that had the biggest effect on me is how slow and unscheduled everything was. Almost nobody owned their own vehicle (and even if they did, they wouldn't have anywhere to park it on the narrow streets lined with tightly packed concrete-walled houses), so running an errand meant catching some combination of transit, a fleet of privately operated individual tricycle drivers, jeepneys, and buses that ferried passengers here and there, from barangay to barangay, neighbourhood to neighbourhood, town to town. How did you flag one

down? You just stood on the side of the street—and waited. And hoped.

Even with the larger buses, the ones carrying passengers longer distances, you'd buy a ticket and get on board... and then wait, because the driver wouldn't start out on his route until the bus was reasonably full. Could take a few minutes, or an hour or more. You never really knew for sure.

Eventually you'd get where you're going.

Want to pick up something quick from the market? Well, you'll get what you came for—but it won't necessarily be quick. The line might be long, there might only be one cashier, and that cashier might walk away from time to time to carry out other duties, leaving customers waiting.

There was a lot of waiting, and waiting isn't typically my strong suit—just ask my husband—but that's just the way things are there. When you get up in the morning, it's foolhardy to have grand expectations for what you may accomplish. You may only get two or three things done, but that's okay. Whatever you didn't get done today, you'll try to get done tomorrow.

During other parts of our trip, we did more recognizably touristy things. We stayed at resorts, swam in infinity pools overlooking

the ocean, watched sunsets while strolling the boardwalk, gorged ourselves on all-you-can-eat buffets. We walked the streets of Manila, enjoyed local delicacies, and shopped in world-class malls (Manila's got a lot of 'em).

But even in the fast-paced city, with cars zipping through busy intersections without the benefit of traffic signals, life moved slowly at the individual level.

And all the while, we read more reports from China. Cities locked down, regional travel bans enacted, airport screening measures taking effect... We started to suspect this coronavirus thing might be more serious than we'd thought back in the early days of January.

Oh, and there was also the small matter of an erupting volcano near my husband's hometown. Just another day in the life of the Philippines.

And my God, the people were happy there. Surely no other people espouses *joie de vivre* like the stalwart, adversity-facing, life-loving Filipinos. The pace of life was slow and inconvenient, and full of joy despite it all.

We flew home right at the tail end of January, stopping for an extended layover in South Korea to see the sights. The virus had beaten us there by a week; travel still flowed, but masks were out in force.

Returning to Manitoba,

life went back to normal. I resumed my work and fell into my old routines—but I couldn't get out of my head the things I'd seen during my trip. My fellow Westerners were running around in a way that had seemed normal back in December but which I now thought about more reflectively. We were back in the land of getting up before the sun, commuting 40 kilometres to work, and having a checklist of 20 things to do each day.

I understand, of course, that this is the price we pay to live in the in-many-ways-wondrous society we've built for ourselves—but in the quiet moments of the afternoon, it was inevitable to think back fondly on the unhurried pace of life in the Philippines and wonder if there might be a way to bring that home with us.

And then, only one month later, the coronavirus reached Manitoba. Schools closed, businesses shut their doors, the highways emptied of traffic... and I wondered if perhaps I hadn't gotten exactly what I'd wished for, but not in the way I'd wanted.

Indeed, life *did* slow down here.

2020 was a tumultuous year. Our routines were greatly upset. We contended with fear on a whole new level, about our health and the state of our bank

accounts. We worried about our families.

And hundreds of people lost their lives—and continue to lose them at staggering rates. This is not okay.

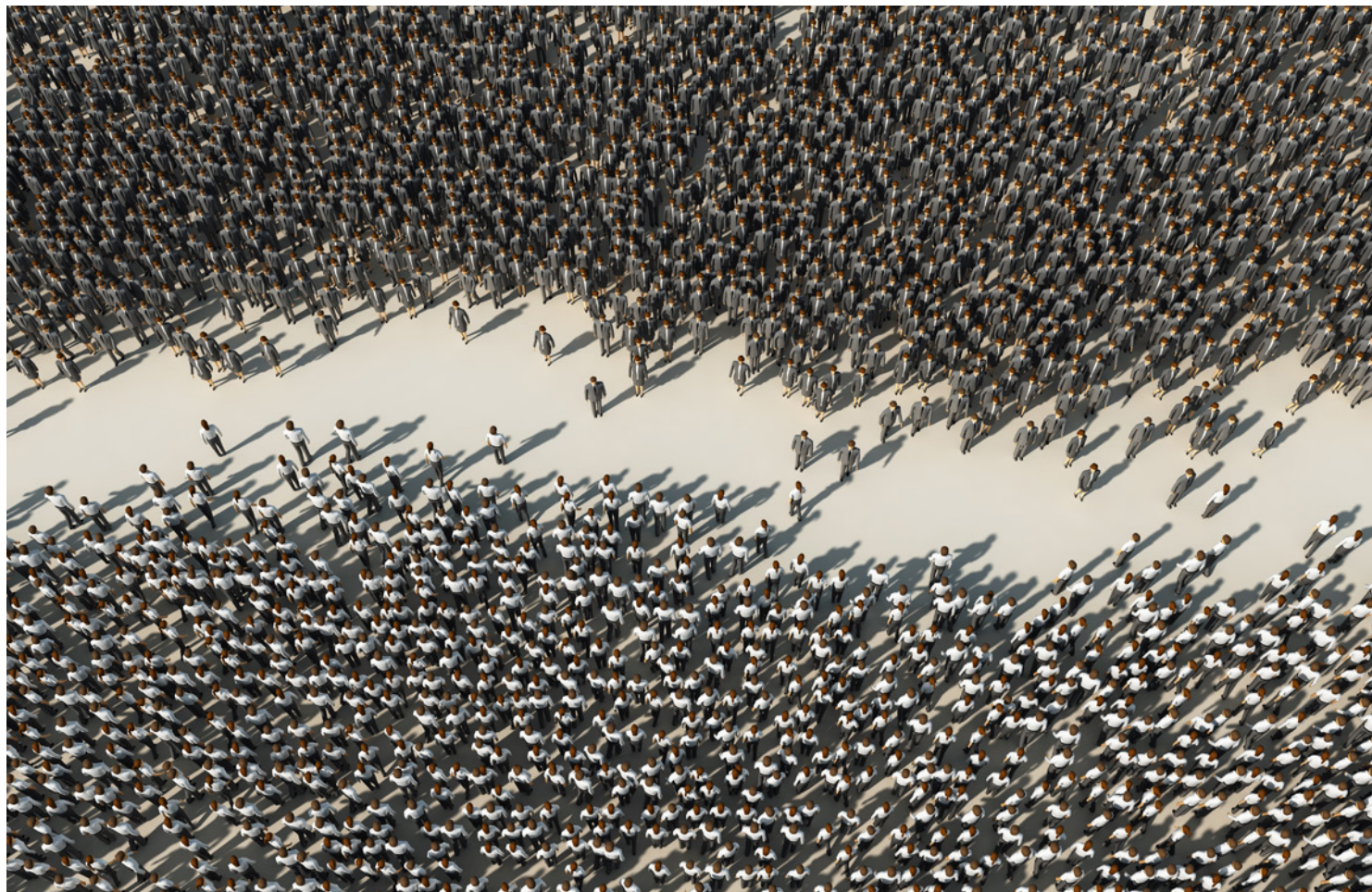
We're not through the crisis yet, but as I look to the future today, I am filled with a great deal of hope. I hope we've learned some lessons about the value of life and the importance of empathy. And I hope that as we get better, we don't fully return to normal, because there were some ways in which our society was not a healthy place in the before-times. Isn't it ironic that it took a pandemic to open our eyes to the ways in which we were already unhealthy? I think that's exactly what's happened.

Of course I wish none of this had ever happened, but just as I felt when I returned from the Philippines one year ago, I think there's an opportunity to take a second look at the way we live our lives and decide whether our lifestyles are helping or hindering us.

Are there changes we can make to enrich our lives, live more fully? These aren't big, society-spanning questions. They're the sorts of questions we should ask ourselves on an individual level. After all, change starts small.

And wherever you're going, just remember: it's okay not to be in a hurry to get there.





# Are We Really in this Together?

By Brenda Sawatzky

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“We’re all in this together.” I can’t remember how many times I heard that slogan in 2020. It was one of the first messages of hope to ring out during the early months after the insidious virus perforated our borders.

At the time, for me, it provided about the same level of solace as it would a group of sunbathers watching a tsunami come crashing toward the shoreline. We’re all in this together, sure, but not one of us seems to have a hot clue how to get to safety.

I understood what the message was saying, though. Unlike the other c-word (cancer), where the afflicted walk a hard and sometimes lonely journey while the world carries on around them, COVID presented a crisis that had the potential to affect every one of us.

For many, fear reigned supreme. We were aghast when people stood too close or dared to loiter in groups. We cast a sceptical eye on those who were slow to don a face covering in the heat of summer.

But we muddled our way through the frequently confusing messages coming down from the

top brass and slowly adapted to a new way of living. Many rallied around each other in social-distanced efforts, making grocery runs for the isolated, cheering on parades of graduates, and creating fun and safe activities for families to take part in outdoors.

And as I marvelled at the creativity and resiliency of mankind, I felt the power of that early message. We really are in this together!

But as the summer waned, our luck in evading the world’s nemesis did, too. Suddenly every newscast was glutted with numbers: how many infected, how many in ICU, how many dead.

From my armchair in front of the nightly news, the media seemed to provide little help in inspiring hope over fear. Why, when hope pulls us together and fear drives us apart? Instead, COVID negativity consumed each daily broadcast, reminding us primarily of the ravages of the virus and not the much larger survival rate.

At the same time, we were essentially removed from the bigger picture of worldly non-COVID events. For myself, it created a myopic view and softened my sympathies for those who were starving in refugee camps or clinging to life in the midst of

far-off wars. It warped my greater perspective.

Closer to home, decisions needed to be made that would divide us: elected leaders stepped in to administer unprecedented restrictions over our personal lives and those of the small business owner.

Whether the imposed local restrictions were the best possible answer to saving lives or a heavy-handed attack on human rights is not the point. For me, it was more about the dismay I felt as social media became fraught with discord. To a large extent, and as much as social media can be trusted as a barometer of society, we were divided.

Proponents on the one side accused those on the other side of favouring the economy over human life. Naysayers, with equal fervency, were quick to throw stones of verbal indignation at those who would “follow like sheep.” Never had I seen the phrase “There’s no cure for stupid” bandied about so freely on both sides.

Suddenly, there was no room for dialogue or friendly agreeing to disagree. I saw long-held friendships culled, family relationships severed, and neighbours keeping a watchful eye on neighbours to

see who would dare to break the Christmas gathering rules.

Of course, to some degree, I point at a generalization of what I myself felt. Not everyone wields their passion like a freshly sharpened machete. There is still kindness, goodness, and grace among us, to be sure.

But at least for me, COVID became not so much a pandemic as a deep philosophical question: is it even possible to get through a crisis in a state of togetherness?

Who is the real enemy here? Is it COVID or is it the person who disagrees with my opinion on how best to deal with it? Unless we can figure that out, it will be hard to stand together when future crises arise, as they surely will.

Like everyone, I want 2021 to be the bearer of brighter things. I want to turn the page on last year, but not without first having an objective to guide me into the future: to learn and grow from the experiences of 2020.

Can we listen to others without contempt in the hopes of gleaning a better understanding of another’s point of view? Can we respect a diversity in ideology and opinion, not just skin colour?

I’m banking on it, because together we really could be stronger.

## IN BRIEF

### LETTER TO THE EDITOR

## St. Adolphe Friendship Trail

I have read your article about the “Friendship Trail” in St. Adolphe and I really wanted to see it for myself. I have lived in St. Adolphe my whole life, more specifically near the dike which leads to the Pierre Delorme Bridge. There has always been somewhat of a trail in that area, but for the couple to transform it into a beautiful walkway is great for the town.

I recently went to see the trail with my brothers, and we were shocked by the work that was put into this. All the hard work put in by Henriette and Richard Collette was evident. I can agree with the statement, “We are bringing lots of smiles to people’s faces and that’s our reward,” as it brought a smile to my face. When driving on the Pierre Delorme Bridge, I continuously see people on the bridge bird-watching. It does not surprise me that the bridge is among the top ten places in Manitoba to bird-watch.

During these times of isolation, there are not many options for activities if you would like to get out of the house. I believe building this trail was a great way to get out of the house and get a little fresh air. The Collettes had an opportunity to get some exercise in while putting their brains to the test. On the other side of it, the trail gives the families of St. Adolphe something to do. It allows them to get outside and check out this homemade trail. The placement of the trail is great for kids, because afterwards they can enjoy sliding down the hill.

It was a great idea to allow the community to get involved in the project. The kids who were able to help did a great job with the bird’s nests. This trail is catching the attention of the whole community. With the weather being as beautiful as it is, there is constant action at the Pierre Delorme Bridge. I hope that our community continues to take advantage of this handmade friendship trail.

Sincerely,

—Luc Lagasse  
St. Adolphe, MB



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# Sports & Recreation

## Countdown to the 2022 Manitoba Winter Games

By Jennifer Lavin

With less than 14 months to go, excitement is ramping up for the 2022 Manitoba Winter Games, which will take place in Niverville. Angela Janz and Chantel Todd, co-chairs of the Games, say that plans are well underway and they are confident the event will be a huge boon for the town.

Janz and Todd have spent the last year deep in preparation, with much of their work taking place well in advance of the official announcement of the Games last February. Since Niverville's bid was selected, the pair has been busy meeting with staff from Sport Manitoba.

They've also faced the daunting task of hiring a divisional chair and Games coordinator, in addition to setting up communication platforms for all the volunteer chairs and their committee members.

They say the COVID-19 pandemic has added stress to the already complex planning process. Normally there would be an information handoff from the Summer Games committee to the Winter Games committee,



The 2022 Manitoba Winter Games co-chairs help announce Niverville's successful bid last spring.

TOWN OF NIVERVILLE

but since the Dauphin Summer Games had to be postponed, that handoff did not occur.

Janz and Todd say that planning meetings have also been more difficult because the meetings have to be conducted online, which has led

to some additional logistical challenges.

Nonetheless, the co-chairs insist there have also been some unanticipated benefits to this new process. For example, there's far less driving around for everyone involved, and the meetings,

although remote, tend to be shorter.

The Games will take place in Niverville, with the exception of two venues. Curling will be played at the Morris Curling Club and alpine skiing will take place at Spring Hill Winter Sports Park. The

Games committee will be working with the Hanover School Division regarding transportation to and from these venues. HSD already provided the transportation for the 2016 Summer Games held in Steinbach, so the co-chairs feel that this will

work out well.

Niverville Elementary School, Niverville Middle School, and Niverville High School will house the athletes for the duration of the Games. These school-based Athletes Villages will allow for quick access to the various sporting venues. Guests of the athletes will be required to find their own accommodations.

Janz and Todd are certain that hosting the Games will bring many benefits to the town. The new CRRC, currently on track to open on June 1, will bring a major boost to the town and the Games will provide an excellent opportunity to showcase the new facility.

Local businesses should also see a much-needed boost, with thousands of visitors expected to flood into town every day for the duration of the week-long Games.

The 2022 Manitoba Winter Games will take place February 26–March 5, 2022, and require upwards of 800 volunteers in order to run smoothly. If you are interested in volunteering, keep an eye out for a recruitment drive taking place in 2021.



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# Arts & Entertainment

## Author Tackles Tough Topics in Children's Book Series

By Brenda Sawatzky

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Local author Thom Van Dyke recently wrote, illustrated, and published the first in a series of children's books dedicated to tackling subjects that are often difficult for children to grasp. *Ari's Awful Day* provides a childlike perspective on racism—and provides solutions to overcome it.

The book features a lion named Ari who feels threatened by the new kid, Mainer, a bear whose talent for hockey seems to outshine his own. Ari responds to his own feelings of inadequacy by causing others to question Mainer's character.

"I'm a firm believer that silly stories are some of the best ways to teach challenging truths," Van Dyke says. "Animals give us a way to talk to kids in a less threatening way. Talking about animal species is much softer than talking about white kids and black kids, for example."

But to truly understand racism, Van Dyke believes it's important to also hear the story from the perspective of those who've experienced it firsthand. For that reason, Ari's telling of the story ends in the middle of the book.

When the reader flips the book over and begins at the back, they get a fresh take on the same story from Mainer's point of view.

"In the book, the new kid, Mainer, moves to a new town, finds out that he is the only bear, and feels those differences deeply," says Van Dyke. "The other character, Ari, has some deep assumptions about bears and it leads to a common childhood tension. On the other hand, Mainer has some assumptions about lions as well."



Local author Thom Van Dyke holds up his recently published children's book.

THOM VAN DYKE

It's literally a meeting-in-the-middle kind of story where the two characters eventually learn to see past their differences and build a lasting friendship. But it takes work.

Van Dyke was approached to write the book by Steinbach hockey agent Ray Petkau.

With racial tensions running high across North America this past summer, Van Dyke and Petkau agreed that racism was still as insidious today as it's ever been.

To assist in writing the book, Petkau introduced Van Dyke to one of his clients, Jermaine Loewen.

Abandoned by his birth parents at the age of one, the Jamaican-born Loewen was adopted by a Manitoba couple when he turned five. For most of his growing up years, he found himself the only child of colour among his peers.

At six years of age, Loewen

received his very first pair of skates and was soon enrolled in the local hockey circuit. By the time he turned 16, it was determined that the lad had a rare talent for the game, and in 2018 Loewen was drafted by the Dallas Stars.

His professional career continues to unfold, and he currently plays for the Chicago Wolves in the American Hockey League.

For most of his life, Loewen has gone by the nickname Mainer, and he's the real-life embodiment of the bear in Van Dyke's story.

"Jermaine understands the pressure of racial tension," says Van Dyke. "His voice was the vital piece we needed to tell an authentic story."

Van Dyke has long tried to understand the nature of racism and is baffled that it still has a place to exist in our world of cultural exposure and psychological advancement.

"You know, for all the astonishing human accomplishments of the last 200 years, humans still appear to be self-centred at their core," says Van Dyke. "I sometimes wonder if that isn't at the root of racism. On a macro level, power, elitism, historical conflicts, etc. all may have something to do with the racism we see today. But on a micro level, the personhood level, I think we may just fear what is different than us. Or perhaps we are so desperate to feel adequate and worthy that the degradation of other people is our last resort."

Putting others ahead of our own interests, he says, isn't easy—but it's certainly a better and richer way to live life.

In terms of Van Dyke's writing credentials, he admits he has few, apart from a previous foray into self-publishing a book of short stories for middle schoolers. But he has

long been a storyteller, inspired by his many years of work as a pastor dealing primarily with kids. He's also a father of eight, as well as foster parent to countless children over the past nine years.

To complement his pastoral role, Van Dyke is trained as a practitioner in Trust-Based Relational Intervention, providing resources and training to hundreds of parents, educators, and social workers across the province.

On a current six-month furlough from his ministry work, Van Dyke is dedicating his time to the children's book series, the second of which is already in the works. This one will address another critical subject that kids need to be equipped for: mental health.

"The storyline is still being worked out, but I can tell you that it will be co-authored again and I will be writing with an NHL player," says Van Dyke. "You'll have to wait to have his identity revealed."

To go along with the storybook series, Van Dyke encourages kids to become members of Ari's Kindness Club, a website where they'll find fun activities, stickers, and colouring pages.

"It's simple: to truly learn a lesson, you need to put it into practice," the author says. "And if I want a kid to put something into practice, then I need to sweeten the deal. I didn't want to just write a book. I sincerely want to start a kindness movement among young kids!"

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Ari's Awful Day is available on Amazon.
- Visit Ari's Kindness Club at <https://arithelion.com/>

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## OBITUARIES

**Isaac Dyck**

On November 26th, 2020, age 90

Isaac (Ike) Dyck, of Niverville, Manitoba, peacefully left this earthly home and gloriously entered his heavenly reward.

He is survived by his wife of 69 years, Katherine (Tina) Dyck, six children, Marlene Hiebert (Jim), Ken Dyck (Anne), Gerald Dyck (Tannis), Gary Dyck (Sherry), Doug Dyck (Suzanne), and Kathy Hiebert (Darrell), 21 grandchildren and 22 great grandchildren, 2 sisters, Tina Harms and Betty Reimer and 1 brother Bill Dyck, many nephews and nieces and countless number of friends.

Dad was born in Plum Coulee, MB., and moved to Kleefeld with his family when he was 14 years old. He was a very curious boy and remained so until his passing. He married the love of his life in 1951 and they had 70 wonderful years together.

As a young man dad was a truck driver, carpenter and spent some years as a buyer for Eatons. His main career was spent at Flo Form Industries from which he retired after 26 years to enter into full time ministry together with mom as Christian counsellors. This took mom and dad to many places to minister the word of God and bring people to walk in the freedom through inner healing. His passion for the word of God remained strong as he was still reading and expounding the word until just days before his passing. His hobbies were reading, singing, wood working, gardening, studying and watching Wheel of Fortune. His love for his God, wife and family was most evident in how he lived his life.

Dad has taught us many things, none so much as love and gratitude. It is with grateful hearts that we, his family, say thankyou to the staff at Niverville Credit Union manor and most recently to the staff at St. Pierre Hospital for the exceptional love and care given to dad.

2 Timothy 4:7 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

Cremation has taken place.

Celebration of life is to follow at a later date.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Springs Church Inner City.

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