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## LOCAL NEWS

### Farmers Weather Extreme Drought

■ Throughout southeastern Manitoba, farmers have been contending with unprecedented drought conditions that have led to crops literally baking in the fields. The past July was the driest on record in approximately 150 years.

Details on Page 5

## LOCAL NEWS

### How Can We Get Back to "Normal"?

■ Pandemic restrictions are easing, but going back to life as it was is turning out to be a complicated challenge.

Details on Pages 6-8

## SPORTS & REC

### Niverville Welcomes Amateur Soccer Team

■ The Niverville Force are primed to kick off their first games in early August. The team will play in Hespeler Park.

Details on Page 17

## ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

### New Music Academy Caters to All Ages

■ Rob Bonefaas of Niverville has founded Music Academy Manitoba, bringing music instruction to young and old.

Details on Page 19



# State-of-the-Art Rec Centre Opens in Niverville

➤ READ MORE ON PAGES 14-16

Cutting the ribbon at the official opening of Niverville's new recreation complex.

JOEY VILLANUEVA

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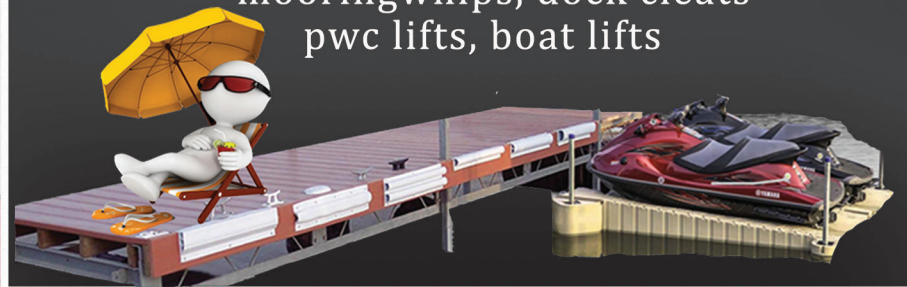
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The

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# Manitoba Eliminates Most Remaining Pandemic Rules

By Evan Braun  
editor@nivervillecitizen.com

Changes are coming to Manitoba's public health orders on Saturday, August 7. Citing steadily rising vaccination rates and continued declines in new COVID-19 cases, Premier Brian Pallister and Dr. Brent Roussin announced at a press conference on August 3 that the province will eliminate many restrictions.

These will be the least restrictive public health orders since before the second wave of the pandemic last fall. Only the highest risk transmission environments will be subject to continued health measures.

Notably, Manitoba has not yet reached the third vaccination milestone it set out in late June, which would require two things: for 80 percent of Manitobans 12 and over to have received their first dose, and for 75 percent of Manitoba 12 and over to have received their second dose. So far, only the first requirement has been achieved.

Starting on Saturday, most capacity restrictions will be dropped and the indoor mask mandate will be a thing of the past—although indoor mask usage will remain a strong recommendation for some time to come.

The new orders drop all restrictions in the following sectors:

- indoor and outdoor gatherings at private residences.
- gyms and fitness centres.
- libraries.
- personal services such as hair and nail salons.
- day camps.
- retail businesses, markets, garden centres, and malls.

Limited restrictions will continue to be in effect for the following sectors:

- expanded capacity limits will remain in place for weddings, funerals, and other public gatherings both indoors and outdoors, including larger capacity limits for worship and cultural events.
- restaurants and bars will no longer need to restrict the size or space between tables and dining



Premier Brian Pallister announces new health measures.

will not be restricted to households or vaccinated individuals; however, patrons will still be expected to avoid congregating or socializing between tables.

- museums, galleries, and movie theatres will remain limited to 50 percent capacity but will no longer be restricted to vaccinated individuals.
- casinos and bingo halls, professional sporting events, horse and auto racing, and concert halls will continue to be limited to vaccinated individuals; however, all these facilities may now open to 100 percent capacity.
- indoor and outdoor sports and recreation will fully reopen with limits only on spectator capacity.
- overnight camps will be permitted with limits on camper cohorts.
- workplaces must continue to report cases to government for follow-up and public health-confirmed transmission of COVID-19 in the workplace may result in workplaces being ordered to close for a minimum of 10 days.
- remote working will no longer be required or recommended by public health and workplaces will be encouraged to transition from COVID-19 safety plans to a general communicable disease prevention plan that focuses on basic risk-reduction principles to reduce the risk of workplace transmission of

COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses.

Central to these orders is the principle that gradually public health orders in Manitoba will be replaced with public health guidance.

As such, in light of the continued threat of variants—particular the delta variant, which has been shown to be up to four times more transmissible than the original strain of COVID-19—the following public health guidance is being put in place:

- wearing masks in indoor public spaces for everyone who is not fully immunized including children under 12.
- maintaining physical distancing of two metres (six feet) in indoor settings.

“Unless you are fully immunized, you are still at risk for more severe effects of COVID-19, such as requiring hospital care or even death,” says Dr. Roussin. “We are slowly but surely approaching a post-pandemic Manitoba, but this does not mean COVID-19 will disappear. We need to remain cautious and vigilant in our efforts to stop the spread of this virus.”

These new public health orders and guidance will remain in place until at least Tuesday, September 7, at which time they will be revised based on new information.

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## CITIZEN POLL

## Do you think the province is opening up too quickly?

- ☐ Yes. The delta variant poses a greater risk and there is more we could be doing to protect against it.
- ☐ No. The time has come to reopen our economy and learn to live with COVID-19 and its consequences.
- ☐ Have a more nuanced opinion? Leave us a comment online.

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## LAST MONTH'S RESULTS:

**With the announcement of Niverville's MJHL franchise and the Providence Pilots playing their home games at the CRRC, what are your plans for game attendance?**

I plan to see most games, and maybe even buy MJHL season tickets.  
**20%**

I plan to attend some games throughout the season, when it works for my schedule.  
**54%**

I will only go to a game if I'm given free tickets.  
**3%**

I have no interest in attending any games.  
**23%**

## YOUR COMMENTS:

I'd see a team from Niverville, but have no interest watching something that should be in Otterburne.

It will be great to have this local team and I am excited to attend games and cheer them on!

It's possible I may go to some games and bring grandkids, depending on restrictions

Thrilled that a MJHL team is coming to Niverville. #supportlocal

The MJHL coming to Niverville is excellent news. Really puts the town on the map. I plan to be a season ticket holder for sure. Love Junior hockey, affordable family entertainment. Great to see the community businesspeople getting behind it to make it happen.

MJHL forces teenage boys to take an experimental jab to play the sport they love?! Yeah no thanks. Was willing to drop huge to support the new team in the community but that ship has sailed. Very unfortunate what is being forced on the kids.



Work is underway at the Niverville Dog Park.

by BARRY PIASTA

# Niverville Dog Park Gets Major Upgrade

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

The Niverville Dog Park is undergoing some significant upgrades and needed repair work this summer.

"Our park has a drainage issue, which has become more prevalent with the new multiplex nearby," says Barry Piasta in reference to the Community Resource and Recreation Centre, which opened less than a month ago and sits directly south of the dog park. "The multiplex has a higher elevation. So snow and rain drains down into the north part of the dog park, creating a small lake that is messy and muddy for our fur friends."

Piasta says that most of the park needs to be raised to the same level as the CRRC, which

means bringing it up two feet along the west side of the park and about six inches along the east side.

Additionally, the fence surrounding the park has long been in need of replacement.

"The fence is very old and portions had already been removed to accommodate the new multiplex construction," Piasta adds. "With the fence showing its age, it needs to be replaced."

Large portions of the fence needed to come down anyway, he points out, to accommodate the heavy equipment that has to be brought in to raise the park's elevation.

The work started off two weeks ago with the removal of the park's equipment and pet features.

Piasta says that a small, temporary dog park area is

being created for visitors to use until the full park is ready to open again.

Once the grading is complete on the park, the ground will be hydroseeded.

"Most likely the full dog park will take a year before it's ready," Piasta says. "That's how long it takes for the grass to take and grow to a point that it won't be damaged by daily use."

The new park will also be larger, with the new fence extending approximately 100 yards to the tree line beyond the former north boundary of the park. The fence will also extend around the back of the Niverville Curling Club.

Finally, ground compost waste bins will be installed.

"The town has listened to the community's concerns about the park and have

taken on the task of doing the updates and repairs," says Piasta.

He adds that he'll be launching a fundraising company later this summer to raise money to add new features to the park.

The Niverville Dog Park is a one-of-a-kind park in Manitoba, with other communities, such as Winnipeg and Morris, having used it as the basis for their own parks in recent years.

"I'm sure that the Niverville Dog Park will remain the only one like it in Manitoba," Piasta says. "It's still a destination park for groups. The park has had groups from outside of town come with up to 50 dogs, and from the dog park they have stopped at our town businesses."



**Katie Knebel**

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DEPOSITPHOTOS

# Southeast Farmers Face Unprecedented Drought

By Jennifer Lavin

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Farmers across southeastern Manitoba are worried this year, and they're not alone. Drought conditions all across the province, and even throughout western Canada, have produced a somewhat bleak outlook for this year's crop.

The situation is no different for farmers close to home.

Marcus Loeppky has been farming for 25 years, and he says this is the driest year he has ever experienced. He farms land southwest of Niverville as well as in the Glenlea area. This region, he reports, has had 20 days when

the temperature reached 30 degrees or higher so far.

The average, for what it's worth, is 13 days.

This level of heat is bad enough for crops, but the situation is made all the worse by the almost complete lack of precipitation. Loeppky says that July is a critical time in the plants' reproductive stage.

This year, the dry weather and heat are stunting their growth.

"All rain is good rain," says Loeppky. "But the little bit we've received recently isn't enough to make a difference."

The region received just 8.4 millimetres of precipitation in all of July, an astonishing low.

The average amount

of rainfall for July is 53 millimetres.

Not only is it hot and dry this summer, though, it has been hot and dry for several summers in a row. This long-term patterns compounds the effects on the soil, and thus the plants.

Loeppky says that crops are burning up in the fields and there's nothing he can do. Each day crops lose further yield potential, which cannot be recovered even if the weather turned tomorrow.

It's hard for even an experienced farmer to predict how much yield loss they will see in 2021, but Loeppky has some guesses.

He speculates that canola

will be the worst hit, perhaps suffering a 50 percent loss, if not more. Cereal crops, he expects, will yield about 60 percent of normal rates.

Corn and beans have taken a hit, too, but Loeppky says it's too early to guess what kind of yield they will produce.

"I'm very concerned about how this year will play out and the effects it'll have for future years," he says. "We tend to be more on the wet side in the Red River valley, and I expect we'll get back there someday. But for now we'll try to focus on the many blessings we do have in our lives."

In this difficult year, it's been difficult getting farmers to open up about the struggles

they're facing.

Loeppky can understand the reasons for their reticence to talk. Even guessing at yield potential, he says, makes him cringe.

He adds that he wouldn't

want people to think farmers are having a "pity party," because that's not what's happening.

Rather, when the crops don't grow, every single one of us pays the price in the end.



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# How Do We Get Back to “Normal”?

By Jennifer Lavin

✉ jlavinn@nivervillecitizen.com

The past year and a half has been a challenge for most Manitobans.

As COVID-19 gradually swept through the world, upending our lives, everyone had to learn to navigate it and find a place of comfort and safety as best they could.

For some, the daily changes brought to the fore have been overwhelming.

For others, there's been unimaginable loss and fear.

For most, the changes have perhaps been less dramatic.

Less dramatic, yes, but still life-altering. Tasks as simple as going to the grocery store have become ordeals: “Do I have my mask? Has the store changed its hours? Will I have to wait in line outside to make sure there aren't too many people inside? Can I use the tap feature on my card to minimize touching surfaces?”

Perhaps, in the process, we've all developed a touch of social anxiety.

We've also learned a host of new words and phrases—social distancing, cohorts, herd immunity, flattening the curve—and to a large extent done our best to follow the rules, often out of an abundance of caution.

Then there's been the daily briefings by government officials, who every day have told us what we could and couldn't do.

Some will have watched these briefings with relief, knowing that the government is watching out for us. For others, it has felt like a massive affront to our collective rights and freedoms.

*The Citizen* spoke with several members of our local communities to better grasp how the pandemic has affected them—and most importantly, how they believe their lives might change as things begin to get back to



STEFAN BARDAL

the way they were in pre-pandemic times.

## THE STING OF LOSS AND ISOLATION

Stefan Bardal, a University of Manitoba student, has plenty of thoughts on how the pandemic has affected him personally.

“I'm a pretty big introvert, and most of my communication with friends is over the internet anyway, so the quarantine didn't have as large of an impact on my life as it did on others,” admits Bardal. “Although I certainly found myself wishing I could meet up with friends more, even if I wouldn't under normal circumstances.”

Shari Davey, a lifelong resident of Niverville, had similar sentiments. She, too, doesn't think of herself as being extremely social.

And yet it's been difficult to distance herself from family.

“It was strange to literally drive by family members' houses and toss gifts to my children and grandkids,” says Davey. “It was difficult to go months without hugging my elderly mother. Having online church was also very different since community and relationships are such a big part of church life.”

Nicole Savard is a local mom of two teenagers. She says this has resulted in

some profoundly lonely times over the last year and a half.

“Special celebrations have felt more sombre since my children and I couldn't always be with my parents due to the restrictions,” Savard laments. “I have felt very much ‘on hold’ since March of 2020.”

These feelings are widespread, and shared by fellow Niverville resident Pamela Stoesz.

“I have struggled with my mental health, experiencing feelings of isolation, failure to provide for my family, inability to focus on and complete tasks, and concern for myself, my family, and my community,” says Stoesz. “In the last couple of months, I have improved my mental health with meditation, addressing thought distortions,

*“It's a helpless and hopeless feeling one has when you can't even see, talk, comfort, or just hold hands with your special person in their time of need. No goodbyes.”*

Janine Ivey | Local Retiree

a healthy diet and exercise—mainly hiking and walking—and being present in the moment.”

For Stoesz, helping her children navigate the crisis has been especially challenging.

“My children are missing their friends,” she adds about the ongoing parenting struggle. “Even though they understand why we've been limiting contact, including home-schooling, I can see that it's getting to them. My daughter in particular, who's two, struggles with this when we're out for a walk or hike. She'll cry out ‘My friends!’ while reaching out for the passing child or pet, and it

breaks my heart to explain that she can't stop and play.”

Janine Ivey, a retiree who lives in Niverville, can relate, having experienced so many of these exact same feelings.

“Not being able to hug our two grandsons was unbearable at times!” Ivey agrees. “With life being semi-normal at the moment, we sure appreciate what we have and don't take anything for granted.”

Unfortunately, Ivey says that she has lost much more than time with her grandsons over the course of the pandemic.

“I lost two cousins, a longtime school friend from ‘back home’ in Ontario, and a co-worker here in Niverville to COVID-19,” she says. “It's a helpless and hopeless feeling one has when you can't even see, talk, comfort,

or just hold hands with your special person in their time of need. No goodbyes.”

Another local resident, Melanie Hogan, has felt the familiar sting of isolation—but for a different reason. Hogan has chosen not to vaccinate and she is sad to say that the decision has led to difficult arguments with her family members.

“I feel less free and less entitled to my opinion,” says Hogan. “No movie theatres, dine-in restaurants, or fun places to take our kids... I feel barred to my home! Having to home-school an eight-year-old while nursing my newborn daughter. Things have been absolutely wild.”



SHARI DAVEY

Since Hogan's interview, a number of those freedoms have been restored, with restaurants and theatres no longer being closed to the unvaccinated.

However, due to pandemic restrictions, Hogan was unable to bring the father of her child to her ultrasound appointment while pregnant.

“That's something he can never go back and do over,” she says.

## REALITIES OF PANDEMIC WORK

Professionally, there were few positives for some of the locals *The Citizen* spoke to.

Savard says that she has quite enjoyed working from home.

For financial reasons, there are many conferences she normally wouldn't be able to attend, but because of the pandemic she was able to use videoconferencing to take part without the need for travel.

But most people don't see much to be positive about when it comes to working through the pandemic.

Davey had only recently retired from teaching at Niverville Elementary School but chose to go back to work in November when class sizes were reduced by government regulations, creating the need for more

teachers.

She says that teaching young children amidst the pandemic was particularly difficult.

“We were required to wear masks and follow a variety of new guidelines over the past months,” says Davey. “But many of these guidelines were difficult for a teacher of young children, who needed reassurances and a certain understanding of the changes both at school and in their community. It was especially difficult to keep children physically distanced and find creative ways to teach when so many of our usual methods were no longer available.”

Like many others, Stoesz took a big professional hit due to the pandemic and its restrictions. Pre-COVID, she ran a popular daycare in Niverville.

“At first, I decided not to replace clients who left the daycare, which decreased my wages but not the number of hours worked,” Stoesz says. “Then, as things got worse, I temporarily closed and then finally closed indefinitely. I have family members who are at high risk and I couldn't live with myself if the daycare caused their death.”

Stoesz says she was frustrated at points about the Town of Niverville's response to COVID-19, citing a lack of information regarding social distancing at the beginning of the pandemic. Many people seemed confused by the regulations at first, she says, ultimately souring her feelings on providing childcare.

That said, Stoesz has used the unexpected change in circumstances to undertake some personal and professional development.

She recently decided to go back to school, taking online courses to eventually



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earn a bachelor's degree in computer science.

As for Hogan, she's currently on maternity leave, but before that she was working in retail and found it challenging, especially when it came to the regular disagreements and confrontations she had with customers about mask-wearing.

"The awkwardness of having to tell a customer to put a mask on... that should never be something we should have to do," says Hogan, who expressed many frustrations about the mask mandate that was in place for such a long time. "We have no authority to do so, so why should we be doing it?"

As a university student, Bardal says his education experience was rocky, to put it mildly. Everything about his life as a student changed to a large degree.

"COVID-19 hit at the end of my first year," Bardal says. "The professors were in unknown territory just as much as we students were. I'm in the Faculty of Science, so I had a lot of labs that transitioned to an online format, which was often poorly executed, due largely to a lack of planning time."

By the fall term, he says that the experience became somewhat smoother, with professors and school staff having had more time to work out their plans.

Still, many aspects of school were new and unfamiliar.

"Second years like me had just gotten into a routine attending classes on campus, and that all got thrown off when we changed to entirely online lectures," he adds. "There were convenient parts, like not having to drive to campus, sleeping in



MELANIE HOGAN

until just before class, more courses offering lecture recordings... things like that. But the lack of social interaction with other students took away a lot from the university experience, I found. Not to mention exams either being open book and very difficult, or invigilated over Zoom call and ten times as stressful as in person."

#### TRANSITIONING TO "NORMAL"

The big question on people's minds this summer is how they will transition to something approximating normal.

Pandemic restrictions in Manitoba are easing as the daily case counts and rate of hospitalization drops to the lowest levels since last fall.

In his press briefings, Dr. Brent Roussin, Manitoba's chief provincial health officer, has cautioned Manitobans that even as we move more quickly to reopen in August, our everyday activities continue to come with a degree of risk.

Although Manitoba will soon be post-pandemic, he reminds people, it will not necessarily be post-COVID.

To that point, everyone's risk tolerance is a little different. Just because dining in

restaurants, seeing movies, and going to sporting events are now allowed doesn't mean everyone is eager to go.

One big question is whether people should continue to wear masks.

The province has now dropped its mask mandate, although Dr. Roussin maintains that wearing a mask in indoor public places is still strongly recommended.

Savard says she might still wear a mask now that the rule has gone away, especially if she isn't feeling well.

"I could see possibly wearing a mask if I had to go out while sick, but the only places I'd likely be going would be the pharmacy or medical clinic," Savard says. "I'll likely be staying home rather than going out, even if it's because I have a cold."

Stoesz has a similar mind-

"I am tired of wearing a mask, though," Davey remarks. "It is hot and uncomfortable and, more than the physical aspect, it hides our expressions. I like to read people's faces and show others my smile of friendliness, welcome, or gratitude."

For Ivey, the decision will come down to the recommendations of health professionals.

"We have always followed the guidelines and will continue," says Ivey. "With these new variants, I have a feeling we will have to mask up in public for some time yet."

But Bardal isn't sure about wearing a mask. "I think I will continue to carry one on me at all times, but given the choice to wear it, I likely won't. Perhaps in a crowded store, or an area I think appears unsanitary,



JANINE STOESZ

#### POST-PANDEMIC LIFE

Stoesz feels that her entire life has drastically changed and will continue in that vein in a post-pandemic world.

She does plan to reopen her daycare, although she'll be shifting her focus to earning her bachelor's degree in the coming year. Part of the shift will see her focus on school-age children.

Davey doesn't know how much her life will change as summer turns to fall, but she says that she hopes she has learned from living through a pandemic.

"I hope I have learned lessons about appreciating health, family, freedom, and medical expertise," Davey says.

Ivey is more specific about the ways she expects her everyday life to change as more freedoms are reintroduced.

"We'll probably stay away from buffet-style restaurants, and sanitizers and disinfecting wipes will be readily available at all times in my purse," says Ivey. "We're creatures of habit, so yes, I believe we will get back to normal—someday. It will be a slow transition, I think."

Bardal likes to think she will make some changes to

how he lives his life—such as becoming more adventurous, trying harder to have new experiences, and going out in public more often.

"More likely, I'll slip into the same routines as before," he acknowledges. "Especially since university only allows so much free time. But I'll certainly always think to myself, 'Would I wish I could do this if we were still in quarantine?'"

Savard feels that life will more or less go back to how it was before.

In fact, she's eager to return to large events and says that COVID hasn't made her afraid of germs or crowds.

For her part, Hogan says that she would love to be able to snap her fingers and have things just return to the way they used to be.

But she just doesn't think that's going to be possible in the near term.

"The future is looking a little grim," she says about her own circumstances as an unvaccinated person. "It's looking a lot like I won't be able to travel without having to quarantine... the future is kind of scary."

#### HOW PEOPLE HAVE CHANGED

One thing that everyone seems to agree on is that the pandemic has changed us.

The people interviewed for this article could disagree on the specifics, but it's hard to argue that our perspectives aren't different than they were a year and a half ago—our perspectives on our fellow human beings and on the world as a whole.

"I'm concerned by the anti-science mentality I've

(continued on page 8)

*"I experienced fewer colds this past year, and I credit masks for that."*

Janine Stoesz | Local Parent

set. "Once we reach a high vaccination rate, I won't wear a mask unless I'm sick. If I have a common cold but can still productively go about my day, I will wear it. I think it's a good compromise between staying at home and losing productivity unnecessarily and proceeding as normal, risking infecting others. I hope others do the same. I experienced fewer colds this past year, and I credit masks for that."

Davey will continue to enjoy the protection of a mask for a while. Right now, she says that she feels more comfortable and confident in a crowd when masked.

I'll put one on. Certainly if I'm ever feeling under the weather, which is something I hope all people begin doing if they hadn't already. And if a store asks that customers wear one, I will happily oblige."

Not everyone feels the same way.

Hogan says that she has a medical exemption from wearing a mask—but even if she didn't, she wouldn't wear one. Her opinion is that mask-wearing gives people a false sense of security. She honestly believes masks may cause more harm than good, regardless of public health advice.

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(continued from page 7)

seen during the pandemic," says Stoesz. "I was always aware that it existed, but the pandemic showed just how prevalent it is."

Bardal agrees with Stoesz, noting that he has seen a lot of ugly qualities in his fellow man. These qualities, unfortunately, are much harder to ignore now that they've been brought out into the open.

"[There is] a lot of closed-mindedness, misplaced scepticism, fear-mongering, and general disrespect to other people and their personal choices," Bardal says of the world he sees all around him. "All that certainly makes me worry about if a more serious global threat comes around in the future, whether we'll be able to handle it like intelligent, civilized humans or not."

Even though Hogan is the only respondent who has so far chosen not to vaccinate, her feelings on how people have changed



■ JANINE IVEY

remain somewhat similar to the others.

"I never thought something like this would divide us," Hogan says. "We should be actually 'in this together,' like people say, but I feel like because I am [mask-exempt], people look at me like I'm selfish, and because I won't get the vaccine I'm selfish. I don't look at them like they are selfish. I am happy that they feel comfortable enough to do what they feel is necessary. I'm just unable to trust it yet."

## THE GOODNESS OF PEOPLE

But people haven't necessarily changed for the worse.

Bardal says that despite some concerning trends that have become apparent, he is still reassured by what he sees in many of people he's closest with.

"COVID has also shown me that many people, arguably the majority of people I know, are very caring, compassionate, and empathetic in times like these, and they always try to help out their peers," he says. "I will try to focus on those good aspects of people in times of crisis, rather than the negative ones, because it's easy to lose faith in humanity if you don't give people the benefit of the doubt."

As for Savard, she says that she believes even more strongly now in the essentially goodness of most people.

"So I'm not afraid for my children or myself to go about living our lives," she says. "I know that there will always be evil in the world,

but I'm not consumed by it."

Davey says that she would like to use the lessons she has learned during the pandemic as an opportunity for personal growth and development.

"I want to improve my tolerance of other people's beliefs and work at understanding their points of view where we may differ," Davey says. "I know we have all gotten tired of the slogan 'We're all in this together.' However, it is true... hopefully there can be a drawing together and understanding of what we have all been through—apart, yet in the same situation."

Ivey, who has lost so much, including people who were close to her, also sees important lessons in all the shared trauma.

"This pandemic makes one realize how small our world is and how important it is to take care of each other," she adds. "Always count our blessings and never take anything for granted! Be kind to everyone."

# Province Announces Community Grants

By Evan Braun

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

Late in June, the provincial government made several announcements regarding grants for our local area. The money has been earmarked to Niverville and Ritchot through the Building Sustain Communities Grant Program.

"I am proud to highlight our PC government's investments in local projects that will help build thriving, sustainable communities for everyone's benefit," said MLA Ron Schuler at the announcement. "These grants will help boost community organizations during these unprecedented times as we begin to rebuild our economy beyond the pandemic."

The grant program was expanded for 2021, with up to \$13 million made available by the province to support 305 individual community development projects.

For Niverville, the grants include \$22,499 for the 2022 Manitoba Winter Games. Specifically, this money will go toward the purchase of a utility terrain vehicle (UTV)

and a wrestling mat.

Some money will also be set aside for programming to take place after the Games.

Additionally, Clipper Ice Sports will receive \$8,471 for a rink divider, to optimize and modify the ice surface at the Centennial Arena.

The third project in Niverville is an expansion of the dog park. The province has given the town \$35,000 in order to repair and resurface the park, improve drainage, plant grass seed, install a new fence, and plant trees.

That work is already underway.

Finally, \$517 is being provided to Niverville through a separate grant, the Heritage Grant Program, which is funded through the Department of Sport, Culture and Heritage. This money will go towards developing two interpretative signs for the Niverville Heritage Wall, which will soon be erected along Main Street next to the Niverville Credit Union parking lot. The signs will expand on the history of the town.

A wide array of community projects have also received

funding throughout the RM of Ritchot.

The first is \$117,195 for the new boat launch in Ste. Agathe. The money will be used to finish the boat launch and construct a dock along the river. Once complete, the site will include lighting, signage, and bank stabilization.

The Ste. Agathe Arena is getting some necessary equipment upgrades, to the tune of \$43,585. This will come about in the form of a dehumidification unit and a replacement ice resurfacer.

Speaking of arenas, the Îles-Chênes Arena will get a new wheelchair ramp and an automatic door opener at the top of the ramp. That project will receive \$9,902.

In St. Adolphe, the arena and community centre will be given \$34,584 to tackle mould remediation. The need for these improvements, which include the removal and replacement of a wall with significant mould damage and a new fire-rated wall, came to light earlier this year when St. Adolphe made the top four finalists in the annual Kraft Hockeyville contest.

The St. Adolphe Arena will also be given \$6,047 for facility upgrades, including the replacement of the compressor room roof and brine pump.

Accessible washroom and shower upgrades are coming to Ste. Agathe, with \$42,366 being spent on replacing an existing washroom and shower facility with one that is accessible.

Finally, the Seine River Minor Ball organization is being given \$10,155 to complete upgrades to its park. Dugouts and fencing will be upgraded to increase safety, and a storage garage for maintenance equipment will be built.

At the announcement of these grants, Schuler noted that the 2021 program intake was expanded by more than \$5 million so that larger-scale capital projects could be supported.

The maximum grant contribution is 50 percent of eligible capital project costs of up to \$300,000. Other community projects have continued to be eligible for funding for grants up to \$75,000.



# Self-Storage Business Expands Footprint This Summer

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

A business in Niverville is about to undergo a significant expansion.

This summer, Main Street Storage will be adding 10,000 square feet of new self-storage, with two new buildings and two acres of new outdoor parking being added to their property at 299 Main Street.

Work on the new buildings got underway in July and is expected to be complete by late fall. The new parking will be finished much sooner.

"When we initially developed the site and built the first building at 299 Main Street, there were definitely some unknowns," says Ray Dowse, who owns the business with his wife Cara. "Our best projections were made about what we thought might work for types of storage and mix of sizes, whether there would be uptake on the outdoor parking, how long it would take to begin to fill up, pricing, etc."

The self-storage began at 226 Main Street and only expanded its footprint to the larger facility at 299 Main Street last summer.

"The first steps included a lot of planning and a significant initial investment in earthwork and drainage plan on the 1.5 acres of land," Dowse adds. "We enclosed it with a compound and gate, automated it with key fobs and door-openers and a ground loop for easy exit, then added in security cameras, parking lines, and stall numbers as well as the first building."

That first building, which opened last year, is partially climate-controlled. And even before it was finished, the husband-and-wife team had begun formulating plans to expand further.

The two new buildings, Dowse says, will add 85 additional self-storage lockers, bringing the total at the site to 134. One of the new buildings will be fully climate-controlled, while the second will not. Units



Main Street Storage in Niverville.

JUSTIN BRAUN

will vary in size from five-by-ten to 12-by-20. The larger units will be big enough to park a vehicle inside.

"Construction on the two brand-new buildings is expected to begin in July with the pouring of the foundations," says Dowse. "Then the epoxy floor coatings will be done before the framing of the buildings. But with delays in the delivery of the steel, we don't expect the buildings themselves to start construction until September... On completion, the area from the front of the compound to the back of the new buildings will be paved completely, and that will need to be done before freeze-up this fall."

The original site offered about 60 stalls of various widths and lengths, but Dowse says it was more of an experiment to see if they could generate additional revenue from the property's vacant space.

The answer to that venture was a resounding yes. When they realized the high demand for secure parking in town, the Dowses got in touch with the owners of the neighbouring property to see if there was an opportunity to collaborate.

Ron and Eric Hamilton, who own

the Niverville Animal Hospital, also control approximately two acres of vacant land behind their building.

"After some dialogue, we were able to work out a plan to collaborate with one another where Cara and I utilize our existing systems, management, and infrastructure with the self-storage operations and combine it with the empty land next door owned by the Hamiltons, which will be converted into a finished parking site," Dowse explains.

In the end, the new parking site will be able to accommodate approximately 100 parking stalls with sizing from 10-by-20 up to 12-by-40 pull-through stalls.

"Cara and I are excited to have the Hamiltons join us on this part of the facility expansion and look forward to what the enhancements at the site will be able to provide our customers," says Dowse. "There will be some organized chaos at the site for the balance of the year, but once construction is complete we are really excited for what the site will offer from a self-storage perspective."

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# Middle School Student Wins Provincial Award

**By Jennifer Lavin**

✉ jlavin@nivervillecitizen.com

Ben Hiebert, a Grade Seven student at Niverville Middle School, has won a provincial award—both for himself and for his whole school.

Each year, students in Grades Five to Eight all over Manitoba are asked to create posters with fire and burn safety messages for Burn Awareness week in February.

A provincial winner is then declared for each grade and the winners' artwork and messages are used in the pamphlets distributed to students in Kindergarten to Grade Four the following October for Fire Safety Week.

Niverville Fire Chief Keith Bueckert and Grade Seven teacher Laurie Loepky have worked together to implement this program at Niverville Middle School. This was only their second year



**Ben Hiebert of Niverville Middle School.**

PROVIDED BY BEN HIEBERT

participating in the program, but they already produced a winner.

Ben, a student in Loepky's class, won a \$200 Toys R Us gift card, and the school received a \$250 gift from the Manitoba Firefighters Burn Fund. In addition, Ben's classmates all received swag bags.

For his poster, Ben says he

wanted to do "a current scene, with electronics that people use these days, and also add a little humour."

He has already used his gift card. With it, he chose to buy wireless earbuds and some Lego.

"I was really surprised about winning," Ben says. "I didn't expect it!"

## YOU GET TO CHOOSE

In the 1920s, a missionary travelled the remote paths of Northern Saskatchewan on foot to call on homes rarely seeing visitors. This cold November day turned into a white-out snowstorm and the missionary, Percy Wills, found himself lost. With temperatures dropping to -35C, he knew he was at God's mercy. Collapsing against a log, he cried out to God for help. Within the next few moments, he heard what sounded like horses and a wagon. He called into the night. The wagon stopped, and off jumped my great grandfather, Malcolm Burley, who loaded Percy and took him back to his sawmill. Malcolm invited him into his work shack, shared a meal, and Percy told my grandfather the wonderful story of God's love and Salvation. That night my great grandfather trusted Jesus as his personal Saviour. This life-changing news was too good to keep quiet about, and so he asked Percy to travel 15 miles to where my great grandmother Carolyn was staying with her parents. Percy trudged off in the morning, and there was joy that evening when the three heard God's call and decided to trust Christ as their Saviour. Malcolm and Carolyn's eight children were, by this time, older teens or newly married. While they all heard the gospel message, only Joe received God's Salvation. One of Joe's brothers was Fred, my grandfather. Fred provided a loving and caring home for my Dad and his three brothers. Still, it was without prayer or regular Bible reading, but God wasn't finished with this family. My father, at the age of 21, was given a gospel tract by a workmate, and for the first time in his life he was told he could have his sins forgiven and eternity in Heaven. It wasn't long before he chose to follow Christ as his Saviour. And so, God's calling continues, onto me and my siblings, onto my children who have heard the Gospel message and now my grandchildren. They get to choose if they will receive it or not. God forces no one to accept it. The Bible tells us that "many are called but few are chosen." More simply stated, the "chosen" are those who come when they have been called. God is not willing that any should perish. Have you ever heard God calling? To many, it comes through a happy or tragic life event. It may come through a radio program, a Bible opened in the hotel room, a gospel text hanging from a wall. Maybe it came through Christian parents or a Sunday School teacher that are still praying for you. God is not short of ways to display the message of His saving grace. God also fulfills his promise of Jeremiah 29:13, where He says, "And ye shall seek me, and find me when you search for me with all your heart." One of the best ways to hear God speaking to us is through the Bible — His Living Word to man. Take your Bible and read the first five chapters of The Gospel of John. Do it more than once. Before you read, pray, "God, if you have something to say to me, I'd like to hear it." In these chapters, you will discover who God is and the Salvation He offers to all.

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# Commentary

## How I Became an Exvangelical

By Jennifer Lavin

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Once upon a time, long ago, I went to church. My family went to church every week without fail and I liked church as a young child. I felt safe and close to holiness, even if I didn't recognize that this is what I felt.

Because it was so long ago that this could happen in public school, one day my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Gerbrandt, talked about becoming a born-again Christian. I loved Mrs. Gerbrandt, I loved Jesus, and I was interested.

That afternoon, my mom tells me, she was ironing while I sat on the floor watching Yogi Bear. Suddenly I turned it off, turned around, and told her I wanted to invite Jesus into my heart. She was thrilled and helped me do just that.

Almost all of my elementary school friends went to church; it was easy to be a Christian in a small town with seven churches. And as I grew older, I became more and more involved in the church. I sang in the choir, in a worship team, performed solos, helped lead the girls choir, and taught Sunday school.

I loved it all. The church was my second home.

In my mid-teens, I started considering baptism. I inquired about baptism in

our church but didn't like what I heard. In our church, baptism meant you became a member of the church—and that meant things like giving a certain amount of money to the church each year.

That bothered me. I had no problem with tithing or with charity, but to have to give a certain amount or be called out? I didn't like that. I wanted to be baptized into God's family, not the church family.

Soon after, I was informed that I could no longer teach Sunday School because I wasn't a church member. I was devastated.

Not too long after that, I began to hear rumblings. Rumours. I wasn't a member, so I couldn't attend membership meetings, but my parents eventually told me that there was a schism of some sort. After a time, about half the church members left and my church was no longer the same.

The church had been so much of my life and I was lost.

I moved to the big city at age 20 and tried attending a few churches. None of them really stuck. In one, I had another bad situation happen.

I quit going to church around this time, but my faith in God remained strong. I worshipped by reading my Bible and devotional books, talking about religious matters

with my family, and so much praying and singing.

I missed church, but I began to comprehend that church wasn't a necessity for my faith.

In my mid-20s, my lifelong depression had me down for the count. I took too many pills on purpose one time.

Wracked with guilt, I called my friend Jo, who rushed me to the hospital to get treated.

From the hospital I was sent to a crisis stabilization unit for three weeks, which helped me get past the worst of my pain, and I was then able to go home.

Back at my apartment, I was like a newborn—unable to care for myself. Jo would come over after work and literally help me shower and get dressed. Then she'd haul me over to the grocery store to get healthy food. In the kitchen afterward she'd stand me in front of the stove and instruct me to stir the sauce. She did the rest, bustling around, chatting, and reminding me what it felt like to be human.

She fixed me. And I will never stop being grateful.

Around that same time, I began hearing about Dr. James Dobson. I knew about him because it seemed that everybody had listened to Focus on the Family when I was growing up. His advice was revered!

But now he was telling parents of gay kids to cut them off. To not talk to them until they

"changed their ways." And much worse things too.

I was confused. Jo was gay. And Jo had saved my life.

Now, I knew of course that being a good person isn't the same as being a Christian—but still, my church had taught me that homosexuality wasn't just a sin, but one of the worst sins.

I couldn't quite reconcile that in my brain.

These thoughts stayed in my head and grew and evolved over the years. I wondered, were the sins I had been taught to deplore really sins? Were our religious leaders accurately interpreting the Bible?

How could I know the answers to these questions?

Like many of my fellow Christians, I winced when I watched the news and they showed the so-called "Christian perspective." Why was it always some weirdo? Why did so many flat-earthers identify as Christians? Why were so many anti-vaxxers Christians? I struggled.

Despite my struggles, my faith in God did not fail me. It waxed and waned somewhat but mostly remained strong. God was good, but was the church?

Then came 2015, and Donald Trump announced a run for president of the United States. He boldly claimed his Christianity yet didn't act very Christian. When asked to name his favourite Bible verse, he declined to answer. When his speech writers had him quote from 2 Corinthians, he called it "Two Corinthians."

Puzzling. It got so much worse. His hatred of... well, it seemed to be anyone who wasn't a white, cisgender, wealthy man. He said vile things about women. He mocked the disabled. He mocked American soldiers. When white supremacists, many carrying swastika flags, marched in Charlottesville in 2017, he called them "very fine people." The Nazis. He called the Nazis "very fine."

Much to my astonishment, the evangelical Christian

community flocked to support him. Many famous Christian leaders publicly endorsed him.

The strong connection between Trump, his policies, and evangelical voters was strong, and continues to be strong.

In writing about the most recent U.S. presidential election, NPR remarked, "A notable fact in 2016 was that exit polls showed about 80 percent of white evangelical Christians supported Trump in spite of his unfamiliarity with the Bible, his divorces, his vulgar rhetoric and his association with porn stars. Trump's reputation in moral terms hasn't changed all that much during his time in office, but there is little evidence of slippage among these faith voters."

At this point, though, I began to notice that I wasn't alone. A growing movement of "exvangelicals" came on the scene. Exvangelicals were, well, me! People of faith who grew up in the church, loved God, and loved the Bible... but didn't love all the things they saw being done in the name of the church.

Every year, the news shows us too many examples of pain, horror, war, and death done in the name of the church. Just this summer, 1,300 bodies have been found—so far—on the sites of old residential schools. Who ran those schools? The church.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Springs Church, as well as other smaller churches in Manitoba, were charged with violating federal health orders more than once for refusing to abide by the law. Is that the Christian thing to do? Springs is pastored by a man who is worth \$10 million dollars. Is that the Christian way to live?

While churches were closed during the pandemic, I heard some people saying, "How can you take away our right to worship?" But nobody did that. Nobody took away our right to worship, because the church is a building. Our

faith should exist everywhere, not just in a building.

Now, please understand: I believe there are good churches. And I believe that church is great for some people. I also know that there are many truly faithful people in the church who try every day to follow Jesus's teachings.

But there's a reason why people—young people especially—are leaving in droves. It's not because they're bored, or busy, or tired. It's because they don't see Jesus's values reflected in the church's words and deeds.

I can't figure out whom to credit for this quote, but it's perfect: "If your experience with Christianity has left you with more guilt and less joy, then you have found religion, not Jesus." The expression goes on to say, "Religion is about what you do for God. Jesus is about what God did for you."

In 2017, the amazing Tony Campolo came up with the concept of a "red letter Christian," people who attempt to follow the words of Jesus. If there's a conflict between the words of Jesus and another biblical passage, red letter Christians tend to err on the side of Jesus.

Jesus's words are, well, pretty great! He told us to love. Love him, love our neighbours, love everybody.

That's not what I've seen in many Christian communities. But love, Jesus's love, has always resonated with me.

That's where I stand now. I no longer call myself a Christian; I am a follower of Jesus.

Nadia Bolz-Weber—an author, minister, and theologian—said it best: "People don't leave Christianity because they stop believing in the teachings of Jesus. People leave Christianity because they believe in the teachings of Jesus so much, they can't stomach being part of an institution that claims to be about that and clearly isn't."

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# The Great Transition: Have Our Social Muscles Atrophied?

By Daniel Dacombe

On March 12, 2020, the provincial government announced its first case of COVID-19. Reactions in Manitoba were similar to reactions around the world; we saw stores packed with panicked shoppers, fear on social media, and a perplexing shortage of toilet paper.

As businesses closed and people began working primarily from home, our cities were transformed; if you were one of those who still had to drive to work in those early days, the empty streets during rush hour were positively eerie. It felt more like the start of a disaster film than real life.

Predictably, anxiety became—and remained—a feature in many of our lives.

Now, 16 months later and with roughly 80 percent of eligible individuals having received at least one dose of a vaccine, we are starting to see positive change. Our healthcare system has brought back patients from other provinces and is beginning to breathe a bit easier. It's a beam of light, visible from the end of the tunnel and a break from the tremendous strain we've been under.

Thanks to the heroic efforts of science and medicine, hope is pulling ahead of death and fear.

As restrictions ease and we scurry out of our burrows, though, many of us are glancing around nervously for our shadows.

We've seen it before. We've been through more than one lockdown. It's hard to shake the persistent vigilance we've been living with for more than a year.

Even if more lockdowns are less likely with the vaccination rates



DEPOSITPHOTOS

steadily rising, some people are beginning to experience apprehension about life returning to "normal." The idea of returning to the office, of going without a mask, of being in crowds, even of having regular social interactions fills some people with what's being called by some "reopening anxiety."

Different from the concern that we'll have to go into lockdown again, this anxiety is related to the stress introduced by returning to our old, and now unfamiliar, routines.

According to a study published by the American Psychological Association, roughly half of Americans feel uneasy about returning to face-to-face interaction after the pandemic. The same study found that nearly half of those surveyed felt uncomfortable with the idea of

returning to the way they had lived pre-pandemic at all.<sup>1</sup>

This may seem counterintuitive. Shouldn't we all be excited to return to normal?

As with any issue related to human thought and behaviour, the causes of this anxiety are multifaceted and complex.

One area is social. We've simply gotten unused to being around people. Author of *The Art of Gathering*, Priya Parker refers to this as an atrophying of our social muscles.<sup>2</sup>

Like any muscle, we need to exercise our social skills. It might be challenging, but with practice much of this anxiety will recede—especially as we can see each other's faces in public again.

Another factor partially responsible for our reopening anxiety is the

long-term mental health impacts of the pandemic. Depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, and other issues have risen sharply across the country, and for many people—especially frontline and healthcare workers—those issues have gone untreated.

As we open up, those dealing with untreated mental health issues may be worried about having to re-enter a post-pandemic world while still carrying the scars from their pandemic battles.

In addition, many people who have entered the ranks of the fully vaccinated and are now able to go maskless in some circumstances are faced with other new concerns. Are the people you interact with in public vaccinated, or unvaccinated? It's a new concern for us, having to

think about those who choose to remain unvaccinated and the risks they pose to themselves, to those unable to take a vaccine, and to the development and spread of more dangerous variants.

A post-pandemic world does not mean a post-COVID world, after all, and this unfortunate new rift threatens to divide us.

The political, religious, and interpersonal landscape of the reopened world will be very different, and none of us can really predict what that will mean yet. Uncertainty is a powerful source of fear.

Finally, we need to acknowledge the bottom line: life transitions are hard. Always. Even good ones. Psychologists have known this for decades, and countless books have been written on the subject.

These factors mentioned above are just individual pieces of the great transition we're about to go through. Put together, it makes for a complex puzzle.

Despite how difficult the coming months and years may be, there's one thing we should never forget: we're all going through this life transition together. This gives us an opportunity to support, and be supported by, each other, which is an excellent way to flex our social muscles.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> "Stress in America 2021: Pandemic Stress One Year On," American Psychological Association. March 2021 (<https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress>).

<sup>2</sup> Priya Parker, *The Art of Gathering: How We Meet and Why It Matters* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 2020).



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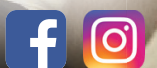
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# Sports & Recreation

JOEY VILLANUEVA



## State-of-the-Art Rec Centre Opens in Niverville

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

On July 1, the Town of Niverville marked the official grand opening of the Community Resource and Recreation Centre. The \$19.5 million facility has long been in the works. It was first proposed six years ago and construction broke ground in July 2019.

"It's truly an exciting day for all of us here in Niverville," said Niverville Mayor Myron Dyck in his remarks. "Through the years, council and the

community has kept this dream. Some have had it for a lot longer than myself... I'm just very grateful for everyone that has been involved. A project like this doesn't come together except for the support of some very key people."

Mayor Dyck went on to acknowledge many of the people involved with the project, from the upper levels of government to the volunteers and town staff who handled so much of the legwork over the last several years.

"This project has been just a real

treat," he said. "It's probably been, if not the highlight, then for sure one of the top couple of highlights for me in having the privilege to be able to serve the people of Niverville, to be able to be part of this team."

He called the day a celebration of teamwork—a reference to both the many teams behind the scenes that have made the CRRC a reality and the sports teams that will draw people here for years to come.

Mayor Dyck also gave special recognition to the team of construction workers and tradespeople who

have gone the extra mile to ensure the building stands apart.

"It's not just visible in the mortar or boards and screws, but also in their heart and their passion," Dyck said. "You can see it in the workmanship that's been done. They have given it their all and we are truly grateful for that. So that is what we celebrate today: what can be accomplished when a team comes together for a common goal."

Also on hand for the ribbon-cutting was local MLA Ron Schuler, as well as the members of Niverville's

council: deputy mayor John Funk alongside councillors Chris Wiebe, Nathan Dueck, and Kevin Stott.

"On behalf of our premier, Brian Pallister, and the government, thank you for joining us on this beautiful day," said Schuler. "Thank you to the town, almost city, of Niverville for hosting us. I want to thank His Worship Myron Dyck and your leadership. I would like to actually claim all of this as having been my doing, but I can't. I think it is really the mayor and council and others who came before you. This is your win, your day."

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Schuler also thanked the federal government for their contributions to the project.

He noted that the CRRC was the first project in Manitoba to be funded by the Investing in Canada infrastructure program and received a \$7.8 million grant from the Government of Canada, as well as an additional \$3.5 from the provincial government.

"This multifunctional recreation culture facility is a great contribution to the town," Schuler added. "It serves to improve the quality of the community and demonstrates our government's commitment to investing in culture and recreational infrastructure... It's a great facility. It is absolutely beautiful."

Schuler said that a facility like this allows the town to really grow beyond a bedroom community, by providing much-needed recreational programming that keeps a town vibrant.

"What this allows for is for people to buy here, move here with their families, and have something to do here. That's what people want," he said. "They want to have a holistic community that includes everything. It's very important to have a place to go to do physical activity. We have to stay healthy. We want our young people to have a place to go and not be out getting into trouble. They can be here and be involved."

After these remarks, representatives from the local media were invited inside for a tour of the facility.

Upon entering the front doors, visitors find themselves in a spacious lobby which stretches the full length of the building. One end features the main washrooms, a seating area, a trophy case, and a yet-to-be-completed donor wall to recognize the many people who have made contributions to the building of the CRRC.

On the other end, visitors will find a multipurpose space and a community kitchen—these rooms weren't quite ready to be shown

off—as well as the hallway link to the Niverville High School.

But at the far west end of the building, there is one particularly impressive feature which families across the region should be getting very excited about: the indoor playground.

The indoor playground is a sight to behold. The structure rises the full height of the building, presenting children with a maze of dizzying ramps, slides, and obstacle-course-like features that will keep them busy for hours.

"This is a piece that a lot of people will be pretty excited about," said Warren Britton, the Town of Niverville's Rec Facility Manager, with a broad smile on his face. "I can tell you that one morning I had to do a walkthrough of this space and I had to try every slide! It's honestly fantastic. There was a lot of discussion as to the different features."

A bathroom is located just off the playground area so that parents won't have to bustle their children from one end of the expansive building to the other.

Britton added that access to the indoor playground, as well as to the running/walking track along the mezzanine level of the fieldhouse, will come at a small cost.

"The playground and the running track will be membership-based," Britton said. "We've set the prices really reasonable. So for a household, for a Niverville resident, it's \$50 per year. This is a really, really fun space... and I don't know how you get a kid out of there if they don't want to leave."

Mayor Dyck is similarly excited about the indoor playground.

"To be able to hear the sound of children at play is music to my ears," Dyck said. "To know that there's going to be children interacting with one another, and just the innocence and freedom of them at play, and then the relationships that will form with the other parents groups that will be there at the same time, that's just huge."

Just a few feet away from the

playground is the cavernous fieldhouse, which can be divided into a number of smaller sports courts to provide a great deal of flexibility.

The entire floorspace can be used as a full futsal (indoor soccer) court, or the centre of the room can be converted to showcase a feature basketball or volleyball court.

Alternatively, the space can accommodate two individual basketball courts, three volleyball courts, or nine badminton courts.

To provide further flexibility, built-in electronics are able to raise and lower the basketball nets, lower court separator curtains, and control the overhead lights individually. There are three scoreboards, which can either be used separately or connected to show results from the same game.

The fieldhouse is adjoined by three change rooms, as well as two locker rooms. During the tour, bleachers were erected for 350 spectators—but the number of bleachers can be expanded depending on how much floor-space is being used for each event.

As announced last month, the fieldhouse will also be home to the various men's and women's teams from Providence University come fall. Their volleyball, basketball, and futsal teams will be playing their home games in this facility.

Overlooking the fieldhouse is a large walking/running track, which features three lanes. It also provides an outstanding view for those needing standing room when the bleachers may be full.

"Our other gyms in town are utilized by our kids, but there's no opportunity for adults in Niverville to get involved in any kind of recreation in them because they're full," said Mayor Dyck. "To now have a facility like this, where we can have wellness and recreation for adults... it's an incredible opportunity for people where they no longer have to leave the community to find it."

The fieldhouse will also be used

(continued on page 16)



The museum space on the second floor is still under construction.

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The new arena, which is designed to be lit at broadcast levels.

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The second floor multipurpose area.

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The arena features a state-of-the-art Zamboni.

JOEY VILLANUEVA



A major highlight is the two-storey indoor play structure.

JOEY VILLANUEVA



The enormous fieldhouse can be subdivided into multiple sports courts and is surrounded by a mezzanine walking and running track.

JOEY VILLANUEVA

(continued from page 15)

for more than just sports. Carpet can be rolled across the floor, converting the space into a large event hall able to accommodate up to 1,500 people.

As an example, in the future the town's well-attended Remembrance Day services will very likely be relocated to the CRRC from the Heritage Centre, where they have drawn packed crowds for many years.

On the other side of the CRRC, visitors will encounter the new arena. The first thing they may notice is just how brightly lit it is. According to Britton, the arena lights are capable of producing the level of intensity required by TSN games.

"So if we were to host an event that's televised, we're set up for that," said Britton. "But we probably will not run the lights at 100 percent at all times, because it's, like, ridiculous."

To date, the arena has seating for 750 spectators, although there is room to expand that number. Part of the agreement to bring a new MJHL team to Niverville is a provision to install seating for more than 1,000. The town is currently in discussions about increasing the amount of seating, but no announcements are ready to be made yet.

The seating itself had not yet been installed at the time of the tour, due to some shipping delays from the supplier. Britton estimated that the seats would arrive in two weeks.

Those seats have been a key component of the CRRC's fundraising effort. Donors were able to buy seats for \$1,000 each. The names of these donors will be featured on the seats themselves on nameplates.

Another feature which Britton highlighted is that the glass boards are curved, something which he says makes Niverville's arena stand alone.

"I'm told we might be the only rink in Manitoba with this," he said. "It just keeps the seams looking a little nicer. It's just a really nice feature."

Yet another feature has to do with providing greater accessibility for players. The bench areas, where the teams sit, can be converted to allow for sledge hockey.

Britton added that the arena will have ice in it at least ten months of the year. In fact, the ice plant will be turned on by August 12, to allow for arena programming to begin by August 15.

However, that doesn't necessarily mean the arena will sit idle during the summer months. The space is large enough to be used for any number of community events,

and Britton noted that some rinks in Manitoba open for lacrosse in the summertime.

The arena also comes with a state-of-the-art Zamboni as well as digital advertising boards.

On a more technical level, Britton spent some time detailing the geothermal system which runs the ice plant. There's 80,000 feet of pipe below the ice surface, and an additional 120,000 feet north of the high school.

A couple of reporters on the tour asked about the possibility of one day expanding the CRRC to include a second ice surface.

"As far as space goes, there's a ton of land in the vicinity that could be used for that," said Councillor Nathan Dueck. "That's another conversation, I guess. But yes, you could add a second ice surface."

Below the bleachers, there are six dressing rooms. They are, for the most part, identical to each other—except two of them are fully accessible. This space also includes a series of storage rooms, a ref room, and a first aid room.

Upstairs, the second level includes a large meeting space straddling the fieldhouse and arena, with excellent views of both. The space can be divided into two separate 1,600-square-foot rooms, which can be used for a broad variety of activities. These rooms have rubberized floors, making them well-suited to aerobics and yoga classes. They could also be used to host meetings.

An intriguing aspect of the facility which hasn't yet been installed is a museum area on the second floor which will be dedicated to telling the history of our region.

This will be one of the last parts of the facility to be finished, most likely around mid-August. More details about the historical exhibit will be available later in the summer.

The second level also includes a pair of additional washrooms.

So with the CRRC opening for tours, the obvious question is: how much longer would it be before the building was officially put to use?

The answer? Not long.

Day camps have started already, bringing a host of young people into the facility for the first time. And when families got their first glimpse of the many recreational facilities now available to them here in Niverville, most have been enthusiastic about what they saw.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Tours of the CRRC are available to the general public. If you are interested in getting a look inside the facility, get in touch with the town office to arrange a visit.



# The Force Bring Amateur Soccer to Niverville

By Jennifer Lavin

✉ jlavin@nivervillecitizen.com

The number of sports teams playing in Niverville continues to grow. This summer will mark the inaugural season for the Niverville Force, a new soccer team who will begin play after the August long weekend.

The Force will be playing in the Manitoba Major Soccer League, starting in the third division in their first year.

Coach Andry Giesbrecht says the team's goal is to move up to compete in the top divisions in the next few years.

The team is co-owned by Giesbrecht and local soccer enthusiast Sue Thompson, who also serves as team manager. The partnership began in the fall of 2020, when Thompson contacted Giesbrecht, who has years of experience both as a soccer player and coach, about the notion of starting a local soccer club.

"We've been a team ever since," Giesbrecht says.

The Force are ready to go with a full slate of players from Niverville and the surrounding area. But



The Niverville Force

by SUE THOMPSON

according to Giesbrecht, they will soon be looking to add more players and depth in coming seasons as the team grows.

The team's home games will take place at Hespeler Park, while away games will take them throughout Manitoba.

Game action will begin in Winnipeg on August 3 against the Triumph. However, the first home game will kick off at 7:15 p.m. on Tuesday, August 10 against the Scorpions, another Winnipeg-based team.

The Manitoba Major Soccer League is a not-for-profit

organization dedicated to the development of amateur soccer in this province. They have been operating since 1971 and, according to their website, they feature the best adult amateur soccer in Manitoba.

The MMSL currently boasts nearly 150 teams in total, both outdoor and indoor, and a roster of over 2,000 players.

Thompson says that the support from both local and non-local businesses has been tremendous in the lead-up to the start of the season.

"WM Dyck's and Negash Coffee

have sponsored our home jerseys, and Brio Insurance and Sunova Credit Union have sponsored our away jerseys," says Thompson. "Plus other local businesses have donated money towards other expenses, like field rentals and various start-up costs."

Giesbrecht is eager for their first game and to work with the first crop of Force players.

"I am so excited for this opportunity for the young players in this town," Giesbrecht says. "And I hope that they will have an opportunity to play locally for years to come!"

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CARA DOWSE

# Clipper Ice Sports Makes Sizable CRRC Donation

By Evan Braun

editor@nivervillecitizen.com

Last week, Clipper Ice Sports officially made a sizable donation to Niverville's new Community Resource and Recreation Centre, which first opened its doors to the public on July 1.

According to Travis Mason of Clipper Ice Sports, the donation of \$50,000 has been in the works for a very long time.

"Approximately 15 years ago, when Darryl Rempel began to serve as board president, they had a fairly successful year of fundraising," says Mason. "One of those fundraisers were the community poker nights. They were able to raise enough funds to purchase new jerseys that were badly needed, and they ended the year with a surplus of \$5,000."

Mason says that Rempel then approached the board with two options for what to do with the surplus: the money could be refunded in the form of \$50 rebate cheques to

each family, or the funds could be set aside as a future donation for a new hockey rink in Niverville.

A motion was passed to set the money aside, giving birth to CIS's new arena fund.

"After Darryl served as president for five years, the board had been able to set aside \$5,000 annually into this fund due to continued success in fundraising," Mason says. "With \$25,000 now becoming a sizable fund, future presidents and board members continued to set aside funds when possible."

With time and compounding interest, that money eventually grew—and by the time the Town of Niverville announced the construction of the CRRC, the board had built up a \$50,000 balance.

"It was a great idea by Darryl and the board at the time," adds Mason. "It's amazing that each incoming president kept up with trying to put money into the fund. All the credit goes to many past and present families in Clipper Ice Sports over the

past number of years... Many people questioned the amount of money CIS had on hand over the years, but I think when they see the results they will appreciate it, as they have had a hand in building the community."

Mason points out that the door is now open for Clipper Ice Sports to make contributions to other community projects, both in Niverville as well as in Ste. Agathe, where a number of local players come from.

In the meantime, the organization is looking forward to an especially exciting season.

"Not only are we able to move into a new facility, but we also are able to showcase our new jerseys and logo change," says Mason. "The new facility helps solve some challenges we have had in the past with ice. It will also allow us to provide some teams with more full ice practices, as well host a AA Eastman team to help the region with ice shortage in a lot of surrounding towns."

Mason says that the Clippers are in the process now of setting up

the registration process, the details of which will have already been released by the time this article is published.

They're also looking forward to a relatively normal season, after all the disruptions of the past year.

The CRRC will also provide the organization with some new opportunities.

For example, this year they'll be able to host their first annual Clippers day camp.

"With the ice surface, gymnasium, and multipurpose room all under the same roof, we can provide a full day camp for an affordable price," says Mason. "And we think this camp is going to grow into something pretty big once we're able to work with the new MJHL team."

Another perk of the CRRC is that our region will be equipped to host tournaments on a much larger scale than ever before.

"The new facility and new hotel will allow us to host one of the best youth hockey tournaments

in Manitoba," he adds. "The sky is the limit with two ice surfaces and the option to utilize the Ste. Agathe arena. We're crossing our fingers that later in the season we will be able to host tournaments."

Finally, Mason adds that Clipper Ice Sports is also grateful to have been awarded a grant this year from the provincial government's Building Sustainable Communities program.

That grant money will allow them to purchase half-ice board dividers, which will provide the U7 and U9 players with the full hockey experience.

"We have had a lot of new changes on the board with a lot of new faces," he says. "These volunteers are what make our program so special. I would like to thank all the past members who have moved on and helped progress the program forward. With our first couple meetings complete [this year], we have had great discussion with some new fresh ideas for the future to continue improve our program."

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# Arts & Entertainment

## New Academy Provides Music Exploration for All Ages

By Brenda Sawatzky

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Music, they say, has the power to unite the world through its ability to transcend all language barriers. For some individuals, like Rob Bonefaas of Music Academy Manitoba, music is both passion and way of life, and his love of the craft is something he hopes to share with as many as possible in this corner of the world.

Located at 10 Cedar Drive in Niverville, Music Academy Manitoba (MAM) offers private lessons in voice, piano, woodwinds, brass, and percussion. Group lessons are available in recorder and band, as well as a special class called Music for Children, geared towards kids ages five to 12. Here, Bonefaas strives to open up the child's world to the multiplicity of music using speech, song, movement, percussion, and performance.

At the core of Music Academy Manitoba is a simple idea. In January 2020, Bonefaas decided to connect the local youth through music and formed the Niverville Youth Choir. It got off to a successful start with 40 initial members between the ages of seven and 17.

Unfortunately, the months of pandemic that followed brought a temporary halt to the group's gathering.

By September, though, as pandemic restrictions eased for a bit, Bonefaas had received

enough interest in his choral group that he decided to diversify, establishing a kid's choir (ages five to 11), a youth choir (ages 12 to 17), and the Niverville Community Choir for adults of all ages.

The music academy was born from there as word began to spread. Many people he'd connected with around the area also expressed a desire to see music education, in all its vast and varied forms, be available under one roof.

"The goal of the academy is to provide professional music education by qualified music professionals," says Bonefaas.

Deeply inspired by the response to his initial youth choir, he adds, "All this shows me that there is much more possible, especially once the COVID restrictions are lifted. I am providing the opportunity for people in the community, of all different ages and levels of ability, to join a group and to let us work on inspiring performers by cultivating craft, creativity, and confidence."

Bonefaas and his family decided to make Niverville their home nearly two years ago. For the past ten years, he's been working as a professional educator at the Immanuel Christian School in Winnipeg, teaching music classes to elementary students as well as instructing and conducting the high school band. Bonefaas and the band class have hosted and attended many a competition across western Canada.



Rob Bonefaas, founder of Music Academy Manitoba.

JOEY VILLANUEVA

He also offers his students the extracurricular option of joining the annual high school musical. His repertoire has included renowned titles such as *HMS Pinafore*, *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, and *Cinderella*.

Hailing from the Netherlands, Bonefaas first came to Canada to pursue work experience as a chef, his then-chosen profession. Until that point, music had been little more than a passionate hobby.

Since the age of eight, he'd been training at Dutch conservatories, building his skills to become an all-round

percussionist who played in concert bands. Before and after moving to Canada, Bonefaas stretched his musical repertoire by joining local choirs.

In 2001, Bonefaas decided to make Canada his permanent home, and by 2002 he'd met the love of his life, Diane. Realizing that a family was in his future and supporting them may be difficult in the restaurant business, Bonefaas went back to school.

He enrolled at McMaster University with the goal of entering the ministry and, eventually, becoming a pastor. He immediately joined

the university choir, singing as a tenor.

"For the Christmas concert, I received a solo [position], and during the final singing test the conductor said, 'If you don't go into music I might have to kill you,'" Bonefaas muses. "I was then encouraged to meet with Elise Bedard, a voice teacher at McMaster University who, after I had sung three contrasting pieces, also said, 'If you don't go into music I might have to kill you.' I had heard that before, somewhere! So I auditioned and got accepted into the music program and Elise Bedard became my official voice teacher."

Bonefaas eventually accepted the position of music director at the Immanuel Christian School in Winnipeg. At the same time, he pursued his Bachelor of Education degree at the University of Manitoba.

This is where he also received his certification as a Carl Orff Canada, Music for Children instructor. According to the Carl Orff Canada website, the organization's approach to music education is "holistic, experiential, and process-oriented." Their goal is to offer professional musical training to all children, not just the musically gifted, by providing instruction for aural, visual, and kinaesthetic learners alike.

Today, Bonefaas and his wife are proud parents to four children ranging in age from six to 12. All of them are

developing their own interest in music, including playing guitar and percussion. They each take piano lessons and plan to sing in one of the choirs of the Niverville Choral Society.

Reflecting on his own musical beginnings, Bonefaas says the first and most impactful music influence in his life was his elementary music teacher, a man who also happened to be his uncle.

"Looking back, I see his brilliance in his ability to create beautiful music with very little," Bonefaas says. "Sadly, he died when I was only 15. Another person who has greatly influenced me and has supported me in terms of my passion for music and teaching is my wife, Diane. In all my crazy ideas, she has always supported me, provided meaningful feedback, and been by my side for the last 17 years."

As to why he believes that music is so integral to the human experience, Bonefaas draws from his deep-seated spirituality.

"Personally, I believe that music is a gift from God, a means by which we may express our thankfulness to him. Good music will glorify God's holy name and will recreate us and give us pleasure."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

[www.musicacademymanitoba.ca](http://www.musicacademymanitoba.ca)

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