

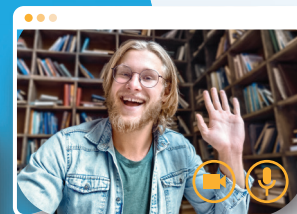
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## LOCAL NEWS

### What to Do About Bad Road Conditions?

■ It's a perennial question, but one made more urgent this winter, with frequent storms, high winds, and deluges of snow making it hard to get around. Is there anything Niverville in particular, which is accessible by an often difficult to traverse east-west highway, can do to alleviate the problem?

Details on Pages 4-5

## LOCAL NEWS

### Remote Learning on Snow Days?

■ Local school divisions are considering plans to use remote learning on snow days to combat lost school days.

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## HEALTH & WELLNESS

### Taking a Multipronged Approach to Wellness

■ Local businesses are at the forefront of efforts to improve our overall wellness during this brutal and isolating winter.

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## SPORTS & REC

### Sprawling Park Proposed for IDC

■ A large new park with many features has been proposed to be built near the TC Energy Centre in Île-des-Chênes.

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# Smitty's to Open Niverville Location This Year

» READ MORE ON PAGES 3

RAY DOWSE

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The

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# Smitty's to Open Niverville Location This Year

By Evan Braun  
editor@nivervillecitizen.com

A new restaurant is soon to join Niverville's business community. This year construction will begin on a new commercial strip mall on Drovers Run, the anchor tenant of which will be a Smitty's.

The business will be owned by the Dyck Family Smitty's Group—comprised of Robert Dyck, Chris Dyck, and Kaely Dyck—and the Funk Group—comprised of Brian and Valerie Funk.

Collectively, they own and operate nine Smitty's restaurants in Manitoba. Niverville's new location will be the tenth.

"We are excited to bring Smitty's signature hospitality to the vibrant, growing community of Niverville," says Jim Weidinger, President of Smitty's Canada. "The strength and longevity of the Smitty's brand is due to the commitment of our franchise community, and we are proud to have one of our strongest and most tenured franchisees, R&B Management, lead this expansion."

Together, Funk and Dyck operate R&B Management.

"They have built a reputable name throughout the Winnipeg and Steinbach areas, and we look forward to establishing ourselves into the Niverville community as well," Weidinger adds. "Restaurants are a big part of the fabric of the community and we take that responsibility seriously. We can't wait to serve you!"

Ray Dowse, one of the developers behind the Drovers Run commercial strip, also lauds the experienced ownership team behind the new location.

"Having this team leading the planning and operations of the new Niverville location, the community should be very excited as we will get to enjoy a top-notch, well-run establishment in our backyard," says Ray Dowse. "Anyone who has visited any of their locations can see they do an exceptional job with their restaurants."

The deal to bring Smitty's to Niverville has been about three years in the making, with extensive



The Smitty's management team of Kaely Dyck, Chris Dyck, Brian Funk, and Valerie Funk. Missing: Robert Dyck. RAY DOWSE

work behind the scenes between the ownership group, the Town of Niverville, Smitty's Canada, and the owners of the Drovers Run commercial development.

"These things take time, but in the end it's going to be done right," Dowse says. "I'm really pleased with how everything has come together at this point and excited for the finished product. It will be an excellent addition to Niverville and our region."

The 5,500-square-foot restaurant will be located right beside the entrance to the Drovers Run golf course.

It will also be positioned at the new intersection to be created at the corner of Highway 311 and Mulberry Avenue.

This controlled intersection, with lights and turning lanes, will provide a second access to the Drovers Run commercial strip, in the process alleviating traffic congestion at Krahn Road.

Dowse explains that the restaurant's south-facing patio will back onto the golf course's scenic ninth hole.

"One of the objectives during planning was to make it easy for golfers to meet for breakfast before their round, or stop in for a post-game drink or wings on the patio," says Dowse. "The restaurant will also be walking distance from the new hotel and waterpark, which is set to start construction this spring. The hotel was a significant part of

the planning around this project."

The restaurant will also be within walking distance of the Community Resource & Recreation Centre.

In addition to the patio, the restaurant is expected to have approximately 175 seats, according to Valerie Funk, who is part of the management team. Management anticipates hiring a large number of local staff, with upwards of 60 employees.

Construction on the building is anticipated to begin in March, with Smitty's projected to open in the final quarter of 2022.

Details of the restaurant's layout are still being worked out, although it's been decided that the lounge will include VLTs, a feature which is not currently offered elsewhere in Niverville.

"Projects like this one take years of planning before construction even starts," Dowse says. "But I love working together with entrepreneurs and businesspeople to explore opportunities and help create successful enterprise in my hometown. Niverville is a place with incredible potential, and it's exciting to see Brian, Robert, and the Smitty's organization make the commitment to be part of our community."

The building which will house the restaurant is to be the final phase of this development. Dowse adds that while some of the units in the mall are already spoken for, a few still remain available for lease.

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# Looking for Solutions: Brutal Road Conditions Create Driving Hazards

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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Near record-breaking snowfall, days on end with brutal winds, and arctic air masses that seem to park overhead and never leave... the winter of 2022 has boasted all the right ingredients to make for one of the most challenging seasons ever for Manitoba's drivers.

Residents of Niverville in particular are forced to regularly drive a portion of highway that seems to deteriorate rapidly when conditions change for the worse.

Niverville is located along a 10-kilometre stretch of Provincial Road 311, an east-west highway, without any other paved routes leading in or out. This stretch of highway has few treed properties—indeed, few trees of any kind—a factor some residents have identified as contributing to especially hazardous conditions.

When winds pick up after even a small amount of precipitation, there is no shelter to prevent the build-up of ice and snow. And nothing to stop almost complete whiteout conditions from descending on unlucky motorists.

## A BRUTAL WINTER

This winter is shaping up to be one of the snowiest on record, with some of the longest stretches of frigid temperatures recorded in January and February.

In a statement on his Twitter account, retired meteorologist Rob Paola said his records show this year to be



DEPOSITPHOTOS

the third snowiest on record. And while the average winter sees 12 days reaching -30°C or lower, this year we've had more than 25 (so far).

"Not only has it been a snowy month, but it's been cold," Paola wrote on February 24. "Today will be our 14th straight day below normal. Only three days this month have averaged significantly above normal. Will likely end up as coldest February here since 2014."

Niverville resident Nicole Ross works as a nurse at the hospital in St. Pierre. She says this year has been the worst for winter driving she has ever experienced.

"I take 311 to 59 any given day," says Ross, who has lived in Niverville for 11 years. "Lately, the way healthcare has been, I'm pretty much working full-time hours. So I'm on that highway any given time, sometimes middle of

the night, sometimes middle of the day, so I'm very accustomed to drive on that highway... It's been blowing snow every other day, or it's been so cold that the highways are just like hockey rinks, just pure ice. This year sticks out as one of the worst I've driven in."

Ross feels there are many factors contributing to how dangerous the driving has been this year. And the brutal conditions on Highway 311 frequently come up in conversation with friends, family, and coworkers.

"Because it's so wide open, as with any east-west highway travel, you have a north wind blowing in the cold or a south wind blowing in the warm air, and then you're always getting the blowing snow if there is any to be had," she says.

One solution could be the addition of shelterbelts—in other words, planting lines

of trees along the roadway to break high winds—along the worst stretches of PR 311.

It's not a new idea among Ross and her friends, but she says they don't necessarily see it as a practical idea.

"It would be great if they had shelterbelts, but we recognize that a lot of the land is farmer's fields," she says. "We know [the government] doesn't have the land and it's likely outside of their control."

However, the lack of shelter isn't the only problem along Highway 311. Ross says she and her friends are concerned about the crumbling condition of the roadway itself.

"We've all discussed how we can breathe a sigh of relief when we reach Highway 59, because the lines on the road can give you a sense of how to navigate," Ross says. "On 311, there's no definite lines for the shoulder. There's no lines in the middle of the highway

separating the lanes. Because it is blowing in and drifting, you often don't know if you're heading for the ditch or in the middle of the highway or not."

She would like to see the province make a greater effort to fix the shoulders and paint fresh lines more frequently, especially as the amount of traffic on this highway continues to grow as people keep flocking to Niverville.

"The upkeep on 311 is so poor," says Ross. "Niverville is the fastest growing community in Manitoba and it's dangerous. They're going to have to keep up better as a province. There has to be some improvements."

## ADDRESSING SAFETY CONCERNS

New residents, seasoned drivers, and town officials alike have highway safety top of mind this winter. The topic of shelterbelts has been float-

ed in many online discussion groups in recent weeks.

The Province of Manitoba says that a shelterbelt program was announced this past summer through Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation.

Although they can confirm that they are monitoring the Niverville area for increases in traffic, they haven't confirmed whether Niverville is eligible for the shelterbelt program.

"Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure's most recent traffic volume count on PR 311, west of Provincial Trunk Highway (PTH) 59, was conducted in 2019," reads a statement from a provincial spokesperson. "The annual average daily traffic count was 5,800. The department anticipates conducting another traffic count at this location this year."

Mayor Myron Dyck says that the town has been discussing the issue of poor conditions on Highway 311, including the possibility of installing trees to create a shelterbelt.

Many residents have also pointed to the lack of information available on winter driving conditions along this highway, as the road isn't currently listed on Manitoba 511, the province's website dedicated to road and travel information.

"Our plan is to reach out to Manitoba Infrastructure in regards to putting PR 311 on the 511 site, and also to inquire about the process of installing a shelterbelt," says Mayor Dyck.

In comments made online, Dyck referred to the

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community of Elie in the RM of Cartier and how a shelterbelt had been installed along the Trans-Canada Highway. The highway running west of Winnipeg is known for quickly deteriorating conditions in blustery weather, similar to Highway 311.

"A barrier of some sort would certainly help," Dyck wrote.

#### SHELTERBELTS IN OTHER COMMUNITIES

Christa Vann Mitchell, reeve for the RM of Cartier, reports mixed reviews on the trees planted near Elie as part of the province's shelterbelt project.

She says there was a tree-planting initiative about 30 to 40 years ago to create a shelterbelt in the median along Highway 1.

"But that didn't mitigate snowbanks, and it created a hazard for drivers if they did hit the ditch," says Vann Mitchell. "Then in 2019, they planted trees on the north side of the [Trans-Canada] by Elie. It's been hard to tell if there's been any benefit this year because of the record snowfall amounts, but there is no other location to put such trees. If they would've planted a bit further away from the highway, on both sides and not just the one, it may have been more successful. I'm not sure."

Vann Mitchell says that the community has greatly appreciated the province's effort to install the trees, but she also points out that there have been challenges. The health of the older trees is in decline and many of the newer trees didn't grow.

In August 2021, the provincial government committed another \$3 million to maintain the health of existing trees and establish

an additional 10 kilometres of shelterbelts in the area. They say this will enhance safety and demonstrate natural infrastructure along the Trans-Canada Highway between Winnipeg and Portage la Prairie.

"There's a terrible need in Manitoba for more trees in general," says Vann Mitchell. "So when it comes to highways and shelter, we see the need for trees and it may help... but it also depends immensely on the weather. The wind plays a huge factor. This year, the snow has gathered so badly that the snow piles on either side of the road are prohibitive. If we had it on both sides, further out, it may help. But then we're dealing with farmland."

This raises an important point, anticipated by Nicole Ross and her friends. The province often needs to procure land or use the land they already own near the highways.

Vann Mitchell says farmers need all the land they can get, so the government typically doesn't look to buy up farmland just for shelterbelts.

The town of Neepawa is another Manitoba community with a major east-west highway.

Marilyn Crewe, the town's economic development officer, says that Neepawa likely has fewer residential commuters due to their greater distance from big cities.

She also points out that Neepawa is uniquely located at the crossroads of two provincial highways, Highway 16 and Highway 5, both of which act as major transportation corridors. Because of this, they have a priority agreement with Manitoba Infrastructure. When there's a weather event, the province

clears and maintains the roads quickly.

In fact, she adds that Neepawa doesn't even own a grader.

#### SAFETY A PRIORITY

Vann Mitchell says the problem of driver safety certainly isn't unique to Elie and Niverville. Many communities in Manitoba with large commuter populations are asking for help.

"Some communities and colonies around here are begging the province to come out and clear the roads, and they have felt quite stuck," says Vann Mitchell. "Two-lane highways are always dangerous. The emergency vehicles reaching residents is always the number one concern. And they've got to clear one lane for emergency vehicles first before cleaning up the entire roadways. Shoulders are last."

She says leaders in her community are always monitoring the highways during a weather event. Many have criticized the province for closing highways too early or too late.

"We need to realize that in many cases the highway crews are downright skeletal," she says. "They've been trying to maintain the roads, and the conditions worsen and then people say they close the roads too late. In our area, we know they are trying to work with people who may have left for work, travelled the highways, and then they know the roads are going to close so they're trying to get home. I think they delay closing for a little while so people can make the choice to get home."

She says the options can feel limited, but everyone is doing their best in what has been an exceptional year of winter weather.



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## IN BRIEF

## Switching to Town Water in Niverville

By Jennifer Lavin

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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At a public meeting in February, Niverville's council responded to concerns from residents about transitioning from wells to town water.

The issue revolves around what happens when a well fails. An old bylaw stated that if a well failed and the town's water supply was available, the owner of the well needed to switch to the town water supply.

Because the word "fail" is vague, council has decided to clarify the policy.

The word "fail," according to council, means that the well is not fixable and a new one would need to be dug. If a well simply needs a new pump or something similar, it would not be considered to have failed.

In the event that a resident is primarily concerned with the cost of switching to town water, council pointed out that if a well had already failed, the cost of digging a new one would already be similar in scope to transitioning to the water system.

"Overall, what is better?" Mayor Dyck said. "Is it better for council to leave it and say 'You can continue to have your well and the risks that come with it'? Or is it better for council to say that every resident in a community should have access to what would be considered quality water?"

After these clarifications, some residents in attendance at the meeting said that they had come to agree with the town's water policy.

Others said they still didn't necessarily agree but were glad to at least understand the situation a little better.



Niverville continues to see a boom in residential growth.

© PEDRO BALSEIRO

# Niverville Fastest Growing Town in Manitoba

By Evan Braun

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

editor@nivervillecitizen.com

Niverville is the fastest growing municipality in Manitoba (with a population over 5,000), according to the first wave of 2021 census data released by Statistics Canada.

This is the continuation of a long population growth trend, as Niverville has been growing by a similar amount for three consecutive census periods.

Ten years ago, the town's population was set at 3,540. Five years ago, it had jumped to 4,610.

The current population is pegged at 5,947, an increase of 29 percent over the previous count. There are 2,010 private dwellings within the town limits.

Not only is Niverville the fastest growing Manitoban municipality with a population over 5,000, but it's the fifth fastest growing municipality in that category in all of Canada, placing it in rare company.

The only municipalities in the country growing more quickly

are East Gwillimbury (a suburb of Toronto), The Blue Mountains (a rural municipality along Lake Huron in southern Ontario), Langford (a small city on Vancouver Island just west of Victoria), and Saint-Apollinaire (a bedroom community south of Quebec City).

The visible signs of Niverville's growth have been impossible to ignore over the last several years.

The community has gotten a new high school, an expansive new community centre, several prominent new businesses and commercial developments, and residential expansion on all sides.

### OTHER LOCAL GROWTH TRENDS

The RM of Ritchot grew by 11.8 percent, reaching 7,469. In the previous census period, Ritchot had grown by 21.9 percent, an indication that the municipality's growth may be slowing.

This appears to be a trend. Niverville's neighbouring municipalities in the southeast have mostly grown by a slower rate than they did in 2016, some by significant

margins.

Although the RM of Tache grew by 12.5 percent in 2016, that figure has dropped to just three percent in 2021. Steinbach's growth rate went from 17 percent to 11.1 percent, and the RM of Hanover's went from 12.2 percent to 10.8 percent.

One other local town with a sky-high rate of growth is Ste. Anne, which jumped by 36.8 percent to 2,981 residents. Although this is a faster rate than Niverville's, the census considers it in a different category since its population is below 5,000.

The City of Winnipeg matched its population bump from five years ago, once again growing by 6.3 percent, adding 44,363 residents since 2016.

Elsewhere in the province, strong growth was also reported in West St. Paul, which increased in population by 24.5 percent, and Neepawa, which increased by 23.3 percent.

As a province overall, Manitoba grew by five percent, slightly slower than in 2016. The total

provincial population sits at 1,342,153, an increase of 63,788 residents.

Of all Canada's provinces and territories, Manitoba's growth was only exceeded by Ontario (5.8 percent), British Columbia (7.6 percent), Prince Edward Island (8.0 percent), and the Yukon (12.1 percent).

The populations of Newfoundland and the Northwest Territories both slightly declined during the latest census period.

While Statistics Canada has released data about population and dwelling counts, a great deal more information is set to be unveiled in the coming months which will shine a light on how our country, province, and region is changing.

Future releases will include age and sex, language, family information (size of households and marital status), income, immigration and ethno-cultural diversity, housing, and education.



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The RM of Ritchot's administrative offices in St. Adolphe.

CARA DOWSE

# Ritchot Proposes to Expand Admin Offices

By Jennifer Lavin

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
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At a meeting on February 16, the RM of Ritchot's council proposed a plan to expand their municipal administration offices in St. Adolphe.

"We have the opportunity to develop the civic site adjacent to the municipal office," said CAO Mitch Duval. "We have received funding that's significant in nature, so we can start developing the civic site. However, we would also like to look at an office expansion in conjunction with the civic site as we're going to do this once and do it right."

Duval cited numerous benefits to expanding the municipal offices. All are related to the municipality's significant growth in the last 40 years since the building's construction.

Between 2011 and 2016, the population of Ritchot grew by 22 percent. The recent census shows the population

grew by another 12 percent between 2016 and 2021.

In 1981, when the offices were built, Ritchot had a total population of just 4,200. Now that number is 7,469, an increase of 75 percent.

Duval said that he believes this trend of growth will continue based on the building projects that are already in the works. He points to the Tourond Creek Development in St. Adolphe and Grande Pointe Meadows and Deer Ridge in Grande Pointe as examples.

"The proposal for the office expansion would also include an incubation area," Duval added. "We're hoping to include three spaces of about 250 to 350 square feet to be part of the building. This would enable economic development opportunities in the municipality."

The expansion would almost double the office's current square footage.

Duval has recommended a budget for this project of \$3

million but believes it can be done for \$2.5 million.

According to the RM's proposal, this project is to be paid for out of the general reserve fund—which Duval says means "no borrowing, no debentures, no tax costs to the ratepayers."

It is expected that the general reserve fund will be replenished within four years.

Duval also pointed out that the funding for this project will be part of the upcoming financial plan.

A public hearing will need to be held in order to approve that financial plan.

Mayor Chris Ewen suggested that perhaps the public hearing on the financial plan could include an open house so residents can get as much information about the expansion as possible.

If everything falls into place, council hopes for a late September 2022 start for construction.

The proposal was unanimously approved by council.



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# School Divisions Consider Remote Learning on Snow Days

By Sara Beth Dacombe

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
sdacombe@nivervillecitizen.com

Many of us have had the experience of waking up early, checking the school's website (or, in times gone by, listening to the radio), and hearing that our school was closed for the day due to inclement weather. A true Manitoba school day has often been met with whoops and hollers of joy, especially if the temperatures were moderate enough for us to play outside.

Those days may soon be at an end.

Some Manitoba school divisions are working to initiate remote learning on days when schools have a weather-related closure.

## CLOSURES CREATE CHALLENGES

On Wednesday, February 2, the HSD sent an email to parents thanking them for their "understanding and cooperation on winter storm or cold days when student safety and division policy necessitate cancelling school."

With online learning being required at some points during the pandemic, and for various lengths of time, most schools have had the chance to put in place remote learning procedures. They've become considerably more experienced at running online classes

for students of all ages—although how successful they've been is a matter of debate.

The pandemic also introduced another challenge—having to cancel classes in order for staff to organize, ensuring that lesson plans, technology, equipment, and learning supports are all in place.

The result is that students have lost a lot of learning days in the past two years.

This year's escalating number of snow days doesn't help.

According to Shelley Amos, the superintendent and CEO for the HSD, their schools were closed six days in January alone, which is the most snow closures in 15 years.

"Other divisions ended up being a little bit different, but for us, it's definitely a record going back as far as 2007," Amos says. "In 2013 to 2014, we had a period of five days we were closed, and in 2009 we also had five days. But we also know there is more winter left to come."

Indeed, February brought even more snow days.

## CLOSURE CRITERIA

Each time schools close due to weather, decision-makers are met with challenges.

"It is complex," says Amos. "It depends on where you live. You might live across the division, or you might

live en route from Steinbach to Niverville. The weather conditions vary across the division, so that makes it difficult for one person to make an informed decision. We have staff out on the roads early in the morning to see what road conditions are like. We network with each other within the division and with contacts in other divisions to see what they are experiencing. It's a very complex decision."

She adds that they have

*"If we have another snow day here or there, we are looking at whether we can flip our system to be remote for the day."*

**Shelley Amos** | HSD Superintendent

observed that at times road conditions are better in some areas than others, but the current HSD policy demands that any closure apply to the division as a whole.

"We are going to have a conversation to review the policy, as we do when we review policy on a regular basis, to decide if that is something we'd like to continue or make a change at this time," says Amos.

This year, the decisions were made even more complex by the high degree of fluctuation in storm

conditions on a single day, combined with the need for lengthy snow-clearing operations which sometimes lasted well into a second day.

According to Amos, this is due in part to the large number of rural students served by the HSD and the variable conditions faced by bus drives on remote country roads.

"Along the gravel roads, there were long, hard drifts that were impassable by school bus," she says.

"We will always make the decision based on what is safest for our students and bus drivers—and if the conditions are not safe, we will close. But no, it's not a day off for staff. There are expectations for our staff. They are reassigned to work from home and all have been issued devices. There's some prep work, collaborative meetings or staff meetings, planning meetings that can take place."

## PARENTS LEFT TO SCRAMBLE

The sheer number of school

closures this winter has left many parents to scramble for childcare. For some, frustration has been running high. And when sunny days follow storm days, many parents wonder why the schools must remain closed.

On social media, parents raise other questions. Such as, are schools perhaps closing for another reason?

For example, to mitigate against COVID-19 exposure due to the sharp spike in cases over the Christmas holidays? After all, when the province made the decision to delay the return of school following the winter break, the reason given was to prevent or delay COVID exposures in children and staff due to the sharp rise in Omicron cases.

"I will definitively say, there is no decision being made to close schools related to Omicron," Amos says pointedly.

Simon Laplante, the assistant superintendent of the Seine River School Division, which had eight closures in January, says that he has fielded the same concerns.

"It's absolute nonsense," says Laplante. "COVID has absolutely nothing to do with this. I reject that notion that we are closing more or that we are closing schools because of that."

On one snow day, Laplante says that he made

the decision to close the school and he received upset emails and phone calls from parents who didn't agree with the decision.

"I closed the schools that day because the weather conditions were very obviously bad," he explains. "Then the next day, because the roads were still passable in some areas, I got phone calls that the schools should not have been closed."

Another day, Laplante elected to leave schools open because the temperature was below the closure threshold in some areas, but not in others.

Like the HSD, the SRSD covers a large geographical area with a lot of variability.

"And I got phone calls from parents then as well," he says. "What people don't realize is there's an aftermath to these storms. The main road may get cleaned up pretty quickly. It's another matter for the back roads, the gravel roads. Most of our rural parents live on those gravel roads, and driving a truck or driving a car is a very different thing... The centre of gravity of driving a bus is much higher than driving a car or a truck. If you get a bus stuck in a snowdrift, or sliding, it becomes absolutely unsafe."

Keeping schools open is important to Laplante, who acknowledges there is an element of stress for parents when the schools do close.



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"Teachers and the superintendent, we understand that snow days are a real burden to parents," he says. "We're very, very aware of that. I'm very sensitive to that."

### PREVENTING LEARNING LOSS

While students may rejoice at not having to attend school on snow days, educators see a growing problem related to lost classroom time.

Adding extra days to the end of a school year is not a solution made at the school or divisional level, although it could be instituted by Manitoba Education as a whole.

Divisions could also individually consider turning staff in-service or professional development days back into learning days, but the HSD says that they are not seriously considering this.

Instead they are working on the idea of preparing remote learning options that could be implemented on short notice so students can continue learning despite snowy or cold weather.

"If we have another snow day here or there, we are looking at whether we can flip our system to be remote for the day," says Amos, "knowing that it may not work for everybody."

Amos admits that this idea comes with challenges, like ensuring that students have access to equipment and the internet.

Staff also need time to convert lesson plans to work well online.

"All of our teachers have Hanover devices issued to them," she explains. "Many of our Grade Nines and up have Chromebooks. The younger ones don't, so we wouldn't mandate it. But we feel the older ones have the capability to check in with

their teacher. Our teachers, they are very conscientious and diligent to reach out to their students and I think some of that happened during recent snow days... It is doable."

She adds that the experience of remote learning during the pandemic has equipped schools more than ever before to consider these options.

"Remote learning during a snow day wouldn't really be a new experience, but it would be a new system," says Amos. "COVID has forced our teachers to quickly learn how to implement remote learning well. Many younger students have access to an app called Seesaw that our teachers are using, and many parents have expressed appreciation for how well that works."

The division, of course, recognizes that there are connectivity issues in some remote areas, and some families don't have the necessary devices. Therefore, it wouldn't be 100 percent mandatory.

Laplante says that the Seine River School Division is working on the same idea.

"There has been some talk about that," says Laplante. "It's not ready to go. We're still in a conversation stage... Winter is not over. It could be useful."

Laplante acknowledges that enacting remote learning on snow days would require teachers to have online lessons ready to go with very little notice, which necessitates a different type of planning.

"Effective remote learning needs to be planned ahead. It's not something you can do one day on and one day off," he says. "Snow days go against that notion, because snow days are unpredictable."

When schools conducted remote learning this year

after the winter break, Laplante points out that the SRSD's teachers had two days to plan for it.

"So that's the challenge right now. If we are having more snow days, we are looking at ways that teachers can connect with their students, or teachers could prepare some work that could be done at home and [figure out how to] support that type of online learning at home that day," says Laplante. "But we would like to avoid the notion that the teachers need to be able to have something ready the morning of without any notice. We want to avoid that."

SRSD's remote learning plan for snow days may only be in the early stages, but Laplante sees the potential.

"We have lost so many days, and that is not beneficial to students," says Laplante. "How can we connect with the kids? How can we support their learning? We are having these conversations with our leaders."

As is the case with the HSD, Laplante agrees that it wouldn't be their first choice to remove professional development days from the school calendar. He says it is very important for teachers to have those opportunities.

"That's when the staff gets together and learns a new approach or new strategy. To me, that is fundamental to our education system," says Laplante. "The kids today are very different than the kids 50 years ago. There are different values, different lifestyles, different challenges we must be aware of, such as about climate change, gender diversity, and all of these things... teachers need to constantly learn and improve their strategy. That's why these professional development days are very important."

### CITIZEN POLL

## Should school divisions flip to remote learning on snow days in order to prevent the loss of learning days?

- ☐ Yes. This winter (and pandemic) highlights the need to adapt our education systems.
- ☐ No. Asking students to work on snow days creates an unnecessary burden.
- ☐ Have a more nuanced opinion? Leave us a comment online.

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### LAST MONTH'S RESULTS:

**Do you support the freedom convoy that has recently made its way through Canada, protesting vaccine mandates?**

Yes. The government has gone too far in curbing our personal freedoms.

38%

No. Vaccine mandates are needed to keep us safe and protect our hospital system.

62%

### YOUR COMMENTS:

I support free speech, regardless of whether or not I agree with the person speaking. I disagree with the protesters on the substance of their protest.

Unvaccinated people have to get educated!

I support the right to peacefully demonstrate or protest to make a point. Once that point is made but the protest continues, the risk of harm increases. I worry about everyone. The truckers, the people dying in isolation, all of them.

People who are still afraid of a virus with a 99.98% survival rate are the ones who need to stay home, or they can choose to wear a mask. The government should not be able to tell us how to live. Especially when it's obviously not working.

We need to be supporting our nurses and doctors. Politicians and truckers aren't health experts. Let's listen to the majority of doctors and nurses and do everything we can to ease the strain on our hospitals. Especially when we have over 150,000 waiting in our surgical backlog.

While I support peaceful protest for any political related issue, I strongly support the need for vaccine mandates not only to protect all Canadians but to avoid any further overwhelming of our already taxed healthcare system.

I believe that the mandates did their job in the beginning of the pandemic. But the science no longer supports what the government is doing, and it is disgusting that your personal medical information is being demanded by jobs, restaurants, stores etc. I have always firmly believed in a person's right to choose, and the government is strongly infringing on that belief.

I believe in freedom of speech and the right to protest, but that should not take away other people's freedom and the right to drive on public roads and live in quiet neighbourhoods.

I understand their frustration, but the people who have led the charge have some questionable backgrounds, and they've prevented some people from reaching hospitals. In Ottawa, they're causing mayhem for the average citizen, not the politicians. If it wasn't a majority white protest, things would be very different, which is sad.

They have done a DEPLORABLE JOB at respecting trucker's rights to peaceful protests, choosing to inflame the worst of behavior by a few NOT representative of the whole; have chosen to denigrate and insult them; have chosen NOT to meet with or grant them a fair hearing, and have, themselves (federal and provincial governments) chosen rather to think the worst of them and pigeon-hole them into the very worst light possible. It's a sad, sad day for Canada when your own government stoops to such low down behaviour and responses.

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# Together, Xplornet and Swift High Speed Are Bringing Gigabit Speeds to Rural Manitoba

**EVAN SCHROEDER**, cofounder of Swift High Speed, was born and raised in Kleeefeld, Manitoba. Now, after the completion of the Xplornet acquisition of Swift, he's embarking on his next fibre construction project – right in his hometown.

*"It's the first full fibre project we're doing together with Xplornet: 650 homes, a school, a number of small businesses and a gas station," he explained.*

As of February 1st, Swift has completed 60% of the drilling stage and are now starting to jet fibre into the mainline ducting.

*"The next stage will be to start splicing the fibre together," said Swift High Speed Public Relations Manager, Andrew Wychnenka.*

Customers can expect to get service with speeds up to 1 Gbps as early as the end of April.

With the average household's number of connected devices growing, Andrew says that these speeds will make a big difference.

*"The real advantage is the ability to have multiple devices using the Internet simultaneously to video conference, play video games, browse the Internet and stream high quality video with ease," he explained.*

Fast speeds and reliability are only two of the numerous benefits of fibre.

*"Right now, we all need to be connected more than ever. Whether it's for business, school, family, entertainment or anything else, the demand is ever increasing and fibre will be able to continue to improve to meet that demand. It will be the best Internet Kleeefeld has ever had – in my humble opinion!" said Andrew.*

He says that what sets Swift apart is their accountability.

*"Swift delivers on commitments and completes the process from beginning to end," he said.*

Swift and Xplornet recognize that their LTE customers have been with them from the beginning.

And, as a thank you, Swift is offering free installation as well as free tower removal and a premium Wi-Fi router when they sign up for fibre!



## Meet Evan Schroeder



Evan Schroeder wasn't always your neighbourhood fibre wizard!

His original intention was to take over the family dairy farm before realizing his wife's allergies would prevent that. That's when Evan started his first business, Splatters Paintball. At this time, Evan installed Internet for Xplornet on the side, which he fit in after his paintball business closed for the day.

He later learned how to help friends and family with IT issues, and with the same entrepreneurial spirit, made a career out of that skill as well.

One of his IT customers owned a small Internet company called Chill Communications and hired Evan to run the company with his business partner, Chris. Two years later, they purchased it and operated as Swift High Speed for close to eight years.

Swift was a fixed wireless-only company until the spring of 2019 when they decided to start installing fibre.

*"As we started that process, we decided to do the construction work on our own. We bought all our own equipment. It's really nice to control end-to-end so that we can make sure the project goes ahead quickly," he said.*

Originally, they thought fibre to the tower was their objective, but in 2020, they started doing fibre-to-the-home because it improved every user's experience.

*"We found that as we installed town by town, the town with fibre-to-the-home would get better service, and those in the country would also have improved service because we took half the load off that tower," he explained.*

When Xplornet showed interest in purchasing Swift, Evan saw it as a huge opportunity for growth and stability, with the abundance of resources that he would now have at his disposal.

After the acquisition, he quickly found out that Xplornet has a lot of faith in the expertise of the industrious business owners they collaborate with.

*"As we do construction town by town you can rest assured knowing it's a local Kleeefeld boy constructing next-generation technology in front of your house in Kleeefeld," he said.*

For more information about Swift High Speed's fibre packages visit [swifthighspeed.com](https://www.swifthighspeed.com).







Vehicles pass through the high-traffic intersection of St. Mary's Road and the South Perimeter.

GOOGLE

## Construction to Start This Spring on South Perimeter Interchange

By Sara Beth Dacombe

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
sdacombe@nivervillecitizen.com

The intersection of St. Mary's Road and the South Perimeter Highway will soon see the start of construction on a new traffic interchange.

"The Design-Build contract for the project was awarded to Aecon Infrastructure Management Inc. in January 2022," says a provincial spokesperson. "Site preparation and contractor mobilization will be getting underway shortly. Construction is planned to start this spring."

In June 2020, the provincial government announced their intention to build an interchange at this corner.

At the time of the initial announcement, the government indicated that

construction would begin in 2021, to be completed by 2023.

However, the project has not seen any progress since then—at least, no progress that's visible to the public.

Manitoba Infrastructure now says the work will continue over a two-year timeframe with the interchange expected to open to traffic in the summer of 2024.

The exact layout of the interchange is still not known.

Many residents of the nearby RM of Ritchot, as well as Niverville, use this intersection regularly as part of their daily commute to Winnipeg.

Springfield-Ritchot MLA Ron Schuler, who was also Minister of Infrastructure at the time, noted that the junction is part of the Trans-Canada Highway. Not only that,

but the South Perimeter Highway is one of Manitoba's most important trade corridors.

The intersection has seen a marked increase in traffic volume from communities south of the city, all of which are seeing rapid population growth.

That growth has been on special display this month, with the release of census data showing that the towns are continuing to boom.

Mayors Myron Dyck of Niverville and Chris Ewen of Ritchot have praised the provincial government for its decision, saying that the new interchange will increase safety at the busy intersection.

Funding for the overpass is planned to be covered out of the \$500-million Manitoba Restart Program, an economic stimulus package to help restart Manitoba's economy

and ramp up construction in the wake of the pandemic.

The improvements to the St. Mary's Road intersection are also part of the 2018 South Perimeter Highway Safety Plan.

The stretch of highway used to include many uncontrolled access points and median openings which have been steadily removed, consolidating traffic to funnel into more secure intersections.

The plan is intended to work alongside other initiatives as part of a long-term South Perimeter Highway design study to eliminate all at-grade crossings from the Trans-Canada Highway West interchange at Portage Avenue to the Trans-Canada Highway East interchange at Fermor Avenue, replacing them with interchanges and overpasses.

### IN BRIEF

## New B's Sold, Owner Cites Burnout

By Jennifer Lavin

jlavin@nivervillecitizen.com

New Bothwell is about to see a big change to one of its most popular institutions.

Elle Funk, owner of New B's Café & Store, has sold the business and is moving on to new things.

Funk grew up in Grunthal, but eight years ago she decided to move to New Bothwell and dedicate herself to building New B's.

The main reason Funk is moving on is burnout.

"I'm the only person that owns the place," Funk says. "So when one person does it all, then it takes a toll."

She adds that she spent quite a bit of time reflecting on what was best for her—and what was best for the community—before she made the decision to sell.

"I'd been thinking about what I wanted in life," Funk says. "I couldn't see myself... doing what would be required to take it to the next level. I wanted to do the town justice too, because I didn't want to be one of those owners that if my heart isn't in it anymore they just let it go until it's a dive... I wanted to go out on a high note."

For the next little while, Funk will relocate to Steinbach, but she says that's probably only temporary.

"I have some options available to me... I'm burned out, so I'd like to take however long I need to regroup."

Funk and her store have been a fixture in New Bothwell these last few years. She often went out of her way to provide a valuable service for locals. On many blizzard days she had to close New B's but would post to social

media that she was willing to unlock the store if anyone had a pressing need.

"My motto while having [New B's] has been 'It's not about me, it's about the community,'" Funk says.

Although the job of owning a store and restaurant has been physically hard, Funk says it's been even harder in an emotional and mental capacity.

One factor that didn't much come into play in her decision was the pandemic.

"I know there are lots of businesses that are closing because of COVID-19," she says, "but that is not the case for me."

Still, Funk says that she has a lot of positive memories and experiences to reflect upon as she moves on to the next phase of her life.

"I've made some great connections here," Funk says. "Burger Days are crazy times. I thrive on the chaos sometimes and it's just a high throughout Burger Days. The bonus was that we got recognition for our burgers."

Although New B's Café has been closed as of Saturday, February 26, the business will close its doors completely on March 18.

Funk plans to keep updating the New B's Facebook page over the next few weeks. She will use the social media platform as the primary means of letting people know what she's doing and when or if she starts a new business venture.

As of April 1, the building will be under new ownership.

Funk says that she doesn't know specifically what the new owners plan to do with the business.

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# Snow-Clearing Creates Headaches in Niverville

By Jennifer Lavin

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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This winter has been one for the books in terms of snowfall, and some residents of Niverville say that the town's snow removal process has caused them problems.

Denise McGory has lived in her Niverville home for ten years and she claims that for six of those years her yard has sustained damage from the town's snow-clearing equipment.

"Sometimes it's the lawn being torn up," McGory says, "but the most significant damage was a huge piece of our concrete driveway being cracked/broken."

McGory did not contact the town about the damage.

"Previous correspondence with the town, on other matters, has not been addressed," she says. "I would add that the mayor and council of this town are not very easy to deal with. I have sent emails in the past that have still not been answered."

Another resident, Eric Duval, also says damage has been done to his property. Last year, he noted a 30-foot gash on his lawn due to snow-clearing equipment.

"[I] called the town office and asked who I should contact," says Duval. "They transferred me over, so I left a message with my name, number, address, and brief description. And I never got any reply."

Duval says he is frustrated that he had to use his own time and money to fix a problem that he feels was



DEPOSITPHOTOS

not his fault. The following spring, he had to lay topsoil, then seed and water it constantly for it to grow.

Mayor Myron Dyck says that he is aware that the snow-clearing process is not perfect.

"There are times when operators, who are doing their best to keep the roads cleared, are jostled," says Mayor Dyck. "When you're clearing snow, it's not like you're driving on a flat, dry surface. It's a bumpy, snow-covered surface... I've had my own yard scalped by the blades."

Dyck says that the Public Works department does intend to fix problems created through the snow removal process, and complaints of yard damage are added to their to-do

list.

However, Public Works operates on a priority basis and issues with residential yard damage are simply not always at the top of that list.

"If there is suddenly a ton of rain and the soccer fields need more mowing than normal, for example, they might not get to the curbs as soon," Dyck says. "So in some years, unfortunately, it hasn't been done. Sometimes I've had to buy three or four bags of dirt and sprinkle some grass seed. It is what it is. I would hope that people would look at this as more of a team approach than an adversarial approach."

Dyck adds that he appreciates how hard many townspeople work

to keep their yards looking attractive. But he also points out that residents don't necessarily own their entire front yards.

"What people may or may not know is that... there is infrastructure under [the front yards]," he says. "Water lines, sewer lines, fibre optic cables, things like that. Not everything is under the street bed itself. There is infrastructure that runs between the curb and the front wall of someone's home. The town needs to be able to access this should it need tending to."

Ryan Dyck, Manager of Operations for Niverville, explains the matter further. He says that the amount of land the town owns in

front of each home varies depending on the street.

"It can range from 10 to 20 feet from the road," he says. "It depends how big the town's right of way is on that particular street."

Mayor Dyck adds, too, that sometimes salt and sand make their way onto front yards. He wants people to know that he is aware of all these issues, but that they are not unique to Niverville.

"Unfortunately, that's the joy of living in a wintry climate," Dyck says.

In response to townspeople saying that they are not receiving return calls or emails when they contact the town office, the mayor wants to do better.

"We talk about communication all the time with our staff," says Dyck. "If [townspeople] are calling and leaving messages, that should be acknowledged. Our people should be getting back to them and if [they're] not, I would like to know because we will address it."

Dyck also says that residents should make sure they are contacting the correct department. They can feel free to call or email the front desk to make sure they contact the correct people.

The mayor also encourages anyone who notices issues regarding snow-clearing to email [snowclearing@whereyoubelong.ca](mailto:snowclearing@whereyoubelong.ca). These emails go directly to the Operations Department to let them know of problem areas.

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## IN BRIEF

## Bylaw Discussions

By Jennifer Lavin

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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A Niverville council meeting on February 15 included a lengthy discussion about kennels and backyard decks.

One resident expressed a worry that if kennels are allowed in Niverville, so-called “puppy mills” could follow.

Council clarified that this is not what the bylaw in question is intended to allow—and in fact the bylaw in question is meant to prevent that problem.

Currently, kennels are permitted in town and the owner of a kennel wouldn’t need to seek permission from council to build one in a commercial zone.

The change being requested would allow kennels only with a conditional use permit.

A conversation also ensued regarding the size of backyard decks, with some residents concerned they will not be able to choose the size of their own deck.

Council clarified that their only interest is in making sure that decks don’t take up more than 50 percent of a given lot.

One homeowner, Diane Kroeker, feels the town could improve their process of notifying people about upcoming public hearings. She argues that much discussion would be unnecessary if more people had been able to comprehend the “legalese” included on the notices in the first place.

“The people in town need to know about these things,” Kroeker said. “And the notices that come out from the town, we just don’t understand them!”

Kroeker suggested that the town’s website, which already lists in advance each public hearing, could include more everyday language.



New businesses and residential units are coming to this mixed-use development.

JOEY VILLANUEVA

## Expansion, New Businesses Announced for “Niverville Commons”

By Jennifer Lavin

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Niverville’s town council met on February 22 to discuss a conditional use permit for the addition of four residential units at 290 Main Street.

Katie and Sean Knebel of Knebel Prairie Developments, the owners of the property, were in attendance to answer questions.

“Throughout the meeting, there was a very healthy back and forth working through several options and scenarios,” says Katie Knebel. “Knebel Prairie Developments, town council, and the others in attendance worked together to come to decisions that all parties were happy with.”

The permit was unanimously approved by council.

Knebel Prairie Developments will now proceed with adding the four residential units to the top floor of 290 Main Street.

Three of the units will be two-bedroom, and the remaining will be one-bedroom.

The units will range in size from 765 square feet to 1,025 square feet. Each will be equipped with in-suite laundry.

Knebel says she anticipates having the units ready for possession early this summer.

“We are working with a fantastic group of local trades and companies that will help us move the project along at an efficient speed,” she says.

The Knebels own both 290 Main Street and 10 Cedar Drive, and they unofficially refer to the two buildings collectively as Niverville Commons.

Once the new units are complete, Niverville Commons will house ten residential suites and 17 commercial spaces.

Knebel says they currently have only one vacancy.

“Unit G 290 Main Street has

received a complete overhaul,” she says. “We have stripped the unit down, installed a complete HVAC system, new bathroom, new lighting, and painted the entire unit. This space is 1,066 square feet, has three entrances, and is a corner main floor unit.”

Among the new commercial tenants to set up shop this year is Clarity Vision, a full-service optometrist and eyewear retailer. The business expects to be ready to serve the community in late March or early April.

Another longtime business in Niverville Commons, Done Hair, Skin & Nails, is currently undergoing expansion. Done will be adding a fourth hair station as well as upgrading their equipment and ambiance.

Done has also recently added a Botox nurse to their team. As well, they have added gel nail extensions to their menu of services.

Prairie Soul Dance Company,

another of the Knebels’ tenants, has recently welcomed the Manitoba Music Academy to their studio. They now offer a wider array of lessons in dance and musical arts.

Better Bare Body Sugaring has expanded into a new space in the complex as well as introduced brow therapy.

Finally, Knebel Prairie Developments are ready to announce a new tenant scheduled to open their doors in May.

Tyler Schroeder and Mellissa Gladue are opening Village Pub.

The couple previously operated Niverville’s Pizzeria out of a location on Drovers Run but are now in the process of moving and expanding their offerings.

“Village Pub will be a full-service restaurant and licensed Irish pub,” Knebel says. “Village Pub will also be serving Niverville’s Pizzeria pizza and will continue to offer pizza delivery to Niverville.”



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Shelley Amos. HANOVER SCHOOL DIVISION

## Amos Appointed Permanent HSD Superintendent

By Evan Braun

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

editor@nivervillecitizen.com

After about a year and a half serving as the Hanover School Division's interim superintendent and CEO, Shelley Amos has at last been appointed to the position on a permanent basis.

Amos brings 28 years of administrative and instructional experience to the role. She was initially appointed interim superintendent in August 2020, having been the assistant superintendent for the two years prior.

Before joining the HSD's senior administration, she worked at Woodlawn Early Years School, first as vice principal from 2009–2011, and then as principal from 2011–2018.

Even earlier in her career, she taught in the former Transcona-Springfield school division.

"Since Shelley's appointment to the interim superintendent position, she has demonstrated strong leadership through an unprecedented two-year pandemic that has been both challenging and turbulent for school divisions," says Ron Falk, HSD board chair. "As a board, we are delighted that she has accepted this permanent position, and we fully support her vision for education moving forward."

The decision to appoint Amos as an interim superintendent instead of a permanent one was only ever a by-product of cost-cutting mandates by the provincial government.

According to Rick Peters, who served as board chair at the time of Amos's initial hiring, Manitoba Education and the province had been in the midst of a fiscal workface sustainability review that mandated a reduction of 15 percent in all divisional administration costs.

Peters explained at the time that the province had also stipulated that any new management or administrative hires during the pandemic be interim positions.

"We couldn't hire anything permanent in any of the management positions, nor could any other school division," Peters said.

With those mandates now in the rear-view mirror, including some associated with the aborted education law Bill 64, the way has been cleared to make interim positions fully permanent.

"With the demise of Bill 64, we are now able to move forward in a strong position" says Falk.



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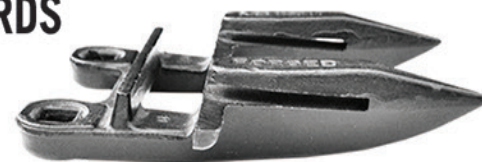
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# Forecast Shows Major Risk of Spring Flood

By Sara Beth Dacombe

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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The RM of Ritchot faces a major risk of spring flooding according to Manitoba's spring flood forecast, released on February 18.

Water levels are expected to remain below community dikes and flood protection measures, but the Hydrologic Forecast Centre is predicting a high volume of water passing through waterways in southern Manitoba, including the Red, Rat, and Roseau rivers.

Ritchot has a large amount of low-lying farmland. The flooding situation is carefully monitored each spring and area officials are always on the lookout for trouble spots, such as low roads or highways.

"It's hard to say what an average spring melt truly means," says Mitch Duval, CAO for Ritchot. "For the past eight years, it has been fairly 'quiet' as far as flooding. The common trouble spots are on lower level road crossings such as Prefontaine Road, Crown Valley Road, the La Salle Bridge at Waverly, Courchaine Road, and Alarie Road... We will likely see a closure of the St. Adolphe north dike and the 'Richardson Curve' on Highway 200 will likely be underwater."

Although Duval has reviewed the latest forecast, he feels it is still too soon to make many plans for the RM's flood response.

Given the rapid growth of the community, many residents new to Ritchot may not have seen flooding before, whether overland or rising river levels.

Flood hazards in any year include thin ice, overland water, culvert blockages, and improper sump pump drainage.

"It has been a while since a significant event," says Duval. "It's a good time to remind people to stay away from thin ice, open water areas, and not to travel down a closed road due to flooding."

He also encourages people to assist by not getting in the way where flooding is happening, to make room for construction equipment to do their thing, and preparing to evacuate if necessary by having a plan in place.

The RM also says that as the



Water flowing over Highway 311 at Wallace Road during the flood of 1997.

✉ RUDOLF KLASSEN

melt begins, their team has routine procedures in place to help with drainage.

"Normal spring operations include thawing out frozen culverts, clearing snow in some ditches to help with drainage and water flows, ensuring pumps are ready if needed, doing an inventory check of sandbags, and looking at opening the Emergency Operating Centre (EOC) if needed," says Duval.

Should water levels rise to a level of concern, the RM has procedures that are ready to be enacted if residents need help. In March, a provincial seminar and further update will take place.

## FLOOD FAMILIARITY

Many residents in the area are already deeply familiar with the flood concerns that come with living so close to the Red River.

The Masse family owns A Maze in Corn north of St. Adolphe and has experienced many floods over the years.

"We are certainly in an interesting location for flooding," says Angie Masse. "We are at the intersection of the Red River and the Seine River Diversion, so we are usually the first to flood and then obviously the last for the waters to recede."

While this year's forecast indicates an elevated risk for their property, Masse also says they are concerned for the risk of flooding every year. They are already as prepared as they can be.

"We are very well prepared for natural floods, as we have lived on this property for over 20 years and have experienced numerous levels

of flooding," she says. "We have been evacuated two times, maybe three."

## PREPARATIONS IN NIVERVILLE

While Niverville isn't directly next to a river, the town has experienced flood threat before from the rising waters.

Overland flooding from nearby farmland can also be a concern if there is a fast spring melt and the water hasn't been able to drain properly from the fields and ditches into the rivers.

During the 1997 "Flood of the Century," Niverville maintained road access to the east along Highway 311. Since that time, the town has further invested in flood protection by establishing dikes along Crown Valley, Wallace, and Stott roads.

Mayor Myron Dyck says that in 2011, Highway 311 and Highway 200 had to close due to high water.

Town employees, he adds, are ready to proceed with regular flood preparedness and drainage assistance when the spring melt begins.

"Items the staff does each and every year is to open ditches, steam culverts, and provide sand and sandbags at the municipal yard for people to get and fill should they wish to place them around their homes," says Dyck.

Residents can also be mindful of the water around their homes and help facilitate drainage when possible.

"Some suggestions would be to remove snow from window wells to prevent possible leakage through basement windows," Dyck adds. "While it may be too late for this spring, slope the ground away from

the foundation to the side yard boundary. The town does offer sandbags for owners to take and fill up and take to their homes in the event that the ditches fill up quickly if we get a fast melt. The town does not fill or deliver the sandbags, but they are made available at our public works yard."

The mayor says that town officials are monitoring the situation after having reviewed the latest flood forecast.

"Yes, we have seen the forecast and have additional meetings with the province every spring," says Dyck. "Our local emergency control group plans for these items months before they occur. The town has invested significant dollars in infrastructure improvements and inventory to ensure we are better prepared for whatever eventuality occurs."

## HOPES FOR SLOW THAW

Charlene Erickson was born and raised in Niverville, growing up a mile and a half west of town. She says she can remember always having a flood risk in the area and seeing lots of water every spring.

"We always had floods in the spring, full ditches and swollen rivers, and some road closures, but it was normal," says Erickson. "I remember the 1997 flood really well. I was a teenager and didn't understand what was coming. It was so different."

Erickson says she remembers all the adults talking about it, town preparations, and even seeing actions taken by the city of Winnipeg to prepare for the flood.

"And then I remember everything

speeding up. All of a sudden the water didn't stop rising. We became a crew of sandbaggers going from neighbour to neighbour putting up walls to save their homes. We had to move into town and share an apartment with my aunt, uncle, and cousins. It was four adults and like five teenagers in a two- or three-bedroom. Fun though," says Erickson. "We'd go back to the farm often to make sure we didn't spring any leaks, do general maintenance checks, and see if any of our pets/animals came back. We would take a boat and could boat right over the roads. You couldn't see the power lines. Niverville was an island."

While the so-called "Flood of the Century" brings back some fond memories from her teenage years, Erickson also remembers the seriousness of the situation.

"Niverville was only accessible from the 59, or otherwise by boat, and there was water everywhere I can remember, but definitely stuck to our area, and west of town which was where our home was," says Erickson. "The community came together and the tragedy holds fond memories for me, of friends working together to help the community."

Erickson now lives in Winnipeg, but she drives to town every day for work.

Hearing about the flood forecast, she is concerned about possible road closures that would become a challenge when travelling to and from Niverville, given the levels of precipitation we've accumulated this winter.

"I am hoping for a slower thaw, and the fact that we've been in a drought for a couple years might help with finding a place for all the thaw," says Erickson.

Knowing how many new residents have moved to Niverville since the last major flood, Erickson advises anyone who lives or works in the area to familiarize themselves with alternate routes to and from town as well as any necessary destinations in the event of an emergency.

"New residents should know other routes to any important places, like their place of work, schools, hospitals, and maybe discuss alternate accommodations in the event of a worst case scenario."



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We are pleased to announce that effective immediately, Shereen Rashwan will be the interim Executive Director for the Niverville Chamber of Commerce.

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# Health & Wellness

## Taking a Multipronged Approach to Wellness

By Sara Beth Dacombe

sdacombe@nivervillecitizen.com

For Manitobans, March is the time of year when we're most ready for winter to leave.

Anyone who made new year's commitments surrounding health may be feeling discouraged. The exceptional snowy weather has many of us feeling the winter blues, and pain issues have been acting up because of the intense cold.

All of us could use some fresh ideas to keep us inspired toward wellness.

### STRETCH BEFORE SHOVELLING

Dr. Heather McLeod leads the team at Niverville Family Chiropractic, focusing on spinal health and mobility. She has seen people struggling with soreness and injury from all the snow-shovelling demanded of us this year.

"Symptomatically, all this snow and shovelling—and needing to pile the snow higher and higher—has definitely caused a lot of lower back pain complaints," says McLeod. "This then prevents them from doing things they'd like to do."

If you needed a professional to give you permission, McLeod says it's okay to hire someone to do your driveway for you. If someone you know has a machine or is more able-bodied, don't be shy to give them a call.

If you do have to dig yourself out, doing a good job is about more than just heaping snow as fast and as high as possible.

McLeod says avoiding body pain after clearing your driveway starts before you pick up that shovel.

"Warming up the muscles and light stretching before shovelling is very helpful to avoid injury. Longer stretching after shovelling can be helpful as well," says McLeod. "Using good mechanics—perhaps a scoop you can just push, rather than needing to lift and twist a shovel full of snow over a bank—is important."

McLeod says stretching before shovelling can help avoid injury and strain. The two stretches she would recommend focus on the hamstring and lumbar.

Stretch your hamstrings by raising your leg straight out in front of you and placing it on top of an elevated surface. Lean slightly forward and reach toward your raised toe until you feel a stretch along the back of your leg.

For the lumbar stretch, raise one elbow to chest height and reach your arm across your body, twisting from

the waist slightly toward the opposite shoulder. The stretch should happen across your core and lower back to loosen it up.

"There are many YouTube videos that show how to do these stretches and they can be very helpful for many people," says McLeod.

Niverville Family Chiropractic conducts assessments and adjustments to help maintain spinal alignment, which positively influence how the nervous system can function, communicate, and coordinate the functions of the body.

"We help people with things they might expect such as headaches and back and neck pain," she says, "but often people experience results beyond their initial complaints and choose to stick with regular care to maintain that sense of wellbeing."

And it's that regular self-care routine that many people still aren't able to lock into. Many work environments are still flexing between in-office or work-from-home situations, and the weather has many experiencing unpredictability from one day to the next.

She also reminds us that self-care is about more than just eating right and exercise. She points out that chiropractors provide an essential service through touch.

"Just that alone is helpful for people," she says. "Many people who have been isolated at home may not have been touched at all for long periods of time these days."

While she's not a mental health professional, McLeod sees that progress and relief from pain is one piece of the puzzle in our overall sense of wellbeing.

"I encourage people to explore meditation and breathing practices which can be very beneficial for mental health. I have a lending library in the office for people to borrow with many titles focused around these topics as well."

### EDUCATION IS EMPOWERING

Andrew Neufeld is a lifelong resident of Niverville, a physiotherapist, and the owner of Niverville Physiotherapy. Specializing in muscle and joint issues, he says that physiotherapists are movement experts and part of a leading profession in pain relief.

At his clinic locations in Steinbach and Niverville, Neufeld treats issues involving the musculoskeletal system to restore function, reduce pain, and prevent injury. While the recent weather has contributed to an increase of cases, Neufeld says since

the beginning of the pandemic they were already seeing a significant shift in their caseload.

"Neck and TMJ issues are now more prevalent," says Neufeld. "Much of this is related to posture, whether people are working at home with poor ergonomics, spending more time on their devices, or just being more sedentary."

Health and wellness look different for everyone and Neufeld incorporates an individual approach whether someone is reporting a first-time or long-time pain issue.

The first visit typically involves a detailed evaluation and discussion of the client's lifestyle and description of the injured area, as this information is very important to crafting an effective plan to correct the problem.

"Listening to our clients is an important part of the exam. This gives us a chance to hear how our clients are being impacted by their condition," says Neufeld. "This can range from not being able to go to work, playing with their children, or participating in recreational activities. Then the physical exam will identify the structures that are not functioning properly and require corrective treatment."

Many clients see a benefit from the hands-on treatment and home exercise program Neufeld provides. The exercises are tailored to each specific muscle area where strengthening is needed.

Neufeld also says that physiotherapy is a collaborative effort between client and therapist, and one of the most important keys to success is for somebody to learn more about how their body works and how it can get better.

"Client education is so important. We need to empower our clients to understand what is happening and what can be done for it," says Neufeld. "As an example, a client comes in with a sore back after shovelling snow. The exam indicates a disc herniation, and for many people they will believe they will now have a permanent issue with their back. With client education, they will understand that this is correctable, preventable, and that 85 percent of people will have had a disc issue and that the vast majority of cases will resolve."

Seeing how discouraged some people can be when faced with a pain issue, Neufeld encourages people to consider that pain and tissue damage aren't the same thing.

"Think of a paper cut," he says. "It hurts a lot but is a very minor injury.

We do a lot of work with chronic pain clients to educate them on what pain is, why it is there, and how to manage it using breathing, mindfulness, and cognitive exercises. Clients really benefit from all the education, as it gives them confidence on their prognosis, activities that are safe for them and things to avoid, and how to modify activity and take control of their impairment."

Learning about pain—called "pain science education"—can be empowering and give us a sense of control.

What is beyond our control remains the weather—and as a true Manitoban, Neufeld knows winter may not be finished dumping the white stuff on us yet. His top tip when shovelling snow is to not rush, and focus on strengthening your form.

"To prevent injury, avoid filling the shovel fully," he says. "Try not to twist when throwing the shovel. Use your feet. And take frequent breaks to extend your back. Bend backwards."

### CONNECTION IMPROVES HEALTH

The Niverville Heritage Center is a multipurpose event centre that incorporates not-for-profits and businesses with intergenerational living, cultivating meaningful connections between families, children, and seniors. The organization provides many community services that enhance people's lives.

The seniors living arrangements available at the Niverville Heritage Centre are organized into three separate yet interconnected options: the Niverville Credit Union Manor (a 36-suite assisted living and supportive care residence), Heritage Life Personal Care Home (an 80-resident PCH), and Heritage Life Centre (a 46-suite life lease residence for those 65 years of age and older).

Many programs and resources are available to seniors living at the Heritage Centre and within the community at large. Service to Seniors offers recreation, workshops, and assistance with paperwork and appointments and available to seniors within an eight-kilometre radius of Niverville.

Congregate Dining is a community-based meal service that is intended to increase opportunities for nutritional and social support among older adults. An adult day program is also hosted nearby at the Golden Friendship Centre.

Within the immense complex, residents and community members alike can access Niverville Open Health, Niverville Heritage Dental

Centre, the Red River Co-op Pharmacy, Growing Minds Child Care Centre, and Hespeler's Cookhouse and Tavern.

The Niverville Heritage Centre is an example for the community, not only for its efforts to improve the health of older adults, but for the overall health and wellness benefits of its intergenerational approach.

### FIND WINTER RELIEF

Harsimran Sandhu is one of three business partners who opened the Urban Flavours cannabis store in Niverville just over one month ago.

Sandhu says people in the community have been very welcoming and have reached out to the business to access their products, many of which have substantial wellness properties.

"We see many people come into the shop with chronic pain or trouble sleeping," says Sandhu. "We have a variety of different cannabis products that can definitely help alleviate both of these concerns."

Sandhu finds it fulfilling to connect his customers with products that are going to bring them relief. He says cannabis is used to treat many medical conditions and symptoms including nausea, loss of appetite, pain, anxiety, insomnia, inflammation, and muscle spasms. He adds that some people experience fewer negative side effects when using cannabis to ease these symptoms compared to pharmaceutical drugs.

"As a cannabis retailer, we are not here to provide medical advice, but we do our best to guide customers to what we feel might be the best approach for them," says Sandhu. "We always recommend consulting your personal healthcare professional before trying any cannabis products for medical use."

Another use for cannabis, according to Sandhu, is facilitating a healthy spiritual wellbeing, which is becoming more accepted as an approach to overall health. Some say that the effects of cannabis can increase one's understanding of meaning and enlightenment, which bring a sense of connection to both the natural world and people's spiritual experience of it.

Whether people come in looking to ease symptoms or to support a healthy lifestyle, Sandhu says there are a few products he has noticed his customers select most often.

"Our edible gummies, CBD soft gels, topical creams, and bath bombs have been very well received in the community thus far," says Sandhu.






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# Commentary

## Hijacked: How our Brains (and Beliefs) Can Be Radicalized

By Daniel Dacombe

On January 6, 2021, pro-Trump protestors stormed the U.S. Capitol. Americans—and yes, Canadians—watched in shock as an “ordinary,” albeit angry, protest turned violent and invasive. Government officials were sent into lockdown as protestors, some carrying signs indicating a desire to lynch the vice president—or, even more alarmingly, zip-ties, indicating an intention to take prisoners—entered the federal government’s upper and lower chambers.

While their occupation of the Capitol was short and ultimately ineffective except generating chaos and getting the protestors in significant amounts of trouble, it lodged itself in our memories as an example of what extremism looks like right here in North America. Some of us may have thought it was as close to home as we’d ever see such an event.

Last month, we had to adjust our expectations.

At the end of January, as has been widely reported, a convoy protest arrived in Ottawa. But referring to it as the “trucker protest” isn’t accurate, as the vast majority of truckers in Canada didn’t participate or necessarily approve.

According to every poll taken, an overwhelming majority of Canadians also disagreed with the protest.

During the three-week occupation, these protestors defaced public property and were reported to harass and intimidate local residents, store employees, and healthcare workers.

Despite pleas from residents and public officials, many of the protestors had to be removed by police—in some cases, by being arrested.

The protests haven’t been confined to Ottawa.

Other protests have popped up in cities across the country, including in Winnipeg. And protestors have shown up at border crossings, shutting down points of entry to the U.S. in stark contrast to their stated objective of protecting trade.

For many, these protests have been as jarring to Canadians as the January 6 insurrection was to Americans.

In the last few weeks, our social media platforms have become more divided than ever—which is saying something.

A small but increasingly vocal contingent of Canadians are calling their prime minister a dictator, decrying outlets such as CBC and CTV as fake news, and adopting militant language



DEPOSITPHOTOS

to describe their intentions to impose their will on the majority.

This has many of the rest of us asking how all these people, some of whom are people we know and love, became so willing to engage in such extreme behaviour. As many Americans were asking this time last year, what causes an otherwise “normal” individual—someone with a family, friends, a job, and community involvement—to invade the U.S. Capitol, committing what is now described as domestic terrorism?

Whether Canadian or American, were these people always extremists under the surface, waiting for a chance to act out?

You may be surprised to know that despite decades of psychological research, we have not uncovered a “terrorist personality type.”

Those who engage in extremist behaviour are, generally speaking, just like the rest of us.

Instead most experts in the field talk about radicalization, the process by which an individual becomes increasingly extreme in their views and behaviour compared to the rest of society. The process is fascinating and worth learning about as we try to understand what’s happening in the world around us.

Before we continue, it’s important to understand that radicalization is a spectrum. There are many degrees of extremism and while someone may be radicalized enough to go encamp in our nation’s capital, this is a far cry from committing acts of violence.

As disruptive as the convoy protests were, there were no deaths, and many people believed they were supporting it with good intentions.

However, this is how the process starts. We don’t begin by setting off bombs. We begin with socially accepted ideas that contain the seeds of extremism before moving on to

take direct actions, and eventually violence.

This is all the more reason to take it seriously at the early stages.

There are many theories in the social sciences, specifically psychology and sociology, which attempt to explain the process of radicalization.

Psychologists Dr. David Webber and Dr. Arie W. Kruglanski, experts in terrorism and criminal psychology, suggest that people become radicalized through a gradual process influenced by three interrelated factors. This is sometimes called the “3N” model.

**1. Need.** Sometimes this first factor is called the “quest for significance.”

Everyone has an intrinsic need to make sense of and have control over their life, to have a strong sense of identity and purpose. When this sense of significance is threatened or lost, people become highly motivated to regain it.

The pandemic and the measures we’ve all had to take to protect our healthcare system have been stressful for all of us and led many to experience a loss of significance in their lives.

**2. Narrative.** When seeking to regain significance, we may gravitate towards stories or narratives that attempt to make sense of our significance loss.

Narratives help identify the actions we need to take to regain significance in our lives, and sometimes they help identify who is to blame for that loss.

This provides us with an enemy to focus our attention on.

In its most extreme form, the narrative makes it morally acceptable to commit acts of violence against that target. The narrative is most compelling when the target is a person or groups of people, as opposed to an intangible virus—this is why it’s easier for some to blame the government,

the media, or “science” in general for the plight instead of an invisible, intangible virus responsible for nearly six million deaths. Psychologically, we find it more comforting to blame those with agency.

**3. Network.** Once we’ve identified a loss of significance and settled on a narrative/story as to why this occurred, we have a strong desire to seek out networks of individuals who agree with us.

We do this for two reasons.

First, to have a sense of community on the journey to significance. Second, to validate our radical beliefs.

Extreme beliefs will seem more sensible when you’re surrounded by people who agree with you. A significant body of research demonstrates that people with extremist views become more willing to engage in violent behaviour when surrounded by those who share their views.

None of these factors—the need to feel significant in the world, the desire to understand the story in which you are participating, and the presence of a network or community that surrounds and supports you—are in and of themselves bad.

But when the quest for significance points us to identify targets for our current distress, when the narrative gives us a reason to engage in increasingly extreme behaviour towards those targets, and when we’re surrounded by a network that encourages us to be increasingly extreme in our actions, we are more likely to be radicalized for violence.

With these factors in mind, we can turn the conversation to the opposite process: how do people return to more moderate views after they’ve been radicalized?

Deradicalization is also a process long studied by forensic psychologists, terrorism experts, and other social scientists.

Thankfully, deradicalization is very possible and has even been successful in cases when individuals were engaging in violent acts of terrorism.

On an individual level, deradicalization occurs when a person’s commitment to their extreme narratives and networks are reduced and they become open to revisit their previously held moderate viewpoints.

This can be done by identifying ways for people to experience personal significance through more positive means, such as helping others and contributing directly to one’s community.

Community leaders who preach moderate views can have a huge impact in creating a more positive narrative for people to connect with.

One example of this would be the local pastors who spoke out in favour of following public health restrictions—and yes, vaccines—while also offering support, care, and community meaning. These leaders created opportunities for hope, purpose, and support, a fact that many people were deeply grateful for.

Conversations about extremism may seem like an overreaction, especially here in Canada.

However, violent radicals are not unheard of in North America. In fact, most of the extremists known to law enforcement officials were born right here and look like the average person in southeast Manitoba.

Also, a 2020 report from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security explains that the greatest terrorist threat to our collective society currently comes from homegrown white supremacist groups.<sup>1</sup>

This is one reason why the convoy protest organizers’ ties to white supremacy should be taken seriously, and why we should, whenever possible, seek to deradicalize the people in our lives—by acknowledging their need to be significant, by providing them with alternative and more accurate narratives, and by presenting them with healthy way to contribute to their communities.

If we can do this, we may find a way to repair the fractures in our relationships, not to mention the fractures in our society.

### REFERENCES

1 “Homeland Threat Assessment,” U.S. Department of Homeland Security. October 2020 ([https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2020\\_10\\_06\\_homeland-threat-assessment.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/2020_10_06_homeland-threat-assessment.pdf)).



# Sports & Recreation

## Sprawling Park Planned for IDC

By Sara Beth Dacombe

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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The RM of Ritchot is planning to build a new park in Île-des-Chênes.

At an online open house hosted by the RM on February 8, the IDC Legacy Park Committee announced their concept for a 40-acre park to be built on vacant land next to the TC Energy Centre.

The new park, when built, will connect to two existing parks in the community, Optimist Park and D'Auteuil Park.

### PARK FEATURES

The proposed recreation space is set to include a toboggan hill, outdoor fitness equipment, a public art space, washrooms, hiking trails, BMX bike hills, as well as a skatepark and an all-ages playground.

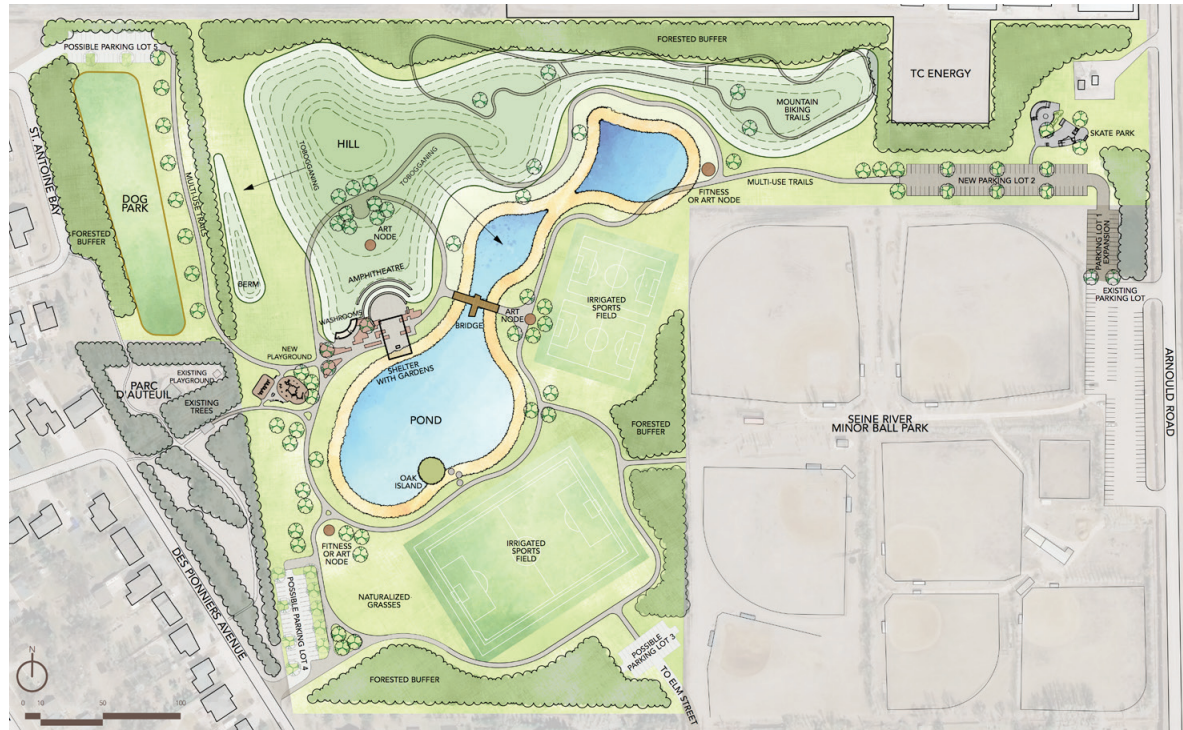
According to the concept drawings, a large shelter or covered feature space will be built next to a large pond and surrounded by gardens and an amphitheatre.

In the past, this land has been used for agriculture and is currently a completely undeveloped clear-cut property. It is quite flat and has very few natural topographical features. Trees would need to be planted and developed to create a forest buffer to diffuse wind and provide relief from the elements.

There would also be plenty of green space, including a fenced dog park.

Many landscape and community planning experts have worked to study the area to bring about the best possible project.

Scott Rosin, a registered landscape architect, owns SiteworkLA, a landscape architectural practice based in Winnipeg. Rosin has worked with the RM to conduct several extensive design studies on existing legacy parks, considering topography, drainage, and any existing trees and other factors at the proposed site.



Preliminary master plan for IDC's new park.

RM OF RITCHOT AND THE ÎLE-DES-CHÊNES LEGACY PARK PLANNING COMMITTEE

He says the area in Île-des-Chênes will work well within the surrounding properties and allow for a flow of both park users and maintenance vehicles or workers.

"The whole site is to be connected by a system of multipurpose trails, which could be walking trails, biking trails, or in winter could be cross-country skiing," says Rosin. "There would be a bridge midway through the pond that would carry you across from one side to another. We've put a variety of large and open fields that could support a variety of events from soccer, ultimate frisbee, picnics, and some lawn space for that type of activity."

One major feature in the park is the water, which Rosin says will be designed to be more interactive, not just something a person sits and watches. There will be a boardwalk and large viewing platform, in addition to a space for seating. The park

will also include opportunities to interact with the environment, perhaps with a habitat that would attract birds and wildlife.

The concept includes a circular structure called Oak Island, which will be located at the water's edge, overlooking the pond. Old Island, for the uninitiated, is the English translation of Île-des-Chênes.

### PROJECT TIMELINE

This park is the next step in a long line of recreation efforts conducted in the RM of Ritchot.

In 2013, a recreation study was conducted to determine the needs of the entire municipality. A number of initiatives were identified as potential projects and Recreation Director Amber Mamchuk was hired to see them through to completion.

Park space was prioritized in multiple areas, including in Grande Pointe and Ste. Agathe.

At the end of August 2020, community and recreation leaders conducted an on-site analysis in Île-des-Chênes. In October, a committee was struck to begin preliminary conceptual planning. Designers prepared preliminary plans for consideration and met with the steering committee to develop a master plan.

Now that the new park is at the open house phase, Mamchuk is excited to present that master plan.

Mamchuk has been working with the RM of Ritchot for more than eight years and this park will be the biggest project she has worked on. The scale is impressive and Mamchuk hopes the community will be excited to see what could be built here in the future.

"Based on the survey results we received from the community, it's not necessarily the most exciting or flashy features we were striving for, but what would have the most impact for Île-des-Chênes, which is

to create a safe space for people to be active," says Mamchuk. "People want to go for walks, ride bikes, and have space to do that. We're planning some changes in elevation which will be unique and we'll be doing some of that type of work on the back side to lay the foundation for a great space, especially for the BMX trails. For walking, right now the only municipal park space is a small section of D'Auteuil Park. The other two playgrounds are at the schoolyards, so it's pretty limited when it comes to use during the daytime. What's being proposed is going to change all that significantly."

Since the open house, the public has been encouraged to submit feedback. That feedback will need to be considered and incorporated in the plans. Together with the RM, the committee will then request the rights designation and zoning for park use, obtain construction permits, and begin fundraising.

There is a substantial amount of work to be done and Mamchuk knows the bulk of the costs aren't yet covered.

"The RM of Ritchot secured Hydro CDI funding, which was made available over ten years to various RMs along the Bipole III transmission line," she says. "For the first several years, we coordinated the planning toward smaller RM projects and upgrading playgrounds. For the last four years, we've implemented funding toward one large community project at a time. Grande Pointe received funding for the clubhouse recently. St. Adolphe received it for the daycare, and Ste. Agathe for the dock and boat launch. So Île-des-Chênes is next to receive funding for a project."

Mamchuk says the RM will work hard to secure grants from all levels of government. But none of that can move forward until the public's response from the open house is amalgamated into the final design of the park.

(continued on page 22)

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(continued from page 21)

"We're still in the planning phase," Mamchuk explains. "We're not quite ready to drill down to the design where we'll be able to pinpoint the final cost or start community fundraising. But when we did the survey, we asked for people's input on whether or not they'd be interested in fundraising, donating in-kind services, and so on. So when it's time for fundraising, we will reach out to those who responded as well as the general public for that kind of support."

#### COMMUNITY RESPONSE

The community response from the open house has so far been positive.

During the question-and-answer part of the open house, a few residents had questions about the park design and the potential challenges of the large pond at its centre.

"That's quite a large amount of land set aside, and a large pond," said Chad Leclaire. "I have a concern about geese. What is the plan for keeping the area safe for everyone using it, during nesting season, and also for cleanup? Because everywhere you go, the areas that have ponds, the amount of goose droppings is substantial."

David Wagner was on hand to answer Leclaire's question. As president and senior landscape architect at David Wagner Associates Inc., he is on the planning committee and is working with the RM to develop the project.

"We certainly understand the problem—and in the detailed design, one of the challenges would be to do the edge condition to mitigate geese," said Wagner, who has extensive experience in largescale outdoor landscaping projects, including parks. "We know if you have a lot of cattails or bulrushes around the edge of the pond, it makes it less attractive for the geese rather than have the edge treatment of the lake manicured down to the edge of the water. So that will be one of the design challenges we will have in designing the pond."

Wagner used the example of golf courses, which have landscaping and plants installed at the water's edge to deter geese.

"But geese won't be able to be deterred 100 percent," admitted Wagner.

He said that the committee will make a note of addressing the issue of geese droppings when it comes to discussing the park's maintenance needs.

Another local property owner asked about potential drainage

issues, as well as the concern over pond water health that has plagued other community ponds in the area. Notably, the Town of Niverville has had extensive issues and public concern over some of their ponds.

"Where is all the water going to come from to fill the lake?" asked one owner. "Will it be snow and groundwater, or town water, and will it be circulated so it doesn't become a green sludge?"

After the open house, Mamchuk addressed these concerns.

"We're just starting to get into [pond care]," she says. "The RM of Ritchot is a fast-growing municipality with quite a few new developments. Often in development design, they include retention ponds. In Grande Pointe and in St. Adolphe, there are retention ponds there. So [we will] gain experience in maintaining those ponds."

Wagner added that the site designers have plans for drainage that will not affect existing properties. There is talk of having an onsite well to supplement the amount of water collected naturally by the pond. He says that designers think they can introduce an irrigation system so that open field can be irrigated from the lake itself.

"With wind going over the top and agitating the lake water, it should be fairly self-cleaning,"

Wagner said. "Maybe [there could be] a pump or recirculation system at the east side of the lake, which would be attractive as a fountain and aerate the water to keep the water clean."

Community members responded well to that idea, so long as it's not going to affect other people in the community who use wells.

Another community member asked about a splash pad, saying that the community would benefit from one.

Rosin said that there is space for a splash pad allotted, and it is adjacent to the playground space. That said, the committee has so far decided not to include it as part of the concept plan, citing the maintenance cost.

Residents also asked about lighting to improve the security of the park and increasing the amount viable space that can be used during the winter when there is substantially less daylight.

"Yes, it will be lighted," said Rosin, adding that the lights will likely not be part of the initial construction, but rather added later as funding allows. "It is a question for council to take up. Lighting is costly, and hopefully as the park moves along funding will come forward."

#### WHEN WILL WORK START?

Wagner explained that the property, to his knowledge, has already been leased for this upcoming growing season to the farmer who has been using the land.

Therefore, construction won't get going in 2022.

"Hopefully, if everything goes well, we can look forward to perhaps breaking actual ground and move mud in the summer of 2023," he said at the open house.

Shane Pelletier, councillor for Île-des-Chênes admits that the cost of the project will factor in to the construction timeline.

"With a project this size, if I win the lottery, it will be done in four years," Pelletier says. "If I don't win the lottery, we're looking at a 10-year buildout for everything and anything the board decides we want to add after. It's 37 acres of real estate we're looking at, so it's not an overnighter."

Overall, Mamchuk says that the park committee has been working well together and people are excited about the idea of a new and expansive community greenspace.

"We've just recently launched this into the community, but what we have heard has been positive," Mamchuk says. "Around the committee table, they're quite excited about the design and how it has pulled the features in a cohesive way for the community."

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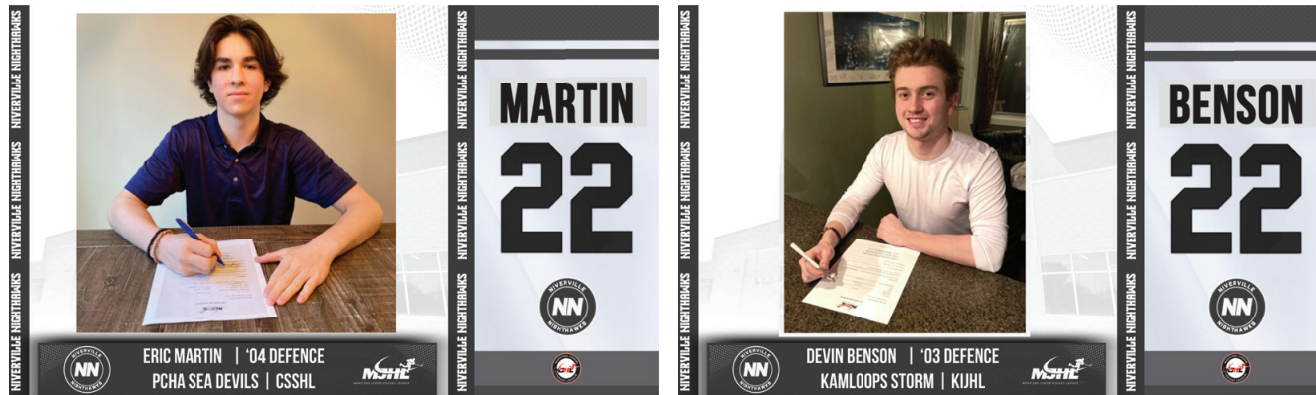


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# The First Nighthawks Have Been Signed

By Scott Strohe

The Niverville Nighthawks, the newest team in the Manitoba Junior Hockey League (MJHL), have signed their first players.

## ERIC MARTIN

Eric Martin from Edmonton, Alberta was announced earlier in February as being the first player to sign a letter of intent with the club.

Martin has spent his last two seasons with the Pacific Coast Sea Devils U18 Prep Academy, which plays in the Canadian Sport School Hockey League (CSSHL).

The young defenceman, born in 2004, has tallied three goals and seven assists in 22 games for the Sea Devils this season.

"I'm super pumped to sign with the Nighthawks," says Martin. "The coaches and management made it a very easy decision to become the first Nighthawk in team history."

Newly appointed general manager and head coach Kelvin Cech has been busy out in British Columbia looking to build the first key pieces of the team's inaugural roster.

"Eric is a phenomenal young man. The first thing he did was to ask to get the phone numbers of new recruits so he can get them all communicating," says Cech. "He's a good player, a modern defenceman. It's the little things off the ice that really demonstrate his character. Most of the guys won't know each other, but with people like Eric, it won't take long. We are thrilled to have him."

Martin's current club is focused on the last stretch of the CSSHL season.

"We are very excited and happy for Eric," says Jason Becker, head coach of the Sea Devils. "Two years ago, Eric and his family made a decision to attend [Pacific Coast Hockey Academy] and we were very excited to get a player of this calibre. He's

become a great example of a student athlete, has become a leader in the program, and we are very proud to see that his hard work and resiliency have paid off. We are definitely looking forward to seeing Eric in a Nighthawk uniform."

## DEVIN BENSON

In mid-February the Niverville Nighthawks added a second player as well, with 18-year-old Devin Benson signing a letter of intent with the MJHL's newest franchise.

Benson has played parts of the last two seasons with his hometown team, the Kamloops Storm of the Kootenay International Junior Hockey League (KIJHL).

This season alone, he has tallied two goals and 18 assists in 37 games for the Storm.

Additionally, Benson has previous Junior A experience, suiting up for 10 games with the Merritt Centennials, who play in the British Columbia Hockey League (BCHL).

The BCHL recently

became an independent league in 2021. Previously, they had been a member of the Canadian Junior Hockey League (CJHL), the same association that the MJHL belongs to.

"We're thrilled to add Benny to the lineup," says Cech of the new addition to the team. "He's bringing character, competitiveness, and 200 feet of skill across the prairies with him."

Coming to Manitoba will be a big change for Benson, who grew up in the British Columbia interior, but he's excited to embrace it.

"I'm super stoked to be a part of the Nighthawks organization," says Benson. "The coaches and management team did their homework on me, which as a player really impressed me. It wasn't where I played, it was who I played for that was important. I can't wait to get to work and be a part of the Niverville community."

## IN BRIEF

## Looking Forward to Softball

By Jennifer Lavin

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The weather may still be frightful, but the Niverville Wildcats Softball Program coordinator, Mike Bouchard, is hard at work preparing for a new season.

Bouchard, who moved to the Niverville area two years ago, is taking over from previous coordinators Chad and Dana Johnston.

"It appeared that I came at the right time," Bouchard says, "as Dana and Chad... were looking for someone to take over."

Bouchard has a lot to offer the organization as he has competed in four national championships.

Chad and Dana served as the coordinators for the last five years.

Softball has traditionally been a predominantly female sport, but Dana says the team is more than happy to accept anyone who wishes to join.

Also, kids as young as four years old can join the program.

"The Rally Cap program is baseball's initiation program and is designed to enhance players' and coaches' first experience with the game," says Dana. "The program helps teams teach players the five fundamentals of baseball in a fun and safe environment."

Rally Cap is meant for children between the ages of four and seven.

Beyond the Rally Cap program, kids and teens can continue to play softball all the way through age 18.

Regular softball season

runs from May until June, covering about eight weeks.

"Community teams can play into the summer if they choose to play in playoffs hosted in Winnipeg," says Dana. "But the Niverville Softball Wildcats like ending their season [at the] end of June to enjoy summer."

The Wildcats program is recruiting new umpires for the 2022 season.

Umpire training involves a two-day course usually held in Ile-des-Chenes. The course is taught by a certified umpire.

Newly trained umpires are required to have their own gear but are paid \$40 per game plus mileage if applicable.

The Wildcats will need coaches this year, too. Coaching positions are usually filled by parent volunteers who come forward.

"My goal is to get moms involved in coaching," says Bouchard. "I know it can be scary, but the way we are going to succeed is by teaching parents the skills plus offering practice plans, giving them more confidence."

When filling out one's child's softball registration form, there will be an option to volunteer as a coach or assistant.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you're interested in the Niverville Wildcats Softball program, email [niverville.wildcats@gmail.com](mailto:niverville.wildcats@gmail.com) or check out their website at [www.nivervilleyouthbaseball.ca](http://www.nivervilleyouthbaseball.ca). If you're interested in the South East Girls Softball league, check out [www.segsl.ca](http://www.segsl.ca).

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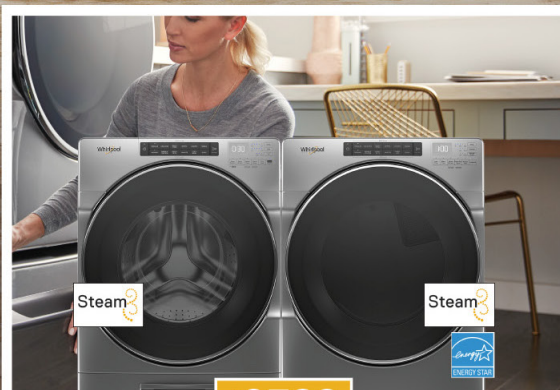
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**Valid from February 24–March 30, 2022. See In-Store Associate for Details.**

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