

# The Citizen

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### LOCAL NEWS

## Hotel Marks Sod-Turning

■ The previously announced Blue Crescent Hotel will soon begin construction in Niverville. The high-end property will be home to a waterpark, meeting rooms, unique accommodations, and an executive floor.

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### LOCAL NEWS

## Land Annexation Would Double IDC

■ Île-des-Chênes could get twice as big if Ritchot is able to annex a large portion of land from a neighbouring RM.

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### SPORTS & REC

## Prov Men Earn Gold

■ The men's volleyball team at Providence finished their season as MCAC champions, opening the door to the school's first trip to nationals.

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### ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

## Jordan St. Cyr Nabs Juno

■ Jordan St. Cyr, who recently moved his family from Niverville to the Nashville to further his recording career, has won a Juno for his self-titled album.

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# Hollywood Comes to Niverville

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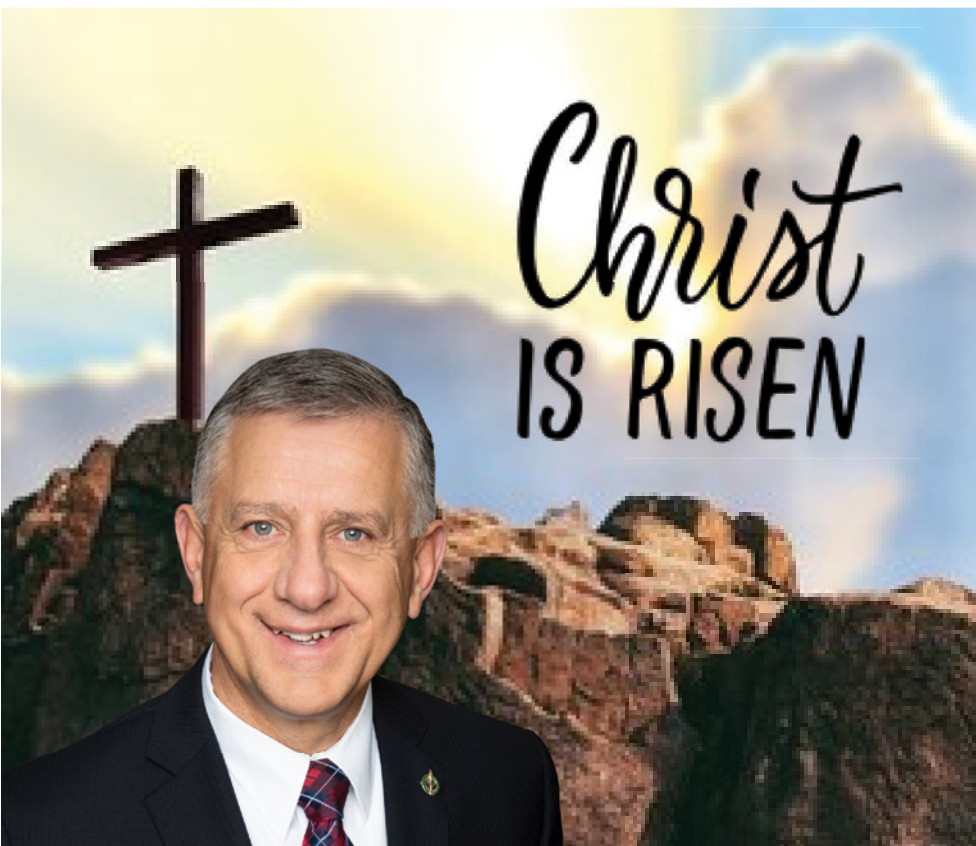

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The planned site layout of Jette Studios, set to be erected at the corner of Highway 311 and Wallace Road. VOLUME GLOBAL

# Hollywood Comes to Niverville

*A state-of-the-art film studio is about to put down stakes in Niverville—and in the process put the town on the map in a way never seen before.*

**By Evan Braun & Brenda Sawatzky**  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
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At first blush it seems almost ludicrous to suggest that a relatively sleepy, low-profile community like Niverville, Manitoba should ever be compared to a place like Hollywood, California, the glamorous locale of movie stars, moguls, and high-tech production studios. Instead it's home to blue skies, sprawling fields of wheat, quiet summer days, and blustery winter ones.

But as the film industry heats up and flourishes around the globe, moviemakers everywhere are looking for space in which to expand.

Niverville will soon become home to Jette Studios, one of the most cutting-edge, state-of-the-art movie production facilities in the entire world—and residents can

expect the action to get underway this very summer.

The \$30 million facility will be located at the intersection of Highway 311 and Wallace Road, at the west end of town.

On Thursday, March 23, dignitaries and media from across Manitoba converged at the CRRC in Niverville for the announcement.

“For those of you that aren’t from here, Niverville is known as the fastest growing community in Manitoba,” said Ron Schuler, local MLA. “It is also known as the fifth fastest growing community in Canada. In Los Angeles, they now refer to Niverville as the Hollywood of the North!”

### NAMES BEHIND THE VENTURE

Chris Harrington and Michael Hamilton-Wright are primary shareholders in Volume Global, a film and TV technology company that’s intent on transforming the future of film production.

Tim Harrington, brother to Chris, operates as the company’s chief management officer.

The trio also own and manage Dovetale Media, the production company behind films such as *Shelby, the Dog that Saved Christmas*, starring Chevy Chase and Rob Schneider, as well as *And Now a Word from Our Sponsor*, a dramedy written by Hamilton-Wright and directed by Zach Bernbaum.

Partnering with Juliette Hagopian, president of a Winnipeg-based TV and production company called Julijette Inc., these make up the key players behind Jette Studios.

“[We are] what I would describe as the perfect melding between filmmaking and technology,” Tim Harrington told *The Citizen*. “Mike and Chris have 25 years together in producing films in a completely different way.”

(continued on page 4)

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(continued from page 3)

Hagopian boasts more than 30 years of experience in local film-making and directing. In 2020, she produced a Lifetime movie called *Let's Meet Again at Christmas*. It was filmed at Whitetail Meadow, just four kilometres west of Niverville.

The quartet first met through the making of *King of Killers*, an action-adventure film shot in Manitoba in 2022.

Harrington says the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on the film industry, but not in the way you'd expect. Unlike so many other hard-hit businesses, the movie industry has picked up momentum like never before.

"The demand is so voracious that you're seeing streamers like Netflix and HBO Max and all the big names spending billions and billions," Harrington says. "The trouble with that is there's not a lot of space to [shoot their films]."

Herein lies the big reason that companies like Volume Global are able to capitalize on growing demand.

"There's a massive pain point right now because the streamers are having a streaming war," says Hamilton-Wright. "It's about the way that people like to view content, which is immediately as opposed to waiting till Thursday night at 6:00. So it's massively competitive. Just Netflix alone is spending \$17 billion this year on content. Collectively, it's over \$100 billion. They just don't have the capacity to deliver the content fast enough."

### A NEW KIND OF MOVIE MAGIC

In the face of such unprecedented competition, filmmakers have to watch their bottom lines closely, Hamilton-Wright says. At the same time, they can't sacrifice quality if they're going to maintain a competitive edge.

Cue the studio earmarked for Niverville.

The key feature of this facility will be an LED wall known as the Volume. This is a wall of LED screens that forms a 312-degree arc and on which can be rear-projected any type of background imaginable.

It's a revolutionary, highly versatile type of technology that has been in development for a long time but only recently been pressed into service. Since cameras first began to roll in front of such LED walls, the entire

industry has undergone a seismic shift.

Even those with scant knowledge of film production may have heard of "green screens" and how they are used to create digital effects. Basically, an actor performs in front of a wall or curtain that is made of a solid colour, usually neon green. Afterward, in postproduction, through the use of computer software, the green colour is replaced with the intended background.

The actor may have been standing against the green screen in an empty studio during the initial performance, but after the background is digitally replaced it will look like they were standing somewhere else entirely—perhaps on the surface of the moon, or on an interstellar ship hurtling through the cosmos. The possibilities are endless.

That said, the process is expensive and tedious. And this is the primary means by which special effects have been married to live-action footage for the last several decades of movie-making. For many budgets, it's also cost-prohibitive.

Locals who frequently drive along Highway 59 will likely have noticed Chroma Ranch, a farm just north of Île-des-Chênes that is filled with green-painted buildings. This is a green screen studio, and many films and commercials have been shot here.

That's yesterday's technology. The LED wall—the Volume—has changed the game.

When filming in the Volume, a film crew can travel, virtually, to any location on this world or any other. Unlike with a green screen, very little postproduction work is required. Rather, the work is all done upfront. The actors stand against the LED wall, which showcases the finished background, and the camera is able to capture both the actor and the virtual environment live at the same time.

Appreciate, too, the effect that the Volume has on an actor. Gone are the days when they are called upon to react blindly to green screen effects which haven't yet been created—and likely won't be created for several months to come. They may be told,

"And now you're being charged by an army of six-hundred-pound gorillas. Action!"

If that sounds difficult, you're right. Actors have long struggled with the challenge of trying to generate compelling performances with nothing to go on.

But when they're performing in the Volume, they don't have to use their imaginations. The environment is right before their eyes.

The technology began its development at Industrial Light and Magic, the oldest major special effects studio in Hollywood and the one founded by George Lucas to produce the first *Star Wars* movie in 1977. They have long been pioneers

have the latest-latest. Our techs are the guys who started with Industrial Light and Magic, at the very beginning, at the acorn of this technology."

### THE DEMAND FOR STUDIO SPACE

Volume Global is currently constructing its first studio, complete with LED wall, in New York City. Niverville will soon be home to their second studio in North America.

According to Hamilton-Wright, the LED wall is capable of realizing tremendous savings in both time and cost simply by the fact that producers no longer need to send countless production vehicles and crew, trailers and actors to various shooting locations around the globe.

For example, Hamilton-Wright says, you no longer have to go to Wiltshire, England to shoot a film at Stonehenge. The Niverville and New York film studios will be able to recreate a virtual Stonehenge on screen capable of fooling even the most discriminating eye.

At the same time, government incentives across North America are helping to drive film companies towards greener initiatives. In the end, filming in a Volume Global studio just makes good fiscal and environmental sense.

"That synergy leads to content that is cheaper, more green, and faster to market," Hamilton-Wright says. "And [the streaming companies] need it faster because they need to have a movie out every week. They're going anywhere and everywhere where there's soft money, which is the tax credits in Canada."

### EYE-CATCHING INCENTIVES

In recent years, Manitoba seems to have taken notice of the economic promise behind the very lucrative film industry.

While most provinces and states offer incentives to entice production companies to film in their locales, Manitoba's new policy exceeds virtually every one of them.

"Manitoba's tax credits are the best in the world," says Hamilton-Wright.

According to the Manitoba Film and Music website, film companies can receive a credit of up to

65 percent on their paid salaries while filming locally. Alternatively, they can choose up to a 38 percent credit on their cost-of-production expenditures.

Hamilton-Wright says that most film credits on production expenditures in North America average around 25 percent.

But Manitoba goes even further, providing filmmakers with savings beyond production rebates.

"The cost of everything that surrounds the peripheral expenses to productions are much cheaper in a place like Manitoba, as opposed to downtown Toronto or Vancouver," says Hamilton-Wright.

To sweeten the pot just a little more, the provincial government also removed one further impediment, one that moves Manitoba right to the top of the game.

According to Obby Khan, Minister of Sport, Culture, and Heritage, the strategy is working. A total of 88 film projects were undertaken in Manitoba last year alone, generating \$365 million for the economy.

"We have heard time and time again that Manitoba, and now Niverville, is the ideal space for film production," Khan says. "But the backbone of the industry is the people. Manitoba has a dedicated, creative, well-established media production workforce and they are ready to work."

In October 2022, the province also collaborated to create direct flights between Winnipeg and Los Angeles, thus reducing travel time between the two cities by almost 50 percent. The burden and headache of having to endure multiple layovers and flight changes are a thing of the past for directors, actors, and producers.

"If an executive from Netflix can get up and be on set [in Niverville] in the morning, basically walk around, say hello, and be back [in L.A.] at the end of the day, they love that," Hamilton-Wright says. "They want to get home at the end of the day like anyone else."

### BUT WHY NIVERVILLE?

It should come as no surprise to residents of the community that local developer Ray Dowse, of Dowse Ventures, has been instrumental in sealing the deal between Niverville and Volume Global. Dowse, after all, has had his hand in many new business arrivals to Main Street and the west side of town in recent years.

Dowse also rallied hard to help



Producers and politicians gather at the future home of Jette Studios.

in the business.

Since those early days, the technology has come a long way. The brain trust behind Volume Global is confident that the LED wall is well on its way to becoming the default. The only limitation right now is a lack of studio space.

There are only a handful of studios currently equipped with LED walls in North America. One is located in Los Angeles, where it is primarily used by Disney, and another can be found in Toronto, where it is used by CBS Studios to produce the latest *Star Trek* shows.

What will be the difference between those facilities and the one in Niverville?

"There aren't any differences, except that our technology will be better than that," says Harrington. "We will have better LED panels. We will have the latest panels that are even more advanced than the ones people are saying are the most advanced. It's very ironic and interesting that people can say 'Here's the latest' when it really isn't. We will



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pull together Niverville's MJHL team, the Nighthawks, which has made a strong impression since their debut last fall.

Dowse says he first became aware of Volume Global's interest in investing in Manitoba in the summer of 2021.

Then, in May 2022, he received a call from Hagopian. The company was setting out to find the perfect prairie location and hoped to get the venture off the ground as quickly as possible.

"I was aware of the list of criteria required to enable the development and operations in a timely manner, but also what the site needed in order to support the long-term needs and vision," says Dowse. "I knew Niverville had some competition from other communities throughout the province who had pitched to the studio group as well, so I went to work."

Niverville had it in the bag for a good number of the company's criteria. The town lies in close proximity to major interstates and highways, and it's also within a short driving distance of Winnipeg and its international airport.

The community's size and steady growth points to the availability of a solid employment base and plenty of housing opportunities for outside crew to make Niverville home.

Of course, Dowse says, the upcoming Blue Crescent Hotel is also a key driver since the community will need to host movie bigwigs and visitors of all stripes.

For Dowse and others, it's been a very busy year dealing with the various parties, including both the municipal and provincial governments, to ensure the project could come to fruition.

Along with Len Peters, the developer of The Highlands who has been instrumental in making this happen, a plot of land on the corner of Highway 311 and Wallace Road was rezoned last year in the hopes that the film studio would see its potential.

In the end, Dowse says, the community really sold itself.

"Juliette indicated to me that she has filmed all over the province and when she produced a movie around Niverville several years back, it was one of the most positive experiences she and her crew had ever had due to their interactions with the locals," says Dowse.

Even so, Hagopian admits

to visiting every community within a certain radius of Winnipeg before making the decision to bring the studio to Niverville.

"I liked the idea of Niverville," says Hagopian. "It's one of the fastest growing communities in Canada—and there's good coffee there."

This last part is said with a grin. She's referring to her infatuation with Negash Coffee, Niverville's famous little roastery and café. Indeed, that café has been turning heads.

Hagopian is set to become Volume Global's primary manager of the Niverville studio. When asked what her title will be, she responds tongue-in-cheek: "She-Woman of the Universe."

#### WHAT CAN NIVERVILLE EXPECT THIS YEAR?

Due to the overwhelming demand for film studio space, Volume Global intends to get a rapid start here. If all goes as planned, the doors will open for business in the fall of 2023.

*"We have heard time and time again that Manitoba, and now Niverville, is the ideal space for film production."*

*Obby Khan | Minister of Sport, Culture, and Heritage*

Initially, they will begin by erecting a 20,000-square-foot inflatable tent-like structure, known as a pop-up soundstage.

Harrington and Hamilton-Wright explain that this is the optimal size.

"A soundstage of 20,000 square feet provides enough space to build multiple sets, including large-scale sets, and to store equipment such as cameras, lighting, and props," says Harrington. "At this size, filmmakers can easily adjust the set layout and lighting to suit the needs of different scenes, providing greater flexibility in the production process."

He says that a facility of this size also allows for the precise control of acoustics, which is important for capturing high-quality sound during filming.

"A soundstage of this size is also generally considered cost-effective," Harrington adds. "It is large enough to accommodate most

productions, but not so large that it becomes prohibitively expensive to rent."

This initial pop-up soundstage will take a mere 120 days from the start of work to ready-to-shoot completion.

Progress is expected to happen fast. Hamilton-Wright anticipates bookings for the pop-up to begin immediately.

"Once this thing gets built, we hit the ground running," Hamilton-Wright says. "It's going to be something so cool that I think it's going to be a model [for others], in a sense."

The pop-up soundstage is just the first phase of development. By 2024, Hamilton-Wright anticipates the completion of phase two, which will include the first brick-and-mortar part of the studio. This building will include offices for all department heads, a carpenter mill, an online post-production facility with virtual effects, picture, and sound editing bays, and, to view the final

results, a Dolby Atmos 50-seat finishing theatre.

And based on the sizeable plot of land the studio will occupy, there'll be plenty of room for expansion into the future as demand requires.

#### EFFECTS ON THE ECONOMY

It must also be said that the economic spinoff from this news will extend beyond the studio itself.

The town and surrounding area can expect to enter a boom period of commercial development.

When production companies roll into town, Hamilton-Wright says, they will take up short-term residence. Local restaurants, grocery stores, gas stations, and every conceivable business will benefit from the many visitors.

And those visitors are poised to become a constant stream.

"You're going to see a giant circus of trucks coming in and they will be looking for any support they can get

locally, because they don't want to drive anywhere else," Hamilton-Wright says. "You'll find some real [demand] for certain supplies and certain services that, if the town can follow the energy... they'll be able to take advantage of that economically."

The other side of this coin is the rapid increase in local jobs that will be created here.

"There's never enough people on a production," Hagopian says. "So we're always training and I'm hoping that Niverville will come to me and say, 'I want a job.' If they have some talent in something, we can put them somewhere."

Hamilton-Wright says that it isn't inconceivable to imagine the studio working together with the local high school, providing jobs and training to students interested in film production. It's a model that's helped them build community relationships in other locations too.

"We've had high school art departments working together with our art department doing designs [for us] locally," Hamilton-Wright says. "These kids were saying, 'I don't need to go to L.A. or Toronto or Vancouver for this job that I'm dreaming of. Hollywood is right in my backyard.'"

#### A THRILLING VENTURE

As for Dowse, he couldn't be more thrilled with the bold move that the province has taken to initiate economic growth on this scale.

"You look at how Alberta has been able to attract people and business with the oil and gas industry and that has been a significant driver for the growth within that province," says Dowse. "From a Manitoba standpoint, what the province has done with the Film Tax Credit program, it has really put this province on the map as a destination for one of the fastest growing industries globally."

Likewise, Hamilton-Wright says they are thrilled to finally touch down in Niverville to begin writing their story—because, ultimately, they are storytellers.

"This place, for generations, will tell more and more stories," Hamilton-Wright says. "But our story is, 'Let's do something really cool in Niverville and create something memorable for the partnership, but also for the community.'"

#### CITIZEN POLL

### With a film studio about to arrive in our region, do you feel that the pros will outweigh the cons?

- ☐ Yes. The economic spinoff and job opportunities will be a massive boon for the entire region.
- ☐ No. It's too much, too fast and puts our small-town rural feel at risk.

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#### LAST MONTH'S RESULTS:

### Do you think it's finally time for the province to prioritize twinning Highway 59 south of Île-des-Chênes?

Yes. As traffic counts increase steadily every year, this has become a dangerous stretch of highway.

85%

No. The province has more pressing financial responsibilities to contend with right now.

15%

#### YOUR COMMENTS:

Money needs to be spent on maintaining and resurfacing some of the deteriorating roadways first.

I drive the 59 to get to work Mon-Fri and have dreaded the drive for the past 2 years as the traffic has increased substantially. Too many times I have seen driver's trying to "hurry" and causing near accidents which I understand as the speed limit is 100km/hr and many drivers are driving slower than the posted limit causing these near misses. Also there are too many turn offs which also are causing near misses.

Phase 1: twin Hwy 59 to St. Pierre. Phase 2: twin Hwy 59 to St. Malo. Phase 3: twin Hwy 59 to the U.S. border.

With the quick expansion of businesses in Niverville, there will be increased traffic. We need to prepare and get this started sooner than later so we're not behind the eight ball all the time. The single lane is dangerous, especially during the winter months. Twinning this stretch of 59 only makes sense!

ABSOLUTELY necessary with the growth of Niverville area and the number of commuters! Let's not wait for more collisions/deaths to do what is logical.



# Preliminary Designs Go Public for Shared Wastewater Plant

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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The Niverville Community Resource and Recreation Centre played host to an intermunicipal open house on Thursday, March 9.

Engineers were on hand from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. to guide interested residents from four municipalities through a series of concept designs and detailed plans on a shared wastewater treatment plant to serve the region.

The \$110 million project, currently in the preliminary design phase, is considered a forward-thinking wastewater solution which will help eliminate the need for future lagoons in Niverville and the RMs of Hanover, Ritchot, and Tache.

The project's oversight committee, the Red Seine Rat Wastewater Cooperative (RSRWC), is comprised of members from each of these municipalities.

Barry Williamson and Stephen Godon are engineers with Jacobs, the firm commissioned to create the project design. They are a global firm with more than 60,000 employees worldwide. Water and wastewater solutions comprise much of their expertise.

The future, they say, is to move away from lagoons, which create a large ecological and environmental footprint.

"The province has come down with new regulations to address the [algae growth] happening in Lake Winnipeg," Williamson says. "The new regulations are to control phosphorous, which is the nutrient in nitrogen. Lagoons can do that, but



An open house at the CRRC in Niverville to discuss plans for the regional wastewater plant.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

[only by] adding chemicals into the water. Mechanical treatment does it more efficiently."

The RSRWC plant will be located immediately north of Niverville, near the location of the community's current lagoon. Wastewater from 12 nearby communities plus some rural areas will be processed through this plant.

"It was a good point [to place the treatment plant] because of the elevations that are involved as it moves towards the river," says Godon.

Nine lift stations will be built, one in almost every community being serviced. Some communities, like Grande Pointe and Île-des-Chênes, will share a lift station.

Approximately 90 kilometres of pipeline will transport the wastewater from its various locations to the plant. According to Williamson, much of it will be installed via directional drilling, which has a lower overall impact. It may be required to lay some open cut pipe in certain

areas.

At this stage of research, he adds, the effluent pipelines will follow the road networks and only run through municipality right-of-ways. The firm is confident that no private land will be affected.

A final pipeline will run west from the plant all the way to the Red River, where it will deposit a clean liquid byproduct produced by the plant.

"When we set the elevation of the plant, we will have the ability to empty the water coming out of the plant by gravity," Williamson says. "We're going to have pumps as a backup so we can pump the water in [case of] a flood situation."

The mechanical plant will use mostly biological means to treat the wastewater coming in.

This will be done through the introduction of air, ultraviolet light, and natural organisms, or friendly bacteria, which help remove harmful nutrients.

"The reason why the RSRWC is

going to that is because they need to address the more stringent regulatory requirements," Williamson says. "Down the road, there might be even more regulations in place."

Methane and other greenhouses gases aren't necessarily reduced through this process, he adds, but they are certainly more controlled.

This kind of wastewater treatment creates a number of byproducts.

One is a collection of large and small particulate which has been filtered out and needs to be hauled to the landfill on occasion. It comprises only a small part of the total product in the end.

"People flush everything down the toilet," Williamson says. "Anything that can be flushed [ends up here] and you have to take it out. You don't want that stuff floating down the river."

Another product is the sludge that settles out of the liquid as it sits in tanks. This sludge is thickened, bringing it to a solid state, and has

usefulness as fertilizer.

"There's processes out there that turn it into a prill, like the little fertilizer beads you buy at Home Depot," says Williamson. "The [RSRWC] may decide to go down that road. It's an advanced treatment but it can also be turned into class-A biosolids which can then be land-applied."

The final product is the treated liquid that is sent off to the river once it meets provincial standards.

Some chemical may be needed on occasion, but according to Williamson it requires a small fraction of what is used in a typical lagoon.

One of the plant design options that the RSRWC will need to choose from uses an additional step which includes membranes which the wastewater must pass through. This system is effective to the point where the liquid byproduct headed for the river is virtually potable.

Next steps for the team at Jacobs include gathering feedback from the RSRWC in order to create the final project design. If all goes as planned, they anticipate it being ready for operation by 2028.

Funding for this project is coming from three levels of government.

A total of \$39 million in grant monies has been promised by the federal and provincial governments. The municipal collaborative will bear the balance of \$71 million.

"It's a fantastic project for the communities," Williamson concludes. "This is the first regional treatment plant in Manitoba and I think it's going to set the stage for others. [It's great] to see how a collaborative approach with other municipalities makes things come together."

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# Grocery Store Getting Major Upgrade, New Name

By Jennifer Lavin

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Niverville Bigway has been a cornerstone of the town's business community for more than 20 years—and after a period of renovation and expansion, they are getting bigger and better than ever.

Not only will the grocery store be larger and more modern, it will also have a new name. Niverville Bigway will be known as Your Grocery People (YGP).

John Schmitke, who owns and operates the store, explains that, despite the name change, the store will remain familiar. Since the 1990s, Bigway's wholesale supplier has been a company called The Grocery People (TGP). TGP supplies to Bigway and another grocery chain called Super A.

Over time, TGP's marketing team stopped using the Bigway and Super A branding on their product and just stuck to the TGP brand.

As Schmitke was already creating a new storefront, he decided that now was the time to change the name. He chose Your Grocery People as it aligned with the name of his wholesaler—yet it is wholly his own.

YGP is a 100 percent independently owned and operated store. And Schmitke stresses that once the building is renovated, nothing will change except for the name.

He says he is thrilled to be creating a larger space for his customers. He adds that his number one priority is contributing to the community and supporting it the way locals support him.

Schmitke also explains the history of Niverville Bigway, which began in 1999 when his parents, Tom and Bonnie, moved to Niverville and shortly thereafter purchased the grocery store in town. At that time the store was located on the west end of Main Street.

Around 2003, the elder Schmitkes erected a new building, the same one the store currently



Niverville's grocery store is getting a major facelift.

✉ JENNIFER LAVIN

occupies. The next year, they bought a grocery store in Morris and built a new location there. Their son John became the manager of the Morris store in 2004.

Around 2015, John moved back to the Niverville store and his uncle, Pat Schmitke, bought the Morris Bigway. By 2018, John had purchased the Niverville location from his parents.

In the summer of 2022, Schmitke began the store's current expansion by doubling the size of the parking lot. The old parking lot had become too cramped for the volume of customers visiting the store on a regular basis.

Schmitke says that when he first saw the completed parking lot, he thought to himself, *What did I do? This won't be full for five years!*

But it turns out that the extra space was very badly needed. The lot is often full now, although there is always a spot for another customer to drop in.

After the parking lot expansion, Schmitke turned his attention to increasing the square footage of the store itself. The reason for the enlargement, he says, is simple.

"The building was getting tired and there was an opportunity there that enabled me to serve the community better," he says.

"That's why I did it. My parents never ran this store trying to make as much money as possible. When you do business in a small town—or anywhere, for that matter—it's important to understand that your community is your business partner. I don't succeed without them and I'm only here if I do my job as well as I can. That is the way my parents always ran the store. And if they did that well, then their community would support them very well."

So what are the plans for YGP? Schmitke says that all areas of the store will see at least some upgrades or changes.

However, the produce department will end up benefiting from more improvements than any other. The part of the store dedicated to fruits and vegetables will double in size, allowing for a wider range of products and more space in which to move around and browse.

The liquor department will also see an extensive improvement, growing by about 50 percent. It will expand from two shelves of alcohol to five shelves, the beer cooler will be 40 percent larger, and there will also be a wider selection of wine available, including chilled wine.

The frozen food area will grow

as well, paving the way for more seafood and exotic meats. The grocery and meat departments will each expand by 30 percent. And the bakery department will grow by 25 percent.

Among the new features in the store will be a specialty cheese case, a floral cooler, and many new refrigeration units.

Not only are all these departments getting larger, but the flow of the store will also change for the better. The aisles will be wider and there will be an open feel to the building. Schmitke explains that this should allow for a more pleasant shopping experience for customers.

When the expansion is complete, there will be four checkout counters. Schmitke says that he hates to see line-ups at the front and tries his very best to make sure customers don't have to wait to pay for their groceries.

Despite all these changes, however, YGP will remain cohesive-looking when all is said and done. Both the new and existing areas of the store will get the same paint, flooring, and lighting.

And the barn facade in the back of the store, the one which serves as a reminder of our farming community roots? It's staying too. Schmitke says his customers demanded it.

"I asked everyone questions about their opinions, and I was going to get rid of the barn," he says. "But almost everybody said, 'You have to keep it. I'm smart enough to know that I don't know everything.'"

He adds that his store will remain a generous supporter of its community.

"As I grow, I want to help my community grow as well."

The timeline for YGP's official opening is somewhat uncertain, as some supply-chain issues remain in the wake of the pandemic. That said, Schmitke believes that everything will be completed by the end of summer.

## IN BRIEF

### Province Pledges Highway Renewals in Niverville

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On an auspicious day in Niverville, good news came in threes.

First was the announcement of Jette Studios coming to town, and then came the sod-turning for the Blue Crescent Hotel and waterpark.

A third announcement may have been less splashy, but just as important for residents: Highway 311 is primed for some major renewals.

Inevitably, this stretch of road will be the focus of heavier than expected traffic in the coming years.

Transportation and Infrastructure Minister Doyle Piwniuk says the provincial government has taken notice.

"It is no secret that Niverville punches above its weight when it comes to community development," said Piwniuk at a press conference on March 23. "Today our government is announcing its support for improvements [including] a potential new roundabout between Krahn and Wallace Roads with the future twinning of the highway as traffic flows increase. We're going to be putting \$40.6 million into the region of Niverville as part of our multi-year growth plan."

Specifically, Highway 311 will be twinned from the tracks to Wallace Road.

A signalized controlled intersection is also expected at Krahn Road, making it the second traffic light to be installed in this area, the first being the one at Mulberry.

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IN BRIEF

# Prime Minister Makes Daycare Announcement

By Brenda Sawatzky  
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In Manitoba this month, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made a stop at the south branch of the YMCA-YWCA of Winnipeg on March 3 for a childcare announcement.

Alongside Premier Heather Stefanson and a collection of local officials, Trudeau revealed that as of April 2 Manitoban families requiring daycare will pay a maximum of \$10 per day, on average, for regulated childcare services.

This rate will apply for all children ages 12 and under who attend daycare during regular hours.

The news comes three years ahead of the federal government's target to ensure that every Canadian family has access to \$10 per day childcare by 2026.

"We're seeing results now in Manitoba and across the country. Families in nearly half of the provinces and territories are now benefitting from an average of \$10 per day or less," Trudeau said at the press conference.

Rhonda Kenning is the director of Growing Minds Childcare Centre Inc. in Niverville.

"We are absolutely thrilled with today's announcement," Kenning says. "It not only provides much-needed financial relief to our families when the economy has been so difficult, but it demonstrates that our federal and provincial governments are actually taking measures to finally recognize the crucial role that quality childcare

provides to the economy." Kenning says that this announcement will result in significant financial savings.

The current rate at Growing Minds for preschool children is \$20.80 per day. Parents of infants pay \$30 per day. These will all be reduced to \$10 per day in just under a month's time.

Parents of school-age children requiring before- and after-school care pay \$10.30 per day now, so their savings will be nominal.

According to Kenning, some families have been receiving government daycare subsidies which already bring their daily daycare costs to under \$10.

For these families, nothing will change.

What parents without subsidies need to realize, though, is that the \$10 per day fee will only apply to regular school-day schedules.

"[Families] will still be required to pay full fees on in-service and school holidays, which means \$20.80 per day," says Kenning.

In August 2021, Manitoba entered into an agreement with the federal government to improve early learning and childcare across the province. As a result, the feds committed approximately \$1.2 billion in dedicated funding over a five-year period.

Canada-wide, this federal childcare investment will come to approximately \$30 billion over five years.

Due to this intergovernmental collaboration, Manitoba has set a goal to create 23,000 new childcare spaces across the province.

# Budget Shortfalls Lead to Painful Cuts at HSD

By Brenda Sawatzky  
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On March 7, the provincial government released their 2023 budget, framing this year's school funding as historic and the largest increase in a quarter-century.

That same evening, the Hanover School Division (HSD) held its own public budget meeting. Based on this year's provincial funding model, they say, major clawbacks to the 2023-24 school budget were inevitable.

Faced with some very difficult decisions, the division's board of trustees says they have been given little choice but to gather around the chopping block.

On March 23, HSD released their budget—which included the promised clawbacks. In preparation for the coming school year, teaching staff will be cut by 10.5 existing positions, saving the division \$12.5 million.

This news comes despite the division previously hoping to add 15 new positions to accommodate an anticipated rise in student enrolment.

Based on the division's

forecasts, this will result in larger class sizes, fewer student supports, and fewer course options.

A further \$700,000 will be saved by foregoing school bus replacements, school maintenance projects, and work related to IT infrastructure.

A final \$500,000 will be drawn from the division's surplus account, a fund that already sat below provincial surplus requirements before the new budget was announced.

"In order for us to accomplish our mission and our priorities... we believe that education needs robust funding provided by the Manitoba government," superintendent Shelley Amos said back at that public meeting on March 7. "And we believe that the funding we've received this year is not the astronomical amount that they've published out in the media thus far."

## PROVINCIAL SCHOOL FUNDING MODEL

At first glance, the province's increases to HSD's baseline funding over last year looked fairly significant—it's an increase of 9.3 percent.

On closer inspection,

though, it's actually more like 1.8 percent, when taking into account the additional supplementary income that was given to HSD by the province last year.

With budgeted expenditures of nearly \$100 million, the province's funding will cover just better than 60 percent of total costs.

Until recently, the 40 percent difference would have been made up through school taxes charged to property owners. In past years, each school division was allowed to set their own mill rate based on their annual budget minus provincial funding for the year.

But with the province's rapid phaseout of school taxes charged on property bills, this financial tool will soon no longer be available to school divisions.

According to HSD's finance chairperson, Danielle Funk, the division has experienced either a decrease or freeze on school tax funding every year since 2018.

In lieu of this loss, the province provides equalization initiatives through a Property Tax Offset grant. HSD will see just over \$2 million in funding

from the grant this year, the equivalent of about two percent of their budgeted costs.


According to Funk, the grant doesn't make up for the exponential population growth being seen throughout the division.

This growth will continue to affect the costs and resources needed to run the division going forward.

"A Manitoba Municipal Relations report indicates growth in the RM of Hanover, town of Niverville, and city of Steinbach," Funk says. "Based on these communities, it appears that HSD saw growth in assessment of about 3.14 percent... Our students don't get to realize the growth of the 3.14 percent. It creates a further funding gap [for us]."

Ron Falk, chairperson for the HSD board of trustees, summed up the sentiment felt throughout the division this spring.

"We're certainly very disappointed with the way this has turned out," says Falk. "That wasn't the indication that we were given [by the province] not all that long ago. It was quite the opposite of this. So to have this come is certainly a big blow to us."



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# Hotel Marks Official Sod-Turning

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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It's been exactly two years since Niverville learned the news that a hotel chain is planning to set down roots, helping to fill a major gap in the town's services.

And for the last 24 months, residents and visitors alike have waited with bated breath for construction to start on the plot of land which has been earmarked for the upscale Blue Crescent Hotel and waterpark.

The day of the official sod-turning ceremony has finally arrived, restoring people's faith in the reality of this venture.

On Thursday, March 23, delegates from the provincial and local governments joined Trevor Rempel of Steel Creek Developers, the family-run company behind the hotel chain, for the sod-turning.

"For the past several years now, one of the questions I've been hearing a lot from residents is, 'When are we getting a hotel?'" said Mayor Myron Dyck. "I believe that even when the question was asked, no one considered that it would be remotely as [amazing] as the one the developer has decided to build."

Rempel, too, addressed those gathered.

"The Small Business Venture Capital Tax Credit program has been an invaluable tool for us as we try and work with rural communities to help them grow," he said.

According to Rempel, his company has been able to utilize the provincial tax incentive program for projects in seven different communities in Manitoba so far, including the Niverville hotel.

"Being the first hotel of maybe several in the future, [we're in] a unique position to foster the relationship [between] the town of Niverville and the people coming to visit," Rempel says. "This also then presents the opportunity for those visitors to make



Myron Dyck (Mayor of Niverville), Doyle Pivniuk (Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure), Trevor Rempel (Steel Creek Developers), Obby Khan (Minister of Sport, Culture, and Heritage), and Ron Schuler (MLA for Springfield-Ritchot). BRENDA SAWATZKY

a decision to come and live here."

So what's been the reason for the delay thus far? Rempel says they've been waiting on the availability of a new and innovative building technology. Like so many commodities during the pandemic years, there's been a series of supply-chain issues.

"From everything we have been hearing [about the product], it will be worth the wait," Rempel says confidently.

## HOTEL AMENITIES

Once complete, the hotel will feature 73 guest rooms, including family bunkbed and kitchenette suites.

"We continue to look for ways to innovate our spaces and have created a new offering that we will debut in the Niverville hotel," Rempel told *The Citizen*. "Instead of traditional adjoining rooms, we have a block of two split-doubles adjoining to a split-single in between them. All three can be used as independent rooms or adjoin a double and a single or all three rooms for a larger linked suite."

Rempel says this unique layout will provide a wider range of options to meet particular guest needs. Families or groups renting the full three-suite combo will have access to five queen-size beds in five distinct spaces with a gathering space in the middle.

For discriminating guests who

come for some peace and quiet, the hotel will feature an executive fourth floor with controlled access.

In addition to the various sleeping quarters, the hotel will feature a variety of meeting rooms and hospitality spaces to cater to wedding parties and corporate events.

"There might be a couple of lounge chairs together in a quiet corner so friends can have a conversation without always having to be in someone's room," Rempel adds. "[We're also planning] a gathering space on the third floor that will have an indoor meeting or small event area that opens up onto a rooftop open-air patio. This is a perfect spot for a small reception party, cocktails, or mixer."

Of course, young families have long been pining over the promise of the hotel's waterpark, which will include two large waterslides, multiple hot tubs, and, if things go as planned, a sauna for the adults.

Once complete, Rempel has confidence that the Niverville Blue Crescent Hotel will stand apart from all other hotels of its kind in Manitoba.

"The aesthetic design, both interior and exterior, the fit and finish and the amenities, are all at levels that rival the better hotels in the city," Rempel says. "Our split room design and two or more TVs in every room all provide great guest value."

## HOTEL MEETS FILM STUDIO

Rempel is only too cognizant that there's a perfect synergy between his hotel and another major business venture announced in Niverville on the same day: a major film studio set to be erected just one mile west of his property.

For the Blue Crescent ownership team, it foretells a very bright future.

"There will be a large need for local, modern, comfortable hotel accommodations, and having a consistent occupancy driver is key to most hotel businesses," says Rempel. "Since [ours] will be the first and only hotel for the moment, it will provide the conduit for people to experience the community of Niverville... We are lucky enough to facilitate the connection that the visitor will have to the town."

Until now, he adds, visitors to Niverville have needed to leave town to find accommodations, invariably taking their dining and shopping dollars out of town with them. Filling the gap with a hotel that keeps visitors local will help ensure that more tourist revenue is spread throughout the community.

"We hope to establish ongoing partnerships [with other local businesses] where we can work together to ensure the overall Niverville experience can blow visitors away," Rempel says.

The variety of restaurants, takeout

establishments, and cafes within walking distance will give hotel guests just one more reason to enjoy their experience in Niverville.

"A licensed restaurant and lounge just a short walk across the parking lot is very convenient," Rempel says. "We get important guest amenities right next door without having to develop it ourselves and Smitty's Restaurant will have a valuable source of customers right next door. It's a win/win."

All the new amenities being announced in Niverville this year are sure to fill another big gap in the community—the need for employment opportunities close to home.

Rempel says his hotel will be looking to Niverville to fill its staff. These might include professionals, students, parents looking for flexible work while their kids are in school, or anyone interested in a career in hospitality.

"Hotels are a great opportunity to gain valuable work and life experience, as well as a great employer that can provide multiple levels of advancement," says Rempel. "It also helps to build a resume that is transferable anywhere in the world. And of course it is a wonderful opportunity for someone who loves people to be an ambassador for their community and show visitors from around the world what small-town Canadian hospitality is all about."

The hotel industry also provides excellent opportunities for new immigrants looking to start a new life here.

"As long as there are employment options, new Canadians [will thrive here] because of the strong level of support they receive from the fantastic people that call Niverville their home and are proud of it," Rempel concludes.

As yet, a definitive start date for the hotel's construction hasn't been established.

However, Rempel seeks to assure people that once it's underway, the construction will go quickly. At this stage, there's still optimism for a 2023 grand opening.

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# Ritchot Readies Major Infrastructure Projects

**By Brenda Sawatzky**

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
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In light of the release of the province's 2023 budget, Ritchot's council has voted in favour of advancing to the first stage of three major projects in the RM.

Engineering firm WSP will be tendered in the coming weeks to develop pre-designs and final designs for rebuilding Île-des-Chênes's Main Street, mechanizing the Randolph well site, and upgrading the municipality's water treatment plant.

### IDC MAIN STREET REVITALIZATION

At council's March 7 public meeting, Mayor Chris Ewen advised that residents shouldn't get their hopes up for a quick fix to IDC's Main Street woes just yet. The design phase is merely the first step in readying the project for such a time as the province decides to act.

Public works manager Mike Dumaine says that the RM has been working with the province to secure funding for the project for some time.

"There was some funding available to do kind of just a mill and fill," Dumaine says. "But we want to reconstruct the entire Main Street, as it hasn't been done for the last 40 to 50 years."

The push is to get the province to provide funding for a major overhaul to the pavement in order to bring it back up to provincially regulated standards. In its current state,



Île-des-Chênes's Main Street.

DUSTIN KRAHN

Dumaine says, it falls well below those standards.

At the point when restoration is complete, he adds, the RM will apply to the province for municipal jurisdiction over Main Street going forward.

Dumaine is hopeful that the project will be recognized within Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure's latest multi-year infrastructure investment strategy.

### RANDOLPH WELL MECHANIZATION

Another project hopefully underway soon is the mechanization of two wells in the Randolph area which service Ritchot residents.

Working collaboratively with Friesen Drillers and Landmark Planning and Design Inc., Dumaine says that an application has been submitted to the province which would give Ritchot license to add mechanized pumps to a system which currently operates strictly by natural artesian flow.

"We're hoping to get a little bit of additional water from that site to a maximum of 25 litres per second," Dumaine says. "[This would give us] the consistent flow that we

need for our water treatment process."

Dumaine says that the flow from this site has proven insufficient in past years, especially during summer dry spells. Adding pumps would bring the Randolph wells to much the same flow capacity as the RM's third and final well located near Highway 305.

### WATER TREATMENT PLANT UPGRADES

Naturally, improving the well flow leads to needed improvements at the water treatment plant where the entirety of the RM's water is processed.

"Once we get the go-ahead about the Randolph well site, which is our number one project," he says, "we can upgrade our water treatment plant and add about three manganese greensand pressure filters so we can maximize our treatment process to approximately 55 to 60 litres per second."

Like the IDC Main Street project, Dumaine is hopeful that the province's Water Services Board will look favourably on these important infrastructure projects in the coming months.

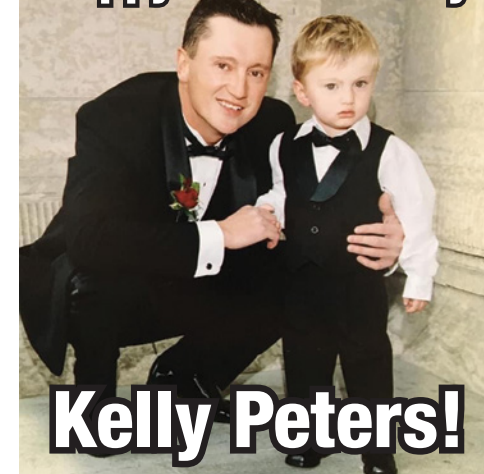


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**Happy 50th Birthday**



**Kelly Peters!**



# Ritchot Seeks Stakeholder Feedback on IDC Land Acquisition

By Brenda Sawatzky

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Residents of Île-des-Chênes were invited to an open house on March 20 at the TC Energy Centre, hosted by Ritchot's council and Scatliff, Miller and Murray (SMM), engineers in urban and landscape design.

The goal of the meeting was to present the potential for a boundary shift for Île-des-Chênes that, if approved, would virtually double the size of the community.

The proposal comes as a result of collaborations between the RMs of Ritchot and Tache. Up for consideration is a section of nearly 1,200 acres of land bordering Île-des-Chênes's east side and currently under Tache's jurisdiction.

"We're projecting to accommodate more than 25 years of future growth for Île-des-Chênes," says Tom Janzen of SMM. "We've done an early study to look at different growth scenarios and [they will continue to] be refined as the process goes forward."

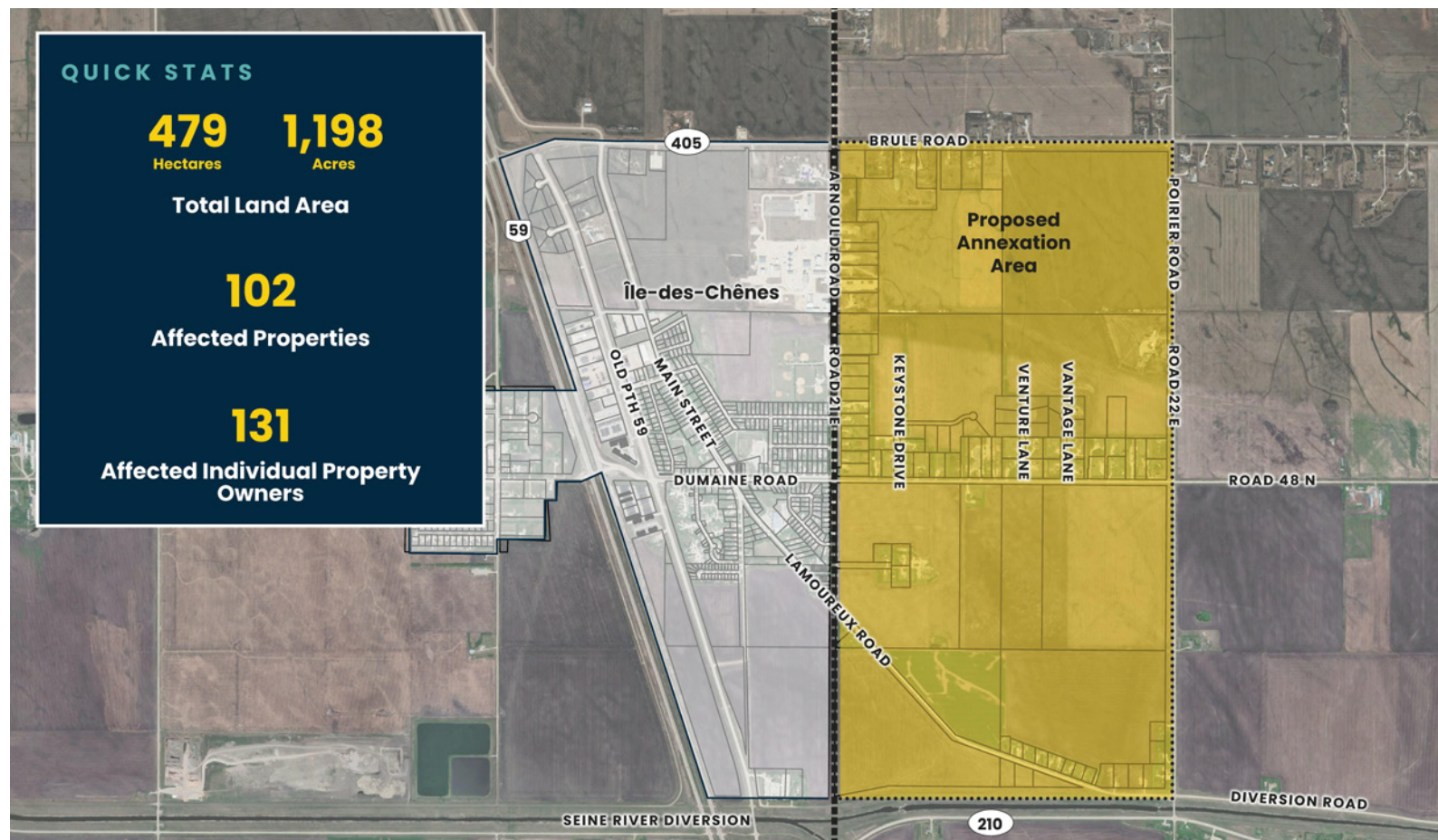
Janzen says this process first began in 2016 when the RM of Tache created a development plan that considered the possibility of a future land transfer to its neighbour.

In 2020, both RM councils invited SMM to perform a feasibility study on the process.

Monday's meeting was the first public engagement to take place on the topic. In these initial stages, invitees were restricted to immediate stakeholders, which included Île-des-Chênes residents and 131 Tache property owners within the affected area.

Based on SMM's study, the impact on these Tache property owners would be primarily positive.

Due to the difference in Ritchot's taxation mill rate, these residents could expect to pay a lower amount



The RMs of Ritchot and Tache are in talks to follow through on a large land annexation to the east of Île-des-Chênes.

of tax overall.

For example, a Tache resident with a property assessed at \$200,000 could expect to save almost \$244 in annual property taxes under Ritchot jurisdiction.

Likewise, owners of farmland in the area could anticipate a reduction in taxes of \$6.60 per hectare.

In terms of services, Tache residents would likely see enhancements to their current garbage and recycling services. Ritchot charges an annual fee of \$160 for this service.

As well, these property owners would have the opportunity to hook

up to Ritchot's sewer and water services down the road.

As for fire, police, and road maintenance services, nothing would change.

In the end, it's an apparent win for residents of Île-des-Chênes too, as the annexation would provide space for ongoing residential and commercial growth well into the future.

Janzen says that one of the biggest concerns for most affected residents is the question of how fast the change could happen.

"I think some people are concerned that development is

imminent," says Janzen. "We've heard that from a few folks and we're trying to assure them that this is the first in a very long process."

Both councils will take feedback from Monday's session to consider where to go from here. Should they decide to proceed, they will need to make a joint request for annexation to the Manitoba Municipal Board (MMB).

Greater public engagement would follow and the feedback gleaned from those meetings would be collected and submitted to the MMB. Should the MMB determine

that there is sufficient dissent, a public meeting may be warranted.

In the end, though, Janzen says these neighbouring communities already function, to a large degree, as one unified community.

"Because of the proximity of the lands, there is a natural affinity and some of the [Tache] folks that I've talked to have kind of confirmed that," Janzen says. "They already feel like they're part of Île-des-Chênes. They come here to shop, they come to the arena, so they already identify with this town."

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# Super Citizen: Joelle Sylvestre, Dedicated Volunteer

By Jennifer Lavin

✉ jlav@nivervillecitizen.com

*In this series, The Citizen profiles locals who strive to make our little corner of Manitoba a better place. Each month, we feature a person, family, or organization that helps brighten the world in some way. If you have someone in mind for a future month, please nominate them: jlav@nivervillecitizen.com.*

This month, we shine a light on Joelle Sylvestre of St. Adolphe for her tireless efforts in service of her hometown.

Sylvestre grew up in St. Adolphe, then moved to Winnipeg for a few years. After she and her husband had their sons, they decided it was time to return to country living.

"We hadn't even moved into our house and I was asked to help out on a committee," Sylvestre says. "I agreed and am still a member at large on that committee!"

Over the last 12 years, Sylvestre has volunteered countless hours for many different organizations, including the St. Adolphe Carnival, St. Adolphe Green Space, and the Hawkey Moms team.

Michelle McEwan, Director of the Ritchot Library, says that Sylvestre has also been on the library board for many years and has been a stellar member of the community.

"Sylvestre would do anything to help a friend as well," McEwan says.

The St. Adolphe Child Care Centre has benefited greatly from Sylvestre's help too. Lana



Joelle Sylvestre with her husband Darcy, sons Easton and Zandy, and dog Rocky.

LEE PHOTOGRAPHY

Redmond, the centre's director, can't say enough about Sylvestre and the amazing work she does for the town.

"Joelle sat on the board of directors for our childcare centre for a number of years," says Redmond. "In 2018-19, Joelle was one of the key players in raising money to expand the centre. And this was no small feat, as it took many hours of donated personal time and a lot of hands-on dedication with organizing and running fundraisers."

Redmond says that Sylvestre was also a great emotional support person for her and her staff.

"Joelle is always willing to give a helping hand and she always has a big smile to go with it. She is not only generous with her time with supporting and advocating for the community and the people who live in it, but she is kind, caring, and sincere."

Sylvestre's friend and neighbour, Trina Raine,

concurr.

"Joelle has long been someone you can count on in the community," says Raine. "She can be counted on to help out wherever help is needed. That old saying, 'If you want something done, ask a busy person,' describes Jo perfectly."

Darren Skelton, president of the St. Adolphe Minor Hockey Association (SAMHA), is also happy to sing Sylvestre's praises.

"Joelle has been involved with SAMHA as the registrar for five years now," Skelton says. "She is a dedicated member of the executive and puts countless hours into ensuring that St. Adolphe families can register for our programs with ease."

Sylvestre was heavily involved in the planning and execution of the U13 A1 hockey provincials, held in St. Adolphe this past month.

"Joelle is always willing to help in any way possible for

the betterment of the program and the community," Skelton adds.

For her part, Sylvestre is convinced that St. Adolphe is simply the best home she could imagine for herself and her family.

"It's such a great community where everyone works together," Sylvestre enthuses. "Whether it be to fundraise for a new daycare, fundraise for a new playground at the school, plan a Hockey Manitoba provincials—in less than a month!—we all come together and get it done. We truly live by [the idea that] it takes a community to raise a child."

Sylvestre was nominated by a past Super Citizen, Kori Plesiuk. Plesiuk wonders if it's because Sylvestre has called St. Adolphe her home for most of her life that she treats everyone there like family.

"Whether it's a senior citizen in need, someone who needs a hand with literally anything, or a child at the arena that needs a quarter for a gumball, Joelle is there," says Plesiuk. "Our community would just not be the same without her and we are so grateful to have her!"

Upon pondering everything Sylvestre has done for the community of St. Adolphe, Skelton says, "I guess the final thought would be that every community would be lucky to have someone like Joelle who volunteers their time and spends hours bettering the community, and asking nothing in return."

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MARCH 30 @ 7:30 P.M.  
APRIL 2 @ 7:30 P.M.\*  
\*IF REQUIRED



Josh Paulhus has been named MVP for the Nighthawks' first season.

JUSTIN BRAUN

# Nighthawks Hand Out Inaugural Team Awards

By Ty Dilello

tdilello@nivervillecitizen.com

Prior to this year's regular season finale on home ice, the Niverville Nighthawks handed out some hardware, presenting their first crop of team awards for the inaugural 2022-23 campaign.

It goes without saying that all the award winners are very deserving. You could also debate all the winners, which shows how strong the team's depth has been this season.

The Nighthawks' Most Valuable Player (MVP) Award went to Josh Paulhus, who led the team with 61 points in 56 games.

"The Nighthawks went as John Paulhus went this year," says Nighthawks assistant general manager

Mike McAulay. "That was a unanimous vote this year. Paulhus was our engine and driver. He's been everything that we thought we were getting when we acquired him and more. Just a terrific human being that had a fantastic season, so we're thrilled with him and what he's brought to this team."

Both the Rookie Team and Outstanding First Year Performer Awards went to defenceman Carson Reed, who was exceptional on the team's blueline with 26 points in 50 games.

"Reed's such a complete defenceman that defends well, skates well, drives play, etc.," says McAulay. "At no point this year did he look like a first-year player. He was also named to the MJHL's All-Rookie Team. So his efforts were

noticed league-wide for sure."

The Nighthawks' captain and leader, Brett Tataryn, earned the Humanitarian Award, for not only his on-ice play but his work in the community. Tataryn scored 35 points in 47 games during the regular season.

"Brett was just so deserving of that award," McAulay says. "A great leader, great human, and fantastic hockey player too. So to balance that skill and leadership and what he brings off the ice is so valuable, and we couldn't have picked a better captain to lead us night in and night out."

Braden Panzer earned the Forward of the Year honour for his fantastic season, scoring 41 points in 47 games. He had a strong season, despite joining the team a little

late. He actually started the year playing for the Minot Minotauros of the NAHL before being dealt to Niverville.

"Panzer has been really good for us. We knew of him before he went to Minot, so to make that deal with Minot to bring him here was huge. We knew we were getting a high-compete and highly skilled player, as he's on pucks like no other and makes plays. Panzer is tenacious and competes so hard, and he's been really good for us."

Rounding out the award winners were Fran Giesbrescht, who took home Most Dedicated Volunteer, and Evan Bortis, who was named Defencemen of the Year. Lorette's Merik Boles was the Fan Favourite, while Carter Spirig won the Coaches' Award.

STANDINGS \*\* AS OF MARCH 29\*\*



  
DAUPHIN  
KINGS

VS

  
SWAN VALLEY  
STAMPEDERS

STAMPEDERS LEAD SERIES 2-1

  
VIRIDEN  
OIL CAPITALS

VS

  
OCN  
BLIZZARD

BLIZZARD LEAD SERIES 2-1

  
NIVERVILLE  
NIGHTHAWKS

VS

  
PORTAGE  
TERRIERS

TERRIERS LEAD SERIES 2-1

  
WINKLER  
FLYERS

VS

  
STEINBACH  
PISTONS

PISTONS LEAD SERIES 2-1

PLAYOFFS POINTS LEADERS									
GOALIE	TEAM	GP	G	A	PTS				
1	Collin Jennings	SVS	3	3	4	7			
2	Ryan Botterill	POR	3	2	5	7			
3	Riley Zimmerman	OCN	3	2	5	7			
4	Justin Keck	SVS	3	4	2	6			
5	Austin Peters	POR	3	1	5	6			
6	Alex Bernauer	OCN	3	4	1	5			
7	Mike Stubbs	POR	3	4	1	5			
8	Colten Miller	VIR	3	3	2	5			
9	Josh Paulhus	NIV	3	3	2	5			
10	Jakob Jones	SVS	3	1	4	5			
11	Braden Panzer	NIV	3	1	4	5			
12	Mike Svenson	WVK	3	1	4	5			
13	Evan Bortis	NIV	3	0	5	5			
14	Nolan Chastko	VIR	3	3	1	4			
15	Gavin Gunderson	NIV	3	3	1	4			
16	Hayden Lacquette	POR	3	3	1	4			
17	Mathew Gough	DAU	3	2	2	4			
18	Travis Hensrud	STN	3	2	2	4			
19	Trey Sauder	SVS	3	2	2	4			
20	Ty Paisley	STN	3	1	3	4			

PLAYOFFS GOALIE LEADERS									
GOALIE	TEAM	GP	GA	SV%	GAA				
1	Dominik Wasik	STN	3	8	0.830	2.63			
2	Chase Hamm	OCN	3	9	0.791	3.05			
3	Malachi Klassen	WVK	3	10	0.737	3.35			
4	Eric Reid	VIR	3	10	0.722	3.36			
5	Bailey Monteith	POR	3	11	0.711	3.47			
6	Kobe Grant	SVS	3	11	0.761	3.67			
7	Cole Sheffield	DAU	3	10	0.767	3.75			
8	Chris Fines	NIV	3	14	0.731	4.40			





# Nighthawks Earn Playoff Berth

By Ty Dilello

tdilello@nivervillecitizen.com

The Niverville Nighthawks closed out their regular season in mid-March—and made some sweet team history in the process by earning their way to the MJHL playoffs in their very first campaign.

After a frustrating February, which saw the team drop a series of close contests, the Nighthawks were back to form this month.

“It was important to us when this thing started a year and a half ago that we wanted to bring a competitive team to Niverville,” says Nighthawks assistant general manager Mike McAulay. “We just didn’t want to come in and limp around the league... being a year-one playoff team was always the goal.”

Head coach Kelvin Cech and his staff were especially happy for the 20-year-olds on the team who would get the chance to conclude their junior hockey careers in the playoffs as opposed to the regular season.

They were also ecstatic that their fans in Niverville and the surrounding area would get to experience MJHL playoff hockey for the very first time.

## MARCH 1 (NEEPAWA TITANS, HOME)

The first contest of March couldn’t have gotten off to a worse start, as Neepawa scored three times in the first period, twice on the power play and once while shorthanded.

Niverville was able to turn it around in the second period, with goals from Brett Tataryn and Gavin Gunderson.

Just when the Nighthawks were looking like they were about to tie the game, Neepawa scored on a long-range shot which seemed to deflate the home team a bit.

“We’re a resilient team and have come back from being down lots over the season,” said head coach Kelvin Cech. “It’s just hard to do. It says a lot about the character of our group, but we need to also find that resiliency when the score is 0-0.”

Neepawa scored again early in the third period to put the game out of reach. Braden Panzer was able to score twice in the game’s dying minutes, but it was too little too late.

The final score was 6-4, although



CRYSTAL STOTT

it could have been worse.

“It’s tough to start a game like that, as they scored a couple on the power play early, and it’s hard to chase a game like that,” said Cech. “Neepawa came in desperate and played well, and our game was not good enough. They’re very strong in the middle of the ice and defend well. We had a tough time generating offence, but we still scored four goals. Neepawa had a game plan and stuck with it and ended up with the two points.”

## MARCH 3 (DAUPHIN KINGS, AWAY)

The Nighthawks picked up a massive 3-2 shootout win against the Dauphin Kings to improve their playoff odds.

Dauphin scored just two minutes into the game to take the early lead, but the Nighthawks tied the game late in the first period with Brendan Bottem’s twentieth counter of the year.

The Kings got the only goal in the second period, but early in the third period it was the Nighthawks who came storming back with a goal from

Josh Paulhus to even the game and send it into overtime.

The five-minute overtime solved nothing, pushing the game into a shootout. In the three-round shootout, Paulhus scored the lone goal to give the Nighthawks the victory.

“It was a big win against a very good hockey club,” said Cech. “I thought we had a slow start early in the game but picked it up as the game went on. Josh Paulhus had a big goal to tie it up early in the third period, and we were able to win it in the shootout, so this one feels awesome for the guys. Dane Couture was also really solid in net, making a ton of key saves. He really helped us win this one.”

The Nighthawks had mainly played at home for the last stretch of games, so Cech was quick to point out that going out on the road might have given his team a boost.

“It’s a little bit of a different feel going on the road, getting away from all of the distractions from being at home and just focusing on the hockey,” said Cech. “We came up here

to Dauphin tonight to do a job and get two points, which we did. So it makes for a very happy bus ride home to Niverville.”

## MARCH 5 (DAUPHIN KINGS, HOME)

The Nighthawks struggled out of the gates against the Kings, who got some revenge by downing Niverville by a score of 7-4.

Merik Boles opened the scoring for the Nighthawks early in the first period. However, the Kings replied with four unanswered goals later in the period to take a 4-1 lead.

The Nighthawks were able to muster a bit of a comeback in the second period with two goals from Paulhus and one from Panzer.

Unfortunately, the Kings found the back of the net two more times in the third period.

“Dauphin was just more relentless than us today,” said Bottem. “They were winning more puck races than us and were playing with more pace than us. The positives we can take are we

were very resilient and almost made a comeback, but a big deficit like we had today was just too much.”

Even with the loss, the Nighthawks had pulled out wins in three of their last five games, officially putting their February losing skid behind them.

“It’s been great to get back in the win column lately, for sure,” said Bottem. “For a little bit there, we were losing a lot of close games, but to have won some games lately, it has been huge for us.”

## MARCH 10 (OCN BLIZZARD, AWAY)

It was a tough night for the Nighthawks when they took the seven-hour road trip to Opaskwayak Cree Nation (The Pas). The Nighthawks fell behind early and couldn’t recover.

OCN scored a minute into the game and again later in the period. After going up 3-0 midway through the second period, the Nighthawks got one back when Hayden Wheddon popped home his tenth goal of the season to cut the deficit.

But there would be no comeback in the final frame as the Blizzard pulled away with a pair of goals to dispatch the Nighthawks.

“We had a bad start with an early penalty that was pretty preventable,” said Cech. “It’s a tough way to start in a difficult building, and then we got behind early, and we’re chasing for most of the game. And then we just had a real hard time getting to the middle of the ice and moving the puck efficiently up the ice to get it to spots to create offence in their zone. So they did a great job of closing down the middle and were really stingy.”

The Gordon Lathlin Memorial Centre, where the OCN Blizzard plays, has a reputation throughout the league as being a particularly tough building to play in with its passionate fanbase.

However, Cech and his club enjoyed the challenge of playing in that building.

“It was exciting playing in their rink as the hometown faithful there smells playoffs,” said Cech. “They have a very strong team this year, so the fans were boisterous and got on our guys a bit, which is fun. So it’s a fun atmosphere to be in if you’re the home team, just like our rink is fun and tough to play in back in Niverville.”



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## MARCH 11 (SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDE, AWAY)

It was another challenging night for the Nighthawks on the road versus the Swan Valley Stampeders. From the Nighthawks' point of view, there wasn't much to say about the game, unfortunately. Swan Valley scored only 12 seconds into the contest and didn't look back from there.

It was 3-0 in the first period until Brett Tataryn was able to get one back for Niverville.

Swan Valley was relentless for most of the game and scored three more times throughout the contest to pull out the lopsided victory.

"It was the worst possible start we could have had, and there are some hard lessons in there early," said Cech. "It takes a bit to come back from those, but we have to keep going."

Despite the second straight tough loss on the road, Cech did take note of some positives.

Cech says that the team talks a lot about building their chances and bolstering their game shift by shift.

"Especially in the second period today, we did that," he says. "We were chasing the whole game, and you just have to try and focus on your next shift. And for that second period, we were able to roll all of our lines, and we hope the score takes care of itself. It didn't work out tonight, but other nights it might, and that's the mindset we need to have."

## MARCH 15 (PORTAGE TERRIERS, AWAY)

After one of their most disappointing performances, the Nighthawks bounced back with possibly their biggest win of the season by dispatching the league-leading Portage Terriers 3-2 on the road.

With this epic victory, the Nighthawks officially clinched the fourth and final playoff spot in the MJHL's East Division.

Niverville had a solid start for the first time in a couple of games, as they got on the board late in the first period with a goal from Tataryn.

Portage then scored twice in the second period to take back the lead, but the Nighthawks didn't falter. Ty Kennett scored the tying goal late in the period.

The third period was scoreless, which sent the game to overtime.

Three-on-three overtime also solved nothing, and so the game headed to a shootout. Panzer scored the game-winning goal.

Chris Fines turned in his finest

performance of the season, making 38 saves in the Nighthawks' net for the win.

"It was a good hockey game with chances back and forth," said Cech. "We scored a cool short-handed goal, which is something we've been trying to do for a while now. It was cool for Chris Fines to be a big part of a win against his former team, as he was just excellent. So it was a fun game and a cool result in the end to beat Portage."

"This game was definitely one of my best this year," said Fines. "It felt really good to beat those guys, especially having a bunch of buddies on that team. I feel confident in my game right now. Especially if the guys play as they did in front of me tonight. We have the mentality that we can beat anyone."

Cech was thrilled that they finally managed to secure the playoff spot they had been eyeing all year long.

"I'm thrilled that we are able to go to the playoffs in our first season," said Cech. "And even further, knowing how much it means to our president, governor, and father figure Clarence Braun. He was pretty emotional when we talked to him after we clinched. For him to be working on this for so long and to hit this milestone, it's amazing, as he's a representative of the community for me personally. So I know how much it means to our town. It's about Niverville. We're excited and proud of our team, and we'll see what happens next week in the playoffs."

## MARCH 17 (WINNIPEG BLUES, HOME)

The Nighthawks continued to trend in the right direction with a 5-1 win over the Winnipeg Blues at the CRRC. Niverville had an excellent game for the most part, cruising to victory.

Paulhus led the way with two goals in the first period. Isaac Rentmeester also scored in the second period to give the club a 3-1 lead. The Nighthawks pulled away in the last period with goals from Bryce Warkentine and Bottem.

"We knew that Winnipeg would come out hard, as they've given us tough games all year," said Cech. "So I thought the guys were mature, maybe a little bit sloppy at times. I thought Chris Fines was excellent when we needed him to be, and it was a good character win. We just keep going in the right direction."

Every team in the league wants to peak for the start of the playoffs, and Cech felt that the Nighthawks were

on that path to playing at an elite level come the postseason.

"We feel close to where we want to be. Our game has been trending in the right direction for a while now. Even last week, when we had that tough road trip up north, there were times when we played really well and it didn't go our way. To peak at the right time, we just have to keep focusing on whatever comes tomorrow and trying to get better tomorrow."

## MARCH 19 (WINKLER FLYERS, HOME)

It was a game that didn't mean anything to either team, but it needed to be played. In the final match of the regular season, the Nighthawks lost 6-4 to the Winkler Flyers in front of a packed home crowd.

Winkler jumped out to a 2-0 lead early in the game, but the Nighthawks fought back with late first period goals from Warkentine and Tataryn, both of which came in quick succession.

Niverville again trailed by two goals as the Flyers scored twice in the second period.

In the final frame, the Nighthawks recovered from a two-goal deficit for the second time with tallies from Kayden Skulmoski and Ben Whitford.

However, there would be no happy ending as the Flyers pulled away once again with two more goals to win 6-4.

"It was sloppy tonight from both sides as we both had some players sitting out to rest up for the playoffs," said Cech. "But it's always a meaningful game for the guys that are playing, and I thought our guys were pretty casual in the second period. We played better in the third period and gave them a run for their money, but it just wasn't enough."

Cech was pleased that his club was able to come back from two-goal deficits twice in a game, even though the game was little more than a postseason warmup.

"It's nice to see that we're able to come back and string together some goals in games like these," he said. "It's a positive and definitely something for us to build on going forward."

## MARCH 24, GAME #1 (PORTAGE TERRIERS, AWAY)

The Portage Terriers are the top team in the MJHL for a reason. They boast a high-flying offence that has been able to outscore everyone they've encountered.

That said, the Nighthawks came into this series with the distinction of having prevailed over the Terriers

twice this year while on the road. That is no small feat. Niverville previously took it to them 6-2 on October 19, and in the last week of the regular season Niverville proved that the first win was no fluke.

But on this first game of the series, despite giving it everything they had, the Nighthawks fell short—barely. It took double overtime to decide a winner.

Paulhus opened the scoring for the Nighthawks early in the first period. Portage replied twice late in the period and then scored again early in the second period to take a 3-1 lead.

Shortly afterwards, the game took a very unfortunate turn as the Terriers' Gavin Klaassen was checked hard into the boards by Warkentine. There was a lengthy delay as Klaassen received medical attention on the ice for 20 minutes and both teams left the playing surface to head to the dressing room.

"We're hoping Gavin Klaassen can make a full recovery," said Cech. "You never want to see anyone get hurt, so we heard he's moving around and feeling okay, and that he escaped serious damage, so that's the most important thing."

When the game resumed, Paulhus scored his second goal of the game to cut it to 3-2.

Portage scored midway through the final frame to extend their lead to 4-2. However, the Nighthawks proved how resilient they are by rallying late and scoring twice in the game's final five minutes with goals from Gundersen and Panzer to send it to overtime.

The first overtime period solved nothing as the two teams traded chances.

Portage came out rushing to start double overtime, and after a goal line scramble, the Nighthawks goaltender Chris Fines lost his stick. A few moments later, Portage's Mike Stubbs scored while Fines was missing his stick to win 5-4.

"It was quite a battle with a lot of drama," said Cech. "It's a game that could have gone either way, and it went their way tonight. Our team is never out of it. It doesn't matter what the score is, as we're comfortable that we can come back. It was a valiant effort, and even that first overtime, we were all over them and had a couple of chances, including a breakaway from Carson Reed that just missed."

Chris Fines was easily the player of the game in tonight's contest. Although the shot totals were not updated, it's likely that he stopped

more than 50 shots on the evening, with many of them being highlight reel saves.

"Fines was sensational and was the biggest reason we were in it tonight," said Cech. "We'll need him to continue playing like that to give us a chance going forward."

## MARCH 25, GAME #2 (PORTAGE TERRIERS, HOME)

The Nighthawks dropped their second straight game to Portage at the CRRC. The building was as packed and as loud as it had ever been, and it made for one of a heck of an environment for both teams to play in.

Niverville matched Portage stride for stride in the first period, keeping the score locked after 20 minutes. And then Kennett got the Nighthawks on the board early in the second period on the power play.

Play opened up midway through the second period as Portage was able to capitalize on some defensive breakdowns from Niverville. The Terriers scored twice in under a minute before Carter Spirig was able to get one back to tie the game at 2-2.

A late penalty in the second period would burn the Nighthawks as Portage was able to score on the ensuing power play to take a 3-2 lead heading into the third period.

The Nighthawks had some chances in the third period, but they couldn't find the back of the net. Portage scored twice in the later stages of the period to put the game out of reach.

"Little mistakes can really hurt you against a team like Portage. The game got away from us a bit, but we have to find a way to rally and get back to work," said Cech. "We were up in the shot total the whole game and were carrying the play for a good part of it. We know there are no moral victories in the playoffs, and we know that we're in a hole now, down 2-0 in the series, but we've been down before, and we know we just need to go out and win one game in Portage on Tuesday."

One of the biggest takeaways from the game had to be the incredible atmosphere shown by Niverville at the CRRC.

"It was awesome seeing everyone waving their towels and the community spirit," said Cech. "It was an amazing atmosphere. I just wish we could have given them a little bit more to cheer for, but we will be back here for game four, and we know it will be electric then as well."



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Dawna Anderson and Shereen Rashwan at Whitetail Meadow.

SHEREEN RASHWAN

# Spring Fundraiser Aims to Kick Cancer's Ass

By Sara Beth Dacombe

sdacombe@nivervillecitizen.com

A party with a cause is coming to Whitetail Meadow this spring.

On Friday, April 21, Niverville resident Shereen Rashwan, known to many as the former owner of Bistro 290, will host a CancerCare Manitoba fundraiser in order to raise money for cancer prevention, leading-edge research, clinical trials, and enhanced patient care in Manitoba.

Rashwan invites everyone to come out to enjoy amazing live music from Last Call and The Whiskey Saints. Guests will eat, dance, and honour those whose lives have been touched by cancer.

The organizers of the event have given the fundraiser a compelling and evocative name: Kicking Cancer's Ass. The reason? They want to create a candid and fun atmosphere.

There will be silent auction prizes from more than 20 local businesses, including Wiens

Furniture, YGP Niverville (Bigway), Chicken Chef, Wm. Dyck & Sons, Ben Sawatzky Electric, Dairy Queen, and Negash Coffee, among many others.

In 2021, Rashwan decided to close her previous venture, Bistro 290, so that she could re-enter the technology industry.

"I miss [the Bistro], I do," says Rashwan. "I had so many great customers and loved being a front-facing business serving the community. But after a year and a half of running a restaurant during a pandemic, jumping back into the tech industry has been a welcome change."

This past December, Rashwan received a stage-two cervical cancer diagnosis. Over the last four months, she has completed radiation and chemotherapy treatments. She is happy to report that the treatments, overall, have gone well and her body will continue to heal in the coming months.

With the help of friends and family, she has chronicled her

cancer journey on social media and had a lot of fun with it.

Amidst all the positive feedback, the group realized they could use the platform to participate in the Canadian Cancer Society's Dry February initiative.

"We were having fun and coordinating TikTok dances and ended up raising almost \$6,000 in February. It was incredible," says Rashwan. "It was just great to feel like we were doing something productive amongst such a turbulent time. My friends and family helped coordinate some of the dances and my partner wore funny leotards and it was really a community effort."

Now that her treatments are finished, Rashwan wants to thank her support system and also spin the momentum of her online fundraising efforts into a larger in-person event.

"[Cancer] impacts people in different ways, but it touches all people. I wanted to put on an event that was fun and encouraging and

showing solidarity that, yes, we together can help to kick cancer's ass."

Besides promoting the April 21 fundraiser, Rashwan wants to remind people to pay attention to their health and make appointments to get checked for cancer.

"I think with COVID, it became a big problem with people not getting proper tests," she says. "Mammograms, pap tests, regular physicals... these were all things that really go get put on hold when life gets busy. And what happens is if you put off these tests, you're going to get an influx of people who now will present with health issues, and it will be farther along than it may have been. So go prioritize your health. Check in with yourself and get tested."

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.facebook.com/

events/202297169073674

www.universe.com/events/kicking-cancers-fundraiser-tickets-NOCJ6M

## IN BRIEF

### Niverville to Get New Pedestrian Bridge

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Pedestrian and bike travel in Niverville between Drovers Run and Main Street will soon become much easier.

A decorative metal bridge will soon be installed immediately to the west of the railway tracks.

The work will get going this summer, starting with the closure of Station Road to vehicular traffic.

Station Road is located at the far east end of Drovers Run.

Eric King, Niverville's CAO, says that ditches will be installed here to improve drainage from town.

This is where a footbridge will be needed so as not to impede pedestrian and bike travel between east and west Niverville.

"Right now, you're walking through a swale there," says Mayor Myron Dyck. "During times of spring rain and stuff like that, [it becomes unnavigable]. So we need do something."

The metal bridge will span 40 feet in length and, at 10 feet wide, will provide space for foot travel in both directions.

Fusion Industries, a metal fabrication company based out of Niverville, has been commissioned to design and build the structure at a cost of \$35,000.

Town council hopes to see the community logo embedded on either side of the bridge.

King says that the town will be working together with the area developer on timing and he anticipates the project may only see full completion in 2024.

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## IN BRIEF

## Province Introduces Hearing Aid Grant

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

On March 2, the Stefanson government announced the introduction of a \$12.6 million hearing aid grant for lower income seniors.

Approximately 25 percent of seniors experience hearing loss which could be improved through the use of hearing aids.

"Our government recognizes hearing loss as a priority concern," says Seniors and Long-term Care Minister Scott Johnston.

Grants of up to \$2,000 will be provided to qualifying applicants later this spring.

To qualify, recipients must be 65 years of age or older, have a family income of less than \$80,000, and have a prescription for hearing aids from an audiologist or otolaryngologist.

Other new funding, too, is on its way. Additional resources will be available to support seniors who wish to remain in their homes and communities longer.

This comes in response to the Provincial Seniors Strategy, a guide for the government to address challenges faced by older adults, their families, and caregivers.

An additional \$12.6 million is designated for the Self and Family Managed Care (SFMC) program this year, with a further \$1.3 million next year.

The SFMC program provides funding to senior clients looking for more diverse options in their home care services.

According to the Southern Health-Santé Sud (SHSS) website, clients or designated family members can act on their own to administer, recruit, retain, coordinate, and supervise non-professional staff persons.

# A Look at Niverville's Budget 2023

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Following approval of the first reading of the 2023 budget plan, Niverville's town council is inviting all residents to join them at the CRRC on March 21 at 7:00 p.m. Here, they'll have an opportunity to ask questions, provide feedback, or object to any component in the town's newest financial plan.

Planning for this year's budget began last December. According to The Municipal Act, the final adoption of a municipal financial plan must take place on or before May 15. As well, any changes to the community's tax rate must be established by this date.

According to the new budget, it is anticipated that nearly \$14 million will be needed to cover the year's municipal expenditures. To meet that goal, council has opted for a four percent property tax increase this year.

This will mean an additional \$78 in taxes on a home with an assessed value of \$319,600.

This increase is thanks in part to the rise in inflationary costs, as well as mandatory minimum wage rate hikes established in October 2022



Niverville council meets for a public meeting in March.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

and which affected the salaries of much of the town staff.

Earlier this year, Mayor Myron Dyck told *The Citizen* that council was trying their best to keep the tax hike reasonable.

"Just to do what we did last year would require a seven percent increase," said Dyck.

On February 24, it was announced that the province is adding a major top-up to municipal funding. Niverville CAO Eric King says that the extra funding will help get the town's rainy-day reserves in a better position.

Also on the rise this year is the annual waste collection levy, which will go from \$125 to \$140 per household. This is the first such increase since 2020 and comes as a result of the rising costs of service providers.

Decreases to public expenses are down in only two Town of Niverville departments this year: General Government Services and Public Health and Welfare.

Even so, council is confident that they'll be able to add more resources to the permitting department at the town office and increase their investment in information technology and cybersecurity.

The budget for protective services is up by 12.5 percent this year. As a result, Niverville will soon have its own RCMP detachment with four police members and one administrator.

Environmental Development is also up by about \$130,000 as council undertakes to rewrite the town's development plan and zoning bylaws this year.

Some of the capital project spending in store for 2023 includes a new tandem truck for the operations department and the addition of a new water tanker to the fire department.

In terms of street upgrades, council hopes to add two crosswalks along Fifth Avenue South.

Accessibility improvements will take place at the Centennial Arena and other improvements will continue at four parks in the community, including the off-leash dog park.

At the same time, a reserve fund is being developed for a number of large capital projects that are just around the corner.

Of imminent importance is the need to expand or find new space for the Operations and Fire Departments as they rapidly outgrow their existing quarters.

Funds will also soon be required for the upcoming wastewater treatment facility project.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more details on the 2023 budget, visit the Town of Niverville's website at [www.wheretheyoubelong.ca/2023/02/24/2023-financial-plan](http://www.wheretheyoubelong.ca/2023/02/24/2023-financial-plan)

# Niverville Council Announces One Year Delay on Fourth Avenue Repairs

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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As is the case with most budgets, things don't always go according to plan. And that will be the case this year in terms of council's plan for a major infrastructure overhaul along Fourth Avenue South.

The town's 2023 budget initially had \$1 million allocated toward this project, which would have included major street and sidewalk repairs, sewer renewal, and drainage improvements on the

stretch of road between the First and Third Street intersections.

Following last year's budget planning session in December, CAO Eric King described this section of street as one of the worst roads in the community, with a long history of inadequate drainage.

According to Mayor Myron Dyck, the project recently went to tender. The lowest bid came in at \$1.4 million from a company with subpar experience. The next lowest bid was \$1.9 million and all the others came in at over \$2 million.

"What we're understanding from residential builders and heavy industrial equipment operators is that there's a lot of leftover work from last year and they're busy," says Dyck. "So there's a lot of 'we don't want it' quotes right now."

After some deliberation, council has agreed to keep the \$1 million designated for this project in savings for now and delay the project until next year. The plan at this stage is to proceed with another tendering process in the fall and then base their 2024 budget plan

on the quotes they receive.

"To those residents [affected], we are asking for patience," Dyck says. "It is a priority, but it [will create] cost overruns and we don't have the extra money to spend right now."

Major infrastructure changes that Niverville residents can count on this year are new traffic lights scheduled to be installed at Mulberry and Highway 311 this spring or summer. Around the same time, two new crosswalks will be installed along Fifth Avenue South.

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# Commentary

## The Impacts of Shunning and Social Violence

By Daniel Dacombe

On March 12, 2023, people all over the world watched as the film *Women Talking* won the Academy Award for best screenplay.

Based on a book written by Steinbach's own Miriam Toews, *Women Talking* retells the true story of a Mennonite colony in Bolivia where a series of assaults occurred against women. The women have a choice: forgive the offenders and remain in their community, or depart their homes and lose everything.

For many people in the film industry, not to mention those watching the awards show at home, this movie may have been their first exposure to Mennonite culture—and certainly not one which puts its best foot forward.

Local response to Toews's work has been mixed, and not for the first time. Her previous award-winning book, *A Complicated Kindness*, provided another glimpse into the Steinbach region, detailing many aspects of Mennonite culture which have traditionally been considered private.

One of those cultural features which drew the most attention and controversy was the practice of shunning, which is a method of removing someone from a community by engaging in extreme ostracization.

When an individual is being shunned by a church or community, their family may be expected to kick them out of the house. They may be ignored by family and friends.

People may refuse to speak to them, do business with them, or even provide them with food or shelter. It creates a stark break between the person being shunned and their community.

However, shunning is not a uniquely Mennonite activity. It isn't even specifically religious activity, although some religions do have it coded into their list of rules and behaviour.

Many branches of Christianity practice shunning via the act of excommunication, publicly announcing that an individual is being removed from the church community. Jehovah's Witnesses have a similar practice (disfellowshipping), as does Orthodox Judaism (charem).

Lest we think of this activity as unique to religious communities, the evidence shows that shunning can occur everywhere—in the workplace, within families, and even within political parties.

The reasons for a shunning are complex.

Many people from the LGBTQ+ community have been shunned by their religious communities. Others can be shunned by family and friends for experiencing mental illness or poverty, or even for being diagnosed with a disease or other physical ailment. An employee may be shunned by their coworkers if they inform Human Resources of the harassment they have experienced in the workplace.

There is such a diverse



DEPOSITPHOTOS

array of reasons for shunning that it may be difficult to find any similarity between them.

To best understand why we shun others, though, we can look to our primate cousins and the field of evolutionary psychology.

Shunning isn't just a human practice. Other social animals—in other words, animals that live and thrive in social groups—have complex hierarchies, expectations, and rules for behaviour.

Indeed, the famous primatologist and conservationist Dr. Jane Goodall found that chimpanzees would ostracize or reject members of their communities who had behaved in ways not beneficial to the group, or even when they had suffered a severe illness.

I've written before in this space about how social animals create ingroups and outgroups, and how protecting the stability of the ingroup is a powerful motivator for all of its members.

The underlying purpose of shunning and social rejection, both for us and for our primate cousins, is to protect the health and safety of the group in two ways: first, to attempt to correct the behaviour of the offending group member, and second, to attempt to prevent a negative physical or social influence from affecting the group.

Now that we know why humans engage in shunning and ostracizing others from their groups, some might be tempted to ask, "So what? Why should it matter? After all, it could be worse. Surely shunning isn't as bad as actual physical violence."

In 2003, psychologists from America and Australia collaborated in a broad study examining the brains of individuals who were being shunned from a group activity.

Using a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scan, they determined that when people are excluded or ostracized from

a group, they experience real pain.

And not just emotional pain. In fact, the same areas of the brain that alert us to physical pain become active during times of loss or ostracization.

Our brains experience these pains equally.

This and other research tells us that, on a psychological and neurological level, social violence and physical violence are very similar.

It's no wonder that shunning has been linked to the development of long-term, complex post-traumatic stress disorder.

Individuals who have been ostracized from their communities report feelings of shame and worthlessness and having trouble trusting others.

These feelings can result in anxiety, depression, other mental illnesses, or even physical ailments such as ulcers or issues with the immune system.

The practice of shunning has fallen out of favour in recent years, though it is still practiced not only in more traditional cultures but in some modern religious groups. These groups may still excommunicate their members when they go against the accepted taboos, such as coming out as gay or leaving an abusive spouse.

Thankfully, many things have changed in our culture that make it easier for the shunned to find community elsewhere and move on from their rejection.

If you have been shunned,

rejected, or ostracized by your community or family, there are steps you can take to recover.

Humans need each other, especially after losing community. Thanks to the advent of the internet, finding community with like-minded people who share your experiences has never been easier.

For those who have been shunned from a religious community and left it behind, countless support groups specific to religious groups exist. They are only a Google search away.

For people who have experienced rejection from family, or in the workplace, navigating those waters may be more complex. In these cases, a myriad of therapists both religious and secular are available to help work through the issues that arise.

Most importantly, though, are the people with whom you live in proximity—like, for example, here in Niverville and the surrounding area.

While Niverville, like many towns, is a growing community, it retains its small-town roots and maintains many places and practices its citizens can share—the community centre, coffee shops, clubs, even the community Facebook group.

If you are leaving behind a community, a family, or a religious group that has ostracized you, try reaching out to your neighbours, community members, and local artists. You might find that you are right where you belong.

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# Sports & Recreation

# Rage Ringette Looks Back at Stellar Season

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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Red River Rage Ringette is celebrating a strong year and saying goodbye to a beloved longtime coach.

Based out of Ste. Agathe, the program has rostered players from throughout southeastern Manitoba, including Niverville, Ste. Agathe, St. Adolphe, and Île-des-Chênes.

The program offered seven teams this year, which translates into 102 players from 80 families as well as 38 coaches and managers, 16 board members, and countless volunteers.

Eric Austman, the club's president, says that while the board always focuses on making the sport enjoyable for all, the group has enjoyed tremendous success this season.

"All six of our competitive teams from U10 to U19 earned medals this year, and overall, across league play, provincials, and other tournaments, our club earned nine gold, six silver, and three bronze medals," says Austman.

The provincial tournament took place from March 14–19 and half of Rage's competing teams finished in the top three. The U19B team won gold, the U16B team took home silver, and U14B captured bronze.

This is the second year that the U19 team won a provincial gold medal, making for a particularly remarkable ending to the girls' ringette experiences as many age out of the program.

"The bittersweet part of [the last playoff game] is that out of the 15 rostered players, seven are aging out," says team manager Julie-Ann Lodge. "All of them scored! That is totally awesome for these girls. We couldn't have written a more perfect ending really."

## CONSISTENT PROGRAM

While many rural ringette programs have lost support in terms of overall participation, and some have even closed, the Rage program keeps going strong. Austman says that social



The U19 team took home provincial gold medals this season.

▀ RAGE RINGETTE

interaction and family support play a large part in players returning year to year.

"Our players have a strong social connection to each other, and that peer group helps a lot," says Austman. "About 25 percent of our families have multiple girls registered, and that older-sibling introduction to the sport probably helps. Most often, we find that once the girls play ringette with us, they tend to continue for many years."

Austman admits that the rural club might not have quite as many local extracurricular activities as some of the larger hubs, but he hints that this is changing as volunteer support continues to strengthen.

"We have a tremendous group of parents and volunteers that support the club with countless hours of dedication to make it possible," says Austman.

He adds that while the sport of ringette is the glue, the real focus is helping the girls to learn and grow in teamwork, respect, accountability, physical activity, and appreciation of sport.

As for Lodge, she has two roles.

Yes, she's the team manager, but she's also the parent of one of the players.

"My husband and I have been part of two ringette clubs with our daughter," Lodge says. "And by far, Rage has been the most fun. Very little drama, with great families who support their girls and staff. But most of all, it's the lifelong friendships that are made that truly amplify this great sport."

She is aware that this program is one of very few clubs that has managed to maintain continual growth.

"We have seen many, many clubs dissolve for lack of players, but for some reason Rage has been able to maintain its growth," she says. "When players from other clubs join us due to their catchment club not having enough numbers to host a team, those girls very rarely want to leave Rage."

The players, staff, and volunteers all work hard to run the club smoothly. Lodge says that as team manager she organizes events, coordinates travel and accommodations, and has gameday responsibilities, like completing game sheets and reporting results to supporting players and families.

It's a lot of work.

"But when you do it for such an awesome group of coaches, players, and parents, it makes it so worthwhile," says Lodge. "Each team needs one coach, one assistant coach, a third bench staff, as well as a team manager. So it takes a village to run a program like this and everyone works hard for this sport, this community."

## BELOVED COACH

The organizers are thankful for the service of a particularly beloved coach, Mel Hall, who is retiring this year after a 15-year coaching career.

Hall started coaching in 2008 when she was asked to help coach her daughter's team because one of the coaches was expecting a baby and was unable to be on the ice. She had experience from playing ringette as a youth at both a community club and competitive level, but coaching was an entirely new thing.

"Seeing the players develop and sharing in the team excitement when they score their first goal or make a good play brought me so much happiness," says Hall. "Each season

would bring returning and new players and offer the opportunity to set new goals and to share new accomplishments. I have been so fortunate to have coached with some amazing people over the last 15 years who have taught me so much and brought so much to the team and made it fun for everyone."

Despite some the challenge of training new players, Hall feels fortunate to finish her time at Rage Ringette on such a highlight of a year.

"Our challenge at the beginning of this year was that we had a lot of players who had never played together on the same team before," Hall says. "We had really good attendance at practice this year and it showed as they started to gel together as a team. Even more than that, I would say that the players themselves really encouraged each other on and off the ice, and this brought the team together."

Her team, the U19B squad, ended the season finishing second in the Winnipeg Ringette League playoffs, which qualified them for provincials. She felt they were an underdog in their successful quest to bring home the gold.

"There are so many documented benefits for girls who are involved in sports, and offering one like ringette provides them with another option to play a sport," says Hall, who would encourage anyone interested in the sport to connect with Rage. "It is a long winter in Manitoba and a winter sport like ringette can really break up the season. The best part about ringette is the speed of the game and the focus on teamplay. There's lots of opportunities to play at all age and skill levels to suit what you want to do. If you are thinking about volunteering I can tell you that from my experience, I have gotten back as much as I've given volunteering as a coach and it is well worth the time!"

Although the season is wrapped up, Rage is planning to host a Come Try Ringette event in September. Find out more at [www.redriver-rageringette.ca](http://www.redriver-rageringette.ca) or follow them on social media.



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Kinder Camp – Princess & Heroes Week	July 17-21
Nature Explorers Camp	July 17-21, Ages 6-9 & Ages 9-13
Kinder Camp – Dance & Music Week	July 24-28
Sports Camp	July 24-28, Ages 6-9
Volleyball Camp	July 24-28, Ages 9-13
Kinder Camp – Princess & Heroes Week	July 31-August 4
Culinary Camp	July 31-August 4, Ages 7-13
Kinder Camp – Sports Week	August 8-11
Imaginarium Camp	August 8-11, Ages 6-9
Basketball Camp	August 8-11, Ages 9-13
Kinder Camp – Animal Adventures Week	August 14-18
Girls Adventure Camp	August 14-18, Ages 6-9 & Ages 9-13
Boys Adventure Camp	August 14-18, Ages 6-9 & Ages 9-13
Kinder Camp – Cozy Crafts Week	August 21-25
Science & Space Camp	August 21-25, Ages 6-9 & Ages 9-13
Kinder Camp – Camping & Nature Week	August 28-31
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# Prov Men's Volleyball Win MCAC Championship

**By Jennifer Lavin**

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The men's volleyball team from Providence University College captured this year's MCAC championship on Sunday, February 26, defeating first the Assiniboine Community College Cougars and then the Canadian Mennonite University Blazers.

First-year player Libero Hector Ortiz earned the championship MVP honour.

Head coach Cody Quiring says that his team is something special.

"We spent hours and hours leading up to this conference championship honing in on some fine details of our system and spent endless hours in the video room game planning," says Quiring. "Credit to each of the 14 strong. They bought into the game plan and executed at an elite level. I am beyond proud to call this group MCAC champions."

The MCAC named Noah Boschman as the men's volleyball player of the year.

Following the end of the season, the team were eligible to attend the Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA) national tournament. The Pilots entered as the eighth seed, facing off against the reigning champions, the Camosun Chargers. The Pilots were able to take the first set 25–22 before falling to the Chargers three sets to one.

Their next game was a battle against the Briercrest



The men's volleyball team are MCAC champions.

SCOTT MASTERSON

Clippers in the placement match. The Clippers were dominant from start to finish, taking down the Pilots in straight sets.

In their final match of the tournament, the Pilots met the Collège Sainte-Anne Les Dragons. Providence was in excellent form and able to take the opening set 25–17. Les Dragons responded quickly, though, and won the next three sets.

"The Pilots may not have won a match, but they were able to win two sets," says Joel Corusey, coordinator for the university's sports programs. "That's more than any Manitoba Colleges Athletic Conference (MCAC) team has done this far."

The Pilots didn't come home from nationals empty-handed. The team was presented with the CCAA Exemplary Leadership Award.

"The Exemplary Leadership Award is given to an individual or a team at the CCAA national championships who demonstrates leadership behaviours that set an example for others to follow," says the CCAA website. "Recipients must have respect for the rules and spirit of the rules of the sport in pursuit of excellence, respect the officials and show acceptance of their decisions, respect the opponent, exhibit sportsmanlike behaviours and maintain dignity under all circumstances."

Coursey says that the men's team has represented Providence well and made the school proud.

Two members of the team received extra recognition.

Right side Avery Bergmann and setter Austin Anderson both played in all 11 sets of the tournament and were named as MCAC Athletes of the Week for the week ending March 12.

During their three games at nationals, Bergmann had 33 kills with a .350 percent hitting efficiency, 18 digs, one service ace, and 34 points. He was also named PUC's Player of the Game in their matchup with Briercrest College.

"Avery played at another level as we entered our playoffs this season," says Quiring. "His heart, work ethic, and developed skill have all been tremendous and he has become a force for the program. I am thrilled with his work ethic to get better each day on and off the court."

Anderson made 103 assists for 9.36 assists per set, 23 digs, six service aces, and two blocks in the 11 sets.

"Austin was dynamite all nationals long," Quiring adds. "He was a steady threat blocking, set the ball super consistently, and made strong decisions when he had the ball in his hands. Austin played some marvellous defence in position one all tournament and extended so many rallies at critical points in our matches. He played phenomenal."

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The Eastman South U13AA hockey team.

PAMELA MAY

# Eastman South Team Boasts Remarkable Unbeaten Record

By Jennifer Lavin

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The Eastman South U13AA hockey team is having a banner year. In fact, the team hasn't lost a single game this season.

Two teams from the Eastman Region participate in the Winnipeg U13AA league.

Athletes in the region are sorted into one of two teams, Eastman South or Eastman North, based on a boundary line created by the Trans Canada Highway.

Jeremy Gingras, head coach of the Eastman South team, explains how the teams were chosen.

"Tryouts were held in St. Adolphe during September of 2022," he says. "Once tryouts were finished, the coaches picked their teams from a ranking system done by Max Analytics. [These analytics] helped throughout the tryout process, so everyone got a fair tryout and a proper report card."

Once Gingras had his team

members chosen, he made a phone call to each of the nine forwards, six defencemen, and two goalies.

"I knew this season was going to be something special with the excitement [I heard] from the players during the calls," he says.

The Eastman South team held a remarkable 39-0 record as of this writing. They were poised to enter the playoffs in a strong position.

That unbeaten record consisted of two exhibition game wins, nine wins over two tournaments, and a 28-0 record in regular season play.

Equally impressive was the young men's goal tally—203 goals for and only 39 against.

In early March, the athletes entered the quarterfinals and held onto their undefeated record.

Gingras believes that a winning streak like this has never before been accomplished in the Winnipeg U13AA league.

"According to my team rankings, the Eastman U13AA South

is ranked as one of the top teams in all of Western Canada," Gingras says. "I can honestly say I have never been a part of a team like this one where the team gelled right from the first practice to the end of the regular season. The success of the team is all on the players. We as coaches can prepare the players for practices and games, but it's the players that have to show up and put in the work."

Throughout the season, the group has participated in some team-building events to further strengthen their bond.

They've done some off-ice training with Sweaty Training & Conditioning in Steinbach and some mindset and meditation work with an organization called The Power of Stillness.

The boys also attended a Winnipeg Ice game, watched an Eastman U15AAA game, and took a few bus trips to Brandon.

They were honoured to participate in the months devoted to Hockey Fights Cancer and Buddy

Check for Jesse. The team was also selected to be given orange jerseys to wear in a game to represent the Every Child Matters movement.

Gingras says, "Being a non-parent coach, watching the growth and maturity of these players on and off the ice is more important than their win-loss record... but having a 39-0 record is quite the accomplishment for this group."

He also commends the parents, attributing part of the boys' success to the sacrifices and commitments their parents have made along the way.

Finally, Gingras also credits his assistant coaches Travis Mason and Hayden Fast, team manager Pamela May, treasurer Jackie Verrier, and safety Jason Mateychuk.

The U13AA team motto, he says, is "Hard work beats skill when skill doesn't work hard."

As the team headed into the semifinals, it appeared that their motto would likely help to see them through all the way to the championship.

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When we hear about Jesus, often the thing that is emphasized is his suffering. After all, he suffered in our place, and that is the greatest gift he gave us.

We can often miss the joy of Jesus.

One of the things Jesus was condemned for was having too much fun. "The son of man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'" Jesus loved to sit and eat and drink and take joy in those who followed him, including, maybe even especially, those who had left a sinful life. He delighted in those who looked to him for salvation.

Particularly in the gospel, according to Luke, Jesus is depicted enjoying food and drink with his disciples. He tells his disciples, "Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them?"

Sometimes Christians can get a name for being dour and killjoys. Sometimes that's fair, and sometimes, it's not. Ultimately though, Christians should be full of joy for the salvation they have been given. We are invited into the presence of God, who invites us to a festival of his love. In the Old Testament, God said this about the gifts that Israel was to bring to God, "then you shall turn it into money for whatever you desire – oxen or sheep or wine or strong drink, whatever your heart craves. And you shall eat there before the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household." If you are willing to come to Jesus and be dressed in robes of righteousness, you, too, are invited to this feast.

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# Arts & Entertainment

## Niverville Native Wins Juno

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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Congratulations are in order for singer-songwriter Jordan St. Cyr, who won the Juno Award for Best Contemporary Christian/Gospel Album of the Year for his self-titled album.

This year's Juno Awards, which celebrate Canada's top singers, musicians, songwriters, and producers, were held in Edmonton.

Though St. Cyr wasn't able to attend in person due to his touring schedule in the United States, he reports being thrilled with the honour.

### A STRESSFUL YEAR

After growing up and then making a home in Niverville with his wife Heather and their four kids, St. Cyr and his family moved to Nashville in 2022. Despite the challenges of making cross-border moving arrangements during the pandemic, St. Cyr knew it was the best choice to support his growing career.

"It was still the middle of the pandemic, but I felt the call to keep writing songs," says St. Cyr. "Then one of my songs caught on in U.S. radio in 2020 and that got us started thinking about a move."

It was 2022 when they finally had everything in place and the family found themselves settled in a small town northeast of Nashville called Murphysboro.

"We ended up in a great neighbourhood, but it probably took about five or six months to feel like we had done a good thing," said St. Cyr.

Just when the family had fallen into a good routine, their youngest daughter, Emery, suffered a major health setback. The then-three-year-old suffers from a rare neurological disease called Sturge Weber Syndrome.

"I was on the road when Heather called me and told me about Emery's seizures," he says. "So we got a crash course in the U.S. healthcare system, which lasted from March to April 2022 until Emery was stable. It really was a challenging time."

St. Cyr spent as much time with his family as he could during this period, but it took a toll on the family to have him gone so often.

"For me as a father who leaves the house for his work, and I'm gone four to five days at a time, well, it was



Jordan St. Cyr, originally from Niverville, is growing his music career by leaps and bounds south of the border.

© C/O JORDAN ST. CYR

Heather who got us through," says St. Cyr. "She believes in me and this call to put the message out, even sometimes more than I believe, so it comes down to family. If family doesn't work, nothing else does."

St. Cyr's mother stayed with them for a time and the family quickly bonded with their new friends and neighbours.

"Our new neighbours became our new best friends, our lifeline. We had a 911 call and they helped our family. It brought us together," says St. Cyr. "Now, just over a year in, we feel settled."

### A SUCCESSFUL YEAR

Professionally, St. Cyr is busier than ever. The full-length Juno-winning album was released in the spring of 2022 under the Seattle-based label BEC Recordings. From the album, the standout songs "Fires" and "Weary Traveler" reached number five and number one on radio charts respectively. Both songs offer hope that even in dark moments God gives people strength.

It was "Fires" that hit airwaves first and played on major networks and stations for nearly 18 months, reaching millions of American listeners.

But "Weary Traveler," which followed, could end up surpassing it.

St. Cyr became a two-time GMA Dove Awards nominee in August 2022, being recognized for Best New

Artist and for Short-Form Video of the Year. He then took home six GMA Canada Covenant Awards wins, adding to the five he already had, including Artist of the Year, Album and Male Vocalist of the Year, Best Pop Song, Live Music Artist, and AC Artist of the Year.

But it's last month's Juno win that St. Cyr described as a Canadian kid's dream come true.

When he received news of the nomination, he quickly realized that he wouldn't be able to attend due to his commitment to open for Colton Dixon, a fellow Christian artist who placed seventh on *American Idol* in 2012.

"I had so many messages from colleagues and peers in the industry saying I had to go to the Junos to see all the people there, all the huge Canadian artists like Justin Bieber and Avril Lavigne," he says. "But I had already committed to the shows I was doing on this tour, so logistically it didn't make sense. When I told the award committee that I wasn't able to make it, I worried that it would affect them, that I wouldn't maybe win the award if I wasn't able to attend, but my integrity told me to honour my commitment to the tour and the people relying on me."

When St. Cyr won the award in absentia, he was surprised.

"I remember signing autographs and shaking hands after a show and

I picked up my phone and it had like 30 messages on it and I thought, 'Oh, I think I won a Juno.'"

The win was also a full-circle moment for St. Cyr and his wife, whose first date was at a Juno Fest event in 2005 when the Canadian show was being produced in Winnipeg.

### FAMILY INSPIRATION

St. Cyr credits his wife and family for inspiring his songwriting. He wrote "Weary Traveler" at the height of the pandemic, and it has resonated with a lot of people.

"Some of us had lost loved ones and we were starting to lose hope," he says. "We were losing our own lives as we'd known it because of this thing that was going around."

St. Cyr explains that he was on the road and Heather was at home with their four kids keeping their routine going when the song came to him.

"She was in my head and in my heart when I wrote the song. I wanted her to be encouraged and be able to carry on. The verse that inspired the song was the one where Jesus is saying, 'Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden and I will comfort you.' I realized it isn't a promise for just today; it's a promise for tomorrow."

Unsurprisingly, the artist says he drew from real-life challenges to find inspiration.

"I think, honestly, the majority of the songs on the album are inspired by what we've gone through with our little girl—the valley of that, and the challenges that we walk through, and how our faith has blossomed because of it," says St. Cyr. "We see a lot of the world, saying, 'Because we hurt, it means God doesn't exist.' But Heather and I see that God has proven his help and his presence over and over again."

Touring with Colton Dixon is the busiest schedule St. Cyr has ever had and he says the travel pressure is real, but the opportunity to bring music to so many people is rewarding.

"I say this every night when I chat with people after the show," he says. "It feels like I've won and my dreams have come true. Yes, there's pressure 'cuz you've got a team that works for you and you want to be a part of providing an income for them, but I think that's a good kind of pressure. When we do it for the right reasons and serve people well, then it's okay."

### A RETURN TO CANADA?

St. Cyr's gratitude extends to his many fans in the United States whose support has created the opportunity for him to make a living creating music full-time.

That said, it seems that he would also love to be able to be back home in Canada.

"I do hope the Juno win opens the door a little bit to be honest," he says. "If I were to dream again, it would definitely be to come home to Canada. I would do a full cross-country tour and pour back into the country that I'm from and encourage the country that has equipped me all the years before. It would be a huge bucket list to be able to do that."

While the prairie native hasn't lost any of the love he has for his home, one thing he is losing is his "prairie accent," which he humbly admits is slowly being replaced by a southern drawl.

"I think to some degree I've always had it," says St. Cyr with a laugh. "I've always been a lazy talker. I started doing shows in Niverville eight or nine years ago and some people told me even then I had a southern sound. It's okay. I'm not going to deny it."

St. Cyr's new single, "Rescue," is coming out on April 14. Find it on Apple Music and Spotify.



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# Niverville Recording Artist Releases New Single

By Sara Beth Dacombe

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Since her Manitoba Country Music Awards nomination for Cover Artist of the Year last fall, Niverville recording artist Catie St. Germain has been inspired to kick her original songwriting into high gear.

On March 24, she released a new single called “The Taxman.”

“I didn’t take home the [MCMA] award, but as much as I love the cover scene and being able to sing in general, it really inspired me to write some original songs,” St. Germain says. “Hopefully I’ll go back this fall nominated in one of the songwriting categories.”

And “The Taxman” may just help her do that.

St. Germain says the inspiration for the piece came from the everyday life she shares with her husband and their three boys.

“I wrote it in hopes that people can relate to it the way I have in my everyday life,” she says. “We grow up, we find a partner if we’re lucky, we have children, and life gets a little more complicated and at times mundane. We feel busy with kids schedules and sometimes forget to make the time for our spouses. Or, let’s face it, we’re too exhausted.”

The song is about love through all of life’s ups and downs and features whimsical lyrics that reminisce about simpler, maybe more exciting, times.

“I hope it inspires people to find the beauty in the mundane and that



Catie St. Germain of Niverville.

© C/O CATIE ST. GERMAIN

everything is just a season,” says St. Germain.

The musician is the granddaughter of Canadian Country Music Hall of Famer Ray St. Germain. She has travelled all across Canada singing to crowds and performs with Réal Comeault as a duo called Whiskey Saints. She is one of the most sought-after cover singers in Manitoba with a vast repertoire of rock, top 40, and country songs that span

six decades of music.

St. Germain is relatively new to Niverville, having taken up residence in 2017. To make the leap into recording her own music, she found the town and surrounding area to be filled with local talent ready to help make her vision a reality.

She recruited her longtime collaborator Réal Comeault (from Steinbach) as well as musicians Trevor Lux (from Niverville), Darcy

Wall (from Niverville), Daniel Friesen (from Blumenort), and Doug Duerksen (from Steinbach).

“And my friend and fellow Niverville artist JR Charron is the one who introduced me to the mixing and mastering producer Derek Benjamin,” she says. “It truly takes a village and I couldn’t have done this without them.”

As a seasoned singer, expanding her own repertoire of original

music was likely going to happen eventually. When performing, her connection with the audience is relaxed. And she’s always found that storytelling comes naturally to her.

For her first attempt at songwriting, St. Germain dug deep to make a personal connection to what is most important to her. She found that it required a lot of courage to present the final product to anyone—even her husband.

“The funny thing is, while I don’t always write songs that are super relatable to my personal life, this one had me crying like a baby on my deck while my husband thought I was a crazy person,” says St. Germain. “This was my first attempt at writing a song ever and I didn’t share it with anyone for months before I found some bravery.”

Despite bravely exploring new creative territory, the ambitious artist is not giving up on singing covers. She has plans to perform a set of both originals and covers at this summer’s festivals.

“I have some more songs ready to record, so we’ll be busy in the studio this spring and gearing up for an exceptional 90-minute set at Dauphin’s Countryfest,” says St. Germain. “It’ll be a jam-packed party set with covers and the originals mixed in.”

“The Taxman” is available now on all streaming platforms and St. Germain is now working alongside a company she hopes will help get the song heard on more radio stations across Canada.

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# New Musical Comedy Debuts at Providence

By Sara Beth Dacombe

sdacombe@nivervillecitizen.com

Looking Glass Productions, in association with Providence University College, debuted a side-splitting new production which ran from March 15-18.

*When You're a Star* is a new musical comedy written entirely by local theatre professionals Marc Moir and Laura Turner. The cast and crew included 12 current Providence students, five alumni, and a handful of professionals.

The play centres around the main character, Marion Fischer, who has dreamed of being at the helm of her church's Christmas pageant.

However, things quickly spin out of control when her stage-struck pastor invites a couple of Broadway heavyweights to turn Marion's dream of a simple pageant into a spectacular nativity extravaganza.

Moir and Turner describe the musical as a "laugh-a-minute satire" of the relationship between the American evangelicalism and the entertainment industry with catchy tunes and memorable performances.

One Winnipeg producer called the show a "magical ride that brought me sheer joy."

"Musical-wise, this is the biggest thing I've ever done," says Moir, who lives in Grunthal and teaches theatre at Providence.

An award-winning Canadian playwright and actor best known for his hit one-man play *Padre X*, Moir has more than 60 theatre and film credits and has appeared in theatres across Canada. His writing has been compared by critics to such theatre luminaries as Horton Foote and Ira Levin.

"It's been about 13 years since I've done a proper musical—*Fiddler on the Roof*, and it was the world premier in Low German—which was



The cast in rehearsals for the debut of *When You're a Star*.

PROVIDENCE

an experience, since I don't even speak that language," Moir says. "As a playwright, this is the first musical I've written."

Turner is an actress and singer/songwriter who is local to Steinbach. Her recent credits include turns as Regan/Edgar in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Dr. Stockman in Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*, and Mollie Ralston in Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*. Her film credits include work with Hallmark and playing noted author Madeleine L'engle in the film *The Science Fiction Makers*.

She soon plans to release her first album, a series of songs inspired by the works of Shakespeare.

"I've loved musicals since I was a kid and when the opportunity to create one came up, it was a no-brainer," says Turner. "Everything about the creation of *When You're a Star* has been an absolute joy, from writing original jokes and songs with one of my best friends, to watching such wonderful actors bring the show to

life. Truly a bucket list dream come true."

Moir and Turner were excited to workshop and premier the show at Providence and have plans to have it produced and performed professionally in the future.

Aside from its local appeal to those in the "Bible belt" of Manitoba, the two creators see the potential for attracting a wide audience with the play's subject matter that pokes light-hearted fun at religious organizations while also drawing attention to serious issues like the commercialism that plagues evangelicalism across North America.

"This show has something for every comedy palate," says Moir. "There's slapstick and dry wit. And it's got a fast-paced script that highlights the relationship between the evangelical church and the entertainment industry, where we see entertainers want to preach and churches want to entertain, which is kind of backwards. So we're

exploring, what is the function of entertainment and what is the function of the church, which is important? But it's all in good fun."

When Turner read Moir's script, she quickly realized that both its message and its humour had great potential to connect with audiences. The play only had one song at the time, so she used her musical skills to add a full complement of musical numbers with lyrics and orchestration.

"The majority of the script is Marc, and the majority of the music is me, but we've both had a hand in both," says Turner. "And you can tell in the script, it was written by locals for locals. There [are] jokes everyone who is from southeastern Manitoba [and beyond] will get. It's so communal."

Aside from the content of the play, it's also the community aspect of live theatre that the team has really enjoyed. Although it's the fourth show the duo has done with

Providence, *When You're a Star* is the first theatre production the school has presented post-COVID.

"Live theatre's been very slow to start up post-COVID, so as it starts to come back we want to welcome everyone into our space again," says Turner.

Catherine Rust-Akinbolaji, dean at the University College, says, "We couldn't be happier about hosting a theatre event again on our campus. We [were happy to have] friends and family to come out and enjoy the event."

With a cast of about 20 people, Moir says they worked hard to be respectful of each other's energy and taking each rehearsal as it comes.

Turner said it was the perfect play to entice people back to the theatre if they hadn't gone in a while.

"People are ready to laugh," she says. "This was a team effort and we have such wonderful actors who have contributed so much humour just on their own to the characters and interacting with the jokes to make them work to their advantage."

The live performance aspect is such an important part of theatre—so much so that Turner calls an audience the "final character in a show."

"That's how I perceive it through my years as a theatre person," she says. "You can come to the same show and it will never be the same because the audience changes every night. You can get going and write comedy, but then it gets in front of the audience and we realize, 'Oh, they're responding to this aspect, so we'll really play up that dynamic that night.' You see how unique the experience is."

Moir agrees. "The audience is the source of energy that changes the cast and you play off whatever vibe you're getting from the audience," he says. "It's live, so it's like a living organism and a relationship."

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