

The Citizen

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LOCAL NEWS

A Sign of the Times

■ A few weeks ago, the new McDonald's location in Niverville opened its doors for the first time. The 24-hour, two-lane drive-thru restaurant employs dozens of locals of all ages and is already proving to be a popular destination.

Details on Page 5

LOCAL NEWS

Torrential Storm Drenches Southeast

■ On September 11, more than 100 millimetres of rain fell over a few soaking-wet hours, resulting in localized flash flooding.

Details on Page 12

SPORTS & REC

Opa's Park Renewal

■ The ambitious grassroots efforts to renew Opa's Park in Niverville are nearing completion and the public is invited to a grand reopening on October 10.

Details on Page 20

ARTS & CULTURE

Ritchot Unveils New Art Installations

■ Art pieces are being revealed this fall at parks throughout Ritchot, including a new installation at Perron Park in St. Adolphe.

Details on Page 26



Canada Post Strikes—Again

» READ MORE ON PAGE 11

DEPOSITPHOTOS



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The

Citizen

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Chantel D'Andreamatteo, Stephanine Rozsa, Uzoma Asagwara, Nathan Dueck, Sheyna Andries, and Dana Human. TOWN OF NIVERVILLE

Manitoba Minister of Health Visits Niverville Clinic

By Brenda Sawatzky
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

At the end of summer, on Wednesday, August 27, administrators of Open Health Niverville entertained a visit by the province's Minister of Health, Uzoma Asagwara. They arrived with an entourage of representatives from Southern Health-Sante Sud (SHSS).

"We discussed the history of Open Health, how we got here, our mission statement, and vision for the future," says Nathan Dueck, councillor and president of Niverville Healthcare Services. "We talked about our catchment area and our ability to grow with our [current] expansion... I think they were very impressed with where we're at. I don't think they had conceptions of what Niverville was all about."

Realistically, Dueck says that Niverville will likely never be chosen as a location for a hospital. The town's

request of Asagwara and of SHSS, he says, was for better collaboration between provincial health bodies and Open Health.

Dueck's hope is that they'll be able to work together to find ways for Niverville to increase its primary healthcare services under their current hybrid model of community ownership. This, he says, will take some outside-the-box thinking.

Open Health administrators believe the community has the ability and ingenuity to reduce capacity on an overtaxed healthcare system, if allowed. But to do that, current legislation on rural clinics will need to be addressed.

Currently, the legislation is inhibitive, and some of it affects access to doctors. The extreme shortage of doctors, Dueck says, is not a Niverville-centric problem. It's province-wide.

"Part of the problem is that, as our population grows, our healthcare system has not," says Mayor

Myron Dyck. "Why we don't index healthcare workers to population [growth], I will never know, whether it's opening seats in our universities or bringing people into this country with specific skillsets."

Asagwara's visit took place as a direct result of Niverville council's sponsorship of this year's Minister's Dinner, providing municipal administrators one-on-one access to members of the provincial cabinet.

"I think one of the biggest wins out of that entire [meeting] is an acknowledgement, or at least a verbal understanding, that we're all in this together and that Niverville is willing to commit the time, effort, and resources to grow healthcare [in this region]," says Dueck.

In May 2024, an expansion of the clinic began which will add four exam rooms and a minor procedures room.

According to Dueck, that part of the clinic should be open in October, if all goes as planned.

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Ste. Agathe Celebrates Grand Opening and Naming of Boat Launch

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Residents of Ste. Agathe didn't let a little rainy weather put a damper on their spirits on Thursday, September 11.

Instead of meeting outdoors, as planned, they gathered at the community centre for an evening barbecue and the official grand opening of the town's boat launch and floating dock park.

Hosting the event were Ste. Agathe Community Development Inc. (CDI) directors Shaun Crew and Joel Gagnon. They were joined by a host of invited guests, including MLA Ron Schuler, Craig Tomlinson on behalf of MP Ted Falk, and Madeleine Arbez, executive director of the CDEM.

A highlight of the evening was the unveiling of the newly installed boat launch signage, dedicated to the late Jeannot Robert, a longtime Ste. Agathe resident and community champion, as well as CDI member and Ritchot councillor.

There to perform the unveiling were Robert's daughter Yvonne and sons Alain and Marco. Speaking on behalf of the Robert family was Jeannot's granddaughter, Rheanne.

"My grandfather loved this community deeply, cared for its people like family, and found joy in seeing it grow and flourish," Rheanne said. "[His] legacy is why four generations of his family proudly call this town home."

Crew also offered remarks.

"Tonight we gather as a community to officially open one of the only publicly accessible, safe boat launches between the U.S. border and the city of Winnipeg," Crew said.

The boat launch first became a community dream in 2003. Following the flood of 1997, however, the engineering stamps and feasibility



The Jeannot Robert boat launch is officially open.

■ BRENDA SAWATZKY

studies required by the province made this riverside project feel daunting.

The dream was resurrected in 2018 when a boat launch committee joined forces with the local CDI.

After much work, they were able to convince the province that it could be done without impacting the integrity of the riverbank too drastically.

The province granted permission to proceed in 2020.

Grants were obtained through a variety of federal and provincial government initiatives, Manitoba Hydro, the Red River Basin project, the RM of Ritchot, CDEM, and AMBM.

Crew says that the overall cost of the boat launch project came to just under \$700,000. For perspective, the original cost of Ste. Agathe's bridge in the 1960s came to around \$640,000.

Joel Gagnon and MLA Schuler made honourable mention of Crew's efforts regarding this project from the time it began right through to its completion.

Deputy Mayor Shane Pelletier also took the podium to bring words of congratulations on behalf of Ritchot's council.

Many years ago, Pelletier said, it was at this boat dock

location where he first learned to water ski.

"There's been a lot of passion from this town to make this happen," said Pelletier. "I've been a big believer in it from day one. The river that runs through our municipality has been a wasted resource for a long time and it's nice to use it again."

Having worked alongside Robert on council, Pelletier recalled his incredible dedication to the community of Ste. Agathe. He recognized even then that projects like the boat launch initiative are what help a community grow and give families a feeling of belonging.

Local resident Guy Gagnon closed the evening with a benediction on behalf of Abbé Gabriel Levesque, priest of the Ste. Agathe Parish.

"Help us to be thankful and respectful of this special meeting place in Ste. Agathe," Gagnon prayed. "May the Manitoba winter winds be fair, the currents of the Red River be gentle, and may your spiritual hand guide the boats and their passengers away from all danger and bring them back safely home. Amen."

Attendees were treated to burgers, hot dogs, and ice cream on behalf of the Ste. Agathe CDI.



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Sign of the Times: Golden Arches Light Up Niverville McDonald's

By Holly Dunphy

The golden arches have officially gone up in Niverville, and in many ways it's more than just a restaurant opening. The iconic sign marks a new chapter in a saga of rapid growth.

The 24-hour location, with a two-lane drive-thru, opened to its first customers at 5:00 a.m. on Friday, September 19. By midmorning, a steady stream of people was coming and going, grabbing hot coffees and breakfasts.

Visitors were quick to share their excitement about stepping inside the restaurant, meeting the friendly crew, and participating in the weeklong prize draws.

"I was curious to see how it looked inside, but I wasn't planning on going there this morning because I thought the lineups would be too long," said one early customer, Jennifer Ash. "When I drove by to check it out, I decided to stop by and go in. My first impression was that it was bright and clean. It was a little surreal to walk into a McDonald's without having to leave Niverville."

Ash, who admits she was initially unsure about the new restaurant, says she now sees it as a positive addition to town.

"I'm really excited that they are committed to hiring local teens. I think it's a great first-time job and I'm happy that my children will have the opportunity to apply there when they are a little older."

Along with burgers and fries, the restaurant serves up a predominantly local crew of more than 70.

"We were so excited when we heard that McDonald's had bought land here," says local resident Chelsea Brown. "We had no idea how quickly it would be built! Once we saw it start to take shape, it became part of our daily routine to see what had been added since the day before. The day the McDonald's sign went up, we all audibly squealed; it made it feel real at that point."

Brown has lived in Niverville for six years and enjoys the peacefulness of life outside the city. As a busy family, though, she appreciates quick and affordable dining options.

She also feels a lot of nostalgia for McDonald's.

"When I was little, I remember going on breakfast dates with my dad, or even just a quick stop for fries and a milkshake," she recalls. "I am very much looking forward to sharing those experiences with my kids."



The ribbon-cutting at this morning's grand opening of the Niverville McDonald's.

HOLLY DUNPHY

RIBBON-CUTTING

The official ribbon-cutting took place shortly after 10:00 a.m., with a crowd gathered outside the front doors.

Among the crowd was Mel Buhler, who once owned the land where the restaurant stands.

Having grown up in New Bothwell and attended high school in Niverville, Buhler retained ownership of the lot until handing over the keys in May 2025.

Buhler previously served as a member of the Niverville Chamber of Commerce and worked alongside town council on various development projects.

"A desire of my heart was to help in some way to bring this McDonald's to Niverville," he says. "I know beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but I do think the building has such a beautiful exterior. One of the first things my wife Kathy and I noticed as construction developed was how much has changed in that immediate area. It is a transformed corner and it's beautiful to see."

Buhler is reflective about the town's growth. Witnessing the ribbon-cutting was a full-circle moment, the closing of one chapter and the start of a new venture.

"Kathy and I would like to thank the entire McDonald's corporation that made this all possible and wish our community, and McDonald's, many wonderful years together."

Shortly after 10:00 a.m., owner Brett O'Meara was joined by his wife Jodie and their team members to address the crowd.

"What an incredible day for Niverville. It's been a long time coming," O'Meara said. "On behalf of myself and Jodie, our family, and our new extended family here in Niverville, we are just so blessed and excited to be joining this community. Thank you for coming today, and with that..."

O'Meara gestured to Mayor Myron Dyck, who was present to officially welcome the new restaurant, ceremonial scissors in hand.

"This is something I only had a small part in," said Dyck. "There are many people here who helped bring this to life. Feel free to put your hands on the scissors, everybody. Let's do this together. That's how we do things in this community; we do things together."

REFLECTIONS

O'Meara, who lives in Kenora with his family, owns several McDonald's

franchises, including locations in Sage Creek and Steinbach. The Niverville restaurant is his eighth franchise but the first he has built from the ground up.

"We love operating in smaller communities, so we are really excited to join the town of Niverville," O'Meara says. "We have some goals, as a brand and within my family: we strive to be a great neighbour, an incredible employer, and speak to the needs of the community. That is something that has to be seen and felt, not just heard."

He certainly understands the duality of the excitement in many residents as well as some natural hesitancy in others.

"For people who are used to their small-town feel, we want to respect that, and I think that the building itself has achieved that. It is a relaxed atmosphere with softer neutral spaces, and we aren't a huge restaurant. Forty-six seats here."

The opening marks a turning point for Niverville. McDonald's Canada performs extensive research before building in entirely new markets.

"There's always iconic moments in the growth of any township," O'Meara says. "When we get our first traffic

light, arena, golf course, and first McDonald's restaurant: Niverville has reached that point and that's really exciting... And then you look at the plans for the future here, plans that have been approved and waiting to build. I think sometimes an investment like McDonald's creates the impetus to get projects going quicker."

In July, McDonald's held a hiring fair at the CRRC. About 100 people attended the event, with about 60 of them being hired on the spot. In total, there are about six dozen part-time and full-time positions, and the employees range in age from high school students to retirees.

Over the past couple of months, the local crew was split into two groups and trained through two of O'Meara's other locations, Sage Creek and Steinbach.

"It was seamless. It was a challenge for the other restaurants as they took on additional staff while they trained. I am so proud of those teams, knowing that they did a great job training and taking on that staff. Most importantly, they made everyone feel comfortable."

O'Meara and his family say that they are actively looking for ways to give back to the communities that support them.

"What I love about being in small communities is that you are the brand," says O'Meara. "It's McDonald's, but it's also my family saying, 'We're representing the brand.' Everything is more organic. When I talk about needs of the community, we want to be the first stop for charitable events that are looking for donations, supporting local community events. I tell everybody: just come and ask. It doesn't hurt to ask the question, because there's always some way that we can help."

Two days ahead of the grand opening, the team held a soft opening event just for friends and family.

This gave the staff a first run at serving customers from their new home base.

Still, O'Meara asks for patience as the team settles into their roles.

"My ask: have some patience with us, and tell us what's on your mind if you're seeing something," he says. "This is almost an entirely new crew from your community and they're still learning. We love the gift of feedback. We'll make things right for you and I'm sure you'll enjoy the experience. Our measurement of success is how you view us."

Niverville's Business Park Sees Influx of New Industry

By Brenda Sawatzky
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

These days, it's pretty commonplace at Niverville's monthly council meetings to hear about new commercial and industrial endeavours.

The public meeting held on September 9 was no exception.

Council was pleased to approve Leon Desmarais's application for the future expansion of his business, Fusion Industries, onto ten empty acres in the business park.

Early planning stages suggest that an 11,000-square-foot building will eventually be constructed here to serve as a location for sandblasting, painting, and assembly of his metal fabrications.

Desmarais says that the expansion will create ten or more new jobs in the near future.

According to Mayor Myron Dyck, Desmarais's story is one that council loves to promote.

Getting his start at a local welding shop many years earlier, Desmarais branched out on his own to build a custom steel fabrication shop in Niverville.

Today, he is one of Niverville's largest employers and his business's products are shipped around the world.

According to Councillor Chris Wiebe, this kind of internal business growth demonstrates a community's vibrancy. Performance Installation, he says, is another Niverville success story that

started off small and has since expanded three times.

Two more manufacturing applications were approved on September 9.

H2 Blinds Ltd. was given the green light to open a manufacturing operation to produce blinds, cabinets, and countertops in the business park.

This will be the business's third location, with others in Winnipeg and Headingly. The Niverville location will create jobs for at least 20 labourers.

"The goal was to [build] a large facility," the H2 representative told council. "That's what we came here for. Niverville is affordable."

In recent years, he says that Winnipeg's costs have discouraged expansion and development of businesses such as his, especially when the company's mandate is to produce quality products that are affordable to consumers. Reducing the cost of overhead matters.

The representative discovered Niverville when his company was hired for local cabinet installations.

He's also built a working relationship with the owner of Lumbercart, a company that will be his neighbour in the Niverville Business Park.

The last manufacturer to gain council's approval is invested in metal siding and sheet metal fabrication. The representative making his case before council is affiliated with JAFRI Canada, which operates another location on Dugald Road.

"We need space," he told council. "Our goal is to make value products at lower prices. I hate price-gouging. And, also, outside of Winnipeg nobody has these services and people need it."

His goal, he says, is to sell his products for 50 percent less than any of his closest competitors.

To accommodate the potential residential growth that may result from these new jobs, council entertained one final application, from Hillside Legacy Development Corp., to construct two three-storey apartment buildings on Fairway Drive.

In total, 105 new rental units would be created, many of which would have access to underground parking. Plenty of outdoor parking would be available as well.

Hillside Legacy is the company behind the row housing constructed on the same street. The new apartment blocks would have similar exterior finishes for a matching aesthetic.

Most of the suites would be two- and three-bedroom units.

All of this new residential and commercial growth bodes well for Niverville, Mayor Dyck says.

Over the past decade, he adds, the community has gone from bedroom to destination community.

"What we've seen in communities surrounding Winnipeg is a challenge with labour force," Dyck says. "We've seen businesses that have had to leave and go back to the city

because they just simply couldn't get labour. Niverville is close enough. We think of it as a commuter town, [where] people leave in the morning and come back in the evening. But if you're ever on the highway, there's actually a cross-flow of traffic with a lot of people coming into town in the morning and leaving at night."

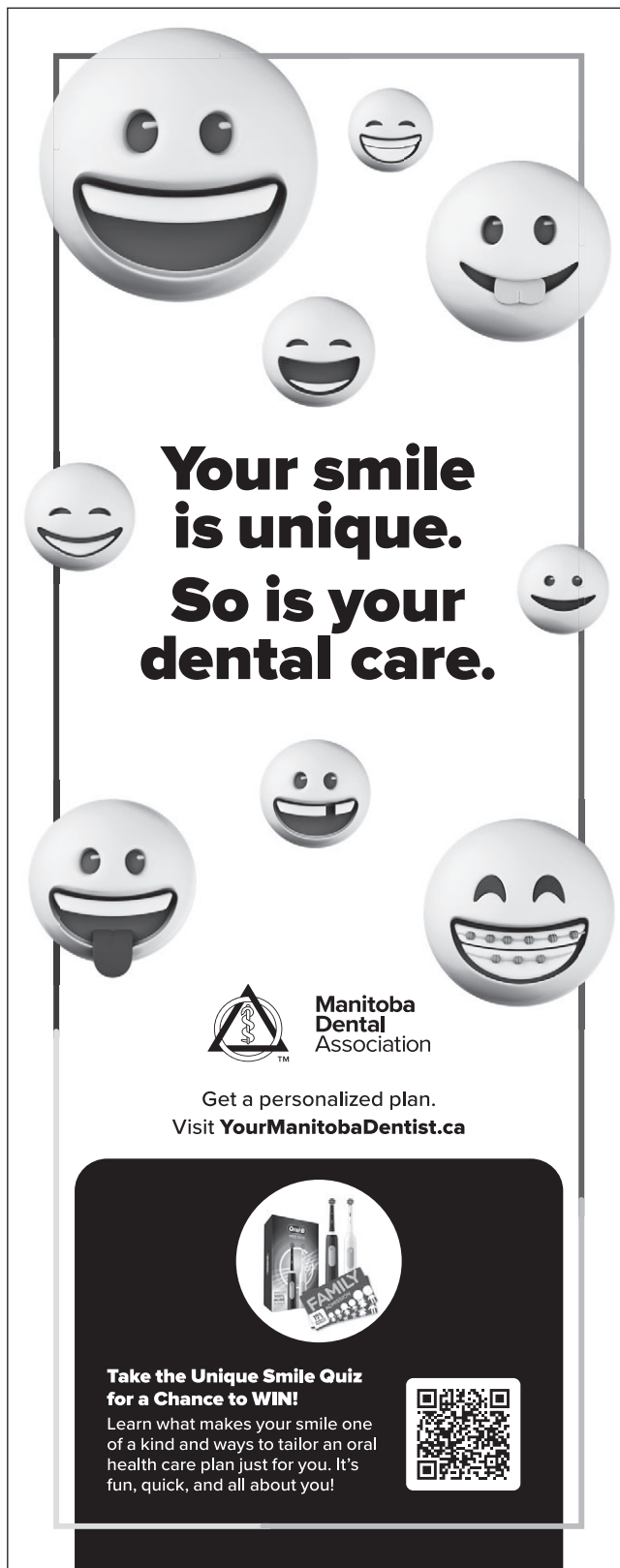
Dyck concluded the meeting with his bi-monthly mayor's report. He offered congratulations to Providence University and College on the celebration of its one hundredth anniversary.

As well, he issued a reminder to residents and students to practice an extra level of vigilance around the various crosswalks around town.

His message follows on the heels of two near-misses that were reported on social media the day before, one involving a child.

"I just ask all of us to please slow down," Dyck said, "especially during the busiest times before and after school. I want to say a thank you today [to the RCMP]. As I came to this council meeting, I saw no less than three RCMP members on Main Street, making sure that this community was safe. I also want to give a special thank you to Scott Stroh, who was there on a volunteer basis, also helping to patrol for safety. It takes a community."

It falls to parents to also remind their children, he said, to check and double-check before stepping out onto a crosswalk.



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Nicole McDonald (ASM Dementia-Friendly Senior Manager) and Jessica Harper (First Link Senior Manager at Care4u 2024).

ASM

Conference Helps Families Understand Dementia and Alzheimer's

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

According to the Alzheimer's Society of Manitoba (ASM), more than 20,300 Manitobans currently live with dementia, a figure that is expected to rise significantly over the next 25 years.

When considering the family, friends, and caregivers connected to these individuals, the ripple effect is quite astounding.

This is why, every October, ASM offers the Care4u Family Conference, designed as a day of learning for those who care for a person with dementia.

This year's event will be held on October 18 at the Victoria Inn Hotel and Convention Centre.

The \$50 entry fee includes breakout sessions, a buffet lunch, and access to ASM's many resources and resource people.

This year's theme is "From Insight to Impact: Turning Knowledge into Confident Care."

Featured guest speakers include local and national healthcare and community professionals.

Some of the topics up for discussion will revolve around legal situations, safety and wandering, daily and end-of-life care, medications, and creating dementia-friendly homes.

This year will mark the event's fifteenth anniversary.

"Our goal is to bring together family members, individuals, and care partners who are providing care for someone living with a dementia diagnosis," says Nicole McDonald, the Dementia-Friendly Senior Manager with ASM. "We're providing them with a space that is a little bit more community-based. They are coming and learning about certain elements of the dementia diagnosis that pertain to them where they're at."

While the conference is primarily education-oriented, it also serves as a community-building event since it brings together individuals from across the province,

all dealing with someone living with Alzheimer's or dementia in its various stages.

"Another key piece of this is the idea that you're not alone and here's another 800 people that are going through a similar lived experience as you," McDonald adds. "Let's connect and find ways to keep that support going outside of this event."

ASM staff members from around the province will be on hand at the conference to connect with attendees face to face.

The sessions are also well attended by healthcare professionals looking to learn more to aid in patient care.

But you don't have to know someone with a formal diagnosis to attend. McDonald says the conference and regular resources provided by ASM are there for everyone, including those who just want to learn.

By and large, services and resources provided by ASM are available at no cost.

The Care4u Conference is the one exception to that rule.

"[The conference] will expand your knowledge and awareness of the topic of dementia. It just best prepares someone and equips them to be able to handle a dementia diagnosis at any point, no matter what stage."

For those who are unsure whether dementia or Alzheimer's is responsible for a family member's behaviour, McDonald says there are three primary signs to watch for: a change in mood, a change in memory, or a change in speech and behaviour.

If any of these are detected, it may be a good idea to seek a professional diagnosis.

The ASM is a non-profit organization which has been providing resources and help to families for the past 40 years.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.alzheimer.mb.ca/care4u

IN BRIEF

Grand Opening Held for Lending Library

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Exactly one year from the initial announcement to Niverville residents that a community lending library was on its way, the day finally arrived.

On October 27, from 4:00 to 9:00 p.m., local residents were invited to the official grand opening of Niverville's first public library, located at the Centennial Arena.

A special grand opening ceremony and ribbon-cutting took place at 7:00 p.m. Throughout the evening, attendees were encouraged to tour the facility, ask questions, and browse through the hundreds of books available to borrow.

To cap off the evening, coffee and dessert were served while local historian Ernest Braun provided some musings on the significance of the event for Niverville.

Over the past year, a portion of the rental space at the south end of the Centennial Arena has been under renovation in order to create a welcoming atmosphere for the new library. The space is small and humble for now, including little more than a few desks and bookshelves.

Hundreds of books have been donated by locals. Over the past few weeks, Councillor Meghan Beasant and other volunteers have been hard at work organizing them by genre and filling the shelves in time for opening day. For now, it will serve as a take one, leave one library as opposed to one with a traditional borrowing program and librarian.

It's a starting point, Beasant told *The Citizen* one year ago—a way for council to gauge public interest in order to determine whether a traditional public library might be in Niverville's future.

Beasant says that she and the rest of council are willing to entertain the possibility of neighbouring municipalities joining forces to create a regional library in the months and years to come.

For the time being, council is hopeful that residents will enjoy the new space they've created and the many books that have been lovingly donated by local readers.

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Heritage Centre Fundraising Banquet to Celebrate Successes

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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After two decades of elaborate fundraising galas, the Niverville Heritage Centre is scaling back to a less formal event. On October 21, the Heritage Centre atrium will play host to 150 friends and supporters of the aging-in-place complex.

"One of the things we want to do this year is to keep it a bit more intimate but still bring together the community," says executive director Ron Parent. "We're not making it about the fundraising but [rather] about celebrating our successes."

As in previous years, guests of the event will enjoy a multi-course meal prepared by the facility's Red Seal chef. This year's keynote speaker is longtime Heritage Centre proponent Ben Sawatzky.

Sawatzky spent some of his formative years in Manitoba before relocating to Alberta. According to Parent, he was one of the early visionaries behind the aging-in-place dream that became the Niverville Heritage Centre.

Members of his family have enjoyed the services provided by the Heritage Centre over the years.

Sawatzky was also the first guest speaker to take the stage at the Heritage Centre's original fundraising gala in the mid-2000s.

Since that time, he has experienced notable business success of his own in the lumber industry and has, in turn, made it his life mission to share the wealth. He and his wife founded a private Christian school in Alberta as well as the Ben Sawatzky Foundation, known for its many philanthropic contributions across Canada and beyond.

Today, the Heritage Centre is championed by many other businesses and individuals across



The Heritage Centre aging-in-place campus in Niverville.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

southeastern Manitoba. Their support is integral to the facility's ongoing success.

"We've got discounted tickets for those who live within our campus," Parent says. "That was one of our goals. How do we make it more

inclusive to those who really benefit from what we do?"

This affordable entry is thanks to donations from local businesses like YGP, Niverville Credit Union, Steinbach Credit Union, Wm. Dyck & Sons, Red River Group, EPIC IT

Solutions, Bristol Hauling, Marquis Hospitality, the Town of Niverville, MCW Engineering Consultants, Ben Sawatzky Electric, Cardinal Health Care, and Winnipeg Building and Decorating.

Together they've already

contributed approximately \$35,000 toward this year's fundraising goal of \$87,000.

All donations received from the event have been earmarked for three important projects this year.

"One thing that we've realized after 13 years in the PCH is that the lighting needs to be improved to align with the new building standards for these facilities," says Parent. "We want to really brighten up the space and make it easier for residents to see their environment. But there's also a safety piece. We know that poor eyesight can contribute to falls."

This will be a multiyear project, he says, beginning with the common rooms, then the hallways, and finally the individual suites.

The second goal is to introduce a 3D interactive virtual game to the PCH, allowing residents to play games that make use of simple hand movements rather than game controllers.

Finally, with a growing campus comes a growing need for greater refrigeration and freezer space for the in-house kitchen.

Tickets for the banquet will be available on the Heritage Centre's website and can be purchased as either a single spot or a full table of eight.

In early October, supporters can also help out by participating in an online 50/50 draw. QR codes will be displayed on the website as well as around the campus.

At the banquet, at least one exciting prize will be auctioned off.

"One of our IT specialty firms has donated four tickets to Disney on Ice in their box suite," Parent says. "It's about a \$2,000 package."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

■ www.heritagecentre.ca

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Proposed Wastewater Plant to Unlock Growth, Raise Sewer Rates

By Brenda Sawatzky

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The Red Seine Rat Wastewater Cooperative (RSRWC) held a public meeting for Niverville and area residents on September 4 at the CRRC. A handful of residents attended the informational session, which was intended to provide updates on the upcoming shared wastewater treatment plant.

Also in attendance were members of the engineering firm hired for the project.

Presenting at Thursday's meeting was Gord Daman, RSRWC consultant.

A similar meeting took place later on Monday, September 15 at the TC Energy Centre in Île-des-Chênes.

The idea of a shared wastewater initiative was first announced in 2022 and comprised four municipalities within the cooperative: Niverville and the RMs of Hanover, Ritchot, and Tache. Since that time, two more have been on-boarded: La Broquerie and De Salaberry.

The treatment plant initiative was born as a response to the problem posed by rural lagoons. Population growth requires greater septic needs, leaving them with few options besides expanding their lagoon capacity.

Daman says there are some pros to a lagoon system versus a mechanical system, primarily revolving around low capital and operational costs.

But for the most part, the advantage ends there.

Disadvantages include the significant land base required for a lagoon. To expand, communities need to rely on the availability of more land, which usually means losing valuable agriculture acres in the process.

For communities with no land in which to expand and no option to annex more, growth can stagnate, since the province has the right to refuse building permits.

According to Daman, this is currently the case in St. Malo.

As well, strict legislation surrounds the discharge of filtered wastewater into the environment and this sludge must be regularly removed.

"About 80 percent of communities in Manitoba utilize this system, but it only [serves] about 20 percent of the population," Daman said. "Once you reach a population of 10,000, you can't continue with this type of lagoon system."

The best alternative to the lagoon



Gordon Daman makes a presentation in Niverville on behalf of the Red Seine Rat Wastewater Cooperative (RSRWC).

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

system is the mechanical system contained inside a wastewater treatment plant. This is what's being proposed for a section of land within the RM of Ritchot.

So that the facility can service multiple municipalities, many lift stations and miles of effluent pipes will need to be installed. But once operational, it is anticipated that the plant will allow growth in all the participating communities for decades to come.

Despite the infrastructure required, Daman says a huge advantage of the mechanical system is its low land footprint.

"If we take all of the lagoons that are represented in the RSR region, about 13 or 14 communities, you would probably require somewhere between 10 to 15 times the amount of acres than you would for a mechanical system. It ensures that we [keep] somewhere between 2,000 and 2,500 acres in [ag] production."

As well, environmental controls set by the province are much easier to manage in a mechanical system, and it leaves a safer byproduct.

"The water that's being sent out of the plant can be used for irrigation and, for a cool \$25 million to \$35 million, we could actually add another treatment process and actually have potable water," Daman said. "We could have a complete circular system."

A mechanical system also requires less labour. The resulting plant will only require a few employees versus the many needed to manage each individual lagoon system.

Speaking in terms of commercial and industrial advantages, the water

treatment plant, as proposed, won't place as many limits on communities when it comes to welcoming new industry.

According to Daman, this is a problem currently faced by Bothwell Cheese, which would like to expand but the greater sewage output they'd produce would overtax the current lagoon.

The primary challenge with a mechanical system, though, is the high initial capital cost. The latest estimate from engineers comes to \$235 million.

"That's why coming together with other municipalities, we can actually get that critical mass to make this work and to have a better system that benefits all," Daman said.

In turn, having an efficient sewage solution with long-term potential helps to increase the value of homes and businesses within a community. No one wants to relocate to an area where growth has been stagnated by lack of foresight.

With Niverville's rapid growth, the community is already dangerously close to this scenario, he said.

Tender for the project closed in early September and, assuming the estimates come in within the proposed budget, Daman expects to be able to award the tender by October.

There is a contingency plan in place should the estimate come in a bit higher.

FINANCING AND OVERSIGHT

In recent years, the RSRWC has been working to secure provincial and government grants to help fund the project. For the immediate capital costs,

a loan has been taken with the Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB) as well as Access Credit Union.

The financing provided by the CIB comes with a very low interest rate, Daman said.

"Not only do we get the benefit of that rate, they lock the rate in for 30 years," he explained.

Because of the economic impact of trade tariffs with the U.S., Daman says it's likely that the components that make up the mechanical system will come from Sweden.

Daman says that the RSRWC has applied to the Public Utilities Board for oversight, although this is not a governmental requirement.

That application was accepted.

"In the long run, to be able to protect ourselves and have the maximum transparency, RSRWC should be deemed a public utility," said Daman. "That means that there's oversight. That means that there has to be applications on a regular basis to justify rates being charged for the members. As importantly, [it means that] rates can't be more than what your services are costing."

Costs established by the utilities board, though, do take into consideration a reasonable maintenance and repair budget so that the RSRWC will never be left without funds for necessities.

EFFECTS ON SEWER RATES

In order to prevent rate shock resulting from the build, tax increases will be rolled out to each ratepayer over a three-year period. Construction costs of \$12 million will need to come out of those taxes.

Using Niverville as an example, Daman says current ratepayer fees come to \$67.85 on a quarterly basis. In 2026, those rates will increase by 50 percent, adding \$32.33 to the quarterly rate.

In 2027, the rates will increase by 100 percent, essentially doubling the rate being paid in 2025. Finally, in 2028, the rates will increase by 150 percent from their original amount, adding \$96.66 to the current rate.

That means that, in three years' time, the sewer rates are expected to come to about \$165 per quarter per household.

For Ritchot's urban residents, sewer rates are calculated on a cubic meter basis since households and businesses are metered. The current rate in the municipality comes to \$1.14 per cubic meter of discharge. In year one, that rate will increase by 68 cents. Year two will see a \$1.35 increase, and by year three a \$2.03 increase.

In the end, this should amount to an approximate \$3.17 fee per cubic meter.

Over the course of the next three years, rural residents can expect their tipping fees for waste collection to also go up.

Daman says that the current rate for sewer in the city of Winnipeg is \$4.40 per cubic meter. By 2027, that rate is expected to climb to \$6.60 to help pay for a new treatment plant of their own.

"When construction is done and we have to revert to [just operational costs], hopefully, if we're successful in accessing some of the grants, rates won't actually have to go up much," Daman says. "It's not guaranteed, but that's the effort that's being made."

One positive factor that can and likely will affect both Niverville and Ritchot's rates over the coming years is growth.

Since each municipality is responsible to cover a certain fixed cost of the project, residential and commercial growth will help spread those costs further, thus alleviating costs for existing ratepayers.

As well, he adds, down the road, if other municipalities decide to come on board the shared system, the RSRWC may have an opportunity to sell those services, thus funneling additional profits towards ratepayer fees.

If residents have concerns about the proposed rates, they are welcome to reach out to their local councils or, alternatively, they can write to the PUB.

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Canada Post Strikes—Again

By Brenda Sawatzky
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On September 26, unionized workers of Canada Post hit the picket lines for the second time in less than a year.

Similar to the last strike, which ended in December 2024, the move brings a complete halt to the delivery of letters and parcels through the postal system.

An exception is being made for socioeconomic supports, such as government pension cheques for senior citizens.

The work disruption affects approximately 55,000 postal workers nationwide, not to mention millions of Canadians who depend on the service.

PREVIOUS STRIKE

According to CUPW, it's been about two years since their last collective agreement ended.

When those negotiations began, CUPW was seeking a 22 percent wage increase for its members over a four-year term. Prior to the 2024 strike, Canada Post was willing to meet them about halfway.

For CUPW, it wasn't enough. The offer fell far short in terms of their other demands, including increases to short-term disability payouts and paid sick days. For rural and suburban mail carriers, the union also sought corporate vehicles as well as paid meals and breaks.

Four weeks into the strike, Labour Minister Steven MacKinnon ordered union employees back to work, promising a full inquiry into how to move forward.

RESULTS OF INQUIRY

On May 17, a report was released by William Kaplan, the appointed industrial inquiry commissioner. It recommended a number of tough new measures, including an end to door-to-door delivery.

"Canada Post is facing an existential crisis: It is effectively insolvent, or bankrupt," wrote Kaplan.

The corporation hasn't turned a profit since 2017. Since that time, it's lost \$3 billion and counting. According to the minister responsible for Canada Post, Joël Lightbound, that equates to an ongoing loss of \$10 million per day.

In 2025, the federal



government dispensed a \$1 billion loan to help Canada Post in the short term.

LATEST RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking Kaplan's recommendations to heart, Lightbound has encouraged Canada Post to bring to their home delivery service to a close.

"We're talking four million addresses that will be converted to community mailboxes," Lightbound said earlier this month. "To give [the public] a sense of the reason why we're doing this, it costs significantly more to deliver mail to an individual address than it does to a community mailbox. Seventy-seven percent of Canadians already receive mail through rural or community mailboxes or department buildings. So... allowing Canada Post to make these changes over years will save the corporation about \$400 million."¹

Another \$20 million could be recouped, he added, by using ground instead of air to move nonurgent mail.

He added that it's time to lift the 1994 moratorium on closing rural post offices.

The CUPW argues that the same Canadians who fund the publicly owned corporation will be the first to lose if Lightbound gets his way.

"When public services are cut, inequality grows, and it's the public that suffers," reads a statement by CUPW. "Postal workers are fighting to not only keep reliable and affordable services in communities across the country, but to provide even more services. Unlike private companies that deliver only where it's profitable, Canada Post keeps communities linked and Canadians connected and that matters."

LOCAL EFFECTS

To say that a postal strike is a huge inconvenience is an understatement. When Canada Post employees are working, they provide an effective and inexpensive way to do commerce.

Important documents such as medical test results and passports are transferred with minimal effort. Bills get paid and goods change hands.

For small businesses, an operational postal system can mean the difference between survival and bankruptcy.

SJ and her husband run an engine rebuild business near Île-des-Chênes. When invoices regularly run into the tens of thousands, cheques are the simplest and most cost-effective way to accept payment.

Many of their clientele, too, are older in age and are not set up for electronic banking.

During last year's strike, SJ says about \$100,000 worth of payments were being held in Canada Post limbo. Still, the couple had bills to pay.

As the strike went on, week after week, the couple had to dip deep into their personal savings to stay in good stead with their suppliers.

"Honestly, it was horrible," says SJ. "It took until January before we were able to pay ourselves back for owed wages and personal money we borrowed to the business. During Christmas we were living off our savings and credit cards. Fortunately, we had money to fall back on, but not everyone in similar situations has that."

Dima Rozanov is a small business owner with an online company that sells everything from computer parts and printer toners to vintage radios and hockey jerseys. His business model relies heavily on shipping these items.

"Businesses have commitments to the clients and have to ship items within specific timeframes," Rozanov says. "Currently, my orders have plummeted to almost zero because people can't rely on Canada Post and they're not willing to pay for more expensive options such as UPS or FedEx."

To stay afloat, Rozanov covers the extra cost of shipping, lowering his profit margins. A 200-gram package that costs \$7 to ship through Canada Post now costs \$17. He absorbs the difference.

Equally frustrating, he says, is watching big corporations like Amazon flourish during times like these.

CHANGING WITH THE TIMES

According to some, it's easy to see why Canada Post's model no longer works.

Physical mail has lost much of its relevance. The 5.5 billion annual letters that Canada Post delivered at its height 20 years ago is now just 2.2 billion. Fewer letters sent means fewer stamps sold, reducing one of the corporation's biggest income generators.

As income declines, the number of addresses across the country requiring mail delivery has gone up by three million.

At the same time, Canada Post has seen an incredible rise in competition when it comes to parcel delivery. This is especially difficult since Canada Post's employees don't work weekends.

Still, Lightbound and Kaplan see merit in saving the postal service.

"I think it has to survive because it provides an essential lifeline to hundreds if not thousands of communities across the country, [including] northern, remote, and indigenous communities," Lightbound said last month. "It's got a vast network that I think Canadians depend on to be connected to one another and to the world."

REFERENCE

¹ Darren Major, Kevin Maimann. "Canada Post Workers Walk Off the Job After Government Demands Reforms," CBC. September 25, 2025 (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/canada-post-strike-government-reforms-1.7644025>).

CITIZEN POLL

In the ongoing saga of Canada's postal service strike, which side are you more likely to support?



Postal workers. These public employees provide an essential service that most people rely on to one degree or another. Let's negotiate fairly to get them back on the job.



Canada Post. It isn't sustainable to operate the postal service at such a large perpetual deficit, bankrolled by the federal government. Big changes are needed to keep Canada Post solvent and competitive.

Have a more nuanced opinion?
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LAST MONTH'S RESULTS:

Should the provincial government maintain a greater focus on keeping people living independently longer or creating personal care home spaces?

Independent living. With greater homeware and support services, people can stay home longer, free up hospital beds, and eliminate the need for new and expensive facilities.

54%

Personal care homes. In addition to their healthcare role, these facilities fill an important social need that often goes unmet in the lives of aging adults when they live on their own.

46%

YOUR COMMENTS:

I think the government should focus more on personal health from childhood to older years, so that independent living would be more of the norm. Better health equals less strain on the healthcare system and personal care homes. That's where it starts... then also putting more funding into independent living so that older people can have a higher quality of life for what is left.

My grandfather lived at Heritage Life in Niverville and passed away there during COVID. I saw first-hand how stretched staff were: overnight, only one nurse covered all 80 residents. That's not an ideal situation, especially if multiple people need urgent care at the same time. Chronic underfunding has left PCHs with bare-minimum staffing. Manitoba must make healthcare careers a top priority, with strong pathways, fair pay, and supportive workplaces. At the same time, we should strengthen home care and independent living supports—and encourage multigenerational housing models, as many European countries do, so families can care together.

Personal care homes should be readily available for people suffering from dementia/Alzheimer's-related diseases. It is usually not a disease that can be handled by home care. These people need 24-hour care. I tried to be there for my mother, but it became increasingly difficult and exhausting. My family who is wide spread and I made the decision to have her panelled and placed in the Niverville PCH. It was the best decision we could have made. It is a wonderful facility. But it definitely needs more staffing. Having said all that, in my humble opinion, it is the best solution for many people to be in a personal care home.

Torrential September Storm Floods Basements, Fills Streets

By Holly Dunphy

On the evening of Thursday, September 11, the skies opened up and unleashed a heavy downpour over a narrow band of southeastern Manitoba, prompting flash floods. Overnight Niverville saw 99 millimetres of precipitation.

Just to the southeast, Steinbach received about 142 millimetres.

The slow-moving system was characterized by a thin band of storm clouds that repeatedly formed over the same area.

Anton Shvets, a photographer from Niverville, was drawn to the active sky that evening.

"At first, it was breathtaking: an unusual natural event with lightning flashing nonstop for almost an hour and thunder rolling endlessly," Shvets says. "But then the heavy rainfall became concerning."

By the time the downpour ended around midnight, he headed outside and captured images of the aftermath: St. Andrews Way, a residential street at the southwest side of town, was underwater.

"The water reached people's garages and driveways, and some small cars could not pass," he says. "They had to turn back, unable to reach their homes... When we returned home, my son showed me online posts where many people said their basements were starting to flood. One woman wrote that her basement was filling with water and that she needed help. My son and I went over to assist her, moving her belongings and vacuuming out water with a wet vacuum."

That neighbour was Bobbi Jo Castaneda, who received an alert at 11:45 p.m. from the water sensor in one of her window wells.

"Within 15 minutes of the first alert, water was pouring in both of our window wells, and our sump pump was overflowing," says Castaneda. "I had eight people show up at my door at midnight after I put out an SOS call on our community Facebook page. It was incredibly heartwarming. The



Flash flooding along St. Andrews Way in Niverville following last week's torrential thunderstorm.

ANTON SHVETS

help has not stopped since. We are tremendously blessed."

Despite best efforts, both preventative and reactive, Castaneda's insurance isn't likely to fully compensate her family for all the damage their home sustained.

Still, she recommends that homeowners install water sensors in their basement windows, a first step that can prevent a lot of later damage. She says that her family also has sensors under every sink, as well as between laundry machines, and in the sump pump area.

SCIENCE OF STORM FORMATION

Dr. John Hanesiak, professor of atmospheric science at the University of Manitoba, is collaborating with Canadian Severe Storms Laboratory at Western University in London, Ontario.

The lab, according to its website, is "the authoritative source for Canadian severe convective storms data and research." Its researchers conduct storm damage surveys across Canada for events such as tornadoes and hail, and they've recently expanded their scope to include flash flood events.¹ The recent storm that swept through southeastern Manitoba is the first flash flood event the lab has investigated in our province.

"This particular storm is what we call an elevated thunderstorm," says Hanesiak. "Most storms we typically see in the middle of the afternoon are surface-based and feed off airflow that is close to the ground. These

ones are different. They were feeding off air that was quite high off the ground."

In the lead-up to the storm, he says, there was a warm front moving through North Dakota.

"In this type of scenario, airflow moving across that front flows up into it and lifts the air as it moves north," he says. "That lifting can lead to storm development, like what we saw. It is sort of a common thing that southern Manitoba can get in the summertime, so it is a little unusual to see this activity particularly in the middle of September."

Continuous thunder and lightning is another indicator of an elevated storm.

"With elevated storms, there is a lot of intercloud lightning. Most of this lightning won't strike the ground, because most of the electric field is contained in the lower to upper atmosphere and doesn't necessarily make electrical connections to the ground. It can, of course, but most activity will be within the cloud itself."

One question many people are quick to wonder about is whether this sort of extreme weather event can be linked to climate change.

Hanesiak points out that it's difficult to attribute individual events to large trends. However, he adds that these types of events do seem to be occurring at a higher frequency.

"As the atmosphere and planet warms, it can hold more water vapour," he says. "The event in southern Manitoba is happening more

frequently and more intensely worldwide... Rather than relative humidity, we use dew point temperature [to predict precipitation], which is the temperature at which air needs to reach to become saturated. The dew points have been in the upper teens, which is unusual for this time of year."

He explains the cause of this type of storm: convection.

"Akin to an air balloon, once the air becomes buoyant, it gets released and the storms form. When you lift air in the atmosphere, it cools and condenses, and that's what creates the cloud and the rain. The more vigorous that convection is, generally you get higher precipitation."

One of the key characteristics of this event was the broader weather pattern behind it. As a slow-moving low-pressure system moved over the Rockies, it allowed warm, humid air from the southern U.S. to stream into Manitoba. That system created unusually wet conditions for mid-September and set the stage.

DRAINAGE ISSUES

Due to the natural drainage of this region, all the rainfall that hit Steinbach and its surrounding communities ultimately flowed towards Niverville on its way into the Red River, producing a strain on town infrastructure.

In response to some resident concerns, Niverville Mayor Myron Dyck took the opportunity to outline the town's flood prevention and diversion efforts, much of which was instituted following the flood of 1997.

"The province installed a dike system around the town to reduce how much water flows through the community," Dyck says. "Along with a series of sluice gates and berms, that infrastructure now helps redirect water around town. Water enters by Crown Valley Road on our southeast corner of town and exits out of the northwest toward the Red River."

Some residents did note water backing up around Crown Valley Road, which sits at a higher elevation relative to neighbouring streets.

"If water is backing up on Crown Valley Road, it could be that the sluice gates allowing water into town are closed and thereby diverting water in and around the ditching that is around the community," Dyck says.

He notes that water flow can also become impeded as it exits the northwest side of town.

"We've been in conversation with our neighbours in the RM of Ritchot, as well as the province, about keeping that drain clear of things like cattails, sludge, and other debris. When the drain isn't flowing properly, water can back up."

Geography also plays a role. Niverville is essentially flat with fewer than 12 inches of elevation from one end of town to the other, a grade of less than one percent.

"From one year to another, a frost heave is enough to offset a culvert that should've been draining but is now too high or too low," Dyck said.

The good news is that only a limited number of homes in Niverville were impacted by flooding in this recent storm.

Still, Dyck says the event serves as a reminder of the importance of flood preparedness. He encourages residents to take preventative steps, from checking yard grading to maintaining or backing up sump pumps.

REFERENCE

¹ "Canadian Severe Storms Laboratory," Western University. Date of access: September 15, 2025 (<https://www.uwo.ca/cssl/index.html>).



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Providence Restructures in Light of International Student Restrictions

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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For Providence University College in nearby Otterburne, Manitoba, 2025 has been a bittersweet year. First of all, it marks the private school's one hundredth anniversary, a milestone meriting major celebration this past month.

Unfortunately, the momentous event has been clouded by the school's need to restructure and rethink some long-held ideals.

Last year, the federal government put a cap on international student applications for a two-year term, effectively reducing their numbers by about one-third. The stated intention was to help alleviate the strain of housing shortages felt across the country.

In implementing this directive, each province was granted an allowance of students, and it's been left to the provincial government to allocate them amongst postsecondary institutions.

For Providence, the news has been bad. As a school that relies heavily on international students, they saw their international student numbers drop by more than 90 percent from previous years.

"It's begun to affect us," says Dr. Kenton Anderson, Providence's president. "We haven't really experienced the full weight of it yet, because we have all of these students that we recruited under the old system. It's a two-year program, so it takes a little while for the effect to be felt."

By 2026 and onward, he says, the impact has the potential to be quite significant.

While the federal student cap was originally introduced as a two-year program, Anderson says that not everyone is convinced that the situation will ever return to the way it once was.

When the cutbacks were first announced in January 2024, only undergraduate students were affected. Immediately Providence was tasked with moving all its



Dr. Kenton Anderson, president of Providence University College.

PROVIDENCE

programs to the graduate level to accommodate.

By September of last year, however, the federal government extended the directive to include graduate students, causing schools everywhere to pivot and restructure once again.

For those students who are already in Canada and partway through their education track, the change doesn't affect them.

"Keep in mind, international students include American students," Anderson points out. "That's a major market for our services that we are no longer able to pursue. That's huge."

What makes the policy tricky to implement in Canada is the fact that immigration decisions are made at the federal level while education is managed by each province.

And when these two portfolios cross paths, provinces are forced to find ways to comply.

"The province didn't ask for this," says Anderson. "The federal government created this policy around

immigration and student study permits and required all the provinces to figure out how to do it."

LOSING WINNIPEG CAMPUS

Apart from restructuring their programs, Providence has also had to say goodbye to their recently acquired Winnipeg campus.

Purchased in 2023, the building once occupied by Booth University College was to become the school's newest urban campus, providing space for 700 new students and affordable housing for 400.

This year, before that dream had even been realized, Providence sold the building.

"Graduates have less need for dormitory residences, so we couldn't really support that building anymore," Anderson says. "We are now operating out of leased space—wonderful space—but we don't have housing anymore."

The loss of international students has an impact on the Otterburne campus as well.

"The proportion on the Otterburne campus of international students has never been particularly large, but these students do bring diversity to the community. It's good for our Manitoban students to be able to rub shoulders with students from all these different places. We're becoming much more homogenized [now]."

According to Anderson, Providence administration isn't sitting on its hands, waiting for things to change. They have started working on other programming ideas to open new streams of revenue.

One of these solutions may include taking education to the students if the students can't come to them. That would mean sending Providence instructors to foreign countries, operating under Providence governance from afar.

Making this difficult is the fact that Providence has catered to students from about 20 different countries around the world.

Why do they choose to educate

at Providence? Anderson says it's because the school is intentional in its directive. It's also a smaller institution, making for a less intimidating experience for foreigners.

WORKING WITH THE PROVINCE

In the coming weeks and months, Anderson and his team hope to create some collaborative space with the province to see if more international student allocations could come their way.

"We appreciate and understand that [the province has] felt the need to prioritize the publicly funded schools over privately funded schools," he says. "They don't really owe us anything. Nevertheless, we believe that what we've been doing is good for Manitoba, certainly good for the city of Winnipeg, and it's good for us here in Otterburne because it provides much-needed revenue that allows us to flourish."

International students based out of Winnipeg, he says, can provide an economic boon to the city because that's where they shop and live. As well, many of them are willing to fill blue collar service jobs that native-born Manitobans don't want.

"We train them and help them develop in their leadership capacity. We help them to become productive for the Manitoba economy. So we feel it would be a substantial loss [to the province]."

Indeed, training international students has been a part of the school's mantra almost since the very beginning. The principle is written into early documents created by the school's founders.

"They express Providence's interest in reaching the world," says Anderson. "They weren't just interested in reaching the local communities. The intention was that we would be a global entity affecting [everyone, everywhere]."

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If Anderson has any say in the matter, Providence will continue with that mantra well into the future.



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Brennan Johnson of Landmark Development and Design Inc.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

Public Input Sought for Phase Two of Oak River Meadow

By Brenda Sawatzky
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
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Residents of Île-des-Chênes were invited to an open house on Thursday, September 25 to discuss the upcoming second phase of the Oak River Meadow development.

The meeting was hosted by Landmark Development and Design Inc. at the TC Energy Centre. The company was hired by Terracon Development Ltd. to research, plan, and engage the public in the process of site development.

Public meetings for phase one of the new residential neighbourhood located at the south end of town took place in spring 2022 and the plan was passed by RM council in September of that year.

In recent months, ground-work got underway on the first phase's 71 acres.

The remaining 90 acres will complete the full development. This second phase was the subject of Thursday's gathering.

Through a series of visual aids, attendees were

introduced to a variety of concepts for the use of phase two lands, as well as information on the steps that will lead to its eventual development.

Landmark Planning staff were on hand to answer questions from the public.

According to Brennan Johnson, phase one has been solely dedicated to residential properties, with no designated commercial zones.

"Market considerations dictated that residential is what was needed rather than commercial," Johnson says. "It's [determined by] what was in demand at the time of the planning. Commercial demand wasn't as high as it was for different housing types, so single-family and multi-family is what [was planned] for phase one."

Commercial areas may be under consideration for phase two, but at this point there is nothing firm. No land is being specifically set aside for a school, at least at this stage.

"If there's demand and interest in a school, and the province has expressed interest in having a school built,

that's usually when those conversations occur," Johnson says.

These conversations generally begin with the local school division, which then pulls the province and a developer into the discussion.

All in all, Johnson says there have been few notable concerns shared by the public this time around.

One of the primary issues that came out of the phase one public consultations was the need to create adequate sidewalk and pathway connections between the new development and the rest of the community.

All those concerns, he says, have been effectively addressed and he anticipates similar congruity for phase two.

"There are sidewalks, there are walking trails, and there are park spaces," Johnson says. "And they are all designed in a way that connect to each other within this new neighbourhood and then to connections outside of it as well."

As for housing options and ratios of single-family to

multi-family units, Johnson says that will ultimately be up to Terracon to decide.

While the Macdonald-Ritchot Planning District has designated this particular section of land as a rural centre, it is still zoned as Agricultural Limited.

One of the first steps in order for development to move forward will be to make a rezoning request of council.

The next steps will involve creating a concrete development plan utilizing feedback from council and the public, drawing from the concepts already presented at the open house.

Until then, residents are encouraged to provide feedback directly to Landmark Planning through an online comment sheet available on their website.

Sometime in November, Johnson says another stakeholder meeting will be called in order to present final plans to the public.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
■ www.landmarkplanning.ca



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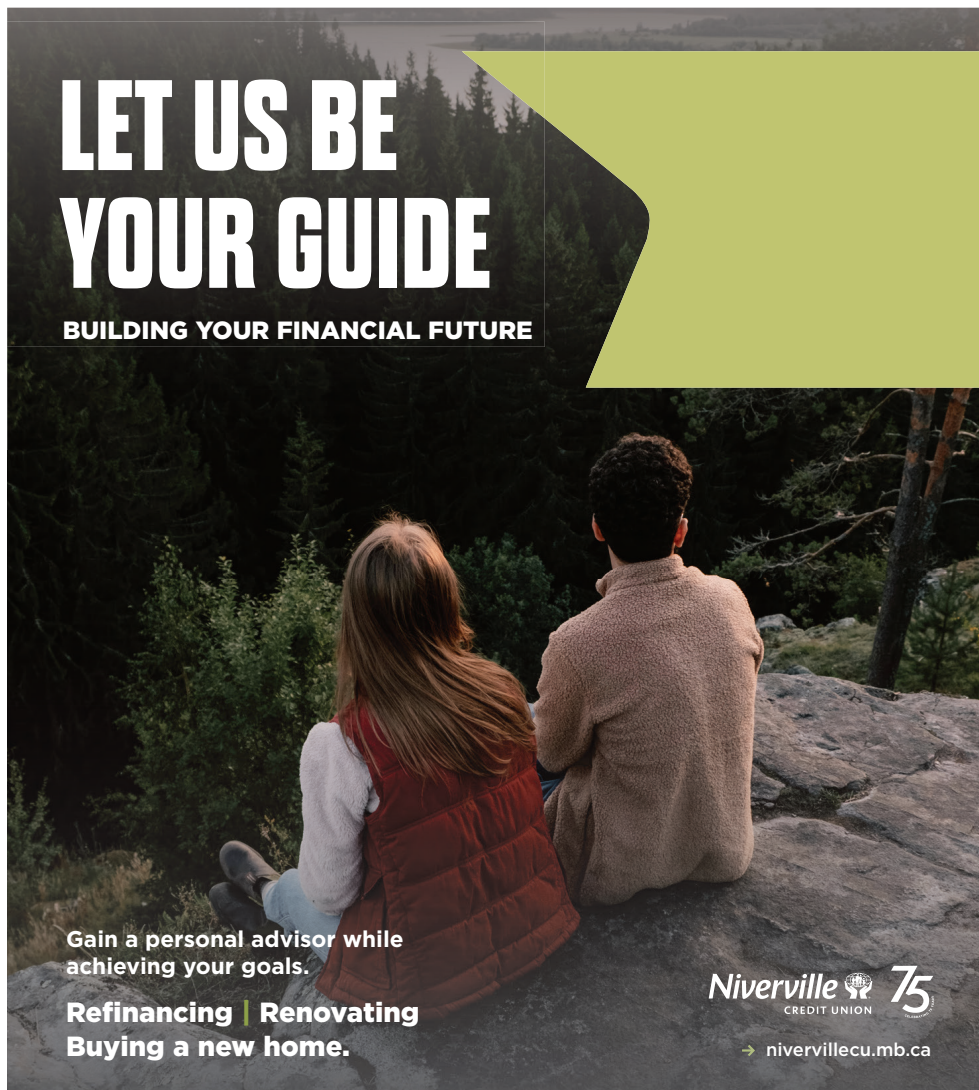
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Prayers for Daisy: Niverville Baby Awaits Heart Transplant

By Brenda Sawatzky

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

For the past several weeks, one of Niverville's youngest residents has been fighting for her life from an Edmonton hospital bed while her family sits vigil, awaiting a miracle.

Six-month-old Daisy Faith is the daughter of Mike and Courtney Bouwman, and a sister to three older brothers. She awaits a heart transplant. But before she's even eligible, she's got to climb a proverbial mountain.

On February 28, 2025, Daisy was born pink, feisty, and, by all outward appearances, healthy and strong. It came as a welcome surprise since the Bouwmans were fully aware that Daisy had a serious heart condition. There had been a risk that she'd need to be rushed into immediate surgery upon birth.

At 20 weeks in utero, doctors discovered the concerns following a routine checkup. Soon after, the Bouwmans met with a cardiologist of the Children's Heart Clinic. An ultrasound confirmed the couple's worst fears.

Daisy was diagnosed with not one but four relatively major heart malfunctions, including holes between the chambers, a reverse orientation, a narrowing of the pulmonary valve, and transposition of the greater arteries.

"This is when Mike and I realized how serious her heart defect was," says Courtney. "We knew that God had a plan for our little girl, and we needed to trust him."

What the couple faced during the coming months was daunting, without question, but the terrain wasn't altogether unfamiliar. Mike, too, had been born with a heart defect and was subjected to five open heart surgeries. Today, he lives a normal and productive life.

Despite the severity of Daisy's condition, she defied the odds following birth, although she remained in the neonatal intensive care unit for observation.

Within a week, though, she began having occasional episodes where she stopped breathing.

By five weeks, Daisy's breathing had resolved and she was sent home. The coming weeks were filled with doctor appointments and scans, but she was growing and developing in all the ways an infant should.

At four months, the cardiologist discovered a membrane in the upper



Courtney and Mike Bouwman with daughter Daisy.

© C/O COURTNEY BOUWMAN

heart chamber that would eventually affect Daisy's blood pressure. The family readied themselves for Daisy's first surgery, a procedure that would precede the full reconstructive surgery that doctors hoped could be delayed until she was bigger and stronger.

On July 28, the Bouwmans left their three sons with family members and flew to Edmonton. The membrane surgery was a success.

"When Mike and I got to see her, she was fully sedated, but that didn't last for long," Courtney recalls. "She is such a feisty girl and woke up shortly after we saw her. She tried to rip her breathing tube out. Thankfully, Mike grabbed her hands to stop her, and the nurses had to give her more sedation to calm down."

Unfortunately, Daisy suffered a cardiac arrest that night and had to be attached to an ECMO, a machine which provides heart and lung support.

"Dr. Anand sat us down and told us that anyone who ends up on the heart and lung machine has a 65 percent chance of recovery," Courtney says. "They couldn't tell us why she arrested, or if she had any damage to her brain or other organs."

Daisy made marked improvement, day after day, and the situation was looking up.

Then she suffered another cardiac arrest.

"They were just prepping her to close her chest when her eyes

widened, her oxygen and blood pressure quickly dropped, and her heart stopped. They performed CPR for 23 minutes and got the ECMO machine hooked up to her once more. Mike and I were in the room while this was happening, and all I could say while watching my daughter get CPR was 'God, save my baby!' over and over."

Daisy's heart did come back and, over the following hours specialists from across the country joined a video call to discuss their young patient's situation.

"The next few days were probably the worst days of our lives," adds Courtney. "We were told that Daisy's heart was dysfunctional and she might not be able to survive coming off ECMO. They came up with some plans to put her on a ventricular assist device (VAD) as a bridge to a heart transplant, but later they told us that could not be an option because she had suffered a minor stroke at some point. We were faced with the reality that our baby might not survive and we might need to let her go."

The Bouwmans were soon joined by their sons, accompanied by grandparents, to see their sister for what might be the last time.

"Our boys were so incredible, and also heartbroken," she says. "They had so many questions that we couldn't answer, and we did too."

Against all odds, Daisy's heart survived the removal of the ECMO. Apart from some minor setbacks, her chest was soon closed up and the

slow removal of tubes and devices began.

"Every day since then has been a gift from God," says Courtney. "She was very slow in weaning sedation and medication. We have bumps, like high blood pressure and a high heart rate. She is a confusing little girl and keeps the doctors scratching their heads."

On August 31, Daisy underwent a second surgery, one that doctors had hoped to postpone until she was more mature. This time, the plan was to install an internal VAC, close the holes in her chambers, and reroute some of the arteries. It was a risky procedure.

If all went well, it would buy Daisy some time as she awaits a complete heart transplant.

Once again, Daisy pulled through. Every day since then has been a day of either triumph or trial. Daisy has had a pacemaker installed and a fragment of a broken feeding tube removed from her stomach. All these procedures have left her with a slightly deflated lung which the doctors are trying to correct.

SUPPORT OF FAMILY & FRIENDS

When life deals out tough experiences, one is ever grateful for the dedicated support of family and friends. Courtney and Mike are blessed with those individuals in spades.

From the very first moment the journey started to look difficult, the couple has been surrounded by loved

ones who have flown out to hold them up with arms of encouragement.

Recognizing that the foreseeable future looked uncertain, friends launched crowdfunding campaigns to help sustain them financially while Mike is off work.

"We started receiving etransfers and messages from people we knew and people we didn't know who were praying for Daisy and for us," Courtney says. "We knew immediately that God was doing something big."

At the same time, the couple's young boys began making bracelets to give to family and friends, serving as reminders to pray for their sister. A niece posted a photo of the bracelet on Instagram using the hashtag #miraclefordaisy.

Immediately these Daisy bracelets circulated beyond the family and the couple started receiving messages of hope and encouragement from afar.

UNCERTAIN FUTURE

It's more than two months since Daisy underwent her first surgery and progress has been slow in getting her stabilized and ready for the transplant list. So far, everyone holds out hope, including her doctors.

"The hospital and staff have been absolutely incredible. These doctors and healthcare professionals care for our baby like she is their own. They also care about our family and taking care of us."

When it comes to telling their sons the hard truth about their sister's situation, even there the staff have been integral, explaining the situation to the Bouwman children in terms they can understand and deal with.

"The next hard conversation we had to have was about staying in Edmonton long-term," says Courtney. "We have no idea how long this process will take, but the doctors have told us to expect to wait about a year for a donor heart. I was terrified to tell [our boys] this, but once we did, they took it so well. We told them we would have them come stay with us and do some homeschooling. They were very excited about that."

For the time being, the boys are in Niverville, staying with family while still being enrolled in their local school.

Courtney and Mike receive a small stipend from Manitoba Health to cover hotel and food costs while they wait out Daisy's future.

Each day is a new day, each moment spent with their wee daughter a precious gift.



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Fire Prevention Week Focuses on Safety with Batteries

By Brenda Sawatzky
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Fire brigades across the country are calling on residents to take time this month to talk about fire prevention and safety. October 5–11 is Fire Prevention Week and this year's theme is "Charge into Fire Safety: Lithium-Ion Batteries in Your Home."

In recent years, YouTube and other platforms have been rife with footage of lithium-ion battery fires that seem impressive in their destructive potential.

Common as they are in everyday household use, the dark side lies in their potential for thermal runaway, or overheating. They are highly volatile due to flammable components which can cause explosions and fires that are difficult to extinguish.

As well, they can emit excessive smoke and toxic gas when overheated.

Electric vehicles (EVs), e-scooters, and e-bikes use lithium-ion batteries. So do many power tools, smart-phones, e-cigarettes, and some electronic toys.

Niverville fire chief Keith Bueckert says that it's not the goal of his team to alarm people but rather educate them, since lithium-ion fires are preventable.

Statistically, most battery fires happen when they are

being charged. For this reason, Bueckert says it's really important to ensure that batteries and chargers are compatible with one another.

Also, both batteries and chargers should have the CSA approval stamp.

"A lot of knockoff stuff is coming from overseas," Bueckert says. "That's true with both batteries and charging equipment."

Equally important is to ensure that batteries are only being charged during daytime hours when someone is home to monitor them, not unlike the rule of thumb in terms of burning a candle.

Never charge your electronics in an egress area which could block your escape in the event of a fire.

For parents of teens, it's imperative to emphasize the risks that come with charging a cellphone in bed.

"Anything that's being charged creates heat," Bueckert says. "We've had instances where people will charge a phone in bed and throw the covers over it. Because it's not able to get that heat release, it can cause the bed to catch on fire."

When a battery is done charging, remove it from the charger and unplug the charger, especially when the charger doesn't have an automatic shutoff feature at full charge.

The battery, too, can create a fire hazard when its integrity

has been compromised—say, after it's been dropped or when it's been left out in the heat for too long.

"These fires are extremely fast and quickly develop into a major contents fire," says Bueckert.

Bueckert and his team will be in local schools again this year promoting fire safety. There'll be prizes and take-home materials to guide parents in discussing fire safety at home.

"Make sure you're talking to your kids about fire safety," Bueckert says. "Take 20 minutes with your family and just review all the stuff. Make sure everyone knows how to get out of your home and practice it. Make sure the kids know how to get out if their first means of egress doesn't work."

As always, he adds that the week should be seen as an opportunity to test smoke alarms and replace batteries.

With homebuilding materials as volatile as they are these days, this has never been more important.

"If you have a fire in your house, you have about 90 seconds to get out by the time the smoke alarm goes off. There could be significant smoke already by that time."

Finally, Bueckert says, make sure you dispose of old lithium-ion batteries safely, taking them to companies like Bristol Hauling to ensure their proper disposal.

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Lest We Forget

By Brenda Sawatzky

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Residents of Niverville and area are reminded of this year's Remembrance Day service, to be held on November 11 at the Heritage Centre. Providing this year's address is retired master seaman Scott Stroh.

Stroh served in the Canadian military for 17 years, much of it spent on



deployments to the Middle East in various capacities.

Now retired from the military, Stroh calls Niverville

home. He has since become an active advocate for PTSD awareness and resources across the country.

He's also a community champion, taking initiatives to make Niverville a better and safer place to live every day.

The Remembrance Day service will be followed by a light lunch in the atrium of the Heritage Centre. All are invited to attend.

Niverville Increases Water Rate

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Effective October 1, water rates have climbed for Niverville residents connected to the water treatment plant.

The rate hike was approved during second and third reading at council's September 23 public meeting.

For the average household, this increase will equate to 5.45 percent and will appear for the first time on the January 2026 quarterly water bill.

The quarterly billing service charge will actually go down in the next quarter, dropping from \$7.37 to \$3.09.

The town says this is a response to increased efficiencies being implemented in the meter reading process.

As service charges go down, though, the actual cost

of the water commodity will go up. Water will see a seven percent increase, taking the current rate from \$11.18 per one thousand imperial gallons to \$11.96.

The increase, says Cyrus Reimer, the town's director of communications, is designed to help cover inflationary costs for the period between 2019 and 2027.

The last water rate increase, according to Reimer, was in 2018.

He points out that it won't be until 2027 that council can apply to the Public Utilities Board (PUB) for another increase.

Based on the results of this PUB rate change request, rate hikes are not always guaranteed.

According to CAO Eric King, council first applied to PUB for a water rate hike 18

months ago. At the time, the town asked for a much more significant increase.

"[The PUB] changed some of the rates to actually go down from what was submitted," King says.

The original ask, Reimer says, was for an overall increase of 17.87 percent as opposed to the 5.45 percent that was actually granted.

"[This request would have] helped cover future inflation as well as an increase in annual funding of the Water Utility Reserve to save for future repairs and maintenance of the Town of Niverville's municipal water system," Reimer says.

"A point to remember is that repairs and maintenance of our water system are funded solely through the water utility payments. The town legally cannot pay for water infrastructure out of

general property taxes, which means only residents who are connected to the municipal water system fund the system."

According to Reimer, the reason for the disparity is that the PUB considers future infrastructure repairs and maintenance quite differently from how town council sees them.

Public notice prior to the rate increase was provided by the Town to Niverville residents in July 2024, seeking resident input. Reimer says no significant responses were received by the PUB deadline of August 15, 2024.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the original request for public input, visit: www.wheretheyoubelong.ca/2024/07/08/notice-of-application-for-revised-water-rates

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Sports & Recreation

Families Invited to Opa's Park Renewal

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

For the past three years, a group of locals has been actively at work to bring new life and vibrancy to a once-neglected Niverville park. On October 10, they hope the entire community will join them for the grand re-opening of Opa's Park.

Opa's Park is located in a well-protected greenspace adjacent to Roselawn Bay and Edelweiss Crescent. To the north of the park lies the Wm. Dyck & Sons lumberyard and the businesses of 10 Cedar Drive.

Access to the park can be found along Roselawn Bay and the southernmost fence line of the 10 Cedar Drive parking lot.

Festivities will begin at 4:00 p.m. with a brief program, followed by a self-guided tour of the newly restored park, bouncy castle entertainment, and a hog roast dinner.

Beth Downey is the original champion of the restoration project. Growing up on Roselawn Bay, Opa's Park was a much-loved playground for her. "When I was a kid, this park had newish swings and two great big play structures in it, in addition to a basketball court," Downey says. "It was a hub of activity with all the kids on Edelweiss and Roselawn. It backed onto half a dozen moms' windows and was extremely safe and well-loved."

Today, Downey and her partner are raising their own children on Roselawn Bay. After the birth of their first, Downey decided her kids should have the same experience she had, as well as all the other kids who inhabit the area.

Unfortunately, the park's use had declined with generational changes in the neighbourhood. The play structures deteriorated and were removed and a general sense of neglect took over.

"The place flooded every year because the grading wasn't correct," Downey says. "There was a ton of garbage blown in from adjacent



Emma Bergen and Beth Downey at Opa's Park in Niverville.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

[commercial properties]. It became a garbage and drug [use] trap."

With permission from town council, Downey and a small team of volunteers jumped into the project.

Early on, a service gate was installed in the chain link fence, allowing easy access for landscaping equipment. One half of the park was then completely relandscaped, significantly improving drainage.

Of primary importance to Downey and the rest of the crew was creating a mobility-friendly space.

The access path from Roselawn Bay was undergirded with an improved gravel surface and then continued from one end of the park to the other. This pathway also connects every single play feature throughout, including the basketball court.

"That's now the first accessible court in Niverville," says Downey. "If you go by power chair or wheelchair, you can shoot hoops there. I don't think that exists anywhere else in town."

Lining the path are four new

overhead solar lights, providing extra nighttime safety.

Downey's goal with the restoration was to encourage, as much as possible, nature play. So you'll find a rock spiral embedded in the landscape to encourage balancing skills. With her own hands, Downey constructed a mud kitchen and weather station which encourages learning.

Next to the mud kitchen sits a miniature timber picnic table with stools, constructed and donated by a Niverville resident.

Downey's been encouraged to see other accoutrements show up, too, thanks to local donors, including a weathervane, saucer swing, and mini basketball hoop.

Already the sensory garden installed just a couple of years ago is producing strawberries and ground cherries for kids to enjoy as they ripen. Plants of differing textures and perfumes have also been thoughtfully incorporated, drawing in pollinators.

Not far away is one of the park's most dominant features, the

prairie garden and learning circle. This labour of love took hundreds of hours and many volunteers to plant, water, and weed.

Emma Bergen was one of those volunteers.

"I think some people walk by it and think it looks all shaggy and wild," Bergen muses. "But [full appreciation] comes from knowing what plants are what, and walking through and identifying things. Like, the Bergamot smells amazing! I've seen more native ladybugs living in this garden than I've seen on my [vegetable] farm."

The learning circle is a hard-scaped sphere that makes good use of reclaimed brick from Providence University College.

Future additions will include a crescent-shaped bench and oak stump stools. Downey anticipates this will be a perfect location for Indigenous teachings to take place. There'd be enough room here for a temporary teepee, if desired.

Even so, the space is already being

put to use by local teachers and their classrooms.

Also new this summer was the installation of a Purple Martin house to entice wildlife back.

"How do you know when a rewilding project has been successful?" Downey asks. "We talked about this with [with a native plant expert] and she said, 'When the birds come back.' They are a keystone species and kind of the marker of health. This fall, I have seen a completely different combination of songbirds spending time here, stocking up on the seed-heads [growing in] the prairie garden ahead of winter migration."

One final item will complete the restoration: the addition of interpretive signage. In the meantime, the original Opa's Park sign received a much-needed makeover and stands proud at the west entry to the park.

"One of the things that was missing from the sign is the fact that this is Treaty 1 land," says Downey. "Now that's on the sign as well and it conveys, I think, that this park is a nature playground and an outdoor classroom, a place for learning from and improving our relationship with nature."

Downey recognizes the many participants who have helped carry out her dream and is glad for each one. The town spent countless hours pursuing grant funding on her behalf and companies like Trotco Electric discounted their fees for the electrical installation.

The Fast family, whose ancestors established Opa's Park in the first place, were significant donors, along with many others.

In support of the grand opening, Danny's Whole Hog and Your Grocery People have stepped up to provide the food.

The Opa's Park committee will accept dinner donations at the event for those who can support.

"It's a pay-what-you-can kind of thing," Downey says. "All the proceeds go towards further development here in the park."



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Ste. Agathe Unveils New Heritage Park at Baudry Trails

By Brenda Sawatzky
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
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This year's National Day of Truth and Reconciliation provided a fitting opportunity for the unveiling of Heritage Park at the Baudry Trails in Ste. Agathe.

Families gathered at the trailhead on the morning of September 30 for the official ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Leading the charge was Shaun Crew and Joel Gagnon, president and vice president respectively of the Ste. Agathe Community Development Inc. (CDI).

"[We pay] homage to the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation when we gather in solemn reflection to honour the children who have never returned home, the survivors of residential schools and the enduring strength of their families and communities," Gagnon told those gathered. "May this place serve as a place of learning, reflection, and unity as we move forward together in the spirit of truth and reconciliation."

Crew followed at the podium, regaling attendees on the history of the new Heritage Park and trail, which began as a collaborative effort between the local Baudry family, the RM of Ritchot, and the CDI back in 2021.

Together, it was agreed that the RM would lease land from the Baudry family in order to construct a recreational spot bordering the east side



The ribbon-cutting at the new Heritage Park at Baudry Trails in Ste. Agathe.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

of the Red River, opposite the new boat launch.

Plans quickly developed for a path that would wind through the densely wooded area and lead to a grassy knoll on the other side.

"In the spring of 2023, a fourth partner from the Ste. Agathe snowmobile club joined the community effort," Crew said. "Together, a project was started to build a snowmobile shelter along the popular Snoman

route at the south end of the park."

In no time, grant funding and financial donations from local businesses and individuals began rolling in, allowing construction of a snowmobile shelter to get underway

last fall.

The newly completed 432-square-foot shelter has a 468-foot wrap-around veranda and is powered by a state-of-the-art off-grid solar system.

At the mouth of the trail, and at the site of the ribbon-cutting, stands a timberframe gateway and sign, welcoming visitors to the park.

In total, the project's cost came to just under \$200,000.

Alain Baudry was on site to dedicate the project on behalf of his family.

"I have had the privilege of being a part of the Ste. Agathe community all my life," said Baudry. "Today I'm filled with gratitude and pride. One of my fondest memories from the early days of this project was being invited to join the seniors club and students from the local school as they painted birdhouses. Seeing the smiles on the seniors' faces as they connected with the students was a beautiful reminder of the joy that comes from community and intergenerational connection."

Those painted birdhouses still hang along the Baudry trail, serving to connect outdoor enthusiasts with the wildlife habitat that surrounds them.

According to Ste. Agathe councillor Joel Lemoine, a donor wall will soon be erected to pay tribute to the many who've invested their time and money into this community project.

The event concluded with live music and a hot dog lunch at the new shelter.



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Nighthawks Chase the Ace Back for Round Three

By Brenda Sawatzky

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If you're a fan of winning cash and other prizes—and honestly, who isn't?—the Niverville Nighthawks Chase the Ace is back for round three and set to give away even more than last time.

Beginning on September 22, and every Monday night following, the Chase the Ace party has resumed in the Smitty's lounge at 6:00 p.m. Each night, at 8:30 p.m., one ticket holder will be drawn for a chance at the grand prize. That prize will build week after week.

"The pot has been seeded higher than the original two [times]," says Kevin Dunn, the team's marketing director. "That means that we've put more money into the original pot to start it off."

By Monday, September 29, Dunn says that the main prize pot will already be around \$5,500.

Like previous Nighthawks Chase the Ace fundraisers, there will also be a weekly prize draw to ensure that the night's selected ticketholder never goes home emptyhanded.

The weekly prize draw consists of 20 percent of that week's ticket sales and can represent thousands of dollars as sales grow.

By the time the ace of spades was chosen in the last fundraiser, the winner took home a grand prize of more than \$46,000, plus the weekly draw of \$3,300.

Prizes in this round will include Smitty's gift certificates, Nighthawks home game tickets courtesy of *The Citizen*, meals from Duke's Burgers, golf passes from Old Drovers Run, and a Nighthawks-themed beer fridge courtesy of Wiens Furniture.

Also new this year is a second Nighthawks beer from Torque Brewing. The Nighthawks light beer is a complement to the original lager and will be available any night of the week at Smitty's.

The light beer made its debut at this year's season opener and was a big hit at the Nighthawks kickoff social held on September 20.

"It has been absolutely remarkable in terms of the feedback we're getting [on it]," Dunn says. "People are enjoying it."

If Nighthawks fans need one more reason to attend Monday night Chase the Ace events at Smitty's, Dunn says that at least four team players will be there each time to rub shoulders with the fans.

Dunn says that it took no effort to convince the Chase the Ace organizing committee to give the contest another go.

"It's part of the financial stability for the growth of the organization," says Dunn. "Having more sponsors come on board and get behind it just keeps everybody motivated. It is a lot of fun, and it brings out a lot of the community spirit."

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The Best Is Yet to Come: Nighthawks Open Season Undefeated

By Bill Burfoot

The Niverville Nighthawks' season is underway, and so far the team is putting together their best start yet. After five regular season games, the team is an impressive 5-0, placing themselves among the top MJHL squads.

BUILDING ON MOMENTUM

Niverville kicked off the 2025-26 season with a veteran-laden roster, a group of talented newcomers, and a clear objective: build on the momentum from last year.

At the start of the campaign, head coach Dwight Hirst described the strong returning core of vets as hungry and determined.

"They all wanted to come back," Hirst said. "They didn't want to test the waters somewhere else. It's exciting to see them return with an appetite to be even better this year."

While experience is a key strength, the team has also injected fresh talent into the lineup.

"We feel good about the younger players we've added and are excited about what they'll bring."

During training camp, the coaching staff recognized a few key areas that needed to be filled. Midway through the preseason, they addressed those needs by trading defenceman Lane Apperley and forward Kanye Huang to the Northern Manitoba Blizzard in exchange for defenceman Aaron Krestanowich and forward Tyler Bernier.

Hirst acknowledged the difficulty of moving such well-liked players.

"You get to know these young men," he said. "Lane was a community guy, working at the local lumber yard, very team-oriented, and just a really nice man to have around. But it's also a great opportunity for him to go to the Blizzard and get minutes he might not have had here."

With a team that reflects the heart of its community—in other words, hardworking and resilient—the Nighthawks are stepping into a new era. The organization believes the best is yet to come.



Nighthawks goaltender Austin Dubinsky has had a stellar start to the season.

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"We want to play fast—not just with skating but with puck movement, relentless forechecking, and pace," he said. "We're a team that's well-conditioned, prepared, and won't quit until the last whistle."

SEPTEMBER 19 WINNIPEG BLUES (HOME)

In front of nearly 700 boisterous fans, the Nighthawks sent the home crowd away happy on opening night with a 5-2 victory over the Blues.

Even before the players were introduced, the atmosphere in the arena was palpable—and it didn't take long for the home side to give their fans something to cheer about.

Just 32 seconds in, Hayden Wheddon picked up a loose puck behind the Blues' defence and sent a backhand pass to a wide-open Adam Vigfusson, who made no mistake.

Vigfusson, who led Niverville in scoring last season, had another

reason to celebrate. Earlier in the day, the club announced that the 20-year-old veteran from Gimli would captain the team this year.

Niverville looked to extend their lead when Jaden Mah's shot slipped through Blues goaltender Mason Burkes and sat at the top of the crease. Loik Leduc was there to tap it in, but the goal was waved off after the official lost sight of the puck and blew the play dead.

Fourteen seconds later, Winnipeg struck. Brennan Green ripped a shot from the left circle that was stopped by Nighthawks goalie Austin Dubinsky, but the rebound went straight to Branden Watson, who tied the game 1-1.

Niverville regained the lead midway through the first, capitalizing on a power play. Newcomer Bernier tipped in a Luke Wagner point shot for his first goal as a Nighthawk.

Tensions boiled over late in the period after a hit from behind by

Luke Mackenzie on Blues forward Carson White. The play triggered a fight between Niverville's Parker Carrier and Winnipeg's Riddick Feely. Both players were handed game misconducts, and Mackenzie received a five-minute major and game misconduct for boarding.

The Blues failed to capitalize on the extended man advantage, however, and shortly after the penalty expired Kole Mears made it 3-1 off a perfect feed from Evan Panzer.

Soon after, an attempted clearing pass from Panzer beside his own net ricocheted off a forechecking Hayden Ritter and trickled past a stunned Dubinsky to cut the lead.

Midway through the third, Niverville iced the game with two quick goals in a 41-second span.

First, on a five-on-three power play, Panzer knocked home a perfect pass from Thomas Phillips at the side of the Blues net to restore the two-goal cushion.

Moments later, Leduc tapped home his first MJHL goal to make it 5-2 and seal the win.

SEPTEMBER 26 VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS (AWAY)

The Nighthawks made the most of their first road test of the season, defeating the Virden Oil Capitals.

It was a slow start for Niverville, who were outshot 15-6 in the opening frame as Virden came out buzzing in front of their home crowd.

The Oil Capitals opened the scoring when Noel Englot capitalized on a slick feed from Nathan Schaefer, slipping a backhand past goaltender Dubinsky.

Virden nearly doubled their lead late in the first after Tyson Ulmer was awarded a penalty shot, but Dubinsky outwaited Ulmer and came up with a timely save.

Moments later, Dubinsky stymied another quality chance from Marshall Light on a two-on-one, keeping the Nighthawks within striking distance after 20 minutes.

Dubinsky stopped 14 of 15 shots in the period, holding the fort.

The second period saw a shift in momentum as the Nighthawks found their legs—and their power play. Niverville struck twice with the man advantage, just 1:48 apart, to turn a one-goal deficit into a one-goal lead.

First, Leduc capped off a perfect three-way passing play with a shot in the slot, set up by a one-time feed from Merik Boles.

Not long after, another power play saw Krestanowich dish the puck to Wheddon, whose fanned shot found its way to Boles. The veteran forward redirected it past Braxton Burdeny for his first of the season, giving Niverville a 2-1 lead.

Niverville carried their momentum into the third, scoring another pair of goals 1:12 apart to put the game out of reach.

Carrier made a great defensive play at his own blue line to pick off a pass and start the rush. Carrier chipped the puck to Bernier, who dropped a pass to John Scott, who



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ripped a shot that snuck under Burdeny's arm and trickled across the goal line.

Shortly after, Krestanowich again made his presence felt by keeping the puck in at the Virden blue line under pressure. He tapped it to Vigfusson, who found Boles at the top of the crease for his second of the night, making the final score 4-1.

OCTOBER 1 PORTAGE TERRIERS (HOME)

It may not have been the prettiest win, but the Nighthawks stayed perfect to improve their season to 3-0 with a gritty overtime victory versus the Portage Terriers.

"We've talked a lot about resiliency and staying in the fight," said Hirst. "It wasn't a full 60 on our part, and that's three games now we haven't put together a full 60 minutes, but I thought we stuck with the plan."

The Nighthawks were slow out of the gate, and Portage made them pay early. Just 2:16 into the first period, Wyatt Dreger gave the Terriers a 1-0 lead, finishing off a slick passing play from Drayden Uhrina on a three-on-three rush before sliding the puck between the legs of an outstretched Dubinsky.

Niverville responded a few minutes later with Mears picking up a loose puck behind the Portage net and dishing a backhand pass to Zeller in the slot. Zeller ripped a shot over the glove of Terriers netminder Donavan Bodnar.

The Terriers regained the lead late in the second after a miscue in the Nighthawks' zone. Rhett Platt intercepted a clearing attempt and found a wide-open Trevor Hill in the left circle, who beat Dubinsky high on the glove side.

The Nighthawks caught a fortunate bounce early in the third to tie things up once again. Leduc, working from the corner, tossed the puck toward the Portage net, and it deflected off a surprised Bodnar's pad and in. It was Leduc's third goal in as many games.

With the score knotted, both goaltenders held firm down the stretch. Bodnar turned away 31 of 34 shots while Dubinsky was solid when called upon, turning aside 26 of 28 shots, allowing Niverville to

force overtime.

Dawson Zeller was the hero, capping off the night with his second goal of the game.

The 19-year-old forward from St. Andrews, Manitoba redirected a perfect feed from Krestanowich, sealing a hard-fought win for the Nighthawks in front of a loud home crowd.

After being held off the score-sheet in the first two games of the season, Zeller's two-goal night was a welcome sign for the Nighthawks.

"Dawson's been a goal-scorer in this league," Hirst said. "He knows how to put himself in position to score the types of goals we saw tonight. It's nice to see guys like that step up and get to be the hero sometimes."

Zeller, who tallied 19 goals last season, is expected to be a key offensive contributor again this year—but he won't be the only one.

"This is going to be a scoring-by-committee team," Hirst added. "We've got a top line that gets a lot of attention with Hayden Wheddon, Adam Vigfusson, and Merik Boles, but... we can get contributions from all our lines, and we'll be counting on that."

OCTOBER 3 WINKLER FLYERS (HOME)

It had been 186 days since the Flyers ended the Nighthawks' playoff run, a loss that still lingers for returning players, coaches, and fans. Tonight, the Nighthawks had a chance to deliver some long-awaited payback—and they delivered in a big way.

The 4-2 win was more than just redemption; it marked a milestone for the franchise. Coming into the night, Winkler held a dominant 10-0-1 record against Niverville in regular-season matchups.

That streak came to an end.

The Nighthawks doubled the Flyers in shots 46-19 and showcased a more consistent effort throughout the game. The win improves the Nighthawks' perfect start to the 2025 season, with a record of 4-0.

"It was probably as close to 60 minutes as I've seen our team play all season," said Hirst. "Obviously we doubled them in shots tonight and that doesn't come without consistency. The couple [of goals] we

gave up tonight were just a lack of attention to detail, but overall I'm happy with how we played."

The Nighthawks were determined to avoid a repeat of Wednesday's slow start against the Terriers, where they conceded a goal just two minutes into the game.

This time around, Niverville came out strong and kept the pressure on, controlling the majority of the first period.

The Nighthawks were rewarded for their early dominance when Mears won a battle in the corner and found a streaking Carrier, who moved in from the point. Carrier fired a shot past Winkler goalie Leif Ekblad to score his first goal of the season to give Niverville the early lead.

Less than three minutes later, Boles sent a perfect backhand sauce pass to Vigfusson, who had found space in the right circle. Vigfusson one-timed a laser over Ekblad's glove to make it 2-0 for Niverville.

The momentum carried into the second period when Leduc put on a show of skill with a great effort to increase the lead to 3-0. Leduc, starting from his own blue line, sliced through four Winkler defenders before calmly tucking a shot under Ekblad's arm, sending the home crowd into a frenzy.

Winkler, however, would not go quietly.

After struggling to generate offence early, the Flyers broke through midway through the second. Niklas Gudmundson found Jacob Michelson wide open in the slot, and Michelson beat Nighthawks goalie Ben Chornomydz blocker-side to cut the deficit.

Moments later, the Flyers made it even tighter when Liam Carlone scored off a perfect pass from Kam Thomas, bringing Winkler within one goal at 3-2.

Niverville held their ground. With less than a minute remaining in regulation, Carrier sealed the deal with an empty-net goal, his second of the game, to make it 4-2 and put the game out of reach.

OCTOBER 5 WINKLER FLYERS (AWAY)

On Sunday night, the Nighthawks and Flyers faced off again—and the

rematch didn't disappoint.

It was a much different contest from Friday's win in Niverville, which was more one-sided in the Nighthawks' favour. The teams went back-and-forth exchanging leads all night long.

The Flyers came out strong in the first period. An early power play gave them the chance to strike first and they took full advantage. On a quick counterattack, Connor Rieger found William Lyons, who was heading toward the Nighthawks' net. Lyons found the gap between the glove and pad of Niverville netminder Dubinsky to give the Flyers the lead.

However, the Nighthawks responded a few minutes later. Boles tied the game with his third of the season when his centring pass deflected off a Flyers defenceman's skate and got by Winkler goalie Ekblad.

The second period opened much like the first, with Winkler once again striking early. Just 33 seconds in, Rieger picked up his second point of the game when he received a perfect drop pass from Trevor Dalton in the slot. He lifted a shot over Dubinsky's blocker to put the Flyers back on top, 2-1.

This was the first of five total goals scored in the middle frame between the two clubs.

Niverville once again tied things up as Vigfusson fired a one-timer from the right circle. Although Ekblad stopped it, the rebound came loose and Zeller was in the right place at the right time to knock in the equalizer.

The Nighthawks took their first lead of the game at the midway point of the second period when Phillips found Wheddon at the Flyers' blue line. Wheddon skated in and ripped a shot over Ekblad's glove, giving Niverville a 3-2 advantage.

The Nighthawks didn't have much time to enjoy their lead, though.

Only 53 seconds later, the Flyers caused a turnover in the Nighthawks' zone and Rieger tallied once again, firing a shot past Dubinsky from the left circle.

Winkler kept the momentum in their favour after the goal, forcing

Dubinsky to make a few clutch saves.

As the period neared its end, the Nighthawks capitalized. With just over a minute remaining, Mackenzie picked up his first goal of the season, firing a shot past Ekblad to give Niverville a 4-3 lead heading into the third.

The Nighthawks had some chances to extend their lead in the third period, but Ekblad continued his stellar play, keeping the Flyers within striking distance.

His efforts were rewarded when Carlone moved around his defender at the Nighthawks blue line, skated toward Dubinsky, and outwaited him before sliding the puck in the net to tie the game yet again with four minutes remaining.

The Flyers were then handed a crucial penalty. Rookie Graeme Pickering was given a four-minute minor for high-sticking with two minutes left.

Niverville's potent power play had a chance to end the game, but Ekblad stood tall once again, sending the game to overtime.

Both teams had numerous opportunities to finish the game, but it was Niverville that found the back of the net when it mattered most.

Zeller nearly won the game early, but Flyers defender Owen Wallace made a desperation clearance off the line to keep the game tied.

Later in overtime, Pickering executed a gorgeous toe drag in the slot, attempting to beat Dubinsky with a shot over his glove.

However, the 20-year-old goaltender from Ardrossan, Alberta came up with a spectacular save with his left shoulder.

Pickering, from St. Adolphe, was making his MJHL debut after being reassigned to Winkler by the WHL's Red Deer Rebels earlier in the week.

Moments after the big save by Dubinsky, Leduc delivered the overtime winner.

Leduc intercepted a pass at the Nighthawks' blue line and knocked it forward. After gathering the loose puck just inside the Flyers zone, Leduc skated in alone and calmly lifted a backhand over Ekblad's glove, securing the victory for Niverville.



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Arts & Culture

Ritchot Unveils First of Four Park Art Installations

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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The first of four art installations around the RM of Ritchot was unveiled on September 8 at Perron Park in St. Adolphe.

Residents were invited to a pop-up party to witness the debut.

Similar parties will take place in Île-des-Chênes's D'Auteuil Park on September 10, the Jeannot Robert Trail in Ste. Agathe on September 16, and the Grande Pointe Park on September 18.

Each event will begin with an introduction of the artist and the official unveiling at 6:30 p.m.

Jason Bodnarchuk, councillor for Ward 2, opened Monday's event with a few words describing the project's inspiration.

"The Signs of Belonging project is an initiative by the municipality of Ritchot's recreation department to create more welcoming and inclusive spaces in our parks while celebrating the diversity of our community," Bodnarchuk said.

A special thank you went out to Southern Health-Santé Sud for funding through their Healthy Together Now grant.

Emma Dequier, Ritchot's recreational program coordinator, is a big part of the reason this project came to life. Earlier this spring, she was inspired by a similar initiative that took place in Minnesota.

A call was sent out to the communities and local art collectives, asking for designs in virtually any artistic medium, including painting, drawing, and digital art.

Nine responses were received in total.

Dequier and her team reviewed



Danielle Peters, Jason Bodnarchuk, Emma Dequier, and Kiran Sran.

BRENDASAWATZKY

the various portfolios and narrowed the submissions down to four.

"After meeting with the artists, we kind of had an idea of where we saw each piece come to life," Dequier says. "We tried to pick a

variety of different [styles] of artwork. Each park has a very different take on what belonging means."

The artist chosen to create the Perron Park art piece is Kiran Sran, a student of the University of

Manitoba's School of Art. She's also a Winnipeg resident.

"We worked collaboratively and kind of guided her, but it really was about what made her feel like she belonged in a park," Dequier says.

The only prerequisite Dequier had for Sran was that it should include the community's famed bird, the Chimney Swift. The rest of the inspiration was Sran's to discover.

"I really wanted to include the native flowers, the sunflowers, and the corn maze," Sran says of the project. "And then there's the river, because there's a lot of bird-watching along this river. Intentionally, there are no humans [in it] because I'm coming to a park and I'm trying to connect with nature. I am the human."

An electronic copy of Sran's finished piece was sent to Dequier, who had it transferred to an aluminium panel for longevity in its outdoor setting.

Beneath the art piece is a written feature describing the artwork and its maker, along with the title *Belonging and Heritage*. It includes a QR code that will take readers directly to the RM website to access more details about the program and the artists.

"I feel so honoured, and I feel so connected to the community," Sran says. "I feel like now I'm a part of it."

All four of the artists to be revealed in the coming weeks hail from either Winnipeg or Lorette, since Dequier says the RM received no qualifying submissions from their own communities.

As for Monday's event, she's glad for the turnout and hopes the upcoming events in the other communities will result in similar interest.

"We're thankful to the community for coming out and engaging, because that's really what helps drive us to create a sense of belonging wherever we go."

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