

# The Citizen

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### LOCAL NEWS

#### French School Division Eliminates Homework

■ As a response to student AI use, the DSFM is directing its teaching staff to minimize homework, if not eliminate it altogether.

Details on Page 9



### LOCAL NEWS

#### McDonald's Drivers Frustrated

■ Traffic around the new Niverville McDonald's is subject to some big restrictions, a reality that has been hitting customers since the restaurant opened one month ago. The reasons are more complicated than many realize.

Details on Page 12

### SPORTS & REC

#### Have You Heard of Walking Soccer?

■ Move over, pickleball. Learn more about this new sport, aimed at older adults, that has been taking the world by storm.

Details on Page 23

### SPORTS & REC

#### Nighthawks Off to Best Start in MJHL History

■ At 15-1, the Nighthawks are off to a historically strong start to the season. No MJHL team has ever won this many games so early.

Details on Pages 24-25



# Niverville RCMP Detachment Opens

➤ READ MORE ON PAGE 12

ADI LOEWEN



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# Behind Every Hamper, a Helping Hand: Local Foodbank Readies for Christmas

By Brenda Sawatzky  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
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Every year, families around the rural southeast rely on foodbanks to make their Christmas a little brighter. This year is no exception.

Dan Macloskie, a board member for the Niverville-based Helping Hands, says the organization stopped accepting applications for hampers on November 30.

At the time of this writing in mid-November, already they had 73 families signed on.

He was fairly confident the number will be closer to 80 by the end of the month.

Sponsorships, too, were being accepted until November 30. The hope was that there would be at least one sponsor per family in need. Sponsors can be individuals, churches, families, or businesses.

Macloskie says that Helping Hands made the shift a couple of years ago from asking the community at large for food and gift donations to leaving that up to individual sponsors.

"We find that it's a bit more personal that way," Macloskie says. "We

can give them more specifics about the kids."

The sponsor makes a cash donation towards the food portion of the hamper, leaving the grocery purchasing to Helping Hands so every recipient receives the same.

This year, families will have the option of a turkey or ham. There'll be potatoes and other vegetables, stuffing, buns and butter, oranges, chocolates, and home-baked Christmas cookies. For Christmas morning, there'll be pancake mix, syrup, milk, and eggs.

"When we get sponsors for particular families, I match them up based on the size [of family], small, medium, or large. The families give a few ideas on what kinds of gifts their kids might be interested in. It's specific to kids 12 years old and under, but most sponsors will get a gift for the teenagers as well."

Traditionally, the purchasing of gifts is left up to the sponsor, but Macloskie says Helping Hands is willing to take donations here as well, taking further pressure off sponsors.

The identity of each Christmas hamper recipient family is carefully guarded by Helping Hands. The

sponsor receives only the most basic information necessary.

Helping Hands will be receiving sponsor donations on the first two Saturdays of December.

"On the fifteenth, we get all of our volunteers together and pack the boxes so it's all prepared. And then on the sixteenth the fire department comes out and does the deliveries for us."

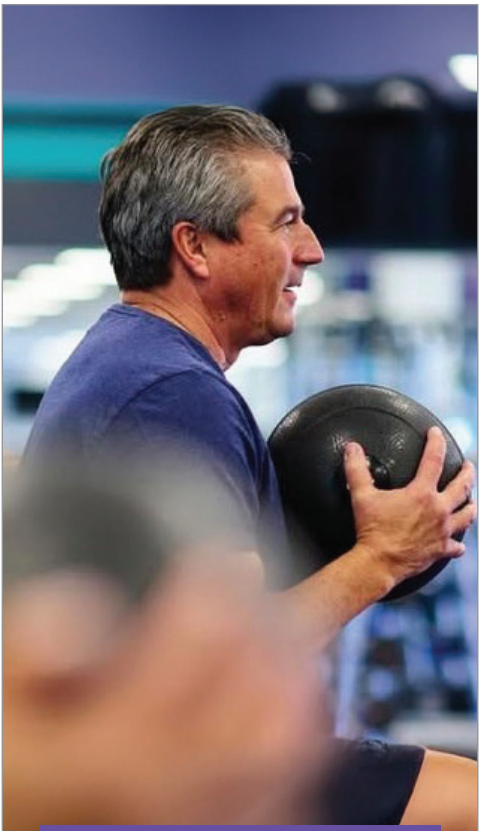
Macloskie adds that a number of local churches and schools have indicated their intent to do food drives for Helping Hands. Oftentimes cash donations are more prolific during this season as well.

Last year, for the first time, one Christmas hamper volunteer took it upon herself to bake 120 dozen cookies to add to the food hamper. She's offered to do it again this year.

"We're always just so super grateful for the community's support," Macloskie says. "It's been a really good year for Helping Hands in that way."

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

To register for a hamper, volunteer, or provide sponsorship, visit: <https://nivervillehelpinghands.com>



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# “Everything Is Doable”: Remembering the Unstoppable John Loeppky

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

On November 24, hundreds of people gathered at the Winnipeg Evangelical Free Church to bid a final farewell to a dear friend and loved one, John Loeppky.

The crowd filling the massive sanctuary that afternoon stood testament to the many lives John touched over his 78 years. The memories shared induced visions of a humble, gentle, funny, optimistic, and fiercely tenacious man in the face of great difficulty.

At the age of 31, just as his career as a Niverville-area farmer was beginning to show promise, John fell from an electrical pole near a barn that was under construction on his property. He went on to live the rest of his life as a paraplegic in a wheelchair.

John was a husband to Linda and father to three very young children at the time: John Jr., Jaylin, and Marcus.

If anything can be said of John during those early years, and throughout his life, it's that he saw his new situation as more of a hurdle than a handicap. Before he was even released from the hospital, he got busy planning a redesign of the barn that was going up, now including wider aisles to accommodate a wheelchair.

He would soon have more than 400 hogs to manage and 800 acres of field to farm.

So a minor hiccup like partial paralysis wasn't about to stop him.

The year was 1978, a time before a lot of research and development had gone into the creation of mobility devices for paraplegics.

Still, according to family and friends, he never lost hope.

In no time, John was designing and engineering his own devices and modifications. The barn was outfitted with an automatic feed release system that he could manipulate with a specially made rod.

He modified his own tractor with a hand clutch and brake and designed a manual block-and-pulley-style lift to hoist himself in and out of the



John Loeppky, alongside his wife Linda.



C/O THE LOEPPKY FAMILY

tractors and farm trucks.

He constructed a similar manual pulley lift to get him and his wheelchair up a staircase and into the house.

In the coming years, John also developed a renewed interest in his high school passion, basketball, and began playing on a Winnipeg-based paraplegic team. He was instrumental in bringing the first Prairie Paraplegic Farmers Conference to Winnipeg.

In 1981, John was featured in an article by the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* titled “Being Handicapped Isn't So Terrible.”

He also made the front page of the *Winnipeg Sun*, sharing space with former Canadian prime minister Joe Clark and Princess Diana. In that article, he is quoted as saying, “I usually don't think of myself as handicapped at all.”

His son John Jr. regaled those gathered at the funeral with stories of his father's life.

“Dad loved farming till the very end,” John Jr. said. “Farming was his passion. He didn't farm for fame,

glory, or riches. He had a hard time understanding people who looked forward to retirement.”

John Jr. recalled he and his siblings accompanying their dad in the barn and on countless farm errands that always resulted in stops for sugary treats.

As young farmhands, they fell asleep at their father's side in the tractor during the long hours of the harvest and occasionally experienced the thrill of taking the wheel.

“One of the benefits of adding hand controls in all the farm vehicles was that you didn't actually need to be able to reach the pedals to drive,” John Jr. joked. “Even being able to look over the dash was optional.”

Life for the family was active and normal. They enjoyed road trips, ski vacations, and countless camping outings.

“Dad wasn't one to sit around at home when a season of farming slowed down. We always had lots of excitement, whether it was going to the Morris Stampede and pulling him all the way up the stairs to the top of the grandstand, going to the Bomber

games and sitting on the sidelines in the handicap zone, or even to local hockey games where Dad had his reserved spot in the corner.”

John also held a deep faith in God. He never worried about the weather or getting the crops off the fields when the season ran late. It all belonged to God anyway, he'd tell his family.

John and his brother Pete eventually passed the main farming operations to their own children. Cousins Marcus and Paul now run the family farm as partners.

Paul was witness to his uncle's ingenuity growing up.

“His main lift to get into equipment was a simple block and tackle,” said Paul. “[It] was originally designed as a fence puller, used to tighten fence wire over long distances. There was an arm that would come out of the tractor with the block and tackle attached to it. He would put a sling around his lower body and hook it up then use his arm strength to pull on a rope to raise himself up into a tractor or combine.”

Despite his resilience, John was

also willing to ask for help when needed and showed sincere gratitude when help came.

Another local farmer, Grant Dyck, says that he grew up a friend to the Loeppky siblings and frequent visitor to their household.

“[John] went through life with a profound optimism and fantastic sense of humour,” says Dyck. “Oh, and he happened to be in wheelchair. But that was by no means something that defined him. Quite the opposite. With his outlook and positive, can-do attitude, it was a part of his life that wouldn't slow him down.”

In fact, in all the years that Grant witnessed the Loeppky family dynamic, never once did he ever hear John complain about or bemoan his condition. His wife Linda, Grant says, was an absolute rock.

“John was of the old guard,” says Grant. “Despite being in the hospital [at the end of his life], he held on till harvest was done, passing away hours after it was complete. Just another example of his resilience.”

Another family friend, Jared Funk, recalls how John's quiet resolve and acceptance impacted him early in life. As a child, Funk spent countless hours at the Loeppky household, having befriended John Jr.

In 1992, Funk's life was permanently changed, too, when an accident rendered him a paraplegic.

“When I had my accident, I realized that this is all doable,” says Funk. “Everything is doable because I saw John do it. In that light, it was easier for me to approach and tackle things because I saw someone else do it before me.”

Since becoming a father himself, Funk says that the example John set, showing how to be an active father in the face of a disability, has been motivational. In the end, he realizes that the wheelchair shouldn't symbolize something that you can't do. Instead it's really just another means of getting around, like a bicycle.

“It's only the mindset that [distinguishes you] as the handicapped person as opposed to just a regular guy in a chair,” says Funk.

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# Gravel Pit Discoveries Reveal Artifacts Dating Back to Ice Age

By Brenda Sawatzky

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In recent years, curious finds by quarry workers in gravel pits near Grunthal have led to some remarkable discoveries about prehistoric conditions in southeast Manitoba.

According to Dr. Joe Moysiuk, curator of palaeontology and geology at the Manitoba Museum, the artifacts date back to the Ice Age, a period believed to have followed the extinction of the dinosaurs but predating humans.

As of December 1, a new exhibit at the Manitoba Museum tells a story based on these findings.

"It's a mural depicting what life was like in the Ice Ages in Manitoba," Moysiuk says. "A lot of the fossil evidence that went into creating this mural was found close to Grunthal, so it's kind of a nice local story."

Once discovered, the artifacts were turned over to the Manitoba Museum.

Scientists were commissioned to study and date them, leading to the conclusion of the historical timeline in which they fall.

"We've amassed a bit of a collection from the area," says Moysiuk. "There are many different bones from animals, mostly mammals. We have things like mammoths and extinct bison species. We also have a very remarkable jawbone from a giant beaver. These are beavers that were about the size of a black bear."

Also among the finds are



Dr. Joe Moysiuk holding the giant jaw bone of a beaver. MANITOBA MUSEUM

evidence of muskox, a species that isn't extinct but certainly not found in southeast Manitoba today.

Within the deep sediment where the bones were found, scientists have also discovered bits of fossilized pine wood and pollen from plants and trees. All of these things, together, flesh out our understanding of the region's past ecosystem.

"It's a really interesting assemblage of fossils and one of the most diverse in the province."

The relics found here aren't as old as those found in Morden in past years. According to Moysiuk, the Morden dinosaur bones date back about 85 million years.

"The material that we're finding in Grunthal, there's still work being done to find out how old it is, but we suspect it's around 40,000 years old."

There are two primary processes for dating artifacts. One of them is carbon dating.

"The trouble with carbon dating is that it relies on carbon-14, which decays radioactively," Moysiuk explains. "Unfortunately, the speed at which it decays means that there's basically none left after about 40,000 to 50,000 years. So it can't actually date things that are older than that, reliably."

Moysiuk's colleagues at the Manitoba Geological Survey are incorporating a more complicated dating process called

optical dating.

"The more approaches that we can use to give us information that's consistent, the more certain that we can be about the age of that material."

During the time of the Ice Age, Moysiuk says it is believed that ice sheets in southeast Manitoba were more than two kilometres in depth at times.

"Over the course of hundreds of thousands of years, the ice sheets moved back and forth across the province," he says. "So sometimes they moved out and some of the plants and animals were able to move back into those areas. And then the glaciers would move southwards again and move around a lot of these bones of animals."

For that reason, it's difficult to be absolutely certain that the Grunthal findings indicate something that was indigenous to the region or simply deposited by the ice movement.

The researchers are confident, though, that the landscape around Grunthal would have been something similar to the boreal forest.

Commissioned to paint the mural for the Manitoba Museum is Julius Csotonyi, a Manitoba native and scientific illustrator. His work is on display at museums around the globe.

The Grunthal artifact mural can be found at the back of the Earth History gallery, behind the iconic giant ground sloth replica. Eventually Moysiuk anticipates that displays containing the actual Grunthal finds will be located here too.

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## IN BRIEF

## Province Announces Major Investment in Rural Infrastructure

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On November 25, the provincial government announced new funding that will benefit Niverville, the RM of Ritchot, and at least four other municipalities in the southeast.

Thanks to the federal Canada Housing and Infrastructure Fund (CHIF), \$22 million has been allocated towards the Red-Seine-Rat Wastewater Cooperative (RSRWC) for a wastewater treatment plant which is about to undergo construction next year.

In 2024, the funding was offered to each province and territory willing to commit to key actions that would increase Canada's housing supply.

"The cost of living starts with the cost of housing, and that means we need the infrastructure that lets communities build more homes," says Premier Wab Kinew. "These vital water and wastewater projects give rural municipalities the capacity so they can grow, attract new families, and keep life affordable."

In total, projects throughout Manitoba will benefit to the tune of \$76.9 million from the CHIF grants.

Project beneficiaries outside of the RSRWC include the Brandon Water and Wastewater network, the Pembina Valley Water Co-op, the Boissevain lagoon, and the Morden sewer line to Winkler.

The RSRWC initiative was first announced in 2022. The cross-municipal wastewater treatment plant was a forward-thinking strategy developed by leadership in four municipalities all facing

the same issue: waning lagoon capacity.

The original four municipalities partnering in this project were Niverville, Ritchot, Hanover, and Tache. Since that time, La Broquerie and De Salaberry have been on-boarded.

The shared treatment plant is currently estimated at \$235 million and will include miles upon miles of effluent pipes leading from the plant to each municipality.

Without question, it's a major response to a critical and widespread need in rural Manitoba.

"On behalf of the RSRWC and its six municipal members, we're truly grateful for this pivotal provincial investment, supported by the government of Canada," says Jim Funk, reeve of Hanover and RSRWC chairperson. "With construction costs rising each year, this support is vital to keeping our project on track and ensuring shovels are in the ground in 2026. We applaud the Manitoba government for listening to municipalities and investing in infrastructure that grows our economy and protects our environment."

Manitoba Municipal and Northern Relations Minister Glen Simard says that the province's focus on rural communities is a direct result of municipal leaders advocating to the province for their region's success.

"These important infrastructure upgrades will unleash housing and economic growth in large and small municipalities across the province," says Simard. "This is the critical infrastructure needed for communities to grow and thrive well into the future."

## For the Love of Peyton: Grandmother Raises Rett Syndrome Awareness

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Bonny Fehr dreams of a kinder world, especially when it comes to kids with disabilities. Her 13-year-old granddaughter Peyton lives with Rett syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that affects brain development and impairs one's language and coordination.

Between 600 to 900 people have been diagnosed with Rett syndrome across Canada, most of them girls. That's because it's caused by a genetic mutation in the X chromosome on a gene known as the MECP2.

October was Rett Syndrome Awareness month, leading Fehr to visit Peyton's class at the Niverville Middle School on a mission to educate approximately 50 of her granddaughter's peers on what it's like to live with the disorder.

Fehr hopes to reduce the anxiety, uncertainty, and misconceptions other kids might experience around children with disabilities. This is her way of making the school environment more accepting.

Uncommon as Rett syndrome may be, there is a national alliance dedicated to creating awareness. Fehr and Peyton's mother, Shayla, are involved with the Manitoba chapter of the Canadian Rett Syndrome Coalition (CRSC).

Peyton has been nonverbal for most of her life. She can walk and use her hands, but with difficulty. She wrings her hands and has characteristics similar to an autistic child.

"The thing that I want people to understand is that although Rett kids are nonverbal, they are very aware of what's going on," says Fehr. "It's almost like they're trapped without their words. I think that is the most heartbreaking."

On October 20, Peyton sat in a chair facing all her



Peyton and her aunt Mariah at Niverville Middle School. BRENDA SAWATZKY

peers with a grin from ear to ear while Fehr made her presentation.

"We put Peyton in front and she was watching her peers as we did the presentation and she was so happy," Fehr says. "It's like she knew it was all about her."

Just as Fehr had hoped, the students were remarkably receptive and curious. Each went home with an information packet and T-shirt in the hopes that conversations about Rett syndrome would continue around the family dinner table.

Peyton's early development began just like any other toddler. She crawled and then walked, all the while developing her language skills.

"At around two years old, we noticed that she wasn't gaining new words," Fehr says. "The words she had already learned, she was losing. Then her gait changed. Her walk wasn't as confident. She just really started to go backwards."

This regression is distinctive of Rett syndrome in kids, only Fehr and her family had never heard of the condition.

Peyton's symptoms slowly worsened. She soon lacked the depth perception to determine whether a surface change was a minor step or steep drop. Eventually, her use of language disappeared completely.

In the meantime, Fehr took notes and sought a diagnosis.

Unfortunately, the wait time at the Child Development Clinic was long. Still, Fehr called, leaving message after message about her observations.

Her persistence finally paid off.

"I finally got this call at work saying, 'Bonny, I'm a doctor from the Child Development Clinic and I must say, I have never had a mother, much less a grandmother, advocate so well for their child. If you can get a doctor's referral, I'll have you in next week.'"

Initially, the tests pointed towards autism. For Peyton's mom, that diagnosis just didn't feel right so they pushed harder.

Fehr says that the day they finally got an accurate diagnosis is the day she felt like she was seeing her granddaughter for who she really was, and it was beautiful.

While there is no treatment for Rett syndrome, a new drug has been released in the last year that shows promise. That drug is expensive, though, and not currently covered through Manitoba Health.

In the meantime, Peyton finds creative ways to communicate. Mostly, it's anything she can do to capture attention—for instance, flicking the light switch when the person she needs to communicate with is in the room.

Fehr and her daughter are

grateful for the help Peyton has received through the years.

Thanks to the Niverville Middle School, Peyton has had access to a tablet with eye-tracking technology. When Peyton's eyes lock on a picture, the machine verbalizes that word.

More recently, Peyton was gifted a three-wheeler bike by a children's charity. She rode it for the first time at this summer's Rett syndrome fundraising walk along with 30 family members.

It's things like this that make kids with disabilities feel like they matter.

It's too bad, Fehr says, that there aren't more financial supports available for parents to purchase specialized items for their special needs kids.

"The things these kids need, why do they have to cost so much? A parent is already trying to navigate life and to help the child as best they can. Yet for children with disabilities, everything costs way more."

Respite, too, is poorly funded. Fehr is thankful that she and her husband have been able to offer that to their daughter. In return, Peyton teaches them much about life, despite her inabilities.

"Seeing who Peyton is and how she's growing into this beautiful woman, and how she's living life to the best of her ability, that makes me want to be a better person," says Fehr.

Fehr has also witnessed the incredible impact Peyton has had in her school.

"Although Peyton is nonverbal, she's very verbal. There's a lot of Rett kids that are very quiet, but not this girl. She laughs and giggles. She's just a ball of energy and joy. And the thing I love hearing the most is that, when she misses school, she is missed because you don't hear her laughter in the hallways."



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# Service, Courage, and Reflection at Niverville Remembrance Ceremony

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
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Niverville's annual Remembrance Day service took on a slightly different feel this year due to its new location: the fieldhouse of the CRRC. But the hundreds who gathered there enjoyed the same inspiring experience as years past.

Remembrance Day committee member Natalie Batkis chaired the event.

"Remembrance Day matters to all of us," Batkis said. "It's about gratitude, reflection, and community. It's about pausing for a moment in our busy lives to think about the freedoms we enjoy and the costs of those freedoms."

This year's themes focused on service and courage, virtues which transcend the military to also include first responders, teachers, healthcare workers, volunteers, and all those who have dedicated their lives to the service of others.

"That's what today is all about," she added. "Honouring those who have served and inspired us all to serve in our own way. The courage of those who went before us reminds

us to be brave in the face of challenges, to stand up for what's right and to take care of one another."

This year's guest speaker was Scott Stroh, a retired Canadian military veteran and master sailor.

Stroh spent 17 years of his life with the Royal Canadian Navy. His time began in Halifax working in the Maritime Coastal Defence Reserves. Eventually he was transferred to a guided missile frigate.

He regaled the audience with some of the more light-hearted moments from his early career, including finding himself on the wrong ship and having to endure the humiliation of this unfortunate mistake for weeks to come.

It didn't take long, though, for the storytelling to get real.

"I was on a ship overseas off the U.K. coast when 9/11 happened," Stroh said. "We actually didn't get a full visual of what happened until days later, the technology being not as advanced as it is today. But within hours of that attack, our posture changed from training to a real-world attack scenario. Weeks later, we were on our way to the Arabian Sea/

Persian Gulf as an initial unit in this new war on terror."

It was a watershed moment for the Canadian military which had, until then, been primarily invested in international peacekeeping efforts.

"You trained for war, but it never dawned upon [you] that we'd be thrown into conflict on a global scale."

By 2006, Stroh was accepted to the intelligence branch of the navy and by 2010 he found himself in Afghanistan, working as an imagery analyst with the drone program.

The base to which he was assigned in Afghanistan was located at a decommissioned international airport.

The military tried their best to bring a little piece of home to these foreign shores by opening restaurants like TGI Friday's, Burger King, Pizza Hut, and Tim Horton's for North American soldiers.

"There was a full NHL-sized hockey rink which many retired NHL players came to," Stroh said. "They got to bring the Stanley Cup and we'd fight them for it."

In 2013, Stroh was released from the military with what was called an occupational

stress injury.

In layman's terms, it's known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Thankfully, Stroh met a fellow retired military man living in Winnipeg who had dedicated himself to helping stress-injured individuals returning from Afghanistan.

"Under his protection, it was safe to talk about [my injury]. I don't know where I'd be if not for him. I can only imagine what it's like for my brothers and sisters who didn't have that same support."

Today, Stroh is a strong advocate for PTSD awareness and supports, although he says there is a way to more accurately frame the term.

"This isn't a disease. I was injured. In October of 2010, I started to feel something was drastically wrong. I couldn't focus. I fell apart mostly every day, what I'd call just being a hot mess."

In fact, there is an entire movement across Canada known as the Rolling Barrage, a group who has made it their mandate to change the terminology used to describe this condition as post-traumatic stress injury (PTSI).

## Operation Red Nose Gears Up for Another Festive Season

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
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Thanks to Operation Red Nose (ORN), everyone can take advantage of a safely guided sleigh this Christmas season.

For the sixth year running, the St. Malo chapter of ORN will provide designated driver services to virtually the entire rural southeast.

Their territory covers every community between Dominion City and Grande Pointe, Vita and Lowe Farm.

Beginning November 28, the volunteer-based program is available each and every Friday and Saturday night until Christmas, and then once more on New Year's Eve.

There is no cost to use the service, but donations are gratefully accepted.

Bob and Crystal Adolphe are the coordinators of this

year's ORN St. Malo program. Joining them for the first time is Bill Marsh, a 20-year veteran of the program who will provide volunteer training and ride night logistics.

"Having lived and worked in rural southeast Manitoba my whole life, I realize that transportation options can be an issue, especially during the holiday season," says Bob. "Being able to be a part of this important initiative... is an honour."

He and Crystal were drawn to the position because it provides a sound solution to keeping Manitoba's roads safer for everyone during the holidays.

Beyond that, the organization also donates all its revenue to local charities.

"It's such a meaningful way to make a difference," he adds. "Whether as a sponsor, a volunteer, a team member, or a ride client."

Each year, the charity recipients are chosen by volunteers.

The Operation Red Nose awareness campaign has been active since 1984. Each chapter operates its own headquarters where calls are received.

Dispatch lines open to the public at 9:00 p.m. on designated ride nights.

Volunteer drivers and riders, located across the region, are dispatched to the calls that are closest to them.

It takes at least three volunteers to respond to each call. They arrive at the requested pickup location and drive the client and their vehicle safely home.

"It takes about 150 volunteers for the whole campaign," Bob says. "That includes the dispatch and volunteer riders. So far we have 45 spots filled so we are definitely still looking for many more."

As in previous years, one call to ORN St. Malo is all it takes to get a client home from any pickup location.

"We will once again coordinate with any other ORN. So let's say somebody's in Tolstoi and they need to go to Winnipeg. It's out of our catchment, but we'll make it work."

One Insurance Group and Sandbox Mutual Insurance are coming alongside as sponsors of this year's ride event. In addition, they will provide volunteers on designated ride nights.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

■ To volunteer, contact:  
st-malo@operationrednose.com  
or 204-216-0140.

■ To learn more, visit:  
www.operationrednose.com

■ You can also find ORN St. Malo on Facebook and Instagram.



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TOY DRIVE**

NEVERVILLE  
**helping  
hands**

DECEMBER 10 @ 7:30 P.M.



PORTAGE  
**TERRIERS**

**WEENIE WEDNESDAY**

DECEMBER 13 @ 7:30 P.M.



WINKLER  
**FLYERS**

DECEMBER 19 @ 7:30 P.M.



SELKIRK  
**STEELERS**

**SANTA | STUDENT NIGHT**

JANUARY 3 @ 7:30 P.M.



STEINBACH  
**PISTONS**

JANUARY 4 @ 3:00 P.M.



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## IN BRIEF



Council fields local questions about development. BY BRENDA SAWATZKY

## Ritchot Council Approves Adult Living Development in IDC

**By Brenda Sawatzky**  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
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Within the next two years, Île-des-Chênes will have a unique housing development that caters specifically to the needs and desires of seniors.

On November 19, Ritchot's council gave a thumbs up to an adult-living housing complex proposed by Rockwell Planning and Development.

The model is a repeat of something the company either already has or is building in La Broquerie, Ste. Anne, and Beausejour.

The development is planned for a 20-acre section of land at the corner of north Main Street and Highway 405. The site allows for a total of 316 units, which will include apartment suites and row housing with attached garages.

The development will be built in four phases over the course of the next few years.

The south section of the parcel will feature a recreation centre, dog park, pickleball court, walking trails, as well as gazebos and campfire areas for the exclusive use of the adult residents.

"My company and my sister companies have built over 430 units of 55+ in southern Manitoba," a Rockwell representative told council. "We have waiting lists for all [of them]. That's why I know it's going to do very well in Île-des-Chênes. It's closer to the city and there's nothing really like it around here."

All of the units will be rentals ranging in price from

about \$1,050 for an entry-level apartment to about \$2,000 for a 1,200-square-foot bungalow with garage.

"In Ste. Anne, where I started, I was making condos," he added. "[But seniors] are selling their houses and now they have money. It's a budget thing and the rentals [were in higher demand]."

The first phase will begin with 63 bungalow-style units and a 54-suite three-storey apartment with an underground parkade.

This phase will also include the recreation amenities.

When questioned about the company's flexibility regarding the age of tenants, the Rockwell rep said there will certainly be some.

"We get the odd person that is 50 or 45," he said. "The main thing is, no kids. To protect our investment, this is what [we've decided]. If I start letting in younger people, that's just going to hurt us."

A neighbour to the proposed development queried council on the speed limit along north Main Street, which is currently set at 90 kilometres per hour.

"Because this is going to become a more rural residential area, we can look at changing that," Mayor Chris Ewen said.

CAO Shane Ray assured her that a sidewalk will be built from the development right to the town's core area.

"I'm looking forward to getting this started," said councillor Shane Pelletier. "55+ will be a benefit to this whole region, especially one of this magnitude."

# Niverville: On a Fast Train to Citydom

**By Brenda Sawatzky**  
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In 2025, the majority of Niverville's residents have only ever known the town as one that's fast-tracked to becoming a city.

According to the Manitoba Municipal Act, a municipality is eligible for the city designation when it reaches a population of 7,500, with a minimum density of 400 people per square kilometer.

"The most recent official survey from Statistics Canada in 2021 has placed us at a population of 5,947," says Mayor Myron Dyck. "However, the most recent Southern Health population report from 2024 has Niverville at a population of 7,110."

The next census is scheduled for May 2026, and the results will be telling.

When the town does arrive at the 7,500-person benchmark, Dyck says it will be up to the province's Minister of Municipal Relations and Northern Affairs to officially declare Niverville a city.

"There isn't much that really changes other than what title Niverville has," says Dyck. "It is more so just a marker of an arbitrary population level. All municipalities have the exact same powers and responsibilities as defined by the Municipal Act, regardless of population size or title. Becoming a city has no functional change to the administration or feel of the community."

Even so, it would be imprudent of a municipal council of any fast-growing community not to vigilantly plan for future infrastructure needs.

Niverville is taking this seriously, based on the recent addition of a water treatment plant and future build of a wastewater treatment plant.

"There has been some discussion, predominantly focused on how it changes our strategy on how to market ourselves externally as a place to do business," says Dyck. "Also how Niverville will continue to be the community we all



WADE KEHLER, STUDIO 479

love because it is the residents who make it great, not its title or status or growth."

Manitoba is home to ten cities. In order of population, they are: Winnipeg, Brandon, Steinbach, Winkler, Portage la Prairie, Thompson, Dauphin, Morden, Selkirk, and Flin Flon.

The last urban municipality to gain city status in Manitoba was Winkler in 2012.

### NOT ALWAYS A BOOM TOWN

Niverville hasn't always been the boom town it is today. Only in the last couple of decades has the population soared.

What many don't know is that Niverville's earliest developer, William Hespeler, intended from the start for this to be a large, progressive community.

It just took more than a century for that to happen.

In 1874, the federal government determined that a railway was needed between the U.S. and Winnipeg, and they commissioned railway contractor Joseph Whitehead to build it.

Niverville's location was chosen by Whitehead as a staging area for the hundreds of men, horses, and supplies needed to build that railway.

The name came in 1877, when the Canadian Pacific

Rail company christened the station Niverville after a long-serving military officer, Joseph-Claude Boucher de Niverville.

Just as the village was getting underway, 65 Mennonite families arrived at the confluence of the Red and Rat Rivers, just a few miles to the east.

Hespeler, the man who'd facilitated the Mennonite immigration, looked upon this site and perceived its potential as a hotbed for grain production and transportation.

Niverville historian Ernie Braun tells the story.

"In 1878, Hespeler commissions William Pearce, an official Canadian land surveyor, to draw up a plan for Niverville," Braun says. "And the plan has 600 lots and six streets... This guy was a dreamer. He commissions a livery stable and a grain elevator, and he builds some houses and a hotel. Before you know it, we have a train, a post office, a telegraph, and a railway station."

Ironically, few of those early Mennonites settled in Niverville. Instead the village drew in people from a wide array of nationalities. Niverville's railway station was run by a Scot and the postmaster was German.

Another German, John Wittick, settled in Niverville

and built the first grain elevator, becoming the local grain buyer.

"Seeing the potential here, entrepreneurs begin to come," says Braun. "Herman Penner, the first Russian-Mennonite millionaire in Canada, arrives to build a store right next to the hotel. By the late 1880s, urban Niverville is characterized by mostly non-Mennonite names."

The hotel keeper was an Irishman. Other prominent residents included Jewish and Scottish merchants. A Russian-born immigrant peddled goods door-to-door.

"In 1906, the Bronstones purchased the lumberyard, and for the next two generations that Jewish family was synonymous with Niverville. Bronstone started the Niverville Credit Union. He brought the first electrical light plant in 1928."

Even with all this progress, Niverville's growth didn't line up with Hespeler's original speculation. In 1923, there were only 20 households here. The community experienced a shot of growth during the second wave of Mennonite immigration over the years, but then it slowed again.

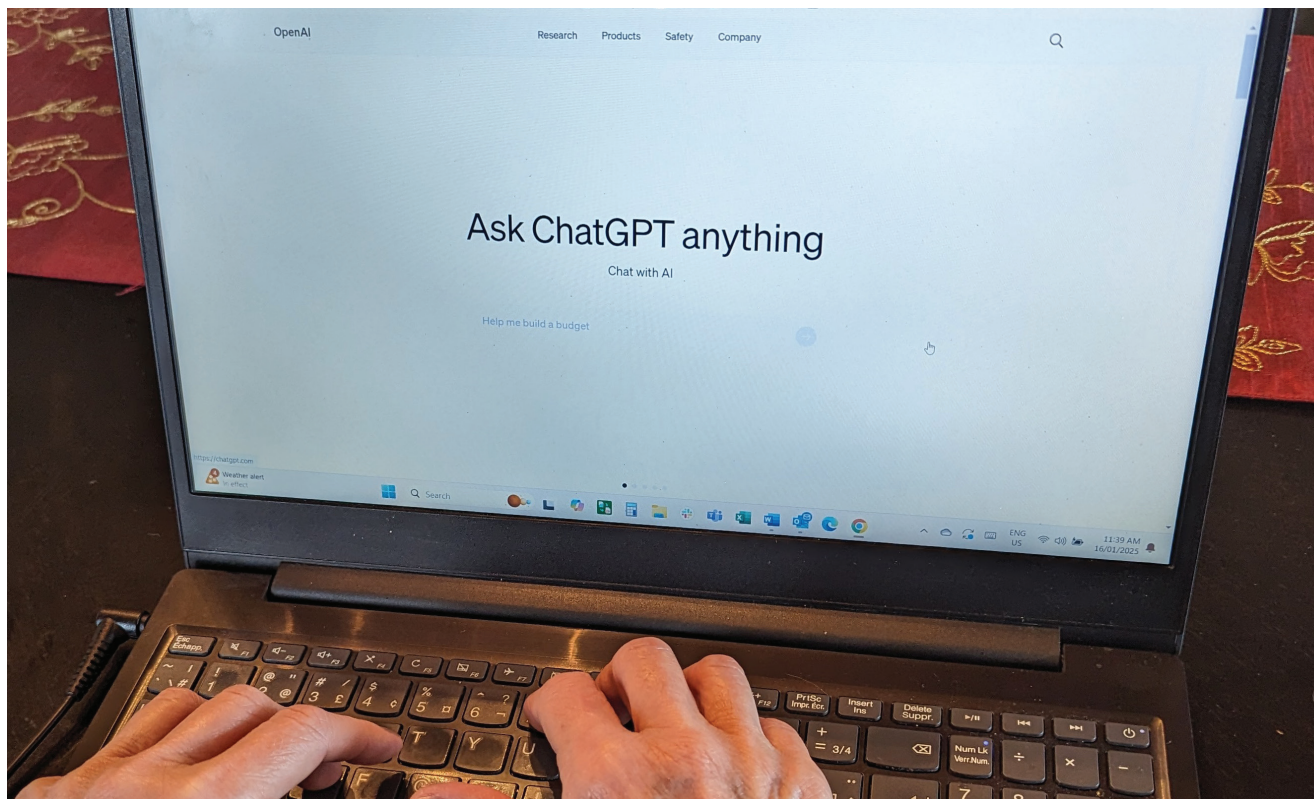
In 1969, Niverville broke away from the Hanover municipality to become its own autonomous incorporated village, thus establishing the community's first council.

They set out immediately to install sewer lines and pave streets. The population sat at around 800 at the time.

In 1991, Niverville's population reached 1,500, granting town status.

"After 2000, Hespeler's dream comes true," says Braun. "The boom arrives and suddenly, over a short period of time, this predominantly Mennonite community regains its cosmopolitan complexion as people move in from Winnipeg to a place where they could belong. None of this is due to the railway. It is due to an entire spectrum of other factors, but foremost among them is a visionary community spirit and dynamic civic and business leaders."





The DSFM is instituting a new approach to minimize the affect of AI on student learning.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

# French School Division Creates Policy on AI and Homework

By Brenda Sawatzky

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When it comes to forward-thinking school policy, the division scolaire Franco-Manitobaine (DSFM) continues to lead the way.

In November, the province's French school division released a four-page directive for its educators, developed as a response to students' use of artificial intelligence (AI) as well as internet plagiarism.

In the end, after months of discussion, administration concluded that the most effective way to curb AI use in learning is to change the way they look at homework.

Superintendent Alain Laberge says that this is the first of many such directives the division plans to release over the course of the coming years, all specific to the use of AI and the internet.

"We believe that AI is everywhere, so we have a job to do as a school division to make sure that we use AI in an ethical way," Laberge says. "We don't want to demonize AI, but it [inhibits] critical thinking unless you know how to use it in a proper way."

DSFM teachers are

welcome to use AI in the classroom, he says, if there's a benefit in doing so. This is a controlled setting, though, unlike the unmonitored time a student may be spending on the schoolwork they take home, where the temptation to rely on AI for research and plagiarize its data is strong for many students.

Part of the problem in letting AI do your research, Laberge says, is that the algorithms tend to lean with a bias toward the user's current way of thinking.

At the same time, AI has the ability to fabricate facts and data, making it an untrustworthy source unless it's subject to extensive fact-checking.

"One thing that is missing these days [in regular life] is debating," says Laberge. "Not debating to win, but debating to learn."

It's a skill that is learned in DSFM classrooms and one that Laberge hopes students will continue to participate in after they graduate. It's through human debate, he says, that critical thinking and honest analysis is truly developed.

The division's proposal for reducing or eliminating homework has a rationale that goes far beyond that of AI use and

plagiarism, though.

Laberge says that homework serves little valuable purpose and, in the end, can actually set kids back in their learning.

"Sometimes when parents are confronted with [their kids'] math problems in Grade Six, Seven, and Eight, they've learned a way to do them 20 years ago and things have changed," says Laberge. "We don't want parents to undo what teachers have done during the daytime."

As a parent himself, Laberge recognizes that students tend to lead much busier lives outside of school than they once did. Between jobs, family responsibilities, and extracurricular activities, homework simply adds a layer of stress to a student's life without much of a return on investment.

"We need to balance family time, social time, and school time. In our schools, usually you have enough time in the daytime to finish [all schoolwork]."

If teachers are going to assign homework, though, the new directive recommends that its focus be on building literacy skills.

"We believe that when the

student comes to school, they will get whatever [time and help] they need to finish their work. But at the same time, we encourage them to read at home because vocabulary is the basis of every other subject."

The prospect of reducing homework assignments, of course, has been met with enthusiasm by DSFM students so far, Laberge says.

In light of recent history, it may well be endorsed by other school divisions as well.

In 2023, DSFM was the first Manitoba school division to ban student cellphone use in their schools. One year later, the province mandated a similar policy across all divisions.

Last year, DSFM took their technology policies one step further by implementing restrictions on the number of school hours dedicated to computer screentime.

Looking forward, Laberge says more change will be imminent as the division continues to look for better ways of delivering education that results in improved student outcomes. He adds that the DSFM is unafraid to let go of long-held systems and structures if they no longer serve a valuable purpose.

## CITIZEN POLL

### Should other Manitoba school divisions follow DSFM's lead in reducing homework and revising AI-related policies?



Yes. Kids are kept busy learning and studying all day in school. They shouldn't have to take schoolwork home with them as well.



No. There are kids who don't learn as quickly as others and may fall through the cracks if there is no expectation to complete work at home.

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The Citizen



# RCMP Detachment Officially Opens

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On November 3, at 9:00 a.m., the new Niverville RCMP detachment opened for the first time. The office is home to three RCMP constables and one corporal on a full-time basis.

For security reasons, there was no tour available to the public.

The office is open from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday to Friday. Criminal record checks are available during more limited hours.

The fully equipped detachment has virtually all the same amenities as St. Pierre-Jolys' has, with the exception of holding cells.

The media was taken behind the scenes for a sneak peak of the new facility, guided by Staff Sergeant Ron Poirier and Corporal Mélanie Roussel, media relations officer for the RCMP.

The tour began in the only public area of the facility: the foyer. Here, residents can access RCMP administrative staff from behind a glass enclosure. Moving into the secure area, media were introduced to the interview room, or what Poirier calls a "soft room."

"The soft room is a little more sensitive," says Poirier. "We can sit down here in a non-police kind of environment. It's a safe place and also soundproofed so whatever is said can't get out."

According to Poirier, the comfortable living-room-type setting of this space is where children and victims of violence may be taken for interview.

"It's a place to start," Poirier said. "It's not your typical desk and two chairs, where there's a spotlight on you."

Even so, the room has two discreet video cameras equipped with audio. Across the hall is another closed room where an officer can sit to monitor the conversation in real time or review by playback later.

"Here, the interviewer will meet with the monitor and say, 'Hey, did you see anything or hear anything?'" says Poirier. "So this is how they can take a little break to determine next steps."

The soft room isn't a typical



Corporal Nichols, Staff Sergeant Poirier, Mayor Myron Dyck, and Corporal Roussel.

ADI LOEWEN

accessory of a rural RCMP office. Even the St. Pierre detachment, which oversees the Niverville location, no longer has a soft room, lost to the expansion of their administrative area.

Police interviews not requiring the sensitivity of a soft room will be performed at the St. Pierre-Jolys detachment.

Past the soft room, a series of desks create space for administrative staff to work. Surveillance monitors line the walls, allowing staff to keep a safe watch on the public entrance.

Julie Allen of Ste. Agathe is the new hire. Working in support services, she is able to provide bilingual services to the public.

Taking up the rear of the main floor is an area called the bullpen. Here officers perform their daily paperwork from a series of cubicles equipped with computers.

Large maps of the community, as well as the entire jurisdiction area of the St. Pierre-Jolys detachment, adorn the walls.

Corporal Justin Nichols, who supervises the constables, has his own personal office.

Across the hallway, behind a locked door, lies the exhibits room.

"When the on-the-road investigator seizes something, they can store it

in there," Poirier says. "They let Justin know and then he moves it down to the main locker where it is secure."

Next door is the officer tack room where shared supplies, such as firearms and radios, are safely stored.

"This detachment is expected to be able to respond to a critical incident on its own, so whatever equipment [is required] in responding to that. Whatever St. Pierre has, Niverville has here as well."

On the second level is a large file room for archived paperwork and exhibits. Some of these exhibits, such as DNA results, are stored for a lifetime.

Next door is an open board room for group meetings. For the use of the officers, there's a full locker room with showers and two workout rooms to keep them active during in-office hours.

Two patrol cars have been designated for the use of the Niverville detachment.

According to Niverville's mayor, Myron Dyck, the decision to include the RCMP office in the civic office building was one of practicality.

When the building at 329 Bron-

stone Drive was purchased by town council in 2018, it had far more space than the town needed.

"All this [RCMP] space was

designed and built to spec as per their [federal] requirements," Dyck says. "Based on meeting the needs of emergency services for our community, we saw this as something that was needed, and we're happy they're here."

While November 3 marks the official opening day, Poirier says staff have been working in the office for more than a month now, getting a feel for the facility and working out the kinks.

As to why it has taken so long for the Niverville detachment to open, Poirier says that administrative staff for any RCMP detachment require training which isn't always available when it's convenient.

In its entirety, the St. Pierre-Jolys and Niverville officers also oversee much of southeastern Manitoba, excluding Steinbach, which has its own detachment.

According to Poirier, the St. Pierre-Jolys office generally covers rural areas while the Niverville office is more Niverville-centric. Still, both offices complement each other in terms of staffing.

"With only a four-man complement, the ability [for the Niverville detachment] to provide 24-hour policing isn't realistic. So there has to be support from St. Pierre and vice

versa."

Currently, around 15 officers are stationed at the St. Pierre-Jolys location.

As for how Niverville residents will directly benefit, Poirier says that there will be an obvious RCMP presence that may not have been as clear before.

"They're going to experience more visibility. From members driving to the office, going to the schools... the restaurants, the rec centre. There's a police car driving down Main Street every day."

What residents may not be able to expect, in house, is conversations with an officer in the French language, since being bilingual isn't a federal requirement in all detachments.

"If someone interacts with a Niverville member and decides they want French service, because it's their right, we will provide it," Poirier said. "We'll have a bilingual member on the phone, over the air, or come in person to deal with that person."

Historically speaking, Mayor Dyck says that conversations around Niverville-centric policing have been going on for decades.

For a while, the presence created by the RCMP officers living in the community was enough, but that changed in recent years.

"What really tripped this was two incidents where there was bodily harm done to two separate individuals," Dyck says.

New conversations began to take place between council and the St. Pierre-Jolys detachment. At the same time, council explored the idea of creating a private police service, similar to the one in St. Anne.

In the end, when it was determined that a location collaboration was possible with the RCMP, the town progressed in that direction.

Based on Niverville's current municipal contract, four officers have been allotted. That number could increase, says Poirier, if council decides it isn't enough. That would come with additional costs to the taxpayer, though.

At this stage, Dyck says that it's a good trial number to start with considering they have the support of the officers from St. Pierre-Jolys detachment to fall back on.



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# Drivers Frustrated with Street Access at Niverville McDonald's

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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For weeks, the excitement of Niverville's new McDonald's was enough to keep locals abuzz with positivity.

It didn't take long, though, for the shine to wear off and the mood to change, at least for some.

In particular, customers have taken note of issues with the flow of traffic to and from the restaurant.

There is only one entrance to the parking lot and drive thru. That access point is located on Arena Road, a one-way street heading north on the restaurant's east side.

So if people are at the Centennial Arena or CRRC, they cannot access McDonald's by Arena Road, which would be the shortest route by far at a 350-meter drive.

Instead they must head west along Centre Street, south along Mulberry, east along Main, and finally turn back north on Arena, a route that spans more than one kilometre and passes through three controlled intersections, one of which is a set of traffic lights.

For those leaving the McDonald's parking lot, there are two exits. Drivers have the option to head back out onto Arena Road, but they must turn left. They could also use the other egress onto Main, but here they must turn right. Those looking to drive the other way down Main must look for an opportunity to execute a U-turn.

In other words, there is simply no quick and legal way to get from McDonald's back into Niverville's downtown.

It would be easy to assume that Niverville's town council is



Traffic flow is greatly restricted entering and exiting the parking lot of Niverville's new McDonald's.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

responsible for this situation. However, according to Mayor Myron Dyck, council has little input. The trouble revolves around the fact that Main Street is a provincially controlled highway, and the province has the final say when it comes to its access points.

Let's begin by considering Arena Road and the construction of the CRRC.

In recent years, Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure (MTI) has clamped down heavily on adding access points to highways. And if you drive along the two-lane portion of Highway 59, for example, you'll understand why. The more access points there are, the more dangerous the trek for highway drivers.

When Niverville was considering

access and egress for the new CRRC and high school five years ago, they needed MTI's stamp of approval.

"When they looked at Niverville, they deemed both Arena Road and Ritchot Drive to be too close to the railway," says Dyck. "When traffic is stacked up waiting for trains to pass, vehicles trying to turn left off Arena Road or Ritchot Drive would have to wait a long time, with drivers perhaps being impatient and [taking risks]."

For this reason, the province requested that the town permanently close both of those streets.

The town proceeded to close off Ritchot Drive's east access, but they appealed to MTI for a reconsideration of Arena Road, asking for allowances to be made.

The province agreed to keep

Arena Road open, on the condition that it become a one-way street.

Fast-forward to 2025 and a McDonald's franchise owner shows interest in establishing his restaurant at that very corner.

"When they met with our CAO, they were informed of the restrictions for traffic flow onto and off PR 311," says Dyck. "Our understanding is that they did consider other options, but at the end of the day they chose to purchase the land they did. McDonald's did meet with the province and lobbied to have traffic leave onto PR 311, but west only. The province agreed, as it is the left turn back into town that they deem to be dangerous."

What has since resulted is an unfortunate number of driving

infractions. Evidently the RCMP anticipated this, as at least one patrol car was stationed here on the restaurant's opening day—and it was kept busy.

Council hasn't stopped discussing the matter. Outside of asking for greater police presence in this area, Dyck says they're toying with some other ideas, too.

This summer, the Main Street crosswalk at Second Avenue, near the Niverville Credit Union, has also drawn attention due to motorist carelessness. There has been at least one reported close call between a driver and pedestrian along with countless reports of vehicles, including large trucks, driving well above the posted speed limit.

It's unfortunate, Mayor Dyck says, that the aggressive and impatient driving habits of a few tend to create restrictions for the whole. He is hopeful that lawbreakers won't cause the province to restrict traffic flow further at the McDonald's location.

As for the crosswalk at Second Avenue and Main, Dyck says that council will eventually be asking the province for another set of traffic lights here.

"That is a few years away yet, as council currently has an ask for intersection improvements along PR 311 west of the tracks. It has been a five-year process from the original ask to doing the engineering and detailed design to getting the province to commit to sharing the project cost with us."

It's not a small project, either. At this stage, the town's request of MTI is to add a roundabout and another set of traffic lights between the railway tracks and Wallace Road.

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The Santa Stop Tour will come to Île-des-Chênes and Niverville this year.

CHRISTINA, CS PHOTOGRAPHY

# Santa Claus Is Coming to Town

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

The winds may feel chilly, but in just a few days' time Santa will arrive to ease the sting. This year's Santa Stop Tour will roll through Île-des-Chênes on Saturday, December 6. One week later, on December 13, Santa and his motorized sleigh will take another cruise through the streets of Niverville.

The Santa Stop Tour first began in 2020 as a way to bring Christmas cheer to south-eastern Manitoba during the pandemic lockdowns. It was the brainchild of Santa Thom, Santa Claus's trusty Manitoban sidekick.

Since that time, the Santa Stop Tour has become a much-anticipated tradition, bringing smiles and happy laughter to children and adults alike.

While Thom started off as a one-man show in the early days, the parade is evolving and growing as more communities get on board.

This year, Santa's Niverville parade will be chaperoned by the Niverville Fire Department and accompanied by Helping Hands and Operation Red Nose.

In Île-des-Chênes, the community is invited to join in the parade with their own decorated vehicles, travelling down Main Street to Dumaine. Prior to the parade, families are invited to the TC Energy Centre for Santa's Workshop and photos with the man in red.

Niverville families will also have an opportunity for photos

on Santa's lap on November 30 at the CRRC.

## HISTORY OF THE SANTA STOP TOUR

Santa Thom hails from La Broquerie and has been filling Santa's big boots for most of his adult life. With a natural full beard and a physique that matches that of his North Pole counterpart, the role just works, especially considering his jolly disposition and affinity for making kids smile.

For more than a decade before the COVID-19 pandemic, Santa Thom played the part at corporate functions and private family gatherings. For some families, he's now the centre of attention for a second generation of kids.

Thom still gets choked up when he thinks about how a pandemic almost stole Christmas.

"I wanted people to see that there was still hope, still Christmas," Thom says.

He recalls the frustration he encountered when trying to plan a Santa parade in the face of heavy pandemic restrictions. According to Manitoba Health, the parade couldn't involve more than one vehicle. It couldn't make stops and the route couldn't be posted for the public to see. All these restrictions were in service of preventing people from gathering in groups.

Under tight rules, Santa Thom wound through nine rural communities on his pick-up-drawn sleigh. The number of towns has since grown and changed, depending on where he feels people are most receptive.

Still, his goal is the same as it was when the Santa Stop Tour first began.

"I want communities to gather. How many people know their neighbours these days? [When I come through], people come out of their homes, gather together, the kids are playing and the parents are talking. That's what I want to see."

Every year, too, the sleigh gets a little more ornate and events are added to his tour dates. In 2025, Santa Thom is scheduled for 47 different events between now and Christmas. For some of those events, Mrs. Santa will join him.

Much of what Thom has been doing comes from the goodness of his heart and his own pocketbook. But gas is expensive and sleighs aren't cheap to maintain.

With all the events he's booked, it's also taken a small army of people to assist in pulling it all together.

For that reason, Thom is seeking sponsorship. Ideally, he says, he'd be happy if he could get one corporate community sponsor for every event he takes part in.

Sponsorship has three levels—friends of Santa, the elf package, and the Rudolph package—ranging from \$200 to \$500. In return, he'll provide varying levels of sponsor advertising, including a company logo right on the sleigh.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For sponsorship and tour details, visit The Santa Stop on Facebook and Instagram.

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# Ritchot and Assiniboine College Join Forces to Offer Local Adult Education

**By Brenda Sawatzky**

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Since Ritchot opened its expanded civic office one year ago, economic development officer Ryan Faucher has been brainstorming ideas for the building's unused space—specifically, the area that once served as council chambers and the old building's reception hall.

Thus was born the Training Hub—a collaboration between the municipality and Assiniboine College. Local residents will soon have access to postsecondary education, employment services, and skills training here.

"We're thrilled to be here and have access to the Training Hub," says Michael Cameron, Assiniboine's dean of community development. "Not only for [new learners] but also for lifelong learners who want to better their skills in something. We believe very strongly in community-based training. When you train people locally, they tend to want to stay local."

Over the coming months, the college will undertake a training needs assessment in Ritchot in order to determine the current and emerging skill gaps, workforce trends, and training priorities.

They will talk to residents, employers, and community organizations to help inform future programming.

For Faucher, one of the more obvious training gaps concerns early childhood education (ECE).

"We have six daycares in the



Lonnie Patterson and Michael Cameron of Assiniboine College with Ryan Faucher and CAO Shane Ray. **BRENDA SAWATZKY**

RM," says Faucher. "There is an immediate need for [childcare providers]."

There's room at the Hub for a wide cross-section of programming to be offered in the years ahead.

While the main classroom holds 20 students comfortably, most courses don't run five days per week.

An ECE course, for example, is offered two weeks of every week, leaving plenty of time for other programs to run concurrently.

"There might be an introductory to something so that people can get their feet wet to decide if they want to go in further," Faucher says. "Or [full course loads] if they've made a commitment to what they want to do in life."

For Faucher, the idea of creating a local educational facility took flight when he overheard a group of residents discussing carpooling to another community for training.

Since municipal growth is a distinctive part of his portfolio, Faucher recognizes the importance of giving the municipality's youth and

younger adults one more reason to keep their roots firmly planted at home.

"I'm the classic example," Faucher says. "I left home at 17 to go to university. I had to move to Winnipeg and I never went back. [We're working on] a holistic view of building up our community and keeping our youth closer to home, to give them the options and amenities that they would have [somewhere else]."

Convenience as well as cost savings, he adds, speak loudly to adult learners, especially in this economy and with the hectic pace of life.

Assiniboine College seemed to be the right fit, according to Faucher, since they offer such a broad range of programs and pride themselves on flexibility in their teaching models.

The college's recent interest in expanding to French teaching modes doesn't hurt when it comes to bilingual municipalities such as Ritchot.

"We're actually going to be rolling out our very first French program early next year," Cameron says. "It's called Green Buildings and Retrofitting.

Right now, we're delivering that program to 1,600 people across Canada in English, but it's being translated into French."

The college has long been known for their interest in bringing education to the people. They have campuses in Brandon, Dauphin, and Winnipeg and operate satellite hubs in Morden, Virden, and now Ritchot.

They have a reputation for excellence in nurses training, health and human services, agriculture, trades, business, and environmental studies.

As well, the college offers a high school program for those wishing to complete their Grade 12 accreditation as an adult.

Wherever possible, satellite hubs in rural communities have a live instructor on site. If the local contingent of students is too small to justify this, the college offers virtual teaching in order to involve students from other communities.

"Our first option is always to put somebody in the classroom with the students," Cameron says. "We believe that having that personal connection with your instructor, face to face, just helps to enhance the learning."

The Hub won't be exclusive to Ritchot residents. Faucher says students from surrounding municipalities will be welcome to learn there as well.

In the coming months, a landing page will be added to the RM's website with a list of upcoming courses. The site will also include a link to the Assiniboine College website where students can register.



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## IN BRIEF

## Body Cams Standard Issue for Most RCMP Officers

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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One year ago, the RCMP announced their plan to roll out body-worn cameras. Today, 98 percent of Manitoba's frontline officers are now equipped.

The body camera is a small black box that clips to the officer's vest. It has the capability to capture both video and audio recordings.

According to RCMP, the cameras are just one more way of providing transparency and accountability to the public.

"The body-worn camera has provided us with many useful tools that make everyday policing a lot easier," says Corporal Jenelle Hulan of the Manitoba RCMP Major Crime Unit. "For example, taking statements and obtaining photos of scenes, victims, and suspects is extremely easy and the apps are excellent in tracking our movement during an investigation."

After each shift, the officer places his or her body camera in a charging port which uploads the audio and video into a digital evidence management system to be stored.

The RCMP have already accumulated almost 175,000 pieces of evidence from the 638 issued cameras in use.

"Without a doubt, body-worn cameras have quickly become an incredibly beneficial and important tool for our officers," says Assistant Commissioner Scott McMurchy.

What may be important for the public to know is that, if they have been recorded by an officer's body cam, they have a right to view the video. The same is true for family members or others who may have a vested interest in the person caught on camera.



# Niverville Council Says Yes to Café and Cabinet Shop, No to Second Cannabis Store

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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November 18 was a busy night for Niverville's council as they addressed a series of applications for new businesses and one variation request.

Council delivered good news to Forgotten Flavours owners Chris and Maria Holbrow. The couple had received their permit to operate a bakery and café at 69 Main Street some time ago, but the couple returned to council chambers with a request to increase the size of their eating and drinking establishment, including outdoor patio, from 16 seats to 25 seats.

Also receiving a unanimous thumbs up was Plan B Metalworks, a robotic metal fabrication company applying for permission to operate in the business park.

The company's representative, Vernon, indicated the use of three robotic metal fabricators at this site, referring to them as cobots, or collaborative robots.

"Part of the idea is looking at some of the labour shortages that we've experienced in manufacturing and those cobots can really help in that matter," he told council.

Canadian Prime Solutions Inc. was the final company to receive unanimous approval from council.

Operating from Kuzenko Street in the business park, this couple-owned business will offer cabinet manufacturing and a showroom, as well as office and storage space in one building that will span three commercial lots. Three to four individuals are expected to find employment here.

The couple have been operating another business in Winnipeg since 2014. The Niverville operation will allow them to expand their current product line into cabinet and bathroom vanities.

### NO TO CANNABIS STORE

Not as successful at Tuesday's council meeting were applicants Ketan and Jatin Patel. The duo sat in attendance to answer questions regarding their request to open a



Niverville's council hears from the owners of Canadian Prime Solutions Inc.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

retail cannabis and vape establishment at Unit A, 237 Main Street, next to Subway.

To approve the variation request, council would need to allow for a change to their current bylaw, which states that a cannabis store cannot be located less than 1,000 feet from any school or indoor/outdoor participant recreation facility.

A precedent for a similar variation had already been created by council when the owners of Urban Flavours, the community's original cannabis dispensary, were approved for business in December 2020. That outlet, at 41 Main Street, is located just 744 feet from the Niverville Elementary School. The successful variance resulted from a three-hour council meeting where arguments were heard from more than 80 proponents and objectors. Three council members eventually voted in favour, with one opposed.

Regarding this latest cannabis store proposal, the question among council revolved not so much about the business's proximity to the elementary school as the fact that it would be located only 377 feet from the Youth for Christ drop-in centre to the east.

Only one opponent was in attendance at the Tuesday

meeting, speaking as a representative of Urban Flavours.

"We were held to certain conditions when we were granted approval," he told council. "The use of [the word] cannabis on the outside of the building, the logo and how we designed it, and so on. So if permission is given, I would request that this business also be held to the same types of conditions."

CAO Eric King reminded council that all these conditions would be addressed in a development agreement if approval were provided.

The owner of the building, who is also the proprietor of Subway, assured council that he was familiar with the provincial standards regulating cannabis retail stores. As well, he stated that he is prepared to make changes to the building in order to accommodate this company, such as creating a barrier wall in the common entrance shared by Subway and the vacant space next door.

One letter of opposition was received in regard to this public hearing and it came from Hanover School Division trustee Dallas Wiebe on behalf of the Niverville Elementary School. The primary concern in his case reflected a misunderstanding that the 377-foot

buffer outlined in the public notice was in reference to the elementary school.

Councillor Chris Wiebe made a motion to deny the variance request, which was seconded by councillor Bill Fast. Wiebe's reasoning was that this request required council to reduce the buffer zone of 1,000 feet by 62 percent, a much more significant number than that of the Urban Flavours location.

"If we are so inclined to change that, we should [change the way the bylaw reads] instead of [making] a major variance of this degree," Wiebe said.

Councillor Nathan Dueck expressed his own concerns in terms of putting restrictions on legitimate businesses that want to operate in Niverville.

"I think the idea of this bylaw is a good idea because it adds a layer when it comes down to protection for the community from something that could be considered not a valid business," Dueck told council. "As the Chamber stated in the past, all legal businesses are welcome in the community... People have a choice whether or not to use it."

In the end, council voted 3-1 to deny the variation request, with Councillor Dueck abstaining.

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The Niverville Chamber of Commerce extends warm holiday wishes to all local businesses and residents. As we close out the year, we are grateful for the strong partnerships, community spirit, and local support that continue to fuel sustainable growth in Niverville.

**We are pleased to welcome our newest Chamber members:**

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We also encourage everyone to mark their calendars for our upcoming 2026 events, which help connect, educate, and celebrate our business community:

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**APR 10** AGM, Awards and Dinner

**APR 22** Chamber Portugal Trip

**MAY 1** Pizza Wars and Summer Market Kick Off

**AUG 20** Annual Golf Tournament

On behalf of our Chamber board and staff, we wish you a wonderful holiday season and look forward to working together in the new year.

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# Sports & Recreation

## 32 Arenas, One Dream: Local Fans Travel the NHL One Rink at a Time

By Brenda Sawatzky

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Farming was Ken Krahn's lifelong passion. From the time he was a young child, though, hockey took a close second.

When he and his wife Emily sold the family farm and retired in 2020, their newfound freedom paved the way for a variety of adventures. The first was the purchase of an RV in which to travel North America.

Another goal they made together was to visit to every NHL arena at least once to cheer for the home team. Of the 32 arenas, Krahn had already visited a few, such as the ones in Vancouver and Calgary.

That still left a lot of ground to cover.

It all started on a 2021 trip to B.C. in their new RV. From there, they decided to head south of the border for a tour of the American west coast.

"We crossed the line into Washington and I casually told Emily, 'This is Seattle's inaugural season in the NHL,' and she said, 'We should go to a game.'"

They did.

Continuing down into California they made another impromptu decision, this time to see a San Jose game. Krahn looked forward to seeing one of his favourite players, Erik Karlsson.

"That fall and spring, we went to 13 different cities," Krahn says.

Stops included games in Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Tampa Bay, Miami, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Washington DC, New York, New Jersey, Columbus, and Dallas.

In Dallas, the Jets happened to be the visiting team.

It was an interesting time, Krahn admits, navigating major cities and congested arena parking lots in an RV. In some cities this was impossible.

In New York, for example, they had to figure out how to navigate the



Ken Krahn poses with a statue of Gordie Howe.

© C/O KEN KRAHN

subway system. At Madison Square Garden, Krahn says, the subway stops five stories below the building.

"The next year we travelled to Denver and Utah. It was Utah's first year in the league."

This past October, over the course of eight days, the couple travelled to the five remaining cities on their list: Montreal, Boston, Buffalo, Detroit, and Toronto.

"I wanted to finish it in Toronto, because they were my growing up team," Krahn says. "That was a highlight because we also went to the Hockey Hall of Fame and I took a personalized tour of the Scotiabank arena. There was only two of us on the tour and we got to sit where the announcers sit."

### CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

Krahn can pinpoint the integral moments from his childhood which laid the foundation for his love of hockey, his father being the influencing factor.

"It was in 1967 when the Toronto Maple Leafs were playing in the finals against Montreal and we did not have a TV," says Krahn, who was nine years old at the time.

He remembers his father rounding

up his sons and heading to the neighbouring farm, where the farmer owned a small black-and-white box.

It was the Stanley Cup final and the Leafs defeated the Canadiens 3-1 in the last game of a seven-game series.

This proved to be such a pivotal moment that Krahn claimed the Leafs as his team for many years to come.

At the time, there was no NHL team in Winnipeg. In fact, there were only six teams in the entire league: the Montreal Canadiens, Toronto Maple Leafs, Boston Bruins, Chicago Blackhawks, Detroit Red Wings, and New York Rangers.

When Krahn turned 14, he witnessed another legendary piece of hockey history. Few older Canadians are likely to forget the Summit Series of 1972 between Canada and the Soviet Union.

"There were four games in Canada and four games in the USSR," Krahn recalls. "That was very impressionable on me. They actually shut down school so everybody could go into the gym to watch the games when they were in Canada."

Canada came out victorious,

winning the final three games in Moscow. In that final game, fans screamed as Team Canada recovered from a two-point Soviet lead and got the winning goal with only 34 seconds to spare.

Emily, too, has childhood memories of NHL hockey.

Most vividly, she recalls falling in love with Gordie Howe and announcing to her sisters that she would someday be his bride. Howe's face was emblazoned on the back of countless cereal boxes.

In 2011, when the Winnipeg Jets came back to town, Ken and Emily bought season tickets.

"Those were amazing times for us because there was so much excitement in the city and in the building during those early stages. It didn't matter if we won or lost, we were just happy that we had a team. Winnipeg is probably one of the loudest arenas that we've been at."

### FAVOURITE ARENAS

Of all the professional arenas Krahn and his wife have warmed a seat in, Krahn says that Detroit's was among their favourites, at least as far as the building is concerned. And in terms

of the fans, Montreal has some of the liveliest.

But Madison Square Garden holds a special place for Krahn.

"I often like to talk to an usher who looks like he's been there a few years," he says. "They know the history and have a feel for the team. So when I was in New York, I approached this guy and it looked like his arena suit had been worn for 20 or 30 years."

Indeed, the man had been employed there for decades. In more recent years, his job had shifted to providing security for VIP patrons. He explained to Krahn the process of assigning guests a seat where a quick getaway would be possible should the need arise.

The excitement in the arena that night was palpable, Krahn says. The New York Rangers took on the Pittsburgh Penguins in a crucial game just prior to the playoffs.

"The Rangers scored three early goals and the crowd was raucous and singing a chant after every goal. I thought, 'Hey, this is cool!'"

Now that the bucket list is complete, Krahn says he'd be lying if he didn't admit that their years at Winnipeg's arena, Canada Life Centre, hadn't made the deepest impression of all.

Although it's the smallest building in the NHL, holding only 15,000 fans, it is also home to some of the liveliest fans out there.

The couple have photos taken everywhere, including beside statues of all the greats from Gordie Howe to Bobby Hull.

At this point, they've never met anyone else who has followed the same dream—that is, with the exception of one couple wearing St. Louis jerseys that said "NHL tour." That couple's journey was taking them around the league, following their own home team to all the out-of-town venues where they played.



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## IN BRIEF



## Niverville Competes with Two Towns for Jets Town Takeover

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Niverville is one of three lucky communities selected as finalists to compete in the 2025 Jets Town Takeover competition. Other contestants include Gimli and Oakbank.

The winner among these three communities will enjoy a full day of Jets-inspired events on March 19, 2026.

The only thing standing between a Niverville win or loss is the number of people who take the time to vote. Voting is now open and will continue until midnight of December 12.

Voters can vote once per day.

"I am excited to see our community chosen as one of the finalists for the Jets Town Takeover," says Myron Dyck, mayor of Niverville. "Being selected as a finalist is an honour and is in large part due to our many great volunteers. Just being selected as a finalist puts a spotlight on us and our small-town feel. I can't wait to see Niverville win and have the Jets in our community come March!"

The winning community can expect to participate in a number of ways that day. Project 11 mental wellness sessions will take place in the local schools. The Winnipeg Jets Alumni and Friends will also host on-ice session with local hockey teams.

Finally, to cap off the day, families will want to attend a free watch party of the showdown between the Winnipeg Jets and Boston Bruins. Present will be Jets gameday hosts, Jet Dogs, Mick E. Moose, and lots of giveaways.

The Jets Town Takeover is an initiative of the Winnipeg Jets as a means to make hockey and programming more accessible to communities outside of the city.

"Thank you to all the communities that put time and effort into their submissions," says Kory Harnum, manager of community relations for True North Sports and Entertainment. "The passion shown for the Winnipeg Jets from towns across Manitoba was inspiring to see. We're excited to bring engaging programming and gameday energy to one of the three amazing communities."

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more, or to vote, visit: [www.winnipegjets.com/jetstowntakeover](http://www.winnipegjets.com/jetstowntakeover)



Seven local athletes returned home from this year's Sask Cup with 11 combined medals.

JENS REUTER

# Niverville Athletes Earn 11 Medals at Sask Cup

By Holly Dunphy

At the end of October, seven jiu-jitsu athletes representing Niverville returned home with a total of 11 medals after competing at the 2025 Sask Cup.

Hosted in Saskatoon by the Canadian League of Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu on October 25, the tournament welcomed more than 360 athletes.

The medals earned over the course of the day reflect the disciplined training in Niverville's jiu-jitsu program and the Winnipeg Academy of Martial Arts (WAMMA)-affiliated wrestling program, both run out of the CRRC.

Running in ten-week blocks, the classes are open to drop-ins and see a mix of youth and adult participants involved in wrestling and jiu-jitsu, as well as other mixed martial arts.

These sessions are supported by coaches like Jens Reuter, who runs the kids wrestling program

at the CRRC, and Terence Martell, who coaches kids jiu-jitsu under Niverville head coaches Jay Sousa and Joe Doerksen.

"It's a very broad program, with a range of participants from complete beginners to coaches who are black belts and former elite competitors," says Reuter. "We see all age ranges actively participating."

In addition to these two coaches, Micah Ihnatenko, 19, took home gold. Reuter's two children, Benjamin (12), and Lilyanne Reuter (14), each took gold and silver. Two other youth, Noah (15) and Nyles Fast (13), each left with double golds in their divisions.

Each reached the podium through distinct challenges on the mat.

Reuter remarks on the unique challenges each competitor had to overcome.

Noah and Nyles, whose primary sport is wrestling while adding weekly jiu-jitsu cross-training, swept in their categories.

"Noah went undefeated in his matches," says Reuter. "He just smoked everyone. Nyles gave up 15 pounds to his opponents through some tough matches. They both took double gold in the gi [formal uniform] and no-gi [non-uniform/shorts] categories."

Lilyanne, competing in only her second ever jiu-jitsu tournament, had to move up to the advanced category to get matches.

Though she is newer to jiu-jitsu, her years of wrestling paid off, earning her a gold in the no-gi division and silver in the gi division.

"Since there was no one in his weight class, Benjamin had to go up a weight class," says Reuter. "Some of the opponents were 15 to 25 pounds bigger than him."

Ihnatenko, who experienced some tough losses in the gi division, returned to defeat all his previous opponents and take gold in no-gi.

"I competed in the advanced open weight and placed second.

I would've liked to have won, but I was happy with it," Reuter adds. "Terence faced some very tough opponents. Even though he didn't win, he acquitted himself well and walked away with third place."

Reuter believes that jiu-jitsu is a little more accessible to a wider age range, including absolute beginners. However, jiu-jitsu, wrestling, and martial arts overall are the best kind of fitness training.

"These classes offer self-defence skills and increase confidence," says Reuter. "You get what you put in. If you want to have fun, hang out with friends, and learn skills, then that's great. If you want to push yourself and compete at a high level, that opportunity is there as well."

Fans of wrestling can look forward to December 20 when WAMMA Niverville hosts Niverville Open, a freestyle wrestling tournament, at the CRRC. The day begins at 9:00 a.m. and welcomes spectators for \$5 cash at the door.



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# Walking Soccer Takes Its First Steps in Niverville

By Brenda Sawatzky

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For the past month, a group has been meeting at the CRRC every Monday afternoon to try out a relatively obscure sport called walking soccer. The initiative is the brainchild of Martin Ward, who first heard of the sport from his mother in England. There, it's known as walking football.

"It's a huge sport there," Ward says. "She said, 'You should try walking football. Surely they have it over there.' So I researched it a bit and found out that there was nothing in Manitoba."

To Ward's surprise, though, there is a Canadian Walking Soccer Association, as well as clubs in a few other provinces. Quite a few of them can be found in Ontario.

The association's website describes walking soccer as "a modified non-contact sport that involves rule changes from the standard game to promote health and safety in a fun, recreational setting."

As the name suggests, running isn't allowed. As a matter of fact, in tournament play, it's cause for a penalty. One foot must remain on the ground at all times, similar to professional speedwalking.

Other requirements of walking soccer are that players avoid physical contact as much as possible and shots or passes cannot be above knee level.

Ward has been actively involved in sports for most of his life. Unfortunately, following a recent knee surgery, he was told to refrain from running.

For this reason, the discovery of walking soccer felt timely for him.

"I'm allowed to walk as long as I'm not doing those pounding movements," says Ward. "For anyone that's



A walking soccer club is taking shape at the CRRC in Niverville.

■ NIVERVILLE RECREATION

had knee or hip replacement surgery, it's one of the best cardiovascular sports out there. It's comparable to pickleball in that you get a really good workout because you're walking pretty fast and changing direction. It challenges your overall balance and movement."

Upon further research, he discovered that the sport had benefits beyond just gentleness on the joints. In England, where the sport first became popular a decade ago, it has been demonstrated to benefit those with neurological issues and cardiovascular diseases.

Ward and his wife Heather decided to invest in a little personal research. They hopped in the car and headed west, making stops in Saskatoon and Lethbridge to check out active walking soccer clubs.

"We dropped in on the Lethbridge club and had a fantastic time," Ward

says. "They were very welcoming. We actually met three people there who had gone over to England and played in the initial World Nations Cup of walking soccer."

After that, the Wards headed to England to visit family. It is said that more than a thousand walking football clubs exist in the United Kingdom. The Wards played some games in his sister's hometown.

"They included older people with dementia, with Parkinson's and other neurological conditions," says Ward. "It's the highlight of their week. They get together and get this physical activity. A lot of them say when they play walking soccer they don't feel like they have symptoms for a few hours afterward."

This fall, Ward headed to the CRRC to speak with the staff about including walking soccer in their sports offerings. They were incredibly

receptive, he says.

For now, walking soccer is being offered as an open gym program from 1:30 to 2:30 every Monday afternoon.

With a CRRC membership, attendance is free. Without a membership, there's a nominal drop-in fee. No registration is required and it's open to all ages, genders, and skill levels.

So far, Ward says they've had up to seven players come out at a time, which allows for three players per side plus one sub. These included a retired police officer, a retired farmer, and a seminary professor from Providence University College.

Still, Ward says there's so much room for growth as people try it out and discover just how much fun it can be.

First, it's a matter of getting people to take the sport seriously.

"The problem is, when we talk to people, they say, 'You're joking, right?

Walking soccer is not a thing.'"

Ward is not deterred, though, and believes it's just a matter of time. He's recently discovered groups in Winnipeg and Steinbach who are also trying to promote the sport. If all goes well, Ward says there may eventually be a walking soccer league which includes teams from around the province.

"In England they call it the new pickleball. It's actually much more popular there than pickleball is now."

In 2023, England held the first World Nations Cup for walking soccer. This year, Spain hosted the games. Canada sent four teams who competed in different age and gender categories.

CBC's Matt Galloway hosted a podcast called "Move Over Pickleball: Have You Tried Walking Soccer?" He interviews coach Kerrin Hands and player Faisal Ahmed of the Canadian Men's over-50 team.

"The comment I hear most often from people that try it for the first time is, 'I love it!'" says Hands. "That's a pretty strong statement."

Ahmed goes on to describe what he loves about the game. It's fast-paced, he says, despite what the name suggests. It's a fun way to experience high-intensity interval training without boring treadmills or weights.

Those who play the sport, they say, are most often between the ages of 40 and 80. Many of them thought their years of enjoying sports were behind them, until they discovered walking soccer.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the Niverville walking soccer group, visit the Niverville Recreation website or email [nivervillewalkingsoccer@gmail.com](mailto:nivervillewalkingsoccer@gmail.com)

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# Nighthawks Off to the Best Start in MJHL History

By Bill Burfoot

The Niverville Nighthawks' incredible run through the first third of the MJHL season has been the talk of the league. Their current winning streak is at 15 games and counting.

And notably, in November the team collected their twentieth victory in just their twenty-first game, becoming the fastest team ever in MJHL history to hit that significant milestone.

This record surpasses the Portage Terriers teams from 2014–15 and 2015–16, both of which needed 22 games. The Terriers captured the championship those years.

In the 2015 season, the Terriers finished with 110 points, a 53–3–1–3 record, a Turnbull Cup championship, and ultimately the national title at the RBC Cup, which they also hosted.

Their .917 winning percentage remains the league's benchmark.

But it's a benchmark that the Nighthawks, at least early on, are flirting with. The Nighthawks currently sit at .955.

For Niverville, this season's start is the result of steady growth—26 wins in year one, 30 in year two, and 35 in year three.

At the heart of Niverville's scorching run is its top line—Hayden Wheddon, Adam Vigfusson, and Merik Boles—arguably the most dominant trio in the MJHL.

Wheddon leads the entire league in scoring with 34 points (13 goals) in 21 games, already surpassing his totals from last season in half the time.

He credits the people around him.

"I think the credit goes out to my linemates," Wheddon says. "I've had a lot of help with both Adam and Merik, but it's also the entire team, and they've really pushed me this year."

He says that a strong summer set the tone, along with the push of head coach Dwight Hirst.

"It was a good offseason, and a



The Niverville Nighthawks are off to a historic start to their season.

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great start to the regular season," adds Wheddon. "I think Dwight's really pushed us and it's made all of us better... It's also an off-ice thing. We're building a lot of chemistry."

For Adam Vigfusson, team captain, his leadership role comes naturally.

"Honestly, it's pretty easy to lead this group of guys," says Vigfusson. "Everybody is pretty bought in, so I've been able to just do my job and let the boys do theirs."

Hirst, who is in his second full season behind the Nighthawks bench, believes that continuity is a major reason for the team's success.

"The biggest thing for us this year is having the same core group of players here for a second straight season," Hirst says. "There's a way we play here and a certain standard we uphold, and the core group that's been here the last couple seasons lead the way... Some teams buckle under pressure, but this group is used to that pressure, and when games have become tense, the team has remained loose. They are thriving under that tension."

## NOVEMBER 7 WINKLER FLYERS, HOME

Both Niverville and Winkler entered this matchup with momentum on their side, with Winkler having won four of their last five contests.

The opening period was a defensive battle, with just nine shots combined between the teams, but Niverville managed to capitalize on one of their few opportunities.

Evan Panzer's backhand deflected off Flyers defenceman Graeme Pickering and went right to Dawson Zeller at the side of the net, who tucked it in to give the Nighthawks a 1–0 lead.

The intensity ramped up in the second period, with both teams trading chances and heavy hits.

Winkler finally broke through thanks to a great individual effort from Trevor Dalton, who chipped the puck off the boards past a defender, drove to the net, and slipped it past Austin Dubinsky for his fourth goal of the season.

Early in the third, the Nighthawks' power play delivered the game-winner. Wheddon set up Jaden Mah in

the right circle, whose attempted cross-ice pass deflected off a stick and Owen Wallace's skate before beating Flyers goaltender Leif Ekblad over the right arm.

The goal put Niverville back in front 2–1, a lead they wouldn't relinquish.

## NOVEMBER 9 WAYWAYSEECAPPO WOLVERINES, HOME

Coming off identical 2–1 wins over the Dauphin Kings and Winkler Flyers, the Nighthawks faced a well-rested Wolverines squad returning to action after a ten-day break—and the Nighthawks didn't make it easy on themselves in the opening period, landing themselves in the penalty box three times in the first ten minutes.

Despite the setbacks, Niverville's penalty killers continued their stellar play and kept Dauphin's top scorers off the board.

Niverville struck first early in the second period thanks to some veteran chemistry.

After Wheddon's shot went wide, Vigfusson gathered the loose puck

behind the net and found a wide-open Merik Boles between the circles. Boles snapped a quick shot past the Wolverines goaltender.

The Wolverines responded five minutes into the third. Sebastien Hicks carried the puck into the Nighthawks zone before sliding a pass to Ben Roulette in the right circle, who faked a shot, moved around Dubinsky, and tucked in a backhand to even the score at one.

But the Wheddon-Vigfusson-Boles line wasn't done. Wheddon entered the Wolverines zone and drew two defenders before finding a streaking Vigfusson in the left circle, whose quick snapshot slipped through Wareham and trickled across the line for the game-winner.

"We didn't come out and play our best right away," says Nighthawks defenceman Luke Wagner. "But I think we let the talent and chemistry of our team take over, which helped us win the game."

## NOVEMBER 11 STEINBACH PISTONS, HOME

The top two teams in the MJHL squared off Tuesday afternoon in Niverville. And when the final buzzer sounded, the Nighthawks emerged victorious—again.

The opening period started cautiously, with both teams feeling each other out. Then a fortunate bounce turned the tide.

Forward Kole Mears flipped the puck in from the red line for what looked like a routine dump-in. Instead the puck bounced awkwardly at the top of the crease and skipped past Pistons goaltender Chris Quizi, stunning the visitors and electrifying the home crowd.

With just over two minutes to go, Vigfusson and Wheddon broke in on a two-on-one. Vigfusson tapped it in to make it 2–0.

The Nighthawks carried their momentum into the second period, continuing to pressure Steinbach and carrying much of the play to start. But

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Quizi was sensational, coming up with some massive saves to keep his team within striking distance.

Midway through the frame, Vigfusson struck again. After Jaden Mah kept the puck in at the blue line, he worked it down low to Boles, who centred to Vigfusson in the slot. The Nighthawks captain fired home his second of the game and eighth of the season.

That same line connected again early in the third. Vigfusson spun away from his check behind the Pistons' net and slid a perfect pass to Boles in front, who outwaited Quizi and tucked home the Nighthawks' fourth goal to seal the win.

"It's another game where we were able to keep one of the top teams in the league off the scoresheet, which is good for us," Hirst says. "It just keeps pushing home that our guys are committed to playing defence and doing what's needed to be successful."

#### NOVEMBER 15 NORTHERN MANITOBA BLIZZARD, HOME

The Nighthawks wrapped up a six-game homestand in emphatic fashion, downing the Northern Manitoba Blizzard 7-1 on Hockey Fights Cancer Night at the CRRC.

Before puck drop, the team held a moving pregame ceremony honouring longtime Nighthawks volunteer Susan Shaver, who is currently battling pancreatic cancer. Shaver was recognized at centre ice to a standing ovation.

Once the action began, it didn't take long for Niverville to strike.

Just 25 seconds into the first period, Loik Leduc crossed the Blizzard blue line and threaded a perfect backhand pass through the defence to a streaking John Scott, who beat Blizzard netminder Keagin Kelln for the early lead.

The second period belonged entirely to the Nighthawks as the floodgates opened.

Just six minutes in, Wheddon redirected a pass from Seth Quayle over the blocker of Kelln for his tenth of the season.

Kelln delivered one of the highlights of the night shortly after, robbing Boles with an exceptional stick save on a wraparound attempt.

Moments later, while on the power play, Evan Panzer buried a rebound

for his first of two power-play goals, extending the lead to 3-0.

Rykan Arran then lifted a shot from the top of the crease over Kelln to make it 4-0.

Arran struck again two minutes after that when Parker Rolston forced a turnover and found Arran in the slot, where he wired a wrist shot past Kelln's glove for his second of the night.

The Nighthawks made it 6-0 before the period ended, following a beautiful five-man passing sequence that finished with Zeller sliding the puck to Panzer, who tapped home his second goal of the game and fifth of the year.

Early in the third, Niverville continued to press. Vigfusson converted a cross-crease feed from Wheddon to push the lead to 7-0.

The Blizzard broke the shut-out near the end of the game when Hunter Dingman pounced on a loose puck just outside the crease and fired it past Ben Chornomydz, cutting the lead to 7-1.

#### NOVEMBER 21 NORTHERN MANITOBA BLIZZARD, AWAY

The Nighthawks showed no signs of slowing down on the road, extending their awe-inspiring win streak with a 6-2 victory over the Northern Manitoba Blizzard.

The Nighthawks stormed out of the gate, striking twice in the first 74 seconds. Wheddon opened the scoring with his eleventh of the season, scooping up a loose puck in the left circle before driving it to the net before sliding it past Kelln.

Moments later, Wagner recorded his first of the season, lifting a shot from the right circle over Kelln's shoulder to make it 2-0.

Niverville controlled much of the play in the opening period and were able to add another in the final minute, with Wheddon picking up his second of the night. After missing the net on his initial attempt, he corralled the loose puck beside the goal and banked it off the back of Kelln and in.

That goal also marked the first point with the Nighthawks for Jake Demone, who joined the team via trade from the SJHL's Melfort Mustangs on November 8.

Wheddon completed his hat trick early in the third period when

Boles found him wide open in the slot, where he fired a quick shot over Kelln's glove.

Then, with the Nighthawks on the man advantage, Wagner added his second of the night. His point shot deflected off multiple bodies before finding its way into the net.

Just as in the previous game between these two teams, Northern Manitoba had a much better third period and nearly broke through with under five minutes remaining, but an apparent goal from Justin Whitrow was waved off after an incredible right-pad save by Nighthawks goaltender Ben Chornomydz, who knocked the net off its moorings just before the rebound was sent home.

The Blizzard continued to pressure and eventually got on the board when Kelton Kellerman fired a power-play shot through traffic to spoil Chornomydz's shutout bid.

Another Blizzard power play just moments later yielded a second goal, as Kellerman's point shot deflected off both Trystyn Sidor and Jett Fogle to make it 5-2.

#### NOVEMBER 22 SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDE, AWAY

After a big win over the Blizzard, Niverville arrived in Swan Valley looking to sweep their first northern trip of the season.

For one of the few times this year, the Nighthawks found themselves playing from behind.

Swan Valley struck first midway through the opening period when Finlay Johnston cleared the puck to Trace Langan, who chipped it past a defender and beat Dubinsky blocker-side on a breakaway.

It was just the fifth time this season the opposition got on the board first against the Nighthawks.

The lead didn't last long, however, as moments later Tyler Bernier danced around two Stampeder defenders before sliding the puck to Scott, who quickly snapped a shot through the pads of goaltender Samuel Bastien.

Swan Valley regained the edge late in the first on a power play. Crosby Harrison's shot was tipped in by Ethan MacTavish, who was planted at the top of the crease.

With only 17 seconds left in the frame, Niverville answered on a

power play of their own. Vigfusson fed a cross-crease pass to Boles, who deposited the puck to even the score.

In the second period, Niverville erupted for five goals. Vigfusson opened the barrage just 90 seconds into the period on a two-on-one with Wheddon, netting his tenth goal of the season.

Boles added his second of the night and tenth of the year on the power play, finishing off a scramble created by Vigfusson, who skated the puck to the top of the crease, trying to find space, but his shot bounced around the crease before being knocked in by Boles.

Leduc then sprung Arran down the right wing, and Arran used his speed to beat a defender wide before snapping a shot glove-side to extend the lead. Arran finished the night with a season-high three points.

The offensive pressure continued and Vigfusson struck again, taking a feed from Wheddon at the red line, moved into the left circle, and fired a blocker-side shot past Bastien for his second goal of the period.

Bernier capped off the explosive frame with a sharp-angle bank shot off Bastien, chasing the Swan Valley netminder from the game and making it 7-2.

The Stampede pushed back late in the period, scoring on the power play with MacTavish's second of the game.

MacTavish completed his hat trick with his team's third man-advantage goal of the night, but the late surge wasn't enough.

#### NOVEMBER 27 VIRIDEN OIL CAPS, AWAY

Once again, the Nighthawks found themselves in unfamiliar territory early on when Viriden struck first. Tyson Ulmer finished a two-on-one off a feed from Tyson Draper, beating Dubinsky high blocker and triggering a shower of teddy bears from the stands.

The celebration, however, proved short-lived. Moments after play resumed, Nighthawks forward Mears forced a turnover by lifting a defender's stick in the right circle, freeing the puck for Panzer, who snapped home his sixth of the year glove-side on Braxton Burdeny.

Viriden then came inches from

regaining the advantage themselves, ringing a shot off the post with just over ten seconds left in the period.

The first half of the middle frame became a showcase for both goaltenders, as Dubinsky and Burdeny traded key stops, keeping their teams in the game.

The stalemate broke just past the halfway mark when Boles slipped past a defender just inside the Viriden blueline before feeding Vigfusson, who buried a blocker-side shot to establish a 2-1 Nighthawks lead.

Calyb Moore doubled the advantage just 1:03 later, firing a shot from the right wall that found its way past Burdeny for his fourth of the season.

Earlier in the week, Hirst had noted that the club's been looking to fine-tune a few areas, but top priority was given to special teams ahead of a heavy section of the schedule coming up. That work delivered during the final frame. Niverville earned four power plays, scoring on three.

Aaron Krestanowich opened the scoring barrage with his first of the season, ripping a shot from the left circle over Burdeny's glove to make it 4-1.

Moore then added his second of the night following strong forechecking by Rolston and Leduc, who forced a turnover that allowed Rolston to set up Moore in the right circle.

Just seconds after the ensuing faceoff, the game's most concerning play occurred when Mears was hit from behind by Ty Plasier. Plasier received a major penalty for boarding and a game misconduct.

Mears was assisted by team physiotherapist Justin Giesbrecht and was able to skate to the bench but did not return.

Niverville capitalized on the five-minute power play, scoring twice more: once from Thomas Phillips and once from Leduc, cementing the 7-1 final.

It was a career-high game for Phillips, with one goal and three assists.

The Nighthawks have two games left on the road before returning home. They face the Waywayseecappo Wolverines on Tuesday, December 2 and then wrap up their five-game road schedule on Friday, December 5 in Steinbach.

Niverville returns home Sunday, December 7 when they host Viriden.



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# Run Run Ritchot Sets Pace for a Season of Community Fun

By Holly Dunphy

The RM of Ritchot's recreation department is keeping residents active and engaged, both physically and mentally, throughout the fall and winter seasons.

The fall kicked off with a fun run in St. Adolphe but will continue for months of programming, including a puzzle race in Île-des-Chênes, a festive centrepiece workshop in Ste. Agathe led the owner of Fleuriste XO, and the second annual Sip & Ski in Grande Pointe.

## RUN RUN RITCHOT

On October 27, runners from throughout the municipality and beyond took to St. Adolphe's ring dike.

The five-kilometre race was inaugurated by the RM's new mascot, Ritchie the River Otter, making his first official public appearance, handing out high-fives and medals at the finish line.

The first-place runner was 16-year-old Joel Thiessen, who finished with a time of 22:01.

The idea for the run was sparked by a conversation between Danielle Peters, Ritchot's coordinator of community engagement, and a local resident who mused about how cool it would be to host a race around the dike.

"We've never done something like that here before," says Peters. "I went out and measured it myself—and as



Ritchie, the RM of Ritchot's new mascot, makes its first public appearance at Run Run Ritchot in late October.

MONIQUE CARRIER

it turns out, it's a perfect 5k."

Planning the race took about a year's time and involved several volunteers from start to finish.

"I worked with that local resident at first and then collaborated with volunteers in town, including a local runner that helped me map it out. I also chatted with people in Kleefeld who did the Kleefeld Honey Run. They were all so helpful to the success of this race."

The run had initially been scheduled for October 5 but had to be postponed due to inclement weather.

Unfortunately, the makeup date coincided with one of Manitoba's largest marathons, the Winnipeg

Fire Paramedic Service Marathon. That clash resulted in 35 registrants dropping out.

The final participation landed at 83 individual runners.

"We ended up with about 12 local volunteers and had three local businesses step forward with assistance: St Adolphe Esso, Cornerstone Deli, and Tourond Creek," says Peters. "Each company contributed monetary donations for snacks like granola bars, water, and coffee. Our public works department helped prepare the course and signage and even loaned trucks with amber lights. Two crossing guards were placed with the trucks at each intersection,

controlling traffic on the 200 and 210 highways. Runners didn't have to stop mid-run and could stay safe at every step."

Next year's run is already slated for October 4 and will take place in Île-des-Chênes. A four-year rotation will bring the race to different towns across the RM.

## PUZZLE RACE AND MORE

Registration is well underway now for another type of race, one that will instead test people's patience and problem-solving skills.

This adults-only puzzle race will be hosted at the TC Energy Centre at a cost of \$100 per team of four,

which includes admission to the timed event, one drink ticket, and a 500-piece puzzle that goes home with each group.

The doors will open at 6:15 p.m. to accommodate food orders from the Île-des-Chênes Canteen Crew and the Little Red Concession. The race kicks off promptly at 7:00 p.m. Prizes will be awarded for the top three teams.

This is a follow-up from a similar puzzle race held back in March.

"At March's puzzle race, the first-place team finished in 28 minutes. That same team has registered again under the name The Master Puzzlers," says Peters. "With a big clock on the wall and music bumping, it's a lot of fun! We even had people show up in costumes last time. One team made up T-shirts. Another showed up in bathrobes. We have decided to incorporate a 'best dressed' prize this time."

The winter will feature a range of other events, including a toddler group and yoga/fitness classes. Peters reminds residents that the best way to stay current with ongoing activities and programs is via social media, like Facebook and Instagram, as well as the RM's website and Connect app.

"We try to do things low-cost to no-cost here at Ritchot Recreation," says Peters. "We're never looking to make a profit on anything. We're just trying to give something to the community that they will enjoy!"

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### Public Notice

### Change to Water Rates

The Town of Niverville would like to make all ratepayers aware that after approval from the Public Utilities Board, **new water utility rates have gone into effect, starting with the October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025, to December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2025, billing period, and will be seen for the first time on the January 2026 utility bills.**

The Town of Niverville applied to the Public Utilities Board (PUB) for revised water rates for the Niverville Water Utility as set out in **By-law No. 862-24**, read the first time on **January 16, 2024**, and publicized **June 17, 2024**. Revised rates were approved by the PUB **September 22, 2025**. Previous rates were approved in 2016 in Board Order No. 61/16, effective July 1, 2018.

The former and current rates are as follows:

	Former Rates	Current Rates
	Bylaw 745-14	Bylaw 862-24
Quarterly Service Charge	\$7.37	\$3.09
Water (per 1,000 gallons)	\$11.18	\$11.96
Minimum Quarterly Charge*	\$40.91	\$38.97
Reconnection Fee	\$40.00	\$50.00
Bulk Water (Per 1,000 gallons)	-	\$14.21

\*Based on 3,000 gallons for a standard 5/8-inch meter



Thank you to all those who donated and attended our 2025 Banquet

## Together we raised over

# \$51,875.00

A sincere thank you to the following individuals:

Bernie and Lillian Falk	Town of Niverville	Bonny and Rick Friesen
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Epic IT Solutions,	MCW Consulting	Ibrahim Khan
Niverville Credit Union	Wm Dyck and Sons	Jonathan Daman
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	Darlene Dueck (B)	Bristol Hauling
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B - board member





Wishing you and your family  
a Merry Christmas and  
Blessings in the New Year

**Ron R. Schuler**  
MLA for Springfield-Ritchot  
Ron@RonSchuler.com



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# Merry Christmas



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**We encourage our readers to recognize and support those people and businesses who continue to help make this region a great place to live, work, and play!**

