

# The Citizen

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#### LOCAL NEWS

### Niverville Couple Reels from Water/Sewer Nightmare

■ After confronting tens of thousands of dollars in unexpected repair costs this year, a local couple is warning other homeowners about the risks they may face.

Details on Pages 8-9

#### LOCAL NEWS

### Assessing the Risks of Youth Vaping

■ Experts have been sounding the alarm about high rates of vaping among young people in Canada.

Details on Page 15

#### SPORTS & REC

### Opa's Park Gets Big Donation

■ Organizers behind the restoration of a beloved park in Niverville recently got a big boost after receiving a \$2,500 donation from BSI Insurance.

Details on Page 29

#### ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

### Music Acts to Throw Local New Year's Bash

■ A trio of musical acts are getting ready to throw a big New Year's concert in Niverville. Tickets are on sale now.

Details on Page 34

## HSD EAs Strike for Better Wages

➡ READ MORE ON PAGE 3

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Throughout November, EAs in the Hanover School Division went on strike. BRENDA SAWATZKY

# HSD EAs Strike for Better Wages

By Brenda Sawatzky  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER  
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It took three weeks of walking the picket lines before Hanover School Division and the educational assistant's union were able to reach a collective agreement for cost-of-living wage increases.

With back-to-back negotiations running into late October, by November 1 Hanover EAs walked off the job in a last-ditch attempt to be heard. By mid-November, the bargaining committees were back at the table.

A deal was ratified by both sides on November 22.

The agreement includes an immediate wage increase of 6.3 percent, much of which is retroactive to 2022.

Senior EAs will also see a wage adjustment of more than \$2 per hour in 2024 and education premiums will go up by 42 percent over the life of the agreement.

Finally, EAs will no longer lose valuable workdays due to unpredictable school closures. Improvements have also been made to sick day provisions.

Prior to the new deal, the wage rate for an incoming EA in HSD was \$16.78 per hour. The maximum rate

for long-term EAs topped out at \$20.87 per hour.

According to Geoff Dueck Thiessen, union representative for CLAC Local 306, these wages trailed other neighbouring school division EAs by anywhere between \$3 to \$4 per hour.

"These wage adjustments, while significant, still need work to get to a wage that fully compensates these folks for the valuable work they do," says Thiessen. "And some of that is going to have to come from better government funding. The last provincial government hamstrung school divisions by limiting their taxing powers, without backfilling with adequate funding. And the current government has been silent as our members went on strike."

Thiessen refers to changes made by the PC government in recent years that imposed education tax restraints on school divisions, limiting the amount they can collect on property taxes within their division.

Certainly, the weeks of strike action were stressful for many. EAs walked the sidewalks with placards saying, "We don't want to be here. We want to be helping your kids."

Schools in the division scrambled to spread the workload to try and compensate for more than 300 missing EAs.

Parents were distraught over the sudden inability of the school system to meet the needs of their special needs children.

In many cases, this greatly diminished the attention given to children in need of EA assistance. In other cases, these children were denied access to school altogether.

It didn't take long for the entire system to be thrown into tumult. Such is the impact and importance of the EA to the modern educational system.

For perspective, most EAs these days are on hand to assist students who struggle with mental, physical, or learning disabilities. They take an enormous load off classroom teachers.

These EAs might be tasked with healthcare responsibilities, such as installing feeding tubes and catheters, giving injections, or dealing with colostomy bags.

For many, the job extends into the psychology field as well. They deal with every level of neurodiversity, including autism, in ways that require cognitive and behavioural understanding.

Despite the difficulty faced by families during the strike period, though, many responded with acts of kindness and support towards their EAs while on strike.

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# SRSD Trustees Vote to Restore Funding

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On November 14, Seine River School Division trustees voted to restore full funding to the Kids at Play (KAP) program as well as bussing for students living within .8 and 1.6 kilometres of their schools.

Letters sent to affected parents earlier this month had indicated the division's intention to develop a fee-for-service model beginning in January.

This would have resulted in a monthly cost of \$190 per child in KAP and an additional \$200 for each student's transportation for the final six months of the year.

Both programs have been free to parents in the division for many years.

The fees would have been among many austerity measures introduced by the division since a \$1.3-million deficit was uncovered in July.

The division's letters resulted in an outpouring of objection from parents, all concerned about the costs, extremely short notice, and lack of parental feedback.

Three delegations and around 60 parents showed up to the November public meeting. Christine Hollyoake and Chad Kessler formed one of the delegation teams, representing the interests of St. Adolphe's affected parents.

## HOLLYOAKE PRESENTS TO THE BOARD

Hollyoake says that she felt respected and heard by the board. Based on trustee responses, she's confident they were unaware of the full ramifications of what their fee-for-service model would mean to local families.

"Their anticipated revenue for KAP assumed 100 percent participation, whereas, with transportation, they only anticipated 80 percent of kids buying into that," says Hollyoake.

This became clear in a slide presentation by the board which indicated the potential for a \$500,000 cost recapture in the new year between the combined programs. The bulk of the revenue, \$400,000, was expected to result from KAP enrolment.

Based on what Hollyoake had been hearing from other parents, though, the buy-in for both programs



would likely have been much lower—not for lack of support, but rather a response to facing yet one more challenging cost in already tough economic times.

When presented with this info, Hollyoake says that some board members were inclined to consider a relaxed approach to collecting fees, to make it more financially feasible.

Others recognized that such an approach would not improve their revenue stream quickly enough.

Another thing the administration seems to have failed to consider, she says, is the extra cost of transportation for kids who would no longer be enrolled in the KAP program in January.

Currently, Kindergarten and KAP students only require transportation for the beginning and end of day.

"Administration didn't have the information on what transportation costs would be to bus kids home midday and pickup midday," says Hollyoake. "And none of those costs were factored into the cost-saving measures. So if you only have 70 percent buy-in, then you only have 70 percent of \$400,000. Plus you now have the additional cost of transportation to get the 30 percent home midday."

Additionally, she says, the fees had the potential to create an economic divide between children of parents who could afford the services and those who couldn't.

Hollyoake still has questions about how fee-for-service can be justified when the division receives at least some funding from the province.

In the end, however, six of the nine trustees voted in favour of eliminating the fees at this time, including board chair Wendy Bloomfield.

"This is a short-term victory and I'm very thankful for this victory," Hollyoake says. "The flip side to that is they now need to find \$500,000 somewhere else. I really want everybody to get what they need for their children, but I don't know how you do that in the situation that we're in."

## AUSTERITY MEASURES

At the meeting, the board presented a candid report on the division's financial outlook. When the first budget was created in spring, the board was led to believe that a \$3.1-million surplus would be achieved by the end of the 2023–24 school year.

With the arrival of a new secretary treasurer in July, and following a budget review, it was determined that a \$1.3 deficit was more realistic.

When you add the new contracted agreements with EAs and other groups, the board estimates a total shortfall of \$5.3 million by the end of this coming school year.

As per their legal requirements, the SRSD admin have since been in communication with the province. Their responsibility is to create a new budget which incorporates a plan to eliminate the deficit.

This plan will need to be approved by the Minister of Education.

Due to the sizeable expected shortfall, the board has concluded that a multi-year plan will be needed to turn things around. A hiring freeze has since been initiated and non-essential expenditures put on hold.

The SRSD board and admin are also considering the layoff of all temporary contract staff. This could affect 25 teachers, 17 EAs, and a number of other support people.

This has the potential to save the division approximately \$1.4 million.

"A threshold was set for each school in consultation with the principal for how many educational assistant vacancies the school can manage and still meet the programming needs of the students with individualized education plans," read a visual presentation from the board.

Also under consideration is the replacement of the KAP instructor with an existing employee. The role of secretaries and librarians may be paused or reduced where possible and expectations lowered for operational staff to help reduce hours.

According to the presentation, another \$3 million in cost savings could be realized by cutting programs and services as well as educational funding for staff members.

## PARENTS STILL CONCERNED

According to a substitute EA working exclusively in the SRSD, the situation has already been difficult in the division over the past couple of months. She wonders how much worse they could get in the face of these austerity measures.

On request for anonymity, we'll call her Jane.

For eight years, Jane has supplemented her family income by working as a substitute EA.

This fall, she noticed a significant drop off in calls for her assistance in schools across the division.

Prior to the board's cuts, she says, she received three calls in one week, which was fairly typical. In the weeks that followed, she hasn't received a single call and her one prebooked workday has been cancelled.

"There are huge concerns for the most vulnerable students in the division not getting what they need each day," says Jane. "If an EA is away

and there is no coverage for a certain student, then EAs will be moved around to cover the student with the highest needs. But that means that students with lesser needs will often lose their help. This could mean a student who still requires a full-time EA but is not one to run away or cause huge distraction could constantly be losing their one-on-one support. It also means that a higher burden is put on the classroom teacher in an already busy environment."

She worries that she and other substitute EAs will soon lose all of their hours and need to seek employment elsewhere.

Jane is also a parent to a child with special needs. She understands the kinds of hoops parents have to jump through just to get EA assistance for their child in the first place. These budget cuts won't make that task any easier.

Another mom, Allyn Bishop, is in a similar situation. Her son, who attends Kindergarten in La Salle, suffers from global delay. At five years old, he's more like three years old developmentally. He has epilepsy, has to be tube-fed, and experiences very poor balance.

Ideally, she says, he should have an EA with him all day, but he only has extra help during class time in Kindergarten and KAP.

"He has to eat lunch in a separate room with other kids who require extra help instead of being with his classmates," says Bishop. "He doesn't get to go play on the structure or the swings with the other kids at recess because there isn't enough help, so he just stands there. He didn't get to participate in the Terry Fox events because of staffing. I'm sure there is much more [that happens] that I don't get to see."

Bishop fears that the separation between her son and the other children will only grow as hiring freezes and staffing cuts are rolled out.

Worse still, he may not be able to attend school at all.

"He would not be able to go to school without an EA," she says. "He needs one, both physically and mentally. My biggest fear is him being left out on both learning and play, therefore not being able to learn and develop to his full potential."

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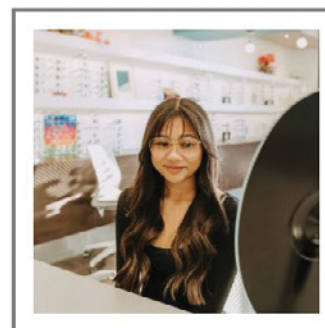
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# Gala Features Amazing Race Host Jon Montgomery

By Brenda Sawatzky

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November 4 marked another first-rate gala hosted by the Niverville Heritage Centre. Hundreds in attendance were treated to a night of fine dining accompanied by the inspirational and comedic storytelling of Jon Montgomery, 2010 Olympic gold medalist and host of *Amazing Race Canada*.

The fundraising goal was a lofty one this year, coming in at just over \$151,000. According to an early tally, proceeds had already reached almost \$93,000.

"We are expecting additional funds as many guests took home their pledge cards," says Anne Eastman of Niverville Heritage Holdings. "We are hoping we will be closer to our goal."

With a focus on improving life for the seniors living within the Heritage Centre's aging-in-place campus, much of what is raised will be directed to improvements at the Heritage Life Personal Care Home (HLPCH) and Niverville Credit Union Manor.

This year, the HLPCH marks its tenth anniversary and the NCU Manor reaches the 16-year mark.

Prior to the event, Montgomery received a guided tour of the campus.

"This is the real deal here, folks," Montgomery said. "I have never been to a community that could lay claim to something like this."

That was the launching pad from which Montgomery dived into his own life story, a story of dreaming big and achieving even bigger things for himself.

Montgomery grew up in Russell, Manitoba. As a child, one of his greatest inspirations was hometown hero Theo Fleury.

Despite his small stature, Fleury rose to NHL fame and closed his hockey career with an Olympic gold in 2002.

When Montgomery was 11, Fleury paid a visit to his school.

"I identified with this diminutive hockey player like the rest



Jon Montgomery shares his inspirational story in Niverville.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

of the guys on my hockey team couldn't," Montgomery said. "I was the second smallest kid in my class. The girl who was born prematurely, she was smaller. But when I stood shoulder to shoulder with this athlete, it was a watershed moment for me. [I knew] my limiting factors were self-imposed, and I began to view my world through a different lens that day."

In 2001, Montgomery moved to Calgary and worked as an auctioneer not far from Canada Olympic Park. He spent a lot of his time at the park working on what he called a self-guided tour of all the winter Olympic sports, trying his hand at each one.

But the first time he witnessed skeleton racing, he was absolutely hooked on it.

"As we [stood] by the track, I happened to see an athlete come by at 125 kilometres per hour, on their stomach, hands at their side, toes pointed and chin draped over the end of their sled, going through a 360-degree roundabout, rising and falling and then smashing the wall on the way out, sparks flying. I was like, 'Yes! I have found it!'"

Unlike most other sports, Montgomery joked, skeleton requires no great mental skill. As a matter of fact, you have to be a bit braindead to want to do it.

If high-level competition was the goal, though, serious training was needed. He began by searching for the program that made sense for him.

It involved ten repetitions of ten squats every day for ten days, with

weights. The kicker, he says, is that this required him to add ten extra pounds every day, per side, to the weight he'd been squatting with the day before.

"So at the end of ten days, you are doing 100 squats with 200 additional pounds on the bar than you had ten days ago."

He didn't make it. In fact, few humans would. But he didn't know that until he reread the program details, only to realize that he'd inadvertently doubled the weight it prescribed.

"I pushed myself to absolute crippling failure," Montgomery said. "I had tried to do 100 percent more work than what was asked of me, but I had nearly completed it. And it made me realize that things are only truly fundamentally out of our reach if we put them there."

Using self-limiting words such as "I can't" or "I'm going to fail" will become self-fulfilling prophecies, he said.

In the end, Montgomery went on to take gold in the men's skeleton event at the 2010 Winter Olympics held in Vancouver. He became renowned for his victory march through Whistler Village, taking celebratory swigs from a pitcher of beer as he passed through a crowd of raucous fans.

Looking back, though, Montgomery never lets that victory overshadow the years of hard work that it took to get there.

"If you're not celebrating the small victories and if you're not savouring those incremental gains that you're making, in skeleton

racing and in life, you will convince yourself that you're not getting any better. And you will quit before the miracle. Before you realize your own potential."

The same is true, he said, as we attempt to accomplish things collaboratively.

This was witnessed by Montgomery when his fellow Canadian Olympians reached a place where they were no longer competing with each other to make the final cut for the Olympic team, but were rather competing as a unit to bring home the medals for Canada.

A few years later, Montgomery faced a new challenge: a complete redirection in his career path. He found himself on a flight to Toronto for what he calls a terrifying audition for the position of host of *Amazing Race Canada*.

"I didn't know how I was going to take the rejection of hearing, 'We don't like your face and certainly not your voice,'" Montgomery said. "But I did know one thing. I knew that 2014 and the Sochi games was going to be the end of my athletic journey. I had to be honest with myself that tobogganing in a spandex onesie has a definitive shelf life. And at 35 years old, I was approaching that best-before date, if I'm being truthful."

Not only did Montgomery get the job, but he's been the host of the reality TV show ever since.

Montgomery closed the Saturday night gala with an auction, calling out in his rapid-riff auctioneer voice to attendees, hoping to encourage a little extra investment in the seniors of Niverville.

On auction were a beer jug with an authentic *Amazing Race Canada* clue card and an autographed and gently used Connor Hellebuyck goalie stick.

Together, they sold for \$2,500.

"I was pleased with all the positive feedback I received," Eastman concludes. "And with the generosity of Jon Montgomery staying until everyone that wanted had an opportunity for a picture and a few words."

## IN BRIEF

### MPI Strike Ends

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Just weeks following election day, Manitoba's new government went right to work, with one of its top priorities being a complete overhaul of the Manitoba Public Insurance (MPI) board.

On October 20, nine new members were appointed to the MPI board, overseen by Carmen Nedohin, former chairperson of the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission and a former Manitoba Hydro board member.

After days of back-and-forth negotiations in late October, Nedohin and the new board landed on a deal to get workers off the picket line. The deal included a 13 percent wage increase over four years, as well as an \$1,800 signing bonus for full-time employees with prorated bonuses for part-timers.

Ferd Klassen, owner of Niverville Autobody, called the MPI strike extremely disruptive. He said wait times for MPI repair approval were between four and 14 days. The wait was more like 48 hours before the strike.

"Customers are waiting for answers to settle total losses so they can find out what they are going to get paid for their car if it's a total loss," Klassen said at the time.

A problem was that almost no one at MPI could determine who was at fault in the case of accidents involving more than one driver.

"The repair industry in Manitoba has been working extremely hard post-COVID to make sure that vehicles are getting repaired as they try and solve these issues," said Klassen. "My team here has had to veer left and bounce right just to make things happen for our customers."



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# Niverville Couple Reeling After Water and Sewer Breakdowns

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Sarah Gatey and Bryan Claeys have enjoyed ownership of their home on Fourth Avenue South in Niverville for the past 13 years. Their time there has been relatively incident-free.

That is, until one year ago when, within a six-week period, both their water and sewer utilities broke down.

For this couple, those weeks were filled with stress, frustration, displacement, and compounding costs. Their hope is that no other Niverville family will have to go through the same.

But as aging utility infrastructure gives way underground, chances are that the older neighbourhoods of Niverville will continue to suffer.

In fact, it's just a matter of time. According to CAO Eric King, more than 700 Niverville properties still operate on antiquated well and service line systems. Many of these wells and water and sewer service lines are 50 years old or older.

## WHEN THE WELL BREAKS DOWN

Like so many homeowners in Niverville, Gatey and Claeys share a well with two other properties. Water service lines run from the well to each of each house.

The couple signed a well agreement when they purchased the home. They knew from the start that any costs incurred because of the well or water lines would be shared three ways.

They also knew the well wasn't located on their property.

On August 14, 2022, Gatey and Claeys found themselves with no water coming from their taps. A call to the neighbour resulted in some confusion as to the exact location of the shared well.

Gatey made a call to the town office only to discover that they have no records of the locations of private wells or their service lines.

Eleven days passed before a directional drilling company was able to come. They found a break in one service line and repaired it.

The \$5,000 repair bill was split three ways.

"We had water for four days," Gatey says. "Bryan was in the middle of showering when the water stopped again."

The neighbour contacted the same drilling company. This time, it was determined that the well had collapsed and could not be repaired.



Bryan Claeys and Sarah Gatey of Niverville.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

The neighbour informed Gatey that they intended to hook up to the municipal system.

Realizing they were on their own, Gatey and Claeys looked into the cost of digging a new well on their own property. Another option was to connect to the well belonging to their neighbour to the north.

The cost of installing a brand new well would have come to between \$10,000 and \$15,000, depending on the depth of the water table.

Next, Gatey called the town office to seek their advice.

"I contacted the town and they explained that because we have the municipal water line available, [municipal hookup] is our only option," says Gatey.

In other words, the town would not permit the digging of a new well or hooking up to a neighbouring well.

Four years prior, in 2018, a water main line was run from the water treatment plant on Spruce Drive to a new condominium development on Fourth Avenue South. At the time, the condominium developer footed the bill for the water main installation.

Gatey remembers that work being done because it ran right through her front yard.

Looking to cover her bases, Gatey called the lawyer with whom they had originally signed their well agreement. She was told that they couldn't help due to a conflict of interest.

She tried another firm that took a look at her case, only to determine that the couple had no recourse. This legal advice cost them \$500.

On September 1, Gatey sent an email to the town office inquiring into the process of hooking up to municipal water. Six days later, with no response, Gatey finally went directly to the town office.

"It turns out that the person who

deals with this was on vacation," Gatey says.

The couple was provided with an agreement for municipal water hookup. By this time, they'd been without water for a full two weeks.

For the purpose of clarifying utility infrastructure terminology, there are two types of water and sewer pipes that run below the surface. Water and sewer main lines (or simply mains) are like streets running through a community. Water or sewer service lines are like the driveways that connect each home to the nearby street.

The town's municipal water agreement states that property owners are fully responsible for hiring their own contractor to install a one-inch service line from the mainline to their home, which needs to include a saddle, curb stop, and shutoff valves.

Engineering supervision, provided by the town, is also required—at the resident's cost.

A \$2,000 restoration deposit is needed in order to cover the cost of any repairs to the roads, curbs, or sod.

Gatey and Claeys also had to pay for the water main line that had been installed four years prior. They were charged \$83.40 per linear foot, multiplied by the number of feet of frontage they owned. This rate was established based on 2022 installation costs as opposed to the 2018 costs which the developer had paid.

For the couple, the water main fee alone came to more than \$6,000.

Once the work was complete, Gatey and Claeys owed the contractor almost \$11,000 for the service line installation. The town connection charges came to another \$11,000, with some of it possibly being returnable once the grass was restored.

Finally, they incurred another \$300 bill for the plumber they hired to hook up the water meter in their

basement.

All in all, the entire water ordeal, including the lawyer, cost Gatey and Claeys more than \$24,000.

## SEWER PROBLEMS

Just weeks after the water issues were corrected, Gatey and Claeys experienced a sewer backup in their basement. The attending plumber ran a snake and found a break in the sewer service line running through the couple's front yard.

Since a water line had recently been installed in the same area, the plumber determined that there was some likelihood that the sewer line had been damaged by the contractor who installed the water line.

When confronted by Gatey, the drilling company didn't agree.

Unable to determine the extent of the sewer line damage without digging, the company gave Gatey and Claeys an estimate of between \$6,000 and \$11,000 to repair the issue.

This time, the main line for the sewer was on the opposite side of the street, meaning that Gatey and Claeys' sewer service line ran beneath the street to the far side.

A conversation with Ryan Dyck of the town's public works department revealed that if the service line was compromised and needed replacement, the couple would be responsible for the entire line, including the part which ran beneath the street and on town property.

As well, if trenching resulted in street or curb damages during the service line installation, Gatey and Claeys would be financially responsible for the street/curb repairs too.

The couple was shocked. As far as they knew, most cities or communities charged only for service lines up to the property line, not beyond.

"It kind of makes you not want to

live here if that's the kind of issues you have to face," Gatey says.

It took a month before the contractor was able to effect the repair. In the meantime, the couple and their daughter moved into their parents' small basement to wait it out.

When the contractor finally arrived, he determined that the line was in sound condition and the leak was on the couple's property. Still, the new bill came to almost \$6,000.

Within two months' time, the couple now faced unexpected bills adding up to \$30,000.

Gatey reached out to the town office inquiring whether extended payment terms or financial relief could be provided on her \$11,000 town bill due to the extenuating circumstances.

She received a letter of response.

"Council is sympathetic to your situation, however, the circumstances surrounding your well failure and sewer connection issue were beyond the town's control, and in the interest of being consistent with established policy, council has determined that no exception will be made, and no reimbursement for your water installation will be provided," the letter stated.

Gatey and Claeys did receive some empathy from the drilling company, who provided extended payment terms that the couple could manage. Gatey had to reach out to her parents for help with the \$24,000 water bills.

## MUNICIPAL WATER VS. WELLS

Mayor Myron Dyck says that when the municipal water project began years ago, council was faced with the decision to either take a hard line with residents or allow some flexibility. They chose the latter.

"To help with the costs, council of the day should have mandated that all residents hook up to water when [a main line] went past their place," Dyck says. "Instead the policy of 'when the well fails' is in place and residents should be planning for it."

Dyck is fairly confident that Niverville is one of the few larger communities left in Manitoba that still has homes connected to private wells.

And while many homeowners balk at the idea of paying for treated municipal water, he says that private wells aren't without their own ongoing costs when one considers the need for water softeners and salt, iron filtration systems, and appliances and faucets with shorter lifespans due to running on hard water.



For other homeowners, the reluctance to change may be due to concerns about chemicals in their drinking water. Here, too, Dyck says that well water can be compromised, posing health risks and boil water advisories that are far less likely in a treated water system.

It should be noted that where there are municipal water mains, there are fire hydrants. Home insurance companies recognize the extra fire protection afforded a homeowner when a hydrant is in close proximity. Thus, they offer significant discounts.

Niverville's CAO Eric King says that once the entire community is equipped with hydrants, the fire department will no longer need to own an expensive water tanker. As it stands now, they'll have to invest in a new one soon just to continue offering fire services to homes that are hooked up to wells.

Until everyone's on municipal water, it won't be a level playing field in terms of shared costs from one resident to the next, King adds.

When municipal water mains get installed in the older neighbourhoods, like Fourth Avenue South, nearby residents can enjoy the benefits of hydrants without any investment into the municipal water system, as long as they have a functioning well.

And when wells break down, council's municipal water hookup policy is still pretty lenient, according to King. Currently, the only residents who are forbidden from digging new wells are those with an existing municipal main line running immediately past their property.

Those who are merely in close proximity may still have the option of digging a new well.

"This is all about making the people who have the water main in front of their house use the asset that's there," King says.

To try and expedite the incorporation of municipal water throughout the entire community, King and his colleagues have been applying for federal and provincial grants.

Earlier this year, a request was made for \$3 million in funding on the basis of a 50/50 cost share.

"We have a grant and we're trying to get the province to increase the percentage of the grant," says King. "It's a big project and affordability is the biggest challenge in everyone's lives today."

In the meantime, Mayor Dyck says that if 70 percent of any Niverville

neighbourhood agrees to have a municipal water main installed on their street, council will put forward a request for provincial backing to help reduce resident costs.

"However, if a well fails and one has no water and has to get a hookup in a quick manner, there is no funding for that and one should expect to pay 100 percent of the cost to hook up," Dyck concludes.

### WHY RESIDENTS PAY FOR WATER MAINS

According to the mayor, asking homeowners to cover the cost of sewer or water mains that run across their property is standard practice. In areas of new construction, the cost of the main line is factored into the price of each lot, based on the number of feet of frontage.

In the case of corner lots, it's still only the front yard footage that matters.

"Residents will ask, 'Why do I have to pay for this? Why does the town not pay for it?'" says Mayor Dyck. "The answer is that property owners who have town water have already paid for their water line when they bought their lot or house, and thus they will say 'I paid for mine and you should pay for yours.'"

In the case of Gatey and Claeys, the cost of the water main had been covered by the developer who needed it for his new condo development. So why are these homeowners paying for it again?

King says that an agreement was made with this particular developer. For ten years following the installation, the developer will be reimbursed every time a homeowner along this stretch of line hooks up.

The same holds true if the town installs the utility main lines.

"There's a line running through town that we installed in 2013 that runs from the water plant to the old arena," says public works manager Ryan Dyck. "So when the people along there decide that they want to connect, it'll be the same. They're going to have to pay their share. You have to reimburse whoever paid for it, whether it's a developer or the town."

As to charging current year pricing for the main line, King says that interest paid, Public Utility Board fees, and other factors helped establish that particular council policy.

"That money has been lost from doing other things or from being reinvested into other projects," says King.

### SERVICE LINE REPAIR POLICY

According to Niverville's policy regarding the responsibility for repairs or replacement of service lines, the entire line, regardless of whether it's on private or town property, falls to the homeowner.

This doesn't mean that the homeowner owns the part of their service line that runs through town property. It's still considered town-owned infrastructure, just without town culpability when it breaks down.

"It's a philosophical question with no right answer," says Ryan Dyck. "Should the town as a whole pay every time one of these service lines fails for something that only one person is going to get benefit out of? The council of the day, in 2017, decided it made sense for it to be the homeowner or the business owner."

Similarly, in 2017 council deemed that the costs for repairing damages to town property as a result of service line repairs would fall to the homeowner.

According to Ryan Dyck, that will affect more than 50 percent of Niverville homeowners.

"The main line will either be on one side of the road or the other," Dyck says.

So on streets where the main line for either water or sewer runs along the north side of the street, for example, all of the southside residents will have service lines running beneath the street.

But in some of the older neighbourhoods, the sewer line actually runs down the length of the street. In cases such as this, every homeowner on that street faces the possibility of street repair costs if their sewer service line fails.

### THE DRILLING PROCESS

*The Citizen* reached out to Casdon Masse of Precision Underground Inc. from St. Adolphe to learn more about the processes used when drilling for service line repairs or replacements.

Precision Underground Inc. is not the contractor used by Gatey and Claeys. Their contractor was unavailable for comment.

"We specialize in directional drilling, so to get underneath roadways without having to dig them up, the best method is obviously drilling underneath," says Masse. "And then you never have to street cut or open cut anything."

In his opinion, the only time street damage would occur on his watch is if the sewer line runs under the length

of the street, or if the break in the line lies beneath the surface of the street.

Masse says that his company takes care of everything, taking some of the pressure off the homeowner. They begin by ensuring that they know where all underground utilities are located in order to avoid damaging something when they dig.

"When you call 811, that sends a request out to all utility companies registered in Manitoba," Masse says. "That includes MTS, sewer and water, cable, Manitoba Hydro... they all get the notification that a line is being replaced."

At that point, he says, each individual company with infrastructure in the area is required to run a search on the location and go out to mark any cables or pipes that are theirs.

Once Precision's work is complete, Masse says, if necessary, they'll have another company lined up to repair any street or curb surfaces if it's work that his company doesn't do.

As much as possible, Precision provides a full advance estimate to the customer, including subcontractor work, to avoid surprises.

### SERVICE LINE POLICIES IN OTHER COMMUNITIES

*The Citizen* researched other communities to find out if or how their service line policies differ. The cities of Winnipeg and Steinbach, as well as the RM of Ritchot, clearly list their policies on their websites.

Many other communities or municipalities, like Niverville, do not.

In all three of the communities mentioned, the policy is the same. Sewer service lines are the responsibility of the homeowner all the way from the household connection to the sewer main, even if it extends beyond a homeowner's property line.

Water service lines, though, are treated differently. In these communities, homeowner responsibility ends at the property line.

So it's primarily the water service policy where Niverville seems to differ from at least some other towns.

### TOWN RESPOND

Both King and Ryan Dyck agree that it's unfortunate that Gatey and Claeys didn't get a timely response from the town during their water crisis.

In times like these, they say, a call should be made directly to the public works emergency line where Dyck manages the calls even after hours. While there's nothing Dyck could have done to assist Gatey and

Claeys with their well water issues, he can always provide timely advice on next steps and recommendations for contractors.

And while the town empathizes with people who are faced with these sudden expenses, King says that the town isn't in the business of providing financial relief.

"Where do you start and where do you stop?" King asks. "We'd have to be prepared to treat 6,500 other people the same way and we can't afford to do that."

### HOMEOWNER INSURANCE

*The Citizen* reached out to a number of local insurance companies regarding water and sewer service line coverage.

Cam Dueck of Hub Insurance says that this coverage is optional but may not be available with every insurer.

Without deeper investigation, he was unsure whether any companies provide insurance for service lines that extend beyond the homeowner's property.

Amanda Parkhurst of BSI Insurance reiterated the same sentiment.

"Typically, the service line coverage offered only responds to service line losses on your own property," says Parkhurst. "It is always best to have a conversation with your broker to find out what your specific company provides coverage for, as this can differ from one company to another."

Daniel Wiebe is the engineer for the town of Niverville. He's been tasked by the town with investigating options for homeowner service line coverage.

In recent months, he's been in conversations with Service Line Warranties Canada (SLWC), a company that offers non-traditional insurance options for service lines.

If the town chooses to partner with the insurer, there would be some advantages to homeowners buying a policy through SLWC. Not only would they offer complete service line coverage, but they also monitor a 24/7 hotline and use a bonded list of contractors that they hire themselves. There is no deductible.

Conversely, this kind of insurance comes with a higher premium than standard insurance and there are some limitations to what they'll cover.

Wiebe says that council has yet to decide whether and under what conditions they'll partner with this insurance company.



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*Happy  
holidays*

The Niverville Chamber of Commerce had a successful year that focused on rebuilding the fundamentals to better serve members and the community.

One significant accomplishment is the launch of our new website with features that include online membership management, job posting board, and a wealth of resources.

We refined our internal processes, bylaws and systems which streamlined operations and improved efficiency.

The Advocacy Team worked with businesses to advocate for changes to the food truck policy, developer fees, and spearheaded renewing the business recycling program.

The Membership Team restructured membership fees, created the Sponsorship Package and Welcome Package.

Finally, the events team created an annual events list that offers educational, networking, and promotional opportunities for members.

Overall, the year 2023 was successful for the Niverville Chamber of Commerce, and we look forward to continuing to serve members and the community with excellence and dedication.

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The community gathers at the cenotaph in Niverville.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

# Attendees Brave Chilly Winds on Remembrance Day

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

On a chilly November 11 morning, a moderate crowd gathered around the cenotaph on Niverville's Main Street to pay homage to those who fought for our freedom and those who have served to bring and maintain peace since the great World Wars.

This year's event was scaled back from previous years, but the act of remembrance was no less meaningful.

The many elements that have come to characterize

Niverville's annual ceremony were all in place, from the playing of Terry Kelly's *A Pittance of Time* to Melanie Bergen's rendition of the wartime hit *We'll Meet Again*.

Military veteran Wes Bonkowski officiated the ceremony. MP Ron Schuler, Mayor Myron Dyck, and Craig Tomlinson, executive assistant to Ted Falk, were among the dignitaries to lay wreaths.

At 11:00 a.m., the flags on either side of the cenotaph were lowered to half-mast while the crowd observed a minute of silent reverence.

Brothers Donald and Jeff

Stott flanked the cenotaph for the flag lowering.

They, along with their siblings, children, and grandchildren, mark three generations of Canadians to have experienced the peace that was purchased through sacrifices made by their father Jack Stott, who served in WWII, and grandfather David Stott, who served in WWI.

For Jeff Stott, today's ceremony held special meaning.

As he lowered his flag, Stott noticed that a gust of wind picked up just in time to untangle the flags and make them appear to stand

at attention. At the same time, he laid eyes on a bald eagle soaring directly overhead.

Even the wintry bite in the air held some symbolism for Stott.

"There was just enough chill to cause a shiver of discomfort," Stott says. "Imagine being in a bomber over a strange land or crawling in a trench expecting who knows what."

In light of what so many have endured to ensure our peace and freedom, Stott concludes, the act of remembering should never be too comfortable.

## IN BRIEF



## Poppy Blanket Helps Us Remember

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Members of Niverville Communities in Bloom and a few crafty local residents have been hard at work in recent months to create a visual effect for Remembrance Day, lest we forget.

Five hundred hand-knitted and crocheted red poppies have been strung together to create the poppy blanket. That blanket will be draped over the Main Street cenotaph from now until November 11.

An additional 19 hand-crafted poppies were placed at the gravesites of 19 WWI, WWII, and Korean war veterans who rest at the Niverville Heritage Cemetery on Main Street.

Ten local crafters invested hundreds of hours into the creation of the 500-plus poppies. Materials were supplied by Communities in Bloom.

The hope is that the blanket's effect will be a reminder to passersby in the coming weeks of the veterans, past and present, who made such incredible sacrifices so the rest of us can know peace.

"The idea came from a November visit to Caledonia in Haldimand County, Ontario," says Communities in Bloom member Shirley Hoult. "They created a lovely display of knitted and crocheted poppies. Niagara Falls also has a beautiful display with thousands of poppies arriving from all over the world. Ours is not so elaborate yet, but when a number of local knitters were contacted, there was great enthusiasm for the project."

Hoult says that the poppy blanket initiative was presented to the Remembrance Day committee, town council, and the United Church, which maintains a portion of the cemetery. All parties were fully in favour of it.

This year's Remembrance Day ceremony was held at the Main Street cenotaph on November 11, beginning at 10:30 a.m. There was no ceremony at the Heritage Centre.

The RM of Ritchot hosted a similar ceremony at their Remembrance Day cenotaph, located at the civic office in St. Adolphe. The ceremony began at 10:40 a.m. on November 11.

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## IN BRIEF

## Throne Speech Highlights Healthcare Priorities

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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The first session of the 43rd Manitoba Legislature kicked off on November 21 with the speech from the throne, read by Lieutenant Governor Anita Neville.

Much of it was dedicated to the government's plans to repair Manitoba's faltering healthcare system, a platform on which the NDP campaigned during the fall election.

"We are committed to being a listening government," Neville read. "Our team is launching a healthcare listening tour which will hear from the staff at the bedsides across the province."

As well as reopening emergency rooms across Winnipeg, the government plans to open ten new surgical rooms at the Grace Hospital and expand surgery capacity at three other health centres.

A new mobile MRI unit is slated for delivery to northern Manitoba.

As for healthcare workers, greater autonomy will be given in their decision-making powers. Excess bureaucracy will be removed in order to help reduce burnout.

"Instead of more agency nurses, we will give nurses more agency," the speech promised. "Instead of closing emergency rooms, we will bring emergency rooms closer. And instead of sending more patients out of province to receive surgeries, we will bring more surgeries here, to the province, where you, the patients, live."

## Ritchot Council Talks Financial Statements and Crime Stats

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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It was better late than never for the RM of Ritchot's annual audited 2022 financial statements.

Almost a year after the fact, on November 7, council convened with Ian Hyslop, a contracted independent auditor from The Exchange Group, to review the numbers.

The reason for the delay, according to Hyslop, is likely due to a changeover in RM staffing, including the hiring of a new chief financial officer this year.

As well, it took some time to consolidate final numbers from all sources, which is a problem not exclusive to Ritchot, he added.

"Timely and accurate financial information is the one key component to making good fiscal decisions," Hyslop told council, suggesting that the RM seek to wrap things up earlier, if possible, in the future.

All in all, though, things are looking positive.

"Net financial assets are the municipality's ability to pay its obligations as they become due," Hyslop told council. "So your net financial assets at \$20 million and your net liabilities of \$6.7 million show that you have [a difference] of \$13 million, and that's very healthy. If you compare that to prior years, that number's increased. That just shows good fiscal management on a going forward basis."

When nonfinancial assets are added to the financial assets for 2022, it means that the RM experienced a surplus of nearly \$79 million that year, \$2 million more than the year prior.

Turning some of the financial assets into nonfinancial assets, Hyslop adds, is a sound way to invest in the future of the RM.

"One of the hardest things



Ritchot's council.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

for most councils to truly grasp is this concept of fiduciary duty to the ratepayers," he said. "It's an ongoing thing. It's not just for the current ratepayers. It's for the future ratepayers as well."

## THIRD QUARTER RCMP REPORT

Corporals Kaven Bussieres and Melanie Rouselle Gosselin of the St. Pierre-Jolys RCMP detachment also joined council for a virtual Q&A.

Councillor Jason Bodnarchuk noted the significant drop in traffic offences in St. Adolphe in the last quarter, and he queried whether it was due to improved driving habits or lack of enforcement.

According to Bussieres, the latter was more likely the case since some of his officers have been occupied with MPI work over the past few months. He suggests, though, with holiday season around the corner, that St. Adolphe should expect to see more police presence and checkpoints in the coming weeks.

Traffic speed was also on Councillor Janine Boulanger's mind as she reported concerns about drag-racing on Petit Road in Grande Pointe.

"People use that road because it's a paved road that goes to

nowhere, so it seems like a perfect drag race strip," Boulanger said.

Due to the random nature of the events, though, she admits that it would be hard for the RCMP to monitor.

Bussieres indicated no such complaints coming in at the RCMP office and recommends that Grande Pointe residents call in these crimes when they're occurring.

Unfortunately, he said, people tend to go to social media with their concerns—and that's where it usually stops.

"The more calls we get, the more we can start looking at trends [in order to get] something in place."

In Île-des-Chênes, Bussieres reported ten additional crimes against persons filed this past quarter. Several of those offences, he said, are connected to the same individuals.

"There was a break-and-enter with some firearms that were stolen in Île-des-Chênes, so that's why the stats were a little bit higher," he said. "We located pretty much all of the firearms and four individuals were charged. They were all from the Winnipeg area."

Mayor Chris Ewen also expressed concerns regarding the crime faced by Ste. Agathe and IDC

businesses this year.

"I don't know if it's extra patrolling or if it's a sting operation or what the answer is, but these businesses are hurting," Ewen said. "Their insurance rates are through the roof right now. We have our own hired patrol that does it, but it's obviously not enough."

Bussieres said that other communities in St. Pierre-Jolys's jurisdiction are expressing the same sentiments. Oftentimes these crimes go in cycles where a series of communities are hit by a few individuals and then things settle down again.

He encouraged the mayor to contact him for continued conversations in order to create a plan for better RCMP patrols where they're needed most.

Councillor Joel Lemoine then pointed out what some residents in Ste. Agathe have been doing to help mitigate crime. There's an informal community WhatsApp chat group, he said, which encourages neighbourhood awareness and extra vigilance when suspicious activities occur.

At times, he said, residents have reported confronting dubious-looking individuals or even chasing suspicious vehicles out of town.

"I think it's good when the community gets together to look out for each other," Bussieres responded. "The only thing I would say is that, if you guys decide to do your own thing without us being involved, you never know who you're going to be dealing with. A lot of people we deal with, they're high on meth, they could have weapons, you don't know what to expect. So you don't want to put yourself at risk or the community at risk."

The corporal suggested to continue with the program but determine that the RCMP should be contacted if any suspicious activity was noted.

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hurts and joys of our lives.

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community is that we may know the love  
of God and his gift of eternal life, whether for the  
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# Youth Vaping Rates Alarm Experts

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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November 19–25 is National Addictions Awareness Week. What better time to talk about the phenomenon of vaping and the hold that it has, in particular, on Canadian youth?

Though vaporizers (vapes), or e-cigarettes, first entered the Canadian market around 2004, they didn't really gain momentum until many years later.

Initially presented as smoking cessation devices, vapes quickly developed a unique appeal to the young market, including a large number of people who had never smoked tobacco before.

Canada responded to the device by placing restrictions on vape products similar to those applied to tobacco. Both federally and in Manitoba, you have to be 18 years of age or older to purchase.

Some provinces have increased the age to 19.

Even so, it's no surprise that vapes are falling into the hands of youth, and this is producing some worrisome outcomes.

According to the federal government, the Lung Association of Manitoba, and the Manitoba Tobacco Reduction Alliance Inc. (MANTRA), the most recent data available shows that up to 34 percent of Canadian kids in Grades 7 to 12 have experimented with vape products.

Seven percent of middle school children are now using vape products regularly.

An alarming 26 percent of high school students are regular users and almost 90 percent of them use vape liquids containing nicotine.

Youth between ages 15 and 19 represent the age group

with the highest rate of vaping experimentation across all categories, including that of adults who are trying to quit smoking.

But why are youth drawn to the vaping habit?

The Canadian Tobacco and Nicotine Survey of 2022 collected data from more than 12,000 respondents across the country, representing a weighted total of 32 million Canadian residents aged 15 years and older.

The results point to stress relief as the number one reason youth start vaping, either with or without nicotine. The simple enjoyment of vaping and curiosity about the product came in as a close second and third.

## REALLY, WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT VAPING?

In many ways, the vape has been hyped as a significantly safer alternative to smoking. The vaping device operates on a system of heating the vape product, usually a liquid, until it reaches an aerosol state that can be inhaled into the lungs. It leaves the lungs in a cloud of vapour.

This e-liquid may or may not contain nicotine. Products on the local market contain anywhere from zero milligrams of nicotine per millilitre to 20 mg/ml, the upper limit of Canadian regulations on vape products.

Variables like these are not available in tobacco form.

Nicotine is a naturally occurring chemical compound found in the tobacco plant. The highly addictive stimulant is responsible for keeping so many users enslaved to the habit.

When inhaled, nicotine moves quickly through the lungs and into the



DEPOSITPHOTOS

bloodstream, ending up in the brain and other organs. This can cause short-term increases in blood pressure and heart rate.

In the immature body of a young person, nicotine is believed to interfere with healthy brain development and affect memory and concentration.

Cigarette smoke is also known to contain at least 60 other toxic substances, all of which are considered carcinogenic. Tobacco use is the number one preventable cause of death among Manitobans.

Unfortunately, only time will tell what the long-term effects of vaping will look like.

"Vaping aerosol contains some potentially harmful chemicals," reads guidance on the federal government's website. "In addition to nicotine, vaping liquids typically contain glycerol and propylene glycol, and chemicals used for flavouring. While these ingredients are considered safe for use in cosmetics and foods, the long-term risks of inhaling these substances are unknown and continue to be

researched."

Only in June 2023 did the Canadian government introduce regulations which require manufacturers to fully disclose information about all the ingredients used in vaping products.

The collection of all this information will take time, but once compiled it will help inform policies that help push enforcement and inform public education initiatives.

In the meantime, we are facing a generation of young people willing to act as test subjects.

Denise Poettker is a Niverville resident and registered nurse working in primary care.

She is currently in a public health certification program, studying community health and clinical decision-making. She has chosen to write her paper on the high incidence of vaping among youth in secondary schools.

"Vaping was initially marketed as a safer alternative to smoking, but data has shown that vaping is quite addictive, especially for youth," Poettker says. "The use of nicotine in

adolescence can affect parts of the brain that control attention, learning, mood, and impulse control. Youth vaping and cigarette use have been associated with mental health symptoms such as depression. Research has also shown that vaping can cause agitation, mood swings, anxiety, memory problems, and poor concentration in youth."

## ASK KIDS WHAT THEIR FRIENDS ARE DOING

One former Niverville student was already seeing the effects of vaping among her peers when she attended college in the Greater Toronto Area in 2019.

She has asked to remain anonymous. We'll call her Sara.

At 24 years of age, Sara was already among the oldest in her college class in 2019. Out of her 18 fellow students, about a quarter were regular vapers, mostly taking up the younger group between 17 to 20 years of age.

"I think they may have started vaping because it was trendy, but then it became a habit," says Sara. "Many of them were also cannabis smokers and would rotate between cannabis and nicotine vapes. Surprisingly, none of them were interested in smoking tobacco."

There were few consistencies in terms of brand loyalty for Sara's peers. The primary focus, she says, seemed to revolve around the most affordable options. Most used disposable vapes, replaced every week or two with a new one. The juice flavours seemed to matter more.

"They would buy the nicotine juices with the highest available nicotine content possible," Sara says. "They may

have been experiencing a form of addiction. I think quitting would have been very difficult for them, especially because they could vape just about anywhere without disturbing anyone. The vapes were pulled out in the classroom, at home, in the library, everywhere."

Sara adds that she wasn't immune to the vaping intrigue. Her classmates were always willing to share their products with non-vapers like her.

The high nicotine content, though, left Sara feeling queasy after just a puff or two.

"I'm not sure why it didn't become a habit for me," Sara says. "I enjoyed vaping, but I was always a little concerned about the long-term health effects, so I would never let myself buy one. I also have family members that struggled with quitting the nicotine vape, so I didn't want to risk a similar problem."

## DO VAPE MARKETERS TARGET YOUTH?

In light of studies which indicate a rapid uptake in vaping by Canada's youth, experts are looking to the vape manufacturers and their marketing strategies to determine what's behind the appeal.

Today, compact and discreet vape versions are available that easily slip into a pocket, making them a subtle go-anywhere device. They come in a variety of colours and aesthetics.

Disposable vapes make vaping easy by eliminating the need for refilling cartridges or recharging the battery.

Improvements have also been made on nicotine delivery through the use of nicotine salts in the vape liquid which deliver higher concentrations of the drug to the brain, providing an effect similar to a strong



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pull on a cigarette without the harsh burn in the throat.

The vape liquid itself, though, is arguably the biggest reason for the continued appeal of vaping to young people.

With flavours like “unicorn milk” and “dragon’s blood,” and flavour profiles matching those of cotton candy, banana splits, and creamy strawberry milkshakes, it’s no wonder they’re popular.

Indeed, there are a prolific number of websites dedicated to critiquing the newest flavours and extolling the virtues of exotic options like “blue voodoo” or “mother’s milk” from companies like Suicide Bunny.

The federal government began sounding alarm bells on youth vaping rates in 2021 and proposed significant changes to the Tobacco and Vaping Products Act.

In 2022, they introduced an excise tax on vape substances to reduce the appeal by making them more cost prohibitive.

Recommendations were made on regulating the sale of desirable vape flavours that appear to target youth, but to date those recommendations have not been implemented at a federal level, despite statistics that show Canada having some of the highest youth vaping rates in the world.

Some provinces have taken their own initiative, including Quebec. As of October 31, 2023, only tobacco-flavoured

vape products are permitted for sale as well as those with no flavour or aroma.

Vapes designed to appeal to the younger market, such as those that take on the shape of a toy, jewellery, food item, or fictional character are also banned.

According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation, similar bans on flavoured products are also taking place in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut.

#### WEIGHING IN

Local resident Jesse Friesen picked up tobacco smoking while attending university in his early twenties. He smoked for five years, until vape shops began to pop up in convenient locations. He admits to having traded one vice for another when he picked up the vaping habit to kick tobacco.

He struggles with the idea of legislative overreach that may inhibit access to vape products for everyone and not just youth.

“On one hand, I think it’s important to have regulations to keep Canadians safe,” Friesen says. “These devices, at times, have been found to be unsafe or contain harmful substances, especially when acquired by companies from unscrupulous places. On the other hand, I don’t think that banning flavours is the job of the government or that it has the intended effect.”

Applying an excise tax, he

feels, is more likely to achieve the intended goal of reducing vaping.

“Nicotine taxes seem to have stopped some of my friends from vaping, and it will probably be the reason I stop as well,” Friesen says. “It’s unpopular with smokers and people who vape but might be one of the more fair tools for discouraging people. Unhealthy habits, on average, cost more to our healthcare system, and forcing people to contribute to social security upfront could be an answer.”

Michael Jensen dabbled in recreational tobacco smoking as a teen but is a non-smoker today. He’s also the father to an infant daughter.

“I’m extremely concerned about the prevalence of vaping among youth,” Jensen says. “I remember a few years ago hearing teens talk about how it’s completely safe because there’s no tobacco in it. And that type of mythology is dangerous. Especially at that age where many teens tend to consider their friends’ opinions over facts.”

Jensen adds that he’s disappointed that all the hard work done by both levels of government to curb teen smoking over the years seems for naught.

“I understand that it’s a conjectural observation, but my experience was that the number of kids I saw smoking when I was in eighth grade was significantly greater than when I was in twelfth grade,”

Jensen says. “The culture around smoking cigarettes went from being ‘cool’ when I was entering my teens to ‘stupid’ when I was finishing my teens. And I think significant government investment and education made a difference.”

As for his infant daughter, Jensen says there’s time before she is faced with these choices. But he already has a game plan: to develop the kind of relationship with her that invites open and honest dialogue.

Poettker’s sons are already at those vulnerable ages of 14 and 16.

“It is important to talk to your children about smoking and vaping and how to say no when offered,” Poettker says. “Ask them what they think of tobacco use or vaping and reinforce that you are there to listen. It seems simple, but every conversation you have about smoking or vaping helps your child. It tells them you care and allows your child an opportunity to let you know of other things going on in their lives.”

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

■ For resources about talking to your child about vaping, visit: <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/health/publications/healthy-living/talking-teen-vaping-tip-sheet-parents.html>

■ “Risks of Vaping,” Government of Canada. Date of access: November 22, 2023 (<https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/smoking-tobacco/vaping/risks.html>).

#### CITIZEN POLL

### Should the government criminalize specific vape products, such as flavoured liquids, due to their potential allure to young people?

- ☐ Yes. If it could help to curb the incidence of vaping among youth, then criminalization seems like a good tool.
- ☐ No. We live in a free market and the government should not penalize consumers for a problem recognized in a specific demographic.

Have a more nuanced opinion?  
Leave us a comment online.

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#### LAST MONTH'S RESULTS:

### Should a cell phone ban like the one enforced in DSFM schools be extended to other schools in this province?

Yes. Cell phones are disruptive and distracting to the learning environment.

85%

No. Students should be able to manage their own cell phone use without interference.

15%

#### YOUR COMMENTS:

Totally agree! Should have been banned many years ago!

As a teacher, I can verify that cell phones are a significant distraction for students.

Back in my day, we found enough ways to distract ourselves in the classroom, even without the technology and phones that we see today. I can't even imagine how distracting it would be and the amount of unnecessary work that it places on teachers to oversee a group of students. I don't really see any legitimate reason as to why students would require their phones to learn.



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# Ste. Agathe Pharmacy Welcomes New Physician

**By Brenda Sawatzky**

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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

Beginning November 17, Ste. Agathe residents will have access to their own hometown doctor.

Using newly created clinic space inside the Ste. Agathe Pharmacy, Dr. Riviraj Warnakulasooriya, or Dr. Rivi, will meet with scheduled and drop-in patients from every Friday afternoon going forward.

Bassem Khalil and Mira Behera have owned the pharmacy since May 2021. Khalil says their client base has grown steadily, so it seemed a natural fit to create space for a doctor's office next.

Starting slowly, Dr. Rivi is prepared to increase his hours and the number of days

he's in Ste. Agathe if demand requires it.

His practice will start as a quick care clinic, treating patients who have fevers or other minor health concerns. He will work from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. on Fridays.

If the practice takes off, he'll be able to take on patients as their family physician and diagnose and treat more serious ailments.

"He can't commit to being a family physician [in Ste. Agathe] now because two hours a week is not enough," Khalil says.

Khalil met Dr. Rivi while working from his pharmacy in Pine Falls. Dr. Rivi currently practices in a number of emergency rooms in the Interlake region as well as Selkirk and Winnipeg.

"To be honest, I've talked to another

five or six doctors, but Dr. Rivi is the one that wants to start here," Khalil says.

This is exciting news for Khalil, who says that many of his clients have no doctor at this time.

"In Steinbach, the waiting time there is three years to find a doctor," Khalil says. "And I know that Niverville is busy, too. All my patients are struggling to find a doctor. Why not that we should have a local doctor at our building?"

At this stage, Khalil says that patients can make appointments to see Dr. Rivi at the Ste. Agathe clinic by calling the pharmacy's phone line.

Eventually, Khalil hopes to hire a receptionist to manage his bookings.

To book an appointment with Dr. Rivi, call 204-882-2575.



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DEC. 9 @ 7:00 P.M.  
VS. SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDERS



DEC. 15 @ 7:00 P.M.  
VS. WINKLER FLYERS



DEC. 20 @ 7:00 P.M.  
VS. PORTAGE TERRIERS



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DEC. 9 @ 7:00 P.M.  
VS. SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDERS

WE

DEC. 15 @ 7:00 P.M.  
VS. WINKLER FLYERS



DEC. 20 @ 7:00 P.M.  
VS. PORTAGE TERRIERS

# Nighthawks Face the November Grind

By Ty Dilello

tdilello@nivervillecitizen.com

After getting the season off to a fast start, the Niverville Nighthawks hit some speed bumps in the middle stretch of November.

Even so, the team has also hit new highs, including a pair of thrilling overtime victories at home to bookend the month.

## NOVEMBER 3 (PORTAGE TERRIERS, HOME)

This was a comeback for the ages at the CRRC, with the Nighthawks rallying from 0-3 down to defeat the Portage Terriers 4-3 in overtime.

The Terriers took it to Niverville for most of the contest, scoring three power play goals, including one in the first period and two in the second period to jump out to a 3-0 lead. Going into the third period, the home team seemed sluggish and dispirited.

Fans would be forgiven for having had no clue about what was about to happen.

The game turned on its head midway through the third period when the line of Michael Tanchak, Ty Kennett, and Carter Spirig took over. Spirig and Tanchak scored in quick succession to get the game close.

Then, with the goalie pulled in the final minute, Spirig potted home his second goal of the night with just 24 seconds remaining.

It was a quick overtime as Kaycee Coyle scored the game-winner just 18 seconds into the extra frame to give Niverville the dramatic 4-3 victory.

Games don't get much sweeter.

"We were being beaten so thoroughly for most of the game, and we couldn't get anything going," said Nighthawks head coach Kelvin Cech. "Michael Tanchak, Ty Kennett, and Carter Spirig flipped the script with the first goal, and then I double-shifted them the rest of the way because they had that look in their eyes. And what a special night it became."

Cech was quick to give credit to Spirig, who can be an underrated player in the club. However, his star shone brightest of all on this special night. He had a hand in all four goals, scoring two himself and assisting in both of the others.

"Something just clicked with Spirig



EVAN BRAUN

tonight," said Cech. "He's had an awesome season and is a crucial part of our team, killing penalties, and he's an assistant captain for a reason. The puck in those last few minutes tonight was just glued to his stick. He was possessed and was constantly going to the right areas. We're so proud of his effort tonight."

After the game, all the Nighthawks players and coaching staff celebrated the victory. This wasn't just any win; it was monumental, especially over a perennial MJHL champion like Portage.

"There was more relief than anything after the game, as we know how tight the standings are," Cech said. "It's

only November, but we're fighting for playoff seeding, and Portage is one of the teams we're fighting with. So we think this comeback win is huge for our team and we're going to enjoy it."

## NOVEMBER 4 (SELKIRK STEELERS, AWAY)

The Nighthawks battled hard on the road but were ultimately dispatched 2-1 in a nailbiter at the hands of the Selkirk Steelers.

Goals were a rarity. Tanchak got one late in the first period for Niverville to open the game's scoring, before Selkirk quickly replied with a goal of their own.

From there, the two teams played

a scoreless second period. The game was anyone's for the taking.

In the end, Selkirk scored one more time midway through the final frame, holding on the rest of the way for the 2-1 victory over Niverville.

"Their goalie was really good in the game, as we had a lot of chances and could have put them away early on. But he played well," said Cech. "And they sort of got their feet under them and played better. It was a track meet throughout the game as both teams were rushing up and down the ice, and both goalies were the difference makers tonight. We were probably better tonight than we were against Portage, but Selkirk just executed their game

plan to a tee, and we need to be better for the next game."

## NOVEMBER 8 (PORTAGE TERRIERS, AWAY)

The Nighthawks couldn't muster enough offence in their 3-1 loss to the Portage Terriers on the road on this Wednesday evening affair.

The Terriers scored a couple of goals on the power play in the first period to jump out to a 2-0 lead. They would add another goal in the second period to extend that lead before Brendan Bottem got one back for Niverville early in the final frame.

Unfortunately, that was as close as the Nighthawks got.

"They had two power play goals early, and then we're kind of just chasing the game from there," said Cech. "Portage built some momentum and played well, but when we were five-on-five, it was just tight checking and close. When you get behind against a team like that, they lock it down pretty good and it's tough to come back from. We kept with it and got some chances late, but one goal was obviously not enough. We have to look at the positives when we can and turn the page really quick and be ready to go next game."

## NOVEMBER 10 (WINNIPEG FREEZE, AWAY)

The Nighthawks got back in the win column with a strong 4-1 victory on the road against the Winnipeg Freeze.

After the two teams played to a scoreless first period, the Nighthawks got their offense going early in the second frame with a goal from Kennett. Tanchak and Michael Debrito each added a goal late in the period for Niverville before Winnipeg got one back in the dying seconds.

In the third period, Niverville's Caleb Lepitre scored late to extend the lead to 4-1, and that's how the game would end.

"I liked that we stuck with it tonight," said Cech. "Winnipeg wasn't happy about losing big to us last time we played, and they really came out hard, and we really had to work for our offence and for our power plays. The guys stuck with it and ended up getting rewarded."

Cech has been pleased this season with how his club has been able to



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bounce back right away after losing a game, not letting a bad outcome lead to losing streaks so far this campaign.

“We have a lot more guys that have been in these situations before, and they don’t get too down when we lose a game now,” said Cech. “They know we’re a good team that will bounce back. It’s just overall maturity, and we’re not relying on first year players anymore.”

**NOVEMBER 11**  
**(VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS, HOME)**  
The Niverville Nighthawks couldn’t muster its offensive corps throughout this Saturday match, ultimately losing 2–1 to the Virden Oil Capitals in a tightly contested game at the CRRC.

It was a battle of two teams who play in separate divisions and thus don’t see a whole lot of one another throughout the season.

Virden took it to the Nighthawks, outshooting the home team by a 31–19 margin. A pair of first period goals from the Oil Capitals seemed to set the tone and they never looked back.

Niverville was able to get a goal back midway through the second period when Kennett potted home his fifth of the season, assisted by Coyle.

Unfortunately, that was all the offence the Nighthawks was able to generate on the night.

The two teams played to a scoreless third period, with Virden holding on.

**NOVEMBER 15**  
**(NEEPAWA TITANS, HOME)**  
A couple of defensive zone break-downs cost the Nighthawks on this Wednesday night at the CRRC as they fell 5–3 to the Neepawa Titans in a seesaw affair.

To start things off, Nathan Brown got the Nighthawks on the board early in the first period. Then Neepawa replied with a goal of their own.

Neepawa jumped out to a 2–1 lead a minute into the second period, but this time it was the Nighthawks replying with Debritto’s tenth goal of the season.

Neepawa added another goal in the second period to take the lead again.

In the final period, captain Brett Tataryn scored on the power play to tie the game at 3–3.

Unfortunately, Neepawa pulled away in the final minutes with a pair of goals to knock off Niverville by a count of 5–3.

“Our gaps were too big defensively, I thought, and offensively we actually did a lot of things that we talked about, like getting pucks to the middle of the ice,” said Cech. “And from there, we made some plays and got our offence going, but defensively we just got caught

watching the play at times. We gave them too much tonight.”

The Nighthawks also have a new centreman on the team in Ian Ness of Moorhead, Minnesota, who made his debut with the club. Ness comes from the Aberdeen Wings of the NAHL, where he’s skated in eight games this season.

Ness had an assist tonight in his first Nighthawks’ game.

“Ness brings in a lot of speed,” said Cech. “Once we lost Bryce Warkentine to a lengthy suspension, we knew we had to get someone. He’s fast and brings a lot of skill. I just met him today, but we’re really happy to get him and it looks like a great fit for us.”

**NOVEMBER 18**  
**(NEEPAWA TITANS, AWAY)**  
For the second straight game, the Titans have gotten the best of the Nighthawks. On Saturday night, they doubled them up by a 6–3 count.

Neepawa quickly jumped out to a 3–0 lead by the halfway point of the first period, and it looked like they were going to run away with things.

The Nighthawks bounced back in a big way in the second period with three unanswered goals to tie the game. Tanchak scored twice, while Coyle had the other tally.

In the third period, the Nighthawks had their chances, but it was the Titans who pulled away with a trio of goals late in the game.

“I thought we had a tough start tonight,” said Nighthawks forward and assistant captain Kyle Bocek. “We rallied back to tie it up and played just a solid second period all around. We obviously would’ve liked a better result, but to come back from three down and tie it says a lot about our group.”

Bocek has been one of the many bright spots on this year’s Nighthawks squad. The 20-year-old forward currently has 15 points in 22 games.

“This season has been flying by already,” said Bocek. “We’ve had our struggles as of late, but every team goes through adversity. We’ve got a really good, tight group here. And I’ve really enjoyed my time here so far. It’s only going to get better.”

**NOVEMBER 22**  
**(NEEPAWA TITANS, HOME)**  
The Nighthawks snapped a three-game losing streak on Wednesday night at the CRRC with a big 3–2 win over the Titans.

It was the third straight game that the teams went into battle, and the home side was hungry. After Neepawa opened the scoring just a minute into the contest, Niverville tied it late in the first period with Spirig’s fifth goal of the season.

Brown put the Nighthawks

ahead early in the second period, before Neepawa tied it at 2–2.

The deadlock was ultimately broken by Kennett for the Nighthawks as he scored later in the second period to give his side the lead.

A scoreless third period worked in the Nighthawks’ favour as they hung on for the much-needed 3–2 victory.

“We had a different forecheck, different lines, a couple of different faceoff plays tonight,” said Cech. “The only goals they got on us were a power play and then a mistake early on. But other than that, we stuck to the game plan. Against a team like this that is big and fast, it took our best to beat them tonight.”

Cech was especially pleased that his club was able to shut down Neepawa in the third period, as it was something Niverville failed to do in its two previous games.

“Our third period was our best of the night,” said Cech. “Just mature and professional. When you lose a few in a row, confidence can kind of waver, but I thought we were still confident, and I knew we would right the ship eventually. So it feels good to get the win.”

**NOVEMBER 24**  
**(WINNIPEG BLUES, HOME)**  
The Nighthawks gave the fans at the CRRC a treat on Friday night as they swiftly dismantled the Winnipeg Blues by a 5–1 score. With the win, the Nighthawks stay in fourth place in the MJHL’s East Division with a record of 14–9–1.

Niverville took it to Winnipeg right from the opening puck drop, scoring three goals in the first couple of minutes from Kennett, Tataryn, and Brendan Bottem. The Blues got one back later in the first period, but that’s as close as they would come.

Bottem and Tataryn each added their second goals of the game in the second and third periods, respectively.

Raiden LeGall stopped 26 shots in goal for the Nighthawks. The rookie netminder now improves to 7–4–0 on the season with a 2.22 goals-against average and a .935 save percentage.

“I would say we kept it simple,” said Bottem. “We got pucks in deep and had a good forecheck. We scored a bunch of goals in front of the net tonight, and if we want to be successful moving forward we have to keep scoring near the net.”

Bottem was happy that he was able to get on the scoresheet against the Blues with two goals and an assist.

“It’s always a great feeling to score and contribute to the team. I haven’t scored in a few games, so it was nice to see a couple hit the back of the net.”

Bottem originally started the

2023–24 season with the Bismarck Bobcats of the NAHL, but after nine games he decided to come back to Niverville and rejoin his old team.

“I am super happy to be back in Niverville,” said Bottem. “This is a very special place to me, and it’s always amazing playing in front of the best fans in the MJHL. Everything has been going great so far since I have been back. We hit a little bit of a losing stretch recently, but we are trending back in the right direction and looking forward to making a run with this group of guys.”

**NOVEMBER 25**  
**(DAUPHIN KINGS, HOME)**  
The Nighthawks battled with the Dauphin Kings on Hockey Fights Cancer night and came out victorious with a thrilling 2–1 win in overtime.

The two teams played a scoreless first period filled with penalties.

In the second period, Brown of Niverville opened the scoring with his seventh tally of the season.

Dauphin tied it up early in the third period—and from there, the game ended up tied 1–1 after regulation.

Niverville’s Coyle was the big overtime hero, breaking the deadlock just 44 seconds into the extra frame.

Keegan Gordon turned in his finest performance of the season, making 35 saves for the win in the Nighthawks’ net.

“I thought we just played a mature, professional style game,” said Cech. “There were a million penalties early in the game, and some guys sat out for a long time, but the guys came out and competed the rest of the way. To walk away with two points against a good team like Dauphin definitely feels nice.”

Cech was also quick to give Gordon a lot of the credit.

“Keegan Gordon was number one tonight and had a performance for the ages. So I’m just really proud of him and of our players to get the win, and how they competed for each other. That’s more important than anything.”

This Saturday night game was also Hockey Fights Cancer night, with all proceeds from the evening going toward children’s cancer programs. The Nighthawks’ commemorative game jerseys, worn for this game, will be auctioned off online in the coming days.

“Everybody has someone that’s fought cancer, so it’s an emotional night,” said Cech. “My mom had cancer, and they gave her a low chance of survival. And that was 15 years ago now. My assistant Mike McAulay lost his father to cancer a few months ago. It’s just emotional, and we’re all fortunate to be here playing a game we love.”

STANDINGS \*\* AS OF OCTOBER 31 \*\*

WEST DIVISION							
TEAM	GP	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS	
1 VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS	22	15	5	1	1	32	
2 DAUPHIN KINGS	20	14	5	1	0	29	
3 OCN BLIZZARD	23	13	8	0	2	28	
4 NEEPAWA TITANS	24	11	12	1	0	23	
5 WAYWAYSEECAPPO WOLVERINES	24	9	13	0	2	20	
6 SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDE	24	5	17	2	0	12	

EAST DIVISION							
TEAM	GP	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS	
1 STEINBACH PISTONS	22	19	2	1	0	39	
2 PORTAGE TERRIERS	26	15	6	3	2	35	
3 WINKLER FLYERS	20	16	3	0	1	33	
4 NIVERVILLE NIGHTHAWKS	25	15	9	1	0	31	
5 SELKIRK STEELERS	23	7	14	1	1	16	
6 WINNIPEG FREEZE	21	5	15	1	0	11	
7 WINNIPEG BLUES	22	4	15	3	0	11	

MJHL POINTS LEADERS							
PLAYER	TEAM	GP	G	A	PTS		
1 Josh Lehto	VIR	22	14	16	30		
2 Kirk Mullen	STN	19	12	17	29		
3 Slade Stanick	POR	26	11	17	28		
4 Kaycee Coyle	NIV	25	8	20	28		
5 Trent Penner	WNL	19	10	16	26		
6 Gabriel Laflamme	POR	26	9	17	26		
7 Nolan Chastko	VIR	22	15	10	25		
8 Alex Walicki	SVS	24	9	16	25		
9 Leo Chambers	STN	22	6	19	25		
10 Brandon Funk	STN	22	12	12	24		
11 Carter McLeod	NEE	24	11	13	24		
12 Ty Kennett	NIV	25	7	17	24		
13 Cody Gudnason	NEE	24	8	14	22		
14 Anthony Bax	DAU	20	7	15	22		
15 Brody Beauchemin	WNL	20	7	15	22		
16 Dalton Andrew	WNL	17	10	11	21		
17 Grady Hoffman	STN	18	14	6	20		
18 Jack Clarke	WAY	24	12	8	20		
19 Parker Korman	POR	26	11	9	20		
20 Noah Szabo	STN	22	6	14	20		

MJHL GOALIE LEADERS							
GOALIE	TEAM	GP	GA	GAA	SV%		
1 Liam Ernst	WNL	8	10	1.25	0.942		
2 Cole Plowman	STN	15	27	1.78	0.938		
3 Tomas Anderson	OCN	12	23	1.91	0.937		
4 Raiden Legall	NIV	13	29	2.22	0.935		
5 Gage Stewart	SVS	11	34	3.09	0.926		
6 Jayden Catellier	POR	16	43	2.66	0.921		
7 Eric Reid	VIR	19	40	2.09	0.920		
8 Jack Hodgins	SEL	10	27	3.00	0.914		
9 Malachi Klassen	WNL	12	23	1.88	0.913		
10 Mason Lobreau	NEE	16	52	3.24	0.913		
11 River Leslie-Toogood	WPB	16	58	4.05	0.908		
12 Cole Sheffield	DAU	15	38	2.49	0.907		
13 Loic Morin	OCN	11	29	2.59	0.907		
14 Gavin Renwick	POR	10	26	2.59	0.904		
15 Keegan Gordon	NIV	12	37	3.10	0.904		
16 Beck Liden	STN	7	16	2.28	0.902		
17 KC Couckuyt	NEE	8	30	3.75	0.892		
18 Jase Wareham	WAY	8	23	3.22	0.889		
19 Noel Olsonawski	SEL	14	43	3.31	0.887		
20 Marek Andres	WAY	13	47	3.95	0.883		





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VS. WINNIPEG BLUES



DEC. 9 @ 7:00 P.M.  
VS. SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDERS



DEC. 15 @ 7:00 P.M.  
VS. WINKLER FLYERS



DEC. 20 @ 7:00 P.M.  
VS. PORTAGE TERRIERS



# LeGall Commits to Bemidji State

**By Ty Dilello**  
 tdilello@nivervillecitizen.com

Niverville Nighthawks star goaltender Raiden LeGall has recently committed to Bemidji State University, a prestigious NCAA Division I university.

The 17-year-old from Morden has excelled with the Nighthawks after dominating the provincial U18 league with the Pembina Valley Hawks over the past two seasons.

LeGall, who has accumulated a 6-4-1 record with a 2.35 goals-against average and .935 save percentage so far in Niverville this season, had a couple of

schools interested in offering him a scholarship.

"I had a few schools I was talking to but eventually decided on Bemidji," says LeGall. "I got a chance to go down there for a visit, and the way things were run and the personnel were all great. It's just a really nice city and school. As well, the rink and facilities were unreal. Another plus was that it's so close to home, and I would be able to have family and friends come down to visit and watch games."

Niverville was fortunate that LeGall settled on staying in the MJHL this season, as he was strongly being

pursued by the Everett Silvertips of the Western Hockey League (WHL).

"It was obviously a difficult decision when Everett wanted me to sign with them. Another very well-run program down there," says LeGall. "I mean, it was always my dream to play in the Western Hockey League growing up, but the biggest thing that persuaded me to play in Niverville was just how much everyone here cares about you. Especially within the organization, but also the support throughout the community. Playing a game in the city on a Saturday night and seeing our fans come out and fill the rink there as

well has been super cool and a great example of just how much support we get from the community here in Niverville."

Nighthawks head coach Kelvin Cech is very proud of LeGall and everything he has so far accomplished.

"This is the highest achievement for a Junior A hockey player in Canada or the United States," says Cech. "And it's no surprise considering the lengths the Western Hockey League's Everett Silvertips went to a few months ago in an effort to sway Raiden to the major junior route. Raiden and I spoke while he was in

Everett in September, and he was faced with a choice. This happens eventually with elite players. And if you have choices in life, you're probably doing something right. Fortunately our conversation went well, and Raiden chose to play here in Niverville. And now he's got a scholarship waiting for him when he graduates from junior hockey."

The plan for LeGall is to play another year of junior hockey after this season so he can continue developing and make sure he's ready before he joins the college hockey ranks. He will then head to Bemidji State for the 2025-26 season.

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# Niverville Woman Makes 100th Blood Donation

By Jennifer Lavin

✉ jlavin@nivervillecitizen.com

On Halloween of this year, Niverville resident Holly Rafferty saved a life—but it wasn't the first life she's saved. Rafferty has donated blood 100 times and plans to keep on giving.

Although Rafferty has been donating blood for a long time, she was particularly excited for the blood donor clinic being held in Niverville on October 31 since it would be her one hundredth donation and she would get to wear her fun, and extremely appropriate, Halloween costume.

Unfortunately, when the big day arrived, the weather was bad. The Canadian Blood Services (CBS) had some staffing issues and the clinic that day needed to be cancelled.

Rafferty was undaunted by these setbacks, though, and decided to head to CBS's downtown Winnipeg home base to accomplish her goal.

"I thought, well, it's a quieter day for me," Rafferty says. "I want to be home at 5:00 p.m. to finish with Halloween and be ready for the kids, but other than that I think I can make it work."

So Rafferty set out, braving the



Holly Rafferty of Niverville makes her one hundredth blood donation.

CANADIAN BLOOD SERVICES

combination of bad weather and snarled downtown traffic to donate her one hundredth pint of blood, all while wearing her Halloween costume. And she got back home in time to hand out candy to the little ones.

Rafferty's interest in blood donation began in high school while learning about the different blood types in biology class. She also discovered that her blood type was B-negative.

According to CBS, only 1.4 percent of Canadians have B-negative blood.

However, 12 percent of Canadians can receive B-negative blood, making it an especially important type to donate.

It took a few years before Rafferty met the requirements to begin donating blood, but once she started she didn't want to stop. With the exception of occasions when she was pregnant with or nursing her three children, Rafferty kept giving.

Even during the pandemic, Rafferty made it to Winnipeg once

or twice a year to donate. She admits it was very inconvenient during that time, but she powered through, knowing how much good her blood could do for someone else.

She says that blood donation has become an important principle in her life.

"If it's challenging for me, it's challenging for many rural people," she says. "If I can make it work and try a little harder, then I'd rather do it, just in case the next guy can't make

it work."

According to CBS, one pint of donated blood has the potential to save three lives. And besides a little fatigue right after donating, Rafferty says that she can't see any downsides to giving her blood.

In fact, a study published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute found that frequent blood donors may even have lower risks of developing liver, lung, colon, stomach, and throat cancer.<sup>1</sup>

Rafferty often tells people that she will go with them to donate blood. She's more than happy to discuss the process she's experienced on her donation days and even walk people through their first appointment.

"I hope that when I talk about donating every four months or so that maybe people think to themselves, 'Maybe I should try this time.'"

The next blood donation clinic in Niverville will take place on January 23.

## REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Zacharski, Chow, et al. "Decreased Cancer Risk After Iron Reduction..." Journal of the National Cancer Institute, Volume 100, Issue 14. July 16, 2008, 996–1002.

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# Niverville Dog Park Opens, Makes Big Impression

By Sara Beth Dacombe

sdacombe@niverillecitizen.com

On November 6, Niverville opened the gates on its newly upgraded community off-leash dog park, much to the enjoyment of both its two-legged and four-legged patrons.

"The dog park is done for now and we are open," says Warren Britton, the town's recreation facility manager. "One thing to take note of. Although it does drain much better than the previous park, the freeze-thaw we have been experiencing lately will leave it a little wet and mucky."

The park area borders the west side of the Niverville Curling Club, located next to the CRRC. There are gates to the fenced-in area located at both the west side of the park and the main entrance, which is immediately in front of the curling club.

The plot of land was once a baseball diamond, which was unneeded and largely unusable after the construction of the CRRC and its parking lot.

The new park sees the space expanded by more than 50 percent and features segregated small- and large-dog areas, fresh sod, grading and drainage, hills, agility equipment, benches, dog poop bag dispensers, and garbage receptacles.

Britton also says that the plan is to add more trees, as well as regrade some of the small dog area.

The town has supported the venture's creation and committed to its maintenance, while community members have also made major contributions.

Barry Piasta is one such enthusiast and community advocate. Piasta volunteered his time to coordinate the Friends of Niverville Dog Park Facebook group and fundraising initiatives such as pet photo session, "Starbarks" coffee sales, and dog adoptions.

"The town has really stepped up on this, which is good," says Piasta. "And it is popular. We used to get people coming out to use it from other communities as well and other communities are now



Kelvin Cech at the dog park with Revis and Dasher. SARA BETH DACOMBE

studying what we are doing."

Piasta says that representatives from Winnipeg as well as Morris have visited the area to observe how the park has been organized. Various dog clubs have also been able to come and use the space.

"Winnipeg Dog Park Tour came out here with about 100 people and maybe over 50 dogs out here, and their members had some come all the

way from Thompson," he adds. "It's great to see them gather in a community like ours. I don't know if we still are, but at the time when we started it this was the largest fenced-in dog park in Manitoba and it's the only one with this kind of equipment."

Piasta says that the park wouldn't have been possible without the entire community's help, including Guy

Britten (owner of RuffMutts), a local welders union, and painters who contributed their skills to create the equipment.

"I will continue to fundraise for it," Piasta says. "We're not done yet. The next step is trees, of course."

With the mild fall weather in October and early November, more and more dog owners came by.

Kelvin Cech, head coach for the Niverville Nighthawks, uses the park regularly with his dogs, Revis and Dasher.

"I'm still fairly new-ish to town, having moved here to coach the hockey team," said Cech. "I didn't come use the park when it was smaller, because it was pretty small and muddy and there were always dogs in it. But now, I can just come from practice. To be able to take the dogs and just be able to rip around for like 15 minutes is incredible. What an awesome thing to have."

Cech, who moved here from B.C., has seen firsthand how the community rallies around important causes—and he appreciates that this

community spirit extends right down to the town's smallest, furriest residents.

"I'm not from here and the funny thing is when my family asks me what it's like to live here, this is the stuff that I talk about," Cech says. "Because my dogs are my life. Hockey is not my whole entire life, surprisingly enough. I do have a personal life and my whole personal life is the dogs. For the town to get behind something like this, yes, it costs money to build and maintain, but it's an absolute no-brainer. It makes a lot of difference. It makes my life so much better."

Cech can tell that his two medium-sized whippets look forward to the time they spend at the park. The dogs are known for their quiet disposition, intelligence, and speed; they're capable of reaching speeds up to 35 miles per hour.

"They love it. My older guy doesn't run a ton anymore, but it's nice to just let them off. The younger guy will rip around here and you can't do that just walking around town. I'm not fast enough to keep up with them. It's a game-changer."

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Cyrus Reimer is the latest hire by the town of Niverville.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

## Town of Niverville Hires Communications and PR Specialist

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

In early November, Niverville's council welcomed their newest member to the town staff.

Going forward, Cyrus Reimer will be filling the role of director of communications and public relations, a position to which he brings plenty of diversified experience.

Reimer originally put his training to work as a recruitment specialist with Providence University College.

For the past 18 months, however, he has been working next to MLA Ron Schuler, practicing his skills in the

political arena.

"It was a very amicable parting," Reimer says of that position. "MLA Schuler was very adamant that I needed to get out and work my way up in other positions, and so I took his advice."

The last election, he says, was like a trial by fire for his skillset and he feels like the experience added something important to his qualifications.

He was excited to see a job come available with the Town of Niverville and is pleased that they see promise in what he has to offer.

Reimer's will be a full-time position, responding to the significant number of general

questions that come into the town office in relation to every department.

He'll also manage info that goes onto the town website and ensure that mailings and online communications get out in a timely and thorough manner.

"We're trying to get information out to the general public," says Mayor Myron Dyck. "The staff that we had doing that had other duties already and this was taking up more and more of their time."

Mayor Dyck adds that he and council will still be available if residents wish to communicate with them on a one-to-one basis.

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# Commentary

## Navigating Disagreements During the Holidays

By Daniel Dacombe

In last month's mental health column, we learned about the psychological foundations of morality.

Today we continue the topic, focusing on how to navigate moral disagreements and conflicts with family and friends—hopefully, without ruining those relationships in the process.

As a brief recap, human morality evolved with us as a series of survival mechanisms to help us function better as a species.

These mechanisms grew into five main psychological foundations from which we derive our rules, expectations, and taboos: *care*, which helps us improve our group well-being and reduce suffering; *fairness*, which helps us cooperate for mutual benefit; *loyalty*, which helps us form groups that can stick together; *authority*, which helps us create and maintain a group structure; and *purity*, which helps us avoid disease or other harms.

Different people rely on different foundations when assessing an action's morality. When someone uses a different moral foundation than you, it can often seem like they are behaving immorally.

This is a significant source of conflict between people, even those who generally share many values on the surface.

Imagine that I prioritize fairness and you prioritize loyalty. You might get upset if I look after a stranger's needs before your own. I might get upset if you put me first before others in the community who need help more than I do.

We both rely on a moral framework, but our foundations take us in different directions.

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw this conflict play out on a large scale. Individuals



DEPOSITPHOTOS

who relied more on the foundation of fairness might have been more likely to wear masks for the protection of others, or to receive COVID-19 vaccinations. Those who felt more driven by the foundation of purity may have seen masks and vaccinations as a source of harm.

Both sides perceived the other as not only incorrect but morally wrong, even to the point of dividing families, churches, and communities.

When the divide between us is so wide and stark, it can seem impossible to bridge. How do we reach each other when we are far apart?

On an even more basic level, how do we still have relationships with each other when we are so different?

Even before the pandemic, many social science researchers, therapists, and experts weighed in.

While there is no single correct way to deal with such conversations, there are consistent suggestions for navigating difficult conversations, particularly during times like the holidays.

The first suggestion is to plan ahead. According to the therapeutic approach known as dialectical

behavioural therapy, there are five steps.

1. Describe the situation to yourself in plain language, with non-judgmental terms, naming the likely events and emotions that will take place.

2. Decide in advance how you will problem-solve the situation if it gets out of hand—for example, changing the subject or taking a walk if things get heated.

3. Take some time to imagine the upcoming conversation as vividly as possible.

4. Imagine yourself handling the situation calmly and effectively.

5. Do something to calm yourself, such as engaging in breathing exercises or getting some fresh air.

Another suggestion is to actively choose when to have the conversation. In general, we shouldn't have these conversations when we're hungry, already angry, or tired. If it involves a relative at a family gathering, try to delay until after people have had a chance to eat and rest.

When discussing politics or other heated topics, a third suggestion is to adopt the practice of listening first. Allow the other person to explain their point of view,

then restate it back to them in your own words to ensure that they feel understood.

Remember, our brains cannot distinguish between an attack on our physical bodies and an attack on our beliefs. If we begin an exchange by making sure we understand each other, we minimize defensiveness and maximize open dialogue.

When it comes time to share your point of view, try using dialectics, a method of looking at a situation from both sides and trying to see how another perspective could be valid. You might say something like, "I see that this subject is important to you and you feel strongly. This is also important to me, because it affects people I care about. I feel that a safer solution might be..."

This may allow you both to find a way forward without getting stuck in conflict.

Finally, keep in mind that the individual you're speaking to is not immoral. As we've discussed, they do have a moral foundation that guides their actions; it's simply different from the one you're using.

That doesn't mean that the other person's actions are harmless. Certainly, the vast majority of people

who have harmed others believed they were doing the right thing. You shouldn't be expected to respect someone's bigotry, for instance.

But these strategies do give you a way to understand where other people are coming from. If you can speak that understanding into the conversation—that is, if you can respond to them and acknowledge the underlying framework behind their moral decisions—they may be more open to understanding what guides your own choices.

It should also be said that there does come a point at which relationship can no longer be maintained.

Especially in cases when an individual's identity or safety are threatened, maintaining a relationship with someone may not be worth the price.

For example, consider a person who has come out as gay or transgender and persistently receives criticism, or even hate. They shouldn't feel a responsibility to suffer through those injustices just to keep a relationship going. Doing so can cause more harm than good.

Everyone should decide for themselves how much they can put up with.

There is no prescription for how every relationship ought to be handled. Each case is different.

The gay or transgender child who chooses to sever a damaging relationship with a judgmental parent is no less strong or brave than one who chooses to continue in a similar relationship.

These conversations are bound to come up, and how well they go may not be completely in our control all the time.

But if we take steps to try and have these conversations thoughtfully and intentionally, we may be able to have them without ruining our holiday dinners.

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# Sports & Recreation

# Big Donation Boosts Park Restoration

By Jennifer Lavin

✉ jlavin@nivervillecitizen.com

BSI Insurance has made a donation of \$2,500 to Opa's Park in Niverville. The leaders behind the park's restoration, Beth Downey and Alexa Sawatzky, have plenty of plans for how to use the new funds.

As Downey began this year's fundraising season, she reached out to local businesses and organizations and was thrilled to hear back from BSI first, courtesy of their Because We Care community investment initiative.

The BWC program began in 2008. However, David Robin, BSI's marketing and brand coordinator, says that it didn't really take off until 2012.

"The marketing team recognized the potential and effectiveness of the campaign and subsequently made the decision to increase its funding with an annual budget of \$25,000, solidifying its status as a prominent and impactful initiative within the company," says Robin.

The program operates by inviting customers and clients to visit their website and complete a form detailing the nature of their fundraising endeavours. Robin explains that these can be community-based projects or requests for charitable contributions or financial assistance for community betterment initiatives.

Once the application is submitted, it undergoes a review process involving a team of executives, regional branch leaders, and team leaders, as well as the marketing team.

"While the decision-making process can be challenging due to the numerous worthy applications, we strive to make the best choices," says Robin. "We also encourage applicants to reapply if they haven't received a response within six months, demonstrating our commitment to continually support and uplift our communities."

Robin recalls seeing Downey's name in his email inbox more than once.



Alexa Sawatzky, Beth Downey, and Amanda Parkhurst of BSI.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

"[Downey's] persistence in applying for support is something we actively encourage. After thorough evaluation by our team, it was evident that this project was aligned with a noble cause capable of bringing about a positive transformation in the Niverville community."

This \$2,500 donation is designated specifically towards the park's new natural timber obstacle course.

Throughout 2023, work on the park has been progressing well.

A donation from Your Grocery People in Niverville was used for a part of the project that Downey says was inglorious but important. Failing trees were removed from the space in order to make room for the planting of native fruiting and flowering shrubs.

Clearing these trees also helped make room for another upcoming project: full-scale industrial solar safety lighting and a CCTV security camera.

Downey feels that the most important project of 2023, though, has been the regrading work.

"Skyview Landscaping did some very finicky, high-level regrading work for us in the park in order to amend a long-standing drainage problem," says Downey. "They did a beautiful job, so now the park will no longer be a swamp every single spring until, like, June, at which point it breeds mosquitoes. Every fall that we weren't able to get that done was a spring that we lost to the flooding."

As winter approaches, work in the park will mostly end for the season,

but Downey is exceptionally pleased by the results her team has made so far.

"The survival and thriving rates in the new gardens are outrageously high," she says. "Our horticulturist, Alexa Sawatzky, has been very impressed."

Downey is also so grateful to her team of dedicated volunteers who have managed to keep on top of the weeding and maintenance of the gardens.

"The reason I emphasize that is because natural prairie ecosystems do not look like modern planned and cultivated gardens," Downey explains. "They are very wild, very scattered, very random, and a lot of the plantings that are there deliberately look like weeds because actually

they are. The word 'weed' just means a plant that's going where somebody doesn't want it, but it has no botanical meaning. So I know that there are a number of folks around town who sometimes wander by the park and go, 'Is it supposed to look like that?' Yes, it is!"

This past year, a connection was also formed between the park and Niverville Elementary School. The school has established a committee for the advancement of outdoor learning, in partnership with the park, and they have hosted several visits from first- and second-grade classes.

In 2024, Downey and Sawatzky plan to have a weather station installed in the park to add to their nature playground. They intend the space to function as an outdoor classroom.

Another fundraising effort the pair will launch this year is publishing a "Christmas list" for the park. Downey explains that those who wish to support Opa's Park financially can either donate to the general fund or sponsor a particular item.

Details on this initiative will be coming soon.

Downey and Sawatzky are constantly amazed by the support they get for their passion project. Downey adds that their team of volunteers has been indispensable.

"This project has received a level of enthusiasm and material support from Niverville as a community that I never foresaw in a million years," she says. "But it's not finished yet. We need that support to be sustained and we really, really look forward to delivering on what we raise people's hopes about."

As for BSI's ongoing community investment, Robin wants to encourage others to apply for BWC funds.

"The Because We Care program is set to grow and evolve in exciting ways," Robin says. "We anticipate a boost in the annual budget for our program and an expanded reach that will touch even more lives and communities."



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© C/O MURIELLE BUGERA

# Meet Murielle Bugera, the Woman Behind the Crow Wing Trail

By Jennifer Lavin

✉ jlavin@nivervillecitizen.com

In 1997, Murielle Bugera was hired as the economic development officer for the RM of De Salaberry and the village of St-Pierre-Jolys.

One of the goals Bugera and her staff had was to connect the communities of St. Malo, St-Pierre-Jolys, and Otterburne with trails.

She started her plan by looking for people who had experience with trails. This led her to Dave Graupner, who had recently moved to St. Malo from Ontario, where he had been involved with the Bruce Trail.

Together, Bugera and Graupner began attending Manitoba Recreational Trails Association (MRTA) meetings—and that's where they learned about the Trans Canada Trail (TCT).

"The MRTA was responsible for developing the 1,200-kilometre trail in this

province and encouraging volunteers to help them do that," says Bugera.

Bugera and Graupner realized quickly that becoming part of the TCT would be a boon for their communities.

Quickly, their local economic development project turned into a goal to become part of the national infrastructure.

At that point, another useful member of the team appeared. Henri Desharnais of the St-Pierre-Jolys Museum shared with Bugera the museum's research on the Crow Wing Trail (CWT), an important Métis oxcart trail used in the mid 1800s.

"This Red River Trail was key to the development of not only our communities, but of our province, as carts transported goods and services to the Red River Colony, a.k.a. Winnipeg," Bugera explains.

"The museum had organized trail rides meeting up with their American counterparts,

installed a cairn at the museum entrance, and moved the Goulet House onto their property to preserve a Métis cart driver's home."

Desharnais also provided Bugera with the museum's prized possession: a seven-foot-long provincial map from 1887. The map showed a plan to build Road 606 on top of the Crow Wing Trail from Winnipeg to Emerson.

Bugera says that although this road was never built—it was replaced instead by Highway 59—the map was instrumental in the re-creation of the Crow Wing Trail as part of the Trans Canada Trail network.

Another key member of the team was Ed Ledohowski, the Municipal Heritage Consultant with the Province of Manitoba. He aided the group by helping share the historical importance of the CWT in Manitoba.

After gathering the right people and right information, it was time for Bugera to share



her vision.

"Municipalities south of Winnipeg were invited to meet at the St. Pierre Sugar Shack, and the result was unanimous," she says. "The RMs of Emerson, Franklin, De Salaberry, St-Pierre-Jolys, and Ritchot adopted resolutions of commitment for the development of the Crow Wing Trail as part of the Trans Canada Trail."

Since that time, the Roseau River First Nation, the town of Niverville, and the RM of Montcalm have also joined.

In January 1999, the CWT formally became part of the TCT. The Crow Wing Trail Association Chemin Saint-Paul Inc. (CWTA) was registered as a nonprofit organization with charitable status. Member municipalities could now each appoint a municipal councillor and/or member at large to sit on the board.

"With the help of a landscape architect, planning documents were created for the entire 200 kilometres and volunteers saw to the establishment of the trail, which included building bridges and installing signs. The Crow Wing Trail was officially

opened in 2006. It's made up of quiet rural roads, parks, bush trails, dikes, and paved trails."

Bugera credits many key volunteers in the creation and continued upkeep of the trail, such as Linda Morin, Kevin Stott, Luc Catellier, Chuck Gautron, Peter Friesen, Eileen and Clayton Gunn, Priscilla Reimer, and Wayne Arseny.

The modern-day Crow Wing Trail Association is now responsible for the improvement, maintenance, and promotion of the Crow Wing Trail on behalf of its member municipalities.

Bugera explains that the committee does its job with the assistance of provincial and federal grants and has strong support from the Economic Development Council for Bilingual Municipalities (CDEM) and Eastman Tourism.

The committee also has partnerships with the Canadian Company of Pilgrims and Actif Epica, and more recently with local groups like the St. Adolphe Friendship Trail, the Peace Trail, and St. Malo Cross Country Skiing.

"We do this to help our rural communities prosper

through capital investments and increased tourism. Trails also add to the quality of life, as a low-cost infrastructure that provides a healthy outdoor activity. It's also an opportunity to highlight our stories... the Métis, the First Nation, the different cultures in our diverse communities."

Over the years, Bugera has represented St-Pierre-Jolys on the CWT board and was president of the association for most of those years. She also undertook a lot of the administrative duties as they don't have paid staff other than their trail maintenance crew.

So that's how the Crow Wing Trail came to be, in large part because of Murielle Bugera.

But now the time has come for her to step down from her various positions. Those involved with the association say that her presence will be sorely missed.

Dolores Thiel has been part of the CWTA since 2019 and has worked with Bugera on a variety of projects. Thiel says that Bugera was the heart and soul of the group.

"The board members of the Crow Wing Trail Association

know that the trail exists today because of Murielle Bugera's role as a key founding member in 1999 and her continued board commitment for more than 25 years, [and] many terms as president," says Thiel. "Thanks to her inclusive, diplomatic team spirit, filled with insightful wisdom, the modern-day Crow Wing Trail is deeply enriched. We are so thankful for how she has helped connect communities and municipalities along the 200-kilometre trail from the Winnipeg floodway to Emerson, on Treaty 1 territory. This has resulted in a beautiful section of the Trans Canada Trail rich in history, diverse geography, and friendly communities."

Thiel praises Bugera's ability to connect communities of multiple heritages, including Indigenous, Métis, French, English, Ukrainian, and Mennonite.

Whatever task Bugera took on, Thiel says, she took it on with excitement.

Thiel recalls a story she believes showcases the type of attitude Bugera always has.

"How do you get through the muddy gumbo that snakes

its way along many parts of Manitoba?" Thiel says. "No rocks or logs were within reach, but Murielle did not hesitate. Like a true pioneer, she took off her boots and socks and walked through the gumbo to higher ground. She delighted in the childhood memories that flooded over her body as the gumbo squished between her toes!"

Thiel says that Bugera took advantage of any opportunity to help develop educational materials related to her beloved trail.

Bugera was instrumental in creating the bilingual Crow Wing Trail Heritage Guide, historical maps of the Crow Wing Trail, and interpretive and trailhead signs with both historical and modern information about local points of interest.

"[Bugera] played a key role in creating the Crow Wing Trail Passport, which describes the trail in 11 sections with details of trail terrain and highlights of significant sites," says Thiel. "It is truly amazing how she knows all the terrain details from the floodway down to Emerson."

Bugera was born and raised

in St. Pierre-Jolys and says she's always been involved in the community. Her husband passed away five years ago so now she farms with her son. She is proud to still be growing crops right in the middle of the Crow Wing Trail.

Besides serving on the CWTA, Bugera has also been involved with the Rat River Health Council for 25 years. In 2020, she received the Manitoba Premier's Volunteer Service Award, and she was also a recipient of the Honour 150 Award.

Bugera's biggest point of pride as she leaves the CWTA is that the trail is a six-municipality entity.

"I enjoy working with other communities and have made long-lasting friendships throughout the years," she says. "We all come together with one common goal and we learn about each other's 'neck of the woods.' We often don't know what's in our own backyard. We all have our own treasures and we need to highlight them for everyone to enjoy. It is very rewarding when people from near and far appreciate what we have accomplished."

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# Pair Brings Qigong Classes to CRRC

By Jennifer Lavin

✉ jlav@nivervillecitizen.com

Qigong classes have begun at Niverville's Community Resource and Recreation Centre (CRRC). Known as the Eight Pieces of Brocade qigong, the classes teach eight movements that are said to open and close the body, thus providing healing and building strength from the inside out.

These classes are led by Kelly Whelan-Enns, the founder and head instructor for a company called Legendary Living Arts (LLA).

Whelan-Enns has more than 35 years of experience teaching and training in the martial arts, qigong, and meditation. He's also been a yoga enthusiast since the age of four.

Whelan-Enns learned the basics of qigong when he was only 13 years old. He believes that the practice cured him of both his asthma and hypoglycemia.

After finding such success with qigong, Whelan-Enns decided to deepen his understanding of how and why the Eight Pieces of Brocade had worked so well for him and dove into extensive qigong and martial arts training.

Alongside his martial arts training and conditioning, Whelan-Enns now has more than 20 years studying the medical qigong system of Grandmaster Peng Jiu Ling.

"This system specializes in developing the meridians and sensitivity to qi flow inside and



Kellie Winzinowich and Kelly Whelan-Enns.

EMMELINE GUERRERO

around the body," explains Whelan-Enns. "[It's] a rare method of training neuro-differentiation that accelerates and deepens the mind-body connection."

Kellie Winzinowich is also part-owner and administrator for Legendary Living Arts.

Winzinowich holds a Bachelor of Physical Education from the University of Manitoba and has spent more than 30 years as a coach for elite gymnasts as well

as for preschool, recreational, and adult athletes.

Winzinowich has also spent years as a learning facilitator/coach developer with the National Coaching Certification Program and as an instructor in the kinesiology department at the University of Manitoba.

In addition to her many years of physical training, Kellie has been practicing and studying internal alchemy for more than two decades and holds certification in

naturopathy and spiritual coaching.

Whelan-Enns and Winzinowich met at a fundraiser more than a decade ago and quickly discovered a mutual appreciation for exercise and its benefits.

Winzinowich became intrigued by qigong, as she'd been having trouble maintaining a fitness regimen due to injuries related to birthing her four children.

"After discovering how the qigong set helped Kelly with his personal

health and why he chose to teach, I began taking Kelly's classes," says Winzinowich. "The Eight Pieces of Brocade helped me immensely by connecting the physical with my emotional state, and led to healing on a deeper level."

A few years ago, the pair joined together to create Legendary Living Arts in hopes of bringing Whelan-Enns's classes to a larger audience.

Winzinowich and Whelan-Enns say they are excited to teach at the CRRC and are planning to move to the area in the near future.

LLA's qigong classes are open to everyone and no experience is necessary. The qigong set can be done while standing or while sitting in a chair.

"Participants are encouraged to listen to their bodies and perform the movements to the best of their abilities," says Winzinowich. "In the new year, we will be adding Tai Chi Power flow to the mix. We will warm up with the Eight Pieces of Brocade Qigong set and move into Tai Chi Power Flow movements. The circular and spiral engagement of the exercises are designed to strengthen the core, muscles, fascia, and joints while gently massaging the organs as the nervous system relaxes."

In the fall, qigong classes ran on Tuesday evenings. In the new year, however, the classes will be held on Wednesday evenings from 6:30-7:30 p.m.

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# Arts & Entertainment

## Local Music Acts to Throw New Year's Bash

By Sara Beth Dacombe

✉ sdacombe@nivervillecitizen.com

Organizers and musicians are hard at work to give locals a new way to bring in the new year.

On December 31, the Heritage Centre's main ballroom will host an all-out rock and roll-style social headlined by three award-winning talents and their bands: JR Charron, Catie St. Germain, and the Department of Human Resources, frontlined by Trevor Lux.

Lux, who previously played for local band Plain as Ghosts, is one of the event's main coordinators. He says the artists have come together in a spirit of community.

"The concert was a brainchild of mine. I'd been hearing rumblings around town of wanting a New Year's Eve event," says Lux. "I figured I'd made some good friends in music around here and we became quite interconnected this year. So I thought, why not ask them?"

In 2022, Lux teamed up with fellow Niverville singers JR Charron, Catie St. Germain, and collaborator Réal Comeault to produce a Remembrance Day tribute song.

The artists hit it off, making more music together afterward and working on joint projects.

Originally from Binscarth, Charron moved to Niverville in 2018 and has continued to develop his country style. His debut EP *Impression* made waves in 2020 with "Song for You," which landed in the top ten on the Canadian Indie Country Charts, followed by his second single, "Broke," which charted in the top 50.

Recently, Charron celebrated four Manitoba Country Music Award nominations. In 2022, he won the Fan's Choice award.

Catie St. Germain has lived in



▣ CATIE ST. GERMAIN



▣ DEPT. OF HUMAN RESOURCES



▣ JR CHARRON

Niverville for many years. Fans may know her from the Whiskey Saints, where she performs as a duo with Comeault.

St. Germain recently released her first-ever single, "The Taxman," which was co-written by Comeault and features Lux as musician and co-producer.

This fall, St. Germain was nominated for six MCMA's, taking the win for Emerging Artist of the Year.

"It was amazing!" St. Germain says. "Mitchell Makoons and I were backstage after just performing and I almost walked away when he told me I was in the category of nominees and should stick around in case I won. And thank God he did."

At the November 6 awards ceremony, she had the honour of playing her single.

"I was feeling so happy and relieved of nerves that I made it through performing on that huge stage that so many actual stars have stood—and even myself, but always with other projects," she says. "So to get to be there singing my own song was a literal dream come true. I was just happy to be there."

On the heels of that career highlight, St. Germain also recently signed a record deal. She has a new single and full-length album in the

works.

"The label I've been working with, Atomic Ranch Records, is new and under Warner Music Canada," says St. Germain. "To have them believing in my songwriting and vocals is insane. We've had a lot of fun recording these past few months and it's been hard not to share."

She says that the new year's concert will give her ability to get her music out to a more local audience, coinciding with her album's imminent release.

"I'll be debuting six new original songs, including the new single I'll be releasing in January," she adds. "The people coming [to the social] get to hear them live first. It'll be amazing to test out the crowd response."

Lux's own band, called the Department of Human Resources (DOHR), will also hit the stage.

Comprised entirely of local musicians, DOHR features Lux on guitar and vocals, Darcy Wall on vocals and bass guitar, Doug Duerksen on drums, and Daniel Friesen on guitar.

Although they specialize in 90s and 2000s cover songs, they play a wide variety of music, including modern hits. Their target audience is Gen X and millennials, giving them a dose of nostalgia while

encouraging them to fight the good fight, pushing back against corporate culture with high energy rock and country aimed straight for the heart.

Lux says that with a lineup like this, concertgoers can expect a great show.

"It'll be a worthwhile event," he says. "We have a big stage... We're going to get this right and give the community something to remember."

With two cash bars, a midnight snack, a New Year's Eve countdown, and a ball drop at midnight, Lux says that the evening will feel very much like a social.

And everyone's invited.

"You'll notice our posters say age 18+ encouraged, but people of any age can absolutely come," says Lux. "We want people to know it is a full-blown rock and country show. It is geared as a social, but families are welcome. We are taking into account everyone's safety and comfort and ensuring there will be security on the premises. There will also be Operation Red Nose to help people get home safe."

The New Year's Eve event will start at 8:00 p.m. and continue until 2:00 a.m. Tickets are available online ([www.eventbrite.ca](http://www.eventbrite.ca)) or in-person through Lux or any of the bands.



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