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LOCAL NEWS

The Tiny Homes Movement

■ In a world where so many people can no longer afford their own houses, the tiny homes trend is picking up momentum. But many local municipalities don't allow for these homes, the average of which is just 250 square feet.

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LOCAL NEWS

Siblings Maintain Push for Debbie's Law

■ A pair of Niverville siblings are keeping up the fight to effect a life-saving change to Manitoba's overburdened healthcare system.

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SPORTS & RECREATION

Junior Pilots Excel on Trip Out West

■ The U17 Junior Pilots had their program's best-ever finish at this year's Best of the West tournament in Calgary.

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Niverville High School Debuts Latest Musical

■ The drama department at Niverville High School marks the debut of their newest musical, a production of *Matilda*.

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Liberals Win Rare Fourth Term, Falk Re-Elected in Provencher

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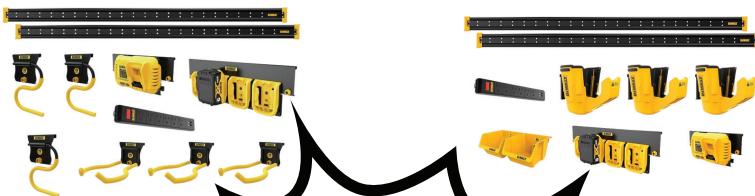


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Conceptual drawing of new strip mall in Niverville.

THREE WAY BUILDERS

New Strip Mall Announced for Drovers Run

By Brenda Sawatzky
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Within two months, the next phase of commercial development will begin along Drovers Run with the construction of a new strip mall.

The property will introduce three new businesses and provide expanded space for two established ones.

Local developer Ray Dowse, on behalf of Stonefield Developments Inc., says his team has been working to get this project off the ground for more than four years.

Together, the five attached units will provide almost 16,000 square feet of commercial space. The aesthetic, Dowse says, will provide unique curb appeal to match the Blue Crescent Hotel that's still planned for the lot immediately to the west.

The two units on the easterly end of the strip mall will share a front patio with timber frame pergola. The business on the far east end has requested a drive-thru lane and window.

At this stage, Dowse says he's unable to divulge the nature of the businesses that will open here. But in the coming weeks, each will seek conditional use permits from town council.

"I'm really excited about this [project]," says Dowse. "The mix of businesses is awesome, and they just complement the community. A couple of the businesses are existing businesses that are expanding, so that's pretty neat too. It's good to see that local business growth."

Dowse adds that three of these business owners have been collaborating in the hopes of enhancing the offerings they collectively

provide. Unlike some other commercial strip malls, this one is being fully customized to meet the very specific needs of its tenants.

"That's why it took four years to put all this together," says Dowse. "We did three or four different designs on it. Some of them wanted future expansion options, [so we looked at] the potential engineering for second floor options and allocating extra parking."

The strip mall, located north of the completed apartment block, will have two access points from Range Road and one access to be shared with the upcoming hotel.

With this project now finalized, Dowse has one remaining 2.3-acre section of land along Drovers Run. He is proposing a mixed-use project for this lot, including both commercial and residential options.



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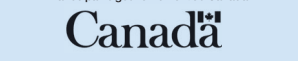
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The potholes on St. Adolphe's Main Street have been getting worse.

JOEY VILLANUEVA

St. Adolphe Main Street, It's Your Turn

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Without question, residents of St. Adolphe, not to mention the daily commuters who travel through the town, anxiously await a planned rehabilitation project for Main Street.

Last summer, St. Adolphe's main drag was finally added to the provincial government's project map for surface repair. Those repairs are expected to extend beyond mere pothole patching.

According to Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure (MTI), 1.8 kilometres of street will undergo asphalt resurfacing, catch basin replacement, and minor curb rehabilitation.

The work will commence at the intersection of Highway 210 and move southward from there.

No official start date has been announced, but MTI says that crews will begin in the summer and work towards an anticipated completion in the fall, pending weather.

The project is estimated to cost the province \$3.7 million.

Comparatively speaking, that comes to approximately \$1 million more than the total estimated cost of Île-des-Chênes's Main Street renewal of 2024.

The Île-des-Chênes project, estimated by the RM at \$2.7 million last spring, became a cost-share initiative between the province, the RM, and local developers. The province covered \$1 million.

"The RM of Ritchot's investment is for components of the project beyond the surface of the highway such as improved sidewalks, bicycle paths, and other improvements that fall under the municipality's jurisdiction," MTI told *The Citizen* at that time. "By partnering together, all improvements can be completed in one project, resulting in various efficiencies."

The MTI spokesperson then added that they are always willing to consider municipal requests and proposals for cost-sharing upgrades.

At their morning public meeting on April 1, Ritchot council voted unanimously in favour of supporting the St. Adolphe Main Street project, a resolution requested by MTI prior to the start of roadwork.

According to Ritchot's CAO Mitch Duval, the municipality's participation on the St. Adolphe project will be less involved than for Île-des-Chênes.

"Unlike Main Street in IDC, the RM is not pursuing acquisition or cost-sharing

initiatives for Main Street in St. Adolphe," Duval says. "However, we remain committed to working with the province to improve traffic conditions in St. Adolphe. This includes the existing 30-kilometre-per-hour school zone, requested speed reductions south of town, strategic pedestrian accesses, and improvements at the intersection of PR 200 and PR 210."

Duval's reference to acquisition is in regard to the RM's intention to appeal to the province for jurisdiction over Île-des-Chênes's Main Street after the work's completion.

As to whether the level of renewal in St. Adolphe will come anywhere close to the work done in Île-des-Chênes last year, MTI has so far provided only vague details.

"The project is a thin lift overlay, which is a layer of pavement that is applied to the surface which will greatly improve the surface conditions and extend the service life of PR 200," MTI says.

Between the work scheduled for St. Adolphe's Main Street, the planned closure of the Red River Floodway bridge, and continuing construction on the Louis Riel Bridge in Ste. Agathe this summer, 2025 should prove to be an interesting summer for local commuters.



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Liberals Win Rare Fourth Term, Falk Re-Elected in Provencher

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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For Canadians from coast to coast, it was a nail-biting night on Monday, April 28 as the results poured in from the country's forty-fifth general federal election.

It was many hours after polls closed, late into the night, before the results began to come into focus: the Liberal Party of Canada, led by new Prime Minister Mark Carney, has earned a rare fourth term in office.

This is a result that nobody would have seen coming just a few months ago when the Conservatives were enjoying a 24 percent lead in most national polls.

A lot has changed in a short time.

One thing that's certain is that the Liberals will form a minority government, although it took until Tuesday afternoon for this to be confirmed.

The House of Commons currently has 343 seats, meaning that any one party needs to elect 172 Members of Parliament in order to reach majority status.

By midday on Tuesday, the Liberals were elected in 169 ridings. The final seat count was unofficial, pending the results of a few recounts in ridings where the final tallies were exceptionally close.

Automatic recounts are triggered in cases where the winner is within 0.1 percent of the second-place candidate.

The Conservatives, led by Pierre Poilievre, were elected in 145 ridings and will form the official opposition. Poilievre, however, was not elected in his Ottawa-area riding and therefore will not be returning to the House of Commons—for now. He is expected to run in a by-election in Alberta in the coming months.

This neck-and-neck battle between the Liberals and Conservatives came at a cost to the country's other parties. The New Democrats paid the highest price and were wiped off the map in most regions, dropping from 24 seats at the last

Parliament's dissolution to just seven. This sets them below official party status.

Jagmeet Singh also lost his Vancouver-area riding, prompting him to step down as leader of the NDP in his concession speech.

The Bloc Quebecois saw their support in Quebec drop sharply as well, falling to just 22 seats from 33.

The Greens held on to one seat.

The closest election result took place in a Newfoundland riding where Liberal incumbent Anthony Germain appeared to fend off his Conservative challenger by just 12 votes.

IN PROVENCHER

For incumbent Ted Falk of the Conservatives, Monday's election produced another decisive win in Provencher. He secured his fourth term in office by earning 34,364 votes, or 66.1 percent.

Liberal candidate Trevor Kirczenow trailed with 13,594 votes, or 26.1 percent. Although a distant second place finish, this was a sharp improvement for Kirczenow, who in 2021 only received 8,471 votes.

The NDP's Brandy Schmidt finished third with 2,398 votes, the PPC's Noel Gautron received 943 votes, and the Green Party's Blair Mahaffy got 705 votes.

Among Falk's supporters, gathered at the Friedensfeld Community Centre on Monday night, the mood was sombre, except for short bursts of cheering as Falk's tally jumped.

By 10:30 p.m., Falk was delivering his victory speech.

"Obviously the national result isn't going quite the way we would like," Falk said. "The last number they gave me, our results here in Provencher were sitting at about 68 percent of the vote. If my memory serves me right... that would probably be a record for my tenure as a member of Parliament. Sixty-six percent is the highest I've had up until [now]."

He said that his campaign volunteers collectively walked just over 3,000 kilometers to knock on more

than 11,000 doors in five weeks. For all the people working to ensure his win, he carries a debt of gratitude.

"I'll continue to work hard to serve you because government shouldn't be the master, it should be the servant," Falk concluded. "And we want to make sure it stays that way."

Over in Kirczenow's camp, the sentiment was similar but the reasons were reversed.

"I feel very relieved by the general election result across the country," Kirczenow told *The Citizen*. "I know that Canada is in excellent hands with Prime Minister Mark Carney, and Canadians' democratic and human rights will continue to be protected."

Despite his loss, Kirczenow said he's pleased to have received more than a quarter of the vote.

The result isn't surprising, he added, considering the number of people he spoke with throughout the campaign, many of whom expressed fear over holding progressive values in such a conservative riding.

On a regular basis in the past five weeks, Kirczenow said that he encountered aggression from conservative voters who actively worked to impede his campaign.

"I hope that looking at these election results will help everyone realize that in the privacy of the ballot box, many of us in Provencher do indeed support women's rights and 2SLGBTQ rights," said Kirczenow. "Together we reject election interference, the purposeful spread of misinformation, and intimidation tactics."

As well, Kirczenow hoped his Conservative counterparts would take Poilievre's loss as an indication that there ought to be a better and kinder way to conduct themselves going forward.

CONCESSION SPEECHES

Poilievre's failure to secure his seat is surprising to many given that the Conservatives picked up a lot of electoral ground. Until this year, Poilievre had held the seat for 20 years.

But on Monday night, he was

defeated by a Liberal, and the result wasn't especially close.

"To my fellow Conservatives, we have much to celebrate tonight," said Poilievre in his election night address. "We got the highest share of vote that our party has received since 1988... and we did all of this in a very difficult environment."

Poilievre suggested that this year's loss, while unfortunate, would prove to be a lesson that propels the Conservatives over the finish line in the next election.

In the meantime, he said, his party will work hard at holding the Liberal government to account while committing to work with the rest of Parliament on common issues.

"We will always put Canada first as we stare down tariffs and other irresponsible threats from President Trump," he said. "Conservatives will work together with the prime minister and all parties with the common goal of defending Canada's interests and getting a new trade deal that puts these tariffs behind us while protecting our sovereignty and the Canadian people."

For Singh, the loss of his Burnaby Central riding also came as a stinging blow. Still, he insisted in his own remarks that the NDP's loss would prove to be a temporary setback.

"Tonight and every night, all of us here were on Team Canada," Singh said. "We want Canada to thrive and we're going to continue to fight for Canada... We may lose sometimes, and those losses hurt. It's tough. But we are only defeated if we stop fighting... I have met New Democrats from coast to coast to coast who will never back down, even when they're told there's no room for them at the table."

CARNEY'S MESSAGE TO CANADIANS

As newly minted prime minister, Carney delivered an election night message resounding with optimism and goodwill.

"I want to congratulate Poilievre on a hard-fought, fair campaign and

his commitment to the country that we both love," Carney said. "He will have many, many more contributions to our land."

Carney added that his reason for entering politics earlier this year was the realization that Canada was in need of big change. In getting there, he has pledged to defend and maintain the three main values that Canadians hold dear: humility, ambition, and unity.

As for humility, Carney has said that he'll lead by example.

"I have much to be humble about," he said. "It's true, over my long career, I have made many mistakes, and I will make more. But I commit to admitting them openly, to correcting them quickly and always learning from them."

Further, he added, humility comes from working with other political parties, and with the provinces and territories and Indigenous peoples, to build a better Canada.

"We are at a hinge moment in history. Our old relationship with the United States, a relationship based on steadily increasing integration, is over. The system of open global trade anchored by the United States, a system that Canada has relied on since the Second World War... is over. These are tragedies, but it's also our new reality. We are over the shock of the American betrayal, but we should never forget the lessons. We have to look out for ourselves and, above all, we have to take care of each other."

In that vein, Carney issued a call for all Canadians to put an end to division and anger and move forward in unity.

In the coming years, he said, Canada will set out to build twice as many homes using Canadian technology, Canadian skilled labour, and Canadian lumber. New trade and energy corridors will be created while establishing Canada as a clean and conventional energy superpower.

"The point is that we can give ourselves far more than the Americans can ever take away," Carney concluded.



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Ritchot Council Approves Smaller Lots in Tourond Creek

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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On April 16, Ritchot's council approved a request from the St. Adolphe Land Company Ltd. (SALCO) for a variation to reduce the size of lots and side yards in phase two of the Tourond Creek development.

The request allows developers to reduce the size of 63 lots from 50-foot to 40-foot widths. At the same time, these lots would have their side yard clearances changed from five feet to four feet.

Corner lots, too, would see a side yard reduction from eight feet to five feet.

All in all, 108 single family lots would be sketched into the phase two plan, creating 19 more lots than were proposed to council three years ago. These lots would range in width from 40 feet to 58 feet.

Brandon Powell appeared at the meeting to speak on SALCO's behalf. He told council that the development has had virtually no lot sales or new home builds in the past three years.

To substantiate that, he reported that there are still about 85 lots in phase one that have yet to be sold.

He blames this lack of inertia on a change in market demand due to uncertainty in interest rates and the fact that building and development costs have escalated.

Now, with the disruption of tariffs, it's anyone's guess as to how the market will change going forward.

"Buyers are being more cost-conscious because of all this, and the market is seeking more affordable housing options," Powell said. "The developer really has a limited



The entrance to Tourond Creek in St. Adolphe.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

toolbox."

After months of discussions with their builders, Powell said they've concluded that downsized lots can be sold for lower prices, thus addressing the affordability issue.

According to Powell, early projections made by SALCO's engineers suggest a cost savings of between \$37,000 and \$60,000 on the lot alone. The homebuyer should see further savings through the build since 40-foot lots would only accommodate a 32-foot-wide house.

To further his argument, Powell reminded council that they had recently approved a similar request made by Terracon for a new development in Île-des-Chênes, setting a precedent.

"The risk of not proceeding [means] that the pace of development in Tourond Creek will continue to be slow," Powell said. "The developer is not prepared to proceed with the existing subdivision under the

current circumstances. They don't want to risk putting millions of dollars into the ground if all they're doing is developing more of the same thing that just isn't selling. St. Adolphe will continue to see limited growth and investment as a result."

Five letters favouring the variation request were received by council prior to the meeting, all from builders in the development.

Another eight letters were received from people who stand opposed.

One Tourond Creek resident attended the meeting, asking council to reconsider the four-foot side yard variation request, citing fire safety.

"You've probably never lived in a community where you've had a whole block of homes burn down because of that four-foot [side yard] concern," he said. "Well, my brother has, in Calgary, and Calgary made a huge change after that."

This resident later visited a subdivision in Saskatchewan where,

he said, this issue was addressed by legislating the use of additional fire-retardant building materials in order to prevent a fire's spread.

"What it costs [to build like this] outstrips the savings of buying a [smaller] lot," he told council. "Just because a building code might say that [something] is adequate, it's not. There are communities out there who are making sure that their neighbourhoods are safe."

Three other residents weighed into the conversation online. One argued that reducing the side yards to four feet would make it virtually impossible for landscapers to access backyards with their equipment.

Another questioned whether the developer had tried other strategies to help move the lots in Tourond Creek, such as better marketing or price reductions.

As council entered their own deliberation, Councillor Jason Bodnarchuk indicated that he'd heard

from a number of residents who shared concerns about the four-foot side yards, primarily in terms of breaking the aesthetic continuity with the rest of the development.

Still, Bodnarchuk expressed sympathy with the developer needing to make changes to meet market demand.

"Most are aware that, if something doesn't change, there's a good chance that the development is going to go dead," Bodnarchuk said. "Also, we're trying to bring commercial and stuff here, and one of the big [ways to] bring commercial here is bring people here."

Mayor Chris Ewen queried whether it would be reasonable to inquire with the RM's fire chief regarding the added fire hazard produced by four-foot side yards.

"Building codes are written to a manner that it is allowed to have the four-foot side yard," CAO Mitch Duval responded.

"They've spent a lot of money in this community to get this off the ground, to have it stalled," said Councillor Shane Pelletier. "I'm good with trying to give this a boost and start seeing some more [building] permits on our reports."

In the end, Ewen agreed.

"I don't want to see this development go into hibernation, because once that [happens] the residents that live there, their home valuation is going to go down," Ewen said. "As a past real estate broker, I've seen this happen."

Council's debate closed with a vote of four in favour of approving the variation request.

In the end, only Councillor Boulanger stood opposed.



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Tiny Homes: A Trend in Compact Living

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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It's been nearly two decades since the tiny home concept was first popularized. Today, tiny homes are a growing movement across North America.

Generally speaking, tiny homes range between 100 and 500 square feet, the average being around 250 square feet.

For comparison's sake, the median size of a new single-family home in the U.S. in 2021 was 2,273 square feet, according to realtor.com.

Tiny homes are also different in that they're usually built on wheels, providing portability similar to a mobile home.

"Multiple factors fuelled the growth of the miniature-house movement," says Liz Alterman, a writer for realtor.com. "As thousands of people lost their homes due to unemployment or foreclosure during the 2007-08 financial crisis, many turned to tiny homes as an affordable alternative to a traditional house."¹

Since that time, the trend has gained appeal for reasons apart from affordability. Those looking to reduce their environmental impact see tiny homes as an excellent option. They also appeal to the minimalist since the lifestyle doesn't allow for the accumulation of a great number of possessions.

In general, the trend towards downsizing has become entrenched with rising interest and inflation rates.

A website called Today's Homeowner reports that tiny homes were a \$21.9 billion market in America in 2024 and are expected to grow to \$29.9 billion by 2033. In 2024, there were an estimated 10,000 tiny homes in the U.S. and these homeowners are expected to have a 45 percent lower ecological footprint than the average American.²

It's no surprise then that the downsizing trend is showing up in Manitoba.

TINY HOMES ON THE PRAIRIE

Tiny Homes on the Prairie is a Mitchell-based business founded by Jonathan and Elana Penner eight years ago. Their business serves as a way to address the growing demand for tiny homes while keeping the staff



Alexa Sawatzky and her partner Harrison Briand work on their tiny home project.

BRENDASAWATZKY

of their roofing company working year-round.

At present, they build one tiny home per year, outsourcing for the trailer on which it sits and the trade skills they don't have.

"If we advertised and really pushed it, we could be quite busy," Elana Penner says. "We'd have to expand our company quite a bit because then it would be year-round."

As it stands, they only build tiny homes that can be CSA-certified, a requirement of many banks and insurance companies. In order to get CSA approval, though, the tiny homes must be built indoors and the Penners only have one building on their property large enough to manage that.

The Penners' primary clients so far have been those who are looking to downsize from their homes and yards for practical reasons.

"It's a lot of people who are just sick and tired of having to maintain a

big house," says Penner. "It's usually empty nesters. They want the freedom that if, down the road, they decide to move to B.C., they can actually do that."

But there are others who come to the Penners. These are cottage owners looking for portable guest suite options or those who are interested in an RV alternative for their seasonal camping site.

Still others are grandparents who want to move in next to their kids in order to help with childcare so the parents can keep working.

This January, Tiny Homes on the Prairie was represented at Winnipeg's Renovations Show, held at the RBC Convention Centre. Penner says about 6,000 people toured their display model.

"You can tell immediately the crowd that it appeals to and the crowd that it does not," Penner says. "It seemed to appeal more to the outdoorsy person. Because your home is so small, you do experience the

outdoors more and that's one of the reasons why it's still more trendy in B.C., because it's just not as cold in winter."

The Penners offer six floor plans. They range in size from eight and ten feet in width and 30 to 40 feet in length. Prices can be anywhere from \$140,000 for a very basic model up to \$210,000. Many finishing options are available to provide personalization.

Penner imagines it won't be long until tiny home communities begin popping up around the province. There is already one such community near Brandon.

As is so often the case with new trends, though, technology and demand gets ahead of legislation.

"The problem with a tiny home in a general neighbourhood is that municipalities have a minimum square footage for houses," Penner says. "In a municipality like Niverville that's close to the city, you have no idea how fast a [tiny home neighbourhood] would fill up."

RITCHOT AND NIVERVILLE BYLAWS

Tanis Klippenstein is the planning officer for Ritchot. She says the RM's single- or two-family dwellings must be a minimum of 700 square feet, significantly larger than the average tiny home.

"Most tiny homes fall under the definition of a mobile home based on the way they are constructed," Klippenstein says. "[They would be] required to be built as per the CSA standard... If a tiny home is built on a permanent foundation, the tiny home would need to meet all the requirements within the Manitoba Building Code (MBC) for a single-family dwelling. A vast majority of tiny homes do not meet the MBC requirements for required plumbing, minimum ceiling heights, minimum room sizes, etc."

If the tiny home is constructed under mobile home parameters, she adds, there are still very few zones in Ritchot that allow for them, although a conditional use permit could be sought from council.

According to Niverville CAO Eric King, council recently scaled back on their minimum residential unit requirement, dropping it from 800 to 600 square feet. Even so, it's still a far cry from the average 250-square-foot tiny home.

Apart from new developments, there are few to no places for a tiny home in Niverville. Developments are designed by developers who seek approval from council on the development plan which typically follows closely with the town's pre-existing bylaws as well as market demands.

To date, King says that Niverville developers have yet to ask council to consider special zoning for tiny homes.

"[If] someone comes to us and says, 'I want to use these 20 acres [for a tiny home neighbourhood],' well, that starts the conversation," King says. "It does take time to change the zoning bylaw. It doesn't happen overnight. We need to have our engagement with the community and then create a zone specific to tiny homes."

As for an individual who wants to purchase a new lot with the intention of building a tiny home on it, King says it would likely not pass design



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controls set by the developer, whose main interest is in creating a very specific aesthetic throughout the development.

ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS

When speaking about the tiny home neighbourhood concept, King isn't completely unfamiliar. In recent months, he flew to Fredericton to attend a conference on sustainable communities.

A portion of that event included a tour of 12 Neighbours, a tiny home community built under the auspices of a charitable organization by the same name. The neighbourhood was created as a means of reducing poverty and homelessness.

Today, 96 tiny homes sit in neat little rows on a parcel of land donated by 12 Neighbours founder and president Marcel LeBrun.

LeBrun, a former computer engineer and software entrepreneur, sold his company and invested \$13 million into creating the 12 Neighbours community.

The community offers far more than just housing. Full wraparound services include retail shops which provide jobs for residents as well as training workshops where they can learn trades.

As well, there are addiction and mental health supports to help residents get back on their feet.

While homelessness isn't a big problem in Niverville, at least not yet, King says that tiny home communities could serve as a reasonable option for those trying to get by on lower pay scales.

"Where does someone making minimum wage live in our community right now?" King asks. "I can't regulate the price of [apartment suites] for people who are working at Dairy Queen or McDonalds. And them driving out from Winnipeg isn't helping our community and isn't actually [helping those employees get ahead]."

Because the appearance of a tiny home can resemble that of a mobile home, King says a tiny home neighbourhood might be a hard sell to Niverville residents due to the stigma that comes with trailer parks.

Even so, council is not in the business of competing with developers, so the first step to a tiny home neighbourhood would have to be taken by a developer.

Even so, council is not in the business of competing with developers, so the first step to a tiny home neighbourhood would have to be taken by a developer.

BUILDING YOUR OWN TINY HOME

Alexa Sawatzky is a former resident of Niverville and tiny home enthusiast. Sawatzky and her partner Harrison, along with Sawatzky's father, began their tiny home project about a year ago.

"It started as a dream probably ten years ago," Sawatzky says. "I don't think I took the idea seriously until 2019 when I was finishing college and thinking about my next steps.

I've always been inspired by alternative styles of living. For a long time, I imagined myself living in a van or a school bus. But I discovered tiny homes on YouTube and I think the uniqueness of the different builds really drew me in."

Financial freedom is one of the motivating factors, she says, as well as having the option to park it until a piece of land is purchased.

"Obviously, building a tiny home requires a large initial investment, but you can buy materials second-hand or find ways to recycle materials that keep costs much lower than building new," Sawatzky adds. "In the end, our home will cost my partner and me around the same as a downpayment on a regular home, only we'll be mortgage- and rent-free."

Sawatzky, her partner, and her father designed their tiny home from the ground up, based on personal preferences gleaned from hours and hours of scouring the internet. This includes the trailer on which it sits.

Once complete, their tiny home will fit into the "average" category, at around 250 square feet of space, including the mezzanine where the bedroom will be located.

So far Sawatzky isn't too concerned about sharing the compact living space with a partner and their dog. It won't be much different, she says, than apartment living.

It will provide a way for the couple to get out of the city,

eventually, and live off the grid using solar power and a composting toilet.

"We anticipate that one day we'll have land where we can spread out and experiment with other types of alternative living," she says. "Maybe a shipping container for the home gym and a yurt for the guests. We're excited to eventually explore different opportunities like these."

One thing Sawatzky and her dad have made sure of is that her tiny home will be Manitoba-winter-friendly. Two layers of insulation and in-floor heat will help keep the chill out. A small woodstove will complement the heat source for a cozier ambience.

"Building the tiny home ourselves has been really empowering. We're learning so many new skills and developing our sense of self sufficiency. It's also been a great way to connect with family, especially my dad who has put a ton of energy into the home and has made the whole process so much more meaningful."

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CITIZEN POLL

Do you think developers and local councils should work to make space for tiny homes in our communities?

- ☐ Yes. Tiny homes provide an economical, practical, and sustainable option for those who aren't interested in apartments.
- ☐ No. Tiny homes, much like trailer parks, could drive down property values for everyone else.

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

As Canadians get ready to head back to the ballot box, what is the most important election issue to you?

Relations with the United States.

39%

The state of immigration.

4%

Climate change and the environment.

8%

Affordability and cost of living.

46%

National defence and border security.

3%

YOUR COMMENTS:

I feel a very important thing to bring to the table is accountability. The Justin Trudeau Liberals campaigned on a platform of openness, transparency, and accountability only to make a complete mockery of those promises over the past nine years. Many people, regardless of political leaning, are completely tired of governments acting as though they can do anything they want and that they aren't accountable to Canadians. Never-ending scandals and billions in misappropriated funds should be a big concern to everyone.

Competence... and while it's not saying much, regardless who wins I think there will at least be more competence in our prime minister's office.



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IN BRIEF

Mennonite Historical Society Hosts Event

By Brenda Sawatzky

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On May 3, the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (MMHS) hosted a full day of events to coincide with their annual general meeting.

Attendees were invited to begin the day with a morning tour of the Mennonite Reflections exhibit at the Mennonite Heritage Village. Guided tours were provided of the many antiquities behind the scenes, within the vault.

After lunch, guests stayed for a showing of *Where the Cottonwoods Grow*, a powerful documentary commemorating the Mennonite migration from South Russia to Manitoba in the 1870s.

Conrad Stoesz works as an archivist at the Mennonite Heritage Archives and is also the president of the MMHS.

He describes the MMHS as an umbrella organization for both individual members as well as other organizations such as the Heritage Village, the Mennonite Heritage Archives, and the Plett Foundation.

Events such as the AGM are important not only to the ongoing work of the MMHS, he says, but to create connection within the membership.

"These events are a chance to come together to reflect on the past, to do some networking, and to find people of like mind," says Stoesz. "Stories are shared at these events that we didn't live through but our ancestors lived through. This is a way of learning those stories and, if we want, to incorporate those into our own lives."

Last year marked exactly 150 years since Mennonites came from Europe to settle in the East Reserve. MMHS held a nostalgic bus tour in the summer, taking sightseers to a series of historic landmarks connected to these early Mennonites.

This year the bus tours will resume, this time on the West Reserve, including the Altona and Winkler area where Mennonites settled one year later.

A big part of the organization's work is to safeguard the archive.

"A lot of the materials are in hard-to-read handwriting and in German, so members of the MMHS have come to the archives, seen these church registries, seen these diaries, and then transcribed them and published them so they are available to a wider audience."

NHS Celebrates Autism through Awareness Campaign

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Cooper Lavin is a 15-year-old tenth grader at Niverville High School. He's also autistic and the coordinator of the school's inaugural autistic awareness campaign.

To create awareness and encourage acceptance of neurodivergent people, Lavin, along with the school's learning support teacher, Raelyn Voulgaris, assigned the last three days in April to the campaign.

On April 28, students at NHS wore rainbow-coloured or tie-dyed clothing to reflect the beauty and diversity of the human mind. Next came Magnificent Minds Day, with the donning of either a fun hat or crazy hair. After that was Sensory Friendly Day, which encouraged others to wear comfy clothing to school, including pyjamas, to create awareness of the sensory sensitivity so many autistic people experience on a day-to-day basis.

"I'm not doing full-on activism," Lavin says. "I'm just trying to spread the word about the hardships that come with [autism]."

In planning his campaign, Lavin chose the symbol of a rainbow.

"In my opinion, rainbows are the colour of chaos and autism is just chaotic," says Lavin. "There is an explosion of information in your brain at all times. Rainbows are every colour and that represents autism because there are so many different types of it."

Other autism awareness campaigns around the world



Cooper Lavin is creating greater awareness of autism. ■ BRENDA SAWATZKY

have used the puzzle piece as a symbol, but Lavin feels this creates connotations that neurodiverse people are incomplete or need to be fixed.

There is some distinction as well, for Lavin, between autism awareness and autism acceptance. Through the NHS events, Lavin hopes to have accomplished some of both.

"Sometime in the 1800s, people realized that the way they were treating black Americans [was inhumane]," says Lavin. "They needed to have better lives and that was the awareness. Later, people like Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King said, 'Now that you guys know that this isn't how it should be, we need to fix it.' That's acceptance."

But it generally takes time for society to pass from awareness to acceptance.

The first diagnosis of autism, Lavin says, occurred

less than 100 years ago. In the grander scheme of things, that's still fairly recent. Being realistic, Lavin says that autistic or neurodivergent people probably won't be fully accepted as "normal" until long after his generation is gone.

Still, awareness must begin somewhere. And one of his goals is to teach people that living with autism has its pros and cons.

"One [pro] that I've seen a lot of autistic people have is a heightened sense of justice and wanting to help other people," he says. "We also seem to have a pretty good memory. We probably won't be the best at multiple things. But if an autistic person has a specific hobby, we call it a hyper-fixation. They are almost for sure going to be the best person in the room at that thing."

Other autistic minds lean in the direction of genius. Lavin suggests that brilliant men like Nikola Tesla and Albert Einstein are believed to have been autistic.

William James Sidis, too, is thought to have had an autistic bent with his IQ of between 250 and 300. He had the ability to speak 25 different languages and dialects.

For Lavin, he certainly wouldn't call himself a genius, but he does have notable gifts.

"I think the best thing that I would credit my autism for is my social skills. I feel like you can't really judge your own charisma, but I have been told that I am charismatic."

Lavin may be less aware that he himself is an astute observer of humankind and bears the ability to articulate his thoughts with incredible maturity. He might credit this to strong parental support. His mother and father, too, deal with different levels of neurodivergence.

"All three of us being neurodivergent might make the world more difficult for us, but it makes us easier for each other," says Lavin. "All three of us have the same way of seeing good things other people can't and being blind to some of the things they can see."

As for Voulgaris, the teacher is thrilled when students like Lavin take initiative by developing strategies for building awareness and acceptance of all kinds of diversity within the school community.

"We need people like [Cooper] to be leaders in our building and to be bringing awareness, education, and better understanding," Voulgaris says.

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IN BRIEF

Annual Walk for Alzheimer's Returns to Manitoba This Spring

By Brenda Sawatzky
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Walkers, joggers, and supporters of all stripes will be doing their part around Manitoba in spring for this year's annual IG Wealth Management Walk for Alzheimer's.

On Saturday, May 24, people will gather for the annual fundraiser at Assiniboine Park in Winnipeg at 10:00 a.m. On Thursday, May 29, participants can head to the A.D. Penner Park in Steinbach at 7:00 p.m.

Similar events will be happening in Altona, Brandon, Darlingford, Gimli, Portage la Prairie, and Selkirk.

The Walk for Alzheimer's happens right across the nation in support of people living with dementia, as well as their families, friends, and care partners.

"It's one of my favourite days because of the strong sense of community pride, like we're all in it together," says Erin Crawford, CEO of the Alzheimer's Society of Manitoba. "It's also just a lot of fun with music playing, activities for the kids, a hot dog lunch, and so much laughter and love. You'll leave with your spirit feeling lifted."

All funds raised for the

Alzheimer's Society of Manitoba will continue to provide one-on-one and group supports, education, and dementia-friendly programming aimed at helping individuals and families live their best lives possible.

"It felt incredible to come together with family and friends at the Winnipeg walk, along with more than a thousand others, all supporting the same cause," says a 2024 participant who lost her husband to Alzheimer's. "We had 37 team members our first year participating and raised over \$6,000 for the Alzheimer's Society. It was a very proud moment for all of us."

Registration for the walk, whether as an individual or team, can be done on the Alzheimer's Society of Manitoba website. Here, participants can create a personalized fundraising page to help them gain sponsorship support from family and friends.

The Society also encourages seniors' residences, assisted living facilities, and personal care homes to host their own walks in support of Alzheimer's awareness.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more, visit
www.alzheimer.mb.ca/wfa

Niverville Chamber Hosts Business Awards Night

By Brenda Sawatzky
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On Friday, April 11, the Heritage Centre atrium rang with applause for four local businesses selected as the winners of this year's Niverville Chamber of Commerce (NCoC) Business Excellence Awards.

The 2025 Business of the Year award went to Talk to the Tail. Niverville Physiotherapy and Sport Injury clinic took the award for Outstanding Customer Service, while Best New Business was awarded to Santa Lucia Pizza.

Receiving this year's esteemed Alex Fast Sr. Memorial Award was Gordon Daman of Red River Group.

Nominations for all the awards were received from the community at large and winners were determined by an independent panel prior to the event.

Guests of the dinner and gala were also treated to a panel discussion moderated by Chuck Davidson, president and CEO of the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce. In the hotseats this year were Chuck Allen of Earth and Hide, Sara Matwychuk of Talk to the Tail, and Graham Taylor of Lineage Distribution.

Why Niverville? That was just one of the questions Davidson posed to all three



Winners of the 2025 Business Excellence Awards.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

local business owners. While all had different reasons for opening their business in this community, each agreed that it was the right choice in the end.

Chamber president Elvin Krahn says that the annual awards night is important when it comes to focusing on local companies that not only meet but exceed customer expectations.

"Business can be hard and success in business is in part the result of that hard work," says Krahn. "As a Chamber, recognizing those milestones

and celebrating success and outstanding service or business models can inspire and motivate."

To further inspire local businesses to strive for high ideals, Krahn calls the panel discussions a way to focus on the innovations and creativity local businesspeople have explored.

"To celebrate those who work to compete in our markets and drive improvement for all, that's a win for the whole community," Krahn adds.

The Chamber serves as a

not-for-profit advocacy and support organization for businesses of Niverville and the surrounding area, providing resources, networking, and education opportunities all year-round. The board consists of ten local businesspeople who volunteer their time to Chamber commitments, as well as one paid executive director.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the Niverville Chamber of Commerce, visit:
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Siblings Continue to Push to Legislate Debbie's Law

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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A pair of Niverville siblings, Colleen Dyck and Daniel Fewster, have been making political headway in terms of enacting a new healthcare policy called Debbie's Law.

After their first press conference on March 12, Dyck and Fewster learned that Manitoba's Minister of Health, Uzoma Asagwara, had announced a healthcare directive heralding many of the tenets of the proposed Debbie's Law.

But the duo says this recent progress isn't enough.

"What we've understood is that a directive is great and it's no small thing, but it isn't party-proof," Dyck says. "You can have directives. But then the next party gets elected and they can do away with them."

So on Wednesday, April 23, the siblings met with the press once again in the hopes of encouraging the provincial government to go further.

Debbie's Law was developed by the siblings with help from a non-profit Canadian public policy think tank, SecondStreet.org. It's a response to the heartbreak they experienced last fall when they lost their mother Debbie to heart failure while she waited on a surgical wait list.

If legislated, Debbie's Law would compel health authorities to ensure that patients are informed when life-saving treatment cannot be provided in the medically recommended timeframe. Doctors and specialists would be required to advise alternatives, such as out-of-province treatment.

Fewster focuses on a couple of key points that are missing from the government's current directive.

First, he says, patients waiting for surgery should be given a journey map outlining each step of their care process so they can track gaps or delays in their treatment. This should include guidance on what to do and who to contact when this happens.

Second, the wording should provide clear direction on what is an appropriate wait time for different levels of health acuity.

"These additions would empower patients, reduce uncertainty, and ensure accountability within the system," Fewster says. "We believe

these changes are not just desirable but essential to improving patient outcomes."

Dyck shares that sentiment. "We understand why the current government would like to keep surgeries in Manitoba, particularly the life-saving ones, and understand with the stroke of a pen this won't be solved overnight," says Dyck. "But it is our sincere belief that legislating Debbie's Law is the very least that can be done for a patient's journey through a broken system."

According to Dyck, the healthcare system in Europe is vastly more effective than in Canada because most of the EU's healthcare policies are firmly legislated, making them difficult to dismantle.

The siblings have been invited to meet with administration of the St. Boniface Hospital, where their mother's surgery should have taken place.

"They are doing a full inquiry into what happened with Mom," says Dyck. "Something went wrong with her file and they [are investigating it]."

Last week, Dyck and Fewster also spoke personally with Asagwara.

"To her credit, I think she is trying to understand what happened [with our case]," Dyck says. "She was very curious, wanting to hear how we are doing and wanting to hear our story. We don't think she was trying to placate us, but she was not willing to move it to legislation."

DEBATING DEBBIE'S LAW

Thanks to individuals like Kathleen Cook, the Progressive Conservative healthcare critic, a bill legislating Debbie's Law has been submitted to the Legislature and seconded by Ron Schuler, MLA for Springfield-Ritchot.

Schuler agrees with Dyck that a directive doesn't have much power on its own. He likens it to a workplace situation where the boss makes a recommendation on workplace behaviour rather than clear written policy.

"A directive can often feel like it's just a political response," Schuler says. "But then there's no forms, no staff put to it, there's no money assigned to it. It's like, 'This is basically what we should do.' Whereas legislation says, 'This is what we must do.'"

He adds that a directive doesn't have the power to require the healthcare system to send patients out of province if they cannot provide

surgery in a timely manner.

On April 24, the bill was debated in the Legislature. After rigorous debate, it unanimously passed second reading.

From here, it is eligible to move to committee for ongoing debate. If the committee votes in favour of passing the law, it will move back to the Legislature for a third and final reading.

Unfortunately, Schuler says, a request made by Cook for the committee to prioritize the bill has been denied by the government.

"Now for the bad news," Schuler says. "The government doesn't ever have to call it to committee, [in which case] it dies. It's the government that now must send it to committee and that must give it third reading."

This is where the public can get involved, he adds, by lobbying the NDP government to see this bill through. Letters, emails, and phone calls to the premier's office all help.

"They track [these communications] in the premier's office and at some point in time they say, 'It's getting to be painful. We want to do it. Let's put it through third reading and pass it,'" says Schuler. "People getting engaged and lobbying their government officials has a huge impact."

If the bill gets to committee, Schuler says the public can get involved once again. During a committee session, the public is invited to register as delegates to speak in favour or against the bill.

For some bills, he says, hundreds of people make presentations. People can watch for advertisements in the news when a committee decides to entertain public delegations. They can also reach out to Schuler, Cook, or the clerk's office for information on how to register to speak.

Regarding Debbie's Law, Schuler stands behind the legislation.

"There was a big judicial case that happened years ago in which the judge said that justice delayed is justice denied," Schuler says. "I believe that belongs in healthcare as well. Healthcare delayed is healthcare denied."

As for whether the government should be responsible to send patients out of province if they can't guarantee timely care, he says that the governing Progressive Conservatives did just that while working

to clear the COVID-19 pandemic surgical backlog.

THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

Dyck and Fewster have attended a number of legislative question periods. It can be disheartening to sit in the audience, Dyck says, when they mostly witness political grandstanding between the parties. She describes the atmosphere as toxic, cold, and sometimes puerile.

"We're really pushing them to collaborate," Dyck says. "This is not a partisan issue. The world seems to be focussed on fear and divisiveness right now. Can you guys not lead the charge with something collaborative for the sake of everyone?"

But to Schuler, these legislative skirmishes are what make Canada's democratic process effective and even enviable.

"It makes for a strong democracy," Schuler says. "It's got to be a competitive and tough environment because if the government knows they have a tough, competitive opposition, they'll be very careful on what legislation they bring forward."

He provides the example of China, a country in which parliamentary debate simply doesn't happen. Similarly, he says, in the U.S., the president is rarely challenged.

"Our 'civil war' is in question period," says Schuler. "That's where we take each other on. We don't take each other on with knives and guns and that kind of stuff. We take each other on with passion and emotion and words, and we challenge each other. Our system produces very strong politicians."

WAITING FOR SURGERY

Niverville residents John and Liesa Funk are currently going through something eerily similar to what Debbie Fewster experienced last fall. John is on the wait list for a double bypass surgery.

Like Fewster, his initial visit to the doctor was followed by a rapid succession of diagnostic appointments.

After that, the entire medical process seemed to stall in its tracks.

It's now been three months since John met with his angiogram specialist and he's now dangerously close to the top-end date in which he was told his surgery should take place.

At this time, he has yet to be given

a surgery date.

His wife Liesa has been his medical advocate so far. Having worked as an EMS for 12 years, she's familiar with the severity of his condition and flaws in the medical system. She's on the phone regularly, trying to get answers.

"We've been told [by health staff] again and again, 'It's the system, not the doctors,'" says Liesa. "I said to the nurse, [Debbie] was my friend and my neighbour that passed away waiting for surgery. She's my age. Now my husband's in the same situation and I'd prefer if he didn't have to die, waiting."

The only definitive instruction they've been given so far is to head to the emergency department if John feels any symptoms, such as shortness of breath.

In recent weeks, they did just that. When they arrived at the hospital, he was triaged fairly quickly.

And then they waited.

"We sat there for just over 14 hours," Liesa says. "We [finally] saw a surgeon after 11:30 p.m. and it was only because we [got impatient]. That was very disheartening. John says, 'I'm not doing that again!'"

Since then, they have seen the surgeon who will eventually perform his surgery. Even so, Liesa says, the nurse warned them that summer vacation time is coming for surgical staff, seemingly as a way to warn them that their wait may be far from over.

Liesa has since been in contact with Ried Love, the director of cardiac sciences in Manitoba, and he agreed with her that patient communication needs improvement.

It was Love, though, who was the first to inform her that John's surgery was listed as elective.

"Elective?" Liesa asks. "We're not choosing to have this surgery. That's almost like a slap in the face. But he said, 'That's just how it's categorized.'"

Because of people like Debbie and John, and countless others waiting for life-saving surgery in Manitoba, Dyck and Fewster are not ready to give up the fight.

"There's a lot of other countries that are doing better than us," says Dyck. "I don't know how much we can make a ripple effect, but we just know we're going to give it the college try. We're going to keep showing up and keep pushing."



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Jewellers Lose Everything in Sophisticated Heist

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Somewhere in the wee hours of the morning on April 15, while the community of Niverville slept, a band of thieves carried out a sophisticated heist at 88 Carats Co. located at 290 Main Street.

Travis and Danielle Wiebe are the co-owners of 88 Carats. Their personal loss will be somewhere in the range of \$300,000. It was the first time in Travis's 26 years in the jewellery business that he's experienced anything like it.

"The timing was just not on our side on this one," Travis says. "We've been working on 30 or 40 wedding or engagement rings at any given time. Gold is at an all-time high right now. It's like \$4,500 per ounce. So when you have all this gold and everything is taken, it's just really bad!"

Missing, as well, is a collection of gold that was being readied to send away for refining.

Equally devastating is the loss of thousands of dollars in client jewellery that was in the studio for alteration or repair.

Danielle gets especially choked up when she thinks about those customers.

"The customers who will have the biggest loss are the ones who left sentimental things with us that can't be replaced," Danielle says. "Those have been the tough phone calls because your heart breaks for them."

The break-in occurred on the west-facing side of their second-floor studio, located just above Pizza Hut.

According to Travis, the thief or thieves will have scaled the side of the building using exterior venting ducts on which to brace themselves. They broke the upper storey window and climbed through.



Travis and Danielle Wiebe, owners of 88 Carats in Niverville.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

The couple's son was the first to arrive on Tuesday morning and witness the carnage. There was glass on the floor and every door and drawer had been opened and ransacked for goods.

Even the oven, where metal casting is done, had been opened and a hot flask removed. Since the oven runs at a temperature of 1,400 degrees, Travis says it's evident that the thief must have had some pretty significant gloves on.

Left behind were some telltale signs that the heist was a premeditated job carried out by one or more people who were familiar with the interior of the 88 Carats studio.

When the Wiebes arrived on Tuesday morning, they noticed that the thieves had turned the oven off—a task which isn't easily done unless, Travis says, a person is familiar with the machine.

The thieves didn't take everything. They left behind a display of jewellery that is gold-plated and of lower value than the missing goods, suggesting that they had some knowledge of

quality.

Somehow, strategically, the thieves also managed to avoid the interior video cameras, revealing the fact that they were familiar with their locations.

For the Wiebes, this narrows down the possibility of who the perpetrators could be.

This is because the Wiebes don't operate a traditional jewellery store. Every client who walks through their door to discuss custom jewellery does so by appointment only. The single door of their premises is always locked, opened only for customers as they come and go during their appointment times.

For this reason, the Wiebes were immediately suspicious that the thief had been a recent client, or posed as such, in order to stake out their premises.

Travis and Danielle have poured through hours and hours of video footage taken during their open hours as customers have come and gone. Not a single face that's come through their doors has gone unrecorded,

they say.

On Thursday, April 17, the couple posted a video to social media asking for the public's help in finding the perpetrators.

Within a short period of time, individuals were reaching out to them, suggesting that a certain man living in the region was likely behind the crime. The name is not unfamiliar to the Wiebes. He had, in fact, been in their studio in recent weeks.

But for all the sleuthing done in the immediate aftermath of the crime, Travis says it was mostly he and Danielle doing it.

Travis has been going around to local homes and businesses asking to see video surveillance footage.

"I've been phoning the RCMP detachment and leaving messages for the last two days and have had no calls back [yet]," says Travis. "I'm emailing and getting no response, so I don't know what's going on. I'm like, 'Guys, this is a huge hit, and a huge wakeup call for the community!'"

The Wiebes have now taken it one step further by offering a

\$50,000 reward for the recovery of their merchandise. If a portion is returned, they'll pay out a portion of that reward.

"The reward that we're offering is probably about the same or more than what the thieves would get on the street for the merchandise," Travis says. "The thief can reach out to us and, if they want to, we'll do a deal."

In the meantime, the couple has been working hard at beefing up their premises to prevent something like this from ever happening again.

They are a resilient couple and believe they will bounce back, whatever it takes. They've been through tough times before, not the least of which were the COVID-19 years that almost put them out of business. During that period, they took a quarter of a million-dollar hit in lost revenue.

As for the clients who lost merchandise in the robbery, Travis says he understands how scared or frustrated they must feel right now. He wants to assure them all that 88 Carats will take care of them. Everything will be replaced without additional cost to the customer.

"I've operated with integrity in this town for 26 years," Travis says. "I'm not going to stop now."

For clients whose weddings are just around the corner, it's been a matter of finding them temporary replacement rings until new ones can be crafted.

Danielle, who's been making most of the difficult calls, says that the customers have been incredibly supportive and understanding so far.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you have any information that might be helpful to the RCMP, contact them at 204-433-7908. Use the file #2025492983 when referencing this crime.

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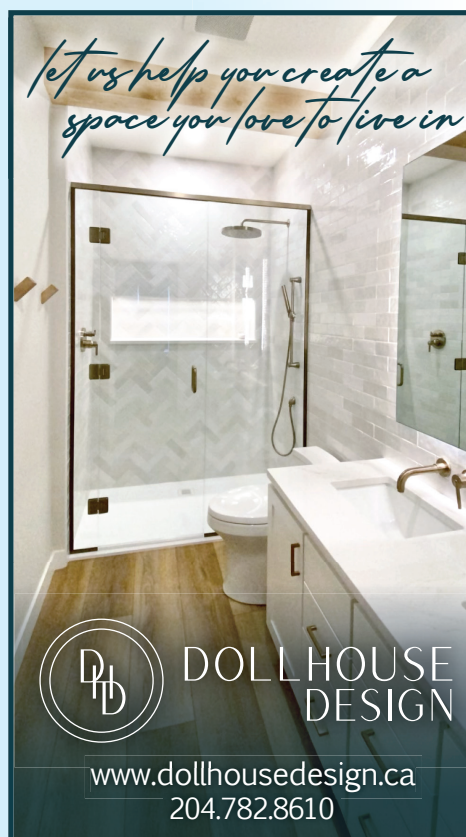
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Niverville Council Rolls Out Budget 2025

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

At their April 15 public meeting, Niverville's council voted unanimously in favour of accepting the 2025 budget as presented.

Since municipal taxation is based on home and business assessment rates, assessment years typically provide a little extra flexibility in terms of how much councils can work with.

According to CAO, Eric King, the value of Niverville's residences went up, on average, by 20 to 22 percent since the last provincial property assessment two years ago.

For the Niverville homeowner, that's good news, and it likely has something to do with the fact that the community, over the past 15 years, has become one of the most sought-after places to live in Manitoba.

But higher home assessments also mean higher taxes. King says, for a \$400,000 home, which is Niverville's median value this year, the municipal portion of the tax bill will go up by about four percent, or \$86.29.

Council says they shoot for a two- to four-percent increase every year.

Because of higher property assessment rates, this year's municipal mill rate was able to drop by two percent and

still achieve the four percent revenue increase council needs to keep up with services, amenities, and growth.

Some projects requiring funding are the expansion of the medical clinic, administration costs for the upcoming RCMP detachment, the detailed designs of Highway 311 west, as well as the new fire hall, expanded recreational programming, and a splash pad system upgrade.

The waste collection levy

would like it to get. Most of that debt is due to the municipality's investment into the CRRC when it was first built.

According to Mayor Dyck, there's another strategy helping to keep taxes low for residents, and it's accomplished by maintaining healthy growth in both the commercial sector and multi-family housing.

Indeed, he says, it's not because of single family homes that we have most of the amenities we do.

To give an example, Dyck asks residents to consider the cost of clearing snow from 100 feet of road.

When you have just two individual homes on that stretch of road, this service must be carried by just two taxpayers.

But if an apartment block with 200 doors lies along that stretch, there are significantly more taxpayers amongst which to spread out the cost of that service.

According to King, budget creation is one of the more difficult jobs with which a council is tasked.

"There's no such thing as an easy budget," King says. "You're always trying to do as much as humanly possible with as little money as possible. There's always things we'd like to do more of, but at the end of the day you also don't want to shock your ratepayers."

"You're always trying to do as much as humanly possible with as little money as possible. There's always things we'd like to do more of, but at the end of the day you also don't want to shock your ratepayers."

Eric King | CAO, Town of Niverville

will be subject to an increase on the property tax bill. This year, residents can expect to pay \$150 per household, up by about \$10.

As for the community's debt load, Mayor Myron Dyck is proud to say that it is quite low in comparison with many other municipalities and cities across the country.

Based on Niverville's property assessment totals, Niverville has the ability to borrow up to \$25 million in order to fund projects if needed.

Currently, the town carries debt of about \$3 million, which is about as high as council

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Hotel Plans Not Dead, Delay Explained

By Brenda Sawatzky

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It's been exactly four years since the Blue Crescent Hotel was announced for Niverville and two years since the sod-turning ceremony took place.

But all these years later, the only evidence that it's still coming is a fading sign in front of the vacant property along Drovers Run.

Having been silent for most of the past few years, Trevor Rempel of Steel Creek Developers, the Manitoba company behind the hotel chain, is ready to speak.

Part of his silence, Rempel says, has been due to the fact that he began to feel like the boy who cried wolf. Too often, assurances of start dates have been thrown out only for the project to be delayed for reasons beyond his control.

Admittedly, he's as frustrated as anyone.

He's also gotten a little gun shy in terms of offering new updates. But one assurance he can confidently provide is that the project is anything but dead.

In order to understand the delay, he says, people need to take into account the details that set the Niverville build apart from every other Blue Crescent hotel Rempel's company has built.

Niverville's hotel is expected to be much grander than the chain's other 30-room hotels. At last presentation, the Niverville hotel would provide more than double that space, with 74 rooms, and include a unique water park feature.

However, raising enough funds for such a grand project through local investors is a mighty challenge.

"[As] we were talking about Niverville's hotel, our other [hotels] had gotten the attention of this group from the U.S. and they were like, 'Hey, we want to partner with you guys to do larger projects,'" Rempel



Conceptual drawings of the Blue Crescent Hotel planned for Niverville.

STEEL CREEK DEVELOPERS

says. "Well, we probably have a list of about half a dozen projects across western Canada that we want to do, but we can't raise that [amount of] money locally. It would take forever."

But this group had the deeper pockets to do that.

By partnering with them, Niverville was set to be Steel Creek's first major hotel build. The plans also increased in scope.

"The aquatic portion of it expanded with this U.S. group," says Rempel. "They're like, 'We'll put more money into it [because] we want the pool area to be really nice and attractive to basically try and intercept that business that goes down to Grand Forks for the weekend.'"

Of course, as Steel Creek kept their U.S. partners abreast about the new movie studio coming to town, plans kicked up another notch to ensure a premium experience.

Despite the U.S. partnership, Steel Creek was still responsible to raise 20 percent of the funds through local investors.

As part of the agreement, the Americans would supply all the building materials for the Niverville hotel, including lightweight concrete precast panels for a modular foundational construction.

This hotel would have been their flagship project.

Unfortunately, they had yet to build the manufacturing plants in which these precast panels would be built.

"Raising the money [to build] these plants takes time as well, so I think that's where a lot of the delay came in," Rempel says. "But now I believe they've agreed to use traditional construction just so that we can get Niverville going."

With all the time that's passed,

though, there is some concern now that Steel Creek's local investors have lost faith.

"Unfortunately, I'm caught in a bit of a middle position here," says Rempel. "All of our local shareholders were from our rolodex, so these are relationships that we had. And we're also the local face of the project... so it's a tough situation to be in."

As a matter of fact, Rempel admits that a ripple of doubt in his company's ability to carry out such a project has caused investors from other communities to decline investment. Such is the case with a Steinbach hotel proposed by Steel Creek that won't get off the ground.

One has to wonder why Rempel and Steel Creek don't just cut ties with the Americans and move forward on their own.

"Part of the problem is the amount of money we'd have to raise on top

of what we've raised already," he says. "It would take quite a while. Secondly, the land is already owned by the numbered corporation of which the U.S. group is the majority shareholder. So they would have to give up the land."

Despite all of these delays and frustrations, Rempel hasn't lost sight of the goal, nor has he lost hope in his American counterparts. He's confident that these partners are ready to move forward using traditional building materials.

"At least at this point, they've kind of heeded our pleas when we said, 'Listen, we've got to get this project off the ground even if it means building it with standard precast or wood construction.'"

Of course, the fact that the CRRC and movie studio are now completed has been a bargaining chip for Rempel as he negotiates with the American company.

Another bit of hope for Rempel is the fact that the Americans have recently partnered with a big investor of their own, giving them even more potential than before.

It's not lost on Rempel that another hotelier could choose to come along at any time and fill the void in Niverville.

"Everything that's happening in Niverville just solidifies how good of a business this is going to be. The town may end up with two hotels in the future, but we're confident in our product. Our split-room design is really popular. It's different than most hotels."

In the meantime, Rempel asks the community to continue to be patient and not lose faith that the Blue Crescent Hotel will be putting shovel to ground in the not-too-distant future.

"Our engines are running," says Rempel. "We're sitting here with our foot on the brake. As soon as they raise that flag and let us loose, we're off to the races."

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IN BRIEF

First Tornado of 2025 Touches Down Near Niverville

By Evan Braun

✉ editor@nivervillecitizen.com

Spring is here! The clearest evidence of this, of course, is the higher temperatures, the extended daylight hours, and the first signs of leaves on trees.

A less welcome bit of evidence? Tornado warnings.

Manitoba's first recorded tornado of 2025 touched down around 5:00 p.m. on May 1, and it did so in our proverbial backyard, hitting a farmer's field approximately eight kilometres southeast of Niverville.

This was an extremely weak tornado, classified as EF-0 on the Fujita scale. That classification pegs the estimated wind speed at about 90 kilometres per hour.

The tornado didn't travel very far, nor did it cause any appreciable damage, although it was visible enough for several people to report its presence.

Most people are primed to expect tornados during big storms, but there were no storms on this relatively clear day. Nonetheless, according to Environment Canada, the tornado likely formed from a low pressure system and cold front, both of which would have been enough to start the necessary vertical motion.

This may have been Manitoba's first tornado of the year, but the first in Canada was recorded in Alberta several weeks ago. On April 12, a similarly small funnel cloud touched the ground north of Rolling Hills. The Northern Tornado Project, based out of London, Ontario, is also investigating reports of tornado activity in Quebec on April 29.



Joey Villanueva and Evan Braun with their new plug-in hybrid.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

Provincial Funding for EV Charging Stations to Benefit Local Drivers

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Earlier this month, the provincial government announced \$500,000 of new funding to support the growth of electric vehicle (EV) charging station infrastructure across Manitoba.

In total, this will subsidize the installation of 51 EV chargers. Of these, 21 are designated for the cities of Brandon, Morden, Steinbach, Portage la Prairie, and Winnipeg.

The rest of the EV chargers are designated for rural communities, including two Indigenous, as well as many for the RM of Ritchot.

"Our government is committed to taking real action to fight climate change and the transition to electric vehicles will help drive down emissions," says Mike Moyes, Minister of the Environment and Climate Change. "As more Manitobans look to make the switch to electric vehicles, there is a growing need to ensure reliable charging infrastructure in strategic locations."

This year's wave of funding will have an outsized impact on Ritchot, with almost half of the new EV chargers designated for

this municipality. The locations of Ritchot's 23 new local charging stations have yet to be determined.

Most of these local chargers will qualify as Level 2 while three will be fast Level 2. The total provincial investment of Ritchot chargers exceeds \$140,000.

Twelve Level 2 charges destined for Winnipeg and Portage la Prairie will be located in multifamily developments.

Evan Braun of Niverville is the owner of a Kia Niro plug-in hybrid. While he and his husband would like to own a full EV one day, at this point their long daily work commute and lack of charging infrastructure at home inhibits that choice.

Their plug-in hybrid serves as a good compromise, giving them approximately 55 to 60 kilometres of EV driving per daily charge before switching to the car's internal combustion engine.

"We could get to work and back with a full EV, with some room to spare, but some days we might cut it close, especially on those occasions when we need to do two runs to Winnipeg on the same day," says Braun. "The main problem is that we live in an apartment condo and don't have a garage where we can

install a Level 2 home charger. If you're going to operate a full EV, it just makes sense to rely on a home charger since the public charging infrastructure isn't yet where it needs to be."

The plug-in battery on his hybrid model is small compared to full EVs, he says, allowing him to charge the car overnight through a standard 120-volt plug.

Since EV chargers aren't available at his condo community, he is able to use the parking lot plugs that most residents use to power their vehicles' block heaters during the winter.

"On the day we brought our new car home, we discovered that the plug wouldn't work," Braun says. "Like many parking lots, it turns out that our plugs have a voltage limiter that prevents them from drawing a charge for anything more significant than a block heater. We had to go to the condo board and request that our limiter be removed and replaced with a standard 120V outlet. Our board was incredibly accommodating and switched it over within a couple of weeks. Now everything is working perfectly and we're getting the most out of our car. Hopefully, this will make it easier for other

residents in our condo community to make similar purchases in the future."

Braun is pleased, too, that the provincial government is recognizing the need to subsidize and incentivize EV charging stations at multifamily developments.

"As far as multifamily goes, I think it will be important for all levels of government to come up with programs custom-designed to encourage existing condo corporations to upgrade their infrastructure," he says. "There are hundreds of condo corps in Manitoba that will need assistance making this transition."

One of the best perks of owning his plug-in hybrid so far, Braun says, is that so many destinations now have dedicated charging stations, especially in Winnipeg. Whether going to the mall, the movie theatre, downtown parkades, or provincial parks, he often finds reserved parking and charging for EV drivers.

"The more of these that get installed, the easier my life becomes," he concludes. "And hopefully it helps incentivize more people to buy these fantastic vehicles, wherever the new chargers end up being installed."

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IN BRIEF

RCMP Detachment Delayed by Hiring Protocols

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Despite the fact that renovations for the Niverville RCMP detachment are now complete, Media Relations Officer Corporal Melanie Roussel says the office is still months away from opening.

"The Niverville detachment will have one corporal and three constables," Roussel says. "These positions have already been staffed."

But there is still one administrative position, a termed public service staffer, that has yet to be filled.

"A public service employee is hired by the RCMP, so it is a federal government position," Roussel says. "Therefore, the process can take some time as they need to select a candidate from a large bank of candidates. Once candidates have been identified, they have to be interviewed. The selected candidate needs to have a background check and proper training completed prior to the opening of the front counter at the Niverville detachment. This can take months to complete."

Even with the delay, the Town of Niverville has been paying significantly higher policing fees since April 2023. At that time, the cost of RCMP services jumped from \$200,000 annually to \$650,000.

This increase was not a direct result of having a local detachment. It was the result of Niverville hitting the 5,000-resident benchmark, which the town was shown to have exceeded at the time of the 2021 census.

The addition of a local police detachment was the result of a proactive municipal council that believed, if the town was paying the extra money anyway, they may as well benefit from a local office with officers onsite.

Regardless of whether the new hires are stationed in Niverville or St. Pierre-Jolys, the hope is that Niverville and the surrounding area may already be benefitting from some added police patrolling when they are not called elsewhere in the jurisdiction.

Ritchot Presents 2025 Financial Plan

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

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Three months into the new year, Ritchot's municipal council gave third and final reading to their 2025 financial plan, effectively giving it life.

The creation of the financial plan begins in January with presentations from each of the various RM departments about their needs for the coming year.

Over the ensuing weeks, council proceeds to deliberate with the CAO and CFO, eventually leading to a formalized plan which is presented for public scrutiny before its final acceptance.

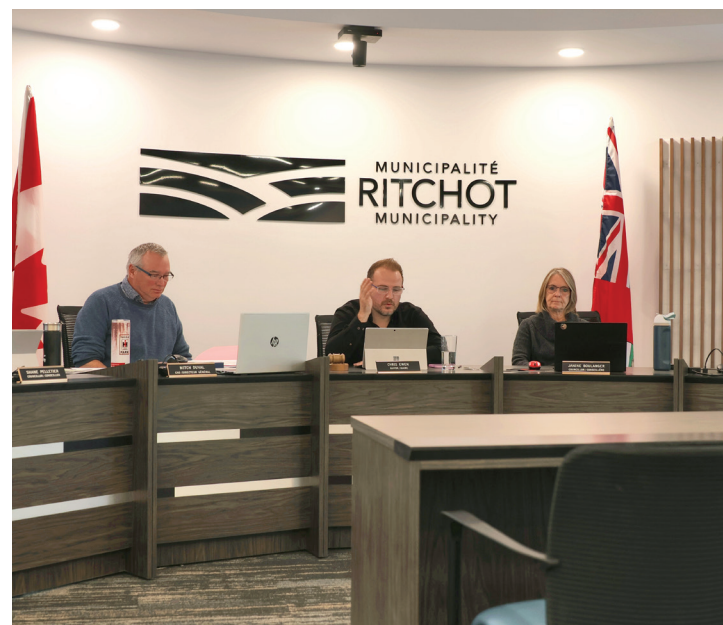
On Wednesday, April 2, in council chambers, the plan went public. Residents were invited to attend in person or via remote participation.

"Administration uses council approved services, strategic direction, and priorities as the foundation on which to build the annual operating and capital budgets," says Muhammad Zaman, Ritchot's chief financial officer. "Administration established the budget with a strong understanding of its impact on future years and the ability to fund those impacts."

As of the 2021 census, the Ritchot's overall population sits at 7,469, representing just under 2,800 dwellings.

Since 2025 was a provincial property reassessment year, administration took into account the total assessment values in the region in order to determine the municipal mill rate for the next year.

Based on that assessment, Zaman says that the value of Ritchot's properties has collectively increased by 25 percent since the last assessment year in 2023. This equates to an increase of about



CAO Mitch Duval, Mayor Chris Ewen, and Janine Boulanger.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

\$177 million in assessment values.

In order to determine whether a municipal mill rate should go up, down, or stay the same, administration divides the financial needs of the municipality for the coming year by the total portioned assessment values of the region.

In 2025, Ritchot's municipal mill rate will stay the same as last year at 7.950 percent, while providing greater flexibility in terms of spending thanks to the new assessment.

"The proposed 2025 municipal operating revenue is \$17.81 million with no increase to the mill rate," Zaman says.

Forty-three percent of that revenue comes from municipal taxation, he adds, while the balance is derived from financial reserves and other revenue sources.

Other revenue sources include sales of permits and municipal services, development fees, and government grants.

In terms of municipal operating

expenditures, one area that will see a significant increase in budget this year, up by almost 40 percent, is protective services. This category includes fire services and law enforcement.

"[This] is due to a budget for a new building inspector for commercial properties, the proposed hiring of a community services officer, and an animal control officer."

Likewise, the budget for economic development services is up by 37 percent.

"Economic development is a top priority for municipal leaders," Zaman says. "[It includes] the process of encouraging business development to boost the local economy by offering tax incentives to motivate and encourage businesses to relocate to the community, resulting in more job opportunities."

The department of public works is anticipated to be funded by an additional eight percent, and

environmental health services, consisting primarily of waste collection, is up by almost the same amount.

Recreation and cultural services will receive a 10 percent bump which, according to Zaman, is mainly allocated to operating and life-cycle funding for community recreational facilities.

Next on the budget is debenture debt, for which \$3 million is being set aside.

"A debenture is a type of business loan and most common form of long-term debt," Zaman explains. "Municipalities often issue debentures to raise money for... funding capital projects."

Two current debentures on Ritchot's books include the Ste. Agathe fire hall and Île-des-Chênes's community centre. These are set to expire in 2032 and 2038 respectively.

Another \$7.2 million has been allocated to capital projects in this year's budget. These include municipal office expansion costs and incubation space equipment, daycare fencing, and the building's façade.

Almost \$92,000 of that will enhance the equipment needed by protective services, with another \$707,000 designated for public works transportation, equipment, and machinery.

Capital projects for the coming year include the construction of a new landfill site, pole shed upgrades, land drainage initiatives in The Grande neighbourhood, as well as street reconstruction of Lagasse Drive and Lagasse Bay North.

A budget of \$265,000 will invest in upgrades to parks.

At the end of the day, based on Zaman's calculations, the RM should find itself with a closing operating reserve of more than \$6.8 million.

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Sports & Recreation

Raising the Bar: The Nighthawks Elevated Their Game in Year Three

By Ty Dilello

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In their third season as a franchise, the Niverville Nighthawks put up their strongest showing by far. Despite losing once again in the first round of the playoffs, they were consistently able to push their opponents further and harder than in either of the previous two years.

The Nighthawks made numerous strides and the future looks bright for the best show in town.

The season began with a bit of a slow burn, with the club posting a losing record in the month of October.

But the team's play picked up substantially in November. The Nighthawks had a 7-3 record over the course of the month and found themselves regularly scoring more than four goals per game.

All this offence came from the likes of Adam Vigfusson, Merik Boles, Matteo Speranza, Avery Laliberte, Sean Williams, and Dawson Zeller. Other key players, such as Hayden Wheddon, Aiden Corbett, Carter Spirig, Alex Ballard, and Bryce War-kentine, put up solid performances night in and night out to shut down their opponents' top lines.

The team experienced something of a seismic shift at midseason when star goaltender Raiden LeGall left the team before Christmas to join the Everett Silvertips of the WHL.

Austin Dubinsky stepped into that role and ran with it. The 19-year-old netminder from Alberta accumulated a 22-11-1 record with a 2.53 goals-against average and a .925 save percentage.

The Nighthawks continued their strong play for the rest of the season, notching better than .500 records in December, January, February, and March.

The community showed up to



YOUR_PICTURES_HERE

celebrate their home team in a big way on January 25, descending on the Heritage Centre for the Casino-Royale-themes Nighthawks annual fundraising gala.

Mike McAulay, the team's general manager, regaled the audience with the Nighthawks' brief but illustrious accomplishments over the past three years.

"In our early existence, we've had three Division 1 college commitments and have had three players go through Niverville and commit to a Division 1 school while playing with another team," McAulay said to the assembled guests. "This season marks the first Niverville Nighthawk to play Division 1 college hockey, with Carson Reed playing for the University of Alaska Fairbanks. We've also had two players move on to the WHL and one player reach the USHL. Thirteen of the 15 players that have aged out of our program are currently playing hockey at the next level, be it NCAA Division 3, ACHA club hockey, or USports."

Additionally, he added, two of Niverville's players have represented their home nations at the World Junior A Championships. One has participated in an NHL development camp and two players made

an appearance on an NHL central scouting list.

"Acquiring, scouting, and developing Manitoba talent is a priority for us," McAulay concluded. "We currently have 12 Manitoba players rostered with the Nighthawks. Now remember, when we came into the league we weren't granted an expansion draft and 12 teams had 50 player-protected lists. Six hundred hockey players were spoken for. For context and comparison, the other playoff teams in our division have an average of six and a half Manitoba players on their roster."

When the regular season ended, the Nighthawks had finished in fourth place in the MJHL's East Division for the third season in a row. But they achieved their best season record of 35-20-3. In this campaign, they eclipsed their 30-win total from the season prior.

Vigfusson led the team in scoring with 62 points in 46 games, while Boles put up 55 points in 57 games.

In the first round of the playoffs, the Nighthawks met up with the top-seeded Winkler Flyers. On paper, many might have expected Winkler to dominate, but the Nighthawks hung in game after game and gave the Flyers all they could handle.

After four games, this back-and-forth series was knotted at two games apiece.

Although Winkler eventually prevailed in six games, the Nighthawks left with their heads held high for having had such a great run.

"I was very proud of our group," said Nighthawks head coach Dwight Hirst. "We lost in six games, but all four losses were by one goal. They could have gone either way. A big credit to the Winkler Flyers, as they're arguably the best team in the league and were ranked top 10 in Canada all season. It was the little details and habits that was the difference in the series, so I'm proud of how our group played and handled themselves."

This was also Hirst's first full season as head coach. He feels his group made a lot of big improvements as a team and organization that will continue to serve them in years to come.

"Each year this team gets better and better, and we took some big leaps and bounds," said Hirst. "I wanted us to have an identity and be resilient. And this was a very resilient group of young men that I coached this year."

Hirst pointed to three areas that wanted his club to improve on this season: accountability,

communication, and empathy. He feels they accomplished this with flying colours.

"We took steps in these three key areas, as they're three things that I stand for," he said. "The passion we showed on the ice moved the needle and helped us have lots of success. Fans can see there's a lot of passion in the way that we play. And it showed in how they played. They became great hockey players and gave us a chance to win every night."

Clarence Braun, president of the board of directors, is equally proud of the Nighthawks for their wonderful 2024-25 season.

"Your unwavering support and enthusiasm creates a vibrant atmosphere at the rink, and we are grateful for your passion for the game," said Braun to the organization at season's end. "Your unwavering support and love for the team make our community stronger and we couldn't be more proud to represent Niverville. To our community, we make the Niverville Nighthawks something truly special. Thank you for making this season a memorable one. We look forward to building on this success and creating more opportunities for our players and our community. We look forward to the 2025-26 season and what's to come."

As one of the best young teams in the Manitoba Junior Hockey League, the future is very bright in Niverville.

Just making the playoffs is one thing, but it's not the main goal of the team. The Nighthawks are building an organization that intends to challenge the very best in the league and one day bring home a Turnbull Cup.

"We raised the bar this season and we're going to do the same next year," said Hirst. "We're going to keep raising the bar and the standard for Nighthawks hockey. It's going to be an exciting future."



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Pair of Niverville Panthers Hockey Players Recognized for Strong Season

By Ty Dilello

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Haven Wiebe and Cassius Walker from the Niverville Panthers high school hockey team recently earned some league-wide recognition for their fantastic play this season in the Winnipeg High School Hockey League (WHSHL).

Cassius Walker was selected as a Second Team All-Star at the banquet. He is viewed as one of the top 10 players in his division. During the regular season, he ranked seventh in scoring with 26 goals and 30 assists. He used his speed and hockey sense to lead the division in short-handed goals, with four.

During the Panthers' playoff run, he scored 10 goals and one assist in five games, ranking him ninth in the division in scoring.

Wiebe's teammates voted him to receive the \$500 Travis Price Hockey Spirit Scholarship Award, feeling that he embodied the following qualities: a hard-working member of the team



Cassius Walker.



Haven Wiebe.

who spreads joy and loves life; a leader who works hard, plays hard, and has a healthy balance between

work and play; someone who's honest, of good character, enjoys learning new things, is a friend to all, and is

a bonding agent for the team; and someone who encourages and assists teammates to get along with each

other rather than focus on differences and conflict.

During the regular season, Wiebe put up 23 goals and 22 assists for 45 points. He also led the Panthers with four power play goals.

An injury kept Wiebe out of the playoffs and his presence was certainly missed by his team.

Walker and Wiebe each scored a goal and an assist while subbing in for the Junior C Niverville Clippers during the regular season against the Landmark Blues. They shared Player of the Game honours and received pucks to celebrate their first HTJHL goals.

The pair also represented the Panthers at the WHSHL all-star game in March. They played on a line together and scored a goal apiece, helping their team to a 6-5 win.

"Cassius and Haven were both very important players for our team this year," says Niverville Panthers head coach Brandon Lockerby. "They are both strong team players and were leaders for us all season."



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Back: Carl Fast, Heather Fast, Carly Friesen, Sage Wiebe, Bella Peters, Abby Voth, Kiersten Reimer, Kyla Zacharias, and Dylan Zacharias.
Front: Abbie Parker, Willow Murray, Halle Smith, Mady Friesen, Olivia Unrau, and Tanya Gauthier.

BOTW

Junior Pilots U17 Navy Team Clinches Bronze at Best of the West

By Ty Dilello

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The U17 Junior Pilots recently returned home after competing in Calgary at the annual Best of the West (BOTW) championship, a prestigious three-day event that invites the top 12 Canadian club teams from British Columbia to Quebec.

This year's tournament took place from March 28–30. At the competition, the Junior Pilots took home a bronze medal, placing them in third spot overall.

It was the best finish for the Providence Junior Pilots program.

The team, led by head coach Kyla Zacharias and assisted by Dylan Zacharias, along with Carl and Heather Fast, showcased their resilience and skill.

The Junior Pilots played five round robin games over the first two days, finishing with a 3–2 record, good enough to qualify them for the playoffs.

At the end of the second day, they played in the quarter-finals against the Ducks U17 Elite out of B.C. in a thrilling three-set match. After a strong serving run early in the third set, the Junior Pilots emerged victorious.

However, the next morning, their journey to the finals was

halted by the Huskies from Saskatchewan, who defeated them in straight sets.

Undeterred by the loss, the team rallied and delivered their best performance of the weekend in the bronze medal match against the Smash Raiders. The Junior Pilots dominated, winning in straight sets with scores of 25–23 and 25–12.

Bella Peters was recognized as a tournament all-star for her outstanding performance.

"We as coaches are so proud of what these girls have been able to accomplish this weekend and look forward to bringing this level of competition back to Manitoba," says

Kyla Zacharias.

Following this significant achievement, the Junior Pilots Navy team returned to the court the very next week in Manitoba to defend their Volleyball Manitoba Provincial Championship title.

"The team's impressive performance at the Best of the West tournament is a testament to their hard work and team work on and off the court," adds Zacharias.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about this year's Best of the West championships, visit: www.dinosvolleyball.com/best-of-the-west

IN BRIEF



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Nighthawks Season Ends in First Round Series Loss

By Ty Dilello

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The Niverville Nighthawks season ended after a 3–2 loss in game six to the Winkler Flyers at home on Monday night.

The top-seeded Flyers were once again the better team for much of the night and outshot the Nighthawks by a 39–22 margin, a margin which had become somewhat typical of previous games in the series.

It was also a game in which the Nighthawks led with strong, quick play—and then fell apart at the halfway point.

Dawson Zeller got Niverville on the board just five minutes into the contest to make it 2–0 for the Nighthawks early.

Early in the second period, Evan Panzer scored to make it 2–0 for the Nighthawks early.

But near the end of the second period, Winkler began to outpace Niverville. A pair of late second period markers tied up the contest.

The Flyers went up early in the third period, scoring on the power play with 14 minutes remaining in regulation. Niverville fought hard but struggled to mount the necessary offence, despite some good opportunities with the goalie pulled in the dying minutes.

Niverville's Austin Dubinsky stopped 36 shots in goal in the loss.

"I'm very proud of this team for fighting hard all series long against a very good hockey club in Winkler," says Nighthawks head coach Dwight Hirst. "We took some penalties early in the third period that cost us tonight and that's the way it went. It was a fantastic season and we hope to be back even stronger for next year."

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Arts & Culture

Niverville High School Raise Curtain on *Matilda*

By Brenda Sawatzky

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About months of preparation, the drama team at Niverville High School was proud to raise the curtain on this year's musical production of *Matilda* by Roald Dahl.

Three performances took place at the school on April 30, May 1, and May 2 under the guidance of Janelle Malech, the school's drama instructor.

Matilda tells the story of a young girl who struggles against abuses dealt to her by loveless parents and a tyrannical headmistress. She finds refuge in books and companionship in a loving teacher.

Through it all, the character of Matilda Wormwood discovers that she has some remarkable powers which end up not only changing her own life but the lives of others in her life too.

The Citizen had the opportunity to interview three students involved in the production: Ruolin Zhang, age 15; Samantha Taylor, age 17; and Nicholas Pritchard, age 17.

While Zhang previously performed in *The Wizard of Oz*, this time around she found her place behind the scenes as the stage manager.

It's a hectic job, she says, ensuring that the props and actors are where they need to be at all times and making sure the dancers remember their choreography.

Taylor and Pritchard, too, have enjoyed the spotlight in previous performances, including in *High School Musical* and a drama club murder mystery.

Pritchard's role was that of Mr.



Back: Janelle Malech and Nicholas Pritchard. Front: Ruolin Zhang and Samantha Taylor.

✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

Wormwood, Matilda's father, and one of the story's most detestable antagonists.

Taylor was cast as Miss Honey, Matilda's timid yet compassionate teacher. She says there's something pretty special about taking on fictitious characters on stage.

"You get to pretend that you're someone else," says Taylor. "It's exciting. Just to try to move the audience is probably a main goal

for me. It's such a unique feeling."

Taylor admits that she put special emphasis on portraying her character's unique qualities on stage.

"My character, Miss Honey, is really awkward," says Taylor. "So I'll fiddle with my fingers or maybe I'll walk around [nervously]."

She also had a number of singing solos in this production.

"Sammy has the voice of an

angel," Zhang says. "She is such a gorgeous singer."

Like Taylor, Pritchard says that there is nothing quite like getting into character before a show.

"I really like making people laugh," he says. "That's the biggest thing. But once I get up on that stage, I feel a little wider in the shoulders, a little clenched in the fists, and a little cruel. And then I step off the stage and say, 'Wow,

how did I do that?'"

Despite his mean and ruthless ways, the character of Mr. Wormwood generated plenty of laughs.

Of course, there was also a lot of dramatic tension.

"I think Matilda's life story is the most upsetting thing," says Taylor. "Her parents are cruel and call her names. It's sad, especially watching that on stage."

But Zhang says there's an underlying message that makes this particular show both inspiring and heartwarming.

"All children should be treated with love, respect and kindness," Zhang says. "I feel like that's the main message."

For some time before curtain call, the cast and crew had been rehearsing every Wednesday over their lunch hour. As opening day approached, rehearsals crept into their after-school hours.

"Within the last month it took all my spare time, meeting up with friends, going over lines and dances," Taylor says.

Their dedication to the craft was partially inspired by their appreciation for some of the greatest actors of all time. For Pritchard and Taylor, the actor they most admire is Robin Williams.

"I was really inspired by his movies and how he could draw emotion from his audience," Taylor says.

"He's really, really funny but then he plays these roles that also pull at your heartstrings," Pritchard adds. "To be able to do that is amazing."

They also benefitted from a shot of inspiration much closer to home, from the careful guidance of Ms. Malech.

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