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LOCAL NEWS

Niverville Fire & EMS Reflects on Busy 2025

■ The previous year was the busiest on record for the town's emergency responders, and 2026 is on pace for more of the same.

Details on Pages 4-5



LOCAL NEWS

Ritchot Talks Housing Proposals

■ Last month, council heard competing proposals, each very different, to bring a new development of affordable housing to a parcel of RM-owned land in Ste. Agathe. A decision will be made in the coming weeks.

Details on Page 8

LOCAL NEWS

AI Data Centre Proposal Raises Major Concern

■ Our January poll question generated a record surge of interest. Read the many comments from cautious local readers.

Details on Page 17

SPORTS & REC

Speedskaters Win Big

■ A group of young speedskaters from our region came home from nationals in Quebec City last month with an impressive number of medals.

Details on Page 22

Nearly a Century of Curling Comes to a Close in Niverville

» READ MORE ON PAGES 15-16

BRENDA SAWATZKY

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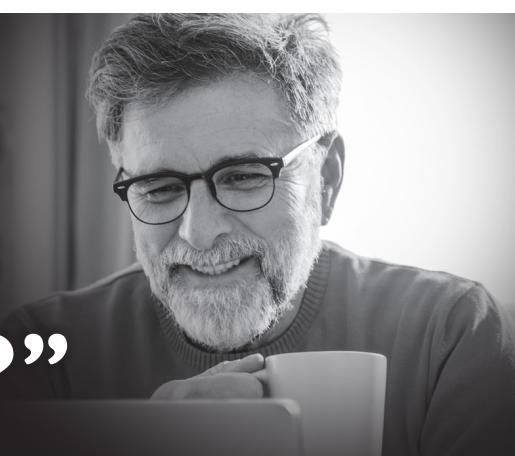


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The Citizen

Box 266, Niverville, MB ROA 1E0
www.nivervillecitizen.com

Managing Editor:
Evan Braun

Sales Manager:
Ray Dowse

Operations Manager:
Cara Dowse

Design/Production Manager:
Dustin Krahm

Contributors:
Evan Braun, Brenda Sawatzky,
Holly Dunphy, Bill Burfoot

CONTACT US

Letters to the Editor:
editor@nivervillecitizen.com

Advertising Sales:
sales@nivervillecitizen.com

Classifieds/General Information:
info@nivervillecitizen.com

Artwork/Ad Proofs/Graphics:
ads@nivervillecitizen.com

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Deputy mayor Nathan Dueck and CAO Eric King.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

Niverville's Deputy Mayor Says Stars Seem to Be Aligning in 2026

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Niverville's council kicked off the new year with its first council meeting on January 6. With Mayor Myron Dyck absent, Councillor Nathan Dueck officiated in his new role as deputy mayor.

"We have an extremely exciting year [going into] 2026," Dueck said. "There's probably going to be a lot of new projects started and a lot of new builds. I think there's a lot of stars that are aligning."

Whether a French school for Niverville is one of those stars, Dueck would not speculate. At this meeting, though, council passed conditional use permits for the Division scolaire franco-manitobaine (DSFM) to use two spacious facilities in the Niverville Business Park for the purpose of storing school equipment, furniture, and supplies.

One subject council could talk

about was the the future expansion of Niverville's fire department and public works building.

According to Dueck, this was a topic of much discussion at the last budget planning sessions.

The design process for the dual-purpose building is already underway. It won't be until council sits down to prepare the new budget that it becomes clear when shovels will hit the ground.

The new building will be constructed on the existing site, just west of the civic office.

"Some [parts of the existing structure] is coming down and some things are going up," said CAO Eric King. "Ideally we'll have the [public works] shop done by fall and then the old building gets torn down and the fire hall goes up. It's a highly timed thing and the fire hall will operate out of the shop [for a while]."

Another topic of optimism revolved around local medical services.

Specifically, Dueck says that the renovated space at Open Health Niverville is almost ready for use.

"We have a line on, I believe, two doctors right now that we're looking on placing this year," said Dueck. "We've set some targets that we'd like to see two to four added this year."

As of now, Open Health has about 13 doctors, some on a part-time basis while others are full-time.

The clinic board is also looking at the feasibility of expanding office hours into the evenings and weekends in order to provide care for more clients.

Also in the design phase are plans for Highway 311 renewal west of the railway tracks.

In light of a recent three-car accident along that stretch, many residents feel like it can't happen fast enough.

King says that he anticipates an announcement to come from the province in the coming weeks.



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2025 Busiest Year on Record for Niverville Fire and EMS

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

According to Keith Bueckert, chief of Niverville Fire and EMS, 2025 was by far their busiest year on record. In all, the team responded to 347 calls. That's up by about 20 percent from the year before.

Of these callouts, 258 were medical calls, outnumbering the 89 fire calls by a wide margin.

When you consider that the team of 40 paid on-call volunteers serve only the Town of Niverville, it means that about five percent of the community's households sent out calls for fire-related concerns.

As well, almost four percent of local residents needed some kind of immediate medical intervention last year.

If the trend continues, 2026 will result in similar numbers. Niverville Fire and EMS has already responded to 21 calls in the first two weeks of January.

As far as fires are concerned, Bueckert says there were no situations of homes being engulfed in flames last year.

The calls they did respond to were investigations of carbon monoxide detector alarms going off or a neighbour witnessing unidentified smoke.

The crew also dealt with small structure fires, kitchen fires, and vehicle fires.

"We were very lucky that we didn't have anything serious fire-wise," Bueckert says. "We had a bunch of small fires, but there was nothing with huge losses. That's



NIVERVILLE FIRE AND EMS

really encouraging for a community of our size."

In part, he says, this could be attributed to the 15 or more years of fire prevention education they've provided to the community,

beginning with the town's school-age residents.

It's also likely due to the fact that the fire team perform regular inspections of public buildings and seniors' facilities to ensure safety

measures are up to snuff.

Of course, when you have a rapid response time like Niverville's fire crew, any small fire attended is a large fire prevented.

Another great fire prevention

measure, Bueckert adds, are monitored fire alarm systems. In recent years, he's seeing more of these in Niverville homes.

"[When] the alarm goes off in their house, it goes to a monitoring company and generally within 90 seconds we're being notified," Bueckert says. "And we're usually on scene within six to ten minutes, depending on the time of day."

Unfortunately, the department responds to their share of false alarms, too.

Bueckert says an actual fire is always presumed until an onsite inspection proves otherwise.

There are ways for homeowners to help prevent these unnecessary calls. First, make sure you hire a reputable alarm company to monitor your system. Also, ensure that smoke alarms are located close to the bedrooms and not as close to the kitchen or bathroom shower. With today's sensitive smoke alarms, even steam can trigger a response.

"Generally, the most common false alarm in our community are those where somebody needs to replace the battery in their [monitored] smoke alarm," says Bueckert. "They take the battery out and that triggers an alarm."

If you have a monitored system, Bueckert advises that a quick call to the monitoring company ahead of time is all it takes to prevent an unneeded fire department response.

As for EMS, Bueckert says the majority of calls were medical-related and not necessarily involving trauma. He describes medical calls as involving situations of chest pain

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and shortness of breath, feelings of being off, and instincts that suggest that something's not right.

Trauma-related injuries would be, for example, falls that result in broken bones or concussions.

"We don't see a lot of calls for trauma-related injuries in town, so that's always a good thing."

Other calls that Bueckert and his team rarely encounter are mental health issues resulting in behavioural emergencies. He's thankful, too, that they get virtually no emergency calls resulting from drug use, unlike Winnipeg EMS, who deal with this on a daily basis.

So who are these local heroes who comprise Niverville Fire and EMS?

The majority, if not all, are Niverville residents. Approximately 15 of them work full-time in emergency services somewhere else and then apply these same skills, after hours, in town.

The rest work full-time jobs unrelated to their emergency volunteer work.

Most of Niverville's emergency team are trained in both fire and EMS, allowing them to work both sides of the system as needed. They carry various medical certifications, such as emergency medical responder, primary care paramedic, and advanced first aid.

"We just hired six individuals and, of those six, five of them are trained," Bueckert says. "So that helps us out a lot, so we don't have to provide it. That's a huge advantage for us because that [otherwise] becomes a cost for the department."

It's not just emergency calls that eat up volunteer time. When you include the many hours spent in training and educational efforts, the crew logged 618 different events into their schedules last year. All of these were hours spent over-and-above the 258 emergency callouts.

Of course, Bueckert is cognizant of the many family members who stand behind each and every volunteer. He himself is a family man.

"I just want to thank the families. Their lives get put on hold at times and I don't think they get enough credit for the part they play to support our members."

In the coming years, Bueckert and his team are hopeful that a new fire hall will become a reality. Council is working on design plans and a budget. It's a facility, Bueckert says, that's long overdue.

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Left to right: Justin Brezden, Luc Vermette, Lehanne Parker, Abe Rempel, Jeremy Rempel, Corey Blad, Hunter Preteau, Zach Enns

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The Niverville Chamber of Commerce is looking ahead to a full and exciting 2026 and invites local businesses and the community to mark their calendars.

Winter Education Series

**FEB
3**

Start the morning with breakfast and practical insights from industry experts. This session features The Power of Charitable Giving, presented by Layanie Fehr and Libby Hannah, and Exclusive Services for Business Owners, presented by Don Courcelles and Dean Melnychuk of IG Wealth.

Elevate Manitoba Expo

**FEB
26**

Formerly the Edge Business Expo, ElevateMB returns for its third year. Hosted in the RM of Ritchot, this regional event brings together entrepreneurs, business leaders, and innovators from across Southeastern Manitoba for a day of learning, networking, and inspiration.

Annual General Meeting, Awards and Dinner

**APR
10**

The Chamber's largest event of the year, combining the Business Excellence Awards, the Annual General Meeting, and an evening of connection with the local business community. Enjoy a sit-down dinner while learning what is happening in Niverville.

Portugal Trip

**APR
22**

Support the Chamber and discover Portugal's vibrant cities, renowned cuisine, stunning beaches, and iconic attractions on this small-group travel experience.

Pizza Wars Begins

**MAY
1**

Back for its third year, Niverville pizzerias and restaurants compete for the titles of Best Tasting and Most Creative Pizza in town.

Niverville Farmers' Market

**MAY
6**

Showcasing home-based and local businesses while encouraging the community to shop local throughout the season.

Annual Chamber Golf Tournament

**AUG
20**

A full day of networking, fun, and friendly competition with local businesses, sponsors, and community leaders.

For more information and updates as events approach, visit www.nivervillechamber.com or follow the Niverville Chamber of Commerce on social media.

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Farmers' Market Dream Sprouts in Niverville

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

For more than a year, the gears have been turning to create a permanent farmers' market in Niverville. If all goes as planned, the market will be an annual summer event beginning in 2026.

Sandra Ingenmey is one of the dreamers behind the idea of an annual market. She's since collaborated with Bre-Ann Boulet, executive director of the Niverville Chamber of Commerce (NCOC).

With the support of the NCOC, the duo has also sold the idea to town council, who have agreed to partner with them to help ensure the success of the initiative.

"We are looking at bringing home-based businesses to the forefront," Ingenmey says. "Growers, bakers, and makers. We don't know what it's going to look like yet and that's part of the charm. We want it to be whatever the community wants it to be."

At this stage, a tentative budget and business plan have been created. The key now is to get the vendors interested.

"In our business plan, we've kind of identified Friday [as the market day] because people are going to the lake and they might want to stop at the market before they go," Ingenmey says. "Still, it's the people who participate who are going to dictate, so we may negotiate that."

Ingenmey envisions running it every second week from May to September.



Sandra Ingenmey is helping to start up a permanent farmers' market in Niverville.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

The immediate next step is to hold a public meeting, inviting makers and interested locals to help inform the market's direction.

Ingenmey hopes, too, that the meeting will be the springboard from which a board of directors will be created.

The meeting has been set for February 12 at 7:00 p.m. in the CRRC's kitchen facility.

The Niverville Farmers' Market board will ideally be comprised of people with a variety of skillsets including organizing, vendor outreach, and social media promotion.

Part of the board's job will be vendor selection.

"We don't want to have ten vendors that are selling sourdough," Ingenmey says. "We want to just try and make sure we've got diversity, but we're not attracting vendors that are reselling premade products."

Ingenmey envisions a market that's far more than just a way to bridge the gap between shoppers and local makers. It should be an event that makes a name for itself across the region, where locals and out-of-towners come to spend time and build connection with one another.

This could include food trucks and local buskers. It could be an avenue for not-for-profit groups to do self-promotion and fundraising. The possibilities are limitless, she says, and dependent on feedback and support.

Before revealing the plan to the public, Ingenmey and Boulet have already been working through some of the logistics.

The town has offered, free of charge, a large parking lot near the Centennial Arena for the market's location. The spot is ideal in its proximity to Highway 311 as well as traffic

headed to McDonald's or the CRRC.

As well, the town will ensure access to washrooms in the nearby arena and availability of water and electricity. They will provide garbage collection after the market closes.

The market financials will be managed by Boulet and the NCOC.

Vendor space won't be limited to those who have experience. It will be open to makers of all ages and backgrounds. It includes those with a registered business name, but it could as easily be comprised of grandmothers who simply love to bake or crafters who have, so far, identified as hobbyists.

"We have all these talents in our community and we think, 'Aww, I don't do anything special,'" she says. "But there is something very precious about meeting somebody who made something that we want to buy."

In some cases, provincial licenses are required, such as for food handling or cosmetic preparation. The board will ensure those licenses are current.

Since the farmers' market ideal is to support local makers and growers, Ingenmey says efforts will be made to ensure that participation is affordable to all.

"The idea has to be to bring that home-based business to market and not let the financial piece be a [drawback] for anyone. We want to support them."

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Ritchot Council Considers Proposals for Ste. Agathe Housing Initiative

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

In an effort to create new and affordable housing options in Ste. Agathe, Ritchot's council put out a call for developers this past fall.

Then, at their January 6 meeting, council entertained two delegations.

The first was Alan Klippenstein of Schinkel Properties; the second, JeanClaude Gratton of NuVision Design.

Each was there to represent their company's plan for the best use of 1.29 acres of RM-owned land, bordered by Samoiset Avenue to the east and Highway 75 to the west.

The two plans are very different.

Based on council's original expression of interest, the objective is to sell or lease the parcel to the developer who provides the most promising plan, which should include affordability and multi-family options.

Klippenstein opened with a virtual presentation.

"Clearly, the most profitable thing to do is to build big and to build up," Klippenstein said. "The government has many funding programs available to developers based on achieving affordable units. Typically, in order to achieve this, developers will build tiny bachelor suites which they can get to market at below-market rents... then all of the rest of the units will be at- or



Duplex housing proposed by Schinkel Properties.

SCHINKEL PROPERTIES

above-market [rent] to offset their losses."

The alternative Klippenstein proposed was something he called the missing middle. In this case, it would involve the construction of 16 three-bedroom, two-bathroom duplex homes designed specifically with families in mind.

Building in bulk, he said, is one way for a builder to reduce costs.

An identical layout would be created inside each of the 1,400-square-foot homes. The exterior design would blend seamlessly

with the rest of the community.

All the units would be rentals and about one-third would be offered at CMHC affordable rates.

If approved, the units would take approximately 15 months to complete.

"The elephant in the room is that we're asking the RM to give us this land," Klippenstein said.

Break-even rent on these units, he said, would be \$1,453 and this rate would be applied to 30 percent of the units. For Schinkel Properties, that creates higher than normal risk

rates with lower cap numbers.

"All that said, we're willing to bet \$4.7 million that this project will work," he concluded. "We think that the lower return will be offset by long-term tenants that want to stay here and raise their family."

Gratton made his pitch to council in person. He introduced himself as a long-term resident of Ste. Agathe and landlord to units both in and out of the community.

His plan is to build nine accessible seniors residences along Samoiset with a sound barrier wall

between the residences and the highway.

"More suitable lots are becoming available [which are] best suited for apartment buildings and row housing," Gratton said. "These lots [are within] walking distance to the church, arena, post office, pharmacy, healthcare, and convenience stores, [which] makes it ideal for seniors."

The detached 1,400-square-foot units would contain two primary bedrooms, each with its own three-piece ensuite, and a double attached garage. It would meet all accessibility requirements with no steps, wider corridors, and wheelchair-accessible showers.

Acting as property manager, Gratton's company would provide all grass-cutting and snow-clearing on these lots.

The on-street parking requirements would be less than that of apartment blocks or housing without garages, he added.

While his housing would be developed with mobility in mind, it wouldn't be limited to senior citizens. The units could just as easily accommodate two young adults until they decide to buy or build.

"In exchange for donating the parcel to the developer, which presents costs to the RM for upkeep, it will generate property taxes estimated at \$27,000 per year plus utility revenues."

Council will deliberate on these plans in the weeks to come.

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Public Notice

Public Hearing for Rezoning in Highlands West Area

UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE PLANNING ACT

Reason for Hearing: A public hearing has been scheduled to review the proposed rezoning found in **Bylaw No. 884-25** for part of the Highlands West area under **Subdivision File No. 4340-25-9176**. This would rezone the affected location from "Agricultural Limited" (AL) and "Commercial Corridor" (CC) to a number of different residential, commercial, and public reserve zones. A full list of the different zones in this proposed rezoning can be found on the map to the right of this text.

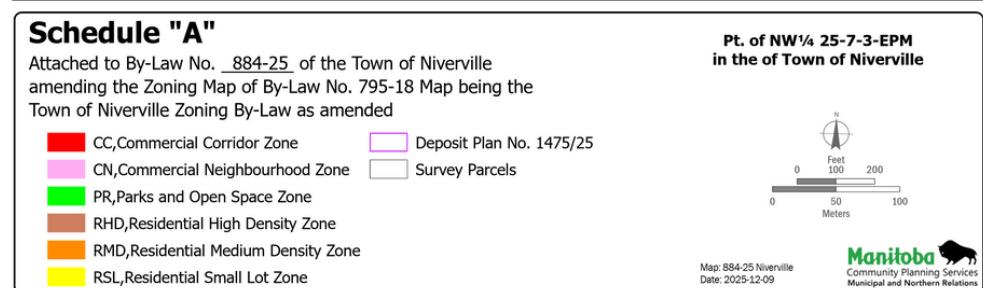
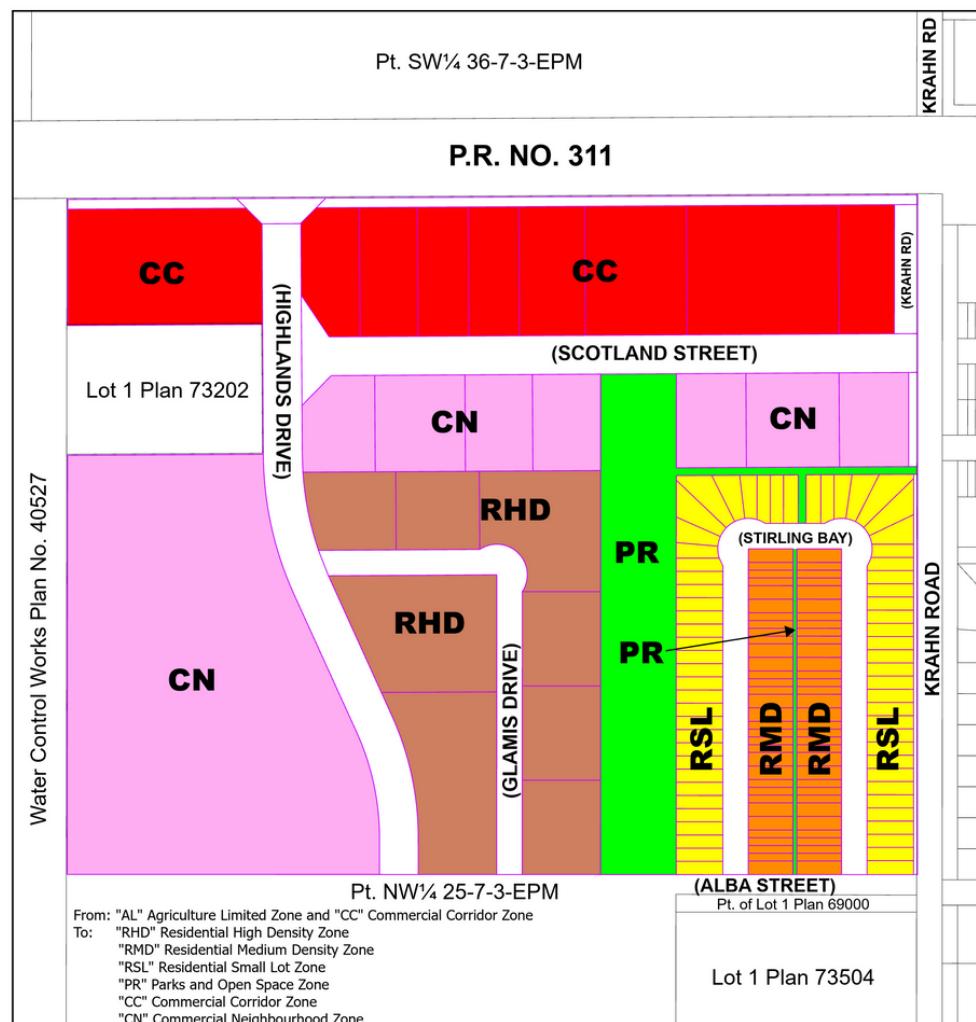
Affected Location: **Part of NW 1/4 25-7-3-EPM.** For a visual description of the area proposed for this zoning amendment, please see the map to the right of this text.

Hearing Location: Niverville Community Resource & Recreation Centre
 501 Centre Street
 Niverville, MB

Hearing Time: Tuesday, February 17th, 2026
 7:00 PM



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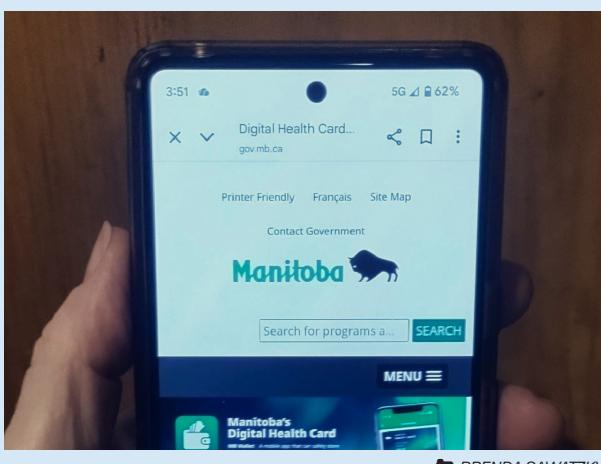


You can review copies of the supporting documents related to this proposed rezoning at the Town Office, located at 329 Bronstone Drive, by scanning the QR code below, or by visiting www.whereyoubelong.ca/town-services/resources/public-notices/

Anyone can attend this public hearing, and Council will hear anyone who would like to make a presentation, ask questions, or register an objection regarding this matter. If you are interested in attending or participating in this hearing in-person or by written submission, **please review all relevant public hearing procedures by scanning the QR code, by visiting the Town Office, or by visiting the link above.**

Questions? Email: planning@whereyoubelong.ca
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IN BRIEF



BRENDA SAWATZKY

Province Rolls Out Digital Health Cards

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

As previously promised by the provincial government, 2026 has kicked off with the rollout of a digital health card initiative. It's one more way, the province says, to make healthcare more accessible.

"Digital health cards put Manitobans in control of their own information, make it easier to access care, and support a safer, more responsive health system," says Premier Wab Kinew. "Over the past year, we've moved from paper health cards to plastic and now to a digital option. It is a practical step that reflects our focus on patient safety, accessibility and putting people first as we make health care better for families."

Manitobans can now apply for their digital card through the provincial website, Google Play, or the App Store. Afterward they will have a secure way to carry their personal health card information on their digital device.

The digital health card doesn't negate the plastic or paper health cards, either of which will still be accepted at any Manitoba healthcare facility.

The province introduced the plastic health card one year ago to replace the paper version. Later that year, they also rolled out a new online appointment booking system called MediNav.

MediNav can be uploaded to any device, ensuring security through the use of a login ID and password. Residents can use it to make online bookings for same-day and next-day appointments for non-emergency care.

Participating clinics include a variety of walk-in clinics and minor injury clinics, the St. Boniface Hospital's primary care clinic, and the Steinbach QuickCare clinic.

Once on the app, a dropdown panel provides a list of clinics, their locations, and appointment openings.

The goal of the program is to make emergency and urgent care more available to those who need it and to reduce long wait times in ERs for those whose care is less urgent. Sprains, infections, and minor injuries are examples of non-urgent care.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more or to apply for a digital health card, visit: www.gov.mb.ca/health/mhsip/digitalhealthcard.html



Ritchot's council meets.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

Ritchot Council Removes Red Tape on Secondary Suite Approvals

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

housing supply without unduly affecting a neighbourhood's character.

STE. AGATHE DEVELOPMENT

At the same meeting, council gave the green light to a development agreement with Joseph Sharobeam, paving the way for a new 23-unit multi-family development to begin construction at 137 Ste. Agathe Street in Ste. Agathe.

Original approval for this development took place at council's May 21, 2025 meeting.

Three letters of objection had been received by council at that time. While the letters weren't read for the public to hear, Councillor Joel Lemoine addressed some of them anyway.

According to Lemoine, concerns had been raised regarding garbage and snow storage, fencing, lighting, and parking spillover onto the street.

Many of these were the same concerns shared at a much earlier council meeting, this one all the way back in 2017, when this developer initially came to council for a conditional use permit on the property.

Still unhappy with the 2025 proposal, though, were the neighbours living immediately to the north of the proposed development.

There was a discrepancy, they said, with the boundary lines and they asked council to verify them through a survey before providing approval to the developer.

They also asked for assurances that adequate drainage would be sought by the RM to rectify the issues they've had with backyard flooding over the years.

Council suggested that both concerns would be discussed at future planning sessions.

After a review of the development agreement put before them in 2026, Lemoine feels content that all these concerns have been adequately addressed.

"Thumbs up to the developer," Lemoine told council. "Seems they've been in discussions with the neighbours to the north and south."

FRONT YARD VARIANCE

Finally, council heard from St. Adolphe resident Garth McDonald, who was seeking a

front yard variation to allow an addition to his home at 699 Proteau Drive.

McDonald proposed to decrease the existing 30-foot front yard requirement to 14.6 feet for the purpose of adding onto his home's primary bedroom.

"I feel the addition will bring a new look to the community and give others the option of future projects," McDonald told council. "We love the neighbourhood and would rather make changes to our home than move to a new location."

Neighbours, he said, were consulted and presented no opposition to the project, especially when considering that his only other alternative would be to add height to the house.

However, both Councillors Shane Pelletier and Jason Bodnarchuk raised concerns that the degree of the home extension could alter the surrounding neighbourhood and change the general aesthetic.

Mayor Ewen agreed.

In the end, council voted in favour of reducing the front yard buffer from 30 feet to 20 feet.



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Most Municipalities Back Out of Regional Library Conversation

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER
bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Four of the six municipalities involved in a working group to explore the creation of a regional library have opted out.

As of late 2025, only Niverville and Steinbach were left standing. The RM of Ste. Anne, Piney, and Ritchot, as well as the town of Ste. Anne, have all officially withdrawn from the initiative.

"There are a number of concerns regarding the current or future level of bilingual services that the new regional library may or may not be able to provide," said CAO Shane Ray at a meeting of Ritchot's council on December 2.

Council voted unanimously in favour of pursuing other alternatives, potentially through the Association of Bilingual Municipalities.

"I think it would be a better fit for regionalization," said Councillor Janine Bodnaruk. "We'd have a bit more control over the bilingual aspect of it."

For Piney, the decision to withdraw revolved around the belief that a regional library, servicing many communities in the southeast, would not likely be located in Piney. With this understanding, residents would still have to drive a distance to take advantage of its services.

The town of Ste. Anne determined that, at this stage, it would be preferable to focus on improvements to their existing community library after the recent hire of a librarian.

Steinbach, still in the game, is expecting to make a decision



Councillor Meghan Beasant.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

about their continued participation at a future council meeting.

Niverville's mayor, Myron Dyck, says that his council isn't quite ready to give up on the idea just yet.

"Council is still interested and continues to gather information regarding a potential regional library," says Mayor Dyck. "We believe in partnerships and will continue to explore if this potential regional library is a good partnership for our community."

HISTORY OF WORKING GROUP

The regional library conversation began in 2024 when leaders from around the southeast gathered at Steinbach's city hall to hear a presentation by

Meghan Hansen, a provincial library consultant.

"They reached out to all of the southeastern communities and everybody was there, [including] representatives from major libraries like Springfield and Jake Epp," Niverville councillor Meghan Beasant told council in October 2024. "It was a large information session showing the benefits of regional libraries."

The meeting's objective, she said, was to provide generalized information on regional library collaborations.

From there, a working group was formed to further pursue the idea.

Some of the benefits include access to provincial funding and the ability to provide a wider array of

resources and services than a small community library could. Governance would be administered by a board consisting of members from each participating community and financial responsibility would be determined by population size.

The location of a brick-and-mortar library could pose issues in a region that extends from Piney to Ritchot, without question.

According to Beasant, the idea of a mobile library had come up.

In the meantime, Niverville opened a humble version of a public library on October 27, 2025.

The micro-library is located in the Centennial Arena and runs on a "take one, leave one" model. Books are received by donation. A collection of volunteers oversee the space during open hours but, without a librarian, there is no formal signing out of books.

"When we want to do projects in this community, you kind of look at what the end goal is," said Dyck at the library's grand opening event. "And you ask yourself, 'Can we do it all in one bite or do we need to do it in a series of bites and steps?' When it comes to a library, we look at the cost of space and operating and putting goods and services into it and say, 'That might be a few years away yet, but we can start today.'"

If the public in Niverville is interested in seeing a more formal library occur in town, Beasant says that it will begin with the formation of a library committee comprised of residents that operates at arm's length of council, according to provincial library regulations.



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Niverville Beautification Efforts Blossom in 2025

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

For the third year in a row, Niverville received top honours from the Manitoba chapter of Communities in Bloom for its beautification efforts this past summer.

The score, which came after a fall visit by provincial judges, resulted in an overall rating of 85.80 percent, or five blooms, the highest ranking any community can receive.

That score is derived from individual rankings in six categories.

Based on overall community appearance, Niverville ranked 88 percent. Another 86 percent was received for the town's heritage conservation efforts. Landscaping, as well as plant and floral displays, achieved 85 percent. Tree management and environmental action ranked at 84 percent.

Communities in Bloom is a Canada-wide volunteer-driven charity. Established in 1995, it was inspired by international organizations such as Britain in Bloom, Tidy Towns of Ireland, and France's Villes et Villages Fleuris.

There were 29 participating Canadian communities in the organization's first year.

Today, the Manitoba chapter has as many as 60 community participants per year.

The organization's goal is to inspire individuals to actively enhance their quality of life and environment in ways that create community pride.

Shirley Hoult is the chairperson of Niverville Communities in Bloom, which is more than a decade old.

To put it mildly, Hoult was thrilled by this year's results.

"Overall, both judges were very impressed with the community, the large group of volunteers that make up the NCiB committee and their efforts, [as well as] the town beautification team."



A new art installation in Niverville.

C/O NIVERVILLE COMMUNITIES IN BLOOM

More specifically, Hoult says the judges were impressed with NCiB's annual tree-planting initiative, which takes place along residential streets in cooperation with residents. Sixty new trees were added to the town's canopy in 2025.

The judges were equally impressed with the town's recreation options.

Other highlights included the Town of Niverville and Chamber of Commerce's signage, the installation of garden boxes at the elementary school for students to plant and tend, and the innovative Main Street flower planters that were outfitted last spring with self-watering mechanisms designed by Terry Martin.

"The community has improved so

much in all the evaluated categories since NCiB began," Hoult says. "The town [staff] have made great efforts to create and maintain a more interesting and greener community."

With eight official NCiB members and a host of unofficial volunteers pitching in to help, there's barely an area of the community that hasn't been affected.

A few prominent examples include the descriptive historical picture boards along Main Street as well as the ironwork art at the Niverville Credit Union.

The seniors living at the Heritage Centre can stroll through impressively staged memorial gardens thanks to NCiB, and the Memorial Forest was established in Hespeler

Park to provide space for people who plant trees in memory of lost loved ones.

The south-facing wall of Hespeler Park's picnic shelter hosts a creative collage featuring hand-painted tiles made by Niverville residents of all ages.

In 2025, NCiB hosted two well-attended workshops which taught the basics of growing food and maximizing yields, along with festive table centerpiece making.

The organization closed out the year with some memorable experiences for all.

"The Light Up Niverville live map was developed by NCiB member Erin Reimer," says Hoult. "And we held a candlelight community carol-singing

and tree-lighting in the Heritage Centre gardens in December."

The organization was also instrumental in raising funds and awareness for Niverville's new mobility van.

Going into 2026, Hoult says that work will continue on a new art installation just east of the railway tracks.

Like the mosaic wall, this one will feature hand-painted wooden discs attached to a fence, providing one more way for residents to publicly display their creativity.

"We would like to see businesses join us in the placement of more community artwork and heritage displays at their locations," Hoult adds. "It can help to differentiate us from other communities and may attract visitors and increase population."

Also in 2026, Niverville will play host to the annual Manitoba Communities in Bloom fall conference.

To keep the NCiB actively operating well into the future, Hoult says they are willing to take on new members in any capacity. Ideas for future beautification projects are always welcome.

As proof that NCiB is indeed helping to foster a sense of community pride, locals of all stripes have responded enthusiastically over the years to interactive programs such as Green Thumbs, Bloomin' Businesses, and the Main Street Christmas planters.

NCiB also works closely with town council, encouraging and assisting in investing in greenspaces and community activities as well as developing means for heritage preservation.

The team networks with other participating communities to share project ideas, access grants, and discover new ways to encourage connection between residents as their towns grow.

"We have found that NCiB encourages community participation in making Niverville a better place to live," says Hoult.

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IN BRIEF



A December gala celebrated senior volunteers.

BRENDA SAWATZKY

An Army of Kindness: Celebrating Senior Volunteers

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Niverville Service to Seniors boasts a plethora of programs created specifically for older residents.

Few stop to acknowledge, though, that it takes a veritable army of volunteers to make this programming work, and the majority of them are themselves seasoned individuals.

The fact of this isn't lost on Cindy Plessis, coordinator for Niverville Service to Seniors, and Elissa Leah, client services manager for the Niverville Credit Union Manor.

In celebration of the dedication of Niverville's senior volunteers, Plessis and Leah recently threw a party and pulled out all the stops. Hosted at the Heritage Centre on December 16, the atrium came alive.

The Niverville Night-hawks honoured these volunteers by serving as butlers and table hosts. Adela Unrau beguiled with her harp instrumentals and JR Charron, two-time country music award-winner, put on a lively performance.

Perhaps the most meaningful part of the night, though, was the fact that every volunteer in attendance was there because their peers believed they deserved to be. They were nominated

by those who'd been moved by their quiet acts of kindness and the joy they gave others.

"I never imagined I'd be overwhelmed with emotion as the nominations came in," Plessis told the crowd. "Why people were nominated left me amazed. It's not just the grand gestures that we do in life but the small ones that also bring people joy."

What astounded her further, she said, was the fact that many of the nominees felt unworthy of such a distinction.

"You go about your day making people happy around you and you don't even know that you're doing it," Plessis added. "The world needs more of all of you."

Leah, too, spoke words of affirmation. She pointed out that Service to Seniors programming is about far more than keeping Niverville's older residents active. It's about supporting long-term independence and reducing isolation and loneliness.

"None of this would be possible without you," said Leah. "Thanks for the phone calls, the rides to appointments, the meals made, the smiles shared, and the moments of listening that mean more than words can express. Your service reminds us that community is built through kindness and commitment."

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

For the third year running, business owners, entrepreneurs, and innovators from around the province are invited to meet under one roof in the rural southeast for a day of networking, inspiration, and learning.

The Ritchot Business Expo, now known as ElevateMB, will feature all the best elements attendees have come to expect from previous years, packed into one full day.

This year's keynote speaker is Manjit Minhas, co-founder of Minhas Brewery, Distillery and Winery, and panellist on TV's *Dragon's Den*.

"We're really excited," says Ritchot mayor Chris Ewen. "We've got strong keynote speakers this year and a full day of courses that I think people are really going to find interesting from AI to tax savings and grant opportunities. We've really packed in a full day and I'm expecting a sold-out house."

Registration for the event is now open. It will take place at the TC Energy Centre in Île-des-Chênes on February 26.

Minhas will be joined by Nicole Dubè, former morning show host turned compelling storyteller, to conduct a fireside chat including a live audience Q&A.

New this year will be a feature called Coach on the Couch, a one-on-one opportunity for attendees to ask questions pertinent to their specific business.

There'll be breakout sessions, a trade show, and plenty of opportunities to connect with like-minded business owners.

Changes to this year's event came as a result of the unfortunate passing of John Falk of John Peter Events. Falk was the originator of Ritchot's



Manjit Minhas will be the keynote speaker.

C/O RM OF RITCHOT

Edge Business Expo.

This year, and going forward, the annual event will continue under the name ElevateMB.

Staff members of the RM of Ritchot were inspired to develop a simple name that evoked the idea of helping entrepreneurs heighten their success.

"[Our staff] have looked at the last two years and they've seen what's working and what people are really interested in," Ewen says. "They've really dialed in and have gotten

some strong sponsorships this year, which has given them the opportunity to make it a really successful event coming up."

Dialing the event back from two days to one, Ewen says, just makes sense when you're dealing with business owners who don't want to be away from their companies for too long.

Instead of a mixer, there'll be a cocktail hour at the close of the day. Instead of food trucks, a local caterer will ensure that everyone is

well-fed.

Learning from the success of past years, Ewen says he hopes Ritchot will continue to promote this long into the future.

"Commercially, Ritchot has grown exponentially over the years," Ewen says. "We've seen businesses start from nothing and go to crazy growth. We've also seen businesses leave other municipalities, wanting to come to ours, so we know that we have an opportunity. We have something special in Ritchot."

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Nearly a Century of Curling Comes to a Close in Niverville

By Brenda Sawatzky

LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

✉ bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Nearly a century of curling has come to an end in Niverville. And for the Niverville Curling Club (NCC), it's not a happy goodbye.

According to Dustin Krahm, president of the NCC, the town is entering into a lease agreement with a private business that intends to repurpose the curling rink, a decision that leaves the NCC out in the cold.

For the 2026 season, the NCC will rent space in St. Adolphe. The future beyond that is up in the air.

At the time of this writing, no official paperwork between the town and the new leaser had been signed. However, the legalities were in process.

According to Niverville mayor Myron Dyck, the leasing group presented an opportunity that council had not gone looking for. Still, the offer was timely and appeared to be the best short-term solution for a building in need of so much repair.

The biggest frustration for Krahm and the NCC wasn't that council looked to other leaseholders. The NCC, after all, were themselves leaseholders for the coldest months of the year.

In fact, bringing in user groups for the rest of the season was the best possible solution for the facility's long-term viability. With some thoughtful planning, budgeting, and renovations, Krahm adds, the building could have been vastly improved.

Krahm says that's what the NCC has been asking of council for years: to collaborate in the development of a long-term vision for the curling



✉ BRENDA SAWATZKY

rink and its other amenities, which include a common room with a canteen and a basement gathering place with tables and a kitchen.

While there had been some conversations with council this past fall, in hindsight Krahm feels that the process was disingenuous.

"In late September, this was proposed as an idea to coexist with a potential new business, but somewhere along the way it turned into a contest where only one of the groups would be granted use of the facility," Krahm says. "We were not notified that we were expected to pitch a case for our own survival. We interpreted the invitation to council's planning session as a positive thing, the start of the conversation we'd been asking for, and not as an invitation to our own funeral."

Now the NCC feels slighted. Not

only had the club been using the facility for almost 50 years, they'd also been contributing their own time, labour, and money to run the curling program. In 2023, they invested \$15,000 in upgrades to the facility's kitchen. More recently, they offered to replace a broken furnace at no cost to the town.

Still, Mayor Dyck says those costs barely scratch the surface of the issues facing the building if curling remains its primary use.

"The building needs to be insulated," says Dyck. "It needs a concrete floor and it needs an ice plant."

COUNCIL'S DEFENCE

One could certainly argue about the need for an ice plant. The NCC has been functioning on a natural ice surface since 1978, albeit with shorter seasons in recent years.

According to Dyck, its functionality will only continue to decrease with time.

"The largest fact the town has to address is the facility being incapable of dealing with a warming winter climate," Dyck wrote in a letter to the NCC. "Just this week we saw temperatures of plus-four. Looking back at historical trends, our below-zero days have dropped by 40 days."

According to CAO Eric King, the town has invested \$87,000 in capital improvements to the facility over the past ten years.

As it stands right now, keeping the building in use as a curling rink costs between \$12,000 to \$20,000 per year.

While some provincial or federal grants exist, King says they don't cover the cost of overhead. The

town did receive one-time funding from the province to improve accessibility to the building.

Other ongoing funding exists, such as the Building Sustainable Communities grant, which covers 50 percent of eligible project costs up to \$75,000 and up to \$300,000 for large capital projects.

The St. Adolphe Curling Club benefited from this grant to the tune of \$15,000 during the 2022-23 season.

At this stage, though, Niverville's council has determined that the best way forward is to bring in a year-round leaser. In the meantime, this helps council stay focused on their goal of paying off the CRRC debt by 2028.

In a few short years, Dyck says council will be faced with another dilemma, that of the Centennial Arena needing massive upgrades or closing altogether due to an outdated ice plant that no longer meets regulations.

According to Dyck, Niverville is not the only community struggling to keep its curling culture alive. For this reason, he believes regionalization of facilities may be the answer.

"Council made the decision to see the potential for a regional curling club to succeed rather than two local chapters work against each other," Dyck says, referring to the St. Adolphe curling rink.

Krahm would argue that the NCC's league has been full every year with a waiting list for the past five years, despite the rink's shortcomings. He can only imagine what numbers could become if the facility were improved.

(continued on page 16)



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(continued from page 15)

For a community growing as rapidly as Niverville, Krahn feels it's short-sighted to provoke the death of a long-time institution like curling. He worries that once local curlers move on to other facilities, it will be hard to get them back without promising a brand-new facility similar to the CRRC.

Dan Giesbrecht is one of those people. He's been curling in Niverville since he moved here about 15 years ago.

Giesbrecht describes the Niverville curling experience as casual and the people as very welcoming of players of any skill level, including those new to the sport.

He wasn't deterred by the shorter playing season required with natural ice. Two months of play, he says, is long enough.

"Curling's been popular in Niverville for a long time," Giesbrecht says. "I know the club has been busy three or four nights a week during the season that we run and there's always people there. That's why it's a shock that there hasn't been more planning on how we keep curling going in Niverville. It feels like it's coming to an abrupt end."

HISTORY OF THE NCC

With the early curling pioneers of Niverville mostly gone, it's hard to pin down a definitive year when the sport took off in the community.

Long-time resident George Sawatzky is fairly confident, though, that the NCC has been around since the 1940s. He and his wife moved to Niverville in 1965. The original curling rink, then located at 85 Second Street

South, was already an older facility when they arrived.

Sawatzky joined the curling club as a way to get active and get to know the locals. He describes the early building as a Quonset-style structure with three sheets of ice and a viewing gallery. It ran as a cooperative with members holding shares. The town was not involved.

In the late 1970s, the property was sold and some of the proceeds went to the construction of a new curling rink. The new building, which remains to this day, was constructed next to the Centennial Arena.

The building was constructed by volunteers and built on charitable donations. But since its real estate was town-owned, the town held title.

Even so, management of the facility was left in the hands of the NCC.

Gary Stott served as president of the NCC at the time. His love for the sport began as a child when he accompanied his father to the original rink.

According to both Sawatzky and Stott, volunteers have always been the backbone of the NCC. That never changed over the years.

Like Stott, Krahn has many fond memories. He too has been volunteering and playing at the Niverville rink since he was a child.

Until about 2010, the town's primary role was to cover the cost of utilities and insurance.

Beyond that, the town provided virtually no oversight.

Later, their involvement evolved into that of a landlord, leasing the building to the NCC for part of the year. Still, the NCC took responsibility for many of the incidentals like annual internet

services, septic tank cleaning, and icemaking supplies.

During the 2025 curling season, the antiquated rink furnace finally broke down. The estimated cost to replace it came to \$10,000. In September, Krahn says the NCC was informed that the furnace had not been fixed and there was no money in council's budget to fix it.

By December, council confirmed with the NCC, in writing, that they had decided to enter into lease negotiations with another user group. The NCC could inquire with this new user group about the feasibility of undertaking one last curling season in the space, they said.

"Unfortunately, with a growing community, needs, and priorities at all levels, the money available is simply needed in too many other places," the town's letter stated.

For Krahn and the NCC, this decision begs certain questions.

"Is every recreation facility in town up for grabs to any company that wants to come along and lease it for other purposes if it provides the town with a greater revenue stream?" Krahn asks. "This is, in fact, how it feels to members of the NCC at this time."

Stott, too, feels some pain about losing the local curling community. One of the beautiful and enduring qualities of curling, he says, is that it's a sport that transcends age. It's fun for all players, whether they're eight years old or 80.

"I would hazard a guess that the [CRRC] doesn't make any money either," Stott says. "That's not really the purpose in offering recreation, especially when building small towns like this."

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CITIZEN POLL**Should a local municipal council require sports and recreation facilities to be self-sustaining in order to be considered viable?**

Yes. Taxpayers should not be expected to fund facilities that don't attract enough programs or sponsorship to pay for themselves.

No. These community-owned facilities promote wellness and social connection, benefits that justify public investment even if they don't break even.

**Have a more nuanced opinion?
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LAST MONTH'S RESULTS:**Are you concerned about the size, scale, and energy and water usage of the proposed data centre in Île-des-Chênes?**

Yes. The massive scale of the facility and its impact on our natural resources should be a matter of great consequence for locals.

80%

No. The economic and technological benefits outweigh worries about the potential use of local resources.

20%

YOUR COMMENTS:

I'd like to know more about the project. If there is a detailed plan in place to ensure water and energy usage in the area is not negatively impacted, then I'm all for it.

Mr Knew says that our data will not go south of the border as a selling point. That seems hard to believe considering this is a company from Nevada. What consequences would there be if they violate this? If the data centre turns out to be damaging to our community, how will that work? Kick them out? That would never happen. We live with it? I smell a rat that is coming here because they have made enemies elsewhere, and we are ripe

and unsuspecting. AI will be abused horribly in nefarious ways, I believe. Can't prove it, of course, but these corporations have a track record and I have the right to not trust them. I don't want them 3/4 of a mile down the road from me. I don't want them in Canada or anywhere. We would be better off less efficient without AI than we would be with it.

The climate here is not optimal, requiring more energy. The power consumption plus the immense amount of water it takes to cool the servers will eventually hurt us all.

AI is the biggest current threat to our planet's environmental health and we must deny its usage and growth as much as we possibly can. The negative impact to the local community would be detrimental.

Where would the proposed AI site at Île-des-Chênes source its cooling water? What guarantee do homeowners have as assurance that there will not be water shortages or water rationing just to support an American-owned operation? Same goes for electricity.

I'm concerned as my home is surrounded by the proposal.
—C. Hardie

What benefits? I keep hearing about the benefits of AI, and all I see are clear and immediate negative environmental impacts. Also that every app now has a crappy AI function and every third YouTube video I watch is weird and kinda creepy-looking. Again I say, what benefits? The impending manmade drought? This is a race to the bottom, for a product nobody is asking for. "So we won't be so reliant on Google and America"? So let's burn our own house down and call it "agency," patting ourselves on the back for eating at the adults table.
—Josiah Speers

Look at places that have already been negatively impacted by allowing data centres.

I live right beside the property of the proposed data centre. I'm very concerned about the environmental effects it will have on my small farm and family. No country living will exist. All of our hard work to build our small homestead will be for nothing. How is that fair, all for a bunch of people to be lazy and have their AI and not use their brain? This is insane and completely unfair for the community.

There's a big difference between AI use, misuse, and abuse—on the part of students (who are at school to learn, and more specifically to learn how to think), and on the part of teachers (who are there to teach and facilitate the students in their learning and thinking). Can we trust that a professional teacher using AI like an office assistant to speed up their workload, while still doing all the thinking and assessment involved, is very different than a student trying to skip the learning and thinking process entirely? Can we not see those are different levels of engagement?

The environmental impacts on energy, but also health, as evidenced in other locations that have built these types of centres near small towns, can be catastrophic. While it might serve a data storage need, it provides little else in positive economic impact, and again we see a big U.S. company ultimately reaping the profit.

—Jennifer Woodward, Île-des-Chênes.

My concern is that this will have an ever-increasing impact on local resources with little local benefit over the long-term.

This data centre has the potential to cause a huge negative impact on our valued water resources. The noise factor is unconscionable and shows total disregard for the peaceful rural community. The negative impacts are far-reaching and this proposed venture must be stopped immediately.

They will most likely overtax the aquifer. There is no recovering from that.

With Manitoba Hydro frequently cutting off electricity to Île-des-Chênes, I don't think a massive electrical drain such as an AI centre is a good idea.

Our very important water resources are at risk with these large data centres, which we'll have absolutely no control over once they are in operation.

Consider what an AI data centre will bring to our community: tax dollars. That's it. Beyond tax dollars, this AI data centre won't bring anything good to our community.

It won't bring any guaranteed jobs for our local community. Those jobs are an easy commute from Winnipeg, so don't have any expectations there.

Generally speaking, AI does not bring us jobs, certainly not local jobs. On the contrary, worldwide it takes jobs, by replacing the jobs of real people everywhere, people with families to provide for. And in this case it replaces those jobs with a 350-square-acre building site.

Consider what else an AI data centre takes from our community.

An AI centre will take our drinking water. Currently it is understood that the proposed AI data centre will use an open loop water cooling system, meaning that water is used to cool data systems (servers/computers) and is consumed in the process (evaporated). It is used once, then gone.

On the other hand, closed water cooling systems, that reuse water for cooling over and over, are available yet apparently these systems are too big an investment for the company that wishes to come to our community to put into place.

According to the article, potentially 26 million litres per year could be consumed by a single turbine AI cooling system. This proposed data centre would use as many as six turbines. That is 156 million litres of drinking water consumed each year. What will this do to the water supply for the rest of us, for our households and small businesses?

As citizens, are we willing to welcome into our community a company that is not willing to make the investment upfront to conserve our valuable water resources?

In recent years, we have been asked by our RM to conserve our water usage, due to drought, by not watering lawns or filling swimming pools, for example. With this in mind, we should ask ourselves if we can afford to share our water with a large potential water waster that won't put in the infrastructure to conserve water. They won't help protect our valuable resource and the environment from the negative effects of drought. And be assured: thanks to climate change, more droughts will come.

An AI centre will take our rural look and feel. Right now we have a "country skies" feel that we who have lived here all our lives enjoy. Many of us have also left behind the city to join the rest of us here. Can we all agree it is preferable to live in a large city? This AI data centre will change our community from a small town and country environment to the look and feel of an industrial suburb of the city we left behind. How do the folks living on Arnould and Mondor feel about having a huge data centre move in right across the street?

An AI centre will take our reputation. Do we want our community of Île-des-Chênes and Ritchot to be the home of an AI data centre company that could harm our local environment and that won't invest to prevent it, that replaces hard-working people's jobs, and that urbanizes our country feel? Who knows what else AI has in store for all of us? Do we really want to give it a home here?

The citizens of Île-des-Chênes and Ritchot should ask themselves: do we really want to share our home with an AI data centre? The love affair that society has with AI will end. Do we really want to be that place where AI lives? Why would we? What good is there in it for Île des Chênes and Ritchot?
—D.C.

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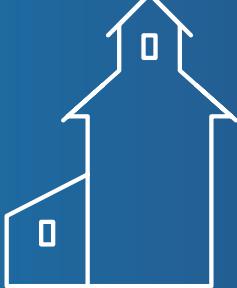
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Record Turnout Highlights Fifth Annual Battle of Niverville

By Holly Dunphy

The fifth annual Battle of Niverville Wrestling Tournament drew 133 athletes to the CRRC on December 20, making it the largest competitor turnout in the event's history and one of the largest held in Manitoba for a competition at this level.

Hosted by WAMMA Niverville, the day-long event welcomed competitors of all ages and experience levels, ranging from complete novices to highly skilled wrestlers.

"This is the biggest turnout we've had in Niverville," says local wrestling coach Jens Reuter. "We originally had about 140 athletes registered, but weather the day before reduced that number to 133."

Reuter noted that participation in wrestling declined during the years of the COVID pandemic but has seen a steady increase ever since.

"Leading up to the event, we took to advertising a lot on social media and by word of mouth throughout the wrestling community," says Reuter. "We are really happy with the turnout this year."

While there were several fantastic matches, including those of experienced wrestlers, Reuter described the youngest competitors as some of the most exciting to watch.

"We had a lot of first-time, very young wrestlers who competed really



RON STEIN PHOTOGRAPHY

hard," says Reuter. "You could see spectators leaning forward in their seats enjoying the energy of the matches."

Among the many people present at the CRRC was Reuter's daughter, 14-year-old Lilyanne, who has been wrestling since the age of five.

Although Lilyanne was unable to compete due to lack of competitors

in her category, she remained active during the event, assisting with coaching and encouraging some of the youngest competitors.

"Watching our really young kids wrestle for the first time was memorable," says Lilyanne. "We had a few younger girls who went out and gave it their all. It was really cute. They were great."

Besides being able to instill her own expertise into the younger groups and enjoying the vigour in their matches, Lilyanne was also impressed by the higher-tiered athletes.

"There were a lot of highlights throughout the day, including some really high-level wrestlers that came out to compete. They did a lot of fun

tricks and moves that were exciting to watch."

In addition to tournament matches, the morning included qualifying matches for the Manitoba Winter Games, set to take place in Thompson this March.

Local athletes Noah Fast, Lilyanne Reuter, Benjamin Reuter, and Ryan Unrau all met the requirements to advance.

Benjamin, Reuter's son, also assisted during the event. It proved to be a welcome distraction from pre-match nerves in his home gym.

Aside from offering help with the scoreboard, Benjamin won all three of his matches, and one in a particularly unique way.

"During one of my matches I ended up on the bottom," says Benjamin. "And that's not where you want to be as a wrestler. Fortunately, I was able to pin my opponent while he was on top of me. It was a good, funny win."

Of course, the goal is to remain on top in a wrestling match, but the moment showed that even from the bottom, it's still possible to come out on top.

In addition to the Manitoba Winter Games in March, WAMMA Niverville is already looking forward to the sixth annual Battle of Niverville Wrestling tournament in 2026, expected to take place next December.

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Nighthawks Unbeaten in January

By Bill Burfoot

The Niverville Nighthawks currently find themselves on an 11-game winning streak, the second double-digit streak of the season.

JANUARY 3

STEINBACH PISTONS, HOME

Entering 2026 exactly where they left off, the Nighthawks continued their winning ways with a thrilling 5-4 victory over the Steinbach Pistons.

The Pistons struck first, with Rory Gilmore opening the scoring. Jackson Kostiuk carried the puck into the Niverville zone before dropping it to Gilmore in the slot, where he snapped a shot over the glove of Austin Dubinsky.

After shaking off the rust from the extended break, Niverville found their legs.

Parker Rolston tied the game, finishing a perfect feed from Aaron Krestanowich.

Kole Mears then gave the Nighthawks a 2-1 lead, converting a three-way passing play involving Dawson Zeller and Loik Leduc.

Just as it looked as though Niverville would take the lead into the second period, Steinbach answered in dramatic fashion with a late power play goal. With three seconds in the period, Sam Noad won the draw to Jack Greenwell, whose quick shot from the bottom of the left circle beat Dubinsky.

The Pistons regained the lead early in the second period when Noad managed to knock a loose puck past Dubinsky to make it 3-2.

Once again, the Nighthawks had an answer. Krestanowich kept the puck in at the blue line before working his way into the left circle and sliding a pass across to Hayden Wheddon, who redirected it home.

The back-and-forth affair continued. Evan Gradt capitalized on the power play with under three minutes remaining in the period.

But Niverville scored late in the second to tie things up. Adam Vigfusson dug the puck free in the corner before feeding Merik Boles, whose quick snapshot from the left circle beat Bauer under the glove.

The third period was tight and physical, with chances at both ends.

A major turning point came when Tyler Bernier was sent hard into the boards by Greenwell. Bernier responded with a flurry of punches, earning a five-minute fighting major and a game misconduct.

Facing an extended penalty, the Nighthawks penalty killers came up big.

Moments later, Evan Panzer capitalized, finding the puck in the slot before sending a backhand to the net that found its way behind Bauer. This was the game-winner.

"These games against division rivals are always four-point games, so it was important to win this one in regulation," said Nighthawks head coach Dwight Hirst. "We've got two games in hand on the Pistons, so now it's about taking care of business."

JANUARY 4

WINNIPEG BLUES, HOME

The Nighthawks wasted little time asserting themselves in this emphatic 8-1 victory.

Unlike the previous meeting between the teams, which required overtime to produce the only goal, this matchup featured offence immediately, with two goals scored in the opening minute.

The Blues struck first. Following a strong save by Blues goaltender Kaffen Kirkwood, Winnipeg countered on a three-on-two rush. Hayden Ritter found Campbell Epp who moved into the right circle and snapped a shot over the shoulder of Nighthawks netminder Ben Chornomydz.

The 18-year-old goaltender then locked down, stopping the next 24 shots he faced to earn his eighth win of the season.

Ryken Arran, elevated to the top line, forced a turnover behind the Blues' net and fed Boles, who beat Kirkwood to tie the game at 1-1.

Just 1:53 later, Rolston scored his second goal in as many games. On the power play, he redirected a pass from Boles over Kirkwood's glove.

Leduc capped off the first period with his first of two goals on the afternoon.

Calyb Moore notched his ninth goal of the season in the second period, finishing off a two-on-one rush set up by Leduc with a shot over

Kirkwood's glove. Panzer followed with a goal of his own, pushing the lead to 5-1.

The third period brought more of the same, as Leduc added his second goal. Jaden Mah and Jake Demone found the back of the net to round out the scoring.

"As a coaching staff we were very pleased with how the team played," said Hirst. "Coming off an emotional win 18 hours earlier against the Pistons, we were very happy with how the team responded."

Hirst highlighted the contributions of players who stepped into expanded roles.

He also credited Chornomydz for his professionalism.

"Ben knows the situation we're in with Austin Dubinsky taking the net the majority of the nights, and he's been nothing but a pro," Hirst said. "It's nice to see him get rewarded."

JANUARY 7

NEEPAWA TITANS, AWAY

Coming into the matchup riding a five-game winning streak, the Nighthawks faced a Neepawa squad that had won eight of its last ten. But Niverville's red-hot offence stole the spotlight.

Just 1:04 into the opening period, Boles finished off a beautiful three-way passing play from Wheddon and Vigfusson to make it 1-0. It was déjà vu for Boles, who had also scored one minute into Niverville's previous game.

Moments later, a scrum ensued inside the Neepawa blue line. When the dust settled the Nighthawks found themselves on a power play.

Thirteen seconds later, Leduc buried his fifteenth goal of the season from the bottom of the right circle, converting a perfect feed from Vigfusson to double the lead.

Mears made it 3-0 after Arran chipped the puck past the Titans' defence, drove hard to the net, and created a rebound that Mears snapped home.

Niverville struck again when Luke Wagner found Arran streaking toward the crease. Arran's shot slipped past Titans starter Zach Burleigh to make it 4-0.

Before the period came to a close, Thomas Phillips capped off a

dominant first period with his fifth goal of the campaign.

This marked the third time this season that the Nighthawks have scored five goals in a single period.

Neepawa got on the board in the second when Keenan Skrupa found a streaking Jack Clark, who entered the zone late and ripped a shot past Dubinsky to cut the deficit to 5-1.

The Titans continued to push. Tyler Wamboldt's shot from the right circle was stopped by Dubinsky, but the rebound bounced directly to Grayson Slaney, who buried it into an open cage to make it 5-2.

Niverville answered on the power play with a breakaway goal from newcomer Marlen Edwards. Acquired just a day earlier, Edwards took a stretch pass from Aaron Krestanowich and broke in alone, snapping a shot past Alex Myers and restoring the Nighthawks' four-goal cushion.

Boles struck again early in the third, finishing off a two-on-one with Vigfusson. John Scott sprung Boles with a flip pass out of the defensive zone. Boles then gave the puck to Vigfusson, who slid it back across. Boles patiently tucked the puck between Myers' legs.

Arran put an exclamation point on his night. Picking up the puck along the left boards, he danced around a defender, drove into the slot, and lifted a backhand over Myers' glove to make it 8-2.

Neepawa added a late goal, but it wasn't nearly enough.

JANUARY 9

SWAN VALLEY STAMPEDERS, HOME

The Nighthawks' offence continued its torrid pace Friday night, erupting for nine goals in a dominant 9-2 victory over the Swan Valley Stampeders.

Edwards made an immediate impact in his home debut, scoring a hat trick to give him four goals in just two games.

Despite the lopsided final score, Hirst admitted that the start wasn't ideal.

"I thought the last 40 minutes were good, but the first period was pretty sloppy," Hirst said.

Swan Valley took advantage of some early miscues, generating quality scoring chances in the opening

minutes, but Dubinsky stood tall to keep the game scoreless.

The tide turned five minutes in when Niverville went to the power play. Edwards opened the scoring with his first of three man-advantage goals, finishing a give-and-go with Wheddon to make it 1-0.

Just 13 seconds later, the Nighthawks doubled their lead when Demone's point shot found Panzer at the top of the crease. Panzer settled the puck before slipping a backhand between the legs of Stampeders goaltender Samuel Bastien.

Swan Valley briefly responded when Dylan Ruff wrapped the puck around Dubinsky to cut the deficit.

The momentum was short-lived, however, as Zeller restored Niverville's two-goal cushion just 22 seconds later.

The second period belonged entirely to the Nighthawks.

Edwards struck again on the power play, beating Bastien glove side from the left faceoff dot to make it 4-1.

Zeller followed with his second of the night midway through the frame, burying a rebound in tight.

A sequence that epitomized Niverville's effort saw Vigfusson absorb a heavy hit at centre ice to move the puck forward to Wheddon. Wheddon carried it over the blue line before feeding Scott, who carried the puck to the bottom of the right circle before finding Wheddon in the slot for a quick finish.

Vigfusson added his name to the scoresheet moments later, converting a pass from Phillips for his twentieth goal of the season. Rolston capped the period late, finishing a feed from Parker Carrier.

Swan Valley's Zach Hertz scored his first with the club early in the third on another wraparound, but any thoughts of a comeback were quickly extinguished.

Edwards completed his hat trick with under three minutes remaining, snapping a shot past Bastien after a strong breakout initiated by Dubinsky, who sent a pass to Scott at the Stampeders blue line. Scott entered the zone, circled, then sent a perfect cross-ice pass to Edwards for the tally.

The assist by Dubinsky gave the Nighthawks netminder points in



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back-to-back games.

"It's something we've been working on a lot at practice," Hirst said of Dubinsky's puck-handling. "Having our goalies recognize when there's changes and opportunities to move the puck up—and Austin's really improved in his stickhandling ability this year."

Edwards' seamless integration hasn't gone unnoticed.

"He's got four goals on the power play, so he adds a new element to that unit and you can't have enough of that," Hirst said. "The way he plays fits in perfectly with the style we play and fits our system."

Hirst also highlighted Edwards' championship experience.

"It's another player in our lineup with a championship pedigree after winning last year with Northern Manitoba."

JANUARY 13

WINNIPEG MONARCHS, AWAY

It didn't come easy, but the Nighthawks continued their winning ways, earning their eighth straight victory with a 5-1 win over the Monarchs.

On paper, the Nighthawks entered the contest as clear favourites. But as the saying goes, the game isn't played on paper, and Winnipeg made it interesting.

Winnipeg goaltender Dylan McFadyen was outstanding throughout the night, turning aside wave after wave of Niverville pressure and keeping the Monarchs in striking distance.

In the end, the MJHL's top offensive team proved too much.

Moore opened the scoring with his tenth of the season, jumping on a loose puck at the top of the crease and chipping it past McFadyen.

At the other end, Chornomydz made timely saves despite limited action. Winnipeg's first shot of the game came on a breakaway midway through the period, but Chornomydz turned it aside.

Moments later, the Monarchs capitalized on a scramble in front. Cam Alt poked the puck home.

The Nighthawks regained the lead on the power play when Phillips found Wheddon at the bottom of the right circle. Wheddon's quick shot beat McFadyen.

Both netminders stole the spotlight in the second period. McFadyen stopped all 15 shots he faced, while Chornomydz was sharp on the six Winnipeg attempts.

The Monarchs nearly tied the game early in the third when Idris

Alameddine broke in alone, but once again Chornomydz came up with a massive save.

With just over eight minutes remaining, Vigfusson forced a turnover in the left circle and fed Wheddon, whose initial shot was stopped. Boles pounced on the rebound at the top of the crease, burying his eighteenth goal of the season to make it 3-1.

The game was put out of reach moments later in unusual fashion. While on the power play, two Monarchs collided in their own zone, allowing Bernier to collect the puck in the slot. Bernier slipped a backhand through McFadyen for a shorthanded goal, snapping an eight-game goal drought.

Leduc added a late goal to cap the scoring as the Nighthawks skated away with another win.

JANUARY 15

SELKIRK STEELERS, HOME

A soldout crowd of elementary school students packed the CRRC on this Thursday afternoon for School Day hockey. Although goals were at a premium, the Nighthawks delivered another strong performance.

Both teams had their chances in the opening period but were unable to solve the goaltenders. Selkirk generated several quality looks from in close, while Niverville created opportunities of its own, aided by a pair of power plays.

Niverville broke through early in the second period while on its third power play of the afternoon. Some great puck movement saw Phillips send a cross-ice pass to Edwards in the right circle. Edwards quickly returned the puck across the crease to Vigfusson, who controlled it at the top of the blue paint and slid it past Sawyer to open the scoring.

The goal sent the 500-plus school kids in attendance into a frenzy.

The Steelers responded midway through the period. Isaac Sousa fired a shot from the point that deflected off the stick of Carter Zalischuk and landed on the stick of Cole Babych in the slot. Babych wasted no time, snapping a slapshot over Dubinsky's right shoulder.

Wheddon then broke in alone on Sawyer, but the Steelers netminder made a key right-pad save to keep the game knotted.

However, Wheddon wouldn't be denied twice. Off the ensuing faceoff, Boles intercepted a clearing attempt at the blue line. After his initial shot

was blocked in front, Boles collected the rebound and fed Wheddon in the bottom of the right circle. This time, Wheddon made no mistake.

The Nighthawks extended their lead midway through the third period, again on the power play. Vigfusson sent the puck down low to Boles, who returned it into the slot. Vigfusson ripped a slapshot over Sawyer's right shoulder.

The Steelers attempted to make a late push, pulling Sawyer with three minutes remaining, but Wagner broke up a pass and chipped the puck up the boards to Mears, who fired home his tenth of the season.

Selkirk added a tally late, but it wasn't enough to stop the Nighthawks from winning their ninth consecutive game.

JANUARY 20

WINNIPEG BLUES, AWAY

After a five-day layoff, the Nighthawks showed no signs of rust Tuesday afternoon in Winnipeg, erupting for six third-period goals to defeat the Winnipeg Blues 8-2.

As has been the case in all four meetings between the teams this season, the Blues kept the game tight through two periods before the Nighthawks pulled away late.

The Nighthawks wasted little time opening the scoring. Just 26 seconds into the contest, Carrier fired a shot from the left wall that beat Blues goaltender Kirkwood, giving Niverville a 1-0 lead.

The score remained unchanged until the final five minutes of the opening frame.

Beckham Garchinski threaded a perfect pass to Wheddon on a breakaway. Although Wheddon was denied, Demone pounced on the rebound and buried it to double the lead.

Demone has two goals on the season and has points in four straight games.

Winnipeg responded late in the period when Aiden McDonald found a loose puck in the slot and snapped it blocker-side past Chornomydz, cutting the deficit to 2-1 heading into intermission.

The second period featured strong goaltending at both ends, but the Blues managed to tie the game just over five minutes in. McDonald picked up the puck at the red line, beat a Nighthawks defender at the blue line, and ripped a glove-side shot from the right circle to make it 2-2.

The game turned decisively in the

third.

Just over two minutes into the final frame, Wheddon sent Vigfusson in alone, and the Nighthawks captain beat Kirkwood blocker-side for what would stand as the game-winning goal.

The assist marked Wheddon's league-leading fortieth of the season.

Only 22 seconds later, Panzer extended the lead. After keeping the puck in at the blue line, Panzer worked it to Edwards, who fed Panzer behind the net. Panzer was able to tuck a wraparound past Kirkwood to make it 4-2.

The onslaught continued at the 7:36 mark when Leduc notched his seventeenth of the season. Carrier found Leduc along the right wall, where he danced around a defender, stepped into the slot, and snapped a shot over Kirkwood's left arm.

Moore added his first of the night on an odd-man rush with just under eight minutes remaining, wiring a shot from the right circle over the glove to make it 6-2.

Moments later, Edwards intercepted a clearing attempt at the blue line, skated into the left circle, and rang a shot off the post and in.

That goal capped a three-point night for Edwards, who extended his point streak to five games and has recorded at least one point in every game since joining Niverville on January 6.

Moore completed the scoring in highlight-reel fashion with a shorthanded breakaway goal, stripping the puck after a faceoff, beating two defenders at the blue line, and finishing with a backhand to seal the lopsided final score.

JANUARY 24

DAUPHIN KINGS, HOME

The Nighthawks continued their torrid run on this Saturday night, coming from behind to defeat the Dauphin Kings 4-2 at Credit Union Place and extend their winning streak to 11 games, the second time this season they have managed such a streak.

The matchup featured two teams who have played each other close this season despite the difference in the standings.

Dauphin entered the night sitting third in the West Division, but the Kings were also one of just three teams to have beaten the Nighthawks this year, having handed Niverville a 5-1 loss back on October 12.

Despite playing just their second game in nine days, the league-leading

Nighthawks found a way into the win column once again.

With starting goaltender Dubinsky sidelined by injury, Chornomydz got the nod for Niverville, marking the first time this season he's started back-to-back games. Entering the night with a 1.39 goals-against average and a .937 save percentage, Chornomydz was tested early as Dauphin controlled much of the opening period.

The Kings generated several quality chances, including a breakaway by Joey Kubas midway through the frame, but Chornomydz flashed the glove to keep the game scoreless.

Dauphin eventually broke through late in the period while on the power play. Kubas carried the puck into the zone before sliding a pass to Rylan Gage, whose quick release beat Chornomydz to give the Kings a 1-0 lead.

Dauphin outshot Niverville 12-7 in the opening period, but Chornomydz's steady play kept the Nighthawks within striking distance.

That patience paid off midway through the second when Niverville tied the game. Krestanowich fired a perfectly placed slap-pass from the right point to Wheddon at the left side of the crease, and Wheddon redirected it past Bryson Yaschyshyn for his twentieth goal.

Early in the final frame, momentum swung decisively. The Nighthawks were awarded a penalty shot after a Kings defender covered the puck with his glove in the crease. Leduc went forehand to backhand to beat Yaschyshyn and put Niverville ahead.

Moments later, the lead doubled. Demone delivered a beautiful pass to Edwards in the slot, who spun before slipping a backhand past the Dauphin netminder to make it 3-1.

The Kings briefly pulled back within one when Kubas fired a point shot through traffic that found its way past Chornomydz, cutting the deficit to 3-2.

But just 17 seconds later, Wheddon raced down the right wing on a two-on-one and threaded a pass across to Mears, who snapped a shot over the blocker to restore Niverville's two-goal lead.

Edwards nearly added his second of the night into an empty net in the final minute, ringing a shot off the post, but it mattered little as the Nighthawks closed out the 4-2 victory.



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Eastman Speedskaters Return from Nationals with Impressive Wins

By Brenda Sawatzky

bsawatzky@nivervillecitizen.com

Manitoba's junior speedskating competitors shone once again at the annual Canadian Long Track Championships in Quebec City from January 8-10.

All five youth members of the local Eastman Speed Skating Club ranked high enough to qualify and represent Manitoba—and between them, they brought home an impressive number of medals.

Making up the Manitoba quintet is 15-year-old Willa Dowse of Niverville and 14-year-old Mia Tetrault of Ste. Agathe.

The final three, hailing from south Winnipeg, are Yule Wang, Everett Saydak, and Justin Cheng.

"Every year, Manitoba does super well," says club president Cara Dowse. "This year we sent five kids and they came home with six medals. Quebec has 30 skaters in this competition and they win a lot of medals. Quebec is very strong, but we do really well considering our low numbers."

All five skaters competed at the Neo-Junior championship level against other 14- and 15-year-olds from across Canada.

"At this age, all the kids race all the distances," Dowse says. "So they all do 500, 1000, 1500, and 3000-metre and they all do a mass start, which is a ten-lap race with 20 people



Five Manitoba speedskaters competed in Quebec City last month: Yule Wang, Willa Dowse, Everett Saydak, Mia Tetrault, and Justin Cheng.

CARA DOWSE

on the start line at the same time. The other distances are called Olympic-style, which is all time-based."

Willa took home a gold medal in the 1500-metre and silver in the 1000-metre. She managed a number of fourth-place finishes as well.

In the mass start competition, Mia took bronze and then a silver in the 3000-metre.

Yule took the bronze medal in both the 500-metre and the mass start.

Unfortunately, one of the remaining Manitoba

competitors came down with the flu while in Quebec and had to miss most of the competitions. Dowse is confident their wins otherwise could have been higher.

Going to the nationals means more than just proving one's skill in a variety of categories. It also provides an opportunity for young, up-and-coming Olympians to hone their skills alongside peers and mentors from other provinces.

"Willa was paired with the top male skater from Quebec," Dowse says. "It's just so that they can practice some of the

events that will come up if they keep skating into higher levels."

Speed Skate Canada is the national governing body for speedskating across the country and the organizers of the national competition.

"We're here to rally, inspire, and lead the charge for our country's most successful Olympic sport," the website states.

Next year, as Willa turns 16, she'll make the jump to the Junior championship category where she'll compete against 16- to 18-year-olds from across the country.

If she continues in the pursuit, Willa will be eligible to participate in Olympic trials in the coming years.

This past fall, Willa and her mom attended the World Cup in Calgary as spectators, giving Willa the opportunity to get to watch international competitors whom she's come to recognize and idolize.

Unfortunately for Manitoba speedskating competitors, there will always be travel involved when it comes to competing at a national level.

"There are only three indoor long tracks in the country," says Dowse. "So the nationals are always in Fort St. John, Quebec City, or Calgary."

The Manitoba club practices on an outdoor rink with a natural ice surface at the Cindy Klassen Recreation Complex in Winnipeg.

"I think that's why we do so well," Dowse says, tongue in cheek. "We're tougher. The Quebec kids are inside skating and we're skating in -30 with a windchill most of the time. So when we go inside, we kick butt."

Speedskating has been a recognized sport in Canada for more than 150 years. What's believed to be the first formal speedskating race in Canada took place in 1854.

That year, three British army officers challenged each other to make the fastest time from Montréal to Québec City, using the frozen St. Lawrence River as their track.

In 1887, the Amateur Skating Association of Canada was created.

Special recognition needs to be given to 63-year-old Randy Plett, also of Eastman Speed Skating Club, who recently won a bronze medal at the 17th Master Sprint Games in Innsbruck, Austria.

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