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VOLUME 5
EDITION 5

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2026
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MLA for Midland



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Competitors in the ever-popular Cardboard Toboggan Races at the Altona Winter Carnival start down the hill at Buffalo Creek Nature Park on Saturday. For more carnival photos, check out Pg. 2. [FACEBOOK.COM/TOWNOFALTONARECREATIONDEPT](https://www.facebook.com/TownofAltonaRecreationDept)

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PHOTOS BY EDWARD VINCENT ARCELAR/VOICE

Altona's Winter Carnival—the Olympic Edition—Saturday featured a host of events both inside and outdoors. Activities at the Millennium Exhibition Centre and the Altona Rhineland Pioneer Centre included a pancake breakfast served up by Queen Quest royalty, inflatable game zone and balloon animals, free public skating, bingo with the 2026 graduating class, and a showing of the movie Snow Buddies. Outside, the Buffalo Creek Nature Park hosted sledding, snowshoeing, curling, a hockey shootout with the WC Miller Aces, and a candy scramble.



Additions to the Voters List and/or Personal Security Protection Requests

In accordance with Section 36 of The Municipal Councils and School Boards Election Act, the Town of Altona Voters List is open for changes or revisions.

Any person who is eligible to vote in municipal elections in the Local Authority of the Town of Altona can have their name added to the Voters List, or have any information about the voter on the Voters List corrected.

Any person can request to have their name and address obscured from the Voters List. A person whose name has been obscured will receive a Personal Security Certificate and identification number. In a civic election, that person may only vote by Sealed Envelope Ballot and cannot vote in person at the regular or advance voting places.

To implement the above, a written request must be submitted to the Senior Election Official:

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by phone: 204-324-6468
by fax: 204-324-1550
by e-mail: info@altona.ca

**The next General Election takes place on:
October 28th, 2026**

Altona



Pride festivities coming to Winkler for the first time

By Ashleigh Viveiros

After stints in Morden, Altona, and Carman, the Pembina Valley Pride 2026 celebration is coming to Winkler.

The 2SLGBTQIA+ organization announced last week that their sixth annual Pride event will take place in the city on Saturday, June 13.

"Every year after our Pride festivities, we put out a survey post-event: what did we do well, what could we improve on, where would you like to see it happen next year? And every year Winkler was in there and last year it was the number one location," shared Pauline Emerson-Froebe, president of Pembina Valley Pride. "It is the largest community in the Pembina Valley, so it would only make sense that sooner or later we'd come to Winkler ... it is time."

Emerson-Froebe acknowledges this decision isn't sitting well with some people. News of the announcement immediately ignited a flurry of social media posts, some supportive and some decidedly negative.

She hopes Winklerites will extend Pride participants the same respect they'd expect from other community members at their own public gatherings.

"We just want everybody to have respect for each other, be nice to each other, be decent to each other. I don't think that is an unreasonable ask."

The entire point of a Pride event, Pauline Emerson-Froebe stressed, is to acknowledge that 2SLGBTQIA+ people exist and to provide a space where they can celebrate with others. This can be especially important in traditionally conservative communities where being different can be in-

credibly isolating.

"It does get really lonely ... am I the only one? And then people want to leave and in doing that they take their talents, they take their personalities, they take it all and they leave," she said.

"We're having it in Winkler to show the folks in Winkler, the queer people in Winkler—because there are some—that they deserve to exist and to be loved within the community," Emerson-Froebe said. "Every time we have come to a different community, it has made such a powerful impact on the queer folks of that community."

This year's Pride won't include a march through town but will instead be focused on a rally featuring guest speakers, stage performances, and other activities taking place at one location. Organizers are also planning to double security to ensure everyone participating feels safe.

Emerson-Froebe hopes some of the more hateful comments made online this past week aren't an indication of how the event will be greeted in real life by Winklerites. She reminds people that no one is obligated to participate in Pride if they don't feel comfortable doing so.

"If this isn't your groove, by all means find something else you want to do that day," she said, noting it's like any other community gathering in that "if you don't want to go to it, don't go to it."

"We're not trying to indoctrinate anybody with this. We're just doing this for the [2SLGBTQIA+] community and also for the allies," she said. "It provides an opportunity for allies to

Continued on page 4



VOICE FILE PHOTO

Pembina Valley Pride has hosted community celebrations for Pride Month in Morden, Altona, and Carman, and now they're coming to Winkler June 13.

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GVSD board gives green light for a new kind of high school experience

Big Picture Learning program to launch in Winkler

By Ashleigh Viveiros

Garden Valley School Division is giving Big Picture Learning (BPL) a go.

The board of trustees last week voted in favour of moving ahead with the proposed project, which division staff have been researching for the past several months.

BPL is an alternative method of high school education that puts an emphasis on practical learning experiences tied to a student's interests.

"We started the conversations on this last year when we looked at our strategic plan and engaging high school students, providing pathways to graduation for some of our students who really struggle with engagement," explained superintendent Dan Ward. "We started talking about looking at high school a little differently for some of our students, and in that came conversations around Big Picture Learning."

Personalized learning plans are created for

each BPL student that allow them to spend up to two days a week on internships out in the community being mentored by people who are putting the concepts and skills they're learning about into real-life action.

Students are still required to attend school regularly and earn course credits so they can graduate with a provincial diploma, but they reach curriculum-based goals in a much more flexible, community-integrated environment than traditional classroom-centred teaching.

"A lot of the instruction and learning is done through working with teachers and subject matter experts on a variety of projects and portfolios," Ward explained. "There's still lots of direct instruction, in particular in areas like math and sciences ... but you'll also see students working on individual projects as well, and working within teams around areas of inquiry ... and out on internships."

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> PRIDE, FROM PG. 3

show their support in a public, visible way so that we are reminded that we aren't alone.

"We're really excited about this because Winkler really is a lovely place," Emerson-Froebe added. "There are so many lovely people who have been so welcoming and so kind, and really that's what we're hoping for—that all of us for each other can be respectful and kind."

It's a sentiment echoed by Winkler Mayor Henry Siemens, who issued a public statement in response to online chatter and the flood of emails he began receiving in the wake of the announcement.

In it, the mayor pointed out that this is not a City-organized event, but noted Winkler does have "many public spaces and facilities that are used by the public for a wide variety of events. Council and I don't personally support all of the beliefs or ideologies of the various groups or events that might take place in Winkler but we do support people's individual freedom to plan and host their own events."

"It is my sincere prayer that we, as a community, find a way to respect one-another's freedoms and pray that no one event would define who we are. That we would live out our faith every day with genuine love and respect and kindness for everyone and THAT is what would define us."

In a later interview, Siemens reiterated that he hopes the true heart of Winkler will win out when it comes to how the community presents itself in the months ahead—and that includes how people act when it comes to dealing with an event they may not agree with.

"How can we put our best foot forward as a community to show the world who we are?" he said. "We are an exceptionally generous, supportive community, and I want us to show the world that."



Big Bros Big Sis finds a new home in Morden-Winkler community centres

Mentoring agency is celebrating 50 years in 2026 amidst navigating financial challenges

By Ashleigh Viveiros

Big Brothers Big Sisters began a new chapter in their 50-year history in the region last week.

Financial challenges forced the mentoring agency to sell its offices in Winkler late last year. They are now setting up shop at the Central Station Community Centre in Winkler and the 500 Stephen Community Centre in Morden twice a week to meet with prospective volunteers and families.

"We'll be at 500 Stephen Tuesdays and at Central Station Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.," shared executive director Jenelle Neufeld as their first week in the new spaces came to a close.

She's optimistic this change will be a good one, long-term, for the agency, as it puts them in spaces where the families they serve can much more easily connect with them.

"Our old office was a little off the beaten path," she said. "For the demographic we serve, unless you have a car, then it was very out of the way."

"We wanted to meet people where they're already at and already accessing other social services," she said. "And we wholeheartedly support

and are behind what 500 Stephen and Central Station do ... they both have programs that are a very wrap-around approach to supporting people, so it just made sense. And they've both welcomed us with open arms."

Still, the decision to sell their offices wasn't one the non-profit's board took lightly. But it had become a necessity.

The unexpected loss of a longtime, externally-organized fundraiser a few years ago that had generated upwards of \$20,000 a year for the agency put them in a significant deficit they've yet to recover from, Neufeld explained.

That situation followed by consecutive years that saw other fundraising initiatives struggle to reach their targets put them in a situation where keeping the Winkler office was no longer feasible.

"It just wasn't sustainable," Neufeld said.

"Ninety-five per cent of our budget is fundraised donations and grants," she noted, observing that uncertain economic times certainly has a ripple effect through the community, including on non-profits, and Big Bros. has certainly felt the sting of that in recent

"WE'RE THE ONLY ONES DOING WHAT WE DO."



Big Bros executive director Jenelle Neufeld in the space they'll be setting up shop at 500 Stephen once a week moving forward, along with one day a week at Central Station in Winkler.

PHOTO BY ASHLEIGH VIVEIROS/VOICE

years. "We know we're not alone in this—it's difficult for everybody right now, and we're very aware of that."

But she feels strongly about the mission of Big Brothers Big Sisters, which is to create supportive mentoring relationships—be it through one-on-one matches or group programs—that help youth build confidence, develop life skills, and feel more connected to their community.

"We're the only ones doing what we do," Neufeld said, stressing they're going to do everything they can to get and keep their heads above water so they can continue with that programming.

Neufeld has made presentations to municipal councils throughout their service area asking them to consider

supporting Big Bros. in their budgets this year.

It's the first time the agency has had to make such a blanket request for municipal support. Neufeld hopes elected officials will consider the impact reaching youth early can have on their success later in life.

"Over the past six years, I've sat at a lot of tables in our region and we as social services agencies are talking a lot about the concerns that we all have—food insecurity, homelessness, financial insecurity, mental health," she said. "All these things that young people may have stacked up against them."

"There are a lot of social service agencies that are helping people in

Continued on page 7

> BIG PICTURE LEARNING, FROM PG. 4

"It's a model that exists throughout the world," he said, noting Manitoba currently has five BPL schools operating in Winnipeg. GVSD will be the third Manitoba school division to launch a BPL program.

BPL students are generally placed in small groups—about 15 students each—and are led by a teacher who stays with them from Gr. 9 all the way through Gr. 12.

"So they get to know each other and their teachers really well," Ward said.

GVSD intends to start with its first cohort of Gr. 9 BPL students this fall and grow from there.

That first year will focus on practical skills training, both in the classroom and on class field trips, with the student internships to come likely more so in the group's second year in the program.

"We're really going to be developing the global competencies, the soft

skills. Elements like good communication skills, good collaboration skills, critical thinking," Ward said. "All these pieces they're going to need to be successful in the world of work and throughout high school."

Discussions with local businesses this past year has yielded a great deal of interest in the program, what it might end up looking like, and how it could help more youth realize the opportunities that exist for building their post-high school careers here in Winkler. That bodes very well for the future of BPL internships, Ward noted.

"We feel confident in this," he said, stressing that it's very much going to be an extension of the existing vocational programs in the division. "We have great career education programs at both GVC and NPC, and we certainly don't want to detract from the work they're doing—we want to

complement the work that's already happening in those schools."

GVSD board chair Leah Klassen said they're excited to be taking this next step in alternative education options.

"We think it's going to be a good program to really embrace the whole notion of real-world learning," she said. "Linking learning back into the community, into service learning with maybe a non-profit organization or with a business ... getting ready for the world after graduation in a different setting than a traditional high school."

The financial impact is expected to be minimal in the 2026-2027 budget year, as the division will be able to shift around existing resources to accommodate the program.

Long-term, those costs will rise as more new cohorts enter the program, Klassen noted, but the benefits in terms of student engagement and

success, the board believes, will be worth it.

"We've seen this, in both urban and rural centers, working really, really well, and with an eye toward increasing graduation rates, ensuring that there's more opportunity for kids that maybe just aren't jiving in the regular kind of high school world."

"Linking it back to business, our area is so fruitful with entrepreneurs. So the mentoring potential is huge. Giving kids an opportunity to go, okay, I want to stay in school and I want to learn all this stuff and now I can talk to this business and they're showing me the ropes."

Divisional staff have already begun meeting to plan how to roll this program out. Registration is expected to begin later this spring.

More details will be made available shortly on gvsd.ca and through public information sessions expected to be held within weeks.

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OUR SISTER PUBLICATIONS



get heard

EDITORIAL > VIEWPOINTS > LETTERS

Who will they meet?

Given that Feb. 14 is Valentine's Day, I thought it appropriate to write a column about love. Did you know there is a point where statistics intersect with love? I will explain.

Depending on the studies you read, somewhere between 4.4 and 12 per cent of the Canadian population identify as 2SLGBTQI+. That's a lot. That's between 682 to 1,860 people in Winkler and between 3,000 and 8,000 people in the Pembina Valley.

What is the point of all of this? I mean, these are just statistics, right? Why do we care?

We care because behind these numbers exist people. Right now, somewhere between 3,000 to 8,000 people in the Pembina Valley identify as part of the Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex communities.

They are people who we work with, people we worship with, people who serve us a meal at the local restaurant, doctors, lawyers, plumbers, electricians, teachers, husbands, wives, partners, and more. They are tax paying, voting, living, breathing, feeling members of our communities. They are our sisters and brothers, our mothers, fathers, grandparents, and children. They are people we care about. They are people we love. Human beings.

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This is why we care (or at least should care).

Recently, the 2SLGBTQI+ organization Pembina Valley Pride announced that the Pride celebration for 2026 will be held in Winkler. I applaud their choice of February—the month of love—as the month to make the announcement. In past years it has been held in Morden, Carman, and Altona, numerous times ... but never Winkler.

Why has it taken so long to come to Winkler, the region's largest community?

Well, to be honest, fear is a big part of why. Winkler is well known as a community very proud of its deep, conservative, evangelical Christian faith. In much of the 2SLGBTQI+ community (and beyond) these things are synonymous with intolerance, fear, anger, and hate—deserved or not.

So, it takes a great deal of courage for a group like Pembina Valley Pride to decide to host its event in Winkler. But why even bother? Why not just continue to avoid Winkler?

Well, Pembina Valley Pride knows that somewhere between 700-1,800 people in Winkler are part of the Pride community. These are people who have watched Pride events pop up around them in neighbouring communities wondering and hoping

one day they would see it in theirs.

It can be an isolating thing growing up different from others in a small, rural community. It can make a person feel alone and without value. God forbid if people found out about your difference. Then you must deal with bullying, harassment, and the depression that comes alongside that.

Youth who are 2SLGBTQI+ are more than three times more likely than their peers to struggle with suicidal thoughts; more than 85 per cent of these youth report having to deal with sexuality-based harassment. 2SLGBTQI+ youth are disproportionately represented amongst homeless youth. Resentment by peers and rejection by family are the key factors in driving these things.

This is one of the key reasons Pride events exist. Pride is an opportunity to state clearly to the Winkler 2SLGBTQI+ population that:

"You are not alone. You have a voice. You have value. We accept you for who you are. We will stand with you. You have a community."

And, most importantly: "You are loved."

You are loved. This is the primary reason for Pride.

Continued on page 7

Letter policy

The Voice welcomes letters from readers on local matters.

Please keep your letters short (excessively long letters are less likely to be published), on-topic, and respectful.

The Voice reserves the right to edit, condense, or reject any submission.

Please include your full name, address, and phone number for verification purposes. Your name and city will be published with your letter. We do not print anonymous letters.

Send your letters to us by e-mail at news@winklermordenvoice.ca.

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• FAITH FOCUS

A place for refuge

The concept of refuge has been on my mind. The Bible presents God as our Creator and also as a refuge for all who seek Him. The word "refuge" appears approximately five hundred times in the Bible.

In Canada we are very familiar with weather conditions that require us to seek refuge. There are other kinds of storms that can swirl around our hearts and minds. In many different ways—personal, local and internationally—we are looking for a safe place where we can have relief from danger or anxiety. As we listen to or watch the daily news we see and hear of people who are seeking "refuge".

What is the Bible definition of refuge? The word is used most often to refer to a safe place, or to tell others to take



By Randy Smart

"It's our job to set these kids up for the best chance that they have to reach their full potential"

From Pg. 5

the here and now," she continued, pointing to the work being done by the community centres and food banks, for example. "In my opinion, however, unless we are also investing money into the next generation, nothing is going to change.

"Our whole philosophy and mandate and mission and vision is breaking the cycles, or at the very least giving kids the opportunity and the tools to break those cycles."

The one-on-one mentoring relationships they foster are a big part of that—research has shown kids who have had another stable adult role model in their lives through Big Bros. are more confident, happier, and believe they're making better life choices as a result—but group programming has increasingly become another focus of the agency in recent years, including through youth-tailored workshops on things like financial literacy.

"It's our job to set these kids up for the best chance that they have to reach their full potential," Neufeld said.

They reached 125 kids in 2025—a ground-breaking number, especially considering the financial challenges they've been facing, Neufeld noted.

"So my plea to the business community, to the municipal governments is: imagine what we could do if we had the funding and support."

As they look to celebrate their 50th anniversary

refuge. The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary says that it is a "shelter or relief from danger or anxiety; a high rock (Is. 33:16), a secure dwelling place (Deut. 33:27), a place to flee to (Psalm 142:4), a shelter (Is. 4:6)."

We will not be shielded from every unpleasant experience, but in the Lord we can find inner strength, certain hope and courage to face the unexpected, unknown and uncertain present.

One hymn that has helped to express the concept of God as a source of refuge is the song "A Shelter in the Time of Storm."

"The Lord's our Rock, in Him we hide, A shelter in the time of storm; Secure whatever ill befalls, A shelter in the time of storm.

Refrain: Oh, Jesus is a Rock in a weary land, A weary land, a weary land; Oh, Jesus is a Rock in a weary land, A shelter in the time of storm.

A shade by day, defense by night, A shelter in the time of storm; No fears alarm, no foes affright, A shelter in the time of storm.

The raging storms may round us beat, A shelter in the time of storm. We'll never leave our safe retreat, A shelter in the time of storm.

O Rock divine, O Refuge dear, A shelter in the time of storm; Be Thou our helper ever near,

A shelter in the time of storm."

In the New Testament the apostle Paul expressed praise to God who had provided comfort to him in challenging times. In 2 Corinthians 1:3,4 we read "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

We may and should seek a safe place because of our own inner needs of soul and spirit. The Lord is the recommended shelter for our souls. Talk to him out loud and tell him of the deepest pains. He is not surprised and will not reject us. He offers us hope and shelter. When we have experienced the comfort that comes from God, we will, in quiet and thoughtful ways, be looking for opportunities to help others who are in seasons of despair and need.

Randy Smart has been a pastor in Southern Manitoba since 1979

> CANTELO, FROM PG. 6

When confronted with the reality of Pride coming to your community and decisions you may need to make, you may believe you face difficulty. But I can tell you that compared to most of us, for people growing up in the 2SLGBTQI+ community it is more difficult than you or I could ever imagine.

When Pride comes to Winkler, the city will be met with joy, happiness, and enthusiasm. Winkler will be met with pride.

Between now and June 13th, residents of Winkler and, no doubt, the small rural villages surrounding it have an opportunity to decide what kind of Winkler the Pride participants will be met with.

Will it be the stereotype? Will it be a Winkler with a face of fear, anger, blockades, threats, intolerance, and hate?

For many in the largely Christian community the question will be: which Christ will Pride be met with? Will it be a Christ filled with fear and anger? Will it be a hateful Christ who threatens harm? Who screams, "Sinner! Abomination! Get away from me, I have nothing for you!" Or will it be an open-armed Christ of love?

Will Winkler meet Pride with love?

How the city and its people meet Pride will directly inform the many community members who are part of the 2SLGBTQI+ community and its allies exactly what is thought of them. It will also communicate to the province, the nation, and beyond what kind of city it is.

Who will they meet?

Salem Crokinole Tournament returns March 5

By Ashleigh Viveiros

The second annual Salem Crokinole Tournament returns next month.

The Salem Ladies Auxiliary is once again hosting an evening of friendly competition at the Winkler personal care home on Thursday, March 5 at 6:30 p.m.

"Last year's was so successful that we just really felt we needed to go for it again. It's a wonderful event," shared Susan Hildebrand, Salem Foundation executive coordinator.

Nearly 40 teams came out to the inaugural tournament, raising over \$20,000 in pledges to purchase benches for Salem's pathway project.

"It was just amazing how the community jumped to embrace it and to support it," Hildebrand said, noting they had initially planned to hold the games in the Heritage Room but the sheer number of teams and all the fans cheering them on quickly saw the event spill out into the adjacent chapel space.

"The thing that we were most thrilled about was how the community and the residents and children of all ages all came together," she said.

"We had residents that were playing, young people playing—it was definitely a community event, and everyone had a great time."

This time around they're setting their sights on raising funds to spruce up Salem's staff lounge, which hasn't been upgraded in decades and, at times in recent years, has become part storage area while renovations occur elsewhere in the facility.

"We do have a staff lounge at present, but it hasn't been functional in a lot of ways, so they're looking to refresh it, take out what is there and start fresh," Hildebrand said, noting Salem's team works hard to care for the residents, and they deserve an inviting, comfortable space in which to take their breaks and recharge. "When you take care of your staff, it certainly makes a difference ... they're looking after our residents, after the people who have made this community what it is. When they get a nice place to refresh, they can come out and do well and just give more to the residents."

There will be prizes once again for tournament's top teams and organizers are also hoping to have some raffle goodies up for grabs.



VOICE FILE PHOTO

The Salem Crokinole Tournament last year brought together teams of all ages. The 2026 event takes place at the Winkler personal care home March 5.

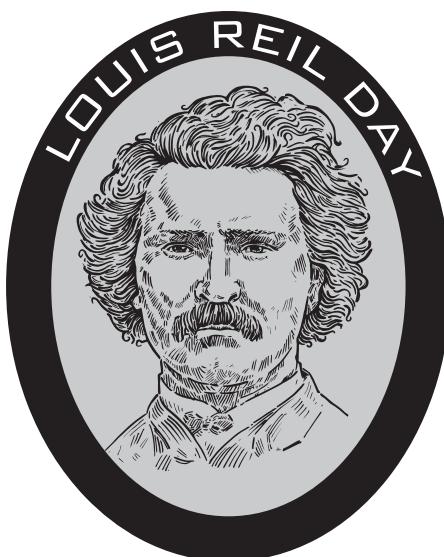
Snacks and drinks will also be available by donation.

The tournament is open to all ages. Registration is \$5 per player (two players/team). Players are asked to collected pledges for the cause.

There is a limit of 32 teams this year, so register early to avoid disappointment. The deadline to sign up is Feb. 23. Call 204-325-4316 to register.

"I just encourage everyone to come out and have fun," Hildebrand said. "It's not about how good you play, it's how much fun you can generate in the environment."

"And if there are family members out there that have a resident here, we encourage them to team up and come and participate."



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Manitoba gov't announces public schools funding increase

By Lorne Stelmach

On Monday, the province announced its financial support for education in Manitoba for the school year ahead, touting that it is increasing school funding overall by \$79.8 million to nearly \$2 billion.

While the funding overall represents a 3.5 per cent increase, it is somewhat limited for the school divisions in this region. Garden Valley School Division is receiving a 2.2 per cent or \$800,000 increase to about \$36.4 million, Western School Division is getting about two per cent or \$400,000 more to \$19.2M, Border Land School Division will see a 1.8 per cent increase of \$400,000 to \$21.1M, Red River Valley School Division increases \$300,000 or 2.1 per cent to \$16.3M, and both Prairie Rose and Prairie Spirit are receiving about \$300,000 or 1.9 per cent more to \$17.8 and \$17.1 million, respectively.

Education and Early Childhood Minister Tracy Schmidt suggested the previous government didn't ad-

equately fund education and also restricted local authorities from raising property taxes.

"We're taking a different approach ... we know that schools and kids deserve to be invested in," she said, adding that they are suggesting to local divisions that it "allows them to go to their ratepayer in an equally stable and predictable way."

"We believe that providing stable and predictable funding is very important for school divisions ... that's what school divisions have been asking for, and that's what we have been delivering ... and we expect them to increase their budgets in a stable and predictable way that meets the needs of Manitobans when it comes to affordability."

"It means smaller class sizes and more individual attention for students ... and it's important to know that these things are only possible when schools have the proper funding that they need."

Continued on page 9

Western SD asking for public input in budget process

By Lorne Stelmach

Western School Division is offering an opportunity for residents to have their say on the 2026-27 budget.

An online survey is part of the process that will lead up to the introduction of a draft budget at a public meeting at Maple Leaf School March 4 to be followed by formal approval at the following board meeting.

"We're still waiting to hear what the funding will be from the province ... they're not giving us a lot of time," acknowledged board chairperson Darcy Wolfe last week. The public schools funding announcement from the province came on Monday (see story on Pg. 8).

He noted the board has done a budget survey for a few years now in the lead up to when they introduce the budget for the next school year.

"This is something we put out while we're making our budget decisions. We are in the middle of budget season right now, so we are just trying to get information and feedback from the community, from staff members who we have talked to already," he said.

It is a short survey that asks a number of questions:

- What are some areas in WSD that are doing well that should be continued?
- What are some areas where WSD could improve?
- What should be the top educational priorities for WSD?
- What additional supports (eg., mental

health, cyber-safety, special education, Indigenous education, career guidance, extra-curricular activities, technology access, etc.) should be prioritized?

- What specific resources do you believe WSD is lacking?
- What specific facility or grounds upgrades, renovations, or new spaces would enhance student learning and well-being?
- What innovative ideas to improve student learning do you have?
- Do you feel all students have appropriate access to learning opportunities and resources based on their needs?

"It shouldn't take too long to fill out, and it's for anybody. You don't have to be a parent of a student or a staff member," Wolfe noted. "Anybody in Western School Division and anybody in the community is welcome to fill it out."

Wolfe said it is vital for the board to get input from the community.

"This is one of the ways for community members who don't usually communicate with the board to let their voice be heard. They are able to tell us through the survey what we are doing well, what we need to work on and what areas they feel might need investment, whether it's capital improvements or whether educational programs that might be missing."

"It's a really good way for community members to let us know what we need to be focusing on and what's important to them."

Wolfe acknowledged WSD has been fortunate with provincial funding in recent years.



"I think part of that was due to the province knowing that we had a new school that we needed to fund, but we don't have that this year," he noted. "We do have some different things we have to look at this year with teacher contracts and such ... so there are some added pressures that we are facing, and we're working on moving the dollars and cents around and making sure that we have enough to keep our schools well funded and well run."

There are of course always some pressures that come with being a growing division.

"Every year, there are more students, and with more students come new challenges. Some students are coming, and they need help with language skills and some students come with special needs," Wolfe said. "Every year, new challenges arise and new costs, and that's just part of the system."

> SCHOOLS FUNDING, FROM PG. 8

School divisions have often suggested they are receiving increases that are not enough to keep up with the level of growth and rising costs of education.

"We know that enrolment certainly is one factor that drives how much money a school division gets each year, but there's other factors that we consider," noted Schmidt.

The province attests that the overall 3.5 per cent funding increase for public schools in the 2026-27 school year will help manage enrolment changes and ensure students have the supports they need to succeed. The formula guarantee will continue for 2026-27, ensuring every school division receives an increase to the previous year's funding amount.

The Manitoba government's 2026-27 school funding now totals \$1.995 billion and includes:

- \$51 million increase to help public schools with operating costs, which includes the investment in salary harmonization and technical vocational education;

- \$30 million for a universal school nutrition program and Nello's Law, which protects the program for years to come, plus an additional \$3 million from the sale of U.S. alcohol products for the Children's Nutrition Council;

- \$15.2 million increase in capital support, which includes principal and interest costs related to building schools;

- \$16.6 million increase to independent schools under the funding agreement.

"When we came into government, schools across Manitoba were struggling after seven years of cuts," said Finance Minister Adrien Sala.

He touted a number of statistics including that the province had hired over 1,600 new staff since 2024 including over 800 new teachers and built 11 new schools, largely in Winnipeg and Brandon.

"Our government is committed to making sure every Manitoba family can count on strong, stable public schools, year after year. We are meeting the needs of students and communities by building new schools and feeding kids with our universal school food program," said Schmidt.

She noted the Manitoba government is allocating \$11.4 million in public school funding to support divisions most affected by teacher salary harmonization. Salary harmonization will be implemented in the 2026-27 school year to standardize teacher pay scales across school divisions to help minimize disparities.

"We've heard from many school boards that salary harmonization costs were creating significant pressures for this upcoming year," she acknowledged.

"By working together, we are creating a more equitable system that benefits teachers and supports stability for school divisions at a time when the demands on public schools are more complex than ever before," said Alan Campbell, president of the Manitoba School Boards Association.

"School boards recognize that the funding contribution for harmonization announced today is a step in the right direction and we look forward to continuing our work with government to ensure funding fully meets the needs of students, staff and communities across Manitoba."

Candlewick brings *Meet Me In St. Louis* to the stage

By Lorne Stelmach

A classic romantic musical comedy that dates back to a 1944 film is being presented this month as the Valentine's season production of Candlewick Players.

Meet Me in St. Louis is a classic MGM musical that focuses on four sisters on the cusp of the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. The film spotlights the sisters' education in the ways of the world amidst plenty of song, dance, and period costumes.

"The show has great family values and dynamics, and most people can relate to these in some way shape or form," said actor Chuck Fefchak. "Strong-minded children express opinions that could alter Dad's employment. Younger siblings offer unrequested opinions on older siblings' choice of companion resulting in the expected rivalry. And in the end, these events bring a smile to patrons' faces who recognize these events in their own lives."

The storyline features the four sisters who are all blazing with excitement over the impending World's Fair. They are also in a state about the love life of their only brother, whom they suspect of ditching his sweet hometown girl for a snob from the east.



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Meet Me in St. Louis took the stage at the Kenmor Theatre in Morden last weekend and will continue its run with dinner theatre performances at the Manitou Opera House this weekend.

In the midst of the sisters' humorous maneuvers to rule or ruin their brother's new romance, the father finally breaks in with an announcement: he's been offered a better job in New York, which will mean leaving their home in St. Louis and missing the fair. At this, the girls unite for action.

"One can imagine the community importance of a World's Fair in 1904, but what if events prevented a family from enjoying them? What sort of re-

actions would we see? And what actions would teenagers take to be able to attend the World's Fair?" Fefchak said.

"As in every production we do, it's wonderful to watch the cast takes these well-known characters and present their own slant on their character," he noted. "We see some familiar faces in the cast, but this year we have a couple of newcomers to the Candlewick family. They bring a de-

lightful addition to this show.

"It's family-friendly fun. And a welcome reprieve from the winter doldrums."

Following shows at the Kenmor Theatre last weekend, the production continues with dinner theatre performances at the Manitou Opera House this Friday and Saturday.

Ticket information is available at candlewick.ca.

New construction numbers continue to grow across region

By Lorne Stelmach

New construction and development overall continued to pick up across the region through 2025.

That trend was reflected in the year-end building permit statistics of the MSTW (Morden Stanley Thompson and Winkler) Planning District.

Some of the numbers varied, but it overall looked positive for the region, suggested MSTW general manager Glen Wieler.

"The big difference in Winkler was the number of permits were very similar but the value was down," he noted.

"We had a couple of big projects that carried over from 2024," Wieler added citing the Winkler arena project as well as the wastewater plant. "Both were major projects going on in 2024 that are getting done now, so that's where the difference is now."

"Other than that, the number of permits across the board is quite consistent actually, considering the volume of work."

A key indicator is always the single-family housing starts, and they were up in both Winkler and Morden.

"That's definitely on the rise, so that's good to see," said Wieler.

"In Morden, they're still working on solutions for the wastewater ... and Winkler looks like they're waiting on developers to open up more lots for 2026. It always just takes time to get those projects completed before people start building houses. It's just a huge cost and a lot of work to get it done."

Here are some highlights from the key statistics for 2025:

WINKLER

Total building permits increased from 231 to 246.

The value of the development, however, decreased from over \$171 million to just over \$83 million.

New single family residential units were up from 29 to 58, and the value rose from \$10.7 million to \$22 million.

New multi-family developments decreased from 15 to 10 although the value rose slightly from \$30.2 million to just under \$32 million.

New commercial development dropped slightly from 15 to 12 while the value also went down from \$5.2 million to \$4 million.

New industrial development went from five to three, and the value dropped sharply from \$52.1 million to \$1.7 million.

MORDEN

Total building permits increased from 96 to 117.

The value of the development only dropped slightly from \$37.6 million to \$37.3 million.

New single family residential units almost doubled from 12 to 23 while the value also increased from \$4.8 million to \$9.4 million.

New commercial development dropped from eight to five although the value went up from \$4.1 million to \$6.1 million.

There was no new industrial development compared to the previous year when there were three permits with a value of \$5.6 million.

STANLEY

Total building permits dropped slightly from 125 to 121.

The value of the development however jumped from \$22.2 million to \$36.8 million.

New single family residential units

went up slightly from 21 to 23, while the value rose from \$9.3 million to \$12.3 million.

New commercial development went down from 13 to 11 while the value went up however from \$1.3 million to \$8.2 million.

There was just one new industrial development with a value of \$700,000 compared to zero the previous year.

THOMPSON

The RM of Thompson had 18 permits last year compared to 12 the year before while the value rose from \$2.2 million to \$2.9 million.

Overall, Wieler said it was encouraging to see development picking up across the region.

"People are still moving here. They're still buying houses and building ... so it's good to see all those things happening."

"There's still lots of multi-family development going on in the region," he added. "We've seen more and more of those coming up in the last five years plus ... there's still lots of people who want to move to the region, so that's a good thing."

Minnewasta Golf clubhouse on track for summer opening

By Lorne Stelmach

Work on the new clubhouse and restaurant at the Minnewasta Golf and Country Club has been progressing well, and officials are optimistic the project is on schedule.

General manager and golf pro Greg Hesom said a key aspect of the construction was being in a position to move on more to interior work before the onset of winter.

"The building was closed in before the cold weather arrived, so the guys are able to work inside with heating," he said. "The interior walls are framed ... the plumbing is going in, the electrical is going in and then drywall following shortly after that."

"Our goal was for sometime in June, and it looks like we are still on track for that," Hesom said of the projected finish date.

The fire that destroyed most of the clubhouse and restaurant came early in 2025 after a gala had just recently celebrated the official opening of the new facility built after another blaze three years prior destroyed the original building.

While the clubhouse completion date is a bit of a moving target, Hesom said they will start the season with a snack shack and tent, so Santa Lucia will be open for business.

He is somewhat cautious and re-



PHOTO BY ASHLEIGH VIVEIROS/VOICE

Work is moving along nicely on the Minnewasta Golf and Country Club clubhouse, which was destroyed by fire early last year. A June opening is in the works.

Continued on page 12

Focus on FINANCE



3 smart ways to maximize your next tax refund

Who doesn't love receiving a tax refund they're entitled to? It's even more satisfying when it's the result of smart planning. Do you know how to make the most of yours? Here are three ways to increase your refund.

1. CONTRIBUTE TO A SUITABLE SAVINGS ACCOUNT

Savings accounts, such as TFSAs and RRSPs, allow you to

invest money while lowering your taxable income. This is a great way to boost your tax refund. However, to avoid potential tax penalties, be careful not to contribute or withdraw too much.

2. CLAIM ELIGIBLE DEDUCTIONS

Find out which deductions are available to you. Depending on your situation, you may be able to claim childcare costs, moving expenses or other eligible deductions to reduce your taxable income. Talk to a finance expert to identify the best opportunities.

3. USE AVAILABLE TAX CREDITS

Tuition fees, medication expenses and charitable do-

nations may qualify for tax credits. In some cases, buying a home or claiming work-from-home expenses can also offer valuable savings.

Once you've applied these strategies, you can use your refund to pay off your debts faster, replenish your savings or finally start that kitchen renovation project you've been dreaming about. The possibilities are endless!

With a little bit of foresight and planning, you can optimize your tax refund. Need tax advice? Not sure where to start? Consult a financial expert near you.



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getinformed

Former fire chief featured in episode of *What Do You Do*

By Lorne Stelmach

An online video series that profiles different occupations has shone a spotlight on retired Morden fire chief Andy Thiessen.

If you've ever wondered what it takes to lead a fire department, a recent episode of *What Do You Do* produced by 47Filmworks follows Thiessen on the job, both at the fire hall and out on calls.

"In the end, we got a really good

comprehensive idea of what it's like to run a fire department," said Clarke Wainikka, who is a Mordenite herself and has been part of the 47Filmworks crew.

"I think they did a really nice job. They painted me in a much better picture than I ever thought I would look like," joked Thiessen.

They started filming for the piece about a year and a half ago, and it over time covered everything from firefighter training to actual fire calls.

The profile also touches on recruitment as well as the wide array of equipment that firefighters use.

"It took longer than we wanted it to, but we're very happy and proud to show it now," said Wainikka.

And it was particularly special to be able to encounter a few fire calls along the way, she added.

"Andy's first interview, I think, was interrupted by a fire call," she noted. "Then we were also doing interviews with other firefighters at Andy's retirement, and it was also interrupted by a call, and that moment is also in the documentary."

Wainikka said it was extra special for her to have this opportunity to connect with Thiessen for the feature.

"The series focuses on unique jobs and dream jobs," she explained. "It started as an idea to serve as a resource for students who didn't feel like they really knew what they wanted to do in life ... it just came from an idea of having more resources of what people do out there."

On their dream job list was a firefighter or fire chief. Wainikka noted Thiessen didn't hesitate when approached with the idea.

"One of the most interesting parts of my job is meeting people who are really interested and passionate about what they do, and Andy just exemplifies that," said Wainikka, who noted

it was a bit of a surprising twist when they learned he would be retiring after 45 years of service with the fire department, including the last 30 as chief.

"We didn't know that when we started the documentary ... then we decided, well, this is part of Andy's story ... so let's follow it all the way to the end."

"As the whole process was going on, I decided to retire, so then the whole flavour of the documentary kind of changed ... and it included all of that as well," said Thiessen.

He found it interesting to be put in the spotlight.

"It was very humbling ... and for me, because I did retire, it's a great keepsake for me that I will be able to have for a long time," said Thiessen. "They made me feel very comfortable with it ... it was a great group of people following me around there for a while."

Thiessen added it gave him a bit of a new perspective on what he has done for most of his life.

"After it was done, I kind of leaned over to [my wife] Tami ... and I thought I had a really great career and have really been blessed to have that kind of a job."

> MINNEWASTA, FROM PG. 11

strained in his enthusiasm for the rebuilt facility—his second new clubhouse since coming on staff at the golf course.

"I'll be excited when it's been standing for a couple of years, to be quite honest," he said jokingly. "Surreal would be the word that I use. It's a little bit like [the movie] *Groundhog Day* actually. It's been a straight five years of either planning or building.

"It's a good thing for the golf course and a good thing for the community, and we will carry on as best we can," he said, adding it will be nice to eventually turn the focus back to running a golf club again.

In the meantime, it will also be a bit of a process to also get the sit-down restaurant up and running again considering they will need to build a new team.

"It will be a soft start," Hesom said. "It's going to take time to build it up again and to do it properly."



SUPPLIED PHOTO

A film crew followed former Morden fire chief Andy Thiessen around in his final year and a half on the job for a recent episode of *What Do You Do*.

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arts & culture

W.C. Miller brings 'Annie' to the stage

By Holly Thorne-Wiebe

W.C. Miller Collegiate is bringing a classic musical to life later this month as students present their production of *Annie*.

For Gr. 10 student Hephzivah Claussen, who plays the title role, the Feb. 25-28. production marks a major step forward in her theatrical involvements.

"I just really wanted to be in a production," she said. "When I found out I was Annie, I cried. I was so happy."

Claussen said she had previously helped paint sets but had little acting experience before auditioning.

"I think I learned a lot about how to act, because I didn't have much experience before," she said. "But with the help of my mother and lots of praying, I was able to get the role that was perfect for me."

The cast has been rehearsing since October, giving many students their first taste of life on stage.

Gr. 11 student Luciano Bartolozzi Ramirez plays Oliver "Daddy" Warbucks in his first theatrical role.

"I was sort of persuaded by my parents to try this," he said, adding he was intrigued by how widely known the musical is. "Mostly I learned that I'm very confident and that I like being on



PHOTOS BY HOLLY THORNE-WIEBE/VOICE

The cast of W.C. Miller Collegiate's *Annie* run through a scene in preparation for their shows Feb. 25-28. Left: Luciano Bartolozzi Ramirez as Daddy Warbucks and Hephzivah Claussen as Annie.

stage. It's fun, and that I can sing."

He said audiences can expect an entertaining evening.

"You're going to have a great time. The music is incredible. You're going to dance, you're going to have a fun time, so many laughs."

Gr. 11 student Kenji Amura plays Rooster Hannigan, the show's smooth-talking villain. *Annie* marks his third production at the school.

"He's a sleazy hustler," Amura said of his character. "He's willing to do anything just to get a few dollars more."

Amura said he enjoys taking on the role of the antagonist and drawing inspiration from classic movie villains.

"It's a musical. It's going to be a doozy," he said. "People are really working hard to embody every character."

For Gr. 10 student Ava Peters, who plays Grace Farrell, the production has been a confidence building experience. Like several of her castmates, it is her first time performing in a school show.

"It kind of brought my confidence up," Peters said. "I didn't think I could do something like this, but I actually could."

She praised the effort behind the production and encouraged the community to attend.

"The costumes are really thought out. Everything is thought out and the casting is really good,"

she said. "I think you should come watch it."

The show is co-directed and co-produced by Sarah Gilbert and Jody Friesen, and includes a special performer: a real dog named River playing Annie's faithful companion, Sandy. River is owned and trained by Brianna Fehr.

Tickets are available in advance only through the school's website, (wcm.blsd.ca). Gilbert notes that they typically sell out quickly, so get them early to avoid disappointment.

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15th annual CancerCare fundraiser runs alongside Winter Carnival



PHOTOS BY SIOBHAN MAAS/VOICE

Above: Colt and Shadow give Ellie, Robyn, and Edda a ride. Below, left: Jackson, 10, gets a bee tattoo. Right: Marisa Wall of Essence Hair Salon (left) and Nicole Sabourin of Nicole's Exquisite Styles cut hair of Twisters players, Justin Lavack and Sam Johnson.



Jiggers from Kineew Local Métis take the stage.

Festivities raise \$12,000

By Siobhan Maas

The Pembina Valley Twisters hockey team hosted their annual fundraising event for CancerCare Manitoba Foundation on Saturday, alongside the Town of Morris' Winter Carnival.

Hundreds of people of all ages visited the Morri Multiplex throughout the day to enjoy

a variety of activities, including youth and senior Red River Wild games, Mavericks hockey, a Twisters alumni game, hot dogs, pony-drawn cart rides, bouncy castles, and, new this year, fiddlers and jiggers, all in support of CancerCare.

"At events like these the community has the opportunity to come together, especially in the colder months, and to support local youth hockey," reflected recreation director Meagan Dilts.

Shirley Grosky, board chair at St. Jean Baptiste & Morris Local Manitoba Métis Federation, was pleased with the traditional jiggers from Kineew Local Métis that "showed the Métis and Indigenous culture and heritage of the area."

More than twenty residents of the Red River Valley Lodge attended to watch the youth dancers and enjoy the fiddlers.

Many heads left the complex with a lot less hair, and attendees showed their support through 50/50 and silent auction tickets as well as direct cash donations.

Since getting its start in 2009 in support of Dale Rempel, who died of brain cancer three years later, the weekend has raised upwards of \$200,000 for CancerCare.

At press time, this year's festivities had brought in just over \$12,000.



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IN MORRIS MB



Pembina Valley Twisters alumni game.

getinformed

Friesens support a gift to Gallery in the Park

By Voice staff

One of the most vital sources of support for Gallery in the Park in Altona has been Friesens Corporation.

Since its founding in 2006, the gallery has grown into one of southern Manitoba's most admired cultural spaces, and it is an evolution made possible in large part through the steadfast support of Friesens.

With its 2024/25 contribution of \$25,000, including \$15,000 dedicated specifically to the sculpture fund, Friesens reinforces a long-standing commitment to the arts, community, and cultural enrichment in Altona and beyond.

"Supporting Gallery in the Park is something I care about deeply," shared Odia Reimer, vice-president of people and culture for Friesens. "It's a place that has inspired me for years, and I love seeing how it brings people together and fills our community with creativity. Friesens is proud to help make that happen."

Current committee chair for Gallery in the Park Al Friesen has been closely connected to the facility since

the 1980s, and he reflected on the profound role Friesens has played in nurturing the gallery's success.

"Successful organizations rely on financial, organizational, and volunteer support, and Friesens has provided all three," he noted.

Friesens was integral in the key transition of the former Schwartz Heritage House into a community-owned gallery and sculpture garden, and it was an effort supported through the involvement of David Friesen on the original steering committee.

The company's investment extends beyond funding—retired staff member Steve Penner and Reimer have contributed expertise, governance, and even their own artistic talent. Penner continues to serve on the sculpture acquisition committee.

"Steve and Odia displayed their personal works of art, which gave us credibility within artist circles," noted Friesen. "Odia's time as curator was extremely beneficial in the early years, giving us grounding and direction right from the start."

One of the most symbolic contributions was Friesens' donation of an



SUPPLIED PHOTO

original Leo Mol sculpture which is now prominently positioned at the gallery entrance as an enduring marker of the partnership's impact.

Annual donations from Friesens also play a crucial role in expanding the sculpture garden, supporting day-to-day operations, and enabling special events and facility upgrades.

"The gallery has become a catalyst for residents from Altona and beyond to enjoy quality art in their home community," Friesen noted. "Friesens ongoing donations also attract interest from other potential donors, allowing us to make significant progress on our master plan for the sculpture garden."

He suggested the positive ripple effects of Friesens' generosity are deeply felt across the region and that Altona's arts landscape has flourished,

elevating both established and emerging talent.

"It would be fair to say that without Friesens, Altona's art and culture scene would not be what it is today," he said. "A local artist once said we should create a 'world class' facility. Maybe that was ambitious, but thanks to Friesens and other builders, we have a truly first-class gallery."

As Gallery in the Park continues advancing through its master plan, additional green spaces will be filled with sculptures, many made possible through Friesens contributions. The gallery also aims to further expand its programs, deepen community engagement and welcome both seasoned art lovers and those discovering the arts for the first time.

Altona seeks input on new dog park location

By Holly Thorne-Wiebe

The Town of Altona is asking residents to weigh in on the future of its temporary dog park, which will need to be relocated this spring.

The current park sits on town-owned land that has been designated for another use, meaning the temporary structure will have to move once the ground thaws.

Town officials have launched a short

public survey to gather feedback on where the park should go next, and what amenities users would like to see included.

The proposed new location is beside Bridge Skate Park. The survey asks residents whether they support that site or would prefer to suggest an alternative. It also asks for input on potential features for the park.

If the proposed location is approved, the plan is to move the existing tempo-

rary structure directly to the new site. This approach would keep downtime to a minimum.

Whether a permanent dog park becomes part of the town's long-term plans will depend largely on community interest.

Officials note that many of Altona's recreation facilities have been community-led projects, and the survey is intended to gauge whether there is enough support to form a committee

and begin those discussions to explore the development of a permanent dog park in the future. When completing the survey, participants can leave their contact information if they are interested in joining said committee.

The survey will remain open until March 4. You can find the survey online at altona.ca or pick up a paper copy from the Town offices.

Emerson cat in the running for America's Fav. Pet

By Lorne Stelmach

An Emerson resident has been earning attention online recently for his feline companion.

Bradley Le Sage happened to come across a post on Facebook about the America's Favorite Pet contest, and he entered his cat Bert.

Le Sage was somewhat surprised when Bert got selected to advance in the competition, where the ultimate winner will be featured in *Modern Cat* magazine and win \$10,000.

"I'm surprised it actually went somewhere," said Le Sage. "It's actually given me the opportunity to kind of try to put my own thing together."

Le Sage said Bert is a symbol of resilience as a Christmas Eve rescue who survived a snowstorm.

On the contest's voting page, Bert is described as a total foodie who never misses a meal.

"After months of wondering where the food was going, his healthy weight is finally showing," it reads. "His favourite treat is sitting regally in his own chair at the coffee table like the king he is. He's gone from skinned to sturdy."

When asked what is Bert's most unique quality, it's noted he "possesses a rare 'aura adoration' that draws other cats and people to him for comfort. He's not just a pet. He's a silent guardian who always knows when you need a paw to lean on."

Le Sage added further thoughts about Bert.

"He's really gentle," he said, noting how he was really timid at first but has since become a little more open and will play much more now. "He was scared of everything before I got him."

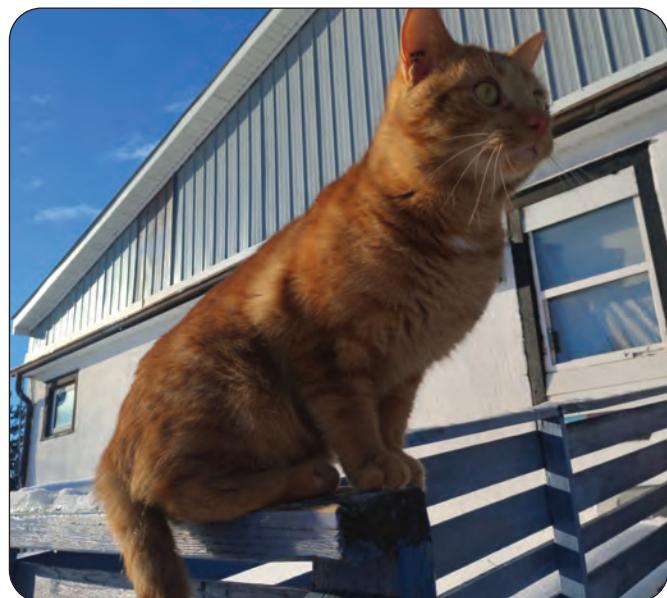
Le Sage is now inspired to do something to help other cats like Bert.

"It gives me a good chance to start up something local for animals here who are kind of neglected and have special needs," he said.

He sees a need for something to serve the area in and around Emerson.

"There are quite a few strays around here ... there's isn't much in this area for animals."

Bert has made it pretty far in the competition—he's currently up against four other cats in his voting group. You can vote until Feb. 12 online at americasfavpet.com/2026/bert-be4b/.



SUPPLIED PHOTO

You can vote online for Bert the cat to make it to the next round of America's Favorite Pet through Feb. 12.

Registration now open for high school ice fishing championship on March 10

By E. Antonio

The Manitoba High School Ice Fishing Championship continues to grow, returning to Balsam Bay for its third year on March 10. Balsam Bay is located on the southwest shore of Lake Winnipeg, just south of Gimli and north of Winnipeg Beach. Tournament organizer Dustin Bruce expects approximately 1,500 students from more than 70 schools to attend, with space still available for high schools looking to participate.

Bruce and co-convenor J.J. Ross first began hosting ice fishing derbies more than five years ago for St. James-Assiniboine School Division high schools. After receiving repeated requests from schools outside the division, the pair coordinated the inaugural provincial championship in 2024.

Since its inception, the event has expanded rapidly, and registration numbers for this year already point to a record-breaking turnout. For Bruce, the championship is about far more than competition—it's a hands-on way to teach fishing skills, responsibility and conservation.

"It's opened up a lot of different ways to teach about fishing and fisheries," Bruce said. "It teaches students how to prepare, and for us, it wraps up our fishing unit in a fun way. It also enables us to have important conversations about conservation. It's rewarding knowing we're leaving our resources in capable hands. That's the legacy behind it—teach them young and teach them the right way."

In the classroom, Bruce prepares his

students by teaching them how to tie knots, prepare tackle, review the angling guide, identify fish and understand the full fishing process.

"I want to make myself as useless as possible come championship day," he said. "I love seeing students able to do everything on their own."

The championship is a full-day event that blends education, community and friendly competition. Students have opportunities to engage with fishing and conservation professionals while competing for hundreds of prizes. Awards include trophies, banners and bragging rights for schools that reel in the biggest catches.

Schools from across Manitoba—including several from the north—have attended in past years. Bruce credits the strength of the fishing community for the championship's continued success.

"What's cool is that all the organizations involved share similar goals of protecting our resources so we can all enjoy them," he said.

While teaching conservation to such a large number of students presents challenges, Bruce called the record-setting attendance an "awesome problem to have."

There is no cap on registration numbers, but teachers or group leaders must register their teams by 3:30 p.m. on Feb. 27. Individual students without adult supervision, and teams without wristbands received through pre-registration, will not be permitted to participate.

New for 2026, the championship

will introduce three divisions based on school size:

A: fewer than 14 anglers;

AA: 14–29 anglers;

AAA/AAAA: more than 30 anglers.

Registration closes two weeks before the event to allow organizers and volunteers time to prepare prizes and pre-drill holes—an intensive, full-day task.

"It takes a lot of volunteers and manpower," Bruce said. "We drill 25 per cent more holes than kids. We head out Monday, camp on the ice, and drill more holes at 4 a.m. It's exhausting, but another awesome problem to have."

Registration costs \$20 per student and includes a fishing licence for the duration of the derby, a pre-drilled hole, and coverage for supplies and services. All remaining funds go toward prizes, as the event is non-profit. Each registered school also receives a welcome package designed to help build or sustain a fishing program.

"Our goal is to make it as easy as possible to just show up and start fishing," Bruce said.

Students are only required to bring a rod, bait, a chair and warm clothing. Food vendors will be on site, with lunch available for purchase.

Bruce emphasized the event is designed to be enjoyable regardless of fishing success. Based on feedback from previous years, schools understand the experience goes beyond catching fish.

"Just being in the atmosphere with so many schools together makes it a

once-in-a-kind event," he said. "Just being here is a reward in itself."

In addition to prizes for the longest and smallest fish, teams can win awards for catching no fish, as well as individual student prizes. Other activities include a fan-favourite push-up contest, ice plank challenge, casting contest, trivia and more.

"There are lots of ways to have fun," Bruce said. "We're more than just about fishing."

New this year is a photo contest encouraging schools to go ice fishing before the championship. Bruce said it promotes practice, helps students prepare and increases the likelihood of catching fish in a quieter environment.

Bruce's favourite moment of the day comes at the very beginning.

"Seeing all the students dash for a hole when the starting horn goes off—it's just the coolest thing," he said. "I still get goosebumps every year."

He extended thanks to the many sponsors and volunteers who make the event possible, with a special shout-out to the Fishin' Hole in Winnipeg for donating prizes and offering school-wide discounts to educators.

A full list of sponsors will be displayed at the championship. Anyone interested in volunteering—either by pre-drilling holes or helping measure and identify fish—is asked to email Bruce at dustin.bruce@sjasd.ca. Registration for the derby can also be completed online.



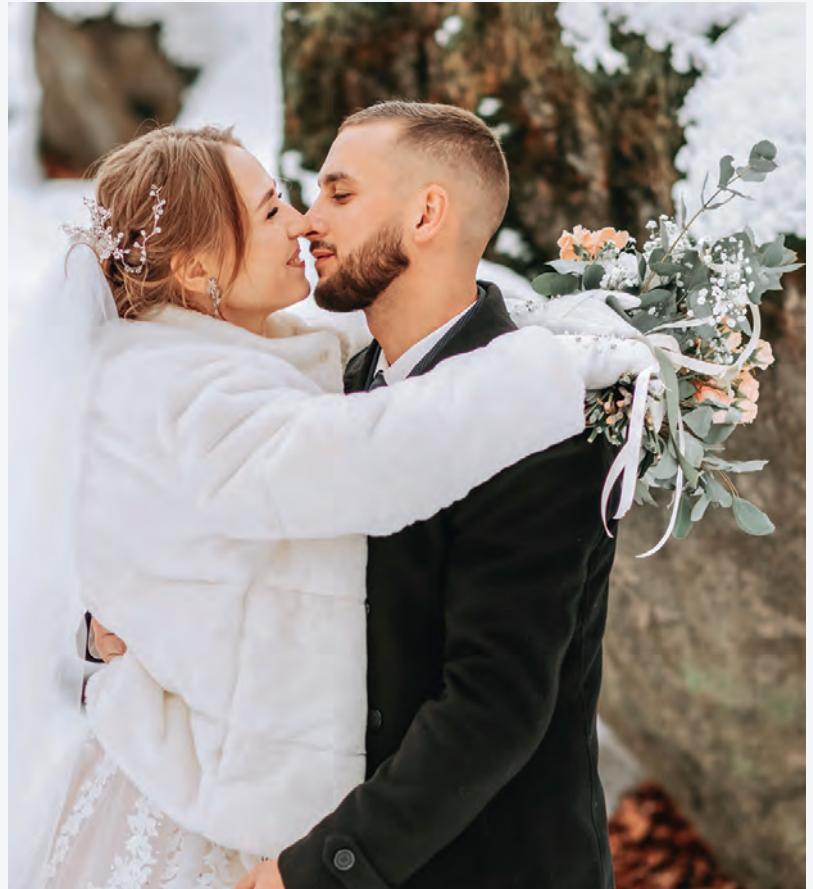
And they
LIVED HAPPILY
ever after...

WEDDING SPECIAL

Getting married in winter: a bold and rewarding choice

Although many associate weddings with the summer season, winter weddings offer plenty of advantages. Venues and hotels are less busy in the off-season. Caterers, photographers and entertainers tend to have more availability. Also, prices are often lower. Here's how to make your winter celebration a success.

- **Location.** Choose a setting that feels warm and inviting, such as a lakeside cottage, a picturesque inn, a cozy hotel or even a modern sugar shack. Just make sure the location is accessible. Avoid remote spots with poorly maintained roads that could become dangerous in snowy conditions.
- **Decorations.** A winter-themed wedding naturally has a magical feel. Opt for seasonal colours like white, pine green and icy blue. Decorate with natural elements, such as fir branches and pinecones. Add soft lighting with candles—LED candles that mimic flames are a safe choice.



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the Great Outdoors
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204-325-4596
585 1st St unit 5B

• **Outfits.** If you'll be spending part of the day outdoors, especially for that quintessential winter photo shoot, make sure you stay warm by choosing elegant and warm clothing. Think long-sleeved dresses, faux-fur capes, quilted coats, wool suits, luxurious scarves and elegant lined boots. A winter wedding creates a romantic atmosphere and endless creative possibilities. Work with local businesses and professionals to plan your snowy wedding.

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MITT closing up shop; future of Morden program uncertain

By Lorne Stelmach

The shutdown of a Winnipeg-based educational institution has had a bit of a ripple effect with a new educational initiative based in Morden facing an uncertain future as a result.

The Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology (MITT) announced last month that it would be winding down operations, with select programs transferring to Red River College Polytech (RRC Polytech).

In a statement, MITT cited how over the past two years the federal government has made rapid, ongoing changes to the international student program.

"These changes have created uncertainty for students and post-secondary institutions across Canada and sent a message abroad that international students aren't valued here.

"As a result, institutions have faced financial and operational shocks that they could not reasonably anticipate or absorb," the statement continued.

"The Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology has seen international enrolment drop by more than 55 per cent, making its current financial model unsustainable."



VOICE FILE PHOTO

The Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology had partnered with Morden on a new network and systems administrator program last fall. The Winnipeg-based school has announced it will be shutting down.

Last fall, MITT in partnership with the City of Morden launched a network and systems administrator diploma program out of renovated space in Boundary Trails Place.

The diploma program's aim was to

provide hands-on learning in information and communication technology and practicum experiences with local employers.

A representative for the City of Morden declined to comment at this time

given they had little more information about MITT's decision to shut down or about the possible future of the local program.

The statement from MITT sought "to reassure students and parents that all students will be able to complete their studies. The transition will occur over the next year, with some programs and functions extending beyond this timeline under RRC Polytech's leadership. Students will continue to access their programs as they currently do.

"We will work closely with the province and RRC Polytech to ensure students are supported and have a clear, well-defined plan for completing their program—whether they're in our post-secondary, high school, adult learning, or English language programming. Any industry training that is underway will also continue to completion.

"As an initial step, a comprehensive review of MITT programs will be conducted. We will engage with students, partner institutions, school divisions, industry partners, and other key stakeholders to ensure all programming and partnerships are addressed thoughtfully and responsibly."

One man facing drug charges in Altona bust

By Voice staff

One man was arrested following a large-scale police operation in Altona late last month.

On Jan. 30, Manitoba First Nations Police Service (MFNPS) executed search warrants at multiple locations, with tactical support provided by officers from Altona, Winkler, and the

RCMP.

The investigation into drug trafficking activities impacting Roseau River First Nation and surrounding communities began last September, police share, based in part on tips received from the community.

Investigators identified a person of interest with suspected direct involvement in supplying metham-

phetamine and cocaine to community members. Police say he allegedly had frequent visits to known drug houses and connections to individuals actively selling drugs on his behalf.

The suspect was arrested and later released from custody to appear in court in Emerson to face charges of possession for the purpose of trafficking (both methamphetamine and co-

caine) and possession of proceeds of crime.

Other individuals interviewed in connection with the investigation were released without charges at this time.

The investigation remains ongoing.

Officials warn of measles exposures at Ag Days

By Voice staff

Public health officials with Manitoba Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care are notifying the public of new measles exposure sites in Brandon and southern Manitoba.

Anyone who attended Ag Days in Brandon, visited hotels, restaurants and shops should monitor for symptoms until Feb. 13. Possible exposures may have occurred in the city on the event days, on the days leading up to it and the days following it, beyond the locations listed.

Anyone at these locations on the

specified dates and times is asked to monitor for symptoms until the identified dates and contact your health care provider should they occur:

- Manitoba Ag Days, Keystone Centre, Brandon, Jan. 20 from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monitor for symptoms until Feb. 11. Jan. 21 from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monitor for symptoms until Feb. 12. Jan. 22 from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monitor for symptoms until Feb. 13.

- Great Western Roadhouse, inside the Canad Inns Destination Centre, 1125 18th St., Brandon on Jan. 20 from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Monitor for symptoms until Feb. 11.

- Manitoba Ag Days, Agriculture in the Classroom event at the Provincial Exhibition of Manitoba Dome Building, Unit 1-A, 1200 13th St., Brandon, Jan. 20 from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monitor for symptoms until Feb. 11. Jan. 21 from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monitor for symptoms until Feb. 12. Jan. 22 from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monitor for symptoms until Feb. 13.

- Stacked Pancake and Breakfast House, 777 Norquay Dr., Winkler, on Feb. 1 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monitor for symptoms until Feb. 23.

- Boundary Trails Health Centre public health office, near Winkler, on

Feb. 2 from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monitor for symptoms until Feb. 24.

- Boundary Trails Health Centre emergency department, near Winkler, on Feb. 3 from 7 p.m. to Feb. 4 at 1:10 a.m. Monitor for symptoms until Feb. 26.

Public health is also asking anyone who was at these locations during the specified times to check their immunization records and ensure they are up to date with measles vaccine (MMR or MMRV).

sports&recreation

Royals roll, Bombers surge, Wild stumble heading into playoffs

By Lana Meier

The Winkler Royals, Morden Bombers and Red River Wild each closed out the SEMHL regular season with contrasting results last weekend as the league prepares to transition into playoff hockey.

League-leading Winkler continued its strong finish with a pair of convincing wins, defeating the Carman Beavers 11-8 on Friday before routing the Warren Mercs 10-1 on Saturday.

Friday's matchup with Carman was a wide-open affair that saw the teams trade goals throughout the first two periods. Winkler struck twice in the opening 90 seconds and never trailed, getting multi-point performances from Justin Augert, Adam Henry and Aaron Lewadniuk. James Penner scored the game-winning goal early in the third, while Matthew Thiessen stopped 37 shots to earn the win.

The Royals followed up with a dominant showing Saturday in Altona, holding Warren to a single power-play goal while pouring in 10 of their own. Augert scored twice, Henry added a goal and an assist, and Thiessen turned aside 47 shots as Winkler closed the regular season first overall with a 14-3-1 record and 29 points.

Morden capped off its regular season Saturday with a 9-4 victory over the Notre Dame Hawks, powered by a three-goal special teams effort and balanced scoring throughout the line-up.

After trailing briefly early, the Bombers took control with five unanswered goals spanning the first and second periods. Collin Shirley, Mike Rey and Jay Fehr each finished with multi-point nights, while Reed Peters made 40 saves in goal.

The win secured Morden fifth place in the standings with an 8-9-1 record, positioning the Bombers as a poten-



PHOTOS BY RICK HIEBERT/VOICE

Notre Dame's Jake Carel and Morden's Tyler Campbell race for the puck in Saturday's 9-4 Bombers victory. Right: Morden's Cade Kowalski (left) receives the 2025-26 SEMHL Rookie Of The Year Award from presenter and teammate Collin Shirley.

tial first-round spoiler heading into the postseason.

Red River struggled down the stretch, falling 5-2 to the Springfield Winterhawks on Friday before suffering an 11-1 loss to the Ile des Chênes Northstars on Saturday.

Against Springfield, Red River opened the scoring but was undone by special teams, allowing two power-play goals late in the second period. Jayden Catellier stopped 34 shots in the loss.

Saturday's contest against Ile des Chênes quickly got away from the Wild, who were limited to a single second-period goal from Clint Lucier as the Northstars struck early and often. Red River used two goaltenders as Ile des Chênes extended its road dominance.

Despite the losses, Red River finished fourth in the SEMHL standings at 10-6-2 with 22 points.

Playoffs next



The SEMHL regular season concludes Feb. 10, with all nine teams advancing to the playoffs. The post-season opens with a Survivor Series between the eighth- and ninth-place teams, with the winner moving on to

face the first-place club. The remainder of the playoffs will feature best-of-five series in the first two rounds, followed by a best-of-seven league final.

Flyers win three straight

By Ashleigh Viveiros

The Winkler Flyers added three more to the win column in MJHL action this past week.

On Feb. 3 they welcomed the sixth-place Winnipeg Blizzard to town, and sent them packing with a 7-2 loss.

It was all-Winkler through the first 40 minutes, with goals from Connor Rieger, William Lyons (with two), Ethan MacTavish, Niklas Gudmundson, and Charlie Weaver giving the home team a 6-0 lead heading into the final frame.

There, the Blizzard bookended the period with goals, wrapped around one more from MacTavish.

Liam Russell was called on to make 20 saves in net off 22 shots. His teammates fired 36 the other way.

The Flyers then squared off against the first-place Niverville Nighthawks Friday night, also in Winkler.

The two teams matched each other shot for shot through the first period—seven in all—but when the whistle blew it was Winkler who was up 2-1 thanks to goals from Tanner George and Joshua Ingram.

Another close period in the second frame—with 14 shots on net from Winkler and 13 from Niverville—saw the Flyers add three to the Night-

hawks' two to remain in the lead 5-3. Scoring was courtesy of Riley Fequet, Aiden Jacobson, and Gudmundson.

Niverville tried to close the gap in the third, but Winkler matched them goal for goal thanks to George and Bernier to win it 7-5.

Liam Ernst was between the posts for the Flyers this game and he made 24 saves as shots on goal clocked in at 29-29.

The next night the Flyers blanked the visiting Swan Valley Stampeders 7-0. Gudmundson and Weaver both scored twice while Trevor Dalton, George, and Lyons contributed singles.

Russell got the shutout in net, making 30 saves.

The Flyers remain in fourth place in the MGEU East Division with a record of 26-16-1-2 and 55 points. They're tied in points with the third-place Terriers, though Portage has two games in hand. In first and second place is Niverville (79 points) and Steinbach (72), both of whom have earned their seat at the playoff table.

This week Winkler hosts Portage Tuesday, Virden on Friday, and Waywayseecappo Saturday night. They then hit the road to play in Virden on Louis Riel Day.



PHOTO BY RICK HIEBERT/VOICE

With Jacob Michelson and Evan Panzer at the doorstep, Flyers netminder Liam Ernst makes a save during their penalty kill to help keep the Flyers in the lead in their 7-5 win over Niverville Friday night.

A rocky week for U18 male PV Hawks

By Lorne Stelmach

It was an up and down week for the male U18 Pembina Valley Hawks, as they dropped two of their three games.

It started with a 6-3 loss to the Winnipeg Wild last Wednesday, but the Hawks then rebounded to double up Kenora 8-4 Friday. Sunday, though, then saw Pembina Valley fall 7-2 to Brandon.

Koen Bleznuk was under fire in the Hawks' goal against the Wild in Winnipeg as he stopped 43 of 48 shots before the Wild put it away with an empty netter. Shots on goal overall were 49-23.

Ocean Fehr had a goal and an assist for Pembina Valley, with the other markers coming from Carson Hiebert and Cole Secord.

It was a different story against Kenora as the Hawks had a 46-26 edge in shots and took period leads of 4-1 and 6-3.

Tyson Pethybridge had a goal and an assist with Paxton White contributing a goal and a pair of assists. Also scoring were Fehr, Secord, Caden McMahon, Logan Delichte, and Mason Leite.

The Wheat Kings connected for a pair of power play goals as they held period leads of 3-1 and 4-2 before collecting three more unanswered goals in the final frame.

Hiebert and Ragnar Gillis scored for the Hawks, while Bleznuk took the loss with 32 saves. Shots on goal overall were even at 39 apiece.

Pembina Valley remains in eighth place at 23-17-1-1 for 48 points, which leaves them one back of Parkland and three behind Southwest.

The Hawks continue a five game homestand this weekend starting with Eastman Friday followed by Interlake Saturday and then the Winnipeg Bruins Sunday.



PHOTO BY RICK HIEBERT/VOICE

Flyer Jacob Michelson was honoured as RBC's MJHL Community Ambassador at Friday's home game. Michelson was recognized for his work in the community, including mentoring younger athletes with Winkler Minor Hockey and through Big Brothers Big Sisters' floor hockey program and volunteering at the Winkler Food Cupboard and Salem Home. The award comes with a \$1,000 donation from RBC to the school of Michelson's choice: Emerado Centennial School.

Carman family watches Olympic history unfold

By Jessica Eblie

When the women's doubles luge competition launches at the 2026 Olympic Winter Games in Italy, former long-time Carman residents, Wayne and Carol Allan, will be watching with pride. Their granddaughter, 22-year-old Kailey Allan, will be representing Team Canada in the inaugural women's doubles luge event.

Kailey will compete on Feb. 11 in Cortina d'Ampezzo as part of Canada's women's doubles luge team, with her partner Beattie Podulsky. While doubles luge has been an Olympic event for decades, Milano Cortina 2026 will mark the sport's debut for women. The discipline features two athletes racing together on a single sled, requiring precise timing, communication and trust while reaching speeds of more than 130 kilometres per hour.

For Wayne and Carol, who lived in Carman for nearly 40 years before moving to rural British Columbia in 2015, the moment is historic, celebratory and deeply personal. "We were in Carman for about 40 years," Carol said. Carol added that she still hears from friends in Carman who are following Kailey's Olympic run via Facebook.

According to Kailey's parents, Stac-

ey and Don, she has always been a superb athlete. "She did every sport she could growing up," Carol said. "She did ski racing, competitive softball, and track, (but) as you go along and get older, you have to start weeding out some of these sports."

Kailey first stepped onto a luge sled at age 10, after spotting a sign in Calgary inviting youngsters to try the sport. What began as a summer camp soon became a high-performance pursuit, carrying her from training sessions to international competition venues around the world.

For the first 11 years of her luge career, Kailey competed as a singles slider. She represented Canada at the Youth Olympic Games in 2020 in St. Moritz, Switzerland, gaining experience on the international stage and earning a seventh-place finish overall.

Kailey came up short in qualifying for the women's singles luge event at the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, but nevertheless persisted in her efforts to qualify for the 2026 Games. That determination ultimately led to a new goal — women's doubles luge.

About 18 months ago, Kailey and fellow Calgary-based athlete Beattie Podulsky decided to partner up, forming one of Canada's most competitive women's doubles luge teams. "They were both single sliders pre-



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Kailey Allan (right) and her partner Beattie Podulsky, at the 2025 International Luge Federation (FIL) World Championships in Whistler, B.C., where they captured the bronze.

viously and thought, well, Canada needed a doubles women's team," Stacey said.

Despite their recent partnership, the duo has already found success. Last season, they earned a bronze medal at the Under-23 World Championships and another bronze as part of Canada's mixed team relay at the International Luge Federation (FIL) World Championships in Whistler, BC. In the lead-up to the Olympics, the duo ranks just outside the top 10 internationally in women's doubles and has placed well in qualifying competitions leading up to Milano Cortina.

"Their goal is to do well (at the Olympics), probably place in the top eight, maybe top six," stated Stacey.

According to the Allan family, luge is "the fastest sport on ice." Singles sliders can reach speeds exceeding 143 kilometres per hour, while doubles athletes face added challenges of weight, balance, unison and trust.

For the duo of Kailey Allan and Podulsky, Kailey rides on the bottom of the sled, with her partner lying on top of her. The athletes are secured together, navigating narrow ice corridors at extreme speeds, all while trying to be the fastest team in order to win the event.

"It's kind of like driving a double-decker bus down an F-1 track," Stacey said.

Despite the intensity, Kailey's family describes her as someone who balances competitiveness with joy. "She's

determined and driven, but she's having fun," Stacey added. "There's always a smile on her face."

As the Allan family prepares to travel to Italy to support Kailey in person, they say the experience has already been incredible. Beyond medals and rankings, they hope Kailey's journey sends a message to young athletes.

"Anything's possible," Carol said. "The places she's been, the people she's met. Sport builds character and life experience."

In a text communication, Kailey stated that she is looking forward to competing and has done everything possible to prepare for these Games. "I'm super excited to compete in my first Olympic Games and represent Canada in the first ever women's doubles event," she added.

Although Carman was never Allan's hometown, her family's decades-long presence in the community means her Olympic debut is being followed with interest by residents who knew her grandparents and have watched her career unfold from afar.

As the Olympics approach, Allan's participation offers local readers a chance to witness both an Olympic first and the success of an athlete connected to the community through family roots rather than residence. Kailey's Olympic moment is a reminder that no matter where you grew up in Canada or who you are, Olympic dreams can take shape and slide all the way to the global stage.

"ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE. THE PLACES SHE'S BEEN, THE PEOPLE SHE'S MET. SPORT BUILDS CHARACTER AND LIFE EXPERIENCE."



Kailey Allan (back) and Beattie Podulsky (front) preparing for a luge run in competition.

Manitoba's ice makers: small-town roots, world-class impact

By Annaliese Meier

While elite curlers compete under bright lights at national and international championships, the conditions they rely on are often created by ice makers with roots in small Manitoba communities.

That connection was on display at the Selkirk Curling Club, where fresh ice was being prepared ahead of men's provincial competition under the direction of Matt Rankine, a Manitoba-based ice technician whose work regularly takes him across North America.

Rankine is part of a group of Manitoba and Winnipeg ice makers widely respected within curling circles for their technical expertise and consistency at major events. Another Manitoba ice maker, Greg Ewasko of Tyndall, is currently in Italy preparing ice for the upcoming Olympic Winter Games. Ewasko would otherwise have been part of the Selkirk crew, Rankine said.

From Rankine's perspective, Manitoba's reputation for producing world-class curling ice is built on decades of mentorship and shared knowledge.

"I would say it's kind of a legacy thing," Rankine said. "We were fortunate enough to have Hans Wuthrich in our province, and Eric Montford, who—along with Shorty out of Ontario—really developed this way of making ice. The grassroots of it started right here in Manitoba."

That knowledge, Rankine said, was passed down through generations of technicians, including Mark Shurek and Ewasko, both of whom have worked major national and international events.

"I'm two generations removed from that," he said. "I got the opportunity to learn from Greg Ewasko, Hans Wuthrich, Mark Shurek and Eric Montford, who is my uncle. To be able to learn from the best in the world is a pretty special thing."

Curling ice preparation is a highly specialized skill requiring precise control of temperature, humidity, pebble and surface texture. Even small imperfections can affect stone movement and fairness of play.

"It has to be perfectly flat and perfectly level," Rankine said. "The rocks will always find areas that are not level."



Matt Rankine oversees ice preparation at the Selkirk Curling Club ahead of men's provincial competition. The Manitoba-based technician is part of a network of ice makers regularly selected for national, international and Olympic-level events.

At Selkirk, Rankine worked alongside club volunteers to break in newly refreshed, or "green," ice—a stage where technicians are still fine-tuning conditions and want stones running repeatedly over every sheet.

That process included a practice game played by the provincial senior men's champions, skipped by George Hacking. The goal, Hacking said, was to help "work in" both the ice and the rocks before the provincials begin.

"We always appreciate the opportunity to practice on competition ice, so we volunteered to play against a Selkirk team to break in the rocks and the ice," Hacking said. "We had a very good turnout of volunteers and the exercise was a great success."

From a curler's perspective, Hacking said green ice can play differently than a settled surface, especially when stones have been freshly sanded.

"Green ice is very heavy and with fresh sanded stones it's very swingy and heavy," he said. "It's a good opportunity to work on positive releases to try and 'set a rock back' to delay the massive curl at the end."

Hacking said the practice game also serves a practical purpose for the ice crew: it gives technicians



George Hacking, skip of the provincial senior men's champions, sweeps during a practice game at the Selkirk Curling Club. The game helped break in freshly prepared ice ahead of men's provincials.

immediate, real-world information about how the stones are tracking—and whether anything needs to be corrected before competition begins.

"They watch and look for any feedback—hopefully the rocks track consistently and fairly evenly as to line and weight," he said. "The more consistent the rocks, the more personal skill is a factor."

As experienced competitors, Hacking said senior-level curlers can help identify issues early, including stones that aren't running true.

"The main thing is to get the rocks moving," he said. "If we saw a 'bad rock' we could notify him, but the Curl Manitoba rocks are high quality and consistent."

While curlers can offer feedback, Hacking emphasized that ice maker expertise is the foundation of fair, consistent championship conditions.

"Ice maker expertise is the most critical factor—balancing temp and humidity to keep the ice hard, without a lot of frost buildup," he said. "Curlers are at their mercy—but it's the same for both teams."

Rankine said that balance is achieved through constant monitoring and adjustment, including control over building temperatures.

"You're constantly just trying to make sure the water is the best, the scraper blade is the best, the temperatures are set proper—everything," he said. "Because without that, they'll notice."

Volunteers remain essential to delivering that standard, Rankine added.

"It's huge," he said. "Without volunteers, we couldn't do this."

Although Selkirk's senior men's team is not competing this week due to scheduling conflicts between Manitoba qualifying and the Canadian championships, Hacking said the club's involvement remains significant.

"Selkirk hosts quite often in the rotation and other than Steinbach's new facility, Selkirk's one of the best places to watch," he said. "It takes hundreds of volunteers, and Selkirk and area curling clubs step up to volunteer and provide the best ice, sight lines and entertainment value whenever we host."

Hacking also pointed to Selkirk's ability to deliver under pressure, including hosting a provincial event in a modified bubble in 2022.

"The committee works countless hours and should be commended for bringing Selkirk to the forefront of the curling world whenever we host," he said.

Rather than being measured solely by teams on the ice, Manitoba's influence on curling continues to be felt behind the scenes—through the ice makers, volunteers and veteran curlers who help shape championship play long before the first draw begins.



PHOTOS BY BRETT MITCHELL/VOICE

Volunteers and ice technicians work together at the Selkirk Curling Club as freshly prepared ice is broken in ahead of men's provincial competition. A practice game involving the provincial senior men's champions helps break in the ice and stones while providing early feedback on consistency.

Calvert claims first Manitoba men's title at Bunge Championship

By Haley Cvar

Manitoba has a new men's curling champion.

Braden Calvert and his Heather Curling Club rink captured the Bunge Championship title Sunday afternoon in Selkirk, defeating Jordon McDonald of the Assiniboine Memorial Curling Club in an extra end to earn their first Manitoba men's crown.

Calvert, joined by third Corey Chambers, second Kyle Kurz, lead Brendan Bilawka and alternate Rob Gordon, prevailed in a dramatic rematch of Saturday night's Page 1-2 playoff game, also won by the Heather rink.

The championship final was tied 7-7 after 10 ends when Calvert slid a foot deep on his last-stone draw, conceding a single point to force an extra end. In the 11th, Calvert set up the winning chance with a perfect first-stone hit, leaving McDonald facing a difficult draw around two centre-line stones. McDonald made the shot but left Calvert a short runback, which he converted to seal the win to represent Manitoba at the national championship.

For Calvert and his teammates, the victory marked a breakthrough after falling short in the past two provincial finals — losing to Reid Carruthers

in 2025 and Brad Jacobs in 2024.

McDonald's rink, which includes Jacques Gauthier, Elias Huminicki and Cam Olafson, had reached the final earlier Sunday with a six-end semifinal win over Brett Walter's Assiniboine Memorial team.

The result capped a week that guaranteed a new provincial champion. Defending champion and top seed Reid Carruthers and his Granite Curling Club rink were eliminated Saturday afternoon by Kelly Marnoch's Carberry foursome, opening the door for a first-time men's champion.

None of the three teams remaining heading into the final day — Calvert, McDonald and Walter — had previously represented Manitoba at the Canadian men's championship, though several players had won provincial titles at the junior, U18 or mixed levels.

Calvert earned his spot in Sunday's final by edging McDonald 8-7 in the Page 1-2 playoff Saturday evening. McDonald led 5-3 at the mid-game break but surrendered five points over the next four ends. Facing a McDonald stone on the button in the 10th, Calvert executed a near-perfect freeze, limiting McDonald to a single point.

Earlier in the playoffs, Walter defeated Marnoch 8-6 in the Page 3-4 game, running the Carberry rink out



PHOTO BY BRETT MITCHELL/VOICE

Braden Calvert (left) poses with third Corey Chambers, second Kyle Kurz, lead Brendan Bilawka and alternate Rob Gordon after capturing the Bunge Championship title Sunday in Selkirk. The Heather Curling Club rink claimed its first Manitoba men's crown with an extra-end win in the final and will represent the province at the Montana's Brier in St. John's, N.L.

of stones in the 10th end. Marnoch had advanced with his upset of Carruthers, while Walter reached the playoff round with wins over Steve Irwin of Brandon and Tanner Lott of Fort Rouge.

The championship field featured a new triple knockout format, with Carruthers, McDonald, Calvert and Walter all advancing through the opening round unbeaten. Preliminary round wins for Calvert came over Stefan Gudmundson of Steinbach and

Irwin, while McDonald defeated Derrick Anderson of Gimli and Marnoch. Walter's early victories were against Marcus Titchkosky of Morden and Lott.

With the win, Calvert will represent Manitoba at the Montana's Brier in St. John's, N.L., from Feb. 28 to March 7. Manitoba will be represented by two teams at the national championship, as Matt Dunstone's rink has pre-qualified for the event.

Female Hawks fall short against Chiefs, Wildcats

By Lorne Stelmach

They were close, hard-fought games, but the female U18 Pembina Valley Hawks unfortunately came up short in their two matchups this past weekend.

Sixth-place Pembina Valley first fell 3-1 to the fifth-place Yellowhead Chiefs Friday and then were edged 3-2 Saturday by the third-place West-

man Wildcats.

Delaney Darby opened scoring in the first period for the Hawks against Yellowhead, but the Chiefs tied it up with a second period powerplay goal then collected the winner and an empty net goal in the third.

Hannah Bannister made 36 saves in net for the Hawks, who overall were outshot 39-25, with one shot being the empty net goal.

A power play goal made the difference for Westman as they connected on the man advantage with just under nine minutes remaining in the third period to snap the 2-2 tie.

The Wildcats had taken a two-goal lead before Casey O'Brien and Sophia Cox connected about a minute and a half apart to even the game in the final frame. Madison Froese made 27 saves with Westman holding a 30-23

edge in shots on goal.

At the end of the weekend, Pembina Valley sat in sixth place at 8-17-0-1 for 17 points, which had them even with Central Plains, with a game in hand. They were 11 points behind fifth place Yellowhead and nine points ahead of last place Interlake.

Pembina Valley closes out their schedule by hosting Eastman Monday then visiting Interlake Friday.

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Einarson claims fifth Scotties in extra end

By Haley Cvar

Kerri Einarson captured her fifth national championship Feb. 1, defeating Kaitlyn Lawes 4-3 in an extra end to win the Scotties Tournament of Hearts in Mississauga, Ont.

The Team Canada skip forced an 11th end before stealing the winning point to edge the Manitoba rink in a tightly contested final.

"Oh, my God, what an amazing feeling," Einarson said during a post-game interview on TSN. "Just overwhelmed. I'm super proud of us. It was a grind this week and we had to make some big clutch shots to get ourselves into this final. So I'm super proud of my team and thank you to all the fans."

Lawes entered the championship game undefeated and was appearing in her first Scotties final since 2015, when she won the national title playing third for Jennifer Jones's Manitoba team.

Einarson struck first in the second end after Lawes's final stone came up light, allowing Canada to pick up an easy steal. Another Manitoba error proved costly in the fourth end when Lawes attempted a short-angle runback wrecked on the guard, giving

ing Einarson a second steal and a 2-0 lead.

Manitoba tied the game in the sixth following an uncharacteristic miss by Einarson. Her final takeout attempt, her rock did not connect and slid through the house, opening the door for Lawes to draw for two.

Lawes took her first lead of the game in the seventh when Einarson narrowly missed a double takeout, leaving one Manitoba stone biting the red ring for a single.

After two blank ends, the teams reached the 10th end with Lawes holding last rock and four stones in the house. Facing elimination, Einarson executed a precise angle raise for the single and force extra ends — a shot she described as one of the week's defining moments.

"All I thought in my head was, 'Just make this one for your team, Kerri, and take it to an extra,'" she said. "So yeah, it was a clutch one. It's incredible."

The championship run capped a demanding playoff path for Einarson, who lost 10-2 in eight ends to Lawes in Saturday's 1/2 Page playoff and had to advance through the semifinal to earn a rematch.

Einarson sealed the title with a steal



PHOTO CURLING CANADA/ANDREW KLAVER

Scotties Tournament of Hearts champions Kerri Einarson (skip), Val Sweeting (third/vice-skip), Shannon Birchard (second), Karlee Burgess (lead), Krysten Karwacki (alternate/lead) and Reid Carruthers (coach).

in the 11th end, reclaiming the Scotties crown and the right to represent Canada at the upcoming world championship in Calgary — an opportunity she said remains deeply meaningful.

"It feels amazing," she said. "To wear the maple leaf is an absolute honour, and we're so looking forward to playing here in Canada."

With the Scotties title secured, Einarson and her team will now turn their attention to the World Women's Curling Championship, scheduled for March 14-22 in Calgary. The event will see Canada host the world's top women's curling teams, with Einarson once again wearing the maple leaf on home ice.

Mudbugs rebound with two wins in busy HTJHL week

By Lana Meier

The Red River Mudbugs closed out a demanding three-game stretch with a pair of wins, rebounding from a narrow midweek loss to finish the week on a positive note in Hanover Tache Junior Hockey League action.

Red River opened the week Wednesday with a 3-2 road loss to the East St. Paul Gators at St. Jean Arena. After 40 scoreless minutes, the Mudbugs answered an early third-period goal with a powerplay marker from Gavin

Hildebrandt, assisted by Ty Tarnick and Ethan Clace, before Griffin Hildebrandt gave Red River a brief 2-1 lead midway through the period. East St. Paul responded quickly, however, and scored the eventual game-winner at 13:01. Tyler Blanchette made 35 saves in the loss.

The Mudbugs bounced back Friday night with an impressive 5-2 home win over the Springfield Xtreme. Red River jumped out to a fast start with first-period goals from Griffin Hil-

derbrandt, Braison Penner and Reece Fehr, with Fehr's tally standing up as the game-winner. Penner added his second of the night late in the third, while Connor Parago stopped 24 shots to secure the victory.

Red River carried that momentum into Saturday's road matchup against the Steinbach Huskies, earning a 5-4 shootout win at the T.G. Smith Centre. After falling behind 2-0 early, the Mudbugs responded with three straight goals in the second period

from Hilderbrandt, Hildebrandt and Tyson Froese. Steinbach rallied to force overtime, but Froese scored the lone goal in the shootout, and Parago turned aside 60 shots in a standout performance.

With the week's results, Red River finished the regular season at 12-17-1, placing eighth overall and setting up a best-of-three play-in series against East St. Paul. Dates and times for the series were not available at press time.

Twins pull away in second period to defeat Twisters

By Lana Meier

A four-goal second period proved decisive as the Ft. Garry/Ft. Rouge Twins defeated the Pembina Valley Twisters 6-3 in Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League action Friday night at the Morris MultiPlex.

Pembina Valley opened the scoring midway through the first period when Ayden Lazarenko found the net at 7:37, giving the Twisters an early 1-0 lead. Ft. Garry responded early in the second period, however, and quickly took control of the game.

Lucas Spencer tied the contest at 2:42 of the second period, before Ketema Wall restored the Twisters' lead with a shorthanded goal at 6:33. The lead was short-lived, as the Twins scored three unanswered goals later in the period — including a power-play marker by Drew Russell at 19:15 — to take a 4-2 advantage into the intermission.

Ft. Garry added two more goals in the third period, with Spencer completing a hat trick and Russell scoring his second power-play goal of the

night. Carter Unger scored Pembina Valley's final goal at 4:26 of the third period, converting on the power play.

The Twins outshot the Twisters 53-38. Rowan Cherkas made 47 saves in goal for Pembina Valley, while Alex Pauls stopped 35 shots to earn the win for Ft. Garry.

With the loss, Pembina Valley fell to 5-27-1 on the season and remains 10th in the MMJHL standings. Ft. Garry improved to 17-14-3 and sits seventh overall.

The teams will meet again later this

season as Pembina Valley continues its final stretch of the regular season.

Several local players were recognized with selection to the 2026 MMJHL All-Star Game, which was played Saturday, Feb. 7, at Eric Coy Arena in Winnipeg. Representing the Pembina Valley Twisters were forwards Owen Vanrobaeys, Ethan Wilde, and Matt Lizotte. The All-Star selections highlight strong individual seasons and gave local fans a chance to see familiar faces compete alongside the league's top talent.

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OBITUARY



Dorothy Anne Rudy (nee Pokrant)

With love and sadness we announce the death of Dorothy Anne Rudy (nee Pokrant), born January 8, 1930 in Morden, MB and peacefully passed away January 18, 2026 in Kelowna, BC.

She is survived by her children Marshall (Sue), Peter (Sonja) and Susan; five grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren, along with her brother-in-law Cliff, sister-in-law Marg and many nieces, nephews and friends.

She was predeceased by Fred Rudy, her husband of 54 years in 2024. Also by her parents Edward and Annie Pokrant, her sisters Verna and Mary, her brother Arnold, sister-in-law Olga and her nephews Bruce and Greg.

After school in Rosenfeld, Dorothy enrolled in nursing school at St Boniface Hospital in Winnipeg, graduating in 1954. She made many lifelong friends from her nursing class. Dorothy was employed in many hospitals and really enjoyed her time with Winnipeg VON and Kelowna Home Care before retiring in 1985.

At a party in 1968, she was introduced to Fred Rudy and they were married in April, 1969 in Winnipeg. Dorothy and Fred enjoyed traveling, making many trips out to the Prairies to visit family. An early trip to Europe with a friend preceded trips to Arizona, Mexico, Hawaii, Alaska, Newfoundland, Cuba and many RCAF reunions in Canada with Fred.

Faith was an important part of Dorothy's life and she was a lifetime member of the Lutheran Church. Dorothy was an outstanding cook. Many recipes of her meals and desserts are still being used today by family. She enjoyed family get togethers, live theater and volunteering for over 20 years at Kelowna General Hospital. She always found time to observe the beauty she found in sunsets, stars and the northern lights.

A celebration of life will be held at a later date.

OBITUARY



Susan Elias (nee Wiebe)

1927 – 2026

Susan Elias passed away 8:00 a.m. at Salem Home in Winkler at the age of 99 years, and 15 days.

Susan was born on January 12, 1927, to Martin and Anna (Thiessen) Wiebe in the RM of Stanley, Manitoba. Our mom grew up south of Morden and received her education in the Waldheim and Osterwick Schools.

She was baptized upon confession of her Faith in Jesus Christ, on June 12th, 1946 in the Blumenfeld Old Colony Church.

On October 10, 1948 she married Jacob Elias. They were married for 65 years, 3 months and 3 days. They were blessed with six daughters and 1 son.

When Mom and Dad were married, they moved into the small lean-to attached to the Blumenfeld General Store which they owned. Their first daughter was born when they lived in this "Tiny Home". After a few years, they moved into the house which was located on the store property in Blumenfeld. In 1959 they sold the store, built a new house, and moved just west of Blumenfeld, onto a barren grassland which had been the community pasture. After the many rows of trees were planted, Mom spent hours and hours, stooped over and pulling quack grass roots out of the dirt. It was not easy to keep up with her work ethics.

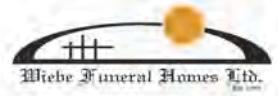
Our mom had many interests, both in the home and out in the yard. We will list only a few of them. In summer she would love to make Waffles for supper on the outdoor, wood-fired waffle iron. I remember Dad sitting there and saying, "Dit zaul dann scheen gon!" We all enjoyed it. Mom baked the best apple pies in the world! She really enjoyed painting the buildings on the farm. Dad had built a "Zoom-boom" bucket on the front-end loader with long pipes and a 45 gallon drum. This made it so easy for Mom to paint the barn. She was painting 25 feet up with her feet on the ground (Dad had put a few inches of dirt in the barrel to make it more stable). Mom loved working in the garden, and preparing meals from her produce and home grown meats, like pork and chicken.

Our home was always open to hosting visiting friends and families from Mexico, Ontario or anywhere else. Some of those friendships have lasted to this day. In spite of Mom's busyness at home, she would still take time for her family and for mission work. After Dad was ordained as a minister, she and Dad spent countless hours doing ministerial visitations. She also volunteered at MCC and later on at Faith Mission. She made a handstitched quilt for each of her children after they got married. She also made pillows and blankets for missions, too numerous to count. Mom knit hundreds of pairs of mittens for her friends, grandchildren and for Faith Mission. Mom and Dad still had time to go to Altona every week to visit their daughter Susan in the hospital for 16 years.

After Dad and Mom moved to Winkler in 1993, they dedicated even more of their time faithfully volunteering at Faith Mission. After Dad passed away in 2013, Mom continued her work there till about 2021 when her memory started failing. On November 17th, 2022, Mom moved into Eastview Place in Altona. On May 11th, 2023 she moved into Salem Home in Winkler, where she lived till her passing.

A Funeral Service took place on February 1, 2026, at the Chortitz Old Colony Mennonite Church, followed by the burial at the Blumenfeld Cemetery.

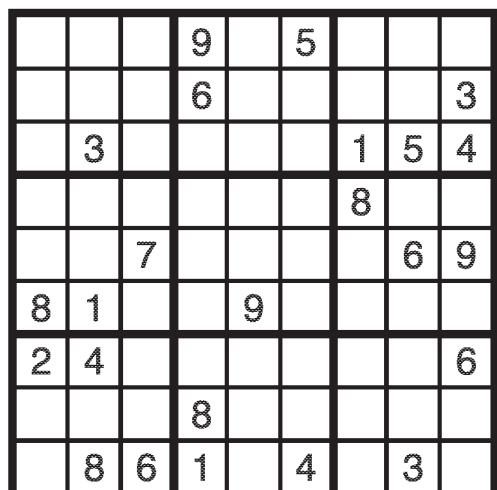
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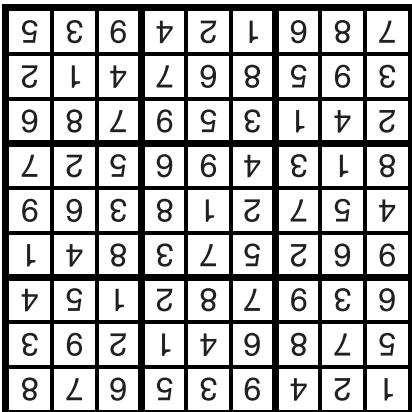
SUDOKU



Level: Intermediate

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Recipe courtesy of The Adventure Bite

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1/2 tablespoon fresh cracked black pepper

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jalapenos

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potato salad (optional)

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Place pork in slow cooker.

Mix barbecue sauce, garlic and pepper. Pour over pork shoulder.

Cook on low 8 1/2-10 hours or high 6-7 hours.

Shred meat and serve on buns with pickled celery and jalapenos. Top with coleslaw, if desired. Serve with potato salad or baked beans, if desired.



Recipe adapted from Mel's Kitchen Cafe

Total time: 30 minutes

Servings: 6

3 1/2 cups water, plus extra if needed

1 can (12 ounces) evaporated milk, divided

12 ounces pasta shells

salt, to taste

1 teaspoon cornstarch

1/2 teaspoon dry mustard

Simple Skillet Mac and Cheese

1 1/2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
1 1/2 cups shredded Monterey Jack cheese

2 tablespoons butter, cut into small chunks

ground black pepper, to taste

In nonstick skillet over high heat, bring water, 1 cup evaporated milk and shells to simmer. Season with salt, to taste. Cook, stirring, until pasta is tender and liquid thickens, 9-12 minutes.

In small bowl, whisk remaining evaporated milk, cornstarch and dry mustard. Stir into skillet. Continue simmering until slightly thickened, about 1 minute.

Remove skillet from heat. Stir in cheddar and Monterey Jack cheeses in batches, adding water to adjust consistency. Stir in butter then season with salt and pepper, to taste.

Photo courtesy of Unsplash

Ask the Money Lady

Dear Money Lady Readers – Why not adopt the new “Soft-Life” culture in 2026?

The hustle culture is something my demographic, (ages 50 to 65) and our parents have been used to all our lives. Living by the motto that you can’t be successful unless you “work really hard, show up every day ready to overcome any obstacle, with a no-limit attitude, and of course, programmed for greatness.” We quickly passed judgment on anyone who didn’t seem to be working hard, and everything in our lives had to become second to our all-encompassing career. Sound familiar? There are tonnes of books out there printed in the 80’s, 90’s and early 2000’s pushing the hustle culture. Suggesting you should create your own “vision board;” telling you to not limit yourself, and this one I love: “never settle for less than what you truly deserve.” My generation was always told to: “suck it up buttercup – stop complaining and get out there, get over it, work harder, and do more.” Well, that’s not the way life is now.

Today young Millennials and the vast majority of Canadian and American Gen’Zs are adopting the new “Soft Life” culture, the complete opposite of their parent’s belief system. They don’t want to live to work, like mom and dad did. No, they want to enjoy their life, focusing on balance, ease, self-care and personal fulfillment through intentionally enjoying the small wins. Have your Gen’Zs hit you with these statements yet: “we need you to respect our boundaries” or how about this one, “it’s not about the money” (regardless of you paying, you still have to go along with their choices not yours). Parents and older generations are having a tough time making this mental shift and many have written me about their troubles. They believe their kids are unmotivated or ungrateful for the monetary assistance from their parents.

While I definitely can relate, I’m thinking the hustle culture generation should also adopt the “Soft-Life” mantra too. Now before you throw down the paper in disgust – keep reading please. When we were young, it was all about proving “you could do it!” But to what end? I’ve seen co-workers, family and personal friends hit their late 40’s and 50’s still pushing, only to be silenced by a single tragedy. Was it worth it – maybe, only you will know? I



never thought I would ever say this, but I’m glad this next generation is pushing back on the hustle mentality. Good for them to want more out of life than just their career. It’s been tough for all of us oldies to deal with the micromanaging bosses, back-stabbing coworkers and peers that have accomplished more in less time.

The Soft-Life is really not about having a lot of money, but rather the evolution of an occasional “treat yourself” lifestyle to be happier. This could mean buying a name-brand grocery product instead of a generic one. Burning a scented candle on your desk while you work from home. Treating yourself to a special coffee drink, spending the afternoon curled up on the sofa with a good book and a plate of homemade cookies, or working on a quite task like a puzzle. The trend is to slow down, enjoy the little things and stop the “pushing for more” attitude. This movement rejects the idea that a difficult life is the only path toward an enjoyable one. It’s all about a life designed for calm, less complexity, sincerity with people, and finding time to unwind, pursue hobbies or spend time with the ones we love. Could we be entering an age of more traditional values? Maybe. Choosing to reject the old narrative can’t be that bad. We all would be better off if we could stop and put our mental and physical health first for once, not just for a day or a weekend, but for our whole life.

Good Luck and Best Wishes,
Money Lady

Written by Christine Ibbotson, Author, Finance Writer and Syndicated Money Coach on BNN Bloomberg. Christine is also part of the everyday lineup on CTV Your Morning in every province. No AI. Follow Christine on Instagram @askthemoneylady, or on Facebook (Christine Ibbotson).

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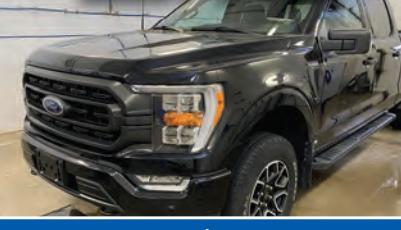
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