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A new chapter

PHOTO BY ASHLEIGH VIVEIROS/VOICE

From left: Longtime Altona MCC Gift & Thrift Store volunteer Elaine Gitzel, Mary Klassen, and Roy Gitzel helped the non-profit cut the ribbon for its grand re-opening last week. For the full story, see Pg. 12.

news > sports > opinion > community > people > entertainment > events > classifieds > careers > everything you need to know

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Mitsch and Sus return

Low German video series is back with new skits, readings

By Ashleigh Viveiros

The pandemic is well behind us, but the antics of Mitsch and Sus are back in the spotlight.

In 2021, Flatland Theatre Company's Tina Fehr-Kehler and Angela Klassen got in touch with their Low German heritage to create a pair of alter egos and do a few slice-of-life skits.

"Mitsch is a bit of a silly character and Sus is the long-suffering friend," explains Fehr-Kehler, who plays Mitsch.

"We did five little videos," says Klassen, a.k.a. Sus, explaining that those first sketches detailed life under COVID-19 with tongue firmly in cheek—one saw Sus sewing together a face mask that would allow them to continue to eat sunflower seeds while wearing it.

"I did a lot of the writing but then we also had Conrad [Stoesz, from the

Mennonite Heritage Archives] and Andrew Unger [a Mennonite humorist] as part of it," recalls Fehr-Kehler. "It was a lot of fun."

Their *Waut de kuckuck?* YouTube channel drew hundreds of subscribers and tens of thousands of views.

"People just loved them," Klassen says.

"And apparently we're really big in Paraguay," adds Fehr-Kehler with a chuckle.

Those handful of videos complete, the pair went on to take a bit of a breather from the act to focus on other creative endeavours, save for live performances at the Plautdietsche Tietfedrief event in Neubergthal.

Their show there last year inspired them to create new videos once again, the first of which was posted on their new channel, *Flatlands Tiet Vedrief*, in December.

That one saw them acting out the vignette *Audee (Goodbye)* by Low German writer Arnold Dyck detailing the long-winded parting ritual between two friends.

In their second video just before Christmas, they presented Reuben Epp's Low German translation of *The*



PHOTO BY ASHLEIGH VIVEIROS/VOICE

Angela Klassen (left) as Sus and Tina Fehr-Kehler as Mitsch in the duo's most recent Low German skit, which begins with Mitsch sheepishly admitting she's not a fan of verenika.

Night Before Christmas.

Their third skit is expected to drop any day now and it will detail a very touchy subject.

"It's about being a 'bad' Mennonite," Klassen says. "It starts out with Mitsch admitting she doesn't like

verenika."

The dumpling dish is a staple in Mennonite households, so it's an admission that causes a fair bit of playful shock between the two friends.

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DEREK HAMILTON
BSO Partner

Derek Hamilton became a BSO Partner at BDO Canada, based in the Pembina Valley in Southern Manitoba in January 2026 .

With over 15 years of professional experience, Derek specializes in providing comprehensive accounting and tax planning solutions to owner-managed businesses. He is a trusted advisor who works with clients across a variety of industries, including agriculture, manufacturing, and private enterprises, offering proactive and reliable support tailored to their unique needs.

In addition to his professional work, Derek is actively involved in his community. He serves as a Board Member of the Morden Chamber of Commerce and the Morden Curling Club and contributes to various local event committees. His dedication to both his clients and his community reflects his commitment to fostering growth and building lasting connections.

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Taking the plunge



PHOTOS
BY RICK
HIEBERT/
VOICE

About
30 brave
souls
turned out

Saturday afternoon to take part in the annual Polar Plunge at Lake Minnewastawish organized by the Law Enforcement Torch Run in support of Special Olympics Manitoba. Held again in conjunction with the annual Morden Winterfest, the event this year was estimated at press time to have raised upwards \$17,000.



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Katie's Cottage marking 10 years of providing refuge, comfort

By Ashleigh Viveiros

Katie's Cottage kicked off its 10th anniversary celebrations last week with a special event bringing corporate supporters together at the Access Event Centre in Morden.

The come-and-go wine and cheese reception was hosted by People Corporation—a Winnipeg company so impressed by the work of the respite home that they wanted to do something to help them celebrate a decade of community impact.

"My husband had foot surgery across the street at Boundary Trails, so I walked into Katie's Cottage and had to get involved," shared Gabrielle Konowalchuk, a business development consultant with People Corp. "I learned the story and fell in love with Ruth [Reimer, Katie Cares CEO] and here we are."

Having a place to come and get away from the hospital environment was a gift, Konowalchuk said.

"I only heard about it because the hospital mentioned I could stay there if I needed to. I had no idea what I was walking into. It was beautiful ... I was just in awe."

She went back to work inspired to do something to help Katie Cares, which runs the cottage.

"I got back to the office and sat my VP down and said, 'We need to get involved in this. It's a great organization, great people.'"

Jeremy Dick, a group benefit consultant with People Corp., observed that the story of Katie's Cottage is an

inspiring example of people coming together to support one another.

"We need more of this in the world today," he said. "It really speaks to the community here in Morden and Winkler more than anything else ... things like what Katie's Cottage represents really speaks to the value of community and what people can do when they really put their minds towards it."

People Corporation reps reached out to businesses across Southern Manitoba to invite them to the gathering last week, where they could learn more about the work of Katie Cares and how they can help them in their mission.

"We made a lot of phone calls in support of Katie Cares, just to bring people out and give them a good kick-off to their 10-year anniversary," Konowalchuk said, noting they plan to continue their relationship with the non-profit, potentially hosting similar awareness and fundraising events in the future.

Ruth Reimer said she was blown away by the company's eagerness to organize this event on their behalf. These kind of partnerships are an integral next step for the organization as it looks at the next decade of service and beyond.

"The southern Manitoba area, they've given so much to Katie Cares. Without them, we wouldn't be anywhere. The community support, the business support," she said. "But we also have to look at it and recognize people are coming here from all over



PHOTO BY ASHLEIGH VIVEIROS/VOICE

Katie Cares CEO Ruth Reimer holding the napkin her late daughter Kaitlyn got her father, Randy, to sketch out detailing her dream for a respite home in the Pembina Valley. Those plans became Katie's Cottage, which is celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2026.

the province, people are asking, 'How can we get involved?' We're operating on a provincial level, for sure."

The milestone anniversary celebrations will continue with a big community celebration July 25, where everyone will be invited down to the cottage for a day of tours, music, inflatables for the kids, and food.

They'll then cap off the year with their annual online auction and Celebration of Life fashion show in September.

Katie Cares is also teaming up with the Winnipeg Kinsmen for a Kin Kar raffle for a \$60,000 Murray Auto Group dealership voucher and 50/50 draw. The draw will take place June 22. Ticket information is available at katiecares.ca.

A DECADE OF CARING

Looking back, it's hard to believe how fast the past 10 years have flown by.

"You blink and we're here," Reimer said, reflecting on how they've learned so much in that time about how best to provide the care and support guests to Katie's Cottage need.

"I think the model has stayed very much the same, except that we've made that model stronger," she observed. "The foundation is so much stronger. The whole concept is stronger because people understand it now."

"People know they can leave the hospital and come here for the day, overnight—whatever they need," Reimer said.

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PHOTOS BY ASHLEIGH VIVEIROS/VOICE

Tracy Dandeneau (far left), Jeremy Dick, and Gabrielle Konowalchuk (far right) from People Corporation with Katie Cares' Ruth Reimer at a wine and cheese event held in the charity's honour last week.



Thousands of people from all across Manitoba and beyond have stopped by Katie's Cottage while their loved ones receive care at the nearby Boundary Trails Health Centre. Each pin represents a community a guest calls home.

“We were hoping for something more substantial”

Public schools funding announcement gets lukewarm response from local divisions

By Lorne Stelmach

The general message coming from local school division leaders in re-

sponse to the province’s recent announcement of its funding support for the next school year is that it simply doesn’t go far enough.

> KATIE’S COTTAGE, FROM PG. 4

Day drop-ins are completely free, while overnight stays come with a modest fee that is a fraction of what a family would have to pay to stay in other accommodations.

They seek to provide a homelike environment, a refuge for people when they need to stay close to the hospital. Last year they rented out 890 rooms, welcoming upwards of 1,650 overnight guests, alongside hundreds more people who simply stopped in for a cup of a coffee or a quiet place to pass the time.

“All those people who now don’t have to go sit in their car or go shopping aimlessly to kill some time while their loved one receives care,” Reimer said. “People need a break, they need a space where it’s quiet, where the noise and smell and all the hustle of bustle of the hospital isn’t, but they’re still close by.”

It’s pretty much exactly what Reimer’s late daughter, Kaitlyn, envisioned when she and her father first sketched out plans for a respite home years ago.

“She was at Boundary Trails, in the ICU, and she was very, very low. Her white cells were so low,” Reimer recalled. “I was going home and she said, ‘Mom, that’s so far.’”

The family lived in nearby Winkler, but even that short drive can seem much longer when a loved one is sick and in pain. And what about families who don’t live in the area, Kaitlyn wondered. Where do they go to recharge?

“When I left, she said to her dad, ‘Take that napkin and let’s draw a picture.’”

That sketch, which now hangs on the wall of Katie’s Cottage, was the seed for the facility it is today, depicting a space with plenty of common areas for people to gather and private bedrooms to stay the night.

After Kaitlyn’s death in 2012 at the age 15, her family picked up her dream and made it a reality. First continuing the Katie Cares charity which still provides thousands of Beanie Babies and care packages to

children in hospitals across the region each year—an initiative Kaitlyn began before her death—and then later spearheading the push to get Katie’s Cottage built.

“I think she always believed it was going to happen, she was going to make it happen,” Reimer said. And, thanks to the support of the community back then and through to today, it did.

“When we started back in 2014, we had zero dollars in the bank for this,” Reimer said. “We raised \$700,000—enough to build this place and start off with no debt. It was just phenomenal the support we got.”

In the years since, Reimer and her team of staff and volunteers have remained humbled by the opportunity to be there for families experiencing everything life has to offer—from the joy of birth (and they’ve actually had one expectant mother deliver their baby right at the cottage) through to end of life care.

“Maybe a loved one can’t go far from the hospital, but their family wants to do something special for them one more time, so they have a barbecue in our backyard,” Reimer said. “We’ve done that for families, giving them a chance just to be together here.

“It’s full circle. Birth and death, those things are happening here, and in between are all of the other struggles that we have to go through,” she said. “We’re honoured to be here for people. And I’m honoured that I get to meet so many wonderful people from all across the province.”

If Reimer has one message for the community, it’s this: thank you.

“Those two words don’t do it justice. But thank you. There’s no way we could have done any of this without everyone—and I mean everyone—as a community of southern Manitoba coming together and realizing the dream of a 13-year-old was something that was very needed and has had such an impact.”

The Manitoba government announced last week that it is increasing public school funding by \$79.8 million to nearly \$2 billion.

And 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, while Western School Division is getting about two per cent or \$400,000 more to \$19.2 million.

Elsewhere in the region, Prairie Rose and Prairie Spirit are both receiving about \$300,000 or 1.9 per cent more to \$17.8 and \$17.1 million respectively, while Border Land is getting about \$400,000 or 1.8 per cent more to \$21.1 million.

“We were hoping for something more substantial. I think most school divisions are in the same boat,” said Stephen Jaddock, superintendent of Western School Division.

“It’s tricky because when you are looking at our budget ... it’s actually just about a one per cent increase,” said Garden Valley School Division board chair Leah Klassen, who noted the increase actually only comes out to about 1.8 per cent, and a portion of

that is dedicated to the staff cost harmonization support, so the actual operational support otherwise is a fair bit less.”

Border Land School Division superintendent Krista Curry echoed that and noted that it can be somewhat misleading for the province to say its support for education is above inflation overall.

“It doesn’t translate to that for every division, and we would be one of those divisions that it is certainly well below inflationary rate.”

Jaddock agreed that will part of the increase including the harmonization costs, the actual operational funding only represents about a one per cent increase for Western.

“That’s going to be short in terms of what we’re looking for to maintain status quo,” he said, adding it not keeping up with increased operational costs, especially for a growing division.

“It’s going to be a challenge to work on the budget and come up with something ... the trustees don’t want to be in the position where they’re reducing frontline workers. We want to make sure that all of our staff is able to provide the support to students.

Continued on page 14

“Why do outages happen?”



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EDITORIAL > VIEWPOINTS > LETTERS

Considering the brighter things in life

Recently my therapist suggested I consider focusing on positive things that are going on around me and in general.

I mean, you and I both know that I can tend to focus in on issues and the general darkness of things from time to time. So, taking a moment to intentionally consider the brighter things makes sense. Balance.

This is important because we know that the things we spend our time looking at and thinking about tend to shape us—spend too much time in



By Peter Cantelon

the dark and you may become blind to light and good things like some ancient cave-dwelling creature.

So, in the tradition of a great Marvel series, I ask the question: What if? What if I took some time to consider the lighter things around me? Those brighter things that persist whether we want to believe they are there or not.

This morning is a good morning for this exercise because it is warm and sunny. A rare combination in winter.

When I stop to consider the good things I have, I find myself thinking about the negative things we don't have but might sneak in and I must stop myself. Good does not always have to contrast with bad. Right? Some things are simply good in and of themselves.

Take the rabbit that has been living in our backyard somewhere. We know it's there because it leaves its bunny trails all over the place but re-

mains stubbornly invisible to the naked eye. I like that there is something alive outside of myself that has found shelter on our property.

As I look more broadly around, I see people in the communities here in the Pembina Valley getting up each day and doing the best they can to make it work. Heck, we're obviously doing more than just making it work—we've been one of the fastest growing regions in the country for a LONG time. This is a good thing.

I can step out my door on any given morning and am within walking or biking distance to a fantastic lake, trails, great shops, a good beer, and so much more. Not too bad.

I know if I fall down there are people here who will help lift me up. Not a lot of places have access to those kinds of services.

Personally, I have it pretty good. My

Continued on page 7

letters

THANK YOU TO CANDLEWICK PLAYERS

Thanks to the talent of the people of the Pembina Valley and the town of Morden, the Kenmor Theatre is still in operation. And, thanks to all, the wife and I had a special weekend recently.

Peter [Cantelon, *Voice* columnist] spoke of the month of February in his column and what it might mean to some people. Well, the first weekend of February 1960 I was asked by a friend's date if I would like a blind date with a nurse for the Saturday night show. I had never had a blind date and never with a nurse, so I agreed. I was to pick this young lady up at 7 p.m. to go to the Kenmor Theatre to the show.

Well, who would have ever thought the first weekend

in February 2026 that my wife Elaine and I, 66 years later, we sat together again and watched our granddaughter on stage at the Kenmor performing in Candlewick Players' Valentine's production of *Meet Me In St. Louis* to a sold-out crowd—all thanks to the dedication of these people who love the art of live stage and who travel a long way to Morden and Manitou to give us top-notch entertainment.

February is a special month for us, but thanks to the dedication of so many people you made this weekend extra special for Elaine and I.

Thanks to you all!

**Wes and Elaine Vanstone,
Rosebank**

All columns and letters published on our Get Heard pages are the personal opinions of the submitting writers. They are not objective news articles, nor are they necessarily the viewpoint of the Voice.

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Police looking for suspects in Morden home invasion

By Voice staff

Morden Police are asking for the public's help as they investigate a home invasion that occurred the evening of Thursday, Feb. 5.

Police say the suspects entered a family dwelling and confronted the

> MITSCH AND SUS, FROM PG. 2

This most recent batch of videos includes English subtitles to make them more accessible to everyone.

"We wanted people who maybe aren't as confident in their Low German to still be able to watch and understand and enjoy and maybe learn a little bit," says Klassen, pointing out that the goal with these videos and the live performances has always been to simply promote the language in a playful way. "A big part of it is preserving the language and just doing fun things in Low German."

"For me, it's actually bettering my Low German and helping me keep it up," adds Fehr-Kehler.

And while comedy is at the heart of many of these skits, Fehr-Kehler hopes they'll be able to broaden their scope in the future.

"What we want to produce are things that show Low German is a versatile language that can be used for a lot of things," she says. "Most people who go to Low German plays expect it to be funny, but my goal is to

> CANTELON, FROM PG. 6

office is in my home. I can blast Green Day or someone more recent like Wet Leg and no one cares as I settle into a day's work or a column.

When I pause to look around me, I see pictures of the most beautiful people this world has created: my wife, my kids, my mum. A kind of trinity of goodness that has held me together in those coming apart times that rise from time to time.

At the very least I can say that here I am in this place still breathing. Heart still beating. Surrounded by communities of people who are also still

occupants. A weapon was brandished and the suspects injured one of the occupants, who was later seen by paramedics and transported to a medical facility with non-life-threatening injuries.

The suspects left the residence with-

eventually produce a play that's not a comedy."

"When people talk about Low German being funny, for me, it's just the language of life," observes Klassen, noting it can capture the breadth of human experience just as well as any other language.

They're already working to translate *The Secret Treaty: A Lost Story of Ojibwe and Mennonite Neighbours*, a graphic novel by Dave Scott and Jonathan Dyck detailing the handshake agreement between the Mennonite settlers to the West Reserve and the Indigenous people already there.

"We've asked permission to translate it into Low German and then create a video about it," Fehr-Kehler says, noting they hope to release that later this year.

Otherwise, the pair intend to keep their eyes and ears open for inspiration for future videos. Head to their YouTube page to catch them as they're released.

breathing. Hearts still beating. These are good things. Things that insist themselves on our dark times like stubborn sunrises.

What if?

What if we stopped to consider that our communities and the people who make them up are not so different than you and I. What if we stopped fighting for a moment, stopped caring about one-another's choices for a moment, and simply existed in one-another's presence for bit. Quiet.

It's not so bad really. In fact, it could be pretty darn good.

out any further injuries.

The department noted that the investigation is ongoing. While the suspects have not yet been apprehended, police believe this to be an isolated incident and say the public is not at risk.

Anyone with information regarding

this incident are asked to contact the Morden Police Service at 204-822-4900, call Manitoba Crime Stoppers anonymously at 1-800-822-8477, or submit a secure tip online at www.manitobacrimestoppers.com.



Manitoba Hydro Integrated Resource Plan & Major New Facility Public Review

On February 2, 2026, the Manitoba Government referred Manitoba Hydro's 2025 Integrated Resource Plan ("IRP") to the Public Utilities Board ("PUB") for its review and recommendations.

The IRP examines how best to meet Manitoba Hydro's expected short-term (2030) and long-term (2035) growth in electricity consumption with different options to increase electricity supply. The primary objective of the IRP is to plan for safe and reliable energy that meets the evolving needs of Manitobans. The IRP includes both Manitoba Hydro's electrical system and the natural gas system operated by Manitoba Hydro's subsidiary Centra Gas Manitoba Inc.

Manitoba Hydro's IRP includes its recommended future development plan, which incorporates a major new generating facility consisting of three new simple cycle combustion turbines at the Brandon Generating Station that will provide approximately 750 MW of capacity. In addition to the IRP, the needs for and alternatives to Manitoba Hydro's proposed new natural gas generating facility will be referred to the PUB for its review and recommendations.

The PUB will be conducting a public regulatory review over the coming months into both the IRP and the proposed major new natural gas generating facility. While these reviews by the PUB will not immediately result in a change to the rates charged by Manitoba Hydro, the costs of the new generating facility and other aspects of the development plan are expected to have an impact on future electricity rates.

Further details related to the upcoming review are available at: www.pubmanitoba.ca.

You can share your views on the filing with the Public Utilities Board in three ways:

- **As a Presenter** – If you want to make a virtual or in-person formal presentation to the Public Utilities Board on this matter and are willing to respond to questions about your presentation, please submit an application to become an approved Presenter using the application form linked on the PUB website (www.pubmanitoba.ca) by June 18, 2026. Presentations are limited to a maximum of 10 minutes and presenters will be scheduled to appear during the hearing in August.
- **Written comment** – If you would like to comment in writing on this review, please go to www.pubmanitoba.ca and provide your written comment.
- **As an approved intervenor** – If you want to actively participate in the public hearing as an intervenor, please go to www.pubmanitoba.ca and apply for Intervenor status on or before February 24, 2026. Interveners are required to represent the interests of a significant group of customers and may be required to combine their intervention with others representing similar interests.

A Pre-Hearing Conference with prospective Interveners will be held in the Board's hearing room, at the address below, commencing at 9:00 a.m. on Monday March 2, 2026.

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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.

Four charged in drug trafficking in Roseau River

By Voice staff

Four people from the Roseau River Anishinaabe First Nation have been arrested and are facing charges after a report of fraud led police into a drug trafficking investigation.

On Feb. 7th, members of the Manitoba First Nations Police Service (MF-NPS) were dispatched to a report of a stolen credit card being used fraudulently at a local business.

Officers identified the female suspect involved and went to her residence, where she was placed under arrest without incident.

During the arrest, police observed drug paraphernalia in plain view. After receiving a search warrant, officers found and seized approximately 187 grams of suspected cocaine and 61 grams of suspected methamphetamine with a combined estimated street value of \$24,800.

A 50-year-old female has been charged with fraud under \$5,000, possession of property obtained by crime, possession for the purpose of trafficking methamphetamine, and possession for the purpose of trafficking cocaine.

A 39-year-old male has been charged with possession for the purpose of trafficking methamphetamine and possession for the purpose of trafficking cocaine.

A 40-year-old male has been charged with possession for the purpose of trafficking methamphetamine and possession for the purpose of trafficking cocaine.

And a 41-year-old female of Roseau River First Nation has been charged with possession for the purpose of trafficking methamphetamine, possession for the purpose of trafficking cocaine, and possession of proceeds of crime



POLICE PHOTO

Manitoba First Nations Police Service officers seized drugs valued at nearly \$25,000 from a home on the Roseau River Anishinaabe First Nation Feb. 7.

All four were released on undertakings to await their court dates.

Province urges measles vaccination as cases rise

By Lorne Stelmach

The province offered an update last week on what has been a severe respiratory season being dealt with by a health care system that is already being challenged by the measles outbreaks.

And the latter has added to the pressure that is always present during the virus season.

"We have to be aware the risk is quite high," said chief provincial public health officer Dr. Brent Roussin during a press briefing last week. "This is even more than what we've seen in similar times during the pandemic."

Roussin did cite particular concern in the Southern Health-Santé Sud health region, but there was now also a larger exposure to measles at the recent Manitoba Ag Days in Brandon.

"We have over 30 cases that we can link to Ag Days right now and counting," Roussin said. "On Feb. 9, we had 12 positive cases; that was our highest number at any point during this outbreak."

At this time, he noted, health officials are not considering mandating vaccination, but their message is clear that it is recommended, especially for children, adults, and others who may be at risk.

"We're going to continue to rely on our messaging, access, and again trying to build that trust with health care

workers and people of these high risk areas," Roussin said.

He emphasized the province is taking a co-ordinated provincewide plan to help manage the pressures and maintain and manage safe care for patients.

"Public health, Shared Health, regional health authorities, and front-line teams work together throughout a province-wide approach. Real-time monitoring, daily co-ordination and activation of surge plans as needed are really responding to this increased demand."

Roussin said those efforts, along with increased investments in staffing and capacity, help to maintain safe care while the system faces increased demands.

"Every year, respiratory virus season brings increased pressure on the health care system," he said. "We'll see things like influenza, COVID-19, RSV circulating more widely, resulting in increased visits to emergency rooms, urgent cares and increased demands on hospitals and intensive care units."

"This season has brought particularly high levels of respiratory illness activity with admissions to emergency departments and urgent care increasing to roughly about 3,000 presentations, and this is even more than what we've seen even in certain times even during the pandemic."

Roussin still emphasized that vaccination is the best means to address and manage illness right now.

"This is significantly more important for those at increased risk, so young children, older adults, those with underlying medical conditions ... if you haven't been vaccinated this season, it's still not too late," he stressed. "We often

see a second wave of influenza that comes in early spring, so if you haven't been vaccinated yet, please do take us up on that opportunity to protect yourself and others."

He concluded with a few more thoughts about the measles outbreak in the province.

"Manitoba has continued to see high levels of transmission of measles now for over a year ... measles is a highly contagious virus, but it's well understood and very preventable."

He cited the example of the Ag Days cases as to how risky it is as far as being easily spread.

"Events like this that bring together a lot of people ... we have to be aware that the risk of transmission is quite high in these areas ... attending these large events, if you're unvaccinated, is putting you at increased risk of being exposed to measles," said Roussin, who particularly cited the level of concern and need for increased vaccinations here in the south central region around Winkler, Morden, and Carman where "we're seeing persistent high levels of transmission."

On Friday, Manitoba Health's measles update warned the public of widespread community transmission of measles in the rural municipalities of Stanley, Rhineland, Thompson, Dufferin, and Roland.

"Individuals should consider themselves potentially exposed to measles at any public location visited within these rural municipalities," officials stressed.

Infants are at increased risk of measles-related complications, including subacute sclerosing panencephalitis, a progressive and fatal brain condition that can occur around 10 years af-



A round dance at the Indigenous Cultural Showcase.

Culture sharing



Ice sculpting at the Canada pavilion.



Trying out a Filipino Colour Game.

Morden's Multicultural Winterfest filled the community with sights and sounds from around the world Saturday as hundreds of volunteers came together to share their native music, dance, food, and more. There were six pavilions in all, representing Africa, Europe & Latin America, South Asia, East Asia, Canada, and Indigenous culture.



Tai Chi performance at the East Asia pavilion



A lively dance at the African pavilion.



Bangladesh culture on stage at the South Asia pavilion.

PHOTOS BY
ASHLEIGH VIVEIROS
AND RICK HIEBERT/
VOICE



Ukrainian United School students perform.



Winterfest's new mascot, the Unity Bear, greets a young fan.



International Women's Day Luncheon

MORDEN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



Kaylee Meakin



Kelly Vipond



Janet Neduzak

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Morden Activity Centre

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www.mordenchamber.com





SUPPLIED PHOTO

From left: Luisa Maronese, Lesley Steppler, Abbie Gardiner, and Victoria Froebe at the Everyday Method Health Collective, which is celebrating its ribbon cutting in Morden this Friday.

Naturopathic clinic opens in Morden

By Lorne Stelmach

A new health clinic in Morden aims to offer an integrative and collaborative approach to care with a focus on sustainable long-term health.

The Everyday Method Health Collective is currently offering naturopathic medicine, including acupuncture as well as mental health counselling and holistic nutrition.

"We had this vision to create an integrated wellness centre ... and Morden felt like the right fit to do

that," shared Abbie Gardiner, who is a certified naturopathic doctor. "And I thought it was good timing.

"I wanted to create that space where patients could come to one clinic and receive all the treatments or at least as many of the treatments as they could," she added.

The Everyday Method Health Collective is holding a grand opening and ribbon cutting this Friday, Feb. 20, in its space at Unit B - 353 Thornhill Street in the back of the St. Paul's United Church building.

Gardiner's focus is on naturopathic medicine, which is a regulated health profession that blends modern scientific knowledge with traditional and natural therapies. Treatments may include diet and lifestyle recommendations, supplementation (vitamins, minerals and botanical medicines), acupuncture and physical medicine such as soft-tissue techniques and manual therapies.

With a wide range of treatment options, naturopathic care is highly individualized and designed to support the body's ability to heal and function optimally, she stressed.

"We believe that health is built through small, sustainable actions taken daily and that the best care comes from looking at health from multiple perspectives. A collaborative multidisciplinary approach allows us to address the whole person."

Gardiner says she practices with an evidence-informed approach, combining current research with clinical experience to guide treatment decisions.

Like medical doctors and nurse practitioners, naturopathic doctors can order laboratory testing and complete blood work through Dynacare to help assess progress and guide care.

Gardiner strongly believes patients receive the best outcomes through integrative, collaborative care. This often involves co-managing patients with medical doctors, nurse practitioners and other allied health professionals.

Also involved at the collective is Lesley Steppler, who is a holistic mental health counsellor and is a registered social worker and holistic nutritionist who offers an integrative, whole-person approach to mental health care.

Common concerns Steppler supports include anxiety, depression, burnout, nervous system dysregulation and overwhelm, nutrition confusion and its impact on mental health and processing and healing from past trauma.

"She and I work really closely together with our shared patients, and the goal is to slowly grow, and we want to make sure we get the right team," said Gardiner, noted they are looking at potentially adding a chiropractor, osteopath and physiotherapist.

"The practitioners will work collaboratively on the care for the patients," she emphasized. "It's just so that we can provide the best care for the patients, and that is my ultimate goal."

She believes an increasing number of people are looking for these kinds of care options or alternatives, but she sees it as being more like 'complementary care' where they will work with family doctors.

"I think it's really important that we all really work together," said Gardiner, citing her emphasis on having an overall care approach that is all inclusive.

"At The Everyday Method, our mission is to create a collaborative health collective where patients can access a team of trusted practitioners under one roof. By working together, we aim to provide thoughtful, coordinated care that supports better patient outcomes.

"As our clinic grows, our goal is to expand our team to meet the evolving needs of our patients."


You can find more information online at www.everyday-method.ca.


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Cuddle Up and Read



PHOTOS BY LORNE STELMACH/VOICE

A variety of school activities have been going on throughout February as part of I Love to Read Month. In Morden, students came in their PJs last Thursday evening to Maple Leaf School for the Cuddle Up and Read Night featuring guest readers.



> MEASLES, FROM PG. 8

ter measles infection. To maximize protection against measles, public health strongly recommends infants living in the rural municipalities listed above receive an early dose of measles, mumps, rubella (MMR)

vaccine, if eligible.

Infants aged six months to under 12 months are eligible for one early dose of MMR if they reside in or travel regularly to and have close contact with residents of health re-

gions of Southern Health-Santé Sud, Interlake Eastern or Prairie Mountain Health. All infants in Manitoba are eligible for their first routine immunization dose of measles, mumps, rubella, varicella (MMRV) vaccine at 12 months old.

Since Feb. 1, 2025, there have been 22 reported hospitalizations, with 16

patients being under age 10, officials say, and including cases involving difficulty breathing and requiring oxygen support, lung infections, and dehydration. There have also been nine cases of measles in pregnant individuals and one case of congenital measles.

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getinformed

Altona MCC cuts the ribbon on new layout

By Ashleigh Viveiros

The Altona MCC Gift & Thrift Store kicked off a new chapter with a grand re-opening celebration last week.

Staff, volunteers, and supporters gathered at the store Feb. 11 to cut the ribbon on its fresh new look.

After decades in their Main St. location, the shop had taken on a bit of a haphazard layout, observed manager Dave Rempel, as they added new departments wherever they best fit.

"There were some departments that had become sort of scattered over the years," he said. "You put something in here and you put something in over there ... we tried to amalgamate all those so it's a little more cohesive. It ended up being a reorganization of the whole store."

They converted the old Ten Thousand Villages room—which had become the staff break room and the donation processing space—into a dedicated children's department.

"We wanted to recapture that for our retail space, so that's one of the first things we did," Rempel said. "It's got all the children's clothing, the toys, all in one location to make shopping

easier for moms."

They then created a new processing space and staff room in the rear of the building, Rempel explained, "and then we just carried on from there."

"We created a new shoe department, we created more space for women's clothing—that's always our number one seller, so we really gave that a good emphasis—and then we really tried to make sure that we have

good flow through the entire store in terms of how we organized all of our departments and also to make the shopping experience just feel better for our customers."

Wider aisles, a fresh coat of paint, better lighting, and clearer signage give the store a much more welcoming and organized atmosphere, Rempel

said.

"We had a committee that was helping oversee it all, but it always ends up being a little bit bigger than what you think initially," he said, noting planning for this project began a year ago, but work started in earnest last fall, wrapping up just after Christmas.

Rempel sends thanks out to everyone involved in making it all happen—including the store's volunteer team, who

weathered the worst of the chaos the renovations generated.

"It was tough for the volunteers, so we really appreciate their patience in the whole process," he said. "And the end result of it all really paid off. The customers are loving it, and the volunteers are adjusting to it all."

"WE REALLY TRIED TO MAKE SURE THAT WE HAVE GOOD FLOW THROUGH THE ENTIRE STORE ..."



PHOTOS BY ASHLEIGH VIVEIROS/VOICE

Altona MCC Gift & Thrift Store manager Dave Rempel in the new sorting and pricing space set up in the rear of the building.

"We have over 100 volunteers that make this shop possible," Rempel noted. "It's really incredible what happens here day in and day out, week after week, month after month, and year after year. It's really incredible in terms of the donor support as well—people keep donating their goods that they no longer need, our volunteers keep processing it, and shoppers keep coming and purchasing it."

The proceeds from those sales go to support Mennonite Central Committee's global relief efforts and also help fund a host of charitable projects close to home.

The Altona location was the very first MCC thrift store ever opened back in 1972. Today there volunteer-run shops all across North America, shared Josué Figueroa, director of so-

cial enterprise for MCC Manitoba.

"Altona holds a very special place in the story of MCC thrift," he said. "It's not just another store in the network. This is where it all began."

"What started as a faithful effort has now brought into this enterprise almost a hundred stores in the U.S. and Canada, all supporting the work of MCC, all supporting your community."

"Every thing that you do here matters—matters here in the community, around the world. It ripples outward into the community and the more than 45 countries where MCC works helping people and serving people and sharing God's love to all."

Continued on page 13



The redesign included creating a dedicated children's department.

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IN MORRIS MB

Curtis Klassen Memorial Fund passing the torch on their annual run & walk

By Ashleigh Viveiros

A long-running community event in Altona is undergoing a big change this year.

The Curtis Klassen Memorial Fund (CKMF) committee announced last week that they are officially passing the torch for the annual Run & Walk to Remember to The Community Exchange (TCE).

"This decision was not made lightly," the committee shared in a statement. "We are deeply proud of what this event has meant to our community, and we are confident that The Community Exchange will carry it forward with care, purpose, and heart."

The 5k/10k run and walk got its start in 2012 as a way to raise money for the endowment fund created at the Altona Community Foundation in memory of Curtis Klassen, who was murdered in 1990.

Eric Hildebrand and several other friends and peers of the 15-year-old had started up the fund a few years earlier, around 2007-2008.

"We wanted his name to be remembered," Hildebrand said. "To keep his memory alive."

In the decades since, the group has raised over \$100,000 in Klassen's name, distributed annually to support grassroots sports, a host of community-focused projects, and education by way of a \$1,000 scholarship to a graduate of W.C. Miller Collegiate.

The fund at the community foundation will continue to issue the annual scholarships in perpetuity, ensuring Klassen's memory will continue to have a lasting impact, Hildebrand explained, but the run and walk itself will now benefit the work of TCE, which in recent years has become a community hub connecting people from all walks of life with events and programming.

The new event will be rebranded Stride Together: Run/Walk for TCE. The first edition will take place on Saturday, May 9, with registration details expected to be released soon.

Representatives from TCE didn't return requests for comment by press time.

The change is a bittersweet one for all involved at CKMF, but the time seems right as the event's organizers—after nearly 20 years at the helm—are ready to step back and let someone else take the event and run



VOICE FILE PHOTO

Last May's Run & Walk to Remember proved to be the last one organized by the Curtis Klassen Memorial Fund. The first annual Stride Together: Run/Walk for TCE takes its place this year as longtime organizers pass the torch.

with it, Hildebrand reflected.

The outpouring of support for both the endowment fund and the run and walk through the years has been humbling, he said.

"This all started with us reaching out to our classmates for the first couple of years with a simple email," Hildebrand recalled. "And it just grew and grew."

He and the entire committee send thanks out to everyone who has ever participated in the event as a runner, donor, sponsor, volunteer, or by simply

showing up on the day to cheer the runners on.

"We were just overwhelmed by the support of the community over the years, from our friends and our family and all the people that registered, that donated."

It's been a fair bit of work, but so worth it, Hildebrand added.

"When the dust settles and that day comes and it goes ... our hearts are full to overflowing with the positivity and the memories," he said. "Just everything about it has been so good."



PHOTO BY ASHLEIGH VIVEIROS/VOICE

The store also carved out much more space for the ladies department.

"This is family"

From Pg. 12

The honour of officially cutting the ribbon went to longtime volunteer Mary Klassen, who was also involved with the committee overseeing the renovations.

"I started here just hanging up clothes and stuff, years ago," she shared of her involvement with the store, which stretches back several decades. "Then I started making blankets and eventually I started in the back [pricing]."

"This is a family," Klassen said of

what's kept her coming back. She urges anyone looking for a meaningful way to give back to reach out to the store to learn more about getting involved as a volunteer.

Klassen has been around for so many changes at the thrift shop through the years—the addition or loss of various departments, the introduction of electronic price scanning—and while it can take some time to get used to something new, she says it's usually for the better, long-term.

"This has been a very good change," she observed of the new layout.

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Your FARM



Local companies recognized in Innovation Showcase

By Lorne Stelmach

Three local companies were honoured as Innovation Showcase winners at the recent Manitoba Ag Days in Brandon.

The event featured 28 new products or services in seven categories, and the south-central region was well represented.

In the agricultural equipment category, the CornerStone planter ready row unit created by North Valley Precision Planting located in the Homewood area earned top honours.

Representative Andrew Kippen said it came from a fairly basic idea to help producers.

"We wanted to showcase what North Valley can do with old equipment, so we rescued an old planter ... stripped it down, painted it and made a bunch of different adaptors and mods to fit with all the new tech," he said.

They then took the idea further and created a blueprint for installing it onto equipment.

"THE WHOLE IDEA IS IF YOU'RE HAPPY WITH WHAT YOU HAVE TODAY, LET'S RETROFIT AND CUSTOMIZE AND MAKE IT FIT."

"We mentioned it to a couple of customers who are actually on the Ag Days board, and they said that's a real innovation there and you should showcase it," said Kippen.

"The whole idea is if you're happy with what you have today, let's retrofit and customize and make it fit," he added.

He said there has been a lot of good positive response so far.

"It might not be a build we would do for everyone, but it kind of shows that you can take something that's 50 years old and make it into something that's new," said Kippen.

"New equipment is not cheap ... so this is an option for guys who

kind of want the new tech but don't want to spend that kind of money."

In the farm safety category, the fence line mower created by R-Tech Industries, also in the Homewood area, received accolades.

Representative Josh Hennen said their innovation also came from a fairly basic need, especially for cattle producers.



SUPPLIED PHOTO

The CornerStone planter ready row unit created by Homewood's North Valley Precision Planting earned top honours in the Manitoba Ag Days Innovation Showcase agricultural equipment category.

"If you have the grass get long and start touching the line, it will short it out, and it will lose its voltage," he explained. "Right now, people are just using weed whackers; that's the main way to do it ... but to go out and weed whack miles of fence line is a little crazy."

Continued on page 15

> FUNDING, FROM PG. 5

"Our numbers are continuing to rise ... so we want to make sure that we can have the supports available."

Jaddock said they want to carefully consider the impact on taxpayers but don't want to be making any substantial cuts, yet some things on the wish list will have to be put aside.

"If we we're going to maintain the front line staff then a lot of those wish list things come off the operation side ... projects that we were hoping to work on," he said. "We're going to have to go through everything with a fine tooth comb."

A similar message came from Curry.

"It's going to be a tough budget year because we want to try to keep things affordable for our taxpayers but at the same time we don't want to have to cut a whole bunch of things either," she said.

"We don't want to impact the quality of education that kids are getting ... we want to try to maintain that without having to cutback a bunch."

Continued on page 15

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Your FARM



> SHOWCASE, FROM PG. 14

They created something that will do the job quicker and more efficiently for producers.

"It's a simple idea for sure, and they do exist in Europe, but it just seemed you couldn't really find them out here in North America."

He saw a need for this relatively straightforward innovation here in southern Manitoba especially, and he appreciates receiving the recognition.

"It's good. It gets our name out there ... it's especially about safety," he said.

Hennan said they have been receiving good initial response to their product.

"Here's some people who came to Ag Days just to look at it, so there is a need for it," he said, noting they only did testing over last summer and started taking orders at Ag Days.

Another honour in the agronomics category went to the Feed Eazy Pro 3020 tub grinder produced by Kan-

par / Allagparts located in the RM of Stanley.

The tub grinder arose through a partnership with a company based overseas that had been distributing a model of a tub grinder.

"They decided they needed to beef their machines up, so they designed their own unit and strengthened the areas where they had issues, and we were able to import these machines into Canada now at over \$20,000 savings over the competition," explained sales rep Todd Botterill.

"It's a stronger machine," he said, noting its advantages include not only its ruggedness but its price as well.

"Cattle producers looking to increase the quality of their feed and using vertical mixers might need stronger equipment and need up to an hour to an hour and a half to chew up a bale," he explained.

"So it's a lot of wasted time and horsepower ... with a tub grinder like ours, we can use a 170 to 200 horsepower, and it takes five minutes to chew up that bale.

"IT'S A GREAT PROGRAM ... AND THE PUBLICITY THAT WE GET FROM IT HELPS A LOT."



SUPPLIED PHOTO

The fence line mower created by R-Tech Industries was recognized in the farm safety category in the Innovation Showcase at Ag Days.

"We're in a more competitive price point. It makes it more feasible for smaller operators to use this machine and improve their feed quality and not spend as much to do it."

Botterill noted the Manitoba Ag Days is the perfect forum for companies like them to showcase what they can offer to producers.

"It's a great program that they have, and the publicity that we get from it helps a lot."

First-place winners in the showcase received \$500 and a \$1,000 advertising

credit, while the runner-ups received \$250 and a \$500 advertising credit.

A spokesperson for Ag Days said it is always rewarding to see the level of innovation that Manitoba companies put in to making things easier and better for producers in the province.

"Farmers really want to see what is new and how it might work for them. They like the opportunity to see products first hand and ask specific questions," said Dwayne Leslie, Manitoba Ag Days innovation showcase committee chair.

> FUNDING, FROM PG. 14

"I would say we have been in that position for the past several years," said Curry. "Our goal at the end of the budget cycle is to be able to sustain what we have. The ability to dream has kind of gone by the wayside because there's just not enough funding."

"There are some very tough conversations happening now," noted Klassen.

She agreed it can be a difficult balancing act to meet the needs of the division while not having too much of an impact on Garden Valley taxpayers.

"We have all of the needs in mind," she said. "There's many different aspects to this, so how do we balance it? We're looking at what kind of efficiencies can we create in the system."

"Garden Valley has always operated on a very lean budget," she suggested. "So we don't have a lot of extras."

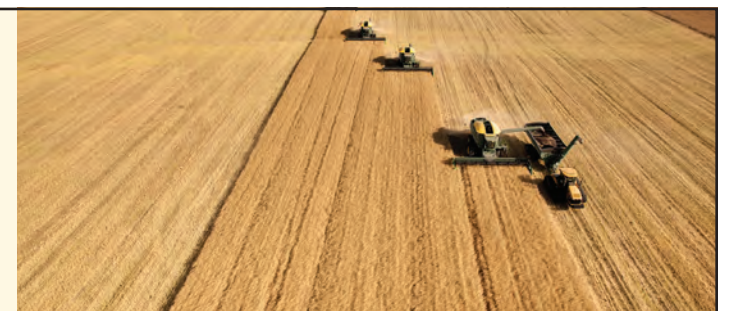
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PHOTO BY ASHLEIGH VIVEIROS/VOICE

Catan qualifier

Seventeen people came out to Sixteen13 Ministry's Manitoba Catan Tournament last weekend. After two days of competition, Trevor Neudorf (at right, centre, with the ministry's Harold Espinosa and Tiffany Krahn) clinched first place, punching his ticket to the nationals in Toronto in May. Espinosa sends thanks out to everyone who came to compete, the volunteers, and the many sponsors who helped make the event such a success.



SUPPLIED PHOTO



Are you feeling dissatisfied with your current financial institution and considering moving your money elsewhere? If so, consider these factors before making your next move.

YOUR FINANCIAL SITUATION

Before making any changes, assess your finances. If you have substantial assets, you'll be in a better position to negotiate attractive deals with a new financial institution. It's also crucial not to overlook the importance of your credit rating. If your credit score has declined in the past few years, it could impact the benefits you're eligible for with a new institution.

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE PROCESS

The idea of switching to a new bank may be appealing for the prospect of better interest rates, waived transaction fees and enticing rewards programs. However, changing over isn't a quick and easy task. You'll have to notify your employer, the government, your service providers, creditors and anyone else who automatically deposits or withdraws money from your account.

POTENTIAL FEES

Some banks charge fees and withhold taxes when they release funds to be transferred. The amounts vary based on the nature of your accounts (whether

they're investments or savings accounts, for example). Keep a few hundred dollars as a buffer in each of your accounts so you have enough to cover any pre-authorized payments you may have overlooked. Defaulting on payments could result in penalties, so it's important to stay on top of your financial commitments.

Once your move is complete, be sure to close your old accounts. Many institutions charge fees for inactive accounts, so it's best to tie up loose ends.

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

If switching financial institutions seems too tedious, there are other ways to improve your satisfaction with your financial services. For example, you can speak up about your dissatisfaction with your current institution. By expressing your willingness to switch institutions, you could negotiate better terms or

a more attractive transaction package. Your feedback can make a real difference.

Tip: Before starting a conversation with your financial institution, review the fees associated with each of your accounts. These fees could be silently eating away at your money, adding up to hundreds of dollars a year. Don't be afraid to negotiate!

Consider doing business with more than one institution. You could keep your current accounts with one and let another handle your investments. This way, you might snag advantageous rates without having to completely switch everything around.

Do you need help finding a new institution or renegotiating with your current one? Contact a financial expert in your area.

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So we'll ask again: do you feel confident in your plan?

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sports & recreation

Male Hawks win two out of three

By Lorne Stelmach

Winning two out of three games in a row this past weekend to close out a five-game homestand was a solid result for the male U18 Pembina Valley Hawks.

After being edged 4-3 by Eastman Friday, the Hawks outscored Interlake 9-6 Saturday before overcoming the Winnipeg Bruins Sunday with a 5-4 shootout victory.

Pembina Valley fell behind 3-1 after 20 minutes against Eastman and couldn't quite complete the comeback.

Ragnar Gillis, Caden McMahon, and Carson Hiebert on a late power play scored for the Hawks, while shots on goal were 38-22 in favour of the Selects. After giving up three goals on seven shots, Brody Peters was replaced by Koen Bleznuk, who stopped 30 of 31 shots.

Pembina Valley then grabbed period leads of 4-1 and 7-4 while outshooting the Interlake Lightning 50-39.

Ocean Fehr led the way for the Hawks with a pair of goals and four assists, while Tyson Pethybridge also chipped in with a couple of markers. Also scoring for Pembina Valley were Hiebert, McMahon, Parker Henderson, and Cole Secord.

Peters got the win in goal with 33 saves for the Hawks, who also picked up three power play goals.

The shootout against the Bruins went six rounds before Nolan Bravo



PHOTO BY RICK HIEBERT/VOICE

Pembina Valley's Ragnar Gillis tries to get a shot on Interlake's Seth Schaeffer in Saturday's game, which the Hawks won 9-6.

connected for the winner, while Hiebert and Fehr also connected on their chances.

Shots on goal were a massive 66-36 in favour of the Bruins, so Bleznuk was heroic in making 62 saves. Scoring for the Hawks in regulation were Hiebert, McMahon, Gillis and Eli

Jones, and Pembina Valley connected for a pair of power play markers.

The Hawks improved to 25-18-1-1 for 52 points, which has them in seventh place—three behind Southwest and just one ahead of Parkland.

Pembina Valley has a good chance to either solidify their position or per-

haps even move up one spot as they close out the regular season schedule this week with three games against the bottom two teams in the league. They played Interlake Tuesday and will face Norman twice this weekend.

Flyers blank Portage, Virden, fall to Wayway

By Ashleigh Viveiros

The Winkler Flyers were 2-1 in MJHL action this past week.

Last Tuesday they trounced the Portage Terriers—who are one up on them in the standings—6-0 in front of a hometown crowd.

Liam Ernst got the shutout in net, making 26 saves, while Jacob Michelson had a two-goal night and singles came courtesy of Trevor Dalton, Riley Fequet, Aiden Jacobson, and Charlie Weaver.

It was a much closer affair a few nights later when the Virden Oil Capitals came to town.

That one required overtime for a decision as it was 2-2 when the final whistle blew (scoring for Winkler were Fequet and Weaver). Connor Rieger got the game winner 1:18 into the extra period.

Ernst made 36 saves that night as Virden outshot Winkler 38-22.

And on Saturday the Flyers fell to the visiting Waywayseecappo Wolverines 4-2.

Goals from Jack Swaenepoel and Kade Stringer got the Flyers in the game after being down 2-0. But the Wolverines scored twice more in the third, including an empty-netter, to win it.

Liam Russell faced 35 shots in net, making 33 saves. His teammates sent 35 the other way.

The Flyers also faced off against the Oil Capitals in Virden Monday night, but results were not available by press time.

Prior to Monday's game, the Flyers

were 28-17-1-2 for the season so far, good for 59 points and fourth place in the MGEU East Division standings.

They were tied in points with the third-place Portage Terriers, who had a couple games in hand over them, and trailed the Niverville Nighthawks (81 points, first place) and the Steinbach Pistons (78 points, second place) by a wide margin.

This weekend they head into Winnipeg to play the Monarchs Saturday before welcoming the Winnipeg Blues to Winkler on Sunday.

Female Hawks finish season in sixth place

By Lorne Stelmach

The female U18 Pembina Valley Hawks closed out their regular season schedule last week with mixed results.

The final week began Feb. 9 with a 5-1 loss to the first-place Eastman Selects, but Pembina Valley then went out on a winning note Friday with a 7-3 win over the last-place Interlake Lightning.

The Hawks faced a tough task against the high-powered and talented Eastman team, which vastly outshot Pembina Valley 53-17, including 24 shots in the second period alone.

Madison Froese of course was under fire in the Hawks' goal but did well to make 48 saves, while Casey O'Brien's 14th goal of the season with 6:35 re-

maining in the third period was the lone Pembina Valley goal.

The Hawks held period leads of 3-1 and 4-2 against Interlake and then put it away with three more in the final frame while outshooting the Lightning 32-30 overall.

O'Brien led the way for the Hawks with four goals, which put her at 18 in total for the regular season. Also scoring were Sophia Cox, Claire Boyd, and Leah Klassen. The power play contributed three goals, including two by O'Brien. Froese got the win in net with 29 saves.

With that, Pembina Valley ended the season in sixth place at 9-18-0-1 for 19 points, which was just two up on Central Plains and nine behind Yellowhead.

It sets up a quarter-final playoff



PHOTO BY JO-ANNE PROCTER/VOICE

Goaltender Madison Froese made 27 saves in her team's 7-3 win over the Interlake Lightning last Friday evening in Warren.

series for the Hawks with the third-place Westman Wildcats. Pembina Valley had close games with Westman during the regular season but ended up losing three of the four.

Game one was set for this Wednesday in Hartney followed by game

two Friday in Morden and then game three Sunday back in Hartney.

If the series is extended, game four will be Feb. 26 in Morden and game five Feb. 28 in Hartney.

Twisters earn point before falling Sunday

By Annaliese Meier

The Pembina Valley Twisters picked up a single point during Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League action last week before closing the stretch with a loss Sunday afternoon.

Pembina Valley dropped a 9-4 decision to the River East Royal Knights and then fell 3-2 in a shootout to the Raiders Jr. Hockey Club, before being defeated 5-2 by the Transcona Railer Express on Feb. 15.

At Terry Sawchuk Arena on Feb. 10, River East's offensive pressure proved decisive as the Royal Knights outshot Pembina Valley 44-21. Graham Maslow scored twice in the opening period, including a power-play marker, before Ryan Thiessen replied late in the frame, finishing a rush set up by Dominic Rooney and Jack Holmes.

River East added three goals in the second period from Adam Hryhoruk, Nolan Fielding and Eros Bazan, while Vlad Stepic countered for the Twisters with his sixth of the season off a feed from Josh Guilford.

The Royal Knights struck just 25 seconds into the third and continued to build their lead, though Darby Olson scored twice for Pembina Valley in the period, with assists going to Stepic and Owen Vanrobaeys. Rowan Cherkas stopped 16 of 20 shots in relief while Darion Penner made 19 saves in the loss.

The Twisters bounced back with a strong effort Feb. 13 at Morris Multiplex but came up short in a shootout against the Raiders. After a scoreless first period, Josh Guilford opened scoring on the power play at 3:56 of the second, converting passes from Olson and Ethan Wilde.

Raiders forward Cole Kennedy tied the game later in the period and Riley Kushnier gave the visitors the lead midway through the third before Pembina Valley forced overtime when Ketema Wall scored with 1:55 remaining in regulation, assisted by Olson

and Guilford. Neither team scored in overtime and Kushnier netted the deciding goal in the fifth round of the shootout. Cherkas turned aside 31 of 34 shots.

The Twisters wrapped up the week Sunday in Winnipeg, falling 5-2 to the league-leading Transcona Railer Express despite a competitive effort. After a scoreless first period, Transcona struck three times in the second before Owen Vanrobaeys got Pembina Valley on the board with help from Stepic and Olson.

Ryan Thiessen cut the deficit to one

early in the third, assisted by Olson and Dwight Sawatzky, but the Railer Express sealed the game with two late empty-net goals. Penner turned aside 37 of 40 shots in a strong performance as Transcona held a 42-37 edge in shots.

Pembina Valley (5-29-2, 12 points) sits 10th in the MMJHL standings and continues its schedule with games Feb. 19 at Stonewall, Feb. 20 at home to St. Boniface and Feb. 22 hosting Stonewall.

Mudbugs, Gators split opening games of play-in series

By Annaliese Meier

The Red River Mudbugs and East St. Paul Gators traded decisive wins to open their HTJHL play-in series, leaving the best-of-three matchup tied 1-1 heading into the deciding game Wednesday, Feb. 18 at 8 p.m. at St. Jean Arena.

East St. Paul controlled Game 1 on Feb. 12, skating to a 9-3 victory behind a four-goal performance from Chris Tataryn and a hat trick from captain Luke Tyslau.

The teams exchanged goals early as Tataryn opened the scoring just 58 seconds in before Red River answered through Gavin Hildebrandt. Caleb

Hofer restored the Gators' lead and Reece Fehr again pulled the Mudbugs even, but East St. Paul seized control in the second period when Tyslau scored a power-play marker and then added the eventual game-winner less than three minutes later.

East St. Paul broke the game open in the third period with five unanswered goals. Tataryn added two more, while Zane Menard and Tyslau also scored as the Gators capitalized on sustained pressure and special teams. Preston Laschyn stopped 25 shots for the win, while Connor Parago made 31 saves in defeat.

Red River responded in Game 2 on

Feb. 14 with a tight 4-2 win, powered by a 44-save performance from Parago.

After a scoreless first period, the Mudbugs grabbed the lead on second-period goals by Traeton Peters and Caleb Boulanger. East St. Paul rallied early in the third as Hofer and Tyslau scored 1:48 apart to tie the game, but Griffin Hilderbrand restored the Red River advantage midway through the frame. Reece Fehr sealed the victory with a late power-play marker. Laschyn made 23 saves for the Gators.

The winner of Game 3 advances from the play-in round.

Mavs, Cougars, Nighthawks, and Thunder advance in Zone 4 playoffs

By Voice staff

Four teams were left standing to advance to the next round of Zone 4 high school hockey playoffs this week.

The Morris Mavericks are squaring off against the Carman Cougars while the NPC Nighthawks face the Morden Thunder in round two of the post-season.

Last week's Survivor Game saw the PCI Trojans advance after knocking out the GVC Zodiacs 3-1.

The Cougars then downed the WC Miller Aces 5-3 twice to earn a seat in round two, while the Nighthawks won their series against the Pembina Tigers with wins of 4-2 and 5-4, Morris fell to the Mountain Mustangs in game one 6-4 but then bounced back with 3-0 and 7-0 wins, and Morden swept their series against the Trojans 6-0 and 6-2.

The next round gets underway with games Wednesday night.

On Sunday the league announced its award winners, and a number of local players were honoured.

The Heavy Metal Designs MVP Award went to Dwight Sawatzky of the Pembina Tigers, with Carman's Grant Friesen getting the runners up nod.

Tyson Mullin of the Morden Thun-

der won the Lloyd C. Orchard Most Sportsmanlike Player award. Runner up was Carman's Nathan Froebe.

The Lew Mueller Defenseman of the Year Award went to Morden's Connor Olson. Mark Schefer from the GVC Zodiacs was runner up.

The Eddie Belfour Top Goaltender Award was won by Kali Hildebrand of the Morden Thunder. Runner up was Kyle Gee from the Pembina Tigers.

Top scorer honours went to Tegan Fehr from the NPC Nighthawks (34 goals and 19 assists in 21 goals played). Runner up was Grant Friesen from the Cougars (24 goals, 24 assists in 23 games).

The Morden Thunder were the top defensive team with 38 goals against while the Morris Mavericks were runner up with 58 goals against.

The W.C. Miller Aces earned the Charlie Market Fair Play Award for least penalty minutes with 278 overall for an average of 11.56 per game. Runner up were the Carman Cougars at 12.08 PIM per game.

Earning the Coaching Staff Award were Carman's Mike Hetherington and Derek Wood. Runner up was Morden's Kyle Nixon, Steve Mullin, and Jason Vanrobaeys.



PHOTO BY RICK HIEBERT

WC Miller Aces' captain Nolan Franz leaps to avoid a point shot as Carman Cougars goaltender Robby Keith tracks the puck during Zone IV playoff action Feb. 13 in Altona.

Finally, the Official of the Year was Shane Froebe, Lance Nault, and Jacob James Nelson. Runners up were Michelson.

Wild take Game 1, Royals-Hawks series opens Sunday

By Annaliese Meier

The Red River Wild opened their South Eastern Manitoba Hockey League quarterfinal with a 5-3 win over the Morden Bombers on Sunday afternoon to take a 1-0 lead in their best-of-five series.

Game 2 moves to Morden on Tuesday, Feb. 17 at 8:30 p.m., followed by

Game 3 back in Red River on Thursday, Feb. 19 at 8 p.m. If necessary, Game 4 is scheduled for Feb. 21 in Morden and Game 5 Feb. 24 in Red River.

The playoff matchup features the fourth-place Wild (10-6-2) against the fifth-place Bombers (8-9-1), part of the SEMHL's opening round following

the completion of the Survivor Series.

Notre Dame secured its quarterfinal berth by sweeping the Carman Beavers in the best-of-three Survivor Series, posting 7-4 victories on Feb. 12 in Carman and Feb. 14 on home ice.

The Hawks now face the top-seeded Winkler Royals, with Game 1 set for Sunday, Feb. 15 at 7:30 p.m. in Win-

kler and Game 2 scheduled for Feb. 21 at 7:30 p.m., also in Winkler.

Elsewhere in the league, the Springfield Winterhawks meet the Portage Islanders while the Ile des Chenes Northstars take on the Warren Mercs.

Red River now holds the early edge as the series shifts to Morden with three games scheduled over five days.

K4K Charity Funspiel raising funds for BTHC child and youth rehab centre

By Ashleigh Viveiros

A funspiel in Altona next month is providing curlers with the opportunity to take to the ice in support of a great cause.

The second K4K Charity Funspiel takes over the Altona Curling Club on Saturday, March 7, and there's still plenty of space for more teams.

"This event is raising funds for the Boundary Trails Health Centre, spe-

cifically the Child and Youth Rehabilitation Centre there," explains Zoe Fraser, one of the organizers.

"We wanted to choose an organization specifically targeted to rehabilitation," she adds, noting her family is one of the many Pembina Valley families who benefit from having these types of services closer to home. "My son has cerebral palsy and epilepsy and global developmental delay ... our rehab unit at Boundary rails is

going to open and it has lots of cool features.

"It's really wonderful to give funds to something that is going to support a really large part of our community."

Registration is \$75 per adult for a team of four. For youth 17 and under, it's \$50 per curler. That gets you two games, lunch, and a plated dinner.

All ages and skill levels are welcome.

"We want to make it as fun as possible and as inclusive to our entire com-

munity as a whole," Fraser says.

The last time K4K came to Altona they raised upwards of \$11,000.

"We would love to raise close to what we raised the first time," Fraser notes. "But I think our goal is always just to help in any way that we possibly can."

To register, find the event's page at kurlingforkids.org.

King Korn Maze named provincial tourism finalist

By Annaliese Meier

A popular fall destination in the Pembina Valley is receiving provincial recognition, as King Korn Maze has been named a finalist in the Small Business category at the Tourism Awards Winnipeg | Manitoba.

The Notre Dame de Lourdes attraction is one of six finalists selected in the category for the fourth annual awards, which celebrate businesses and individuals who contribute to Manitoba's tourism industry through exceptional visitor experiences, innovation and destination promotion.

For co-owner Janik Grenier, who operates the seasonal attraction alongside her sister Taya Grenier and brother Justin Grenier, the nomination carries both professional and personal significance.

"Being named a finalist for this award is a huge honour," Grenier said. "As a business owner, it reflects the time, dedication and behind-the-scenes work that goes into creating an experience people genuinely want to come back to. On a personal level, it's been incredibly rewarding to watch what started as a backyard family project grow into something that's now recognized at a provincial level."

The business has grown steadily over the past eight years.

"When we first opened King Korn Maze, we were honestly just grateful we could cover the gas to fuel the generator that powered the borrowed camper we were running everything out of," Grenier said. "Eight years later, it has grown into something provincially recognized — which we

never would have imagined in our first season."

In those early years, she said, the learning curve was steep.

"We learned quickly and adapted constantly. We went from one 'impossible' corn maze to four mazes, added a permanent snack shack, a golf range and a barn with endless potential. On top of that, we've continued developing and refining activities every year."

Grenier said the growth has been guided largely by listening to visitors and understanding what families are looking for in a day-trip experience.

"One of our biggest early lessons came from that first 'impossible' maze — we realized quickly that success comes from putting yourself in your customer's shoes," she said. "Listening, adapting and continuing to improve the experience has become part of what we do every day."

She believes what sets King Korn Maze apart is its intentional focus on families.

"From pricing, to activities, to hours, to booking options — everything is built around making it easy and affordable for families to spend time together," Grenier said. "That focus has played a big role in building loyalty, especially in a small rural community like ours."

Community support, she added, has been central to the business's success.

"We love collaborating with local groups and committees whenever we can, and it's one of the most rewarding parts of what we do. We enjoy seeing the familiar faces year after year just as much as welcoming new visitors."



SUBMITTED PHOTO

King Korn Maze in Notre Dame de Lourdes has been named a finalist in the Small Business category at the provincial Tourism Awards.

Bringing people into our community has been a lot of fun — and it's also our way of giving back to a place that has given us so much."

Beyond serving as a fall attraction, King Korn Maze plays a broader role in regional tourism.

"King Korn Maze offers something for all ages in the Pembina Valley, which is important because most families include a mix of different ages and interests," Grenier said. "We're proud to provide a local destination that can accommodate an entire family for an affordable price, while also bringing more visitors into the region each season."

Operating a seasonal business in rural Manitoba has come with its own lessons.

"Because we started so young, we learned everything from scratch — from the realities of business ownership to the importance of understanding what guests want," she said. "Even though a seasonal business

may only be open for part of the year, we're always thinking about how to make our customers feel happy, welcome and excited to spend a day wandering around a corn field."

Looking ahead, the siblings are continuing to explore new opportunities.

"It's hard to say exactly where the future of King Korn Maze will lead. We look at every new opportunity as a new challenge, and we try to take those challenges on with open arms — which is part of what keeps things exciting and unpredictable."

This upcoming season will mark another milestone for the business as it prepares to host its first wedding.

"We'll see where that takes us," she said.

The awards ceremony will take place April 23 at the RBC Convention Centre in Winnipeg. Winners will be announced during the gala event, bringing together tourism operators from across Manitoba.



Winkler Men's Bonspiel winners

The Winkler Curling Club hosted its Men's Bonspiel Feb. 6-8, drawing 18 teams and serving up 155 steak suppers on the Saturday night. Clockwise from above, far left: "A" event winners Hank Klassen, John Neufeld, Louis Tanguay, and Jesse Klassen with Vanessa Wolfe from Heritage Farms) Brewing Co., the bonspiel's main sponsor; "C1" event winners Jason Manns, Jeremy Giesbrecht, Justin Groening, and Jon Doell with Wolfe; "B" event winners Dwight Suderman, Reece Hamm, Logan Hamm, and Ron Vanderwees with Wolfe; and "C2" event winners Daniel Peters, Joe Peters, Arnie Toews, and Ray Giesbrecht.

SUPPLIED PHOTOS

arts&culture

Irish Rovers make their return to Winkler

By Lorne Stelmach

It is hard for George Millar to believe that The Irish Rovers are still “roving” after six decades of playing music.

He may be the last remaining original member, with his brother Will having retired and other members having passed away, but he and the other current Rovers, including a son of one original member, are still keen to keep performing and recording music.

“Sometimes it feels like about a hundred years ... this is actually our 60th year. We started in about 1965; I was 16 years old with my brother and my friend Jimmy Ferguson,” Millar recalled in a recent interview in advance of the group’s March 6 show at the P.W. Enns Centennial Concert Hall in Winkler.

“We were playing the folk clubs across America and Canada, and we thought we would give it a year to see how it went, and it went fairly well. So after all these years, we’re still saying oh, we’ll give it one more year and see how it goes.

“As long as we’re doing the same type of show and the same songs, people seem to be all right with it.”

The Irish Rovers are kicking off the St Patrick’s Day season with a tour and a release of their latest album.

After years of wanting to record a homegrown album, The Rovers finally hit the mark with *The Belfast Sessions*, Millar said. It was recorded last year at RedBox Studios in Belfast.

“It’s been wonderful bringing everyone together in the same space after all those remote recording and file-sharing sessions we did the past few years, including COVID,” he said. “RedBox is on three floors of a Victorian house in the city, and it’s run by Dónal O’Connor, the son of our fiddle player Gerry O’Connor. We recorded parts of tracks in rooms on the different floors. I put ideas down a scratch track to give the other lads an idea of the tempo and the phrasing of the songs.”

The Rovers have been in the spotlight for decades. In 2023, they cracked Spotify’s Viral Top 50 in both the US

and UK/Ireland. That year they released *No End In Sight* featuring their 1977 version of “The Wellerman” and a new anthem for the era, “Hey Boys Sing Us A Song,” which earned a Canadian Folk Music Awards nomination for 2023 single of the year.

The band nicknamed themselves “Dinosaurs” on the final track of the most recent album as a nod to the seasoned, crusty musicians who have paid their dues and kept going in a hostile environment for their survival.

Canada has long been home to The Irish Rovers since their early-60s inception.

“It’s a bit odd being from both Ireland and Canada. The fans have found it confusing too,” said Millar, who noted this sense of dual identity inspired him to write “Band Without A Country” from the 2020 album *Saints And Sinners*, which was a song and video tracing their journey from Ireland to Toronto and beyond.

Their breakout era began in 1967 with the album *The Unicorn*, whose title track propelled the band from folk clubs to concert halls and TV worldwide.

To honor its 50th anniversary in 2017, The Rovers released *The Unicorn, The Continuing Story*, featuring new recordings of the original album plus a sequel that answers the age-old question: what happened to the Unicorns when the ark left them stranded on shore?

Their most famous song of course really brought them an entirely different level of fame, and Millar noted it is interesting to think it is a song that might be both sung by kids in Sunday school and people in pubs with pints of beer in hand.

“It was the very last song we recorded on that record ... it was all Irish drinking songs basically, and the producer said, ‘Do you have anything slightly different?’”

The Irish Rovers was the first Irish band to play the Grand Ole Opry, and in 1971 they hosted the first of three TV series: CBC’s *The Irish Rovers Show*, which ran seven seasons and won the ACTRA award for best variety performance.



SUPPLIED PHOTO

The Irish Rovers take the stage at the P.W. Enns Centennial Concert Hall in Winkler March 6.

Since 2010, the band has returned to television with more international specials, letting fans revisit the same early CBC-era locales.

It’s been quite a ride, Millar said in reflecting on his storied career.

“When I arrived in the USA from Ballymena, people from the north were an unknown quantity, and luckily for me, almost as soon as I arrived, Tommy Makem took me under his wing. We found that we shared so much through music.

“There was a huge appetite for folk music, and we were all young and able to party after a gig, and the after hours singing sessions were legendary. We’d meet all sorts of people who were passing through such as the Wolfe Tones and Kris Kristofferson and his wife Rita Coolidge. Soon a supportive network began to grow up around us.”

Millar observed that there is an eternal appeal to Irish and Celtic music.

“It’s a happy style of music ... and even if we’re singing about some poor Irishman who was caught and hung and drawn and quartered back in the 1700s, it’s still an uplifting sort of tune behind the words,” he said. “I’m not sure that people understand some of the words, but the tunes themselves ... I suppose it’s like a good polka. If you don’t particularly like polka, if you’re close enough to it, your toe will start tapping.

“I think Irish music just has that kind of appeal. It’s just sort of an up-

lifting type of music, and it’s probably that music that has kept the Irish music going, that and their humour, has kept them going for 800 years through famines and all sorts of different oppressions.

“Music is so important. It’s an art-work; it’s one of the oldest arts in the world, and I don’t think there’s a civilization in this world that doesn’t have music.”

Millar added that they are “very blessed that our fans, after all these years, are still coming out to see us, and that’s great. What is really nice about Irish and Celtic music in general is that the young people are still into it ... you don’t see it in too many other places. We’re still seeing a lot of younger people coming, and that is always great to see.”

After 60 years on the road, Millar can offer some advice to young musicians just starting out:

“Firstly, perform as if you’re really enjoying it. Of course you should enjoy every gig, but when you are on the road full-time, there will be some shows that are better than others. The audience have paid part of their hard-earned wages to see you, so give them 110 per cent, connect with them, share stories, tell jokes and choruses.

“The second thing is to get on together as a band, enjoy your time and give your band mates space when they need it. An opportunity to make music with your friends does not come along every day.”

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- Tender must be accompanied by a refundable deposit of \$10,000.00 (cheque made payable to Franz Hoeppner Wiens Law Office).

TERMS OF SALE:

- The successful bidder(s) will be required to enter a formal agreement covering terms and conditions of sale.
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- Offers may be for both or either parcel.
- The date of closing and possession will be March 27, 2026.
- The date of adjustments will be January 1, 2026.
- You must provide a certified check or bank draft in the amount of \$10,000.00 payable to Cole & Mace Law Office. The cheques accompanying unsuccessful tenders will be returned.
- You must rely on your own research of the property.
- Tenders are binding upon acceptance and not subject to any conditions precedent.
- Tenders may only be submitted in the form provided by Cole & Mace Law Office; a form of tender may be requested from Cole & Mace Law Office in person at the address below, or by emailing: adam@colemacelaw.com.
- The Vendor will be responsible for the taxes on the property up to the date of adjustments.
- The Purchaser will be required to pay GST unless the Purchaser is registered for GST and agrees to self-assess.
- Title to the land will be transferred free and clear of all encumbrances and liens, excepting Caveat No. 3614192/1.

Signed and sealed Tenders will be received up to 4:00 p.m. on March 3, 2026 at:

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26 Centre Ave. East, Box 2039, Altona, Manitoba, R0G 0B0
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The Altona Senior Centre will be holding the

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

At the Senior Centre

Thursday, February 26 at 7:00 p.m.
Coffee & Dainties will be served

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

IN THE MATTER OF THE ESTATE OF **WILHELM REDDECOPP**, late of the Winkler, Manitoba, Deceased.

All claims against the above estate, supported by Statutory Declaration, must be sent to the attention of: Abisola Bamigboye, Estates Administration, at 155 Carlton St. Suite 500, Winnipeg, MB, R3C 5R9 on or before the 26th day of March, 2026.

DATED at Winnipeg, Manitoba, this 12th day of February, 2026.

Keri Ranson
Acting Public Guardian
and Trustee of Manitoba

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BIRTHDAY



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Happy 94th birthday on February 20th.
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6	7	9	4	5	2	1	8	3
9	1	4	8	9	8	7	2	6
3	8	2	7	6	1	9	9	4
4	5	8	6	7	9	3	1	2
1	9	3	8	2	9	4	6	7
7	2	6	1	4	3	8	9	9
9	3	7	5	1	6	2	4	8
2	4	5	9	8	7	6	3	1
8	6	1	2	3	4	9	7	5

Sudoku Answer

OBITUARY



Anne Neufeld (nee Klassen)

Anne Neufeld (nee Klassen) of Winkler, formerly of Hochfeld, passed away peacefully to be with Jesus on Sunday, February 8th at the age of 80.

She is survived by her son Roger (Helen), grandkids Nici and Mike (Kristen) and his family.

She was predeceased by Harry in 2025, her husband of 58 years. Harry and Anne moved to the farm in Hochfeld 1973 and remained until 2015. She spent many hours in her vegetable and flower gardens, hosting family, friends, and whoever else came through the door. There would always be something on the table and a pot of coffee ready. She knew how to work hard on the farm, and that work ethic transferred to her hosting.

Anne loved to fish and they spent many weekends out at Rock Lake and Grand Rapids with friends. Anne and Harry also spent

many winters in Mexico, Chile, Cuba, and Bolivia where they made many friends, some of whom came and visited them here in Canada.

Anne loved her family, especially her grandkids. Many Sunday afternoons were spent with the grandkids at their house playing cards and having fasha or supper together. She loved being around people, which is why their house was the home of many fish fry's, corn roasts, and evening fires.

Anne was known for her feisty personality. There was very little that she kept to herself. Her loud expressions and honesty made things like playing games extra entertaining. There were always a few people who knew exactly how to get that rise out of her, and even though she knew what they were doing, her response would be the same.

Her strength, work ethic, and feistiness were seen through the last number of years as she dealt with health struggles. From her aneurism seven years ago, to battling double-pneumonia in December, her fight was visible and obvious. She defied many odds throughout the last number of years.

The family would like thank Homecare, Boundary Trails Palliative Care staff, and all those who walked alongside us as we cared for Anne these last years. We appreciated you very much!

A Funeral Service was held on Friday, February 13, 2026 at the Winkler Sommerfeld Church, followed by a burial at the Hochfeld Cemetery.

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	4	2						
		8						7
	9		5					
2			6		9			
4			1				8	3
				3	4			
			2	5			7	

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Hug in a Mug campaign helps fund winter outreach

By Holly Thorne-Wiebe

A group of local youth and volunteers are helping bring warmth and encouragement to people experiencing homelessness in Winnipeg through the Blessing Bag Project.

The outreach provides bags filled with essential items, including hygiene supplies, non-perishable food, and warm clothing. Each bag also contains a handwritten card with words of encouragement and a bible verse.

Evan Kehler, one of the project's organizers, said the goal is to offer both practical support and a reminder that people care.

The group recently assembled 152 blessing bags, with the youth group taking part. Kehler said involving young people is an important part of the initiative.

"It gives them a chance to serve in a hands-on way and better understand the realities that others are facing."

The project works with Winnipeg's Main Street Project to distribute the bags safely and respectfully. While the focus has traditionally been on supporting those in the city, Kehler says they are also exploring ways to respond to needs closer to home.

"We've been having conversations with The Community Exchange and the Share the Warmth initiative," he said. "While poverty may look different in smaller, rural communities, the



SUPPLIED PHOTOS

Volunteers assembled 152 Blessing Bags for distribution to unhoused people in Winnipeg late last year. A Hug in a Mug campaign is on now to raise funds for next year's campaign.

need still exists."

Blessing Bags are typically distributed during the winter months, closer to Christmas. Planning for the upcoming season usually begins in September or October, though donations are accepted year-round at Altona EMMC or Altona United Church.

Supporters can contribute through a creative fundraiser going on now called Hug in a Mug. It's run by Kehler's mother, Eileen. She's collecting gently-used mugs donated by friends, family, and community members and selling them by donation to raise funds for the Blessing Bag project.

"My Hug in a Mug is just a small, tiny part of the Blessing Bags," she

said. "As a mom, I wanted to find a way, other than just making a donation, to help subsidize their efforts."

What started as a simple idea has grown into a popular fundraiser.

"It's probably fair to say I have a mug addiction now," Eileen said with a laugh. "But I try very hard not to keep them for myself."

Each winter, Kehler posts photos of the mugs for sale on her Facebook page. Buyers can choose their favourites, and then stop by to pay and pick them up.

"People in this town are very supportive," she said. "The most common donation for one mug is usually \$20, but I've also had \$40 and \$50. I've even had someone buy a mug from

Texas."

"I tell people that it isn't only about getting a mug that speaks to you," she continued. "It's more about helping the homeless, and as a bonus you get a mug."

Community members can also donate mugs by dropping them off at her home, 123 Centre Avenue in Altona.

With planning for the next round of Blessing Bags set to begin in the fall, organizers say the project continues to be a simple but meaningful way for the community to show care for others during the coldest months of the year.

Lights, camera, action in St. Jean Baptiste

By Siobhan Maas

Northern Lights, a feature film directed by Winnipeg-based Memory Pill Films, finished filming portions of the movie last Wednesday in and around St. Jean Baptiste.

Set in the "unforgiving landscape" of rural Manitoba, the coming-of-age drama is about 18-year-old Polly, a snowmobiler desperate to break free from her small town and go pro.

Through his local and provincial connections with the snowmobile community, Doug Godard—chairman of risk management of trails with SnoMan, president for the central region, and member with the local Border Valley SnoGoers—found himself touring the area with the film's reps back in December.

"We were able to check off many of the boxes required for the movie with St. Jean: the park, the river, and being within 40 miles of Winnipeg," Godard explained. "They filmed around

St. Jean from Monday to Wednesday, renting the local hall for seven days and to warm up and have lunch while filming. There was a huge community effort that made this happen for the crew."

Lunches were catered by Morris Bigway, the RM of Montcalm prepped the park trails, portable toilets were brought in, and vehicles and snowmobiles were stored on residents' driveways and at the local fire hall.

"The film needed a race track to practise, so they used the field behind the park with permission, along with groomed roadways throughout the campground," said Godard, of his local club's contribution of trail groomers. "A lot of businesses in the area received more income while the crew was here."

With the crew using the river for portions of the shooting, Godard found himself using his most recent role of chair for trails safety and auditing, meeting with the film's safety

officer to help with planning.

"I've been riding along water for sixty years," he noted. "Does a manager like to hear if they see slush that I'll shut them down? Don't go past the bend in the river."

Despite his best efforts, some equipment broke through the ice at the fork of the Plum River and the Red.

"It was only knee-deep water," Godard chuckled. "There was a different respect for me after that happened. At the end of the day, the important thing is the safety of the crew. No one got hurt but some of the crew probably got their feet wet."

Although Godard encouraged the filming to take place in his local community, he didn't expect to be so actively involved in production.

"Suddenly, I was made a part of it. We worked long, 12-hour days and I enjoyed every minute of it. It was a hectic pace, with lights at night."

Godard started helping with his snowmobile due to limited accessi-

bility of the crew's equipment for the river shots.

"I slowly got more involved in the support of the crew and ended up being a valuable asset to camera duty—the still shots, racing shots, the pace vehicle that goes ahead, up and down the river beside the racers. The camera was attached on my sled and I got very involved in the action."

"Would I do it again? It was exciting but I'm glad it's over. I'm not used to long days and the pace they travel at. We got some beautiful shots with the snowmobile racing through four inches of water. The splash was unreal," said Godard. "The right people were able to get there to help."

The casting company for the film also recruited locals to act as spectators for some of the racing scenes. The film continues to film in Cooks Creek and at the Beausejour racetrack this month.