

Empire-Advance

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FEBRUARY 13, 2026 | EMPIRE: VOL 121 NO 26 / ADVANCE: VOL 140 NO 28 | PUBLISHING FRIDAYS



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History steps off the page in Ed James' presentations



Ed James poses at a street parade with a First World War ambulance restored by the late Rollie Clegg of Arrow River, MB now on display at Prairie Mountain Museum (Shoal Lake).

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE ADVANCE

As social trends ride the cresting wave of technology and modern thought, historians help keep us humble, providing a connection between the ever changing present and our foundations.

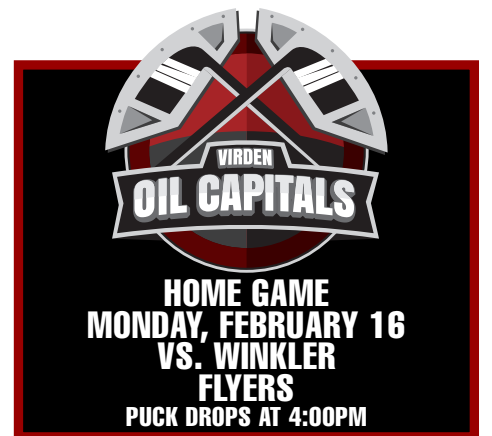
Elkhorn's Ed James is a collector, but he's more than that. Using his large collection of military items - weaponry, uniforms, authentic wartime letters, gadgets and gizmos of army life - as props, he has awakened audiences to stark realities of the life

and times of Canadians at war.

For over 25 years James' moving presentations have educated and inspired school kids, Remembrance Day crowds and crowds at community events.

James was born and raised in Halifax, N.S., one of Canada's oldest historic cities. He pursued several careers there until, with a teaching degree in his briefcase, the federal government hired him to teach in an Indigenous school at God's Lake Narrows, Manitoba.

read more about Ed James on page 3...



VIRIDEN
OIL CAPITALS

HOME GAME
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 16
VS. WINKLER
FLYERS
PUCK DROPS AT 4:00PM

Inside...



**ELKHORN
DANCE** *P10*



**MB BUNGE
BONSPIEL** *P13*



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Cheering on a hometown hero



Submitted Photos
The whole community of Elkhorn is honouring Travis Sanheim, who is on Canada's Olympic Men's Hockey Team.

Correction: RE: Journey for Sight

Please note, in the issue for Feb. 6, 2026 on the cover, the Journey for Sight event took place on January 24, not January 31 as mentioned in the cutline below the photo.

Ivens an ancestor of Margaret Trudeau



PHOTO BY VIRDEN PIONEER HOME MUSEUM
In the photo: Back row (L-R) Rose, Charles and Louise; front row L-R: Elsie, Charles Howe Ivens and Katie.

By Empire-Advance Staff
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

In a recent post, Virden Pioneer Home Museum's manager, Jenn Jaffray, shares a juicy detail – the grandmother of Margaret Trudeau, wife of the late Pierre Elliott Trudeau and great-grandmother of former prime minister Justin Trudeau was born in Virden.

Jaffray posts, "Pierre's wife Margaret has extensive Manitoba roots. Margaret was born in British Columbia. Margaret's grandmother was Rose Edith Ivens. Rose was born in 1891 in Virden. Her parents were Charles Howe Ivens and Julia Webb. There are a few members of The Ivens family buried in the Virden Cemetery. Rose married Thomas Kirkpatrick Bernard. Rose is Justin Trudeau's great-grandma."

Source: ancestry.ca & Findagrave.com

Empire-Advance owner Christine Waddell also shares a connection to the Ivens family and Justin Trudeau's great-grandmother. She says: "I reread Binding Our Districts, which has the history of the Ivens family. In the 1880s, two cousins both named Charles Ivens, moved to the Bosshill district west of Virden. To differentiate between the cousins, one had been in the militia and was always known as Colonel Ivens, the other was called Infant Ivens."

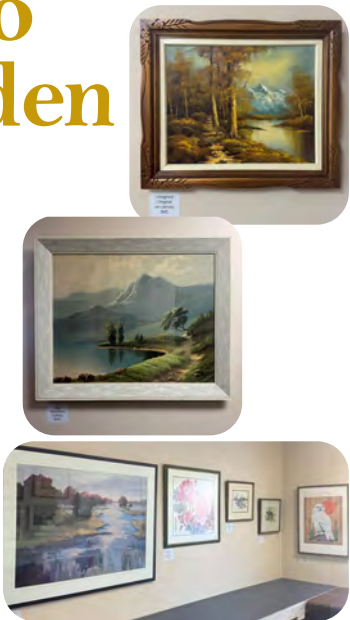
Christine says, "The best I can discern is that this cousin (Infant Ivens) of my great-grandfather is the great-grandfather of Margaret (Sinclair) Trudeau. The Infant Ivens family moved to the west coast early on as farming did not work out for them."

(Binding Our Districts, Jeffrey, Thomas and Janet history Pages 510-512 submitted by Thomas Jeffrey)

New to Virden

The Virden Empire Advance is pleased to announce that in partnership with Rob Waddell (@shoestringpicker on Instagram) we have opened an Art Gallery at the Virden Empire Advance building.

Come in Monday to Friday 9-4 to see our offering of beautifully framed reasonably priced pieces including oils, water colours and prints. We have added a number of antiques, fine china and curiosities!



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Elkhorn's Ed James a great history teacher

Continued from page 1

Back in Halifax, in his Gr. 11 year, he acquired a taste for study of the past, an appetite that he took with him.

"I've always been interested in history because of a very keen teacher back in high school. It wasn't until I got here, in Manitoba, that I had an opportunity to touch base with people who were involved with history, to find historical artifacts."

After three years teaching in the north, then McAuley, Elkhorn and Virden schools, it was upon retirement in 2001 that James began to represent historical characters. His wardrobe of military uniforms and knowledge bolstered by his own large library, James brought history to view in parades throughout Westman and Brandon in his army style jeep.

Challenged to share

With a penchant for collecting, one day at the largest gun show in Manitoba he felt the challenge to share Canada's history more broadly.

He said, "People would come up to me and tell me stories, and I would correct them or help them out." He began to notice that young Canadians' knowledge of military history was sketchy at best and said to himself, "I've got to do something about this."

"I had this young fella come up, and he was absolutely sure...that his great-great-grandfather had won the Victoria Cross at Little Bighorn."

James had more than a cursory knowledge of Canada's war efforts. His identity was shaped when, as a wee lad of 5, in 1951 his father Charles James joined up at the height of the Korean Conflict. Ed writes about it in the Empire-Advance, Nov. 5 2021 issue:

"For the next 22 years, being left behind

was a common occurrence, as the postings were considered unsuitable for family." His father also served in Laos and Vietnam as part of the United Nations Truce Commission. Charles was also among Canadians sent to Gaza Strip to keep the peace, that is until the Six Day War broke out between Israel and surrounding Arab states.

"My father's unit and other U.N. Peace Keeping Units were quickly evacuated... My father remembers, as they were leaving out the front door of their barracks, the locals were coming in the back doors and taking everything of value left behind..."

And so, military life was burned into his soul.

But soldiering wasn't the life for Ed. He says, "I spent some time in the militia and the cadets... My brother was in the military and other family members, I knew it wasn't for me. It just wasn't my mindset."

Lest we forget

Yet, his deep respect for veteran's service has taken him to wartime history locations around the world, including the sands of Juno Beach.

"I was in Normandy for the 75th anniversary." James shared this thrilling visit in an Empire-Advance story.

"I took part in the celebrations. I got to meet Richard Romer. [He] flew a Mustang over Juno Beach on June the 6th, 1944. When I met him and he saw that I was in a Canadian uniform I said, 'I'm writing stories from Canada's experience.' He was sitting on the edge of a counter, and he just took my arm and pulled me down and said, 'sit next to me, son.' And I had the most wonderful interview with him. Somebody who was actually there."

"That makes history come alive."

James continues his historic role play for audiences in Saskatchewan, and through-



A portion of Ed's camera collection.

PHOTO BY ANNE DAVISON

out Manitoba. "An Air Gunner with the RCAF" sees James as Flight Sergeant Bill Brown, a Westman high school graduate in 1938 who became an air gunner in a Halifax Bomber over Europe in WWII.

Other presentations include: "Convoy Duty in the North Atlantic," "Life in the Trenches," "Seven Years a Soldier," "Mail from Home," and "The Holocaust, a Journey of Horror and Hope."

In "I am a Victim" James portrays 10 individuals affected by war - soldiers on both sides of the conflict, a grieving parent, a Holocaust survivor, a U.N. Peacekeeper, an aboriginal warrior and a RCL Veteran.

He guesses that he's done as many as 75 re-enactments.

Proud of the renowned Manitoba Antique Automobile Museum in Elkhorn, and being an educator at heart, James has played the one-room school teacher when school classes visit the Archie School on Elkhorn's museum grounds.

Look and listen

Having worked in a photographic studio in Halifax, capturing images became another passion that led to building a photography studio in the basement of his and wife Margret's historic brick home. He's amassed a vast camera collection and presents "A Hundred Year History of Photography" featuring a turn of the century photographer in period dress. Using antique equipment, he explains how photography brought about great

social changes.

But music was front and centre for the Halifax kid who found his niche as a drummer. "I played rock and roll all over the Maritimes. I had a lot of fun and made a lot of money," says James, reflecting on his young days.

With a chest of thousands of vinyl LP records, some 78s and the small 45s he's equipped to present, "The Music that Helped Win the War" bringing original music and stories of the war years that helped us through those dark times." He now specializes as a vinyl DJ for seniors' events.

A visit to Ed and Margaret James' home is fascinating. You'll find Nancy Drew and the Hardy Boys books, Aboriginal artifacts and Titanic memorabilia. Of his Bluenose models he says, "As it would happen, in high school, one of the guys in my class - his father was Victor Olin, owner of the Blue Nose II."

Complete with the original doorbell, the James's historic home, The Brotherhood House, was built in 1911 for the first banker in Elkhorn. Rowland Henderson Brotherhood came to town in 1904, as manager of the Canadian Bank of Commerce.

Ed James' ordered display of artifacts goes far beyond what's mentioned here. He refers to himself as a storyteller with a purpose: "If you don't remember your history, you're going to lose it and repeat the same mistakes over again."

Toonie Transportation



SUBMITTED PHOTO

This month, the Toonie Transportation went for lunch at the Alexandra Hotel on February 4, and will provide transportation on February 18 to the Princess Lodge, featuring cowboy music and poetry by Ed Brown, and will provide transportation to St Paul's United Church on February 24 for the Sing-Along with Dianne Liefso and Jacqueline Mooney. Getting ready to jump on the bus are Brenda Lund and Sandra Nash.

Thanks you Sponsors



The Lenore Curling Club would like to thank all of our sponsors for their generous donations to the Annual Lenore Bonspiel!

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Many thanks to all the volunteers for the hours of work done each year.

Tundra

By Chad Carpenter



Get ready for local elections

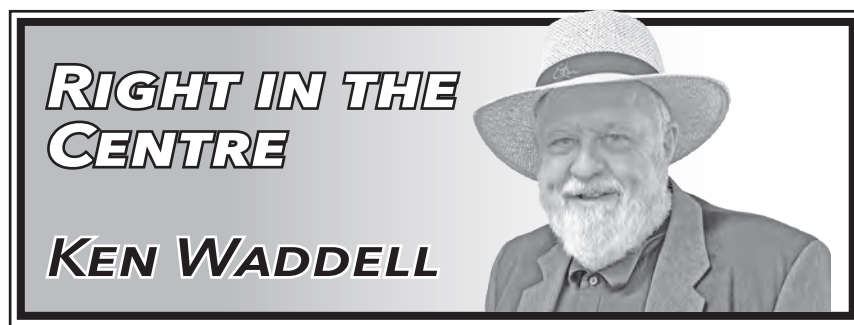
As we are just getting into 2026, it's a good time to review our options about local council elections. Our small group of three family owned newspapers, the Nee-pawa Banner & Press, the Rivers Banner and the Virden Empire-Advance collectively cover 24 towns and municipalities and seven school divisions.

This fall is election time and the big day will be October 28, 2026. It's time for prospective candidates to start thinking about their candidacy. It's also time for voters to start encouraging good people to run for office. Why is it so important? It's because our local school boards and councils affect our lives more than any other level of government. More than the federal and provincial government and more than the difficulties that may come our way from international affairs. In real estate they say, location, location, location. In politics it's local, local, local?

A person that I often check with about my columns had a good suggestion. He said, "Ask folks to organize a committee, a group or circle of friends who would talk to voters to promote the best or favourite candidate". That way they could get really involved in the political process.

In a recent letter released to the public, Courtney Kostas, CAO for the RM of Gilbert Plains asked all councillors and members of the public to be more civil.

She said, "Many good, experienced CAOs are leaving the profession. Not because they don't care, but because the job has become increasingly difficult to sustain. Ongoing negativity, public hostility, name-calling, and personal attacks – often played out loudly on social media – take a real toll." Kostas



“Criticize ideas — not people”

set out eight principles for better results in municipal matters.

1. Criticize ideas – not people
2. Understand roles and limits
3. Pause before posting
4. Ask questions before assuming intent
5. Use proper channels
6. Respect that public servants are human
7. Recognize positive work
8. Model the behaviour you expect

Following those principles would go a long way towards better governance.

In one way or another, I have observed or been involved with municipal politics for over 50 years and I believe that local politics is both more complicated and more difficult than I have ever seen it. Many years ago, a municipal reeve said all that the RMs had to worry about was gravelling and upgrading the roads in the summer and plowing the roads in the winter. I don't think it was ever that simple in the past but it is far beyond that today. Senior levels of government have off-loaded responsibilities for

everything from roads and drainage to health care. And every off-load brings its own costs and trouble.

While there is a lot of stress and even conflict in municipal and school administration, well run councils and boards are essential.

There's an old rural adage about voting. If you don't vote, don't complain. As voting percentages fall, and they are dropping, it seems that the non-voters are in two categories. The first group don't vote but they still complain a lot. The second group don't vote and don't say much. Quite frankly, neither group is much use to the functioning of our democracy. It is amazing to me that people don't vote. Possibly we are way too comfortable, maybe there are other reasons.

We have a number of months to bring changes or improvements to our communities, don't miss that chance

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this column are the writer's personal views and are not to be taken as being the view of the newspaper staff.

Homebodies

RITA FRIESEN



And then there were four...

Zippo, a kitten, has been added to the household. It's been a very long time since I have shared my home with a cat. On the farm there usually was at least one house cat, on the acreage we had two - Ed was concerned that with our busy schedules one cat would get lonely, so we got two. Poots and Boots lived long and were great mousers, they had the run of the house and the yard. They played well with children and controlled the moles in the garden. They got old and we quietly released them from this world before I needed to move to town.

Way back in late August this wee little mischiefmaker, a true tabby, joined our household. (Her name, Zippo, is from the distinct orange flame on her forehead.) And it's never been the same! Actually it's better. Time was taken introducing her to Arie and now to watch them play - wrestle and chase, attack and defend - is absolutely delightful. Zippo will lie in wait and then pounce from the top of the chair. And the chase is on.

There have been a few changes that I have had to make. Do not leave a closet door open or ajar. Put away the sewing needles after every use. She loves the fiber fill for quilts and I solemnly avow she has a stash somewhere that she keeps bringing out in bits and bobs. It truly is easier to keep the fireplace mantle free from any object. It was difficult to reconstruct the beautiful lego flower arrangement that got toppled....and then there was the day that my grand dog stayed for a few hours....Meeka is a beautiful mid size dog, well behaved and gentle, but Zippo didn't know that! A leap from the chair to the cat tree to the chair and across to the couch had the pictures on the wall swinging madly! Nothing fell, but we learned that swaying frame does not safely support a kitten....

Zippo and I have words about my growing plants. I already have the shelving in my room, and the door is mostly closed. There is something about the water in the watering can that is irresistible. I will catch her, paw fully extended, dipping into the water and gently licking it before repeating the process. Now the earth is a different scene. I have become accustomed to walking on pieces of dirt on the mat, on the floor and not quiet out the door. I know how much I enjoy playing in the soil so I can't really blame her. The mini cucumber has just started to bloom and the mini tomatoes just got transplanted into larger pots...I hope she leaves them alone.

Zippo's favourite perch is any windowsill. By the time Arie and I are outside for her morning bathroom break, Zippo has gained her perch and is watching us. So far, she is not an outdoor cat but she has taken to watching for an opportunity to escape.

Would I have gotten a kitten/cat? Not likely. Am I sorry we have one. Not likely. Well, not yet!

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Letter to the Editor

Parent calls out aggression in U11, U9 hockey

So I'm not really one for public rants but here it goes.

This weekend (Jan. 31), I had the privilege of attending two completely different hockey tournaments, one for our U11 team and one for U9.

I'm going to be very careful how I word this next part because my goal here is not to publicly shame any teams involved.

I need to say this, because what I witnessed at these non-body contact hockey games was absolutely unacceptable.

Non-contact hockey exists for a reason. It is there to prioritize skill development, safety, respect, and sportsmanship—especially at this age. What

I saw instead was blatant disrespect, unnecessary aggression, and behaviour on the ice that had no business being normalized, tolerated, or excused.

Let's be clear:

This wasn't "competitive edge."

This wasn't "kids being kids."

And it certainly wasn't hockey being played the way it's intended at this level.

These are children. They are learning not just how to play a sport, but how to regulate emotions, respect boundaries, and respond to authority. When lines are crossed and nothing is done—when adults look the other way or encourage it—it teaches kids that rules are optional and respect is conditional.

That's not toughness. That's poor leadership. If a game labeled non-body contact looks indistinguishable from something far more aggressive, then we have a serious hockey culture problem—not a "oh they're just kids" problem.

Coaches set the tone. Officials enforce the standard. Organizations decide what behavior they're willing to tolerate. And parents should do better.

And right now, the standard is slipping. Hockey can be intense without being disrespectful.

It can be competitive without being hostile. And kids deserve an environment that protects both their bodies and their character.

We owe them better than what was displayed. And pretending this is "just part of the game" is how the problem continues.

Enough is Enough.

-Nicole Hunter
Virden, MB

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Resumes with cover letter can be submitted **until April 1, 2026** to:

Faye Pope – Office Manager, Town of Virden
Box 310, Virden MB R0M 2C0
office.manager@virden.ca

Upcoming Council Meetings

February 19 and March 3
Council Meetings start at 7:00 PM

Tax Prepayment Discounts

The Town of Virden offers tax prepayment discounts as outlined below to taxpayers wishing to pay an installment or installments on their 2026 property taxes.

Those wishing to prepay may pay an amount or a series of amounts that in total does not exceed the amount of their 2025 property taxes. The discount rate is equivalent to an effective annual interest rate of 3%.

Month of Payment	Discount Rate	Savings on \$1000.00
February	2.00%	\$ 20.00
March	1.75%	\$ 17.50
April	1.50%	\$ 15.00
May	1.25%	\$ 12.50
June	1.00%	\$ 10.00
July	0.75%	\$ 7.50

Tax prepayments made in the months of August, September or October will be accepted at par and can be made via Online Banking, Telephone Banking, E-Transfer, or through our Drop Box located at the main doors of our office at 236 Wellington Street West.



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Announcement: April 10, 2026

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HELEN DRYSDALE

OUT OF HELEN’S KITCHEN

The honorable onion. Onions are the most important single cooking ingredient in main dishes. When cooking most casseroles, stews, soups and other main or side dishes the recipe almost always starts with “chop an onion.” They are the flavor cornerstone of just about every cuisine on this planet. An onion’s pungency results from the level of sulfur-rich oils the onion contains. During slicing, the oil is released. The released oil is what causes eyes to water and burn when chopping an onion. I have never found a “magic way” to alleviate this problem and just suck it up and get the job done through my tears.

In Caesars’s day, athletes were fed a breakfast of nothing but onions before they went into any competitive games. In the bible onions are mentioned in several places. One such place is when the Israelites, led by Moses, were tired of eating the manna God had provided and complained of their desert diet. “We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.” The Greek armies were fed on onions to develop martial stamina and strength. It was said when the Greek army was advancing on their enemies the smell of onions preceded the troops! Native American Indians used wild onions in a variety of ways, eating them raw or cooked, as a seasoning or as a vegetable. Such onions were also used medicinally in syrups and poultices and as an ingredient in dyes.

Several years ago a “myth” appeared on the internet that stated once an onion was sliced, the remaining unused onion was hotbed for bacteria and should be discarded and not used later. This is not true as onions aren’t vulnerable to bacterial compounds; the sulfur compounds in them are a repellent to bacteria. As well bacteria like to grow on food with a high protein content and onions have a low protein content. When you handle onions, wash your hands first, use clean utensils and cutting boards, and avoid cross contamination with raw meats or eggs. Immediately wrap leftovers in plastic wrap or containers to prevent moisture loss and store in the refrigerator.

Oven Baked Onion Rings

Baked, not fried! Much healthier than the fried version! They are a perfect party appetizer or side dish for a meal.

2 Tbsp. vegetable oil	1 cup bread crumbs
1/4 cup flour	1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. garlic powder	2 eggs
2 Tbsp. milk	1 large onion, cut into 1/4 inch slices, separated

Preheat oven to 400 F. Line a baking sheet with foil. Brush foil with oil. Stir bread crumbs, flour, salt and garlic powder together and spread on large plate. In a bowl, beat the eggs and milk together. Dip onion slice in egg mix and press into bread crumb mixture, turning to coat both sides. Place breaded onion rings in a single layer on the pan and bake for 15 minutes. Turn the onion rings over and bake for another 10-15 minutes or until golden brown and crispy.

Onion delight

This is wonderful as an accompaniment with roasts, steaks, pork chops or any barbeque meats.

2 lbs. onions, thickly sliced	2 Tbsp. water
2 Tbsp. ketchup	1 Tbsp. honey
1 Tbsp. butter	1 tsp. prepared mustard

In lightly salted boiling water cook onions for 10 minutes. Drain and transfer to a lightly greased 6 cup casserole dish. Mix together the remaining ingredients and pour over the onions in the dish. Cover and bake at 350 F for about one hour until onions are tender and glazed.

Onion pinwheels

These yummy savory biscuits are perfect with soups or salads.

1 Tbsp. butter	1 1/2 cups diced onion
1 cup whole wheat flour	1 cup white flour
3 tsp. baking powder	3/4 tsp. salt
1/2 cup butter	3/4 to 1 cup buttermilk or milk
1/2 cup grated cheese	Salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 375 . In a frying pan melt the one tablespoon of butter, add the onions and cook stirring for about 10-12 minutes or until onions are tender. Set aside. In a bowl mix together flours, baking powder and salt. With a pastry blender cut in the butter until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Stir in 3/4 cup of the milk to form a soft dough. Add more milk as needed. Turn out dough onto a floured surface and gently knead 8-10 times to form a ball. Roll out dough to form a 10 by 15 inch rectangle. Mix together onion and cheese and spread over dough. Sprinkle lightly with salt and pepper. At the long ends roll up tightly like a jelly roll. Cut into around 15 slices. Place on a lightly greased baking sheet and bake for 12 to 15 minutes or until lightly browned.

Police Report

Westman RCMP Service Report for Feb. 1 to 7

Submitted
BY WESTMAN RCMP

During this week, Westman RCMP received a total of 69 calls for service. Some of these calls for service include 24 traffic offences, 4 Assistance to Canadian Agencies/General Public, 3 Assaults, 3 Traffic Collision(s), 3 Mental Health Act(s), 1 Coroner’s Act, 5 Wellbeing Checks, 7 Mischief files, and 2 Suspicious Person files.

On Feb. 1 during routine traffic patrols in RM Wallace-Woodworth, RCMP observed a vehicle travelling at a high rate of speed. Radar confirmed the 23-year-old male driver was driving at a speed of 142 km/hr in a 110km/hr zone. A traffic stop was conducted, and the driver was issued a Traffic Offence Notice for Speeding, which carries a fine of \$469.

On Feb. 1 Westman RCMP were dispatched for an assault that had taken place in the Settlement of Sioux Valley Dakota Nation. First Nations Safety Officers had been called out for a disturbance earlier and had a 43-year-old male in their custody. RCMP arrived and with information and statements provided, placed

the 43-year-old male under arrest for Aggravated Assault, Break and Enter with Intent, and Possession of a Weapon for dangerous purpose. He was remanded into custody and appears in court again this month. EMS attended and transported a single victim to hospital for treatment.

On Feb. 4 Westman RCMP were dispatched to a motor vehicle collision in RM Wallace-Woodworth. A vehicle rear-ended another causing it to go into the ditch and roll over. EMS attended the scene and treated minor injuries on scene. No signs of alcohol or drug use. Both vehicles were towed from the scene.

On Feb. 5 Westman RCMP received an Allegation of Non-Compliance with a Probation Order package from the Probations Office. An 18-year-old male from the Settlement of Sioux Valley Dakota Nation failed to report via telephone for an appointment with his probations officer as ordered by the court. He is charged with one count of Failing to Comply with a Probation Order and an Endorsed Warrant has been issued for his arrest.

On Feb. 7 during routine traffic patrols in RM Sifton, RCMP observed

a vehicle travelling at a high rate of speed. Radar confirmed the 18-year-old female drivers was driving at a speed of 152 km/hr in a 110km/hr zone. A traffic stop was conducted, and the driver was issued a Traffic Offence Notice for Speeding, which carries a fine of \$599.

On Feb. 7 during routine traffic patrols in RM Pipestone, RCMP observed a vehicle with burnt-out headlight and taillight. Traffic stop conducted. Roadside testing for alcohol and drugs were initiated on the 36-year-old female driver, positive results for THC, Cocaine, and Alcohol. The driver was arrested, and issued a three-month license suspension, and the vehicle was impounded for thirty days. As a novice driver, operating a motor vehicle while having alcohol in the blood a Traffic Offence Notice was issued to the driver which carries a fine of \$113, and a Traffic Offence Notice was also issued for her as a novice driver operating a motor vehicle after consuming drugs that were detected above the screening threshold on the approved drug screening equipment, which carries a fine of \$113.

Miniota News

Submitted
BY LINDA CLARK

February 6 report

Congratulations to the U11 Miniota Elkhorn team who won the B Side Banner at their home tournament, with Saturday games being played in Elkhorn and the Sunday games in Miniota. Teams came from McCreary, Virden, Minnedosa, Brandon, Lundar and Macdonald. Players on the U11 team are: Rhett Lelond, Brooks Lelond, Emmett Poppel, Noah Poppel, Hudson Lelond, Shaye Sheane, Jayce Howard, Britton Canart, Emmett Canart, Finn Fortier, Jaxson Tutthill, Joel Archambault, Nash Canart and Tucker Istace with coaches Jeff Poppel, Luke Lelond and Andrew Lelond. Way to go Team!

Isabella News

Zoe Knight is a member of the Star 4 Rivers Silver Jets Synchro skating team. They competed this past weekend at Winkler at the Prairie Regionals Synchro competition and came home with the bronze medals.

Congratulations Zoe!

Hazel and Kelvin Wall enjoyed a visit with Louise Sherwin at her home in Brandon, along with Louise’s family, Cory and Barb Sherwin of Las Vegas, and Greg and Laurie Sherwin of Brandon.

“When you arise in the morning think of what a privilege it is to be alive, to think, to enjoy, to love.” -Marcus Aurelius

February 13 report

Congratulations to the U13 Miniota-Elkhorn CHawks team on winning the A side of their home tournament, with play on Saturday in Elkhorn, and on Sunday in Miniota. A total of six teams enjoyed the weekend. Well done team and coaches!

News seems to be a bit scarce these days, so be sure to let me know about your travels, etc. Many are busy watching the Olympics and curling on TV, while many are following our local youth in all their different activities. How many of you tuned in to the halftime Super Bowl entertainment to learn about Bad Bunny? “The only thing more powerful than Hate Is Love” was his message.

Happy Valentine’s Day to all, young and old. “May your day be full of magic and may you not be too busy to see it.”

It's All Good: thrift closes shop

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

All good things come to an end and so it is with Virden's "It's All Good" thrift shop. Owners Bud and Connie Hay are retiring at the end of February, having recently sold the property at 525 Nelson St. E.

Despite the hard work to clear out remaining stock and prepare to vacate the building, Bud and Connie are elated.

Connie says she's anticipated having time and energy for family. Time to go to grandchildren's sports events, to travel to visit family in Winnipeg and Alberta. Bud gives that an affirmative nod.

He's also looking forward to dedicating time

to his passion, music. Bud plays guitar and has recently got back together with some former band members from the 1970s.

Although owning and operating a thrift store was a dream job for Connie, as she watched clothing racks go out the door to serve at another thrift shop, she said, "I don't have a minute of regret."

The building on Nelson St. E. where the family has operated several businesses through the years has served them well. "It was January 1, 1983 we took possession of it," says Bud.

They operated a laundromat and drycleaning plant there initially. Their son Brody later had a computer business at the location. And for the past 11 years Connie has sold gently

used clothing, housewares, collectible treasures and some furniture through 'It's All Good'.

Finding satisfying bargains has been an interesting lifelong endeavour for Connie.

"I totally enjoy it...and raising five kids is expensive so I used to go yard selling. But I did that, not just to be economical, but also because I loved doing it."

With Connie's talent for recognizing items of value and a knack for creating attractive displays, the couple were a good team in the thrift business. Bud did the handi-man carpentering, a trade that he first learned right out of high school.

Redeeming used items and keeping them out of the landfill is a great business model for an entrepreneur



PHOTO BY ANNE DAVISON

Bud and Connie Hay are closing up shop, preparing to say goodbye to their business, It's All Good.

and for a community. However, free stuff isn't actually free after it's sorted, cleaned and put on display. And some is not fit for the rack, so it goes—yet another cost.

A thrift store has some of the same upkeep and costs as any retail in owning or renting, property taxes, and accounting for labour costs.

Thrift shops do double

duty for their community, conveniently relieving donors of stuff they no longer need, while providing bargains for others - clothing, lamps, toasters, artwork, you name it.

Virden has had as many as three such stores but in the fall of 2025, Rosas' Second Time Around closed. New to You had to close its down-

town Nelson Street location this winter and moved into Rosa's former location.

With the closure of It's All Good, Virden has just one thrift now. However, thrift shops in nearby towns are purchasing their racks and display cabinets and a new thrift is about to open up in a nearby village.

Manitoba Government increases school funding by \$79.8 million, bringing total investment to nearly \$2 billion

School funding for 2026-27 supports Divisions with 3.5 per cent increase

Submitted
BY MANITOBA GOVERNMENT

The Manitoba government is increasing its investment in schools by \$79.8 million for the 2026-27 school year, Education and Early Childhood Minister Tracy Schmidt announced today.

"Our government is committed to making sure every Manitoba family can count on strong, stable public schools, year after year. We are meeting the needs of students and communities by building new schools and feeding kids with our universal school food program," said Schmidt. "This is good news for teachers, school divisions and families while building a brighter future for Manitoba's students."

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

"By working together, we are creating a more equitable system that benefits teachers and supports stability for school divisions at a time when the demands on public schools are more complex than ever before," said Alan Campbell, president, Manitoba School Boards Association. "School boards recognize that the funding contribution for harmonization announced today is a step in the right direction and we look forward to continuing our work with government to ensure funding fully meets

the needs of students, staff and communities across Manitoba."

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

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

- \$51 million increase to help public schools with operating costs, which includes the investment in salary harmonization and technical vocational education;
- \$30 million for a universal school nutrition program and Nello's Law, which protects the program for years to come, plus an additional \$3 million from the sale of U.S. alcohol products for the Children's Nutrition Council;
- \$15.2 million increase in capital support, which includes principal and interest costs related to building schools; and
- \$16.6 million increase to independent schools under the funding agreement.

Manitoba is also on track to build four new schools, including Devonshire Park and Prairie Point in Winnipeg, Meadowlands in West St. Paul and another in southwest Brandon.

For more information on school funding, visit <https://edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/finance/schfund/index.html>.

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Grain trailer struck



PHOTOS BY WDFD FACEBOOK

On Feb. 5 at 8:46am Station 1 Virden was called to an incident involving a semi truck hauling a grain trailer. On PTH 83, ¼ mile south of Road 255 near the hamlet of Scarth, a tractor pulled out of an approach and the front-end-loader bucket sliced open the side of the grain trailer, spilling the grain and putting the semi/trailer into the ditch. EMS and RCMP attended the scene, however, no injuries were sustained. Virden Towing removed the equipment and cleaned up scene. This was the second accident the fire department was called to within two days.

WDFD attend Collisions on busy highways



On Feb. 4 at 9:10am Station1 Virden was paged to a two-vehicle collision west of Virden on PR 257, at the intersection of Road 161. A half-ton truck had damage to the front end and a green SUV was initially upside down in the ditch of the paved road between Virden and Kola. Upon arrival, Wallace District Fire Department crew controlled traffic on this busy highway. EMS attended to the vehicle occupants who were both able to exit their vehicles themselves. The firefighters disconnected the vehicle batteries to remove potential ignition sources from the damaged vehicles. Virden Towing removed both vehicles from scene and debris was cleaned up before the highway was fully re-opened.

Firetruck puts out truck fire



PHOTO BY WALLACE DISTRICT FIRE DEPARTMENT FACEBOOK

On Feb. 10, 2026 at 6:55 p.m. Station 1 Virden was paged to a vehicle fire in Virden. Upon arrival crews found the front end and cab of vehicle engulfed. Crews had fire out shortly and prevented fire from reaching the slip tank of fuel in the truck box, and from reaching the home in front of vehicle. No injuries were sustained. Thank you to Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Manitoba for attending the scene and to Virden Towing whom will remove the vehicle from the scene.



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February is Heart Month

Submitted
BY PRAIRIE MOUNTAIN HEALTH

February is Heart Month, a time when Manitobans are encouraged to pause and take stock of their heart and brain health. This year, Heart & Stroke is emphasizing the importance of recognizing and managing modifiable risk factors for heart disease and stroke—risks that are more common than many people realize. In fact, 9 in 10 Manitobans have at least one risk factor for heart disease or stroke.

To help individuals understand these risks, Heart & Stroke offers a free, online Risk Screen tool, which provides a personalized action plan based on lifestyle factors, medical history, age, sex, and women’s life stages, including pregnancy and menopause.

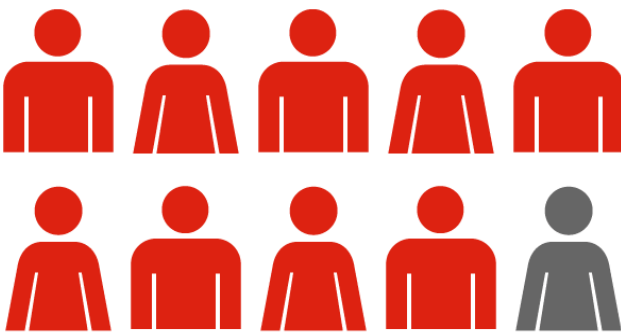
For more information, you can also review the newly released 2026 Heart Month Report: The state of risk factors for heart disease and stroke in Canada or contact Heart and Stroke directly at 204-926-3132 or email: kaitlyn.archibald@heartandstroke.ca.

In Prairie Mountain Health (PMH), Primary Care offers a regional Heart Program that provides ongoing education, support, and encouragement to clients following a cardiac event or diagnosis. Our program offers 1:1 education for clients with a variety of heart conditions and those recovering

after heart surgery. We also offer group classes every Tuesday, 1:30–3:00 p.m that can be accessed in-person in Brandon or virtually from the comfort of your own home. Topics include: The Heart, Nutrition, Exercise, Stress & Coping, and Heart Medications. Each session is facilitated by clinical staff with expertise on the topic. Referrals to this program are accepted from healthcare providers and through self-referral. If you are uncertain if this program is right for you and want to learn more, contact the PMH Heart Program at 204-578-4225 or 204-578-4204.

In addition to cardiac specific education, our Chronic Disease Education Program and Health Promotion Team also offer a variety of group classes that support heart health at a broader level; including such topics as nutrition, blood pressure and cholesterol management. Get Better Together supports those living with health conditions to better manage their health through group support and discussions. Commit to Quit and the Tobacco Quit Card and Counselling programs provide education and counselling for people interested in quitting smoking. To learn more about any of these offerings, you can follow the links or call 1-877-509-7852.

For families looking to get active and learn more about heart health, the 2026 Mega Heart Event is coming up on February 22, 2026 from 1:00–4:00 p.m. at the Wellness Institute, 1075 Leila Ave,



9 in 10 Canadians have at least one risk factor for **heart disease or stroke.**

Winnipeg, MB. This is a free, family-friendly event featuring walks, Zumba, CPR demos, science activities, health booths, and more for young and old.

In honour of Heart Month, we encourage everyone to take one step this February toward better heart health: try using the online Risk Screen tool, check out a link in the article above, add a walk into your week, cook a heart-healthy meal, or start a conversation with a family member about risk factors.

Every step counts — and together, we can build a heart-healthier Manitoba.

Oak Lake Rink comes alive again during successful Open Bonspiel

By Ev Nolan
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

What a week it was at the curling rink! From the first draw to the final rock, the building was full of energy, laughter, and the unmistakable sound of stones crashing together as the annual Open Bonspiel made a strong return.

This year's event welcomed 18 teams, something organizers say has not happened in roughly 15 years. The strong turnout brought a renewed excitement to the club, filling both the ice and the lounge with curlers, spectators, and visiting teams throughout the week.

Club president, John Michael Klassen, now in his 18th year, said it was especially rewarding to see the facility come alive again.

"We were super happy to see the rink so full of local and nonlocal people. It had a great buzz all week that we haven't had in a few years and we couldn't be happier with how it went."

Games throughout the week featured tight ends, carefully planned strategy, and plenty of great shot making. Each day brought new matchups and friendly competition, with teams enjoying both the challenge on the ice and the social atmosphere off it. Many spectators stayed to watch late games, gathering along the glass and cheering on the players as matches came down to the final stones.

After several days of competition, the final standings were as follows:

- 1st — Jason Heaman rink from Virden
- 2nd — Albert Rimke rink from Oak Lake



PHOTO BY METRO CREATIVE

3rd — Willie Smith rink from Griswold

All three teams played consistently strong curling throughout the event, earning their spots after a week of competitive games.

Behind the scenes, the success of the bonspiel depended on many helping hands. Volunteers kept the ice in great condition, meals were prepared, and organizers worked throughout the week to keep the draws running smoothly. The club also expressed appreciation for the strong support from sponsors and donors who help make events like this possible.

Special thanks were extended to Ted and Sharon Taylor, Dennis and Denise Griffith, Art and Lynda Denbow,

Louis and Sherry Vachon, Strike Welding, South Country Electric, Fusion Credit Union, Tundra Oil and Gas, Fountain Tire, Virden Rec and Water Sports, Marks Mobile Welding, Beejo Jerseys, Maureen Bailey, Karen Penner, AM Ranching, Kim Houston, and many others who contributed.

The strong turnout and positive atmosphere marked a welcome boost for the club and the community, showing that interest in curling remains strong when people have a chance to gather.

And the season is far from over!

The club is still looking for five more teams to enter the upcoming Two Man Bonspiel, scheduled for February 13 and 14. Known for its faster pace and relaxed atmosphere, the event is always a favourite among players and spectators alike.

*** Virden: WE NEED TEAMS! ***

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Rock and Roll will never die!

By Ed James
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

There is a saying that in life, the only sure things are death and taxes, later was added postal strikes! I would like to add to this list, music, dancing and singing. Why? Because it makes people happy and I see this happiness among all ages, from school concert to the many senior homes events where I bring my music shows.

Recently Elkhorn SAIL (Seniors Access to Independent Living) had its 55 plus dance at the Elks Hall. You can attend if under 55, if you like dancing. The event brought in a good crowd of dancers, both men and women, but it seemed by mid-dance the men had to slow down a bit! The crowd included Manitoba and Saskatchewan people. The day was sunny and warm, the dance floor was set up with tables and chairs, light refreshments and some great chocolate chip cookies were served.

About a half-hour into my play list of old-time waltzes, polkas and country hits, I noticed that not many people were dancing. I was told people wanted to visit friends and neighbours after the very recent cold spell. So, I decided to change things up on my play list, called "The Music of Your Life." I did some basic math and realized I had a group of early rock and rollers under the tops of grey hair.

I put on that R&R classic from 1955, "Rock Around the Clock" by Bill Haley and His Comets, a song considered to be the first R&R song. I turned up the volume, and the floor came alive with dancers, laughter and the group singing along with the music. The rest of the afternoon I saw a new form of country line dancing given over to R&R

dance steps! I began to mix it up with some classics such as "Ragtime Annie", "Maple Sugar", "Irene Good Night", "The Auctioneer Song" and as always, a few favourites from an old friend from back home, Don Messer.

For the next two plus hours the crowd danced to 50's R&R classics such as, "Johnny B Goode", "At the Hop", "Great Balls of Fire", "Jail House Rock", "Rockin' Robin" and "Blue Suede Shoes" to name a few. Some slow songs were, "Are You Lonesome Tonight", "I'm Sorry", "Oh Donna" and "Blueberry Hill." What made the afternoon dance even more unique was that all the music was played from 78 RPM vinyl records, some of them 80 years old and still had that R&R magic!

Towards the end of the event, a ticket draw was held for a Co-op \$25 gift card.

After the show a few people came up to thank me for the music and ask about a special request for a future SAIL dance. Karen Mitchell, the area SAIL director said, "Everyone enjoyed the music, but the classic R&R music, really got people on the floor! Down the road, SAIL has more senior 55 events planned and a very



PHOTO BY ED JAMES

"You make me feel like dancing, dance the night away." Song by Leo Sayer.

special event is in the works. Our group today appreciated your vintage record collection of music that held so many musical memories of friends, places and events. The Music of Your Life Show was a great way to spend a winter's afternoon."

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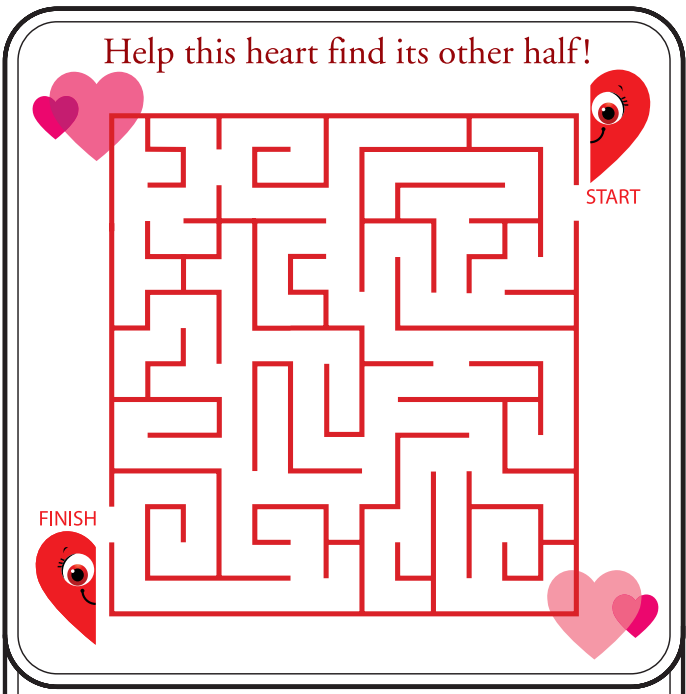
WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

There are four differences between Picture A and Picture B.



Answers:
1. Heart below card is upside down. 2. Missing red pattern on right wine glass. 3. Card has message. 4. Chocolates replace heart confetti.

Help this heart find its other half!



Fun FACT:

Around 250 million of these are grown for Valentine's Day each year. They are a popular offering as a gift of love.

Answer: Red roses

ANSWERS: cupid, candy, hearts, romance, arrow

Spelling Scramble

Unscramble these love-ly letters!

DUIPC

ADYCN

TREHAS

CERNOMA

RWOAR

VALENTINE'S DAY CHOCOLATE LAVA CAKE

Ingredients

- 6 ounces (170g) high-quality semi-sweet chocolate*
- 1/2 cup (8 Tbsp; 113g) unsalted butter
- 1/4 cup (31g) all-purpose flour (spooned & leveled)
- 1/2 cup (60g) confectioners' sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 2 large eggs
- 2 large egg yolks*
- optional for topping: ice cream, berries, and/or chocolate syrup



Directions

1. Spray four 6-ounce ramekins with nonstick cooking spray and dust with cocoa powder. This ensures the cakes will seamlessly come out of the ramekins when inverted onto a plate in step 7. Or spray half of a 12-count muffin pan and dust with cocoa powder. If baking in a muffin pan, the recipe will yield 6 cakes.
2. Preheat oven to 425 F (218 C).
3. Coarsely chop the chocolate. Place butter in a medium heat-proof bowl, then add chopped chocolate on top. Microwave on high in 10-second increments, stirring after each until completely smooth. Set aside.
4. Whisk the flour, confectioners' sugar, and salt together in a small bowl. Whisk the eggs and egg yolks together until combined in another small bowl. Pour the flour mixture and eggs into the bowl of chocolate. Slowly stir everything together using a silicone spatula or wooden spoon. If there are any lumps, gently use your whisk to rid them. The batter will be slightly thick.
5. Spoon chocolate batter evenly into each prepared ramekin or muffin cup.
6. Place ramekins onto a baking sheet and bake for 12–14 minutes until the sides appear solid and firm; the tops will still look soft. *If baking in a muffin pan, the cakes only take about 8–10 minutes.
7. Allow to cool for 1 minute, then cover each with an inverted plate and turn over. Use an oven mitt because those ramekins are hot! The cakes should release easily from the ramekin. *If you used a muffin pan, use a spoon to release the cakes from the pan and place each upside down on plates.
8. Add toppings. Serve immediately.



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SPORTS

HUSKIES STUN FAVOURED GOLDEN BEARS AT HAMIOTA

By Dale Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Westman High School Hockey League action came to the Hamiota & District Sports Complex on Thursday Feb. 5 as the Hamiota/Rivers/Elton (HRES) Huskies hosted the Virden Golden Bears. The fourth place Bears were favoured to win but the ninth place Huskies had other ideas.

It was a tight game with equal shots on goal. The Huskies held the lead for most of the game with goals from Carter Rozdeba, Duncan McLean, Matao Finnie and Nash McMaster. Reed McGrath kept Virden in the game with a goal in each of the first two periods until the Bears tied it with goals from Dexan Routledge and Beckham Clarke early in the third.

The game winner came when Huskies' Harlen Bridgesscored a short-handed goal with thirteen minutes left. Corbin Munz added the insurance goal to seal the deal.

The refs were kept busy, handing out ten penalties to the Huskies and eight to the Bears.



PHOTO BY ANNE DAVISON

Golden Bears celebrate as Beckham Clarke, Spencer Gompf and Lincoln Harvey team up to tie the game in the third period

REF MEMORIES

REF TO
WRITER

GERRY
NOLAN



Taking a look at other infractions, following along from last week. High sticking. A player is to be in control of his stick thus hitting an opponent in the head with your stick is a minor penalty. It can also be called as a double minor, a major or a match penalty. Now one thing to look for is if a player is bent forward and a player hits the player along the boards and his stick comes in contact with the other player's head, is that a high stick? In my opinion, no, that is not a penalty! It is just a natural state that the player got hit.

I remember Garry Bowles from Elkhorn was penalized a number of times for elbowing. The problem was if you were not figuring it out, Garry was tall and many players would try to scoot underneath him to get the puck

to the net. Garry could not help the fact he was tall and although it would appear he was elbowing the opposition, it was just his natural height that made it appear that way. No penalty should have been assessed, but I saw him called for that infraction, far too many times.

I have watched some minor hockey this season and have seen some referees that just need experience and confidence in their game that they are making correct judgments in their penalty selection. Like players and coaches, officials need coaching and instruction as well. I have always said two things, the importance of positioning and hustle. As an official you are getting paid for the game you are officiating, hustle at all times, keep your hands out of your pockets and just give it

your all. This will cover a multitude of mistakes!

Another difficult call is the slash. At what point is it a slash? Is it a tap on the stick or the gloves, is it a hack? What is the determining factor on whether a penalty is issued? Again this is a difficult penalty to call as it involves judgement. Two

officials may have a difference in judgement about any given play. The NHL has adopted anything on the hands as a penalty. I do not necessarily agree with that, but as long as they are consistent with that call, I am good with it. The players are the ones that need to adapt to that particular call.

Consistency is what it is all about. To all you young referee's out there, get it established what penalty calls are nonnegotiable, this is always going to be a penalty and stick with it. This will help you become consistent! Work hard on your game and give the best effort you can give each and every game. We

need you officials, otherwise there is no game.

I hope all the officials are having a great year and enjoy their time on the ice. You are a team as well, encourage one another. Talk about the game you are working and most important get into your rule book often throughout the season. Until next time!



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SPORTS

VIRDEN PARTICIPATED IN THE BUNGE MEN'S PROVINCIAL CHAMPIONSHIP



L to R: Jace Freeman, Dallas Burgess, Ryan Ostrowsky, Aaron MacDonnell, Graham Freeman (coach).



L to R: Jay Kinnaird, Cory Zdan, Kris Kinnaird, Brent Hoffman.



L to R: Kelly Marnoch, Bart Witherspoon, Branden Jorgensen, Brooks Freeman.

By Jessica Coulter
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

This year the Bunge Men's Provincial Championship took place in Selkirk at the Selkirk Recreation Complex Feb. 3–8, 2026.

Virden was well represented this year at the competition with two teams, Skip Jay Kinnaird's team and Skip Jace Freeman's team. Virden also had two other Virden club mem-

bers playing on a team out of Carberry. Brooks Freeman and Branden Jorgensen played front end with the Kelly Marnoch team.

Kinnaird's team finished with a record of 1 -3. "It was nice to get a win!" says Jay Kinnaird. This was Team Kinnaird's first men's provincial win.

Freeman's team made the top eight. They lost on Saturday morning to Kelly

Marnoch's team.

Marnoch defeated the defending champs Ried Carruthers at 2pm on Saturday with a score of 10–5, which put them in the final four. They lost against team Walter at 7pm on Saturday night in the Page 3 vs 4 game with a close score of 8-6.

Winners of the Bunge Men's Provincial Championship was team Calvert.

Elkhorn groups meet to plan ahead



PHOTO BY ED JAMES

Representatives of Elkhorn's community committees met in the Elks Hall last week.

By Ed James
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

A good crowd representing several Elkhorn community groups, with a good mixture of ages, recently met at the Elkhorn Elks Hall. The meeting was arranged by Morgan Gray, the area Community Economic Development and Recreation Manager. At the meeting were local reps from Hospital Auxiliary, Daycare Centre, Ag. Society, Senior Centre, Chamber of Commerce, Museum Board, Elks Lodge, R.C. Legion, Tiny Tots, the rink board, Elkhorn Foundation, the curling society and a new volunteer group called E.C.A.R., standing for Elkhorn Community Access Report.

The purpose of the meeting was to both look back on the various community group projects of the past year and what plans they have for 2026. Several mini reports were given, with their success and failures noted.

In general group discus-

sion, it was felt that more effort was needed to inform new community members about the various community groups and activities, in some cases with changes needed. It was noted the large number of seniors in the community sometimes restricts their involvement and help. It was suggested that perhaps a monthly community calendar be started to inform more people.

In some community groups funding and costs are always an issue. There was also discussion on community needs such as a mid-age senior four plex residence and affordable rental housing for new local employees and perhaps a full-time restaurant.

On the plus side of the discussions, the E.C.A.R. rep was very pleased with the successful fund raising and repair of the antique auto museum. Perhaps some floor repairs might be a future goal. The Elkhorn and Area foundation passed

the two-million-dollar mark, which resulted in it giving out more community building funds every year. One rep that evening complimented the community's street snow cleaning program as compared to other communities.

Keith Orr, a member of E.C.A.R. asked those present that evening with the upcoming Winter Olympics to show lots of red banners in our community in support of Team Canada's Hockey Team that has a local area boy, Travis Sanheim on the team.

Morgan Gray said after the meeting, "I thank so many community group reps who came out tonight and the wide age groups they represented. The discussions this evening will help our office to make a greater effort to work more closely and offer support for community group projects. Our office and services are here to help our area community groups to be successful in all their community building projects."

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SPORTS

OIL KINGS TAKE ON ELKS IN ROUND ONE

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The Virden Oil Kings are battling the Souris Elks in the first round of the Tiger Hills Hockey League playoffs.

The senior teams opened their first-round series on Feb. 10 in Souris after the Empire-Advance's deadline. There will be no love lost between the teams when they meet in Virden on Feb. 14. If needed, a third and final game will be played on Feb. 15 in Virden. What will be required for the Oil Kings to be successful?

"Some of the keys will be playing extremely disciplined," Virden coach Tyler Campbell said, "It's always tough in playoffs, everyone finds another step, and giving the Elks a man advantage isn't something we need to make a habit of. With the big rink in Souris, and playing game one there, we need to take full advantage of that. Our team thrives on big rinks, the Bowles brothers (Brad and Shawn) are playing some of the best hockey I've seen. Having (defenceman) Tristen Cross back has been a good addition as well. Main goal of the first round, stick to what's been successful all year, and do not get outworked."

The top 12 of the THHL's 14 teams make the playoffs. The teams with the four best records get a first-round bye. They were Killarney, Minnedosa, Hartney and Rivers.

Virden finished fifth (14-5-0-0) and got to choose its opponent. The Oil Kings chose the 11th-place Elks, who were 5-14-0-0 in the regular season. The other first round matchups are the No. 6 Boissevain Border Kings versus No. 12 Carberry Plainsmen, the No. 7 Neepawa Farmers against the No. 10 Deloraine Royals, and the No. 8 Melita Bisons face the No. 9 MacGregor Wild.

The Oil Kings are hoping for a strong postseason. Regarding the regular season, Campbell said he was most pleased with his squad's resilience and work ethic.

"There were lots of nights we didn't go with a full bench, due to commitments, coaching, school, lots of other stuff. We managed to still put up a really good record this season, and that falls on the entire team. I feel like we lost a few guys from last year, which was tough to start the year, but we've built a really good room and culture this year. I really like our team going into the playoffs. It's time to make a run."

The Oil Kings' Brad Bowles paced the THHL in points (75), goals (28), and assists (47) in 18 games. Teammate Tanner Koroscil finished second in goals (27) and points (50). Shawn Bowles only played eight games for Virden but placed seventh in the scoring race with 33 points. Elisha Bambridge was 13th with 30 points. Riley Wallace posted a league-best in goals against average (0.72) and save percentage (.965) in three games.

On Feb. 4, the Oil Kings wrapped up the regular season with a 14-3 road win over the Deloraine Royals. Brad Bowles recorded a hat trick and six points. Koroscil scored three times and had five points. Colby Asselstine also lit the lamp for a trio of goals. Shawn Bowles scored once and collected five points.

SPORTS

FRESH START FUELS LAING'S ROOKIE SURGE

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The Manitoba Junior Hockey League's Christmas break brought more than just presents for Virden Oil Capitals rookie forward Bryan Laing.

The 18-year-old from Boissevain recorded five goals and 10 points in January on his way to being named the league's Chevrolet Rookie of the Month. Before the first month of 2026, Laing had recorded four points.

"I went through a bit of a mental funk a month or so before the break, and I feel like I hit a reset button after the break and started fresh," he said. "It was good to get away from the game for a bit and take my mind off it."

The 5-foot-9, 166-pound Laing had eight goals and 14 points in 31 games, as of Feb. 9. He had three assists in a contest versus the Swan Valley Stampede in January. Laing scored twice in a game against the Northern Manitoba Blizzard.

"Bryan is a very intelligent player in all situations," Virden head coach Tyson Ramsey said. "As a smaller guy, he is a great skater and can grind it out against bigger

bodies. His work ethic is tremendous and contagious. He wins faceoffs and also has an ability to score. Bryan is a very complete player and also a great teammate. We are lucky to have him here and I am excited to watch his game continue to progress."

Regarding Laing's prolific points production up front, it is interesting to note that he was a defenceman early in his hockey career.

"I changed at bantam AAA tryouts because I had no chance of making it as a D-man," Laing said. "I went as a forward for the tryout and stuck with it ever since. I found some success with it pretty early and it seemed to fit my game more with being a smaller guy."

He played U15 and U18 AAA in the Southwest Cougars organization. The Oil Caps drafted him in 2023. This season he is billeting with Linda, Curt, and Connor Somerville. What has he liked about his time with the Oil Capitals?

"The biggest thing I've enjoyed is all the off ice stuff our team does together, and always being together every day - unlike in AAA where you might have one or two guys in your hometown."



PHOTO BY VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS

Virden Oil Caps Bryan Laing.

VIRDEN'S DAVIDSON THRIVING WITH CAMPBELL RIVER STORM

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Virden's Hudson Davidson is enjoying life on and off the ice on Vancouver Island.

The son of Karla and Craig Davidson is in his first season with the Campbell River (BC) Storm. The squad competes in the Vancouver Island Junior Hockey League.

"Playing for the Storm this year has been an awesome experience," Davidson said. "I've enjoyed everything from the culture of the town and support we get from the community to the excitement and new experiences I've been able to find myself in on the Island, the new teammates and new friends I've made from all over the world, all have made for an incredible time and an amazing learning opportunity."

Last season, Davidson was a rookie defenceman with his hometown Virden Oil Capitals. He played in front of friends and family at every home game. Now they back him from far away.

"My family's support has been amazing," he said. "My family has been very great at staying in touch and continuing to support me even through all the challenges of being thousands of kilometres away. I've been super grateful to have amazing billets in Campbell River that have fully opened me into their home making the transition away from home so much easier."

The 5-foot-11, 185-pound blueliner has grasped an opportunity to put his offensive skills on display. He has three goals, 12 assists, and 15 points through 33 games.

"Offensively, I was able to contribute more this season as I've been given the opportunity to be a more offensive D-man and been able to get tons of support

on the ice through our coaching staff and the skills coaches we work with," Davidson said. "But overall, on top of all of that, I've been able to gel great with my teammates, who have been great in pushing our team's pace and playing a style of game I've been able to do well in."

The Storm have been pleased to have him. General manager Lou Gravel said, "Hudson is a smart, puck-moving D that makes great decisions and that can jump in the offence. He's a top-two D here and has attracted the attention of (British Columbia Hockey League) teams."

As of January, Davidson twice had been called up to practice and skate with two BCHL teams: the Coquitlam Express and Powell River Kings.

"I was able to go over to Coquitlam for a few days and skate with them," he said.

"As well, I was also asked to go to Powell River to skate with their organization as well. Both were a phenomenal experience.

I was able to partake in both normal practice as well as structure learning practices and skills practice, which full showed me all the small details that go into the game at a high level as well as the compete and effort put in every day to be a high-calibre winning organization that Coquitlam has."

Regarding life away from the ice, he said "Living on the island has been an absolute blast! The island offers a little bit of everything I enjoy. Whether it is going for a hike through the lush forest, going up the mountain to



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Hudson Davidson, posing between his parents Craig and Karla, plays for the Campbell River Storm in British Columbia.

ski or taking a dip in the ocean, the Island has it all. As well, my billets have made it super easy for me to be able to get to experience everything the island has to offer."

Davidson has been working part-time as a youth baseball instructor based out of a gym that sponsors the Storm. He said "it was a great opportunity to be able to get my mind away from hockey at times and help out in another sport that I love. That, tied with the beautiful weather, has made some December days feel like I'm back in Manitoba summer."



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SPORTS

OIL CAPITALS EXTEND WINNING STREAK TO 11 WITH TRIO OF VICTORIES



PHOTO BY VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS

Virden Oil Caps vs the Dauphin Kings on Feb. 7.

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The Virden Oil Capitals continued to rack up the wins last week.

With a trio of victories, they extended their winning streak to 11 games. Win number 11 was a 1-0 victory over the Manitoba Junior Hockey League-leading Niverville Nighthawks.

“We like a lot about our game right now,” Virden head coach Tyson Ramsey said. “I think we are getting contributions from up and down our lineup and we have gained a confidence that when we play the right way we can have success against anyone. Our ability to stick to our game plan no matter what happens in the course of a shift, period or game has been important. When we are fast, physical and structured we are a tough team to play against.”

As of Feb. 9, the Oil Caps led the MJHL MGEU West Division with a 29-10-2-0 record. They hosted the Selkirk Steelers on Feb. 10 after the Empire-Advance deadline. The Oil Capitals play in Winkler on Feb. 13 and Neepawa on Feb. 15. The Winkler Flyers visit on Feb. 16.

In front of a crowd of 801 in Niverville on Feb. 7, rookie Tyson Ulmer scored 11:26 into the third period to lift the Oil Caps to victory. The Virden team had been defending in its own end when an opponent lost the puck.

“Brooks (Siemens) picked it up and sent me on a breakaway behind their defence-men,” Ulmer said. “I had the puck on my forehand, realized that I wouldn’t be able to get a quality shot on goal before the backchecker caught me, so I quickly pulled it to my backhand and flipped it past the goalie’s left shoulder as he was sliding to

his right.

“The goal was obviously huge for us as it gave us the lead with under nine minutes to go against a very strong Niverville team, and it ended up being the difference in a very tight-checking game. We’re obviously pumped taking down a team like Niverville, and I think that game serves as a statement for our group, that we can play with and beat anyone when we’re at our best.”

Virden goalie Braxton Burden made 33 saves to earn his fifth shutout of the season. He was the game’s First Star. Defenceman Nathan Schaefer earned the third star.

The Oil Capitals outscored the visiting Dauphin Kings, 3-1, in the second period on the way to a 7-5 victory on Feb. 7. The contest had been knotted 2-2 after 20 minutes of play. The Oil Capitals scored on three of its seven power play opportunities. The hosts killed off all three of Dauphin’s power plays.

Virden’s own Bryce Bryant racked up four points with a goal and three assists. London Hoilett was the game’s First Star. He had a goal and an assist as did Colten Worthington, the Second Star; Cohen Lewko; Ulmer; and Austin Osiowy. Carson Wright also scored. Schaefer had two assists. Micky Gross made 24 saves as Virden won in front of 817 fans.

A three-goal second period helped the Oil Capitals beat the Northern Manitoba Blizzard 5-3 on Feb. 4 in The Pas. The teams were tied at 1-1 after one period. Virden led 4-2 after two.

Bryant, the First Star, registered a goal and two assists. Colten Wright was the third star with a goal and an assist. Worthington, Liam Goertzen, and Marshall Light also scored for Virden. Burden stopped 19 shots.

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BUILDING, PLANNING AND MUNICIPAL BY-LAW INSPECTOR

The R.M. of Wallace-Woodworth is seeking a qualified individual for the position of **Building, Planning & Municipal By-Law Inspector**. This role is responsible for ensuring compliance with Manitoba’s building codes, planning regulations, and all municipal by-laws (including zoning, property standards, nuisance) while administering development agreements and planning documentation for Trans Canada West Planning District on behalf of the Municipality.

Duties and Responsibilities

- Conduct building, plumbing, mechanical, zoning, and property standards inspections
- Review and issue building, plumbing, occupancy, and development permits
- Ensure permits and documents are uploaded to the Manitoba Municipal Reporting Online (MMO) system
- Enforce all municipal by-laws – property standards, signage, nuisance, noise, etc.
- Investigate complaints and issue warnings, orders, and violations as required
- Administer and monitor development agreements and planning documentation
- Assist with conditional use, variance, and subdivision applications
- Maintain accurate digital and paper records, inspection notes, and reports
- Provide information and guidance to residents, developers, and contractors
- Coordinate with RCMP, Peace Officers or Provincial agencies for joint enforcement
- Perform other duties as assigned by the CAO or Council

Skills and Qualifications

- Experience in building inspection, by-law enforcement, or municipal planning as asset
- Ability to read building plans and interpret zoning regulations
- Strong communication and customer service skills
- Manitoba Class 5 driver’s license (clean abstract)
- Inspector certification (Parts 3 & 9) or trade background an asset

The R.M. Wallace-Woodworth offers a competitive salary based upon the applicant’s experience and qualifications. A complete job description is available upon request. The successful candidate can expect a salary reflective of their experience and qualifications.

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT/RECEPTIONIST

Job Description: The R.M. of Wallace-Woodworth is seeking a motivated and professional individual for the full-time position of **Administrative Assistant/Receptionist** at the Virden Municipal Office. The Administrative Assistant/Receptionist reports to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and is responsible for providing frontline customer service and administrative support to the CAO and municipal departments.

Duties and Responsibilities

- Provide front-counter reception and customer service to residents, contractors, and visitors
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Skills and Qualifications

- Strong customer service, communication, and organizational skills
- Attention to detail and ability to manage multiple priorities
- Previous office or reception experience preferred
- High school graduate at minimum; post-secondary administrative training considered an asset
- Demonstrated proficiency with computer applications including Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, Outlook)
- Ability to work independently and as part of a small team
- Valid Class 5 Driver’s Licence

A complete job description is available upon request. The successful candidate can expect a salary reflective of their experience and qualifications. The position will be eligible for a full benefits package after 6 months, including employer-paid Blue Cross insurance and a matched pension.

LANDFILL SITE ATTENDANT – KENTON

The R.M. of Wallace-Woodworth is seeking a motivated individual for the position of **Landfill Site Attendant** for the Kenton Nuisance Grounds location. The Landfill Site Attendant assists the Transportation Superintendent in operating the waste disposal grounds in compliance with the Waste Disposal Ground Operating Permit for the site, municipal policies, and Workplace Health and Safety regulations.

Certificate in Landfill Operations is an asset. Applicant must be willing to take the necessary certification courses.

Description and Qualifications

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Obituary

IN LOVING MEMORY
AUDREY ELAINE SPARKS
FEBRUARY 27, 1937 - DECEMBER 26, 2025



On December 26, 2025 heaven gained another angel: our mom Audrey Elaine Sparks.

Mom was born February 27, 1937 to Merv and Nellie Heaman, the oldest of three children.

On March 10, 1956, mom married our dad, Francis Sparks and from that union came Heather (Andy), Doug (Barb), Donnie (Shelley), Dennis (Bev) and Tammy (Brian).

Mom loved life on the farm, and the door was always open and coffee on. There was always time for a visit. Mom leaves her children, 19 grandchildren and 26 great grandchildren, who were her world. She also leaves her sister-in-law Marlene (Murray) Heaman, Julie (Fred) Sparks, as well as brother-in-laws Dave (Verna) Sparks and Ken (Fran) Sparks, as well as many nieces and nephews.

Mom was pre-deceased by dad (Francis), her parents Merv & Nellie, sister Carol and brother Murray as well as daughter-in-law Tonia. As well as her mother and father-in-law Katie & Ivan, sister in-laws May, Wilma, Phyliss and Doreen, brother in-laws Jim, Fred, and Albert (Butch).

The family would like to thank hospital and Sherwood staff for the care mom received during her stay. Also thank you to everyone for the phone calls, texts, etc. after mom's passing.

Thank-you

Thanks and appreciation

The Bennett cemetery committee would like to thank the following people for their donations. January 1, 2025 - to December 31, 2025:

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Caldwell sheds light on Internet dangers

Brings adults up to speed

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Armed with information about apps and how kids are using the Internet, Val Caldwell's presentation, Bridging the Gap, at Hamiota Collegiate, was a wake-up call for parents to provide vigilant supervision over their kids' device usage.

Caldwell, a Kenton area wife, mother of two grown kids, municipal councillor and part-time farmer has become a leading voice in helping kids and their parents navigate today's 'wild west' – the Internet.

She's spent 18 years speaking to groups that include Child and Family Services, hockey teams, school classes, parents and even seniors. Closing the Gap presentation to adults at Hamiota Collegiate was both a wakeup call and a tool belt.

"When I started this initiative 18 years ago, I imagined that there would be 30 or 40 people around the province doing this type of education. Unfortunately, that's not the case."

She says the RCMP's ICE unit (Internet Child Exploitation) provides some education, but says they're understaffed right now.

In the evening presentation on Feb. 5 at HCI, Caldwell contrasted how parenting has changed since the Internet's rapid takeover of the global communication that began in the mid '90s to today where online information, commerce, entertainment, and social networking is normalized.

"I grew up in the 70s," Caldwell talks about her Brandon childhood. "We had some cool TV shows. Cartoons were done by 10 o'clock in the morning on Saturday. We had nothing to do but get outside and create some fun."

She told of slipping away with friends to the rail yard in Brandon where parents told their kids NOT to go. Those were the days before the world became our playground through the Internet.

She pointed out that stranger danger has taken on a whole new meaning. Appearing as a cool friend, someone who 'gets' them, who understands your 14-year-old in a virtual world, that 'friend' could actually be a 50-year-old in Winnipeg or in Singapore.

With audience quizzes and a dose of humour, she revealed the underbelly of cell phone apps (applications or programs). Caldwell's dynamic presentation included PowerPoint slides and real-life examples of incidents that were averted, and some that were not.

She told of a young girl who was being lured into a meet-up by someone she thought was a teen. The girl heard Caldwell's presentation just prior to the agreed 'date' and she called it off. Others have not fared so well.

This wasn't only about kids. Caldwell pointed out that cell phones have invaded family spaces like the dinner table, where dinner interaction might amount to 'pass the potatoes' and actual conversations are nearly nil. She encourages parents to model what it means to be present, not distracted.

Caldwell is the first to admit that she's on her cell phone a lot (and some of that is research). But she's firm about keeping cell phones out of bedrooms for a couple of reasons including the fact that the blue light emitted by device screens interrupts the sleep cycle.

"How many of you take your phone to your room at night?" she asks. "So even though you feel tired, then you put the device down, [but] your brain



PHOTO BY ANNE DAVISON

Val Caldwell presents information to adults about well-known apps like YouTube to less known Cover Star (pink square icon with a "C") and Be Real.

thinks it's not time to sleep now.... So, about an hour before bed, we should be off of any visual technology."

Don't trust labels

On YouTubeKids for example, Caldwell tells that Five Nights at Freddy's, a video that would be pretty creepy and frightening for young children, was available until around 2022, when complaints finally led to action."

She advised, "Indirect supervision is a parent's best friend, so while you're in the kitchen making supper, they're in the living room on YouTube. You can hear it, so then if something comes up or you hear, you know, odd content, then you can hop in and take a look and say, what are we looking at? Because even when it's kids' YouTube, there's still stuff on there that can potentially not be appropriate."

CoverStar, aimed at kids as young as six to nine, (pink square icon with a "C") is a reward-based app that pushes users to gain likes, followers, and interactions. Caldwell points out, "How can you get 'likes', 'follows', and interactions if you have a private account? I'm not a big fan of an app that would be encouraging young kids to be broadcasting themselves live for people to see."

While intended to be kid-friendly, the app effectively trains young children to act like social media influencers at an early age.

'Be Real' is an app that accesses a phone's forward and backward-facing camera at the same time. The photo appears like a facetime, with the big screen and you are in the little square. Snapping a photo within the two-minute window of time is kind of a

game. But are you fully clothed, is it the right time and place to take that photo at the time?

The most somber minutes of her presentation explored painful examples of sextortion in Manitoba that resulted in teen suicides. Photos sent to a 'trusted' friend fell into the wrong hands. The young people were devastated, in one case shamed by peers, and took their lives. The photos do not disappear – they may continue to circulate.

Throughout her presentation Caldwell encourages parents to take adult responsibility and monitor cell phone use. She validates parental decisions to limit phone use and to make decisions that may meet with their children's howls of protest and anger.

A most telling slide shows a dad stepping into his young son's room to say goodnight, leaving the little boy with his Internet connected device. It's likened to a room with doors behind which violent offenders of every kind are lurking, like a Trojan Horse.

No matter how vigilant a parent is, kids can make mistakes.

If a young person has shared photos that they shouldn't, that could result in extortion, the hope is that the kid has a trusted adult to go to.

Caldwell admonishes parents not to reprimand but to support and to know what to do.

Do not ask to view the image and further embarrass your child, but this is evidence and should not be erased from the phone.

If a child is being targeted by someone online the incident should be reported to the RCMP Internet Child Exploitation unit (ICE): 204-984-3129. They know what to do.

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Thoughtful Valentine's gifts



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Valentine's Day brightens up the bleakness of the shortest and most wintry month of the year for the northern part of the globe. Businesses and homes are awash in pink and red each February, with heart-shaped decorations and boxes filling up store aisles. Sending heartfelt sentiments is a large part of celebrating Valentine's Day,

and most people cherish the day for the opportunity to bestow gifts on the ones they love.

The National Retail Federation says more than half of all consumers typically plan to celebrate Valentine's Day. In 2025, \$27.5 billion was spent on the holiday, with consumers continuing to prioritize gifting those closest to them. The NRF reports the top gift categories for Valentine's Day are candy, flowers, greeting cards, an evening out, and jewelry. Here's how to make these gifts

more thoughtful and endearing.

Candy

Gift givers can select candy that is preferable to their loved one instead of choosing the first box of chocolate they find at the store. Perhaps the person you love likes confections from a boutique candy shop a few towns over or has a hankering for candy from overseas? Mexico, for example, is known for its Dulce de Leche, while Halva is a dense, sweet treat from the Middle East. Choosing a special candy really sets the gift apart.

Flowers

Flowers are special gifts. Too often, people feel pressured to buy roses on Valentine's Day, even if this might not be a special someone's preferred flower. Choose, instead, a flower that has particular meaning to the person or one that is known to be a favorite. Aster and Baby's Breath are two blooms known for being symbols of love, according to The Old Farmer's Almanac.

Greeting cards

A handmade card may express warmer sentiments than one picked up at the store, particularly since the former can be customized to the recipient. Include personalized sentiments, inside jokes or memories of time spent together. Craft and hobby stores offer plenty of supplies for paper crafting, so it's possible to create a lovely greeting card with minimal effort.

A night out

A night out can be tailored to the interests of the couple celebrating. Book a dinner at a restaurant that was the scene of your first date; otherwise, stay in and watch a movie you each love.

Jewelry

Jewelry is a very personal gift. While it may seem like a great idea to surprise a special someone with a bracelet or earrings, if the style is off or the color wrong, the piece may not be worn. Rather, the surprise can be a trip to the jewelry store together to pick out something recipients wear all the time.

Gifts that fit the interests, personality and memories of a couple can be especially meaningful on Valentine's Day.

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