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APRIL 3, 2026 | EMPIRE: VOL 121 NO 33 / ADVANCE: VOL 140 NO 35 | PUBLISHING FRIDAYS



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Carolyn Arndt
Branch Manager



Keystone Oilfield Services, inducted into the Manitoba Oilfield Museum and Hall of Fame



Keystone Oilfield Services where customer service meant everything.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

By Nancy Jo Moller
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Keystone Oilfield Services is the first company to be inducted into the Manitoba Oilfield Museum and Hall of Fame. This recognition is well deserved for Dave Fefchak and Randy Browning. Dave began working at Continental EMCO, an oilfield supply store, in 1967 and was a knowledgeable employee when Randy Browning joined the company in 1974. As their friendship grew, so did the idea that “why don’t we do this by ourselves” since they had some innovative ideas and saw the need for an independent store that could not only have reasonable prices but excel in customer service. This thought persisted and in 1978, Keystone Oilfield Services opened its doors with Randy and Dave as the owners.

Keystone Oilfield Services was ‘that’ store that carried everything from rope, soap to oilfield pipe dope and many more items. Fire extinguishers could be charged, refilled and certified at Keystone eliminating another stop for business owners. As Randy described it, “Keystone was a farm store for the oilfield”. When the downswing in oil prices happened, Keystone started marketing paper products and was awarded a contract for Fort La Bosse School Division. Determination to survive meant creative thinking.

Early on in their venture, the realization came that if a cribbage game or three was available, customers would stop in and chat, and frequently, a needed item was mentioned that could either be added to their purchase order or brought into stock. This form of ‘old-fashioned’ networking provided a space for competitors’

employees to solve the world’s problems. Their loyalty was won and frequently they would leave with a few supplies, just in case they needed them. Randy and Dave were ahead of their time in customer service, taking a trip to Montana late at night to ensure the parts were ready in the morning for the customer was not unheard of in their business. Opening early to ensure the crew had the products they needed was a normal occurrence. It wasn’t unknown for crew from Estevan to swing by Keystone because they knew supplies would be in stock. Randy and Dave located stock from both sides of the border ensuring the customer could purchase affordable products. Business was a quotation ‘bidding war’ but sometimes loyalty swayed the decision.

The original Keystone building saw a few structural additions in its lifetime but remained a mainstay of oilfield supplies in Virden. One of the first changes was converting the attached greenhouse into offices. Store frontage was extended to Moomsomin and Wawota with outlets that created more mileage on vehicles but provided another place to store those unusual items needed. With over 20 employees working at Keystone, there was always someone available to make the stock trip.

Respect for Randy and Dave is apparent with former employees still approaching them saying “I learned so much by working with you guys and maybe I didn’t say thank you”.

As the thought of retirement became more often, or at least slowing down, the opportunity became visible to sell to Apex Distribution Inc. The paperwork was signed and Randy and Dave joined the ranks of retirees wondering what do we do now?



2026 PLAYOFF HOME GAMES
TUESDAY, APRIL 7
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 8
VS. STEINBACH PISTONS
 PUCK DROPS AT 7:30PM

Inside...



EASTER CONTEST P24




4-H FUNDRAISER P9

PLAYOFFS ROUND 1 HOME SCHEDULE


CALL OR VISIT THE WHEAT KINGS OFFICE FOR TICKETS OR SCAN THE QR CODES

OFFICE NUMBER (204) 726-3535


WEAR WHITE FOR THE WHEAT KING WHITE OUT


GAME 3




TUNDRA OIL & GAS PLACE
TUESDAY, MARCH 31ST
7:00 PM CST




GAME 4



TUNDRA OIL & GAS PLACE
THURSDAY, APRIL 2ND
7:00 PM CST



***GAME 5**



TUNDRA OIL & GAS PLACE
FRIDAY, APRIL 3RD
7:00 PM CST *IF NECESSARY

Mark Plaisier inductees into the Manitoba Oilfield Museum and Hall of Fame



Mark Plaisier, "a fracking pioneer" truly outstanding in the field.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

few adjustments Mark became recognized in the region as a fracking pioneer. Mark's "we can do it" attitude has made him a valuable asset in the Patch.

After stepping away from Morris, Mark found himself participating in open hole fracking for Tundra Oil & Gas Limited.

After a few years, Mark decided to work as an independent and his service vehicles quickly became recognized in the Patch. Whenever "Black Smoke and Tail-lights" were headed into the field, the crew knew help was on the way and they would be up and running shortly.

While Mark continues to work in troubleshooting abnormal pressure tests on local wells, he is also available to provide advice to family members from his experience.

By Nancy Moller
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

As with most young farm boys, Mark quit school before graduation to help first at home and on a neighbour's mixed farm. After a couple of years of this work, Mark decided that he wanted to do more and the oilfield began to sound like the place to be. Mark packed up and moved to Virden accepting a job performing maintenance on a service rig. There was no time

for doubt, the hours were long, the duties new but he was energetic and adaptable. Throughout his early career, he was fortunate to work for Frank Coulter and Bob Lane, both well known in the field as mentors and both have been named into the Manitoba Oilfield Museum and Hall of Fame. Mark was eager to learn and there was no stopping the amount of knowledge he was storing for future use.

Mark was hired by

Morris' Oilfield Services in 1982 and began 35 years of dedicated service with the company. When it became apparent that fracking services were needed in the area, Mark's knowledge and fabrication skills were called upon. Because it was too cost prohibitive to hire the "big" companies, Mark with the assistance of fellow employees made the necessary modifications to available equipment. A few kinks in the system were quickly evident but after a



S.A.I.L. Annual Wellness Day Event

PLANNING with Purpose

Wednesday, April 15, 2026
Tundra Oil & Gas Place, Virden
Doors Open: 9:30 | Opening Remarks at 10:00

Presentations

10:30 - 11:15
Doug Buss of Your Style Financial

1:15 - 2:00
Christine Cross - Your Wishes Matter: Planning for Life's Later Chapters

Vendors

A wide variety of business and organizations will be present all day to help you get all of the connections and resources for you or your loved one. Please take your time to stop and visit with them!

Lunch!

Lunch served by our very own SAIL Cook from Elkhorn - Kristina Walker! Soup, Sandwich, and Dessert for \$12.00

Sponsors

VIRIDEN
Empire-Advance
R.M. of Sifton
Oak Lake & Area Lions Club

15 Minute Active Break & 2 'Mini' Carol Burnett Skits by Theatrick Players

WE WILL HAVE A PUZZLE EXCHANGE TABLE!
BRING A PUZZLE - TAKE A PUZZLE

TRANSPORTATION AVAILABLE WITHIN YOUR AREA!
Oak Lake: Call Tanis at 204-855-3150
Elkhorn: Call Karen at 204-845-2011
Virden: Call Julie at 204-851-7100
Questions about the Event: Krista at 204-748-2323

50th Pipestone Fun Days 2026

ATTENTION BALL PLAYERS AND FANS AND FRIENDS!
PIPESTONE FUN DAYS has been going for 50 YEARS!!
We would like you to come and help us celebrate this milestone weekend!
JULY 10, 11, & 12

Slow Pitch Tournament - \$1500.00 PRIZE MONEY!
Dine and Dance with Live entertainment and Catered Supper!
70's Fashion Optional!
Pancake Breakfast- Sunday!
Parade -Sunday!
Games for Kids!
Beer Gardens!
Canteen on Grounds all weekend!

Hope to see you there!!!

Camping available, 16 Full Service sites.
More updates as the weekend gets closer!

Get your teams in early to. Contact: Aaron Edwards-204-522-0084 ~ Ryan Flannery- 204-908-0528 ~ Wade Flannery-204-851-1120 ~ Cory Elliot- 204-522-5163 ~ Aaron Turnbull-204-264-0293

THE GIESBRECHT FAMILY

APRIL 15 • 7:00 PM
KILLARNEY MENNONITE CHURCH

APRIL 16 • 7:00 PM
VIRDEN ALLIANCE CHURCH

Free Admission • Donations Welcome

An evening of family-friendly Gospel music in support of

onehope CANADA
onehopecanada.ca/events

Manitoba Government announces Budget 2026 to deliver jobs, lower costs, better health care

Briefed: Manitoba Government press release

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

With the lowest deficit-to-gross domestic product ratio in Canada, the Manitoba government's Budget 2026 makes... progress on the path to balance the budget within four years, Finance Minister Adrien Sala announced last week.

"Budget 2026 reflects the priorities we heard from Manitobans every day, strengthening health care, lowering costs and creating good jobs," said Sala. "We're delivering real progress with relief at the grocery store, more front-line staff in our health-care system and new opportunities for workers."

Budget 2026 continues to invest more in health care, adding 4,054 net new health-care staff added to the front lines and focuses on new initiatives to reduce the number of emergency rooms (ER) wait times.

This budget also includes \$22.1 million to re-establish the Cardiac Centre of Excellence at the St. Boniface Hospital, now called Heart Care Manitoba, and provides additional funding to perform 200 more hip and knee surgeries at the Selkirk Regional Health Centre, along with 3,250 more MRIs.

Manitoba is leading the country in tackling rising grocery prices through new legislation that would ban predatory pricing and restrict property controls. Budget 2026 goes further by removing the provincial sales tax from all food sold in grocery stores starting July 1.

Additional measures to lower costs for Manitobans include an increase to \$1,700 to the Homeowners Affordability Tax Credit, increased rent relief delivered sooner, and free transit for children and youth.

Manitoba's economy is strong with wages outpacing inflation, continued private-sector growth and a steady increase in the number of Manitobans working. Budget 2026 builds on this growth with a historic commitment to train 40 per cent more apprentices in the skilled trades and a new \$10-million Churchill Catalyst Fund to attract more private-sector interest in an energy corridor that will create good jobs for generations.

With \$118 million to build four new schools, \$71.8 million to build personal care homes in Lac du Bonnet, Arborg and Transcona, \$36.1 million to build new ERs at the Victoria and Eriksdale hospitals, the Manitoba Jobs Agreement is ensuring those jobs go to Manitoba workers.

Budget 2026 boasts new investments in free child care for low-income families, and a \$2.5-million investment in adult literacy programs to help more Manitobans graduate and find a good job. See details at: manitoba.ca/budget2026.

Reactions to Budget 2026 are varied

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

There's been varied reactions regarding Manitoba's 2026 budget. A point form summary suggests investments in Churchill (Manitoba's ocean port), availability of business loans and "a record \$3.8 billion capital investment to build roads, hospitals, and schools and create good jobs."

Along with other important health services upgrades, the promise to improve food service for seniors in personal care homes is a win, although given the numbers, it amounts to about \$500 per person for the year. Cutting out the PST on groceries is expected to help.

The budget is slated to pass in June.

Here's a brief of some reactions to the budget:

Manitoba Beef Producers (MBP) welcomes investments related to the province's beef industry outlined in the 2026 provincial budget and is "pleased to see commitments to several initiatives related to our sector, including new funding to support the Veterinary Medical Services Strategy, an extension of the Crown land rental rate freeze, continued support for the Livestock Predation Prevention Program and for wildlife damage compensation, increased lending support through MASC, including for young producers, and more," said MBP President Arvid Nottveit.

"The beef industry is a key economic driver in Manitoba, responsible for more than \$900 million in farm cash receipts and helping to support many businesses and services," added Nottveit.

Healthcare

Manitoba's largest labour union, CUPE, says while the 2026 Manitoba budget hit the target, it's still far from a bullseye.

A glaring omission from the budget is the continued refusal to legislate staffing levels for health care support workers in personal care homes.

"One nurse to 50 patients is unacceptable, but nurses aren't working alone; health care aides and dietary aides are doing hands-on patient care every single day and are consistently working short-staffed," said Margaret Schroeder, President of CUPE 204.

"Health care is a team effort, and if you want to truly strengthen the bench you need to include the support staff in the lineup too."

CUPE is pleased to see new mental health support for HSC, but we are concerned there is no plan to reduce private agencies or end mandatory overtime for support workers.

President of Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals (MAHCP), Jason Linklater, said, "Today's budget made it clear that government still isn't listening to the paramedics, the respiratory therapists, the MRI technologists, and many other allied health professionals who are dangerously short-staffed and have been asking for help."

He says Manitoba needs an evidence-based and fully funded workforce plan to start retaining, training and recruiting the 1,000 more specialized allied health professionals, immediately.

Education

CUPE was hoping to see real improvements for frontline education support workers, like Education Assistants.

"For far too many people working in our K-12 school system, retirement security remains a pipe dream," said Gina McKay, President of CUPE Manitoba. "If we want to recruit more staff for our schools and make these jobs a career, then being the only support staff in Canada without a real pension makes it a lot harder."

This challenge is even greater for school staff in rural Manitoba, and this budget does little to bring equity between workers in Winnipeg and those outside the perimeter.

"For too long, rural school divisions have paid staff up to 30 per cent less than in urban divisions," said McKay. "With teacher salaries now standardized, it's time for the inequity to end for support staff as well."

The budget does include some excellent movement for child care, including a promised 2,000 new spots and increase to child care wages.

Manitoba Chambers of Commerce

Manitoba Chamber applauds some budget items but is looking for conditions that will strengthen long-term economic growth, investment attraction, and business confidence and they're concerned about over reliance on federal transfers.

Competitiveness, workforce capacity, and a predictable operating environment for business, including trade and market expansion in the context of ongoing global uncertainty are on their list of concerns.

Their report says, "Central to the success of this initiative is the creation of seamless transportation networks and efficient supply chains."

"In Manitoba, federal transfer payments represent approximately one-third of total revenue. Increased reliance on federal transfers, debt servicing costs that are expected to reach \$2.3 billion, and constrained investment in sectors that drive economic growth, presents a risk to Manitoba's long-term competitiveness and the province's goal of becoming a "have" province."

The Chamber points out that the province's net debt is projected to rise to \$39.7 billion, an increase of \$1.6 billion over the previous year. Greater clarity on the path back to balance and long-term fiscal sustainability are vital to maintaining business confidence and to taking full advantage of our moment of "great economic opportunity." mbchamber.mb.ca/

Turtle Mountain Souris Plains Heritage Association



12th Annual Local History Seminar

FEATURED PRESENTERS:

Cultivation & Connections: Recent Results of Archaeological Research along Gainsborough Creek and Beyond
• Dr. Mary Malainey •

Finding Airman White (and Other Adventures)
• Jan McClelland •

Perspectives: the Treaty Land Sharing Network in Saskatchewan
• Landowners: Paula & Morley Maier and Sheena Muirhead Koops •

Keeping Them Known: Recovering the Stories of Women Who Served
• Director General Zoe McQuinn, Commonwealth Air Training Plan Museum •

- Thursday, APRIL 9, 2026 - 10:00 AM to 3:30 PM -
- Community Complex, 119 Lake St., Deloraine -

Doors Open 9:30 AM • refreshments
local museum displays • photography exhibit • door prizes
Entry Fee: \$25.00 per person - includes homemade hot lunch
Free Admission for Students



Boundary



THANK YOU to all event sponsors!

Please RSVP: vantagepointsmb@gmail.com



Tundra

By Chad Carpenter



He is Risen, he is risen indeed!

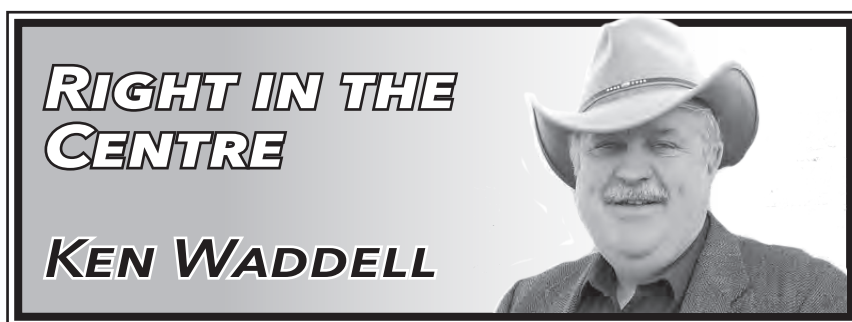
I believe it was back a few years ago, possibly at our 50th wedding anniversary that I greeted the family and guests with the words of Fanny Crosby's great hymn.

"To God be the glory, great things He hath done, so loved He the world that He gave us His Son, who yielded His life an atonement for sin, and opened the life-gate that all may go in."

I truly believe the title of this column and I truly believe the words of the hymn quoted above. To me those words are the bedrock of the Christian faith along with John 3:16 which says

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Many years ago, a man was working for me, who at an earlier job site had a near-death experience. The particular equipment he used in his work was needing an overhaul of the same type as when he had his brush with death. Naturally, he was very afraid to tackle that task again so he started drinking. After a period of drinking, he looked at me and said, "I died in that accident and I went to the Heaven's Gates and by Jesus, they were closed." While he did recover and regained nearly full health again, he was convinced that Heaven's Gates were closed to him. I could understand and appreciate his fear but I said something that I hope encouraged him. I said, "I think you are wrong because it is by Jesus that those gates are opened"



“ Who goes and doesn't go to Heaven, that's up to God and the individual. ”

Over the years, I think a lot of time and energy has been expended by Christian churches and members trying to determine who goes to Heaven and who doesn't. I have been involved in the Christian church in one context or another for all my life and that is over 75 years. I have concluded that while I may have spent some time on the question of who goes and who doesn't go to Heaven, that's up to God and the individual. I posed a question to a person recently by saying, "If Jesus died to save people, all people, then it is possible that Hitler is in Heaven." Now that concept may not sit well with some folks and I will admit it makes me ponder for a bit. However, if God's grace is complete and His blessing is for everyone and anyone, then Hitler may be in Heaven. And then there's another concept that I have pondered and that is when someone does something

wrong, are we prepared to forgive. The Lord's prayer says "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." See, there's a catch. If we don't forgive, does that mean we are limiting God's forgiveness to us. I believe that if people believe in Jesus (as in John 3:16) then they will have everlasting life. But I also believe that, aside from going to heaven, we hamper ourselves and others by not forgiving one another. Unforgiving won't keep you out of heaven but it can certainly hamper your life on earth. Happy Easter to each and everyone and if you want to offer an opinion on what I have written, please do so.

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 Banner & Press staff.



'Are you having fun yet?'

Any one of the family would be deeply involved working on a project: it could have been a piano student trying to master a piece of music; it could have been a lad constructing a model; it could have been a lass creating a masterpiece of art; a son reconstructing a transmission system or me — up to the end of my patience with a sewing project or household task, and Ed would stroll by, observe the intense concentration and casually ask, "Are you having fun yet?"

It really wasn't much of a conversation starter! But it put life into perspective. We were working diligently in an attempt to achieve a goal. Hard work often precedes success...

The oft used expression resounded as I pattered at my garden projects. There are a number of grow lights nurturing seeds and seedlings. I have planted climbing petunias and sprawling petunias. They have germinated and I had no idea that those beautiful hardy colourful annuals start out hairlike. They are so tiny, so fragile...I never knew. Among the healthy plants are mini tomatoes, red and yellow, already blooming but not many setting. The first planting of sweet peas, even after an overnight soaking, only had one plant emerge. So I have another batch soaking. The peppers are planted and I'm waiting,

As do I wait for the tomatoes to sprout. Some of the seeds are nestled in the individual pod trays and this year I am trying the snail method for indoor planting. I heard people speak of it, I googled it, and then I rolled up my sleeves and worked at it. It was as I was carefully coiling the bubble wrap strip loaded with very moist starting soil, that I heard - are you having fun yet? Hands covered with wet dirt, surrounded by seeds and growing things, grow light glowing...indeed, I was having fun.

I heard the words again as I was twisting like a pretzel painting in the laundry room/bathroom! I really did ok, I had the first coat on before the washer and dryer were in their places. The second coat was mostly on before the toilet was installed, just an occasional spot to recover. It was the set of shelves that I asked for. They are exactly what I wanted and exactly where I wanted them. They are narrow and deep. And they needed painting. A primer and a colour. It was as I was on a ladder, the smallest roller and tray I could find balancing in one hand while I stretched and reached to paint the very back, that I hear — are you having fun yet? Honestly, not at that precise point! But moments later when the job was finished, and looked great — that the having fun was realised.

It is helpful to keep in mind the end result when starting a project. There are a couple of quilting projects that I really want to undertake. Within my skill set certainly, perhaps requiring more patience than I wish to give. Oh, I am certain, that more than once, I will hear again "are you having fun yet?"

Empire Advance
Serving Virden and area since 1885

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Town Office: 204-748-2440

Virden Landfill: 204-748-6033

Tundra Oil & Gas Place: 204-748-2736



Animal Control: 204-851-5881

Facility Bookings: 204-748-2440

Emergency After Hours: 204-851-5540

Spring Thaw Reminder

As spring approaches, please use extreme caution around creeks, culverts and drainage ditches within the Town of Virden and surrounding areas.

For everyone's safety, please keep children, pets, and yourselves out of danger, and off of thin ice.

Upcoming Council Meetings

April 14 & 28

Council Meetings start at 7:00 PM

Employment Opportunity

Flower & Garden Caretaker

The Town of Virden is seeking to employ a self-motivated individual to assist in its annual planting and seasonal maintenance of flowerbeds, planters and hanging baskets throughout town.

Preference will be given to individuals who have graduated from or are enrolled in a recognized green space management course. Individuals with similar experience and training are encouraged to apply. Applicants must hold a valid driver's license.

This position will run from May to September, and will remain open until filled.

Equipment Operator II

The Town of Virden has an opening for a permanent full-time Equipment Operator II position to work primarily in the Public Works Department, although the individual could be required to assist in other departments if necessary.

This position requires an individual that is in good health and capable of carrying out the physical requirements of the job. A valid Class 3 with air Manitoba driver's license is necessary. This position is generally scheduled for 7:00 am to 4:00 pm, Monday to Friday, but this could vary depending on requirements of the Employer, weather, or other circumstances.

A detailed job description, with wage rate is available at the Town Office.

Please forward resume with cover letter to:

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

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
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.

Summer Employment Opportunities

Virden Pioneer Museum – Assistant Curator

- Term of Employment: May 4, 2026 – August 31, 2026
- Group Tours for School classes, Daycare Facility and Day Camp Groups
- Update inventory database on computer
- Social Media updates and changes to web site as required
- Provide interactive tours to visitors

Please send resumes to virdenpioneeremuseum@gmail.com

Deadline for applications: April 15, 2026

Virden Public Swimming Pool

Head Lifeguard/Assistant Head Lifeguard:

- 2-3 years previous Instructor experience plus certifications listed below.

Applications will be accepted until April 30, 2026 at 4:00 PM.

Lifeguard/Instructor:

Certifications Required for Supervisor, Assistant Supervisor and Lifeguard/Instructor

- Willing to obtain, or currently hold valid First Aid Certification with Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Certificate of C-Level or higher
- Valid National Life Guard Service (NLS)
- Valid Water Safety Instructor (WSI)
- Valid Assistant Water Safety Instructor (AWSI)
- Valid Life Saving Instructor (LSI)

Applications will be accepted until April 1, 2026 at 4:00 PM.

Assistant Lifeguard:

Certifications Required for Assistant Lifeguard

- Willing to obtain, or currently hold valid First Aid Certification with Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation Certificate of C-Level or higher
- Valid Bronze Cross Certification or Red Cross Assistant Lifeguard Certification

Applications will be accepted until April 1, 2026 at 4:00 PM.

Please include the following along with your resume and cover letter:

- Preferred position of interest
- Copies of all relevant certifications (required)

Programs/Events Leader & Assistants

The Town of Virden has the following employment opportunities available for the summer of 2026:

Programs/Events Leader – this position, starting July 6, 2026, will be primarily responsible for the coordination of the planning, implementation, operation and evaluation of the Community Day Camp programs for children 5 to 11. Other duties may include planning and assisting with other community programs and events.

Programs/Events Assistants – these three positions, starting July 6, 2026, will be primarily responsible for assisting at the Community Day Camp. Other duties may include assisting with other community programs and events.

The positions listed above will both be subject to 40 hour work weeks, which could include evenings and weekends. The successful applicants must be self-starters, possess exceptional organizational and time management skills and communication skills. The ability to work with children and the general public is imperative. An original Police Information Search (criminal reference check) and Child Abuse registry search will be required prior to the commencement of employment.

Detailed job descriptions are available at the Virden Town Office or on the website at www.virden.ca/p/employment-opportunities.

Resumes will be accepted until Friday, April 17, 2026 at 4:00 PM.

Please forward resume with cover letter to:

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

Elkhorn seniors get scam savvy

By Ed James
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Recently, the Seniors Access to Independent Living (SAIL) leadership arranged a fraud awareness workshop at the Elkhorn Leisure Centre. The event brought out about 20 people, most of whom were seniors.

The presentation was given by Darby Shackel of Virden branch of the CIBC. Shackel is the bank manager and team leader of the bank's various services. She began her presentation by defining what fraud and scams are, and the many forms they can take.

In today's modern society, scams can come from anywhere in the world, using methods ranging from old-school approaches to the most advanced electronic and email-based tactics, now even including the power of artificial intelligence (AI). Many of these modern electronic devices—and even your phone line or daily mail—can be used in fraud attempts. It would seem that in today's world, mankind's best inventions can be turned into something harmful.

We now have to be very aware of what we say to phone, mail, or electronic offers. We must stay on guard, and perhaps the best advice is that old saying: "If it's too good to be true, then it probably is."

Shackel went on to discuss several common scams in detail, including bank fraud, CRA calls, "family member in trouble" scams, fake contest winnings, and requests for credit card or bank account numbers. In general, if someone you do not know personally asks for personal information, hang up the phone. If it is your bank or another legitimate institution, contact them directly to confirm and ask for help.

As a reality is that many scammers are trained professionals who know how to manipulate emotions and take advantage of people's honesty. The development of AI has only given them another powerful tool.

Throughout the session, the audience asked many questions about what to do in uncertain situations, while others shared their own personal experiences with fraud and the protection techniques they use.

In closing, Shackel outlined several ways to protect yourself from fraud. These included asking your bank to set cash limits on your credit card or bank account. She also stressed that the bank will never use phone calls or email to ask for personal information, account numbers, or credit card details— "we already have that on file."

She advised always keeping credit cards, debit cards, and cheque books in a safe place, even



PHOTO BY ED JAMES

Darby Shackel speaks at Elkhorn SAIL fraud awareness workshop.

when in public. Be cautious of emails that spell your name incorrectly, as this is often a red flag. If you receive an email from someone you do not know asking you to open a link, never open it, as it may give scammers access to your computer and personal information.

Other tips included using secure envelopes when sending cheques by mail, and being cautious even with well-known apps, which can be misused.

Finally, if you become a victim of fraud, contact your bank or the RCMP immediately. It is also important to tell your friends and family to help spread awareness of local scams. News travels quickly through places like the senior centre or local coffee shop and sharing information can

help protect others.

There is no need to feel embarrassed or ashamed. Fraudsters are very skilled at what they do, and sadly, in many cases, there is little chance of recovering lost funds.

As a personal safety measure, when making online purchases from someone in Brandon, I choose to meet in a designated safe area in front of the Brandon Police Service building, which is under 24-hour surveillance.

After her presentation, Shackel stayed to answer additional questions. She said she was very pleased with the turnout and the level of engagement, and that she enjoyed being back in her home community to connect and share with many people she has known all her life.

HELEN DRYSDALE

OUT OF HELEN'S KITCHEN

Easter Rice Krispie baskets

3 Tbsp. butter	1 bag mini marshmallows
6 cups Rice Krispies Cereal	1 cup coconut
1 or 2 drops of green food colouring	mini coloured easter eggs

Lightly grease muffin tins. In a large pot, melt butter over medium/low heat. Add marshmallows and continue cooking, stirring occasionally until marshmallows are melted. Remove the pot from heat, pour in the Rice Krispies, and stir gently until cereal is coated. Grease your hands with cooking spray or butter to help keep the sticky mixture from sticking to your fingers when pressing it into the muffin tin cups. Press the rice Krispie mixture into the cups of the muffin tins. Make an indentation in the center of each to create little nest. Work quickly to form the nests with the cereal mixture before it begins to harden. Allow the nests to set up and then remove from the muffin tin. Add the food colouring to the coconut and mix until the coconut is green. Place a little bit of coconut into the indentation of each nest. Place several easter eggs in each nest.

The big Easter cookie

1/2 cup margarine, room temperature	3/4 cup brown sugar
1 egg	2 tsp. vanilla
1 1/3 cups flour	1/2 tsp. baking soda
1/4 tsp. salt	1/2 cup mini chocolate chips

Mini chocolate easter eggs such as Easter M&M's or mini-Cadbury eggs

Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray a 9-inch pie plate or round cake pan with non-stick cooking spray. Set aside. Mix the margarine and sugar together, then stir in the egg and vanilla. Mix the baking soda and salt with the flour. Add the flour mix into the creamed mixture and stir just till combined. Add the chocolate chips. Put the dough into prepared pan and gently pat down. Bake for 25 minutes or till the top is golden brown. Remove from the oven and gently press the easter eggs into the warm surface while it's hot. Cool before slicing.

Strawberry poke cake

Poke cakes are so easy to whip up using a cake mix and they're just a whole lot of fun for the kids to make.

1 package of white cake mix	1 cup of boiling water
1 small package of strawberry Jello	1/2 cup of cold water
1 container of Cool Whip	

fresh strawberries or frozen sliced strawberries thawed

Prepare the cake mix according to package instructions and bake in a greased 13x9-inch cake pan at 350°F. Let the cake cool for about 15 minutes when it comes out of the oven. Then poke holes in the cake using the handle of a wooden spoon. Dissolve the Jello in 1 cup of boiling water, then add 1/2 cup of cold water. Pour the Jello mixture in the holes of the cake. Refrigerate the cake until needed. Then top the cake with whipped topping and top with fresh or thawed strawberries. Enjoy with your favourite people.

Police Report

Westman RCMP Service Report for Mar 22 to 28

Submitted
BY WESTMAN RCMP

During this week, Westman RCMP received a total of 59 calls for service. Some of these calls for service include 16 traffic offences, 2 Assistance to Canadian Agencies/General Public, 4 Assaults, 3 Mischiefs, 1 Wellbeing Checks, 2 False Alarms, 3 Mental Health, and 2 Fail to Comply with Probation files.

On Mar. 22, during routine patrols in the RM of Wallace-Woodworth, RCMP observed a vehicle travelling at a high rate of speed. Radar confirmed the driving speed of 135 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 \$378.

On Mar. 25, RCMP received a report of a disturbance in the Community of Sioux Valley Dakota Nation. The call was received from First Nations Safety Officers that had originally attended the scene. Members attended and located a 21-year-old female who was intoxicated, breaching her curfew, as well had outstanding warrants from Brandon Police Services, she was

placed under arrest and charged with x2 counts of Failing to Comply with a Release Order Condition, and the warrants from Brandon were executed. She was remanded into custody of the province and will attend court this month. A second person, a 20-year-old male was also intoxicated and placed under arrest to be released when sober.

On Mar. 28, RCMP received a report of assault in the Community of Sioux Valley Dakota Nation. Members arrived on scene and were informed by the complainant that they had been assaulted by a 24-year-old male. The victims' statement was obtained, and it was revealed that the male entered the dwelling without permission and assaulted them. Patrols were carried out but the suspect was not located, a warrant for his arrest has been issued.

On Mar. 28, RCMP conducted routine traffic stops in the town of Virden. A 17-year-old male was pulled over and had no drivers' license to present to the member. He was asked to provide a roadside breath sample, which resulted in a FAIL 100/90mg% respective. He was placed under arrest

for impaired operation of a vehicle. His vehicle was seized for thirty days and towed. He also received a 3-month driving suspension, his guardian was notified and he was released on an Appearance Notice for court in June.

On Mar. 28, during routine patrols in the RM Sifton, RCMP observed a vehicle travelling at a high rate of speed. Radar confirmed the driving speed of 146 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 \$521.

SCAM ALERT - There is currently a text message scam being sent out from an unknown number, when received it states it is an official automated notice from Manitoba Justice regarding the provincial traffic violation registry, stating your vehicle, or drivers licence will be suspended if money is not received. It provides a payment portal for you to log into for payment, or you can reply "Y" to the text to be routed to the payment portal. Please be aware this is a scam, and Manitoba Justice does not send out texts asking for payment.

Seniors Wellness Day - Planning With Purpose



FILE PHOTO

Last year the speaker for Lifeline services is enjoying visits at her booth.

By Anne Davison

EMPIRE-ADVANCE

SAIL-Seniors Access to Independent Living has their 2026 Wellness

Day event lined up to inform and entertain. This event is under the direction of SAIL offices with Karen Mitchell (Elkhorn), Tanis Podobni (Oak Lake) and for Virden - Julie Mason and Krista Pederson.

"We have a full day planned...and all are welcome to attend," says organizer, Krista Pederson. "Our theme is 'Planning With Purpose.'"

Life is a journey and she says that planning for the future makes us "ready to meet situations as they come our way ... and we have time to enjoy our lives now."

Pederson is excited about this year's guest speaker. "Doug Buss, of Your Style Financial, will talk about practical financial ways to plan for your future." She adds, "He is a very dynamic speaker and you're sure

to be inspired."

Local speaker Christine Cross's subject matter will be: "Your Wishes Matter: Planning for life's later chapters." Her session begins after lunch at 1:15pm.

"Christine comes with an abundance of experience and knowledge combined with care for people and a dash of humour, you won't want to miss her talk," says Pederson.

There's no pre-registration required for this event geared for seniors. It's open to all ages as it's never too soon to start planning.

In Tundra Oil & Gas Place, the banquet hall doors open at 9:30am on April 15, with welcoming remarks at 10am.

There is no entry fee but donations are welcomed. Free coffee and muffins start the day.

"And sprinkled throughout the day are other things you don't want to miss..." For example, there will be 25 to 30 product vendors in the banquet hall and there are skits.

"Theatrick Players will do a couple of Carol Burnett skits, (a sneak peek at their next big fundraiser, May 29th and 30th for the firefighters... details to be announced soon!)."

Active breaks (yes exercises) are always fun.

There are door prizes, a puzzle exchange table, and time to visit over lunch which can be purchased for \$12. Kristina Walker, Elkhorn Sail cook, will be providing soup, sandwich and dessert offering.

Do you need help getting to Tundra Oil & Gas Place? Transportation is available:

- Elkhorn, call Karen at 204-845-2011
- Oak Lake call Tanis at 204-855-3150
- Virden call Julie at 204-851-7100

Letter to the Editor

RE: Mar. 27 editorial

by Ken Waddell

"Let me know your thoughts", I agree that the USA has been treated badly by Iran. One of the reasons for this is that the US has been interfering in international affairs in the middle east for decades. This includes forcibly removing a democratically elected prime minister in Iran in 1979, and installing a dictator who was more friendly to US interests in the area. While Iran certainly has produced terrorists that hate the USA. The CIA in the USA are considered terrorists by many countries. They do not hesitate to interfere with elections, or remove political leaders that do not support US interests..

Senator Chis Murphy spoke in support of a resolution to discuss and vote on ending the war in Iran. He pointed out that the war has never been authorized by the House of Representatives or Senate. It is costing the US taxpayer in excess of \$2 billion a day. The primary objective in the war now is to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. The Strait WAS open before the war, Now they are trying to fix a problem that THEY created. Iran now has more control over the world economy that before the war started! Senator Murphy points out how insane this war is..But the Republicans all voted against the resolution and the war continues.

I do enjoy reading your editorials!

Ed Clayton
Elkhorn

9-1-1 deal tabled, road bans reviewed

By Dale Davison

EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Wallace -Woodworth council held their regular meeting on March 24 in the municipal office.

Next Generation 9-1-1 Service Agreement

Council considered a resolution to authorize signing the Next Generation 9-1-1 service agreement with Bell Canada. During discussion it was noted that the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM) has raised concerns about the agreement's wording. AMM stated, "At this time we believe the wording of the service agreement contains several problematic provisions that could result in significant financial and administrative burdens for municipalities."

Council decided to table the decision and request clarification from AMM. They agreed that while the new 9-1-1 service has the potential to improve emergency response, there are concerns about cellular service gaps in rural Manitoba. Coun. Val Caldwell said, "I just hope that our province plans to improve their cellular reception before we start relying on cell

phones for ambulances to find your location because there are some locations where you can't get a cell signal."

Road bans

The 2026 road bans are currently in effect as of March 20. Council discussed how the municipality has been interpreting road ban rules, and whether this interpretation is clearly communicated to ratepayers. Reeve Clayton Canart said, "Maybe that is something where we need to be sending out a notice, putting in the paper just to put awareness out. To define it."

The policy review committee will take this up at their next meeting to define and standardize the rules more clearly.

Transportation

Council discussed an upcoming meeting with Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure (MTI) to discuss longstanding concerns. A key topic for the meeting will be the sign corridor policy. Roadside signage in Saskatchewan is more informative and complete, and Reeve Canart suggested creating a video to show MTI a comparison with signage that is used in

the neighbouring province.

The RM is selling a grader and has listed it on an auction site. The top bid on the site did not meet the reserve that had been set, but the decision was made to contact the highest bidder to see if they would still purchase at that price.

Kenton LUD

Coun. Diana MacDonald reported on a recent meeting where Wallace-Woodworth Transportation Superintendent Nicolas Zuck addressed snow clearing policies and service responsibilities that are shared with MTI. In other updates Levi Best has completed the new picnic tables. A St. Patrick's Day lunch drew 25 participants, and a recent foot clinic included a session at Lenore as well as Kenton. The committee also discussed the pricing formula for use of the community hall and Kenton's responsibilities regarding the daycare.

Elkhorn LUD

Coun. Denis Lachapelle reported that the Canada Post building project is nearly complete. Most of Elkhorn's seasonal employees will be returning this summer although campground staffing is still

not resolved. The committee made progress on the 2026 service plan as well as preparations for seasonal beautification and discussions on a sidewalk plan.

Council approved a resolution to extend the contract of Jack Lewis as Elkhorn Village caretaker as well as the contract with David Kyle for maintenance of the Elkhorn Village cemetery.

Council granted a request from the Elkhorn District Community Centre to provide a letter of support for a grant application. The funding is intended for several capital improvements, including, construction of a Zamboni shed, replacement of a hot water tank and maintenance of the ice surface roof.

Fire Department Report

Coun. MacDonald attended the Wallace District Fire Department meeting and reported that Station 2 (Elkhorn) has had five calls in 2026 to date, including structure fires and motor vehicle incidents. Updates have included a new hall sign and replacement pylons. A training schedule has been set to the end of June followed by a summer break. Purchase of a thermal imaging camera is being considered with

quotes being gathered.

Station 1 has had 13 calls to date with six in Virden, six in Wallace-Woodworth, and one in Pipestone. Staffing stands at 29 members total, with 26 active, one lifetime member, one on leave, and one new recruit.

Weekly training sessions are continuing with nine members registered for Manitoba Emergency Services College (MESC) training and others progressing through Level 1. Three fire inspections have been completed since last month and a set of smoke detectors were handed out.

Cost pressures are a concern as the department is short about 10 uniforms and there is a need for new Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) including helmets and structural gloves. Fundraising efforts are ongoing, including a proposed community skit night. The department indicated its 2026 budget would remain unchanged, but an increase will likely be required in 2027.

Doctor Recruitment

Coun. MacDonald reported from the doctor recruitment and retention meeting that a medical student placement is scheduled for the Virden Health Centre from April 6-26, and three additional med-

ical students are expected between June and August. There are currently six doctors and one nurse practitioner, with a target of nine doctors. Rural Week this year will see four medical students arriving May 24. There will also be a cross-trained lab/X-ray worker arriving in the Hamiota medical facility by May 1.

Staff Recognition

Council recognized the retirement of two long-serving staff members, Denise Mayo and Ruth Mitchell, with 15 and 13 years of service respectively.

Benefit coverage vs rising costs

Coun. Caldwell stated that benefit coverage levels for the RM's medical insurance plan have remained unchanged for approximately 20 years, despite significant increases in service costs. She noted that therapy coverage remains capped at \$500 annually, while session costs have risen to \$175 and massage therapy now exceeds \$100 per session. This means that current coverage does not support even a few visits for mental health or other services. Premiums continue to rise, but benefits do not increase, leaving employees underinsured.

Very spirited VCI arm wrestling contest



SUBMITTED PHOTO

They had spirit week at VCI and part of that included trivia and an arm wrestling contest in the gym.



The arm wrestling contest has become a very popular event in the last 5 years at VCI. They usually do it at the Christmas banquet, but it was postponed this year due to inclement weather. This year's winner was Saunders Brown, who, after winning, went on to defeat Mr. Keown as well.

Rural partnership fuels STARS mission in Hamiota



PHOTO BY DALE DAVISON

Three \$2,500 cheques on the way to STARS. Representing Hamiota Community Foundation, Hamiota District Health Centre Foundation and Acres for Hamiota, (L-R) Eric Rawlings (HCF), Dale Brooks (HCF), Brent Fortune (HDHCF), Murray Lockhart (HCF), Mark Knight (AforH), Vaughn Wilson (HDHCF)

By Dale Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Last year the Shock Trauma Air Rescue Service (STARS) flew two missions to Hamiota. In addition, over the years, the community of Hamiota has supported the organization through a fuel cache to enable emergency equipment to be ready for its next patient.

STARS is a charitable not-for-profit organization that responds to emergency needs across the province. They draw their funding from government, individuals, service associations, businesses and charitable foundations.

On March 24, three Hamiota community groups got together to present STARS with three \$2,500 donations.

STARS originally applied for a grant from the Hamiota Community Foundation, who invest the contributions they receive and use the income earned to make grants to a wide range of charitable groups. Realizing that the need for rural emergency medical service is of critical importance, the Foundation decided to pull in more support.

They joined forces with Acres for Hamiota and the Hamiota District Health Centre Foundation that serves Miniota, Hamiota,

Oakview and Wallace-Woodworth. The \$7,500 grant to STARS was the result.

The grant application from STARS requested funding for a Hamilton T1 ventilator. This device is intended to provide critical respiratory support to severely ill or injured patients during transport. The ventilator is compact, portable, and highly versatile. It is designed for use in ambulances, helicopters, airplanes, and other medical transport situations.

In their grant application STARS noted that their operational policy is to reach patients by any means required. While helicopters are often associated with STARS, the organization says that it also uses airplanes and ground ambulances depending on the situation.

STARS plans to give back to the community by providing Hamiota area residents with education and safety training delivered directly in the community. This includes landing zone training for fire departments, site workers and first responders, as well as critical care simulation training for rural health care providers.

In 2025-26, STARS flew 1,233 missions in Manitoba. Over 1,200 Manitobans could be impacted by this project.

Working group says Veterinary Service Districts model needs change

Submitted
BY OAK LAKE NEWS

The Manitoba Agriculture working group held a public meeting in Souris, March 18, to gather input from farmers, veterinary board members, municipal representatives, veterinarians and the Manitoba Veterinary Medical Association regarding the current model of Veterinary Services Districts.

Dr. Wayne Lees is the chair of this group and RM of Sifton councillor Scott Phillips is a member. The first meeting was held in Fisher Branch, and the remainder will be held in Dauphin, Morden and Neepawa.

The working group will compile the feedback from each consultation and from interviews of the many stakeholders to formulate a report for Minister of Agriculture Ron Kostyshyn regarding the future of Veterinary Service Districts in rural Manitoba.

Presenters gave a short history lesson on veterinary services in Manitoba. In 1949 the Veterinary

Services Act became law. Many rural areas were lacking adequate veterinary care so in 1970, the Rural Manitoba Animal Hospital Program was established along with the Manitoba Veterinary Services Commission to oversee the fee schedule.

Clinics were built in underserved rural areas approximately 60 km apart on municipal land. Today there are 26 veterinary service districts in the province. Veterinarians sign service agreements with the districts and are allowed to use the buildings rent free to run their practices.

They agree to a fee schedule determined by the veterinary services commission. The provincial government and surrounding municipalities of each district contribute money for the upkeep and maintenance of these facilities.

Fast forward 50 years, some districts can no longer find veterinarians to staff clinics, other clinics have expanded and even acquired satellite offices, in other places veterinarians

have started to provide mobile services or have built private clinics.

Now many of the older government-built clinics need expensive upgrades to provide safe and optimal care. Standards for veterinary care have changed greatly in the last 50 years. Smaller practices struggle to attract new veterinarians due to huge on-call demands.

The working group asked the attendees whether they thought the current model of veterinary service districts should remain the same, be slightly changed or be done away with completely.

This led to some lively discussions. That the model needed to change came through quite clearly.

Attendees were also encouraged to complete an on-line questionnaire to gather more feedback. If you want to do the survey it can be found at: <https://engagemb.ca/rural-veterinary-medical-services/surveys/survey>. You can also email written comments to: vetdistricts2026@gov.mb.ca

No one leaves this community hungry



PHOTO BY NANCY JO MOLLER

Lining up for the assortment of delicious food prepared by local 4H members assisted by their families and local Lions members.

By Nancy Jo Moller
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Pipestone Community Center was a hub of activity Sunday morning, March 29, for their third Fundraising Brunch of the season. A few years ago, at a local Lion's Club meeting a member said, "we have to do something for the community." As

ideas were bounced across the table, brunch was mentioned. But then how could they do all the physical work when the membership was aging? This event organized by the Pipestone Lions has been made possible by the community spirit shown by the Pipestone 4H Beef Club. Their 'Helping Hands', along with parents and Lions members prepared a buffet styled brunch for local fundrais-

ing, in recognition of the Pipestone 4H Beef Club members efforts the Lions Club covers some costs for the 4H achievement.

The tables were full of delicious aromas. The pancakes were piled high and syrup came in small coffee carafes, quick to pour and everyone got an extra splash of sweet maple syrup. Bacon was crisp, sausages evenly browned and freshly scrambled eggs were the main items on the tables. While over 100 hungry individuals came through the door, the volunteers kept a steady stream of hot food available, and no one left hungry. If your sweet tooth wasn't satisfied by the carafes of pancake syrup, there was an assortment of cakes and fruit cocktail to complete the meal.

Coffee and assorted juices were sipped on as conversation flowed. Where cell phones are always in view, it was refreshing that few were visible, and everyone was visiting and enjoying the social event. The ages ranged from 2 to young at heart, no one shared their true age and the crowd caught up on local news in a relaxed atmosphere. Customers from Oak Lake to Melita sat at the tables, along with a few from points unknown. Newcomers were greeted with a smile, as were local residents.

The Pipestone 4H Beef Club has been operational for 86 years. The Pipestone 4H Beef Club currently has 20 members from age 6 to 18 years old. Their members exhibit the key aspects of 4H: Head for clearer thinking, Heart for greater loyalty, Hands for larger service and Health for better living. Local 4H clubs promote positive development, skills like responsibility and confidence while fostering community involvement and strong work ethic.

I Can Only Imagine 2: final gift to the community

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

On Tuesday March 24, with Easter and Good Friday just ahead, the final episode of the epic, The Chosen, Season 5 depicted scenes in Gethsemane-nightfall in Jerusalem, the clink of armoured soldiers, betrayal with a kiss.

Robert Eslinger says season 5 has been a satisfying journey:

"For the team organizing the presentation and the discussions including me, Rita, Brock, and Lorraine, this has been a great privilege.

"The Chosen is an amazing production that has attracted a huge following of Christians worldwide enabling a faith reawakening while at the same time providing a warm introduction to the curious. We love these, and each viewing can reveal a new truth. These take you there, and they never get stale.

"We want to thank all the friends, new and old, that came out to share this with us. These showings were the highlight of the week, and we eagerly await the arrival of season 6. In the meantime, folks can catch up or re-watch all 5 seasons again on Amazon's Prime streaming service."

The March 24 showing in Virden's Derrick Theatre was the capstone on eight shows. It left viewers with a taste of a double entendre, the olive garden in Gethsemane (meaning oil press), Jerusalem, AD 30 (possibly 33), and the pressure that Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ,

endured that night, knowing what was in store.

Season 6 is expected to be released world-wide in the fall of 2026. The crucifixion will show in theatres in the spring of 2027.

Furthermore, this spring, on April 7, Virden's sponsors of The Chosen will celebrate season 5's showing with a full-length movie finale - I Can Only Imagine 2. It's a free movie, a gift to the public, with the viewing starting at 7:30 AND, the concession will be open.

A very recent release (Feb. 20, 2026) I Can Only Imagine 2 is the sequel to the movie that followed Bart Millard's journey through defying circumstances to become a known and beloved singer songwriter of the track by that name, I Can Only Imagine.

The original movie released in 2018 was widely acclaimed. In an interview the host said the 2026 release might be better than the first movie, Millard almost agreed, saying of I Can Only Imagine 2, "It's better than I even thought it would be."

Millard keeps living an interesting life, so, I Can Only Imagine 2 continues Millard's story, where past issues threaten his career. When Millard meets Christian singer Tim Timmons, he rediscovers gratitude and seeks to restore his relationship with his wife and son.

Much like the first film, the sequel features a MercyMe song: Even If.

Lenore 4H Beef Club fundraising with country inspired items



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Lenore 4H Beef Club currently holding 'Member Made' Silent Auction.

By Nancy Jo Moller
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Clubs like this often have yearly fundraisers to cover expenses that they incur around achievement time. These costs can be judge and clinic honorariums, member uniforms, prizes and other incidentals. This year the Lenore Beef members decided to have a Member Made Silent Auction. The auction deadline for bids is April 6, 2026, at 12:15 am. Bids can be placed through www.32auctions.com Auction items involve the members' efforts, craftsmanship or have been donated by them. There are 24 items currently avail-

able with everything from Cattle Processing Helper, Framed Pictures, Babysitting, Pet Sitting, Freezer Meals and Meals delivered to the Field, Baking and a variety of other items. This variety shows the hard work that members are prepared to give to have their club succeed.

This local club has 30 members, ranging in age from 7 to 18, participating in their beef projects this year. They are showing steers, heifers, and continuation of heifer projects this year with achievement held on July 6, 2026, with the Interclub show being held on July 7, 2026, finishing with the sale of their steers. The mem-

bers care and feed their calves during the year. They are responsible for training them to lead, and preparing them to show which includes washing, trimming and hair finishing. 4H clubs hold monthly meetings, as well as other activities in and around the community. The members "Learn by Doing". Their members exhibit the key aspects of 4H: Head for clearer thinking, Heart for greater loyalty, Hands for larger service and Health for better living. Local 4H clubs promote positive development, skills like responsibility and confidence while fostering community involvement and strong work ethic.

Life in the slow lane

By Gerry Nolan
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

In the spring, the ball gloves came out and playing catch with our baseball was the order of the day. I have two brothers as you can see in the picture, Lynn the oldest who is 10 years older than me and Garth who is 7 years older than me. My brothers could throw much harder than I could, but I wanted to be included in catching the ball as well as throwing the ball. I guess I was a pest or in the way so they would suck me into playing some game where I would end up with my hands tied and tied to a tree. They would carry on playing catch. Mother was oblivious to my cry for help. After a while they would untie me and walk away. Game over! What great brothers I have, I love them dearly!

I am sharing some life stories with you from my youthful years as it will show how the world has changed just in my lifetime. From farming to technology, the landscape is much different now.

There was a lot more physical labour back in the day, as we did not have the machinery to do the work. That was in the future from when I was a lad.

In the 1970's, we still made sheaves using a binder. Stooking was just another form of exercise and using the threshing machine was fun even though pitching sheaves all day was hard work. Corn was seldom planted unless you had a dairy farm as it was fed for silage. I believe in the RM of Wallace-Woodworth there are no dairy farms

anymore. It is a far cry from when farmers hand milked cows. I think the most we hand milked at one time was 10. It made for strong wrists! Milking cows in the summer also meant a few smacks in the face from the cows swishing their tails to get the flies away. We usually sprayed the cows every night to keep those pesky insects away.

Summer also meant the haying season. Square bales were made, then hand-bombed a time or two, on to a rack and then built into stacks of bales. In 1959, a drought was upon us but 1961 would be worse. Dad purchased some hay bales from a farmer in the Oak Lake area. They were put together with wire. The farmer had a baler that used wire, thinner than high tensile wire that we use for fencing today. Those wire stringed bales made real good calluses and hurt the hands, but it was a job that had to be done.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Lynn at the back, around 13 yrs old, Garth around 10 yrs old and Gerry in front approx 3 yrs old. Picture taken in 1955.

I never saw a wire baler except on the internet, we never had that kind of bale again, I guess one time was enough. The upside was we never ran out of wire for a farmer fix, and I suppose even today there is some kind of haywire fix used.

Naturalists plan hawk watch near Virden

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Virден valley becomes a birdwatcher's destination on Saturday, April 11. The spring hawk watch is becoming a tradition where Westman Naturalists (WNI), a group based in Brandon, gathers at the Assiniboine lookout on Errol Road.

Information in their newsletter says, "Many species are making their way north for migration, and this weekend in April should give us a chance to see plenty of hawks riding thermals over the Assiniboine Valley north of Virден. We held our first spring hawk watch last year, so we'll see how the numbers compare a year (plus a week) later."

"Please bring a lawn chair if you have one, we will be sitting at one spot for a few hours. Snacks, coffee, etc. are a good idea, along with binoculars, camera, and/or a scope. We expect to be watching hawks until just after lunch or thereabouts."

The group anticipates arriving at the Virден lookout about 9am. To

find out more, email: contact@westmannaturalists.ca

Rivers Christmas bird count

Watchers reported sightings of 306 Bohemian waxwings and 303 Snow Buntings plus a few Robins that had made plans to winter over. The report lists 27 bird species.

The 2025 Rivers Christmas Bird Count took place on Sunday, Dec. 28, with 16 field counters out and about in the blowing snow, and eight feeder watchers keeping an eye out for birds in their yards.

WNI also report, that it was a good day for mammals, with a group of North American River Otters spotted by the dam, moose and white-tailed deer out on the grid roads, and at least one American red squirrel.

To find out more about the bird count in the Rivers area: westmannaturalists.ca/christmas_bird_counts

About WNI

Westman Naturalists Inc. membership is open to everyone who is interested in nature and the environment, and



PHOTO BY METRO CREATIVE

Hawk perched on fence post.

who support the club objectives - to offer nature-related educational opportunities, encourage study and protection of the natural world, collect nature-related data for statistical and educational purposes, and act as environmental stewards.

Membership is not required to participate in outings (such as hawk

watch) or presentations, or to receive WNI newsletters.

Membership has a minimal cost and helps support the activities of Westman Naturalists Inc.

The group organizes a number of events each year, several of which take place near Virден, Oak Lake and Whitewater marsh near Deloraine.

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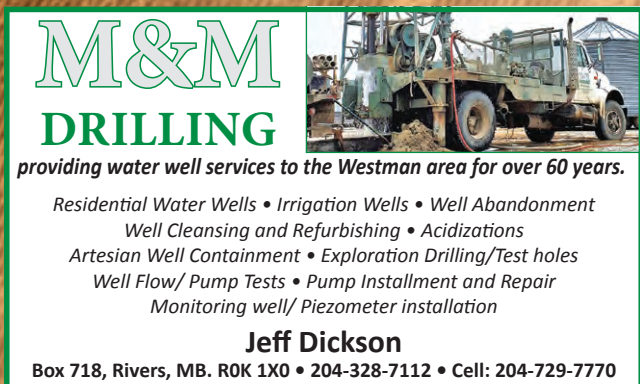
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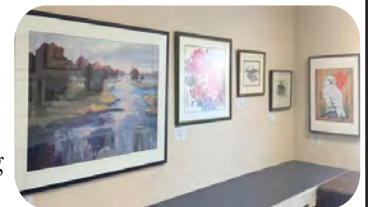
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New to Virden

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 at 305 Nelson Street in Virden.

Come in Monday to Friday 9-4 to see our offering of beautifully framed reasonably priced pieces including oils, water colours and prints. We plan to add more stock and possibly some art and curiosities!



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FORMER WINTER GAMES ATHLETE NOW SHAPING NEXT GENERATION ON THE ICE

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Twenty years after competing on the ice in the Manitoba Winter Games, former Virden resident Kaleigh Hole helped guide a talented group of skaters at the B.C. Winter Games.

The daughter of Howard and Patty Hole took part in figure skating at the 2006 Manitoba Winter Games in Beausejour. This past winter, Feb. 25-March 1, she was an assistant coach for the Zone 1 figure skating team at the B.C. Winter Games. The prestigious event was held in Trail and Rossland, where Hole now resides.

"The B.C. Winter Games were a great experience," she said. "Hosting the Games in the West Kootenays was very cool—seeing the communities vibrant and busy with all of the athletes and their families supporting them. I have only been in the Rossland area for about one and a half years, so it was fun to see how all of the small communities out here came together to make this event happen."

Head coach Ashley Ross led the Zone 1 figure skating squad. She was pleased to work with Hole.

"Kaleigh was a lot of fun to coach alongside, and she's been an incredible asset to the Kootenays," Ross said. "She brings fun energy and experience, which creates a fantastic environment when working with skaters in high-pressure settings, such as the B.C. Winter Games. I especially enjoyed seeing the connections she built with the skaters and other coaches."

Hole is in her second year as the head coach of the Rossland Figure Skating Club. She said:

"I am enjoying learning all of the aspects of being a head coach as I have always been just an assistant coach more so in the past, helping other coaches out when I could. The kids and parents here are so great, that it's been a great experience so far. We have grown the club a lot even from last year to this year, so hopefully we continue to do so."

During Hole's time with the club, her mother, who coached at the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, has come out to lead a seminar with her for the club's skaters. She said it "has been a really cool experience. I am so lucky to have her to lean on, continue to learn from, and ask questions when I need."

To the Rossland Figure Skating Club, Hole brings her own unique experience as a coach and also as an elite level skater and athlete. She has her Skate Canada provincial coach certification. A year after competing in the 2006 Manitoba Winter Games, Hole skated in the Canada Winter Games. Then, in 2013, she competed in the Canada Summer Games in heptathlon.

She skated at the Canadian National Skating Championships in both pairs and women's categories. Hole competed in the pairs event at Junior Worlds and on the Grand Prix circuit.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Kaleigh Hole, far right, was an assistant coach for the Zone 1 figure skating team at the B.C. Winter Games.

While attending Western University in London, Ont., she was a member of the Mustangs track and field team. Among the highlights of her successful career were winning the pentathlon title at the U Sports national championships and the Ontario University Athletics championships.

At Western University, Hole earned a kinesiology degree and a pedorthics diploma. The certified pedorthist started Sole to Summit Orthotics in October, 2024 when she moved to Rossland. She also conducts a remote clinic at Elite Physiotherapy in Trail.

Hole said it "has been a journey of starting my own business, learning about the community, engaging with the community. My practice is in a building with multiple other healthcare practitioners and I am so fortunate to be in there with a group of very motivating and wonderful people."

While attending Western

SKATE VIRDEN WRAPS UP WINTER SEASON WITH PROVINCIAL SUCCESS

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

With medals and personal bests, Skate Virden wrapped up its winter season at the provincial championships last month.

Of the organization's skater competing in the March 20-22 event in Stonewall, Skate Virden coach Patty Hole said, "All of them had really good results all around." The coach challenged her skaters and moved some who had successful seasons up a level for the provincial championships.

"This is the next step for next year. Where do you fit in? Those kids I moved up fit in very well, so we're setting ourselves up very nicely for next year, which is very exciting to see."

At provincials this year, Hole noticed what an asset it is for Skate Virden to have a team coaching approach. If one coach was busy at the event, skaters had other coaches to support them.

On the Skate Virden Facebook page, it was emphasized that "The skaters put in the time (on ice and off ice!) and their hard work and dedication was rewarded! Congratulations everyone - we are proud of you!" The club also expressed apprecia-

tion for Skate Manitoba and the hosts Skate Stony Mountain.

It was another successful winter season for Skate Virden. President Matthew Russell noted that the enrollment was similar to its previous season, "if anything we did see a slight increase which is always a good thing." The organization had several skaters who train in Virden compete at the Manitoba Winter Games or the Saskatchewan Winter Games. As well, Nate Greenbank competed in the Challenge Cup in Nova Scotia. These were just a couple of the season's highlights.

"I was extremely proud that we successfully hosted a Skate Manitoba sanctioned sectional event on top of our regularly held FunSkate competition... which leads me into the fact that our FunSkate generated record amounts in terms of skaters attending as well as funds raised for the club," Russell said. "These funds go directly into skater development, coaches development and to also allow our club to keep entry fees low, which is also why our member numbers keep increasing."

Top five results from the Manitoba provincials included: Free Skating -

STAR 7 - Women, Evie McAdam, Skate Virden, 4th; Singles - Pre-Novice Women - Short Program, Kaylee Malcolm, Elkhorn Figure Skating Club, 4th; Singles - Pre-Novice Women - Free Program, Kaylee Malcolm, Elkhorn Figure Skating Club, 3rd; Singles - Pre-Novice Men, Luke Greenbank, Skate Virden, 1st; Free Skating - STAR 5 - U10, Elizabeth Soroka, Skate Virden, 1st; Free Skating - Adult Silver - Women, Madelyn Taylor, Skate Virden, 2nd; Singles - Juvenile - Men - U12, Luke Greenbank, Skate Virden, 1st; Singles - Juvenile - Women - U14, Mia du Plessis, Skate Virden, 1st; Free Skating - STAR 4 - Girls - A U10, Ava McAdam, Skate Virden, 4th; Free Skating - STAR 4 - Girls - B U10, Talaya Dangstorp, Skate Virden, 2nd; Free Skating - STAR 4 - Girls - A U13, Brynlee Boyd, Skate Virden, 3rd; Free Skating - STAR 4 - Girls - C U13, Locklynn Hayward, Skate Virden, 4th; Elements - STAR 5 - A, Elizabeth Soroka, Skate Virden, 3rd; Elements - STAR 5 - B, Jovie Kenderdine, Skate Virden, 3rd; and Synchronized - Adult SyS II, Virden Velocity, 3rd; Synchronized - STAR 4, Virden Velocity Youth, 5th.



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SPORTS

VERSATILE ROOKES POWERS WOLVERINES, EYES NEXT LEVEL

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Manson's Kurt Rookes is thrilled to be playing his final junior campaign

close to home.

After two seasons in the Western Hockey League, the son of Mike and Leanne Rookes is back where his junior career started - with the Waywayseecappo Wolverines of the Manitoba Junior Hockey League. During the regular season, the alternate captain finished third on the Wolverines in scoring. In the first round of the playoffs, Rookes helped Waywayseecappo to a 4-0 first-round sweep of the Dauphin Kings. Rookes' strong play has earned him an opportunity at the next level as he recently committed to the University of Regina.

"Being back with the Wolverines has been awesome," he said. "Being close to home and playing with guys who I've grown up playing with is always the best."

Rookes has played both forward and defence for the Wolverines this winter. He was named the MJHL's Defenceman of the Month for October, but also has been a key contributor up front at times. It is not an easy task to play both positions, but Rookes has handled it with aplomb. Waywayseecappo head coach Landyn Cochrane said:

"What's helped him succeed is his high compete level and willingness to embrace whatever role the team needs. He communicates well and brings the same intensity regardless of where he's playing."

No matter which position Rookes has played, he has produced. During the regular season, he posted junior career highs of 11 goals, 46 assists, and 57 points in 57 games. In the playoffs, as of March 28, the 6-foot, 188-pounder had two goals and three points in four games. That production helped the Wolverines advance to the second round of the playoffs for the first time in franchise history. Waywaysee-

cappo will take on the Niverville Nighthawks.

"This season, I feel I have been able to produce offensively due to me having more confidence and playing more free. Landyn Cochrane has allowed me to expand the offensive side of my game by putting me in good scenarios and with good players," said Rookes, who has also maintained a physical edge, leading the Wolverines in penalty minutes with 173 in the regular season.

His physical play and offensive talents will both help him at the next level on the ice. In addition to being excited about playing for the Cougars at the U Sports level, Rookes is looking forward to studying at the Hill School of Business.

"The University of Regina has been a school I have been interested in for quite some time now. With it being close to home for me, a good degree, and allowing me to play in the top university league in Canada, it is a very good opportunity. After having numerous conversations with head coach Trevor Keeper, it solidified my decision to commit to the U of R."

The Cougars are pleased to add Rookes. On the team's website, Keeper stated:

"Kurt is the kind of player coaches love because he can do a little bit of everything and plays with an edge. He's played forward, he's played defence, and he's produced in both of those roles. That versatility will give us a lot of options and we're excited to welcome him to our program in the fall."

While university hockey is his future, Rookes is focused on helping his team win and enjoying his final junior days. The former Yellowhead Chiefs AAA player was the Wolverines' Rookie of the Year in 2023. Over the last two seasons, Rookes battled his way into roles with the WHL's Wenatchee (Wash.) Wild (2023-24) and Swift Current Broncos (2024-25).

"There will be many memories that I will look back on



PHOTO BY MATTHEW HIGGS/WAYWAYSEECAPPO WOLVERINES
Kurt Rookes celebrates a goal during the playoffs for the Waywayseecappo Wolverines.

... I felt that I have had a very exciting and broad junior career, taking me from Manitoba to Washington," Rookes said. "If I had to pinpoint one area that I will look back on the most, it will have to be the memories I've made with the different groups of guys. That's what junior is all about and you can't replace that."

When he ties up his skates in the Queen City and everywhere else the Cougars play during the next step in his hockey journey, Rookes knows he will have the strong support of his family.

"My family has been very important throughout my junior career. They have seen countless games from Wayway to Wenatchee—there weren't many games that they missed. Knowing I have that type of support behind me allowed me to get where I am today."

OIL CAPS FACE PISTONS IN MJHL SEMIFINAL SERIES

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

After toppling the Neepawa Titans, the Virden Oil Capitals now shift gears

to face the Steinbach Pistons with a Turnbull Cup finals berth on the line.

The Manitoba Junior Hockey League team swept the Titans 4-0 in the opening round of the playoffs. With the four first-round survivors seeded by regular-season record, the No. third-seeded Oil Caps will meet the No. 2 Pistons.

"It will be a tough matchup, they all are at this time of the year, but they should be exciting games," Virden head coach Tyson Ramsey said. "Both teams have speed, skill and depth, so it will be a great series."

The Oil Capitals will open on the road, with Games 1 and 2 set for April 3 and 4 in Steinbach. The series shifts to Virden for Games 3 and 4 on April 7 and 8. If necessary, Game 5 would be April 10 in Steinbach, Game 6 April 12 in Virden and Game 7 April 14 in Steinbach.

The Oil Capitals won the MJHL's MGEU West Division in the regular season with a 39-14-3-2 record and 83 points. With 96 points and a 47-9-2-0 record, the Pistons finished second in the MGEU East Division to the Niverville Nighthawks (51-6-1-0, 103 points), who now face the Waywayseecappo Wolverines (29-24-3-2, 63 points) in round two. Steinbach beat the Portage Terriers 4-1 in the first round. Against the Pistons, the Oil Capitals will look to stick with what has been effective: fast, physical, structured hockey.

"We feel when we play our game with a foundation of compete, we can have success against anybody," Ramsey said.

Oil Caps Sweep

The Oil Capitals were dominant in round one against the Titans. Ramsey said, "I really liked the way we stuck to our game plan no matter what was happening at the moment. We got great goaltending, our special teams were good and we got production from up and down the lineup."

The Virden squad outscored the Titans 23-6. Oil Caps goalie Braxton Burdeny backstopped the team to all four first round wins and posted a 1.50 goals against average and a .933 save percentage.

"What allowed us to limit our goals against this series was definitely our offence," Burdeny said. "We spent so much time in the offensive zone that we really limited the Titans' shots on goal. Then, when they were in our zone, we did such a good job of shutting down plays and breaking pucks out cleanly, and when it came down to it, everyone was selling out and blocking shots. Even when I would give up a goal, no one got upset or stressed out by it, they just all kept the energy up and we kept finding ways to score right back."

Hometown forward Bryce Bryant led the Oil Capitals in the first round with eight points in four games. Rookie forward Dysen Drake recorded seven points to place second in scoring. Drake and Moosomin's Marshall Light each had a team-high four goals.

Game Four

Oil Caps 7, Titans 2

On the road on March 26, the Oil Capitals used a four-goal second period to end the Titans' season. Bryant led the way with two goals and two assists for four points.

"It was good to close it out," Bryant said. "It really shows how much our team wants it...also using it to our advantage to get some extra rest in and practice time before round two starts"

Drake recorded a goal and two assists. Also scoring for Virden were Carson Wright, Bryan Laing, Austin Osiowy, and Colten Worthington. Oliver Schroeder and Liam Goertzen each had two assists. Burdeny made 17 saves, while Neepawa's Zach Burleigh had 22. Scoring for the Titans were Kyke Weisgarber and Logan Paquette.

Game Three

Oil Caps 6, Titans 3

In front of 847 fans, the host Oil Capitals outscored

the Titans 3-1 in the third period to secure a 6-3 victory to take a 3-0 series stranglehold. Light netted a hat trick and racked up four points. Brooks Siemens recorded four assists, while Tyson Ulmer had three.

Regarding the team's offensive prowess, Light said, "We just put lots of pucks on net and made some nice plays and were lucky enough to score quite a few."

The Oil Caps held a 3-2 lead after the first period. Captain Tyson Plaisier, Cohen Lewko and Light scored for Virden. Talen Lewis and Jack Clark had Neepawa's goals in the period.

In the third period, London Hoilett and Light scored to increase Virden's lead to 5-2. Paquette got a goal for Neepawa, but Light completed his hat trick.

Burdeny made 18 saves. Neepawa's KC Couckuyt stopped 41 shots.

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SPORTS

THE ROCKETS' LAUNCH PAD HELPS IMPROVE BASEBALL SKILLS



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Batter Up! Practice began in February for local teams.

By Nancy Jo Moller
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Three years ago, when curling participation was decreasing in Reston, a progressive group of individuals from the Reston Minor Ball Board brought forward an innovative idea. The "Rockets' Launch Pad" is located in the east end of the curling rink in the Reston Rec Plex, Reston, MB. Their idea was to convert the ice pad of the local curling rink to the "Rockets' Launch Pad". Fundraising and a significant donation from a local resident allowed this idea to become reality. Rent for this facility is paid to the Reston Rec Plex with membership fees and fundraising which is continuing to finance the venture with excess

funds being applied to local recreational projects. The current contract is running for the next two years.

The Launch Pad is an excellent practice venue for residents and minor ball teams to enhance their skills in winter months. The former ice pad has been covered with outdoor lawn bowling turf to mimic a playing field. One end of it has been converted into a batting cage, pitching tunnel, as well as a dry pad area to train on this along with the sheet area enables participants to practice pitching, hitting, and ground balls during winter months in a comfortable indoor environment.

The Launch Pad is open February to May each year providing minor ball teams with a practice area.

Individuals from Killarney, Deloraine, Melita and Virden regions are currently booking this venue. Baseball camps are run for the 15 and under-age groups with the current one running from March to mid-April.

Because the Launch Pad area is a part of a multipurpose facility, all equipment is easily removed to allow other social events to use the same space, 72 hours' notice is required for rentals. So, this building stays as cost effective as possible.

The level of dedication of the Reston Minor Ball board and members is a shining example of what can be done if the community works together for a common goal.



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Winter Catches keep talented players in shape.

REF MEMORIES

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I was watching the Winnipeg Jets game against the Colorado Avalanche the other night when there was interference on the Winnipeg goalie. After review, the official determined it was a good goal. This reminded me of a time when I faced a similar action, but with no replay. I signalled a good goal and, of course, the team scored on was not happy, especially the goalie. He said he was pushed into the net and was not able to stop the puck. I said I would ask my linemen and see what they saw. After conferring with my linesmen, they both agreed that he had been pushed into the net, so I waved off the goal. Oddly enough the team that had scored did not

say anything at all.

The National Hockey League Goaltender Interference rule states that the goals will be disallowed if an attacking player, through positioning or contact, impairs the goalie's ability to defend their goal or move freely within the crease.

It covers intentionally, unintentionally, and incidental contact, generally protecting the goalie in the crease. The key aspects of rule 69.

Crease protection

Goals are usually overturned if an attacking player makes contact with a goalie in the crease, accidental or otherwise.

Intentional contact

Any intentional contact occurs outside the crease or inside the

crease results in a disallowed goal and potentially a penalty.

Incidental contact

If contact occurs outside the crease. The goal may count if the attacker was making a reasonable effort to avoid contact.

Defending action

If an attacker is pushed or fouled by a defender into the goalie, it is usually not considered interference.

Incidental Position

Being in the crease does not automatically negate a goal, contact that hinders a goalie must occur.

The overriding rationale of the rule is that a goaltender should have the ability to move freely in his goal crease without being hindered by the actions of an attacking player. If the attacking player enters the goal crease and by his actions, impairs the goaltender's ability to defend his goal, and a goal is scored, the goal will be disallowed.

Nathan MacKinnon scored a goal against the Winnipeg Jets that the Jets wanted it reviewed

for goalie interference. The goal was called a good goal by the official. Any interference call is the toughest because who interfered.

On the play, Nathan MacKinnon touched the puck with his stick before it got to the Winnipeg goalie. It looked like MacKinnon's stick then hit the Winnipeg goalie's glove, but did it? To the naked eye it looked like it did. Unless the official had been right on top of the goal crease he would not know for sure if there was interference and replay would not show it. Kinda one of those things that happen, and depending on who you are cheering for whether it is right or wrong.

The National Hockey League is so inconsistent with this call, even with review. Maybe they need to go back to the old ringette crease to make it more clear!

Watch the playoffs which begin around the middle of April, there will be lots of controversy!

TORONTO BLUE JAYS 2026

By Gerry Nolan
EMPIRE-ADVANCE



The boys of summer are back and the regular season began this week. The defending American League Champions the Toronto Blue Jays season began on Friday, March 27 in Toronto against the Oakland Athletics. Coming off from a world series appearance last season, the team is ready to defend their championship. If the first couple of games are any indication of what is to come this season, hang onto your hat, it is going to be exciting. Here is the opening day roster for 2026 Toronto Blue Jays.

The pitchers are Kevin Gausman, Dylan Cease, Mason Fluharty, Jeff Hoffman, Eric Lauer, Brendan Little, Spencer Miles, Tommy Nance, Cody Ponce, Tyler Rogers, Louis Varland, Braydon Fisher and Mad Max Scherzer!

The catchers are Alejandro Kirk and Tyler Heineman.

Infielders are Ernie Clement, Andres Gimenez, Vladimir Guerrero Jr. and Kazuma Okamoto.

The outfielders are

Addison Barger, Nathan Lukes, Jesus Sanchez, Davis Schneider, George Springer, Myles Straw and Dalto Varsho.

There are 5 players on the injured list which include Shane Bieber, Yimi Garcia, Jose Berrios, Anthony Santander and last season's rookie sensation Trey Yesavage.

John Schneider is the bench boss.

For the first time in a long time we will not see Buck Martinez along with Dan Shulman doing the play by play on Toronto Blue Jay television. Buck Martinez retired in February as he is having some health problems. Canadian baseball fans thank Buck for all the years he was involved with the Blue Jays. We wish you a speedy recovery with your health issues and thank you so much for your contributions to baseball in Canada.

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MJHL REPORT



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MJHL HOCKEY

DEREK HOLTOM

Well that was quick, wasn't it? Three of the four first-round series were completed in as short a time as possible as the Virden Oil Capitals, Waywayseecappo Wolverines and the Niverville Nighthawks swept their first-round series.

As a result the second round matchups are set, both featuring East Division teams being the top seed versus West Division opponents. Here's a preview of the second round series.

Waywayseecappo Wolverines vs. Niverville Nighthawks
This second-round matchup features two teams who won their first-ever best-of-seven quarter-final series. It also means that the MJHL will have a new first-time league finalist this year.

The odds-on favourite is the MJHL's top seeded Niverville Nighthawks. They only lost six games in regulation in the regular season and none in the first round of the playoffs. They out-scored the Winkler Flyers 17-5 and were led by forward Marlen Edwards (seven assists), forward Adam Vigfusson (four goals, two assists, six points), and defenseman Aaron Krestanowich (one goal, five assists, six points).

The Wolverines enter the second round having swept the Dauphin Kings in a series that saw two games go to overtime. Wayway scored 14 goals in four games, led by Sebastien Hicks (four goals, one assist, five points), Dylan Duzan (three goals, one assist, four points), and both Kurt Rookes and Cole Hunter who each had two goals and three points. Ben Roulette also chipped in five assists. And Jace Wareham was rock-solid posting a 1.63 GAA and a .951 save percentage.

Wayway completed a historic feat by beating the Dauphin Kings but the Niverville Nighthawks are a whole different story. The top seed had a decided advantage, but one need only look back a year to see that major upsets can and do happen in the playoffs.

Virden Oil Capitals versus Steinbach Pistons
The Oil Capitals easily disposed of the Neepawa Titans in the first round, out-scoring them 23-6 in their four-game series. Rookie Dysen Drake (seven points) and Marshall Light (six points) each had four goals to lead the Oil Capitals in goal scoring in the first round, while Bryce Bryant had eight points (three goals, five assists, eight points) to lead the team in this category.

The Steinbach Pistons are the only team who didn't sweep their first-round opponent. The Pistons advanced Saturday night with a 2-0 shutout over the Portage Terriers, winning the series in five games – they lost the opener on home ice and then rattled off four straight wins to advance. They were led by first-round playoff scoring leader defenseman Liam Doyle who had 10 points (four goals, six assists), forward Jackson Kostiuik (six goals, two assists, eight points), forward Sam Noad (two goals, five assists, seven points), and forward Brett Kaiser (seven assists). Goaltender Chris Quizi is the only goaltender entering the second round who didn't have a goal against average under 2.00 as he sports a 2.01 and a .938 save percentage.


The Pistons had the toughest matchup in the first round and should be dialed in for the Oil Capitals.



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VCI Choir entertains around town



Choir sings at Bolton Place.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

Submitted

By KRISTA PEDERSON

The VCI choir, under the direction of Luke Munchinsky, entertained around town on March 20th.

Their spring "mini tour" included Evergreen Place, the Sherwood PCH, Princess Lodge, and Bolton Place.

As the large choir found their spaces, the appreciative audience hushed to enjoy the sounds.

The selection of music was varied, from familiar classics and folk songs to newer arrangements from

modern musicals.

Each was performed professionally, and beautifully.

The choir has been rehearsing since the start of the school year in September, and is on the last stretch now, leading to end of school in June. Watch for spring concerts, festival, and of course the high school musical.

You are sure to enjoy the sweet sounds of a cohesive group, thoughtfully performing beautiful music... right here in our town... Lucky us!!!

Manitoba and Saskatchewan talk water

By Anne Davison

EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Land is a golden commodity, and agricultural producers eye every acre that can be protected from high water and put into crop. When water is drained from one area, it's downhill path can lead to ongoing strain between neighbours.

A recent meeting bringing together watershed and municipal representatives from Manitoba and Saskatchewan served as a restart of regional discussions on water management, focusing on areas stretching from Roblin, Manitoba, south to the U.S. border along Highway 83, and from Kamsack, Saskatchewan, south along Highway 8.

Last week's meeting of the Saskatchewan-Manitoba Drainage and Watershed Management Committee in Virden drew together representatives from rural municipalities and water management partners along the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border.

Ahead of the meeting, Sean Osmar with Saskatchewan's Water Security Agency explained "There is a joint commitment to collaborate on shared water management interests, enhance communication between jurisdictions and work collectively toward practical solutions."

Scott Phillips, councillor for the RM of Sifton and Vice-President of the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, noted that the meeting included a mix of veteran and newly elected councillors, and served as a refresher on ongoing water issues affecting the region.

"This meeting discussed BOTH flood mitigation and erosion control, as well as water retention as droughts are crippling as well," he said.

For the RM of Wallace-Woodworth, councillor Lyle Kinnard listened to the legislation requirements for each province. He said that on the

surface, the two systems are not drastically different, although Manitoba has historically been more restrictive and controlled in its approach.

He says that a key distinction lies in geography: Saskatchewan's regulations are designed to move water into established waterways in a controlled manner.

"The difference is that we're downstream from them... That waterway comes to us," Kinnard added "And whoever is controlling it, whether it's a town or a city or farmers, there's costs to holding too much back, too. So, it's a difficult discussion, really, when it comes down to it."

He said it was a well-run meeting and discussion around each table focussed on what changes are needed or what's missing in the system.

Manitoba's water regulations mean that municipalities are restricted from altering culvert sizes or elevations without proper authorization.

There has been a perception that Saskatchewan operates under more relaxed drainage rules. However, it was acknowledged that both provinces face challenges, and while drainage on private property is also under regulations, Phillips says enforcement remains largely complaint-driven. As a result, questionable drainage practices can still occur, particularly given the limited capacity for provincial staff to investigate every concern in the field.

"Both sides need to up their game on questionable drainage," said Phillips.

While there is strong support for agricultural producers maximizing land use, councillors emphasized that drainage must be managed responsibly to avoid dam-

age to infrastructure. This includes impacts on private land, municipal systems, watershed projects, and provincial infrastructure.

From a municipal perspective, a key issue raised at the meeting was that formal approval for licensing does not include municipalities, but municipalities own road allowances and bear infrastructure risks.

Kinnard said, "We were recommending that RMs be part of the approval process, just because of culverts and roads washing out and that sort of thing."

Phillips identified a common theme - the value of communication. He said there needs to be transparency between grassroots municipalities and collaboration on joint projects. "Water, crime, (and) weather doesn't respect road 174W (Man.-Sask. border), so we need to keep each other in the loop on items of joint interest."

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Obituary

IN LOVING MEMORY ROBERT BLAIR THOMSON



It is with great sadness, we announce the passing of our Dad, Grandpa and Great Papa, Robert Blair Thomson on Tuesday, January 6th, 2026 in his 89th year, following a brief stay at the Moosomin Hospital.

Robert, more affectionately known as "Bob" was born on January 22nd, 1937 to Robert & Constance Thomson at Portage La Prairie. He was a big brother to Elaine. During his younger years, Bob worked numerous jobs, particularly on elevators that would take him across the prairies. While home during the holidays, Bob attended a Christmas concert and met a young teacher, Dorothy Woodcock. Bob & Dorothy were married in August of 1959. From their marriage they had four children; Dale, Jamie, Kim and Darren.

The family moved around quite a bit due to Bob's work before settling down in Cromer in 1963. In the spring of 1969, the family moved and settled in Elkhorn.

Bob worked at numerous jobs including working as a mechanic for Delmar Nylin and Rod Coutts and continued driving the school bus for the Fort La Bossé School Division. It was a job that brought him so much enjoyment over his 31 years before retiring in 1998.

Bob enjoyed watching sports on tv, especially cheering on the Toronto Blue Jays. He followed the McAuley Blazers baseball team for years. In his younger years, he enjoyed curling, even managed to get an 8 ender. Bob and Dorothy cheered on the Brandon Wheat Kings, attending their games for many years. They also cheered on their own kids and grandkids playing sports.

Bob & Dorothy enjoyed travelling and made numerous trips out to AB & BC to visit family & friends. They enjoyed a trip to Hawaii, and a couple trips down to Branson. They always made an effort to visit family and friends in Killarney & Portage, especially cherishing his friendships with Donald & Christine Jackson and Ronnie & Marilyn Perchak.

An avid music lover, whether it was listening to fiddling on CJOB or travelling around with Hartley and numerous friends to take in the live fiddling music. You could also find Bob & Dorothy traveling to see a Daniel O'Donnell show.

Bob spent many years volunteering at the Elkhorn Cemetery as a way of being close to his boys and later on Dorothy. He always went to open the gates in the morning, put the flag up and close them in the evening so "nobody would get out as he would say."

Bob was a lifetime member of the Elkhorn Elk's Lodge. He took a lot of pride in the hall whether it was polishing the floors, doing odds and ends and cleaning up after the events held at the hall. It was there that he & Jim Shackle became life long friends along with other members of the lodge.

In 2015, Bob faced his biggest challenge when Dorothy passed away. Following a lengthy hospital stay in the fall of 2023, Bob moved to the Elkview Lodge. He quickly settled in and began to realize the move wasn't too bad at all. He had a great crew there which made him feel very welcome. Whether it was doing puzzles, having coffee or meals together, they all looked out for one another like one big family.

Bob will be lovingly remembered by his daughter Jamie (Billy) Martin, granddaughter April, grandson Billy Jr. & his wife Anwen, great grandsons Maverick & Bennett, daughter Kim Rowan (Glen), grandson Blair, great granddaughter Isabella, great grandson Mason and his mom Kristine and granddaughter McKenzie.

Bob was predeceased by his beloved wife Dorothy (2015) after 55 years of marriage, his son Dale (1992), his son Darren (1997), his sister and brother-in-law Elaine & Bryan Kramble, his parents Robert & Constance Thomson, stepdad Edward Bennett and his extended family and his in-laws James & Florence Woodcock.

The funeral service was held at the Elkhorn Elk's Hall on Wednesday, January 14th with Cheryl Sisson officiating. The interment was at Elkhorn Cemetery with granddaughter April Martin being the Urn Bearer. Ushers were Kevin Tutthill & Delbert Bowles. Kevin Tutthill shared words on behalf of the Elks and did the Eleven O'clock service. The eulogy & powerpoint was done by April. Everyone in attendance were considered Honorary Pall Bearers. Lunch was provided by the Plainview Colony members with the Elks serving it following the service. The great grandchildren were all presented with a "Bob the Bear" which were made from shirts that their Great Papa/Grandpa used to wear. For when they hold it close, he will always be near.

If friends so desire, memorial tributes may be made to the Elkhorn Cemetery or The Elks Purple Cross Fund for Children in memory of Bob.

The family of Bob Thomson wishes to thank everyone for their many acts of kindness shown to our families during this very sad & difficult time. Special thanks to Cheryl Sisson for the beautiful service, the ushers Kevin & Delbert and to everyone who attended the service. We cannot thank you enough April for the beautiful tribute you put together to honour your Grandpa. The eulogy and power point was just perfect, thank you for creating such a special way for us to say good-bye! Thanks Kevin for sharing words on behalf of the Elks. Dad always thought very highly of you and the Elks. He was very appreciative for everything you did for him and for always including him in any of the special activities. Thank you for the use of the hall and helping serve the lunch. We would like to thank Peter David & his wife Andrea and the members of Plainview Colony for providing the delicious lunch after the service. The friendship shown to Mom & Dad over the years is something we will cherish and we can't thank you enough. Thank you to those who made charitable donations to the Elkhorn Cemetery and the Elks Purple Cross Fund for Children in Dad's name. Both charities had a special place in his heart! Special thanks to Carscadden's Funeral Home for guiding us during our time of sorrow.

A big thank you to the wonderful home-care staff for your care! It helped him to stay "home" as long as he could and he enjoyed your banter and visits everyday. To Bert, Ada and Ken, thank you for taking dad under your wing and helping ease his transition during his move. He thought the world of all of you at the lodge. It was always reassuring knowing their was an extra set of eyes keeping an eye on him. Kristina, thank you for keeping him fed, he always enjoyed your lunches! To his past & present neighbours on Wilson St., thank you will never be enough! Thanks for everything you did for him! To Delbert & Sally, thank you for all you have done for Mom & Dad over the years. We would worry a little less when dad was on his own being surrounded by such great neighbours! Lastly, thank you to Dr. Crouse for caring for dad all these years. He admired your professionalism and kind demeanour. To Dr. Roets, Dr. Stephanie and the nurses and staff at SEICC, thank you for the care dad received during his stay and the compassion provided to our family as we said good-bye.

Dad loved nothing more than visiting with anyone everywhere he went. We are so lucky dad had the support and friendships of so many in the community. We will miss him dearly and cherish our memories and stories we have of him!

Love Jamie, Kim & families

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Thank-you

Thank-you

Thank you to our family, friends & neighbours for the many acts of kindness expressed to our family during the passing of our Dad, Grandpa, & Great Papa "Bob Thomson". We would like to thank those who came to visit, graciously sent meals, baking, meat trays/buns, gift cards, gifts, beautiful flower arrangements, cards and charitable donations made in dad's name



during this very sad & difficult time. Special thank you to the Plainview Colony & Boundary Lane School staff for your understanding and compassion during our time of need. All the phone calls, texts, and emails we received were greatly appreciated. We are so lucky to live in such a caring community. We are truly grateful!

Billy & Jamie, April, Billy Jr. & Anwen and Maverick & Bennett Martin

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R.M. of Wallace-Woodworth Municipal Office located at 154023 PR257 between March 30, 2026 and April 10, 2026 Monday to Friday between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

At this time, the Senior Election Official (SEO) will be available to update the voters list by:

- (a) adding the names of voters who are entitled to have their names on the list;
- (b) deleting the names of persons who are not entitled to have their names on the list; and
- (c) making such other correction of errors to the list as required.

VOTER ELIGIBILITY:

A person is eligible to have his or her name added to the Voters List if he or she is:

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APPLICATION FOR PERSONAL SECURITY PROTECTION

A voter may apply in writing to the SEO (at the address/email below) no later than September 22, 2026 to have his/her name and other personal information omitted or obscured from the voters list in order to protect the voter's personal security. The application may be submitted in person, by mail or email and must include your name, address, and include proof of identity.

All changes to the voters list must be completed on or before **September 22, 2026**.

Dated at the R.M. Wallace-Woodworth Municipal Office in the Province of Manitoba, on March 27, 2026.

Braden Pilling, SEO
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Virden, MB R0M 2C0
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Help Wanted



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

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
- Answer and direct phone calls, emails, and general inquiries
- Receive, process, and receipt payments in accordance with municipal policies
- Assist with utility billing, changes of ownership, and related records
- Handle incoming and outgoing mail, deliveries, and document filing
- Provide administrative support to municipal departments including Utilities and Transportation
- Cross-training to provide coverage at other municipal offices (Kenton and Elkhorn) as required
- Active role in the Municipal Safety Program
- Uphold a strict level of confidentiality
- All other duties as assigned

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 Public Works 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.

Description and Qualifications

- Permanent, part-time position (currently at 14 hours/week winter, 17 hours/week summer).
- Must be willing to work Saturdays, and one evening per week during the summer months.
- Direct all users to appropriate disposal or storage locations for all items being disposed.
- Ensure source separation of garbage and recyclables.
- Accept tires, general scrap iron, and spray containers; store at proper locations and keep area tidy.
- Assist in transferring or disposing of waste, as required.
- Maintain daily records of waste entering the disposal site.
- Keep all buildings and areas of the landfill site clean and well maintained.
- Collect fees from non-ratepayers using the facility.
- Ensure that fires are not set and all controlled burns are supervised and recorded.
- Report all concerns to the Chief Administrative Officer and Public Works Superintendent.
- Other duties, as required.
- Must be punctual, motivated, self-starter, and able to work without supervision.
- Good interpersonal skills to deal politely and effectively with the general public.
- Ability to meet physical demands of the position and have an excellent safety record.
- Class 5 Driver's License required.

LANDFILL SITE ATTENDANT ~ HARGRAVE & KOLA

The R.M. of Wallace-Woodworth is seeking a motivated individual for the position of **Landfill Site Attendant** for the Hargrave and Kola Nuisance Grounds location. The Landfill Site Attendant assists the Public Works 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

- Full-time position
- Must be willing to work Saturdays, and one evening per week during the summer months.
- Direct all users to appropriate disposal or storage locations for all items being disposed.
- Ensure source separation of garbage and recyclables.
- Accept tires, general scrap iron, and spray containers; store at proper locations and keep area tidy.
- Assist in transferring or disposing of waste, as required.
- Maintain daily records of waste entering the disposal site.
- Keep all buildings and areas of the landfill site clean and well maintained.
- Ensure that fires are not set and all controlled burns are supervised and recorded.
- Report all concerns to the Public Works Superintendent and Chief Administrative Officer.
- Other duties, as required.
- Must be punctual, motivated, self-starter, and able to work without supervision.
- Good interpersonal skills to deal politely and effectively with the general public.
- Ability to meet physical demands of the position and have an excellent safety record.
- Class 5 Driver's License required.

Interested candidates should submit a resume with three professional references by:

E-mail: info@wallace-woodworth.com

Mail/Drop-off: R.M. of Wallace-Woodworth Municipal Office

154023 PR 257 Box 2200 (Corner of 83 Hwy & PR 257) Virden, MB R0M 2C0

We appreciate your interest in this position. Applications will be accepted until the position is filled. However, only those applicants chosen for an interview will be contacted.

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NDP's Budget fails Manitobans when they need relief most

By Greg Nesbitt

MLA FOR RIDING MOUNTAIN

As the MLA for Riding Mountain, I have heard directly from families, seniors, farmers, and small business owners across our region, and their message is clear: life is becoming less affordable, and they need help. Unfortunately, the NDP's 2026 budget fails to provide that relief.

At a time when Manitobans are struggling with the rising cost of groceries, fuel, and housing, this government has chosen not to ease the burden but instead to increase it. By cancelling the indexation of the Basic Personal Amount and personal income tax brackets, the NDP is quietly taking more money off every paycheque. This decision alone will generate hundreds of millions of dollars in additional tax revenue, paid for by families already stretched to their limits.

And while the NDP has pointed to changes around the PST on certain grocery items as relief, the reality is that the savings are minimal and do little to offset the broader increases Manitobans are facing every time they shop for essentials.

I believe Manitobans deserve a clear and meaningful alternative. That is why our Progressive Conservative team has been advocating to raise the Basic Personal Amount to \$30,000. This is a straightforward, principled approach: let people keep more of what they earn. By increasing the amount of income that is completely tax-free, we would deliver broad-based relief to every taxpayer in Manitoba.

For a working family, it means more money in every paycheque right away, money that can help cover groceries, rent or mortgage payments, childcare, and fuel. For seniors on fixed incomes, it means greater financial security. For young people starting their careers, it provides a stronger foundation to build their future here in Manitoba.

This approach would also make Manitoba more competitive. Lowering the tax burden on individuals helps attract and retain skilled workers, including healthcare

professionals, tradespeople, and entrepreneurs. At a time when we are struggling to recruit doctors and nurses, the last thing we should be doing is increasing the tax load on those we are trying to bring into our province.

Instead, this budget does the opposite. It raises the tax burden and fails to provide a path forward for real relief.

The NDP also promised not to raise taxes. Yet we are seeing increases to school taxes and rising education property taxes. In fact, education property taxes have skyrocketed and many homeowners are paying more, but they are not being shown a clear plan to improve education outcomes or provide long-term relief.

In rural Manitoba, agriculture is the backbone of our economy. Yet this budget fails to support producers who are facing rising input costs and uncertainty. If we are serious about addressing food prices and growing our economy, we must support our agricultural sector. This government has not done so.

Manitobans are also feeling the strain of rising costs from public utilities. Hydro rates and MPI premiums continue to climb, and this budget offers no meaningful plan to improve oversight or protect ratepayers. These are essential services, and affordability should be a priority.

Equally concerning is the lack of a real economic plan. With ongoing trade pressures and increasing fuel costs, businesses need certainty and support. Instead, the government has introduced policies like the Manitoba Jobs Agreement, which I believe will drive up the cost of building schools, hospitals, and infrastructure while limiting opportunities for most construction workers who choose not to join a union.

In healthcare, the challenges are just as serious. Wait times for diagnostics and surgeries remain unacceptably long, forcing families to wait in pain and uncertainty. At the same time, we are seeing growing paramedic shortages across Manitoba, putting increased pressure on emergency response times and leaving too many communities without reliable access to urgent care. Frontline workers are also



MLA for Riding Mountain, Greg Nesbitt

FILE PHOTO

raising alarm bells about safety in our hospitals, including incidents that have led to multiple facilities being grey-listed by nurses. These are unprecedented situations, and they demand urgent action.

Manitobans needed a budget that would lower costs, strengthen services, and restore confidence in our economy. Instead, what we have been given is a plan that increases taxes, ignores key priorities, and leaves too many people behind.

I believe Manitobans deserve a government that listens to their concerns, acts responsibly with their hard-earned tax dollars, and puts their needs first by delivering real, practical solutions that make life more affordable and communities safer.

Greg Nesbitt is the Member of Legislative Assembly for the Riding Mountain constituency. He can be reached at 204-759-3313, toll-free 1-844-877-7767 or by email at gregnesbittmla@mymts.net. When contacting MLA Nesbitt, please provide your address and phone number.

A Call to Leadership

By Cam Dahl, General Manager

MANITOBA PORK COUNCIL

A former boss of mine told me something that has stuck with me for 25 years: "Often you have a choice between being seen to be trying to get something done or actually getting something done." Collaboration that is critical to accomplishing key objectives can mean that the credit for hard work is unevenly recognized, however, now is the time in agriculture when getting things done must take precedence over recognition of individual organizations.

Almost all agricultural commodities are facing existential threats and significant uncertainty. War has triggered supply chain disruptions and is pushing up input costs. The review of the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) and the threat of U.S. tariffs has made trade within North America uncertain. Protectionism is on the rise around the world, not just south of the border, with Chinese tariffs on pork and Europe's non-tariff trade barriers being two leading examples. Agriculture should be taking a "whole plate" approach to addressing these issues and not trying to fix things one commodity at a time. If the industry can step out of individual commodity silos and regional perspectives, we can not only address these threats, but we can realize the vision of making Canada a global food powerhouse.

There are positive steps in this direction. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA) has brought together a coalition under the banner "Let's Grow Canada" to support policies that will encourage investment in research and development. CropLife Canada's "Grow Canada Strong" initiative has similar objectives. Canada is currently in last place in investment in agriculture research among the top seven countries

of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. This must change if we are to weather the geopolitical storms the country is currently facing. Canada is at an inflection point where agriculture has an opportunity to present governments with a vision for attracting private sector research and development investment that can partner with industry, farmers, and governments, rather than just waiting for public sector solutions.

Farm Credit Canada (FCC) has launched a "Let's Grow Canada" website with the intent of showcasing the stories behind Canadian farmers and food producers. The goal is to help promote a greater understanding of the strengths of Canadian agriculture and help drive investment from both Canadians and international investors. All three of these initiatives, from the CFA, FCC, and CropLife, show real leadership, but this is not standard practice.

The review of our most important trade agreement, CUSMA, is underway. The implications for Canadian agriculture are massive. These include the threat of new tariffs and origin rules that could discriminate against Canadian agriculture and food exports like live animals, red meat, biofuels, and more. The aggressive shift in U.S. foreign and trade policies over the past years, coming from both political parties, clearly show us that the renegotiation of our most important trade agreement will be difficult. Agriculture must be more prepared than we are today. All of export agriculture needs to come together to develop a strategic plan on how we approach these negotiations. We need to be prepared to deliver real-time advice to our negotiating team that is consistent and united. We need to be prepared to tell our governments things they might not want to hear. We need to have a logical and systematic approach to outreach to our partners in the U.S. Commodity groups cannot afford to "go it alone" and hope for positive outcomes. Developing this united front requires leaders who are willing to



take some risks and step outside of the comfort zone that operating in commodity and regional silos offer.

Labour is another key policy issue that requires a common front from all of agriculture if Canada is to become an international food powerhouse. Almost all sectors of agriculture face labour shortages. New Canadians are an integral part of meeting these needs. Immigration policies in Canada are being questioned due to housing and service shortages in our major cities, but what is needed in Toronto, Vancouver, or Montreal is not what is needed in rural Canada and at our processing plants. Agriculture needs a unified voice to tell the story about how stable jobs for new Canadians in agriculture and food production are building communities across the country. Rather than political leaders delivering, short "social media ready" soundbites we need thoughtful immigration and labour policies targeting regional, and sectorial, needs. To accomplish this goal, agriculture leaders need to deliver clear and consistent messages to governments.

The Canadian economy is facing undeniable threats due to geopolitical instability and rising protectionism around the world. Agriculture and food production in Canada can be key in mitigating these threats. To seize the opportunity, we need to present governments with united and consistent policy solutions. Agriculture needs to lead the way rather than wait for others to present solutions to us.

The Evolution of Ostara and Easter



SUBMITTED PHOTO

By Carolyn Phillips
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Long before Easter became synonymous with colourful eggs and chocolate bunnies, ancient pagans celebrated a festival that honoured the arrival of spring. Known as Ostara, this holiday exemplified the reverence for nature's rebirth and the rejuvenating power of the goddess overseeing the season. The term "Easter" itself has its roots in the German "Ostern," which is derived from "Eostre," the Anglo-Saxon deity of spring. The rich tapestry of traditions surrounding Ostara reveals a deep connection between myth, agriculture, and community.

According to folklore, the goddess Ostara was once credited with bringing forth the season of spring. One

rendition of her story tells of a dying bird she found and lovingly transformed into a white hare. To commemorate the bird's original form, Ostara granted the hare the remarkable ability to lay eggs once a year. In turn, this magical hare was allowed to distribute its colourful eggs as gifts to those gathering to honour her, laying the foundation for what would evolve into the modern customs we associate with Easter today.

Transitioning from pagan traditions, the holiday took on a distinctly Christian significance with the story of Resurrection Day in 30 A.D. For Christians, Easter symbolizes the rebirth of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion. Following the Last Supper, Jesus was betrayed and sentenced to death, entombed in a cave, and famously resurrected three days later. This miraculous event led to the establishment of Easter Sunday as a cornerstone

of Christian faith, encapsulating the themes of sacrifice, renewal, and hope.

In the year 325 A.D., the Christian church sought to unify the observance of Easter. Emperor Constantine, in an effort to bring peace among the varying celebration dates, declared that Easter would be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the vernal equinox. This ensured that Easter aligned with the cycles of nature while symbolizing the triumph of light over darkness.

Over the centuries, various customs emerged, particularly the use of eggs. During the Middle Ages, eggs were banned during Lent, the 40-day fasting period leading up to Easter, which resulted in them being boiled for preservation. Come Easter Sunday, people would consume these eggs as a joyous end to fasting. The 18th century saw the arrival of the "Osterhase," a bunny that delivered beautifully decorated eggs to children—an immigrant tradition brought to America by German settlers.

The shape of the egg itself has always held symbolic significance. The egg is often seen as a metaphor for the stone sealing Jesus's tomb, representing new life emerging from confinement. Even farther back in history, decorated ostrich eggs dating back 5,000 years have been uncovered in ancient Sumerian and Egyptian tombs, indicating that egg decoration is a practice that transcends cultures and eras.

By the 1930s, Easter celebrations incorporated sugary delights, with jellybeans making their debut in American Easter baskets. From fertility goddesses to festive parades, the history of Easter is intertwined with themes of renewal, community, and celebration. Today, whether through the lens of Ostara or Easter, the holiday remains a time for families to gather, revel in the joy of spring, and embrace the powerful symbolism of rebirth that the season offers. Ultimately, no matter the beliefs we hold, the traditions of Easter bring us together in a shared appreciation for life's cycles and the beauty of new beginnings.

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Winner gets a basket of treats donated and on display at the Virden Empire Advance office. Contest ends Apr. 7, 2026.

Contest is open to children 12 years of age and younger. Contact information used for notification purposes only. One entry per child allowed. Immediate family of newspaper employees are welcome to participate but are not eligible to win the prize.

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