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Lute & Fable Music Academy features Anastasia

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE ADVANCE

Has old Russia's young Grand Duchess Anastasia been discovered?

Anastasia The Musical (Youth Edition) begins in St. Petersburg, Russia 1907. The youngest of the Russian royal Romanov family, Anastasia, protests her grandmother's move to France.

Amid scenes of Russian hunger and social upheaval, the main drama occurs in about 1927, in the shadow of the Bolshevik Revolution and the 2018 assassination of the Czar and the entire Romanov family. They appear in white, as ghosts of the family—mother, father and five children.

The plot unfolds when, in post-revolutionary Russia, a young street sweeper, Anya, is herself swept up in a rogue scam to represent Anastasia Romanov to her grandmama, the Dowager Empress in Paris. But wait, maybe the young girl from the streets - Anya - actually is the surviving traumatized Romanov daughter. Or is she just one of many imposters claiming to be royalty in post-revolutionary Russia?

This was the basis of Anastasia the Musical (Youth Edition) brought to the Aud Theatre by Lute & Fable Music Academy (formerly known as Virden Youth Choir). This captivating musical played on Feb. 26 and 27.

For director Susan Martens, the hard work of the team turned to magic on the stage. "My kids got to tell a wonderful story and bring it to life and I could not be more proud of everything they have accomplished.... I found myself holding my breath during certain scenes because they were difficult scenes with very mature emotions. But our cast did a wonderful job handling those moments."



PHOTO BY DALE DAVISON
The Romanov family: seated Tsar (Corbyn Waller), backed by Tsarina (Sophie Archambault), Sisters Olga (Sam Barkley), Tatiana (Emery Strachan) and Maria (Arabelle Tilbury) and (front L) brother Alex (Keaton McLauchlan) and (front R) Young Anastasia (Daphne Holleman).

Scenes showed a wintery St. Petersburg (renamed Petrograd) where the 2017 February Revolution ultimately sparked the Bolshevik Revolution. Somber intensity was met with the desperate hope of youth in Soviet Russia.

Anastasia has been both a movie and a full musical. To play the youth version, these young actors had a lot of history to catch up on. They were unfamiliar with the Russian Revolution - there was a lot of discussion and a lot of questions:

"What was real, what was made up for the story, and how it was different from the 1997 movie."

"How old was Anastasia when her family died, and how did they die? How did she get amnesia, Was Anastasia real and did she actually survive?"

read more about the musical on page 2...



HOME GAME FRIDAY, MARCH 6 VS. WINNIPEG MONARCHS
PUCK DROPS AT 7:30PM

Inside...



RISING FOOD COSTS P3



MEET THE GOLDEN BEARS P10-11

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Anastasia the Musical



Lute & Flute Music Academy has dozens of ensemble vocalists, grades 5 to 9, performing on February 26 and 27.



PHOTOS BY DALE DAVISON

A scene at the heart of the drama: Anya the street sweeper who will become the Grand Duchess Anastasia of Russia, is counselled and primed for her role by the scheming Dmitry (Corr Rossouw), and Vlad (Ella Archambault).

Continued from page 1

Martens said the actors wanted to know if their character was the good guy or the bad guy.

“It was interesting to watch them wrestle with this idea – ‘The Romanovs were given everything and they gave back nothing,’ (Gleb’s line in the show), and yet [their murder] didn’t seem fair to the kids. Gleb (Leah Bukarz) is painted as the antagonist, but the kids sympathized with his dilemma of being a good son and following his duty as a Bolshevik Commissioner, but also realizing that Anya (Anastasia) had done nothing wrong.”

She said, “The kids also recognized that although the story makes Vlad and Dmitry look like the good guys, they are essentially conmen who originally bring Anya to Paris so they can lie and get rich.

“One of our students said it well, ‘So, no one is the good guy or bad guy in this story.’”

The show brought moral considerations and Martens reflected, “I think these questions made the characters, and the world we’re living in, feel more real to our students, which added to their performance.”

Lute & Fable includes youth from Virden, Oak Lake, Elkhorn, Kola, Reston and Melita.

In Thursday evening’s cast, Denali Tilbury’s beautiful vocals expressed the thoughts and feelings of Anya. Immediate supporting roles were Corr Rossouw (Dmitry), and Ella Archambault (Vlad). Dowager Empress (Lauren Thiessen) and Lily (Kelsey Rolfe) were part of the cast of 45 Gr. 5-9 students which included dozens of ensemble vocalists.

On Friday evening with Cast 2, some of the changes included Corbyn Waller (Dmitry), Callie Gray (Anya), Yardleigh Kenderdine (Vlad) and Halle Irvine (Lily).

When not featured, alternate cast members were on stage in other roles. Martens explains, “Our Dmitrys played the Tsar on their off-night, our Empress and Tsarina actors played a sister on their off-night, Anya, Gleb and Countess Ipolotov were in the Russian Ensemble, and Vlad, Lily, Young Anastasia, and Count Leopold were in the Paris Ensemble.”

Directors included Kelsey Brown, Luke Munchinsky and Monique Waller. Assistant directors were: Ariannah Kerr, Sarah Lindsay and Charlie Dunning; Junior assistants were Kaitlyn Cox, Jasmyne Andries and Nevaeh Cowan.

Directing technology was Paul Archambault, with Leon Friesen and Dianne Liefso. Andrea Gray choreographed the tap dance, Eunice Emilson was responsible for front of the house, Dean Munchinsky and Kathy Welsh for props and sets; and parent volunteers helped this effort.

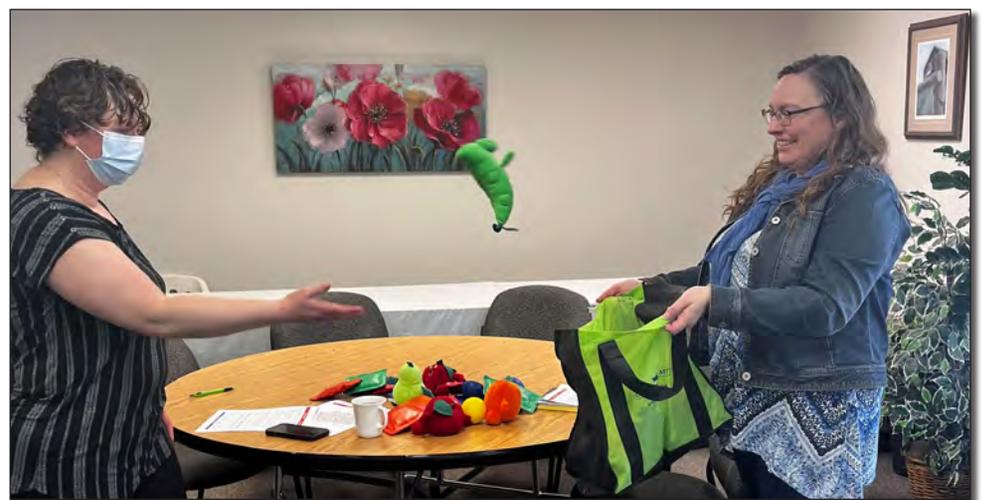
Frosting makes everything better



PHOTO BY OLIVER NOLAN

The participants enjoyed an opportunity to decorate freshly baked cakes on Thursday, Feb. 26 at the Oak Lake Recreation Centre. Using their imaginations and a variety of decorative tools, coloured frostings and buttercreams, sprinkles and fondant, they began to create different designs. One completed cake of a Smiley Face was a definite success!

Total Brain Health



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Even the cleanup became a game: Chantal tosses a beanbag into the bag Krista is holding.

Submitted

BY KRISTA PEDERSON

For the month of February, both Princess Lodge and Kin Place hosted “Total Brain Health”, a program run by Chantal Morais, from Prairie Mountain Health.

A follow-up for the “Memory and Aging” sessions that we did in January, “Total Brain Health” was all fun and games!

“TBH is a social program that combines hands-on activities with brain, boosting knowledge and the power of interacting in groups. This program

was developed by Dr. Cynthia Green, a world, renowned brain health expert reflecting the current research.” (From the Wellness Institute.)

If you missed “Memory and Aging” or “Total Brain Health”, you could contact the Wellness Institute to see where other programs will be held or sign up for a virtual session. info@wellnessinstitute.ca or phone 204-632-3927. And keep up with SAIL for other events, through our Facebook page: Seniors Access to Independent Living. There is a separate page for Virden, Elkhorn and Oak Lake... check it out to see what’s going on in your community.

Virден Curling Club at Tundra Oil & Gas Place



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Another game well played by the oldest team with an average age of 84.



Great food and camaraderie during the Legion Funspiel supper.

By Nancy Jo Moller
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The Virден Legion Annual Funspiel was a roaring success with sixteen rinks participating at the Virден Curling Rink on Saturday, February 28, 2026. There were rinks that travelled from Winnipeg and Brandon, along with one from the Kenton Legion and local community members. The Funspiel Committee of Herb Warkentin, Barry Hayward, Hank Kyle and Kel Smith were some of the many helping hands organizing this event. This local event is a time for young and old to have fun and laughter as they interact with each other. Not all games should be considered serious sport. The oldest team had an average age of 84 and are talking of participating again next year.

All teams played 2 games and had the opportunity to

compete for both cash and prizes generously donated by local businesses – Four Seasons RV Sales, Sunrise Credit Union, Valleyview Coop, Virден Ford and Virден Home Hardware. After the points were tallied, there was a three-way tie for first. Cards were drawn to determine first to third place in the event.

After the physical activity, the upper deck of the Legion Club Room was filled with curlers and spectators who enjoyed a delicious meal prepared

by “Chef Wendy”. It had everyone cleaning their plates with the sound of clinking dinnerware and chatting voices during the meal. Branch President Comrade Andy Nash and Ladies Auxiliary President Comrade Christa Nash assisted with prep, serving and cleanup.

Lead Steward for the evening was member Comrade Brian Grenier.

The younger participants finished the evening with lively games of pool and billiards.

Greg NESBITT
MLA for Riding Mountain



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Navigating rising food costs



PHOTO BY CHARLOTTE ARTYSHKO

A few years ago, the same case of soup would have been on sale for \$6.99.

By Charlotte Artyshko
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

It doesn't take long at the checkout line to notice the grocery bills are not what they used to be. A can of beans not long ago cost under a dollar, now ring in at more than \$2.50. A case of soup that used to cost under \$7 now approaches \$20. In other cases, the price tag may look similar, but the package holds a little less than it once did, something commonly referred to as shrinkflation.

Across Canada, grocery prices rose sharply in 2022 and 2023. Statistics Canada reported that food purchased from stores increased by more than 10 percent year over year, the highest jump seen in decades. While the pace of inflation has slowed prices have not returned to earlier levels. For many households, that means food takes up a larger portion of the monthly budget than it once did.

Those shifts are also reflected locally. When the Virден & Area Food Cupboard began in 2011 five families received hampers. Today, between 35 and 40 hampers are distributed twice each month. Organizers say demand has increased overtime.

The broader conversation, however, extends beyond one program. Higher grocery bills, increased fuel costs and rising housing expenses have become common topics around kitchen tables. For many households, adapting has become part of the routine. Watching flyers, buying store brands, purchasing in bulk when possible and planning meals more carefully are small changes that can make a difference over time.

Financial advisors often recommend reviewing monthly expenses regularly, even if only to understand where money is going. Small adjustments like reducing impulse purchases

can help offset rising costs. Community resources also remain available for those who need temporary support, whether through food programs.

Recent national reporting has shown that more households, including working households, are experiencing food insecurity. Rural communities are not immune to those trends. At the same time, Virден and area continue to show strong community support. The program operates twice a month, volunteers give their time, donations continue, and neighbours help neighbours.

While economic conditions shift the reality at the grocery store remains part of everyday life, and local programs quietly continue their work as part of the fabric of the community.

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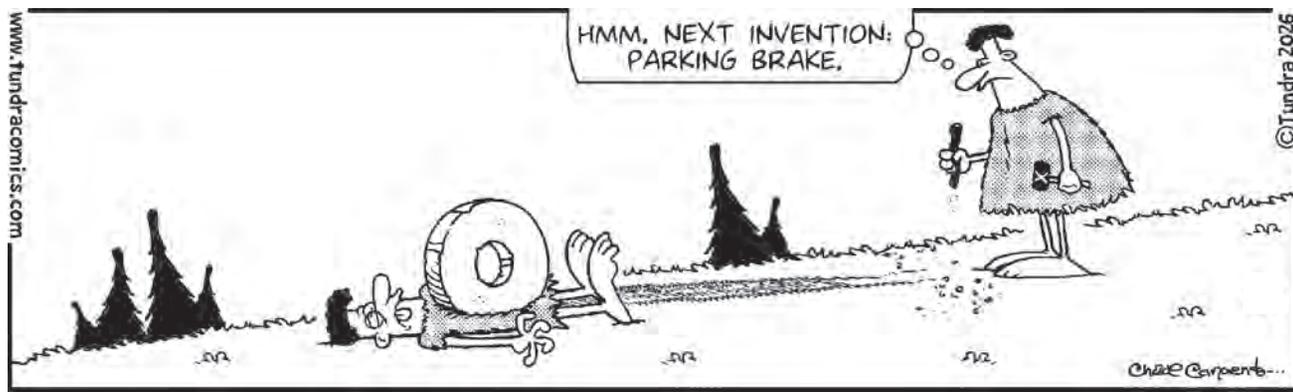


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Tundra

By Chad Carpenter



Just don't play the scammers' game

Last week, the sad, distorted world of telephone scammers came across my desk.

The first was a call from a lady who reported that her mother was almost panicked into complying with a phone scammer's request. The phone scammer said that the older lady owed \$2,000 on her Bell account and it was overdue. It needed to be paid right away or there would be dire consequences. However, it could be paid with a discount by driving to Brandon and buying only \$1,000 worth of gift cards. Once the cards were bought, the lady would have to phone in to see where to deliver them. Fortunately, a family member intervened and said not to do that. I checked the number that the lady was supposed to phone and it was a southern US number.

The incident was reported to the police, but it was explained by the police that they would not intervene as there had been no money lost in the scheme. The message is simple, don't play into these phone schemes.

If there is a serious request for payment on an overdue account, the company will send you a written notice.

Here's more information on phone scams from a RCMP press release. I wouldn't normally print a press release in my column, but the release below clearly outlines another scam.

"Manitoba RCMP are warning the public about an elaborate online phishing scam involving con artists impersonating police officers. Here's how the scam works:

- A random text or email is sent to an unsuspecting individual.
- The text or email includes a link that connects to a video conference call with someone claiming to be a police officer.
- If the link is clicked, the fraudster

then works to convince the individual they could be arrested unless they help officers by forwarding gift cards or bitcoin. At times, the fraudster may also try to convince the individual they have a warrant for their arrest but can have it removed by sending gift cards or bitcoin.

2 • In the past two weeks, dozens of individuals have been given the Manitoba RCMP's general line phone number by fraudsters to convince them they are legitimate.

This is a scam. RCMP will never send people unsolicited texts or links to click on. If you receive such a message, do not click on the link and delete the text immediately. If you did click on the link and/or provided personal details via the fraudulent online meeting, contact your financial institution immediately, report the incident to your local police service and to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre.

There are a number of ways to guard against online approaches from scam artists:

- Don't click on links or download attachments in unsolicited text messages or emails;
- Never send your personal, credit card or banking details in response to unsolicited messages and do not enter

those details on any website if you are not certain the site is genuine; and

- Always take a moment to verify the source of messages received.

As a reminder, the RCMP will never ask you to:

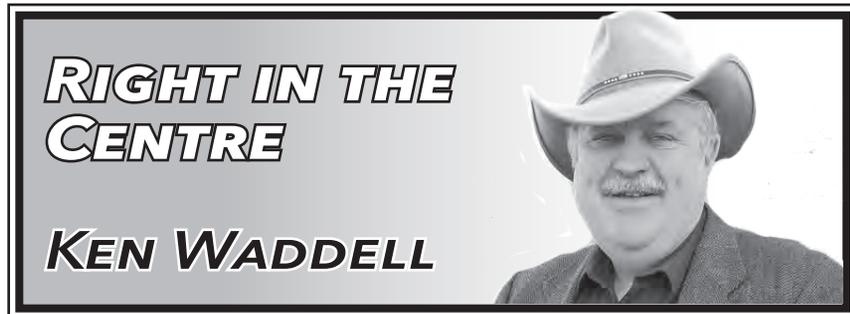
- Transfer money or make a payment, whether it be cash, credit card, gift cards or bitcoin;
- Provide remote access to your computer; or
- Provide personal information, including your name, date of birth, phone number, email, address or banking details via text message.

Anyone who suspects they have been the victim of fraud or cybercrime should report it to their local police service and to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre, at 1-888-495-8501 or online at reportcyberandfraud.canada.ca."

In addition to the above two scams, there are many more including fake calls from a grandchild asking for money to get out of trouble. That one is simply titled, the grandchild scam.

Please, please, I beg you not to fall into these scams.

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.



Delightful dilemma...

Lounging in the big chair, coffee at hand, dog on my lap, I try to simply sit. I could read, I could doze, I could watch curling... the list goes on. But, no... the mind will not slow down and allow me to do nothing. Here's the dilemma, there are a multitude of little things, and some big projects, that I could be, should be doing. Even with the perfect setting, I am compelled to rise and get 'things' done!

I'm working on another quilt. This time I have designed the pattern, a house. There are a variety of skies, differing grasses and flowers, and each house has a window or two, and a door with a button sewed on for a doorknob. It took a few tries to get the proportions of the roof and house, another try or two to be happy with the amount of sky, but I can live with the finished block. I was careful not to say the finished project, for I do have all forty of the squares complete, there is the joining and the quilting and the binding to go. There is no real urgency to finish... however I have three other projects I wish to begin and I try to get one done before I start the next. So instead of sitting I put in a bit of time at the sewing center.

Calling loudly is a small project. With the home renovations going on I want to move the brooms and mops from one space to the closet with the hot water tank. I am so blessed!! In another closet are the tools I need. The battery operated drill, the various sizes of drill bits, and the whole set of screwdriver heads. The steps are to unfasten the cleaning supply holder from one wall and relocate it. I even have been gifted a level so the finished project is not akimbo. (I have the tools, I lack the proper jargon!) Fifteen minutes and it's done, to my satisfaction.

Popping back into the room under renovation, a laundry room becoming an accessible bathroom and laundry room, there are a few little things I can do. I have already removed the medicine cabinet and the rusting towel racks, and tidied up the existing shelving units. If I had another eighty years of life, I would want to become a carpenter, and create beauty out of wood. (An aside— my younger sister has taken a course in woodworking in the last couple of years and is now accumulating woodworking tools. She is an expert at working with stained glass, an expert at quilting and sewing and knitting and embroidery. And now woodwork! I wish!)

A bit of sewing, a bit of puttering, and, always waiting for me, a bit of paperwork. There is a column to be written, a Sunday service to compose, a friendly letter to be written, and now, it's accounting time! Numbers are not my friends. Shall I simply sit? I will, and possibly doze off while sitting. I am so thankful for my interests, for the material and goods available to me, and the time and interest to keep on doing!

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Miniota News

Submitted

BY LINDA CLARK

The U7 Miniota Mustangs and U7 Miniota Nighthawks held their tournament this past weekend. Visiting teams were the Birtle Bruins, the Virde Oil Kings, the Elkhorn Canadians and the Shoal Lake Eagles. The Mustang members, coached by Cory Gardham and Tracie McKean are: Piper Brown, Brae McKean, James Oliver, Jayden Willston, Sonny Stonehouse and Layker Gardham.

The Nighthawk members are Jemma Sheane, Adaline Howard, Samantha Hill, Jacob Cymbalisy, Fynn Lelond, Jack Cole, Cooper Brown and Bo Brown and are coached by Brad Cole and Duncan Lelond. A full rink was on hand to cheer on these young hockey players.

The Miniota Figure Skating Club held their annual skating show on Sunday, March 1 with the theme 'Country Roads.' These young skaters are coached by Andrea Langlois, with Level 1 coached by Elly and Lily Priestley, and honourable assistant coaches are Myelle Priestley and Maci Fenty. Skaters in the club this year

are: Harlo Bryant, Clarke Gardham, Lenni Gardham, Grace Kesterki, Logan McKean, Cooper Brown, Blayke Campbell, Amy Gurr, Samantha Hill, Lawson Maluga, Reghan McLeannan, Jemma Sheane, Lily Priestley, Bo Brown, Kelsy Gurr, Lacey Gurr, Kacee Heaman, Declan Hill, Jazlyn Sheane, Myelle Priestley, Maci Fenty, Jocelyn Brown, Madison Brown, Melodie Cymbalisy, and Ezmae Armstrong-Wall. Congratulations to all the club members and their coaches!

Word has been received of the death of Joyce Wythe on Feb. 17 in Edmonton. Our sympathy to her family.

Isabella News

Cruz and Nick Dushnicky travelled to the annual Manitoba Bow Hunters Awards night in Ile des Chenes Manitoba on Feb. 28. Cruz was lucky enough to harvest four animals with his bow in the 2025 hunting season including a turkey, black bear, mule deer and a whitetail deer which were all displayed at the awards night. Cruz won a certificate for all four categories and he also won provincial championship with his mule deer and won Bow Hunter of the Year award, along with a few nice prizes over the night. Congratulations Cruz on your awards!

"Go for it now. The future is promised to no one." -Wayne Dyer

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Animal Control: 204-851-5881

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Emergency After Hours: 204-851-5540

Flower & Garden Caretaker Employment Opportunity

The Town of Virde 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.

Please forward resume with cover letter to:
Faye Pope, Office Manager
Town of Virde
Box 310
Virde, MB, R0M 2C0
Email: office.manager@virde.ca

Upcoming Council Meeting

March 17

Council Meetings start at 7:00 PM

Tax Prepayment Discounts

The Town of Virde 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
March	1.75%	\$ 17.50
April	1.50%	\$ 15.00
May	1.25%	\$ 12.50
June	1.00%	\$ 10.00
July	0.75%	\$ 7.50

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

Programs/Events Leader & Assistants Summer Employment Opportunities

The Town of Virde 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 Virde Town Office or on the website at www.virde.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 Virde
Box 310, Virde, MB, R0M 2C0
Email: office.manager@virde.ca

Employment Opportunities

Summer Employment

- Green Team
- Head Lifeguard
- Assistant Head Lifeguard
- Lifeguard Instructor
- Assistant Lifeguard

For more information about any of the postings above, please visit www.virde.ca/p/employment-opportunities.

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

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

HELEN DRYSDALE

OUT OF HELEN'S KITCHEN

Do you know how Hazel M. Kellington School (Neepawa) got its name? The first part of the school opened in 1951 with the name of West Park. It had four classrooms and an auditorium. The teacher in charge was Miss Hazel Kellington. Her first class consisted of 51 pupils! In 1953 twelve more classrooms and office space were added. Miss Kellington retired in 1965. Later the school's name was changed to Hazel M. Kellington School to honor her many years of dedicated teaching at West Park. Over the years, the most notable change in HMK School is the number of enrolled students. This added enrollment has seen more additions to the school. H.M.K. School has always provided excellent education to our community due to dedicated teachers like Miss Hazel Kellington. This week's recipes come from the first edition of the cookbook published in 1982 by the school. It's principal that year was Dennis Wrightson. One of the sayings at the bottom of one of the pages made me chuckle. It said "One of the advantages of teaching in a grade school is that you can find a place to park." Enjoy trying and eating these recipes.

Sauerkraut

Hazel Baker

1 Tbsp. pickling salt	1 Tbsp. sugar
1 Tbsp. cooking oil	1 Tbsp. vinegar

Fill quart sealers with finely shredded cabbage. Shake to settle contents. Add 1 tablespoon each of salt, sugar, oil and vinegar to each sealer. Fill with boiling water and seal. Set in a cool dark place approximately 6 weeks before using.

Pickled eggs

Glenda Bohn, Gerry Bohn

16 hardboiled eggs, shelled	2 Tbsp. sugar
2 Tbsp. salt	1 Tbsp. mixed pickling spice
1 clove garlic or 1 tsp. garlic salt	2 cups vinegar
1/3 cup water	1 tsp. whole cloves

Put eggs and garlic in a jar. Combine other ingredients in a pot; bring to a boil and simmer for 10 minutes. Strain and pour over eggs. Seal jar and let stand for 4 days before eating.

Granola

Heather Dunsmore, Melanie Dunsmore

4 cups rolled oats	1 cup wheat germ
1/2 cup sunflower seeds	1/2 cup honey
1/2 cup oil	1 Tbsp. milk

raisins, dates coconut etc.
Mix the first 3 ingredients together on greased cookie sheet. Heat slightly in saucepan the next 3 ingredients. Combine the above mixture and stir well to moisten. Heat at 300 F for about 20 minutes. Add raisins, dates, coconut etc. and heat another 5 minutes.

6 weeks bran muffins

Ann Huynh, Howie Huynh

1 cup white sugar	1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup oil	2 eggs, beaten
2 cups bran soaked in 1 cup boiling water	3 1/2 cups of flour
2 1/2 tsp. baking soda	1/2 tsp. salt
2 cups buttermilk	1 cup raisins

Cream oil and sugars. Add the eggs, bran and water mixture. Sift together the flour, baking soda and salt and add alternating with the buttermilk. Add raisins. Bake at 400 F for about 20 minutes. This mix may be stored in the fridge for up to six weeks, allowing you to have fresh baked muffins in a matter of minutes.

Apple walnut tarts

Phyllis Malfait, Derek Malfait

1/2 cup white sugar	1/2 cup brown sugar
1 tsp. cinnamon	1 cup water
1 1/2 Tbsp. cornstarch	2 Tbsp. cold water
4 cups apples, thinly sliced	2 Tbsp. lemon juice
1 cup raisins	1 tsp. lemon rind
1/2 cup walnuts	

Toss apples with the lemon juice. Combine sugars, cinnamon, lemon rind, apples and raisins. Stir in 1 cup of water. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and cook until apples are tender. Add the 2 tablespoons of water together with the corn starch. Add this to the apples and cook until thickened. Add the walnuts. Cool completely before spooning into precooked tart shells. Makes 18 tarts. May be used as pie filling.

Police Report

Westman RCMP Service Report for Feb. 22 to 28

Submitted

BY WESTMAN RCMP

During this week, Westman RCMP received a total of 71 calls for service. Some of these calls for service include 36 traffic offences, 5 Assistance to Canadian Agencies/General Public, 3 Assaults, 2 Mischief files, 3 Wellbeing Checks, 2 False Alarms, and 2 Mental Health files.

On Feb. 22, members of Westman RCMP attended at a residence in the town of Melita to arrest a wanted male. Upon arrival, the wanted male answered the door and was advised he was under arrest. The wanted male then resisted arrest and assaulted two police officers prior to barricading himself inside the residence. Additional members including the Emergency Response Team, Containment Team, along with Police Dog Services attended for assistance. The wanted male exited the residence and was taken into custody without incident. The male was remanded with the following charges: Assaulting police officer x2, Resisting Arrest, Disarming a police officer and Mischief under \$5000.

On Feb. 23, during routine traffic patrols

in the RM of Wallace-Woodworth, RCMP observed a vehicle travelling at a high rate of speed. Radar confirmed the driving speed of 145 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 \$626.

On Feb. 24, members of Westman RCMP responded to a report of a Domestic Assault in the community of Sioux Valley Dakota Nation. Upon arrival to the residence, members spoke with the victim and learned that the accused male had physically assaulted the victim and damaged the property prior to leaving the residence. Members obtained a statement where the assault was disclosed. Members patrolled the area and located the accused, who was arrested without incident. The accused male was charged with one count of Assault and was released with a notice to appear in court at the given date.

On Feb. 27, during routine patrols in the RM of Sifton, RCMP observed a vehicle travelling at a high rate of speed. Radar confirmed the driving speed of 154 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 \$626.

On Feb. 28, during routine traffic patrols in the Municipality of Two Borders, RCMP conducted a traffic stop involving a vehicle. The driver admitted he did not have a driver's license. Members completed two separate breath samples which the driver blew WARN to both. The driver of the vehicle was issued an Immediate Roadside Prohibition, and his driver license was suspended and the vehicle was towed.

To report a complaint or non-emergent incident to RCMP please call 204-748-2135. For general inquiries or administrative requests including criminal record checks please call the administration line at 204-748-2046 Ext. 3. If you are reporting an emergency, please call 911.

If you witness a crime and wish to remain anonymous, please contact Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477. Crime stoppers is entirely confidential and completely anonymous. The tip line is not traceable, and they do not subscribe to caller ID or call display.



Snow plane restoration, roof repairs highlight museum AGM

Elkhorn's Manitoba Antique Automobile Museum meeting



PHOTO BY ED JAMES

Members of the board of the Manitoba Antique Automobile Museum: Denis Lachapelle, Riley Brennand, Barb Stambuski, Kevin Tutthill (chair), Lil Jackson and Tawna McLean (secretary-treasurer); two community board seats remain open.

By Ed James
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The annual meeting for Manitoba Antique Automobile Museum drew about a dozen people to Elkhorn Elks Hall last Thursday evening.

Current board members were present and board chairman Kevin Tutthill welcomed everyone.

Time was spent on the 2025 museum financial report. The revenue intake was higher than projected, but the yearend surplus was lower due in part to the needed repairs to a 100-foot roof section on the main display building, constructed in 1967. The report overall showed that the 2025 season reflected a capital project year in cost and not a typical operating year.

In 2026, the museum expects to return to a stable, normalized operating year. For a detailed financial report, copies can be picked up at the Elkhorn LUD office.

After the financial reports, a special interactive video conference was held with the subject being the restoration of the museum's historic snow plane.

Snow plane on tour

Lisl Gunderman and Darrel Hunter, via the Internet, gave a detailed report on the restoration work they have done on the snow plane built in the 1940s by Fudge Industries of Moosomin.

It was Lisl's grandfather, Doctor Joe Galloway, a rural Saskatchewan doctor who bought the four-seat snow plane that was propelled over the snow by an airplane engine. It cost the doctor \$1,304 in 1947.

The doctor, at the time, saw it as a safe and quick way to provide medical service in rural Saskatchewan during the winter months when deep snow would cover many rural roads for weeks at a time.

As a rural doctor, one of his duties was the home delivery of babies. Because of that, he had a picture painted on the side of the snow plane of a stork delivering a baby. Doctor Galloway ran the snow plane from the '40s into the '50s.

The couple who restored it went on to explain how they bought a long, enclosed trailer to show the vehicle and related history of the snow plane restoration,

medical equipment of the day, early photos of it and other snow planes, and information on the museum.

Gunderman and Hunter continued on by saying, once word got out on the restoration plans, bits and pieces came in from all over and stories about snow planes. Once the public presentations in the western provinces is complete, they will return the vehicle to the Auto Museum for display after a five-year loan period. After the video conference, the museum AGM resumed discussion in detail of the repairs done last fall on the main building roof.

Mr. Tutthill was pleased to announce that the repair was not only completed with no major issues, but the revenue from fundraising, grants and donations had paid for it all. This enabled the museum to return bridge funding from outside sources, and interest. He added, "The roof repair project was a great community and museum success."

Further discussion included future museum projects such as stabilizing the walls of the agricultural building and repairing some of the cement flooring in the main display building.

Discussion continued on the museum's biggest annual event - Canada Day. The museum being the main activity centre. Some new ideas were suggested to make it more of a family event for all ages.

During the meeting, several recognition certificates were presented to individuals, groups and business who were active in fundraising or donating to the cost of the roof repairs. Donations ranged from \$50 to \$5,000 and much came from the immediate area.

In closing, the museum board members hope that the return of the snow plane, and the advertisement of our museum as it travels about western Canada, will make the public more aware of what a hidden historical gem Elkhorn's Manitoba Antique Automobile Museum presents.

Starting Seeds - Part II

Submitted
BY PATRICIA HANBIDGE

Last week our column focused on some of the basics surrounding starting your own seeds. We talked about plants needing light, water, warmth, oxygen and food to grow and a little bit about the seed itself. Growing your own plants from seed is magical.

Most gardeners derive great satisfaction from growing plants. They are grown for ornamental value but also for growing food that graces our tables when we cook for both friends and family. Starting seeds allows a greater degree of satisfaction and enables the gardener and the chef to know exactly what products were used on the plants from the beginning of life. Growing your own is also a more sustainable alternative to purchasing food that has been grown many miles away and had to undergo an unbelievable amount of transportation in order to get to our local grocer.

You might be wondering why it is a good idea to start seeds. After all, it is a bit of work and you do need to purchase some gear in order to do it right. First and foremost, starting seeds will allow you to extend the growing season. This is a good thing as our frost-free days range from around 90 to 120 on the prairies. Many of the desirable crops you might like to grow need more than that amount of time to mature. Also, if you are a gardener, you already know that what you wish to grow that cannot be seeded into the garden in spring might not be available for you to purchase as bedding plants. We all like to be individual and grow in our gardens whatever we choose, so starting your own seeds will give you much more variability in your garden.

Another consideration to think about is the importance

of maintaining diversity in our seed sources. Growing heritage or heirloom plants allows a refurbishment of seeds that otherwise might be lost forever. In the age of genetically modified seeds and the ease of travel may make us more aware of the importance of ensuring our roots, our history, heritage and ultimately our seeds are maintained appropriately for future generations.

Other than the generalization that germination begins with the uptake of water, there are a host of conditions that are necessary for successful germination. To simplify things for you, let's think of what you are growing as being either warm or cool-season crops. Warm season crops like sweet corn, lima beans, tomatoes, peppers, melons, okra, eggplant will generally need a warmer season of growth and typically a slightly warmer germination temperature. Cool season crops will generally need the opposite. The other common variable you may encounter is the need to either have light conditions or dark conditions for that magical process to begin.

Once that life has begun then it is important for you to provide every little thing that will be needed in order to grow healthy plants that are ready to be transplanted out into the garden. Many times, people do not realize the essential need to grow these little plants under grow lights. Generally, my grow lights sit just above the canopy and I raise the lights as the plants grow. This ensures strong, sturdy plants that are not long, slender and droopy when



SUBMITTED PHOTO

grown with not enough light.

As far as broad planning of planting dates, plant celery, eggplant, leeks, peppers and tomatoes in mid March and in April, broccoli, cantaloupe, cauliflower, lettuce, pumpkins, squash and watermelon. This timing will give you sturdy plants for planting out around the long weekend in May. This will of course vary with the temperature, light and other environmental conditions where you are growing.

Hanbidge is the Lead Horticulturist with Orchid Horticulture. Find us at www.orchidhort.com; by email at growyourfuture@gmail.com on facebook @orchidhort and on instagram at #orchidhort.

Tune into GROW Live on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/orchidhort> or check out the Youtube channel GROW...

Virден dental team lends a hand in Dominican Republic

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

For a second year, Dr. Joe and Karissa Thiessen led their team from Prairie Life Dental on a mission to help people in a third world country in practical ways.

From Feb. 8 to Feb. 15 the Thiessen family from the Oak Lake took a break from their busy Virден practice to head to Dominican Republic (DR) taking their four sons and nephew Ryder.

Karissa explains Shine the Light Initiative (STLI) takes mission trips four to five times a year to El Javillar, a community near Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. She says this outreach has a Winnipeg heart. "Brent and Wendy Wong are the people that started Shine the Light. They are from Winnipeg. They have a heart to help 'the least of these' - they value people very much."

This non-profit organization, founded by the Wongs, not only brings dental aid, but medical aid, education and home building programs to impoverished communities. Since 2004 they have completed more than 60 mission trips around the world.

El Javillar is known as a residential neighborhood experiencing poverty, with approximately 3,000 residents, where some homes still have dirt floors. It is situated close to the main tourist areas of Puerto Plata.

Dr. Thiessen and team performed four half-days of dental work in a community centre that STLI had recently completed. Most of the other dental professionals were from Shine Dental, Dr. Brent Wong's practice. In total they saw over 350 patients.

Other programs at the community centre include English language lessons, boys' and girls' clubs, karate classes and more.

This STLI trip included 63 people, divided into four teams for carpentry. Karissa says, "My sons and



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Rear L-R: Karrisa Thiessen, Dr. Joe Thiessen, Kerri Kliever, Lauren Enns; Centre L-R: Ryder Toews, Becky Lyss, Arianna Ewert, Tessa Burt, Dr. Bhuvan Aggarwal, Liam Thiessen; Front L-R: Rosetta (translator from DR), Jordan Thiessen, Jase Thiessen, Brittany Brown, Cassia Gagnon, Jonah Thiessen, Lupe (new house owner), Shivani Bharkhada, Tony (translator) and his son.

the others their age (called the Young Guns team) built a different house than the rest of Prairie Life Dental team."

Home building is a very important part of the mission. "These houses change these people's lives," says Karissa. "The people in El Javillar struggle with flooding. The streets back up whenever there is heavy rain. The houses that are not built up on higher foundations flood regularly. And it is not healthy. The people that we were building with had houses with holes everywhere and leaky roofs."

Asked about memorable moments, Karissa noted that working conditions were far from Canadian comfort, with patients lying on hard plywood, but their dentistry and their work as builders was deeply appreciated.

"It's hard to explain but you leave feeling more blessed than the people you build the house for, at least that is how it feels. They are such thankful people. And everyone is so kind to us. The people that we got to fix teeth for were so thankful too. I never had so many hugs as I did there...."

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SPORTS

U11 RENARD TEAM WINS PROVINCIAL TITLE

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

A full team effort and a strong work ethic earned the U11 Renard Virden

Junior Oil Capitals a provincial championship.

In Portage, on the weekend of Feb. 27 to March 1, the team won the Hockey Manitoba U11 E Co-ed provincial title. In the gold medal game, the Junior Oil Capitals dispatched the hometown Portage Terriers 6-3.

“It was a full team effort in the final game,” Virden head coach Alex Renard said. “We got into some penalty trouble, and earlier in the year the kids probably would have lost their focus, but they just took it shift by shift. Entering the third period, the game was evenly matched. The boys understood that if they wanted to win, they would have to outwork the other team, and that’s what they did.”

The U11 Renard squad was just one of the local teams that had success on the first weekend of Hockey Manitoba’s provincials. In Reston, the hometown U11 Rockets won provincial B Co-ed bronze. Look for more on that team in this issue. The Virden U11 Corbett team earned the A Co-ed silver medals in St. Adolphe. At the D Co-ed provincial tournament, Virden U11 Hodgins took silver in Manitou. In Bois-sevain, the Reston Rockets won the bronze medals in the U13 A female division. Look for more on these teams in upcoming issues.

Renard said the parents and coaches were proud of how the title-winning team played and how it represented the community. He said, “We talk all season about how the only thing you can control is the effort you put in, and that is what they focused on this weekend in Portage.”

Over four tournament games, the Virden squad only



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The U11 Renard Virden Junior Oil Capitals won the Hockey Manitoba U11 E Co-ed provincial title.

allowed four goals. Renard said, “This is a testament to how well our goalies played, but also to the entire team’s defensive performance.” Goaltenders Thatcher White and Tyler Pateman each recorded a shutout.

In pool play, the Virden team went 2-0. It beat Morden 11-0. Connor Somerville was named Virden’s Player of the Game. Virden shut out Altona 9-0 with Ryker Klimchuk earning Player of the Game honours. The Junior Oil Capitals defeated Springfield Black 9-1 to advance to the final game. Cole Robertson was Virden’s Player of the Game.

“From a coaching perspective, you work with the kids all year developing their skills, their compete

level and how they play the game, and it’s fun to watch when things start falling into place,” Renard said. “We have had an up-and-down year, so it was nice for the kids to come out of the weekend proud of themselves for winning gold.”

The team included Preston Ritchie, Ben Renard, Brock Rost, Jacob Nielsen, Marshall Tack, Tyler Pateman, Thatcher White, Cole Robertson, Connor Somerville, Greyson Flannery, Oliver Bailey, Jackson Murray, Brooks O’Grady, and Ryker Klimchuk. The assistant coaches are Dallas Ritchie, Mike O’Grady and Barry Rost. Kara Rost is the team manager. Alex Renard is the head coach.

U11 ROCKETS WIN PROVINCIAL BRONZE AT HOME



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The U11 Reston Rockets won the Hockey Manitoba Co-ed U11 B provincial tournament.

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The U11 Reston Rockets earned a provincial medal on home ice.

The host team captured the bronze medals at the Hockey Manitoba Co-ed U11 B provincial tournament. The event was held Feb. 27 to March 1 in Reston. What allowed the Rockets to be successful?

“The team used their speed to provide pressure

on their opponents on both sides of the puck,” assistant coach Rory Tycoles said. “When we were playing our best, we were passing the puck to spread out the ice making it very difficult for other teams to defend against us.”

It is a special experience winning a provincial medal in your hometown. Tycoles said, “The team enjoyed seeing some great competition (and) play-

ing in front of classmates, family, friends, and many of the local hockey fans.”

The assistant coach said the team appreciated “all of the volunteers, tournament committee, community members, on and off ice officials, parents, the RM of Pipestone, the sponsors, anyone I am possibly missing for helping provide such a great weekend for the teams. There were many compliments on the beautiful facility we have in our small town.”

At the provincial tournament, the Rockets beat Grand Plains 7-4, shut out Thompson 9-0, and defeated Carberry 11-1. In a semifinal contest, the Rockets lost to St. Anne 6-4. The Reston team beat MacGregor 6-1 for the bronze medals.

“The team rebounded well, and played their hearts out, after a tough semifinal loss to the eventual champions,” Tycoles said. “The team showed resiliency and determination throughout the bronze medal game and came away with a convincing win.”

The bronze medals at provincials are just one highlight of the Rockets’ successful season. The squad topped its league with a perfect 13-0 record. It won its home tournament as well as one in Souris. The Rockets placed second at the Rural Tournament of Champions in Hamiota.

The Rockets roster includes Preston Harris, Mack Shand, Asher Clark, Cole Russell, Jett Guthrie, Hunter Vickers, Carter Wheelans, Johnny Henderson, Jakob Myles, Rhett Miliken, Scarlett Gray, Dexton Flannery, Ryder Henderson, Brooks Irwin, and Ryder Tycoles. Tyler Henderson is the head coach. The assistant coaches are Sheldon Guthrie, Corby Henderson, and Rory Tycoles.

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Virден Guides and Scouts met in council chambers with Town of Virден Mayor Tina Williams

The Mayor signed a declaration recognizing National Scouting Week on Feb. 24



1st Virден Scouts troop. Green shirts: (L-R) Kale White, Anthony Roach, Landon Timchishen, Logan Krohn, Nicholas Roach. Grey shirts: (L-R) Desmond Flannery, Everett Horn. Brown vest: Sean Milne. In the centre Mayor Tina Williams.



PHOTOS BY DALE DAVISON

Virден's Girl Guides of Canada company. Back: (L-R) Karys Douglas, Zoey Elliott. Front: (L-R) Renaye Grumpelt, Ellie Wadham, Mayor Tina Williams, Aubrey Bryde.

Heroes on the Roof. Hope on the Ground.



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For four days in March, Brandon Firefighters trade comfort for commitment — camping out on their rooftop to raise funds for local families.

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Share your input by March 31, 2026.

Visit wcbactreview.com to learn more.

RM considers community projects

Wallace-Woodworth Feb. 24 council meeting

By Dale Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Cemetery Road bridge

An interim payment for the Cemetery Road bridge project was approved to Samson Developments in the amount of \$80,207.24. There will be a final payment made after the paving has been completed.

Accounts payable

Council approved general cheques in the amount of \$1,680,503, direct deposits of \$2,835 and electronic fund transfers of \$109,197.75.

Woodworth Fire Department

Council reviewed a resolution concerning the Woodworth Fire Department's fundraising efforts to purchase batteries for the Jaws of Life. Although the Fire Department already has battery operated equipment, the existing batteries are aging and causing issues, and they need to be replaced. Council approved the motion to accept donations in support of the project and issue tax receipts for amounts over \$50.

Elections

Council considered the appointment of a Senior Election Official (SEO) under the Municipal Councils and School Boards Elections act. The SEO is responsible for managing and conducting all aspects of municipal elections. ACAO Braden Pilling was appointed as the Senior Election Official for the Rural Municipality of Wallace-Woodworth.

The municipal election for Wallace-Woodworth reeve and council will be held on Oct. 28. Manitoba's mayor and reeve candidates must register between May

1, 2026, and Sept. 22, 2026, while councillor candidates must register between June 30, 2026, and Sept. 22, 2026.

Battery application

Tundra Oil & Gas has applied to construct a battery at an existing surface lease. The access road has previously been rebuilt, with Tundra having cost-shared in the reconstruction. Coun. Mark Humphries asked, "Where's the nearest neighbor? Have we touched base with them?" Coun. Barb Stambuski confirmed that, as part of the provincial application process, Tundra must consult with all landowners, residents, and interested parties within a 1.5-kilometre radius and there are already three existing pump jacks on the site. The resolution was carried.

Hall of Fame sponsorship

Council reviewed a sponsorship request related to the Manitoba Softball Hall of Fame dinner and induction ceremony. Jenn Rempel of the Kenton area is a nominee for the honour and a proposal to pay for a half-page add in the Virden Empire-Advance was approved.

Elkhorn facilities

A resolution was proposed stating: The council of the RM of Wallace-Woodworth directs staff to apply for a grant opportunity for the Elkhorn Area Foundation grant program on behalf of the Elkhorn New Facility committee in the amount of \$15,000 to go towards the creation of concept design drawings for the project. The resolution was passed.

The Royal Canadian Legion Branch No. 58 in Elkhorn is seeking donations and apply-

ing for grants to fund a furnace replacement. The building uses two gas furnaces, but parts are no longer available, and the units are beyond their service life.

The RM of Wallace-Woodworth will accept donations and issue tax-deductible receipts for those over \$50.

Planning costs

Council discussed the Dennis County Development Plan that consists of 85 pages including maps. Comparisons are made to the TransCanada West development plan and prior Midwest development plans, and Coun. Humphries said, "The last time Midwest did one, it was \$72,000 for that development plan." These plans are mandated by the provincial government, and Reeve Clayton Canart added, "And they want you to do it every five years," which he considers unnecessary.

LUD reports

Coun. Diana MacDonald attended the Kenton LUD committee meeting and reported that they are considering purchasing two solar lights for town signage at a cost of \$475 each. Carman has the same lights and feedback from them has been positive, though they have not yet completed a full year of usage.

There is an issue about drivers entering the landfill site on days when it is closed. Those towing trailers have difficulty turning around and are often forced to back out a long distance after entering as there is no room to make a turn. It was suggested that a simple closure sign be placed at the road entrance to prevent vehicles from entering when the site is not open.

Coun. Denis Lachapelle attended the Elkhorn LUD committee meeting and reported that work on the accessibility doors at the Ports Office was underway and the installation would be completed the next day.

The committee also discussed questions regarding hanging banners or materials on Manitoba Hydro poles. There are concerns about compliance with Hydro's rules, and the municipality will investigate proper procedures.

Councillor reports

Coun. Lyle Kinnaird attended the Assiniboine West Watershed District sub-district meetings for Arrow River and Oak River watersheds. The RM of Wallace-Woodworth had a strong financial showing within the district. While its levy contribution was \$40,417, local ratepayers received \$1,093,830 in program grants which was by far the largest amount among participating municipalities.

Kinnaird also attended the Virden and area handi-van meeting and reported, "The committee was proposing that we investigate van replacement or something within the next year or two because of the age of the van and perhaps there's some economy with something a little smaller and more convenient."

Coun. Lachapelle reported that the Elkhorn handi-van committee reviewed their vehicle's condition and determined that replacement is not immediately necessary. The committee is actively seeking new members, as several current drivers may be stepping down.

Lute & Fable Music Academy strikes new chord for youth

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Lute & Fable Music Academy, owned and managed by Susan Martens, has grown out of the original Virden and District Youth Choir. That original youth choir, begun by Michelle Chzyk, brought great opportunity to young singers and actors. That tradition is continuing under a new name.

Martens talks about the changes and similarities. The VDYC was run under Michelle Chzyk and Virden Theatre Productions.

Martens became part of that program when she and her husband moved to Virden in 2014.

She said, "As years went on, Michelle slowly phased herself out and had me and Kelsey Brown running it."

Chzyk took responsibility for major decisions until last April, when she asked Martens if she'd be willing to take this work on and start her own youth choir program.

"She had suggested a name change because we would no longer be part of the Virden Theatre Productions. Obviously, I agreed," says Martens.

There are some changes. The youth choir used to run from September to March, with a choir concert in November and a musical production at the beginning of March.

"This year we are ending in April so we can participate in the Virden Music and Arts Festival this year."

Grades 4 to 9 used to be involved in the whole program which consisted of choral music from September to November, then a focus on the musical for the rest of the year.

"This year, we added a younger group and now have a 'boot camp' for our Grade 2 to 4s and our older group is Grade 5 to 9."

She says, the music academy is "trying to teach more music theory and vocal techniques in every class so that students are not just singing but learning how to read music and become better musicians.

"Our 'boot camp' for the younger grades was created partially to have younger students learning choral music, but we also wanted to start teaching them how our musical theatre practices run. We were finding that our Grade 4s last year were very overwhelmed with the fast pace of our musical practice. We wanted to give them a chance to ease into it.

"So this year, while the older grades learned Anastasia, we taught [the younger choristers] a couple of the pieces, including choreography and how to use your face and body to portray emotions.

"We also took them to the Aud one day for a tour and for them to watch the older kids practice. They seem very excited to join us on stage in the future!"

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MJHL REPORT

MJHL HOCKEY DEREK HOLTOM

It's not often this column starts out with suspension talk, but it's also not often (anymore) to see two goaltenders fighting. But that and more happened last Wednesday in Swan River as the Stampeders and Wolverines combined for 142 minutes in penalties.

A match and a major penalty in back-to-back shifts led to two fights breaking out at the same time, players needing help off the ice, and a lot of FloHockey video to review by MJHL Commissioner Kevin Saurette.

When everything was reviewed, the league game out with the following suspensions

1. Swan Valley's Ryley Woods was assessed a two-game suspension for a hit to the head.
2. Swan Valley goaltender Samuel Bastien was assessed a four-game suspension for a goalie fight and the second fight in the same stoppage.
3. Waywayseecappo goaltender Jase Wareham was assessed the same suspension as a goaltender - a four-game suspension for a goalie fight and the second fight in the same stoppage.
4. Waywayseecappo's Ryley Cyca was also assessed a four-game suspension for his match penalty for a cross check.

As an aside, as teams attempt to sell their product to their local communities, who wouldn't say two goaltenders fighting at mid-ice isn't one of the most entertaining and exciting plays of this season. Heck, the NHL saw a goalie fight this season during one of their nationally televised outdoor games, and that was one of the highlights that got people buzzing.

I'm not saying the changes Hockey Canada enacted are for the worse of the MJHL, but Wareham and Bastien scrapping is one of the most exciting and entertaining events of the MJHL in recent memory. And they ended up suspended, putting both teams in a bad spot as they scramble to fill that void (though the Stamps already had a third goaltender readily available).

That said, the goalie fights followed some serious penalties and injuries were reported, which is obviously nothing anyone wants. It exposes the fine line teams face in terms of player safety and providing entertainment.

· Niverville dominated the MJHL Liquor and Lotteries Stars of the Week, claiming two of the three nominations.

Niverville forward Evan Panzer is the first winner thanks to his four goals and three assists in three games last week.

The second winner is goaltender Austin Dubinsky, also from the Nighthawks. He won both games he started, posting a 0.99 GAA, a .969 save percentage and one shutout.

The final winner is forward Jack Clark from the Neepawa Titans. Clark scored twice and added four helpers for six points in three games to earn the nod.

· Next week's column should be jam packed with players of the month honours and perhaps the start of year-end award nominations to report on.

Portage's Trevor Hill should make room for his inevitable awards. He's a lock for the rookie of the year honour and is the favourite for the goal-scoring title, as he hit 39 goals last week - though Niverville's Hayden Wheddon is close behind with 35.

The Terriers still have two games remaining against the Winnipeg Monarchs and the Winnipeg Blues. Those two teams are a collective -241 in goal differential this year. Hill may yet hit the 50 goal plateau with a couple of good outings in the final two weeks - a feat not seen in the MJHL since the 2011-12 season when Dauphin's Jesse Sinatynski lit the lamp 59 times.

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SPORTS

PROVINCIAL U18 HOCKEY

By Gerry Nolan
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Hamiota hosted the provincial U18 women's hockey tournament this past weekend. There were 6 teams taking part in the tournament. Two pools of three competed against one another with the teams seeded after the round robin play.

When all the games were completed, the Southwest Rockets were crowned Champions with a 2-0 victory over the Brandon Wheaties.

In the Bronze Medal game, the host Hamiota Huskies claimed the Bronze Medal with a 5-4 overtime victory over the Brandon Blazers.

The Birtle Bruskie defeated the Southwest Stars 4-2 to win the consolation side of the tournament. Congratulations to all the teams for giving it their all this past weekend. Congratulations to the host of the event, Hamiota Minor Hockey for all their hard work. Also thank you for the many volunteers that it takes to host and run such a major tournament. To all those who worked the door, sold 50/50 tickets, worked the time clock and the game sheet as well as the many volunteers who work in the ca-

teen, well done folks! Also thank-you to all the on-ice officials for making sure the games ran smoothly. Great job Hamiota!

NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE TRADE DEADLINE

By Gerry Nolan
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

On March 6 is the National Hockey League trade deadline. There is so much speculation, so much discussion, so much discussion on trades that are dreamed up, it's difficult to know just what any teams are doing because the general managers are not giving out information. The people on our televisions would have you believe they have the inside scoop and know what the deals are. Personally the only one I pay much attention to is Bob McKenzie. He did not speculate but dealt with facts.

Anyway, I am going to speculate about the Canadian teams and what they should do. As of today, Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto and Ottawa are not even in the playoffs and are likely going golfing

right after the Masters Golf Tournament in April. Edmonton and Montreal although not guaranteed, are likely to make the playoffs. Two Canadian teams and that is all for this season.

Edmonton needs a goalie and they need to trade Darnell Nurse. At a \$9million a year contract and as the 5th or 6th defenseman on that team, he needs to leave. The door is closing on Edmonton to win the cup as their core is in their prime.

Montreal continues to get better each season and are getting close to a long playoff run. I think they need to get more size up front. We saw Washington knock them around in last year's playoffs so addressing that will be on their list.

Vancouver and Calgary are doing a rebuild, so any trades they can make to get draft picks will be on their list and

both teams will have some players they can move. Nazem Kadri in Calgary, Brock Boeser in Vancouver will likely be on the move. Ottawa is underachieving so they may wait until summer to do much with their roster.

Winnipeg has had a terrible season. Last season's President trophy winners are going to miss the playoffs. A wasted year for a team that has so much top end talent. They still do not have a number two centre and need to upgrade a small defensive core. They have kept playing the same guys with not good results. Their farm team, the Manitoba Moose, where their prospects are, must not be that good as they do not bring them up to play.

They are, if you listen to what the sports talk shows are saying, they should be trading Logan

Stanley and Cole Perfetti. Two young players to build around and you are trading them? What about trading the dead weight on the team? Dylan DeMelo, Neal Pionk, Gustav Nyquist, Nino Niederreiter just to mention a few. Gustav Nyquist signed a one year contract with the Winnipeg Jets this past off season. So far he has scored no goals and has nine assists. The game against Anaheim played last Friday night, he was on the ice in overtime when Anaheim scored to win the game. Really coach, why in the world would you even consider putting a player on the ice in a three on three situation that has not scored a goal all year? Maybe it is time Winnipeg changes the general manager and the coach.

It will all be clear after next Friday as to what happened on the trade deadline. Friday!

REF MEMORIES

REF TO WRITER

GERRY NOLAN



I happened to be walking in the mall in Brandon and bumped into an old friend, Frank Taylor from Minnedosa. It was really good to see him. We both used to officiate all kinds of hockey games in and around the area. I really respected Frank, as he was one of the best officials I knew. We did not work a lot of games together, but when we did it was always a lot of fun. As we reminisced about games and times we spent together and the guys we worked with officiating it definitely brought back some great memories.

Frank reminded me of the time he came to our house after a game,

as I had made a pot of chili that needed to be eaten. Probably a couple of brews as well!

We covered some of the officiating we see and I will tell you both of us are not impressed by the officiating these days. It is hard to understand what officials are calling these days. Not a lot of consistency, we agreed. How the game has changed and it is different from what we saw. I think the lack of respect in our world, which filters down, is the root of the problem. Anyway we do not officiate anymore so sometimes you just have to let it be.

As we chatted about the good old days, a couple of fellow officials have passed away and others are facing health problems. We were both sad to hear of the referees who have passed away. It is a reminder to enjoy each day as it comes as tomorrow may never come.

It made my day seeing Frank again, who is a true gentleman and was the best referee for a good number of years. How do I know he was a top referee? Hockey teams, especially in the playoffs, wanted him to officiate their playoff games. When your peers look at you, as they did

with Frank, that says it all! They wanted him in their rink to officiate their most important games of the season.

Frank shared that these days, he follows the grandchildren around, encouraging them as they participate in sporting events. In fact that day, they were headed to Winnipeg to watch hockey. Frank looks like he is in great shape and probably could still be out on the ice officiating the game we both love.

As I said earlier it was great to see him and share some memories of hockey!

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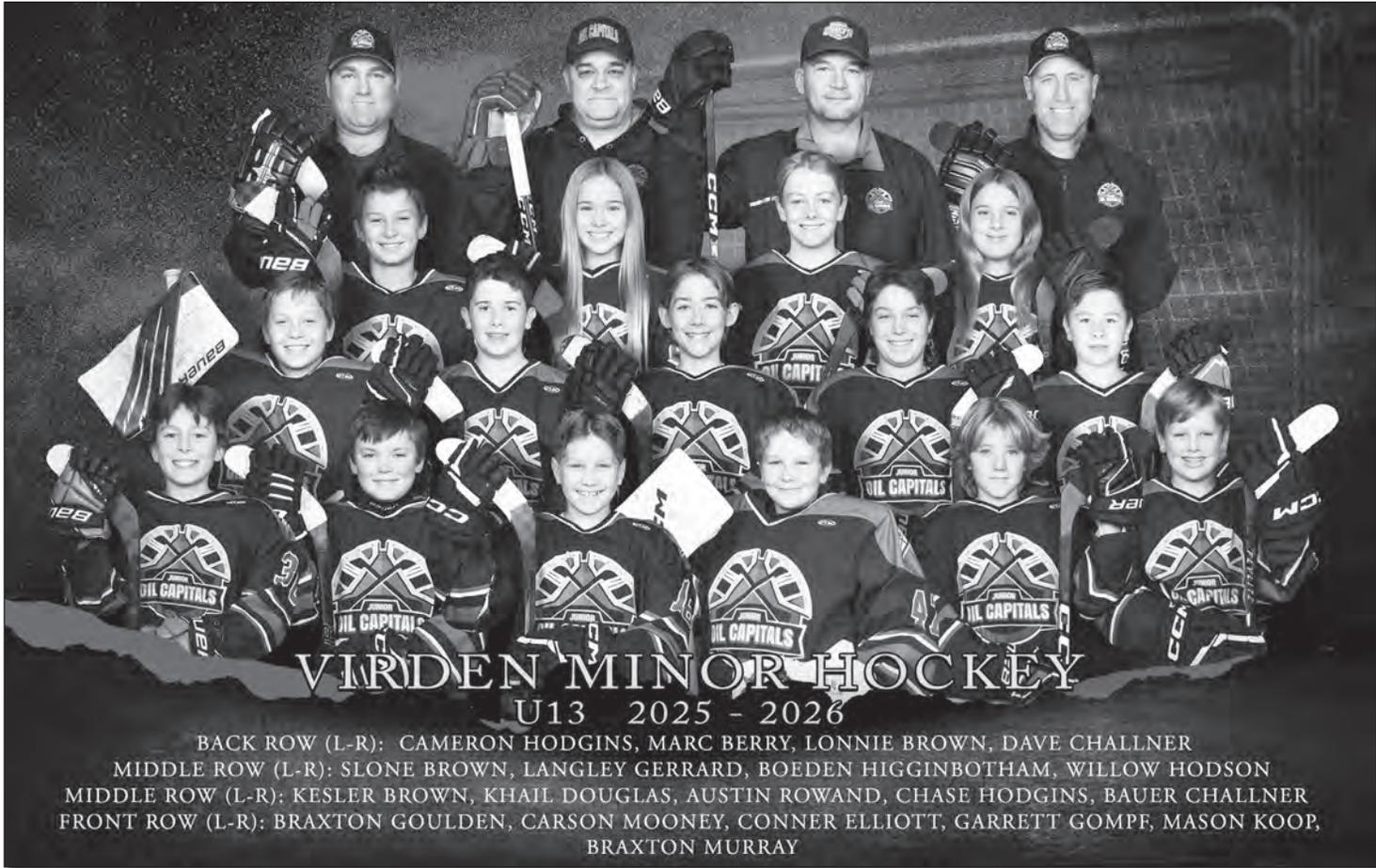
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SPORTS

SPORTS NOTES: VIRDEN SET TO HOST U13 A HOCKEY PROVINCIALS



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 FRONT ROW (L-R): BRAXTON GOULDEN, CARSON MOONEY, CONNER ELLIOTT, GARRETT GOMPFF, MASON KOOP, BRAXTON MURRAY

PHOTO BY SHARLA GEORGE PHOTOGRAPHY

By Robin Wark
 EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Place March 13-15.

Virден Minor Hockey is hosting the Co-ed Under-13 Rural A provincial tournament. The Virден Junior Oil Capitals U13 - Brown team will be cheered on by a hometown crowd.

"Being able to host provincials on home ice is a meaningful opportunity for our kids and we are really excited to watch them compete in front of a hometown crowd, and for our community to experience a weekend of great hockey," said Alyssa Elliott, one of the organizers. "We also feel incredibly fortunate to have a strong hockey organization, a beautiful facility, and a community that continues to support minor hockey."

The U13 Brown squad has had a successful season. It won the Rural Tournament of Champions in its division and competed well at Brandon's Tournament of Champions. For info and updates, before, during and after the event, fans can follow Co-ed U13 "A" 2026 Rural Provincials, Virден MB on Facebook.

It takes a number of people to host a successful provincial event. Organizers would appreciate more volunteers. Anyone interested in helping can contact Brent Murray at 204-851-0073.

Elliott said she could not have asked for a better group of parents and coaches to work with on the planning of the event. She said, "So much time and effort has been put in already and everyone has been very supportive and willing to help." Elliott emphasized that local sponsors and those that contributed to Virден Minor Hockey's annual Crude Oil Cup fundraiser "have made this event possible for our team and we are incredibly grateful that they have this opportunity."

Bradbury, Duncan help ACC to Championship

Virден's Jordyn Bradbury and Reston's Halle Duncan helped Assiniboine Community College win its first Manitoba Colleges Athletic Conference women's volleyball championship. The Brandon-based Cougars swept Canadian Mennonite University 3-0 to win the title at home. Bradbury recorded a team-high 11 digs. She is the daughter of Darren Bradbury and Gina Tait Reiner. Duncan's parents are Stacey and Melissa Duncan. The Cougars will compete in the Canadian Collegiate Athletic Association national championships in Niverville March 11-14.

Hodson Signs With Jimmies

Lenore's Presley Hodson has signed to play hockey at the University of

Jamestown in North Dakota. She currently competes for the U18AAA Yellowhead Chiefs. The Jimmies compete at the American Collegiate Hockey Association Division I level. Hodson plans to study agriculture. Look for more on her in a future edition of the Empire-Advance.

U21 Curling Provincials

Carman's Shaela Hayward skipped her rink to the 2026 Co-ops of Manitoba Junior Provincial Championship in Morris in February. The rink will represent the province at the New Holland Canadian Junior Curling Championships in Sudbury. Hayward is the daughter of Diane Hayward and former Virден resident Darcy Hayward. It was Hayward's third straight provincial title. The rink went undefeated this year 7-0.

"I think we were just very prepared going into this event," Hayward said. She is looking forward to playing her final Canadian junior championship. She said, "We have been gearing up for this event all year and are really excited to play the best junior teams in the country."

At the championships, Virден's Joelle Barkley played second on the Kate Patterson rink from Swan River. It was her second U21 provincials. She said:

"I always enjoy the long weeks of curling the anticipation to get to the end of the weekend and to hopefully make it to playoffs. . . . I really enjoy playing with a new bunch of girls. It gives me a wide range of new experiences and friendships. Overall, I really had a great time in Morris and a big congratulations to Team Hayward and Team Boutet (male winners) on the buffalos."

Joelle's father, Cory Barkley, coached the Patterson rink, which compiled a 2-3 record in only its second bonspiel together.

"We were ultimately still one of the youngest teams there in a very solid 12-team field, so the girls should be proud of their efforts," Coach Barkley said. "Losing to eventual champion and three-time consecutive U20 winner Shaela Hayward in our first game showed us the level we were going to need to play at to compete. Congratulations to Team Hayward on their victory, they will represent us well at nationals."

Cory Barkley and Darcy Hayward went to high school and curled together for many years. They won a Manitoba Winter Games title together in 1994.

Joseph Chosen as MVP

Elkhorn's Colby Joseph was tabbed as the Midwest College Hockey Tournament MVP. The son of Dawn and Gord Joseph helped Minot (N.D.) State University win its second straight MCH Tournament title.

MSU is headed to the American Collegiate Hockey Association Division I men's hockey tournament March 12-22 in Missouri.

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Public Hearing



NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

DEVELOPMENT PLAN – DENNIS COUNTY PLANNING DISTRICT

Under authority of *The Planning Act*, the Planning District Board will hold a public hearing at the time and location listed below to hear from and receive representations from any persons who wish to make them in respect to the following:

BY-LAW NO. 24, TO ADOPT A DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR THE DENNIS COUNTY PLANNING DISTRICT (INCLUDING THE RURAL MUNICIPALITY OF PIPESTONE, RURAL MUNICIPALITY OF SIFTON, AND MUNICIPALITY OF GRASSLAND)

DATE, TIME, AND LOCATION: Wednesday, March 18th, 2026 at 7:30pm Municipality of Grassland Council Chambers 209 Airdrie Street, Hartney, MB	FOR INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT: David Houston Development Officer / Building Inspector Dennis County Planning District dcpd@rmofsifton.com 204-855-2423
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A copy of the proposed materials may be arranged for review through the contact above.

Public Hearing



NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING 2026 FINANCIAL PLAN

Tuesday, March 17, 2026, at 7:00 p.m.
Kola EMC Church
57036 Road 171 W

PUBLIC NOTICE is hereby given pursuant to subsection 162(2) of The Municipal Act that the Council of the Rural Municipality of Wallace-Woodworth intends to present its financial plan for the fiscal year 2026 at a PUBLIC HEARING on March 17, 2026, at the Kola EMC Church, in Kola, Manitoba.

Council will hear any person who wishes to make a presentation, ask questions, or register an objection to the financial plan, as provided through the following methods:

Method	Important Reminders
In writing	To be sent ahead of time by email or regular mail prior to March 17.
In person	Individuals interested to attend the Public Hearing in person are requested to send an RSVP by phoning the R.M. of Wallace-Woodworth Virden Office at 204-748-1239 on or before March 16, 2026, Monday at 12:00 p.m.

A copy of the financial plan will be available for review. View the document on the R.M. website, request for an electronic copy to be emailed, or pick-up a hardcopy during regular hours at the Virden, Elkhorn or Kenton offices.

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Please submit the tendered price per cut for each school you are interested in, plus any other variable charges (including GST) by replying to this tender by email before noon on April 7th, 2026. For more information please visit our website flbsd.mb.ca

Help Wanted



FORT LA BOSSE SCHOOL DIVISION SENIOR ELECTION OFFICIAL

The Fort La Bosse School Division is accepting applications for the position of Senior Election Official (SEO). The next school board election is scheduled for October 2026.

The SEO is appointed by the Board of Trustees and is responsible for the general direction and supervision of the school board election process in accordance with The Municipal Councils and School Boards Elections Act. Responsibilities include managing election logistics and ensuring the integrity of the electoral process. For more information please visit our website flbsd.mb.ca

Written applications from interested individuals will be accepted until March 15th, 2026 addressed to:

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The deadline for applications will remain open until suitable candidates are found.

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YFC Hideout thrives with community support

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Working with youth requires a steady hand, lots of energy and team work including community support.

Judging by the numbers of youth ages 12- 18 who show up, the community support, the enthusiastic staff and the years of continuity, Virден chapter of Westman Youth for Christ is an investment in the future.

Kyle Martens, the leader is now in his 12th year with Virден's Youth For Christ where he coordinates activities at The Hideout. As program director, he was happy this fall to welcome new staff member Ashton Gilliland because he knows he can't do it all.

"I have a really good connection with youth, being able to talk to them, to build relationship, do that kind of stuff, but the business side of it... that's just not my strong suit," says Martens.

Gilliland is stepping in as someone "who knows the community, who can really share the vision of what's going on," he said.

She was employed in the Virден business community, but felt drawn to work with youth. Gilliland applied for the community coordinator position despite initial fears about fundraising her own salary. After seeking guidance and seeing three clear confirmations during the interview process, she accepted the role.

About a month into the job, while still feeling unsure of herself, she supported a youth who was upset after an incident and struggling with issues at school. Worried about saying the "right" thing, she simply told the teen, "I'm so sorry you have to go through this." The youth responded with tears and asked for a hug. The experience taught Gilliland that ministry isn't about having perfect answers — often, young people just need someone to listen, care, and be present.

This thriving youth centre is supported by individuals and businesses who value YFC's contribution within the community. Virден chapter of Westman YFC holds several fundraisers each year.

This year their fundraising banquet was held at Kola Church, Friday, Feb. 20, where board member and emcee, Wyatt Anderson, made introductions and directed traffic toward the roast beef smorgasbord. Tables were set for 80 guests and warm conversation



PHOTO BY ANNE DAVISON

At the 2026 Virден YFC fundraiser banquet a panel of youth talk about fun at The Hideout.

was definitely on the menu.

It was an opportunity for YFC to show appreciation to their supporters and for the public to hear from Martens and Gilliland. Dinner guests were entertained and informed by a panel of eight youth as they responded to questions put to them by Martens.

Executive Director Rena Booth-Navid was present. A Registered Nurse by trade she is Uturn and Housing First Director. Uturn is a 2-year transitional housing program for young people ages 18-29 that are currently, or at risk of, facing homelessness.

Satellite Director Emily Hildebrandt coordinates between YFC Virден, Russell and the Westman centre. She explained that donations generated this year and at this event would be used for Virден's YFC ministry.

Current committee members are: Bob Heaman, Dean Munchinsky, Everett Hildebrandt, Kelsey Jamieson, and newly added Wyatt Anderson. The committee draws members from across the district and from various community and church affiliations.

Volunteers include Susan Martens, Brooke Wernaart, James Kreutzer and Dylon Wernaart.

The Hideout

Within the Hideout comfy orange furniture, a canteen, full-sized billiard table and a host of games welcome the youth who drop in. "It has just, kind of all the stuff, all the different things that you could want to do as a kid," says Martens adding, "And hopefully kids kind of see that and gravitate towards it and realize that there's something here for them...."

Chess has taken on a new appeal. "Chess is an in-

teresting one where kids, they've gotten back into it. There's a lot of streamers now on YouTube and even Twitch," says Martens, laughing and saying the kids could beat him in a chess game.

The Hideout is equipped with Guitar Hero... music related video games. Game popularity waxes and wanes. "Most popular is probably some of the board games," says Martens adding that "Dutch Blitz is always one that they love to play."

Weekly programs begin Wednesdays right after school with Homework & Hang where staff offer encouragement with homework, showing kids "the potential that they have."

By 5:30 Wednesday the Tabletop Club games night gets going. Guitar Hero, pool, chess and many other games are on the menu. Drop-in evenings on Thursdays and Fridays are considered the main outreach. Youth and leaders engage in the story of God and humans — a time where youth can learn and grow and hear about Jesus.

Soul Food is a lunch program on every second Saturday where youth prepare a meal and enjoy it together while having genuine discussions about life.

YFC assists with lunch hours at Virден Collegiate. Gym Blast is an activity packed event for students in Westman area.

And, on the last Sunday of the month the Hideout welcomes adults of any age to gather between 2 and 5pm.

Looking forward to summer, the YFC fundraiser golf tournament is coming up June 14.

Manitoba invests \$1.49 million in Deloraine-Winchester airport upgrades

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Deloraine Winchester rural airport is receiving \$1.49 million towards upgrading its runway and lighting. The airport will be reclassified to become a regional airport to reflect its growing importance as a transportation hub and its role in supporting economic development, emergency response and regional connectivity into the future.

On Feb. 12, Municipal and Northern Relations Minister Glen Simard announced the funding through Manitoba Growth and Renewal Opportunities for Municipalities (Manitoba GRO) program to upgrade the Deloraine-Winchester Airport to improve safety, support increased access for STARS air ambulance services, tourism and to support aerial surveillance by the Canada Border Services Agency.

Simard said, "This upgrade ensures that essential services like STARS air ambulance access, border surveillance and flight training can operate reliably year round. By partnering with the municipality of Deloraine Winchester to modernize this critical infrastructure, we're extending the life of a facility that communities across the region depend on."

"This airstrip is more than a runway. It's a lifeline for medical transport, a gateway for agricultural and business activity, and a critical piece of infrastructure that supports safety, mobility and economic opportunity for our communities," said Reeve Kelly McMechan.

Repaving the airport's runway and upgrading its lighting systems will support safe, reliable, year-round operations for essential services such as air ambulances, flight training, agricultural aerial applications and border patrol.

McMechan commended the local flying club for paving the 4,000-foot runway in the 1980s - years before Life Flight, STARS or aerial agricultural applications were in demand.

Deloraine aerodrome is about 15 kms north of the US border and is the only airport in this southwest corner of Manitoba that's open 24/7/365.

Airport manager Peter Downey said, "The usage of the airport is far and wide. Agricultural activity is substantial in the growing season. Currently we have the Blackhawk helicopters for Canada Border Service fuel up here regularly. We have IFR (Instrument Flight Rating) training that runs through here."

Downey explained, "We're GPS equipped for both ends of the runway, so we do get some training flights



SUBMITTED PHOTO

from various training organizations including the Forces occasionally, and the medical (flights)."

He says that LifeFlight and even the non-emergent medical flights come and go as many as four times per day.

The airport's regional designation opens the door to future development, says Minister Simard, and it draws cooperation on the project from other municipalities.

A local fundraiser is scheduled for mid-March and the renovation is expected to be complete in the fall of 2026, the reeve noted.

SPORTS

VIRDEN CURLING CLUB: HEAMAN RECORDS EIGHT-ENDER; IT'S BONSPIEL SEASON

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

It is an exciting time at the Virden Curling Club.

Anesha Heaman's women's rink recently recorded an eight-ender. It is actually the second time this curling season that this rare feat has been accomplished locally. The Virden Curling Club is also gearing up to host its ladies' and men's bonspiels in March.

"We've been enjoying the performance of the new rocks," said the curling club's Jay Kinnaird. "Ice conditions are great, and we look forward to a packed house for the

next couple of weeks."

8-Enders

During the fourth end of a regular Tuesday ladies' league game in February, the Heaman rink accomplished the rare eight-ender. The Curling Canada website explains "An eight-ender is an end where all eight stones score for one team; a very rare occurrence." According to the Canadian Curling Association, the probability of the feat is one in 120,000.

"Honestly, we didn't really see it at first until I went to throw my last shots and the front end pointed out that we could get an eight-ender," Heaman said. "So, we threw a draw and made it. Our last rock we had to make a nice light hit without taking one of our own stones and made it, but our opponents still had last rock so we still weren't sure we could get it. We were very lucky to have all our rocks still in play after they threw."

When the feat was accomplished, Heaman said, "Our rink was excited. A few of us have been trying for many years to get an eight-ender, so it was very exciting. Hard to contain our excitement at first."

In November, Murray Foster's rink had an eight-ender in senior recreational play. Last month, the Heaman rink went on to win its game after the eight-ender. In addition to Heaman at skip, the rink includes lead Dayna Leslie, second Pattie Routledge, and third Brittany Vinck. They enjoy curling in the weekly local league.

"I love this league," Heaman said. "There are lots of teams to play and we always have lots of fun. You can be as competitive or not as competitive as you want to be. And everyone is always welcome."

Ladies Bonspiel

The Virden Ladies Bonspiel will run March 4-8. Organizer Erin Barkley said the event is full with 24 teams. She noted that it is the first year in a while the event has had three junior rinks.

When asked what makes it a fun event, Barkley said, "The people and the atmosphere. Everyone comes to have a good time. Lots of visiting, curling and a few drinks."



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Anesha Heaman, Brittany Vinck, Pattie Routledge, and Dayna Leslie recorded their first-ever eight-ender.

Men's Bonspiel

The 126th Virden Men's Bonspiel will get started on March 8 after the ladies' finals.

It runs through March 15. About 40 rinks are expected to compete.

"We're very excited to see strong numbers continuing after last year's 125 celebration," Kinnaird said.

Virden's Jace Freeman has led a rink to victory at the bonspiel the past three years.

OIL KINGS BEAT JETS, FACE SHAMROCKS IN SEMIFINALS

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

After getting past the Rivers Jets in the Tiger Hills Hockey League playoffs,

the Virden Oil Kings are now set to tangle with the 2025 champion Killarney Shamrocks.

The two teams battled in the finals last year with the Shamrocks winning 3-1. The THHL semifinal series between the teams will start on March 6 in Killarney. Game two of the best-of-five affair is March 7 in Virden. The third game will be played March 10 in Killarney. If required, game four would be March 11 in Virden game five on March 14 in Killarney. In the other semifinal, the Minnesoda Bombers face the Hartney Blues.

"We are going to need to keep the confidence we have gained through the first two rounds going against the Shamrocks," Oil Kings general manager Ryan Mathieson said. "We have had to play some tight series to get here and will need the resilience that built to get past Killarney."

The Shamrocks finished first in the THHL regular season with an 18-0-0-1 record. Virden was fifth at 14-5-0-0. In the postseason, Ty Enns has paced Killarney with six goals and seven points over three games. Shamrocks goalie Brian Archibald is 2-0 in the postseason with a 1.50 goals against average. Evan Svoboda backstopped the Shamrocks to one win and posted a shutout. Killarney swept the Neepawa Farmers 3-0 in the league quarterfinals after receiving a first-round bye.

After beating the Souris Elks 2-0 in the first round, the Oil Kings defeated the third-seeded Jets 3-1. As reported last week, Virden won the first two games against Rivers. The Jets took game three 3-2 before the Oil Kings closed out the series 3-2 at home.

"The biggest difference in the Rivers series was we had Brad and Shawn Bowles and they didn't," Mathieson said. "Our depth at defence was also a big factor for us. We got contributions up and down the lineup and needed that along with timely saves to get past a strong Jets team."

Through six playoff games, Brad Bowles has 15 assists and 20 points. His twin brother Shawn leads the team with eight goals. Brad Bowles and Elisha Bambridge have scored five goals each. Virden goalie Riley Wallace is 4-1 in the playoffs with a 2.40 GAA. Duncan Paddock is 1-0 with a 3.00 GAA.

On Feb. 24, the Jets staved off elimination with a 3-2 victory. All of the scoring occurred in an action-packed first period. Rivers led 2-1 at one point. Virden tied things up, but then Rivers took the lead for good. Scoring for the Oil Kings were Bambridge and Brad Bowles. Wallace made 19 saves.

The Oil Kings won game four 3-2 on Feb. 25. The game was tied 1-1 after two periods. Shawn Bowles put Virden ahead 8:09 into the period. Layne Toder made it 3-1 for the Oil Kings on a power play just over a minute later. The Jets were able to score once, but were unable to tie things up. Wallace stopped 18 shots.



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BRYANT POWERS HOMETOWN OIL CAPITALS' OFFENCE

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Bryce Bryant is enjoying a career-best campaign for his hometown Virden Oil

Capitals. Bryant recorded four assists in a November victory against Neepawa. Between October 3 and October 18, he scored at least one goal in each of the seven games he played.

Capitals.

The son of Daren and Roanne Bryant was second in scoring in the Manitoba Junior Hockey League, as of Feb. 28. He was second in the league standings in assists and seventh in goals. What has allowed the third-year forward to produce so prolifically?

“Having the opportunity to be put in situations and playing with great players helps contribute to offensive production,” Bryant said.

Entering this week, he paced the Oil Capitals with 75 points, 28 goals, and 47 assists in 49 games. Bryant ranked second in the MJHL with 23 power-play assists. He had scored six goals with the man advantage.

“Bryce is an elite player,” Oil Capitals head coach Tyson Ramsey said. “He has great speed and can change speeds quickly - putting opposing players off balance. He has elite puck skills, he sees the ice at a very high level, and he has a great release on his shot. When Bryce is at his best, he can control a game and make the players around him better. He drives our offence and obviously plays a huge role on our power play. ... We are lucky to have him here with us.”

While Bryant has posted impressive numbers, Ramsey said the 5-foot-11, 173-pound player's physical game is something people might not always take note of.

“I am proud of him for how hard he worked last off-season and, although smaller in stature, he is very strong and protects the puck extremely well and is able to use his body to fend off checks to create time and space for him to use his elite skill,” the coach said. “When Bryce is involved physically on both sides of the puck, he becomes a high-end, complete player.”

The 19-year-old is also counted on the Oil Capitals to be a leader. Bryant gained valuable experience in camp this past fall with the Western Hockey League's Swift Current Broncos. Ramsey said, “Bryce has been a part of our leadership group right from when he returned from Swift Current.” When veteran Oil Caps forward Noel Englot was traded in January, the team had a spot for an assistant captain and the coach said:

“Bryce deserved to take on that role. Bryce is a great teammate, works hard in the gym, and his elite speed and skill on the ice make him a great role model for guys on our team.”

While playing for the U18 AAA Yellowhead Chiefs in 2022-2023, Bryant competed in an Oil Capitals' playoff game as an affiliated player. The next season, he made the team and had an impact as a rookie. Bryant posted 29 points, includ-



PHOTO BY VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS

Virden Oil Capitals Bryce Bryant.

ing 10 goals, in 52 games. Last season, he recorded 37 points, with 14 goals, in 44 games. This winter Bryant is averaging 1.53 points per game. Each season he has improved not only his offensive numbers, but also other aspects of his game.

“Being in the league for a while now and understanding how the game is played has helped me develop each season in a positive way,” Bryant said.

He has appreciated how his family has backed him during his hockey journey. Bryant said, “My family's support is huge, providing me with all the opportunity to maximize my game and having a great place to live during my junior career.”

OIL CAPITALS CLINCH WEST DIVISION TITLE

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The Virden Oil Capitals have clinched the Manitoba Junior Hockey League's MGEU West Division regular-season title.

The Oil Capitals had a 33-13-3-1 record, as of March 2. That put the team, which went 1-2 last week, 10 points (70-60) ahead of the second-place Dauphin Kings (29-22-2-0).

Due to bad weather, the Oil Capitals' Feb. 27 game against the Winnipeg Blues was postponed. The Virden squad hosted the Winnipeg Monarchs on March 3, after the Empire-Advance deadline. It was the start of the five-game homestand for the local team. The Northern Manitoba Blizzard come to town on March 6 and the Dauphin Kings on March 7.

Award Finalists

Several members of the Oil Capitals have been named finalists for MJHL awards. Head coach Tyson Ramsey is up for MJHL Coach of the Year. He won the award in 2023. Virden's own Bryce Bryant has been named a finalist for the league's Most Valuable Player.

London Hoilett is a finalist for the MJHL Outstanding Ability and Sportsmanship Award, while Nate Schaefer is in the running for the MJHL Top Defenceman Award. Braxton Burdeny has been named a finalist for the MJHL Top Goaltender Award.

Roster Moves

On Feb. 23, Oil Capitals forward Cohen Lewko was called up to the Western Hockey League's Saskatoon Blades. For Virden's game against the Steelers, the squad called up Nic Cullen, a 2005-born forward from the Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League's St. James Junior Canucks. On March 2, Oil Capitals defenceman Jett Deschamps was called up by the WHL's Regina Pats.

Steelers 5, Oil Caps 3

In a School Day Showdown afternoon matinee, the host Steelers outscored the

Oil Capitals in the first two periods en route to the win. Selkirk led 1-0 and 3-1 at the intermissions.

Scoring for Virden were Dysen Drake, Brooks Siemens, and Colten Worthington. Burdeny made 35 saves on 39 shots.

Carter Haney (two), Kayden Turner (two), and Wyatt Witham had the Steelers' goals. Ethan Sawyer stopped 35 shots.

Oil Caps 6, Steelers 3

The Oil Capitals never trailed on their way to a road win on Feb. 28. Liam Goertzen got Virden on the scoreboard 3:40 into the game. Turner soon answered for the Steelers, but Hoilett gave the Oil Capitals the lead for good just over 11 minutes into the game.

Drake made it 3-1 for Virden in the second period. A third period power play goal by defenceman Austin Osiowy gave the Oil Capitals a 4-1 lead. The Steelers got goals from Jayton Frederick and Griffin Krone, which made the score 4-3. The Oil Capitals responded with goals from Bryant and Worthington to secure the victory.

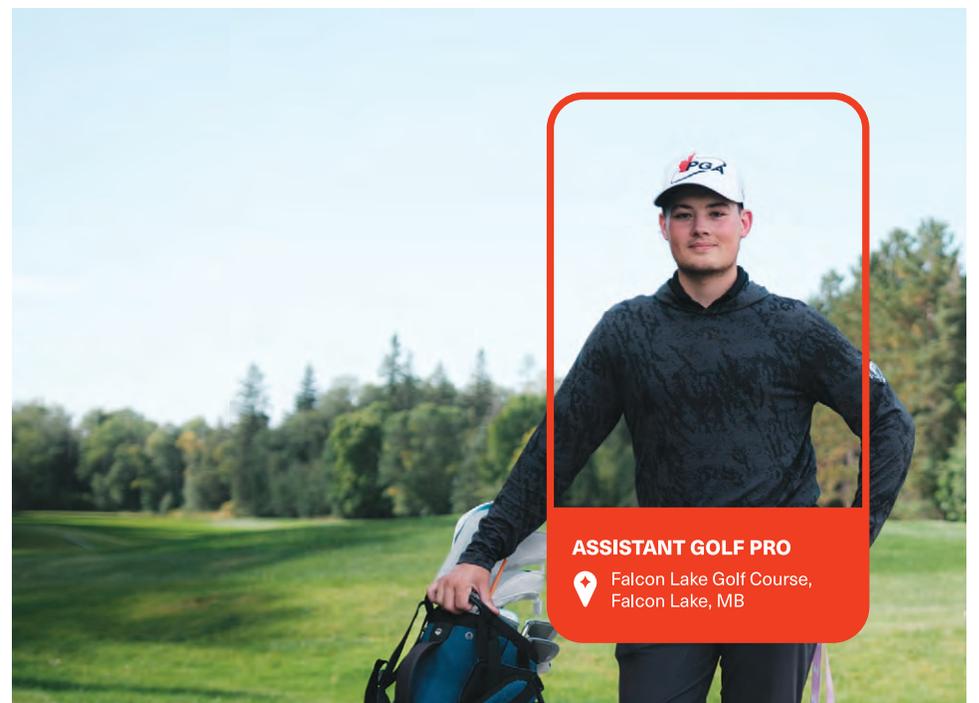
Goertzen paced the team with three points. Bryant, Hoilett, Drake, Ty Plaiser, and Carson Wright all had two points. Micky Gross backstopped Virden to the win with 17 saves. For Selkirk, Hudson Hunnie made 28.

Stampeders 6, Oil Caps 3

On Feb. 24, the host Stampeders used a three-goal second period to gain the upper hand in their contest versus the Oil Capitals. The game had been knotted at 2-2 at the first intermission. Swan Valley scored three straight goals to open the second session. The Oil Capitals scored once in the frame to make the score 5-3. The Stampeders added an empty net goal late in the third period.

Scoring for Virden were Hoilett, Tyson Ulmer, and Bryant. Burdeny made 21 saves.

Easton Falls stopped 29 shots for Swan Valley. The Stamps' goals came from Dylan Ruff (three), Crosby Harrison, Trace Langgan, and Sam Grunewald.



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