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JANUARY 30, 2026 | EMPIRE: VOL 121 NO 24 / ADVANCE: VOL 140 NO 26 | PUBLISHING FRIDAYS

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U11 CORBETT WINS RURAL TOURNAMENT OF CHAMPIONS



Virden Minor Hockey's U11 Corbett team won the Rural Tournament of Champions in Hamiota.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Virden Minor Hockey's U11 Corbett team is headed to Brandon's Tournament of Champions. The local A squad won the Rural Tournament of Champions in its age group in Hamiota in early January. That success secured U11 Corbett a berth in the prestigious Wheat City event, which

runs Feb. 12-15 for its category.


In Hamiota, the team compiled a 4-0 record. It defeated Reston in the final. The Reston squad upset top-seeded Swan Valley 8-4 in a semifinal tilt, while No. 2-seeded U11 Corbett shut out Roblin 11-0.

"I was most pleased to see our team band together and battle, getting their heads up and really passing the puck," assistant coach Joe King said.

Rally King and Brock Brown were selected as

Tournament All-Stars. Ayden Kristinnson was named the event's MVP. Preston Harris from the Reston Rockets was also named to the All-Star Team.

The U11 Corbett team includes Astor Corbett, Rory Hagan, Colby Hodson, Leo King, Jamie Hodson, Rally King, Gabriel Lawrence, Ayden Kristinnson, Will Mytopher, Cooper Gabrielle, Brock Brown, Jessica Brown, Dally Brown, and Fletcher Stoop.



VIRIDEN
OIL CAPITALS

HOME GAME
FRIDAY, JANUARY 30
VS. STEINBACH
PISTONS
PUCK DROPS AT 7:30PM

Inside...



FROST AND FAIR FASHION SHOW
P9



PRIVATE NURSE AGENCY CUTBACK
P3

SPORTS

KENTON BONSPIEL 2026



The first event winners as shown in the pictures were Jason McTavish, Todd Hunter, Debbie Hunter and Jessica Hunter. Congratulations to the overall winners of the 2026 Kenton Bonspiel.



The second event winners from Oak River were Greg Black, Cam Argue, Ross Argue and Shanie Burt. Congratulations to team Black



PHOTO BY GERRY NOLAN

The third event winners and just maybe the most veteran team to play were Arnold Bailey, Robert Alexander, Greg Alexander and Ken Routledge. I am sure with this team there was a lot of wisdom sharing going on!

By Gerry Nolan
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The Kenton annual Bonspiel was held January 21 -24. In a week where it was brutally cold, the games were

played and fun time had by all. The supper meals were well attended and thanks to all who worked or donated to the event. All in all, it was a great week. Thanks to Don Carter and Brent

Houston who had the ice ready to go. It takes a lot of volunteers to keep the event going year to year, so congratulations to them as well as working as a team to make the event a huge success!

REF MEMORIES



We have had a bit of a cold snap lately which reminded me of some cold nights on the road officiating hockey games. I was working a game in Foxwarren one night between the Foxwarren Falcons and the Shoal Lake Eagles. It was -35 and windy as well. This was back in the 1980's. Vehicles were not nearly as good as they are today, but the game must go on. Foxwarren, Cardale, Miniota, Angusville and the old Souris arena were the coldest as best as I can remember. Anyway, back to Foxwarren. The game

itself was fast with only about 8 minor penalties, but man it was cold. You can only put on so many layers to keep warm and on that evening there were not enough layers. I had a pair of curling gloves on my hands which did nothing, but the game was played. In this game a puck was split into 2 pieces due to the cold. I never saw that ever again, that is how cold it was. In Cardale one night it was extremely cold and the Cardale Cougars were hosting the Miniota Night Hawks and it was COLD.

With natural ice, it was cracking. It was so cold so we had to put snow over the crack, then pour water on top of the snow so it would freeze. Talk about cold hands! This was another fast game, as both teams just played hockey. Maybe I just did not call many infractions so we could get back to the dressing room. Cardale had a small officials' room but it was one of the warmest in western Manitoba! Another night in Miniota it was the same thing, the ice was cracked right across the blue line and needed to be repaired as it was not safe to play on. I thought I had Bob McKenzie talked into giving us northern pay due to the weather. Bob, of course, just laughed and stayed in the waiting room. Angusville was also cold and there were some interesting nights with long drives home when it was so brutally cold. Lots of cold nights on the road, but the games had to go on. Stay warm folks, until next time!

OIL KINGS BOUNCE BACK FOR SHUT OUT VICTORY

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The Viriden Oil Kings split their games last week. The senior squad fell 5-3 to the Tiger Hills Hockey League-leading Killarney Shamrocks. As of Jan. 25, the Shamrocks have yet to lose this season. The Oil Kings rebounded the next night to shut out the Boissevain Border Kings, 9-0. Viriden goaltender Duncan Paddock stopped 22 shots to keep the visiting Border Kings at bay. What allowed the Oil Kings to bounce back and earn the victory? "We just kept trying to play the same game," Viriden captain Keifer Johnston said. "In Killarney, we didn't have a great start but got settled in as the game went on. We just came out from the start on Saturday, and Dunc made some big saves in the first for us." The Oil Kings enter the week with a 12-5-0-0 record. They sat fifth in the THHL standings. The Oil Kings only have two games remaining on their regular-season schedule. They host the Souris Elks on Jan. 31. The Oil Kings are in Deloraine on Feb. 4. Shamrocks 5, Oil Kings 3 On the road Jan. 23, the Oil Kings battled back but were unable to beat the Shamrocks. The Killarney crew led 2-0 after the first period and 4-0 with just over five minutes gone by in the

second period. But 21 seconds after the Shamrocks' fourth goal, Tanner Koroscil scored for Viriden to make the score 4-1. In the third period, the Oil Kings outscored the hosts, 2-1. Koroscil got his second goal of the night. Dillin Stonehouse also scored. Viriden goalie Eric Reid made 28 saves. Each team had four power-play opportunities with Killarney converting on one of theirs. Shamrocks goalie Brian Archibald stopped 37 shots. Scoring for Killarney were Rylan Gudnason (two), Kyle Peters, Mike Reykdal, and Bryce Enns. Oil Kings 9, Border Kings 0 Viriden led 2-0 after the first period. The Oil Kings scored six in the second to lead 8-0. They were two-for-three on the power play. Viriden killed off all four Boissevain power plays. Shawn Bowless scored a hat trick. Brad Bowles had two goals and four points. Koroscil scored twice and had an assist for three points. Keifer Johnston's three points came on a goal and two assists. Stonehouse recorded three assists. Layne Toder scored Viriden's last goal. Pierce Martin, Elisha Bambridge, and Jaden Browning-Lozinski each had two assists. Boissevain goalie Jay Pringle made 14 saves and allowed four goals. Matt Stephens had five goals against and 16 saves.

NDP delays private nurse agency cutback as rural hospitals warn of staffing crisis

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Manitoba’s rural and northern communities including Prairie Mountain Health sites at Dauphin and Swan River, rely upon dozens of private agencies to supply nurses to staff hospitals and emergency services. While the Manitoba government plans to reduce dependency upon the private agencies they had to extend the January 15th deadline. The plan was to reduce the number of agencies to four companies to provide nursing staff to fill vacant shifts at public health care facilities.

According to a report on Jan. 22 in the Dauphin Herald, the private companies - Elite Intellicare Staffing, Integra Health, Bayshore HealthCare and Augury Health-care - were selected to work in Manitoba through a competitive bidding process.

Part of the alternate plan includes a Provincial Travel Nurse Team (PTNT) run by Shared Health, but that team wasn’t ready by the Jan. 15 deadline.

After an outcry from health facilities in northern Manitoba and from the Official Opposition, the government rolled back the date, allowing all the agencies to continue providing nurses at least until Jan. 30.

A recent statement from the office of Kathleen Cook, PC Critic for Health, said, “Within 24 hours of these changes coming into effect, (on Jan. 15) facilities including Swan River and Dauphin, which were reporting 50 per cent nurse vacancy rates in areas of their facilities, were struggling to fill shifts.”

Cook, the MLA for Roblin, said, “We warned the NDP this would happen when the health minister announced they were forcing almost every private nursing agency out of Manitoba. Prairie Mountain Health has a 30 per cent nursing vacancy rate and a high reliance on agency nurses.”

However, according to the Dauphin Herald, the removal of agency supplied nurses did not put Dauphin’s emergency department at risk and their health facility did not have to reduce their in-hospital beds. However, Dauphin Regional Health Centre’s “Special Care Unit has been closed temporarily. The four bed unit, which provides a higher level of care to patients who require closer monitoring, requires two specialized nurses per 12-hour shift.”

A recent accident in the Swan River area sent 15 people to emergency, highlighting the need to keep community health facilities well staffed, as another PC MLA noted. “Our community just experienced a mass emergency event that sent a bus full of students from Sapotaweyak Cree Nation to the hospital,” said Swan River MLA Rick Wowchuk. “It pains me to imagine what the situation would’ve been like had there been fewer nurses here to immediately answer the call.”

MNU perspective

Manitoba Nurses Union (MNU) president Darlene Jackson weighed in, noting the strain it brings to nurses to be called to cover extra shifts, or to work without sufficient staff at any given time.

Jackson explained that the dependency upon private agency supplied nursing staff was a growing situation, not addressed until recently. “Probably a few years before Covid, and then during Covid, [the use of agency

nurses] just ramped right up to the point where we are incredibly dependent on the private, for-profit agencies.”

Prairie Mountain Health region has been very dependent on agency nurses particularly in the northern facilities. Jackson said, “It was just to the point where the amount of money going out of our public health care system into the pockets of the owners of the private for-profit agencies was absolutely ridiculous.”

She applauds the use of the provincial nurse teams. However, she says Manitoba’s health system was not resourced to process the numbers of nurses that began applying in December to the provincial team when it became evident that most private agencies would no longer be used.

The idea of using travel teams within the public system was first suggested by the nurses’ union.

“It was MNU that brought it to the table and said, look, why can’t we have an “agency” within the public health care system where it allows nurses to travel within our province and work in our public health care systems. They are employed by the public health care system, they receive the same benefits or very similar benefits to an agency nurse, but we are not paying administration fees to an agency.”

These benefits include scheduling flexibility, working in a variety of settings and pay bonuses.

PMH

Treena Slate, Prairie Mountain Health Chief Executive Officer, acknowledged staffing shortages in PMH region. She said, “Recruitment efforts to fill permanent positions continue, which will reduce the need for agency staffing over time.”

As well as working with the PTNT, Slate said that PMH’s recruitment strategy includes actively engaging “with agency nurses working in its facilities, educating them on the benefits of working within the public system and encouraging them to consider permanent roles within the region.”

The nurse shortage is not just a Manitoba issue. It’s Canada-wide with a projected shortfall of approximately 117,600 nurses by 2030.

Cook, as conservative health critic questions if the two-week reprieve is enough time to fill the very high number of nursing vacancies and dramatically reduce the region’s reliance on agency nurses. She says, “The NDP’s whole plan seems to have been contingent on all those agency nurses taking jobs in the public sector, and I don’t think that’s a given, particularly when facilities just across the border in Saskatchewan will welcome Manitoba agency nurses with open arms.”

The provincial agency continues hiring and on Jan. 27, a Shared Health spokesperson said nurses are showing significant interest in joining PTNT, with 637 nurses employed as of Jan. 20.

This provincial team offers eligible Registered Nurses (RNs), Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) and Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs) and Nurse Practitioners (NP’s) the opportunity to work in communities large and small at locations across the province with critical staffing needs.

For more information or to apply to the provincial team, go to healthcareersmanitoba.ca.

Virden and District Health Auxiliary Celebrates 120 Years

Submitted

By Laura Wright

Almost 120 years ago, on July 19, 1906, the Hospital Ladies Aid Society was formed, and two local ladies were tasked with writing to hospitals in Manitoba to gain information about the cost to build a small, staffed hospital in Virden. The responses indicated that the cost and maintenance of a 10-bed hospital would be about \$2000 per year.

With that information in hand, the ladies of the society then went about contacting every woman in town, asking them to become members of the Hospital Ladies Aid Society at a cost of 10 cents per month. A second committee was sent to visit every businessman and householder to secure financial support for the maintenance of the hospital.

The society was not prepared to buy or build a hospital at the time, as a large house had been promised to them within the next two months at a cost of \$15 per month. The Virden Cottage Hospital opened its doors on October 9, 1906, charging patients \$1 per day for a bed in a public ward, \$1.50 for a semi-private ward and \$2 for a private ward.

In the early days, the Auxiliary members were very hands-on in the workings of the hospital. They trained registered nurses and assisted with financing when the need arose. The members sewed all of the nurses’ uniforms, caps and aprons. They bought fabric and sewed sheets, pillowcases, towels, face cloths, tea towels, dishcloths, clothes for newborns, operating room linens, nighties and pyjamas. They canned vegetables, did pickling, processed fruits, and made jams and jellies.

In order to raise funds, the Auxiliary would host bingo games, dances and teas, where they also conducted blood pressure clinics. They made quilts and grew and sold African violets and daffodils, sold raffle tickets, took pictures of newborn babies for the newspaper, and canvassed the town for donations. They even took turns working in the hospital answering phones, admitting patients, rolling bandages, and if need be, cleaning.

One hundred and twenty years later, the Virden and District Health Auxiliary is still providing for the care and comfort of those who are patients in the Virden Health Centre or residents of the Sherwood Home or the West-Man Personal Care home.

Our role has changed considerably from those early days. We no longer take an active role of the day-to-day operation of the hospital or the care homes, but we do still host a spring luncheon, do fundraising at a local level, and provide financial assistance for much-needed equipment for the facilities we support. This year alone, we secured funds for over \$158,000 of equipment that our facilities may not have been able to access otherwise.

2026 sees the Virden and District Health Auxiliary celebrating 120 years of service to Virden and the surrounding area. We are very proud of the work that we do and would be happy to welcome new members. If you or someone you know would be interested in becoming part of our organization, please contact Auxiliary president Thelma Quinn at tkquinn@rfnw.com or (204) 851-6150. We can assure you that no experience in sewing uniforms or canning vegetables is required!

Thank You

The Virden and District Health Auxiliary would like to extend its most sincere thanks to the following donors for their financial support in 2025. We continue to assist with providing the needs and desires of the West-Man Nursing Home, the Sherwood Home, The Virden Health Centre and Lab, and the Emergency Medical Services

Thank you also to the following donors

2025 Donors:

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| • Virden Royal Purple #220 | • Tim Hortons Smile Cookie Campaign |
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| • Lenore W.I. | • Allan Titley |
| • Virden Area Foundation | • Jean and Gerry Gatey |
| • Elkhorn Area Foundation | • Susan Ivey |
| • Royal Canadian Legion Ladies Auxiliary | • Janice Schwalm |
| • Oak Lake | • Margaret Ann Cox |
| • Virden Donors Choice | • Judy Poole |
| • Virden Oilmen’s Golf Tournament | • John and Pat Hipwell |
| | • Gary and Marya Gardiner |

The overwhelming support of the community in the purchase of the ultrasound machine for the Virden Health Centre. These donors have been acknowledged in a special thank you earlier in 2025.

We gratefully acknowledge 89 “in memoriam” donations.

With your generous donations, we have been able to purchase the following for a total of \$158,227:

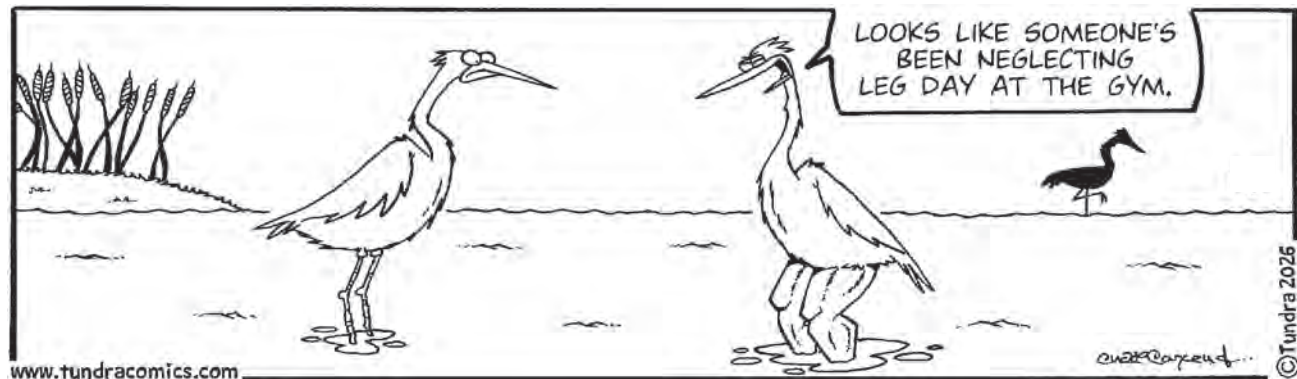
For the Sherwood:	For the Hospital:	For the West-Man:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 blanket warmer and stainless-steel cart (anonymous donation 2024)• 1 platform truck	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 vein finder (half of funding from Elkhorn Area Foundation)• 1 portable ultrasound machine• 1 medical cart• 1 Lucas machine• 18 overbed tables• 1 space lab (funded by Virden Area Foundation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 Broda Chair (funded by Virden Lions Club 2024)• 2 blood pressure monitors and stands (funded by Virden Area Foundation 2024)• 2 blood pressure cuffs• 1 pill crusher• 1 vascular doppler machine• 1 pulse oximeter
For the Clinic:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Blood pressure monitors (private donation)		

We also provide a \$2000 scholarship to any Virden Collegiate graduate, with preference to a student entering any aspect of the medical field.

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED AND OVERWHELMING SUPPORT
VIRDEN AND DISTRICT HEALTH AUXILIARY
CELEBRATING 120 YEARS OF SERVICE TO OUR COMMUNITY IN 2026**

Tundra

By Chad Carpenter



Why are we watching this garbage?

It's long overdue but many people in the news industry and millions upon millions of non-media people are slowly coming to the recognition that many, if not all on-line mediums, are not necessarily good for humanity. On-line platforms are almost completely unregulated. Facebook claims that they do fact checking. A few years ago I asked how many FB fact checkers there were and the ratio worked out to be one for every 90,000 users. That automatically tells us that fact checking is, minimal at best, and at worsts, non-existent. In some countries there are no fact checkers as the billionaire owners have come to realize that fact checkers cost money and are basically ineffective.

In the past few years, it has become evident that Artificial Intelligence (AI) can make up many thousands of stories and videos, be they fact-based or fiction. And lately it has become apparent that be it AI or otherwise, sexual abuse, promotion of falsehoods and violent scenes are being spewed out by the thousands on web based venues.

I have heard of a number of people who are abandoning social media. I think what it will boil down to is being very careful as to what sites a person visits. For example, town or community web sites should be reliable and are needed to announce emergencies and promote last minute changes to events. Newspapers, like the one you are holding, can't always get the news out quick enough being weekly papers. That means community web sites are important.

It should be noted that FB sites for newspapers, radio and television stations are banned in Canada by Facebook. The Canadian On-line News Act declared that companies like FB and Google would be required to compensate domestic Canadian media as they use our



“It should be noted that Facebook sites for newspapers, radio and television are banned in Canada by Facebook.”

material with neither recognition nor compensation and have done so for years. Google agreed that they would pay money towards Canadian Media. Facebook refused and, as a reaction, shut down Canadian news media FB sites.

As criticism of unrelenting and uncontrollable on-line material increases, Jen Zoratti of The Winnipeg Free Press said on the weekend about X (formerly Twitter), “Respectfully, a primary communication tool for whom, exactly? Who is still using it, besides bots, ragebaiters and the creators of child sexual abuse images? There’s nothing to save, nothing to make better. It’s a social media platform run by a billionaire who allows this stuff to happen. The decision to leave should be easy.

How bad does it need to get, exactly, to make people log off forever?”

Good question. Zoratti’s column, along with my own observations and reading other peoples’ frustration has lead me to resolve to cut way back on the use of social media. I plan to head back to reading a book a month. I prefer Canadian histories

and biographies. The local papers, radio and TV stations should be our go-to sources for the most of our media with the only usage of social media being local sites. Other social media should be used very carefully and sparingly.

Interesting that the Bible verse of the day for Jan. 25, the day I wrote this column speaks about being careful what you read and think about. “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.” Philippians 4:8 New International Version.

I feel moved to take that advice but not a lot of what is on the internet falls into the standards of that admonition

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



Not trusting my memory...

About this cold snap...it's not the first or the worst in my memory. Way back in 1963 the temperature recorded at Richardson's Airport, and experienced at Graysville, never rose above zero degrees Fahrenheit, day or night, for the month of January. It was a winter that my father was attending the University of Manitoba, leaving me to keep the home fires burning, and the chores completed. I was in grade eleven, turned seventeen that February. It is recorded as one of the coldest winters, colder than 1947, coldest since 1740. January 1966 beat that record.

It was a tough winter, so cold that some mornings the fog was heavy enough to dim the yard light's glow and give the whole world an eerie other world feeling. So cold that even sheltered animals needed more feed, and watering the livestock was challenging. There was one barn with several milk cows, Jersey and Jersey mix- (I still know them by name, Molly, Daisy, Bambi, Penny...coo boss), some chickens and possibly a hog or two. The other barn housed the sheep. The buildings were adjacent and attached, so once inside, all was well. The loft of the main barn was home to the bedding straw and some bales, but most of them were hauled from a stack outside. Some prickly clover, some alfalfa, some straight hay, all off our land, so any farmer knows that back them, those wonderful square bales where handled many times- on the rack, off of the rack and onto the stack, into the barn, and then in a less delightful form, out of the barn! No wonder I have long arms! By this time the water had been piped into the barn, a vast improvement from hauling it, in five gallon pails, from the well. That was not a pleasant winter chore.

What I remember so well was the wonderful sense of accomplishment when the chores were done. Opening the door I would be greeted with a cacophony of sounds, cattle, sheep, chickens all calling for breakfast. And as the food was distributed, silence would reign. Well, silence in comparison, for there was the sound of chewing, hay being pulled toward, and the lambs gambolling and galloping in the open space provided as all the ewes gathered at the feed. The air was heavy, moist, rich, and pungent. The morning routine only called for the supply of feed, the clean up and out came as part of the evening chores. There was satisfaction there as well.

I don't recall many snow days, days that the vans didn't make their rounds. Back then the route was driven by a neighbour, a bus to which we had progressed from using individual's vehicles that could have been a station wagon - no seat belts- or simply a car.

I do recall that winter wear was not what it is today. We relied on bulk to keep warm, layers of sweaters and jackets. Thankfully by then I was past those brown cotton stockings kept in place with a canning jar sealer ring to leotards.

Not the first, not the worst. Not the last!

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Town Office: 204-748-2440

Viriden Landfill: 204-748-6033

Tundra Oil & Gas Place: 204-748-2736



Animal Control: 204-851-5881

Facility Bookings: 204-748-2440

Emergency After Hours: 204-851-5540

For updates on the Town of Viriden Public Water System, please visit www.virden.ca or follow us on Facebook.

Request For Pricing

The Town of Viriden will accept pricing for the 2026 season up until **4:00 PM on Friday, February 13, 2026**, for the following:

- Construction Equipment & Materials
- Sidewalk Repairs & Asphalt Patching
- Septic Vac Truck & Hydrovac
- Tree Trimming & Tree Removal
- Dust Control

For additional details, please contact the Viriden Town Office.
Forms are available at www.virden.ca/p/tenders-and-requests.

Phone – 204-748-2440

Fax – 204-748-2501

Email – executive.assistant@virden.ca

Employment Opportunities General Labourer I (full-time/part-time)

The Town of Viriden has openings for one full-time or two part-time **General Labourer I** positions to work primarily in the Parks and Recreation Department at Tundra Oil and Gas Place.

This position requires an individual that is in good health and capable of carrying out the physical requirements of the job. Shifts are primarily scheduled for evening and weekends so would be ideal for a student. A valid Class 5 Manitoba driver's license is necessary.

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

This position will be open until filled.

Summer Employment Green Team

The Town of Viriden is accepting applications for two summer students to be employed under the Green Team Program for the period May 4, 2026 to August 21, 2026 in Parks and Recreation and Public Works. Applicants must be between the ages of 16 and 24 and hold a valid driver's license.

The Town of Viriden is accepting applications for one summer student to be employed under the Green Team Program for the period July 6, 2026 to August 21, 2026 in Parks and Recreation.

Viriden Swimming Pool

- Head Lifeguard
- Assistant Head Lifeguard
- Lifeguard Instructor
- Assistant Lifeguard

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

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

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

Upcoming Council Meetings

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



Southwest Business & Entrepreneur Expo



The Southwest Business & Entrepreneur Legacy Grant Program aims to reinvest remaining sponsorship funding from the Expo – to help businesses grow, launch new initiatives and contribute positively to the local economy and quality of life.

Applications Open: February 2, 2026

Deadline to Apply: March 23, 2026

Announcements: April 10, 2026

For more information please visit www.swbusinessexpo.com

Request For Proposals – Hayland

The Town of Viriden is accepting proposals for a two-year period for the cutting and removing of standing hay at the following locations:

- Pt. S.W. ¼ Sec 21-10-26 WPM
- Pt. S.E. ¼ Sec 34-10-26 WPM
- Pt. SW ¼ Sec 35-10-26 WPM

Proposals will be accepted until **12:00 noon on Friday, February 13, 2026** at:

Town of Viriden
236 Wellington Street West
Box 310, Viriden, MB R0M 2C0
Phone: 204-748-2440 | Fax: 204-748-2501
Email: executive.assistant@virden.ca

Tax Prepayment Discounts

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

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

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

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

HELEN DRYSDALE

OUT OF HELEN’S KITCHEN

A clementine is a tangor, a citrus fruit hybrid between a mandarin orange and a Seville orange, thought to be one of the sweetest oranges. They were named after a family member of my mother, Brother Clément Rodier, a French missionary who first propagated the cultivar in Algeria in 1892. Hence their name “clementine”! Unlike oranges, Clementines are smaller, easy to peel and typically seedless. They are as an easy way to add fruit to a child’s diet.

With just 35 calories in one clementine, you can technically count two as one serving of fruit. Two clementines have the same amount of sugar as one banana, one cup of grapes, or one small apple. But they are lower in total carbs with just 18 grams of carbohydrates in two fruits, compared with 25 grams in one medium apple and 27 grams in one medium banana. Clementines are also a vitamin C powerhouse, with one small fruit providing 40% of your daily needs.

An easy orange glaze is the perfect finishing touch to top this Clementine flavored loaf.

Clementine cranberry loaf

2 cups flour	1 1/2 tsp. baking powder
1/2 tsp. baking soda	1/2 tsp. allspice
1/2 tsp. cinnamon	1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 cup butter, softened	3/4 cup white sugar
3 eggs, room temperature	1/3 cup milk
1 1/2 Tbsp. clementine zest, from about 3 clementines	
1/3 cup clementine juice, from about 4 clementines	
1 cup dried cranberries	

Drizzle:

1 1/4 cups icing sugar	2 Tbsp. clementine juice
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Heat oven to 350 F. Spray bottom and sides of a 9 5-inch loaf pan with cooking spray. Very lightly flour. In a large bowl, mix together flour, baking powder, baking soda, allspice, cinnamon and salt. Set aside. In the bowl of a mixer beat butter and sugar on medium-high speed about 2 to 3 minutes, scraping sides and bottom of bowl occasionally, until mixture is light and fluffy. Add the eggs, one at a time, beating on medium speed for about a minute after each addition. Stir in zest, juice and milk until combined. Gradually stir flour mixture into butter mixture; stir until everything is just combined. Add the cranberries. Pour batter into prepared loaf pan. Bake loaf 45 to 55 minutes or until loaf is golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center of the loaf comes out clean. Cool 10 minutes in pan, remove loaf from pan and continue to cool on a wire rack. Once loaf is fully cooled, make the icing: In a medium bowl, mix icing sugar with clementine juice until mixture is smooth. The mixture should be thick but still drizzle off a spoon; if necessary, add more clementine juice or powdered sugar until you reach the correct consistency. Spread icing over top of cooled loaf; let stand until icing is fully set, about 10 to 15 minutes, before slicing.

Beet and Clementine salad

For the Salad:

3 medium beets, cooked, peeled, sliced	2 cups baby spinach washed
3 Clementines, peeled and segmented	3 thin slices of red onion, halved
2 Tbsp. chopped fresh parsley	1/4 cup crumbled feta cheese
1/4 cup chopped toasted walnuts or pecans	

Dressing:

2 Tbsp. oil	2 Tbsp. red wine vinegar
2 Tbsp. fresh Clementine juice	1 Tbsp. honey
2 tsp. Clementine zest	1 tsp. Dijon mustard
1 tsp. Dash or dried dill	salt and pepper to taste

In a bowl add the sliced beets, spinach, orange pieces, onion and parsley. Place all of the ingredients for the dressing in a lidded jar and shake. Pour over the vegetables in the bowl. Gently stir. Top with the cheese and nuts, serve and enjoy!

Miniota News

Submitted
BY LINDA CLARK

Our sympathy is extended to Bev MacArthur on the passing of her dear husband Jim on January 21st. Jim was known to everyone for miles around from his years as manager at Heartland Livestock in Virden, and was always up for a good visit. Sympathy also to all extended family members.

Congratulations to Ashlynn Cousins who placed first at the Neepawa gymnastics competition this past weekend, qualifying her to attend the Manitoba Winter Games, March 1-7, at Thompson.

Good luck Ashlynn!

Our community is saddened with the news of the death of Dean Fenty on January 25th at the Virden Hospital; and Debbie and their sons Doyle, Derek and Danny and their families are in our thoughts. Dean and Debbie have built their horse industry to be well known over the country through the years. Dean was a rider at Wallace Community pasture for many years. Our sympathy is also extended to the Bryant family members.

“There is a time when silence is betrayal.” -Martin Luther King

Isabella News

Our deepest sympathy to Stephen and Deborah Wiles on the death of Stephen’s dad in England. Our thoughts are also with their children Sarah, Katherine and Chris and their families.

Letter to the Editor

RE: Trump, tariffs and free trade

Tariffs are a hidden tax paid for by consumers. Tariffs increase the cost of goods, slow down the economy, increase the unemployment, slow down innovation and cause tension and hostility between nations.

The best course of action for peace, freedom, justice and harmony between nations is free trade while respecting each nation’s sovereignty and independence.

The economist Milton Friedman used the example of steel to demonstrate the harmful effects of tariffs. Steel manufacturers and steel workers demand the Government impose tariffs on cheaper imported steel to protect their industry and that does benefit those people to some extent, but the great majority of people are worse off because they have to pay more for vehicles, appliances and anything made with steel, and they have less to spend on other products and the country that had the tariffs imposed on it often retaliate with counter tariffs on goods it imports from that country such as grain or beef, or as in the case of Canada reacting to arbitrary tariffs imposed on its exports by the United States seeks new trade partners such as China, not exactly a free and democratic country.

Free market competition is the way to go and I would advise President Trump to pursue a policy of free trade with your friends and allies and save the tariffs for China and Russia until they stop their aggression and repression.

Damian Dempsey
Arden. MB

Police Report

Westman RCMP Service Report for Jan. 18 to Jan. 24

Submitted
BY WESTMAN RCMP

During this week, Westman RCMP received a total of 59 calls for service. Some of these calls for service include 19 traffic offences, 1 Wellbeing Check, 1 Mental Health Related, 1 False Alarm, 2 911 Acts, 1 Assistance to Canadian Agencies/General Public, 1 Assault, 1 Coroner’s Act – Sudden Death, 3 Fail to comply with Order, 3 Traffic Collision(s), 2 Discharge firearm with intent, 1 Breach of Peace and 5 Mischief files.

On Jan. 19, during routine traffic patrols in RM Wallace-Woodworth, a 37-year-old male was pulled over for disobeying a traffic control device – namely a stop sign. A Traffic Offence Notice was issued, which carries a fine of \$203. He was also issued an additional Traffic Offence Notice for Disobey rules of Laned Highway – namely Fail to Signal, which carries a fine of \$143.

On Jan. 22, during routine traffic patrols in RM Sifton, RCMP observed a vehicle travelling at a high rate of speed. Radar confirmed the 30-year-old male driver was driving at a speed of 133 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 \$351. RCMP also observed a vehicle that was driving at a higher rate of speed when approaching or passing emergency or designated vehicle while it was stopped or engaged in prescribed activity and using emergency lamp or other required equipment, as the 81-year-old driver failed to comply with speed requirements a traffic stop was conducted and the driver was issued a Traffic Offence Notice, for failing to comply with speed requirements, which carries a fine of \$298.

On Jan. 22, RCMP were responding to an impaired driver call in RM Wallace Woodworth, while en route a vehicle matching the description was located and a traffic stop was conducted; while it was not the initial vehicle that had been called in about, the 34-year-old male driver had a Driving Prohibit Canada-wide. An oral fluid demand was read, and results were positive for Cocaine. The vehicle was towed and impounded for a minimum of 30 days. The driver was fingerprinted and released on an Appearance Notice for an April court date. He

was charged with Operation while Prohibited, he was issued a Traffic Offence Notice for speeding, which carries a fine of \$626 as radar confirmed he was travelling 154 km/hr in a 110km/hr zone and a Tiered suspension for Cocaine.

On Jan. 24, Westman RCMP received a call for a family dispute occurring in the Settlement of Sioux Valley Dakota Nation. Members attended the residence and arrested a 26-year-old male that had an outstanding warrant for his arrest. He was additionally charged with two counts of Failing to Comply with an Undertaking condition and released on a new Undertaking to appear in court in March.

On Jan. 24, Westman RCMP received a report of an assault that occurred in the Settlement of Sioux Valley Dakota Nation. Members attended the complainant’s residence and obtained a statement of the incident. The suspect a 40-year-old male was later located and arrested, he was charged with Assault and Fail to Comply with Undertaking condition, he was released on an Appearance Notice with a court date in March.

Elkhorn Elks club warms up a winter's day



PHOTO BY ED JAMES

Elkhorn Elks Corn Hole tournament where bean bags are tossed and in the background cards games and crokinole are underway in the Elks Hall.

By Ed James
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The Elkhorn Elks Lodge #381 has a long history of community involvement and has always been a giving, helping and fun organization throughout the years. So, it was no surprise when they recently held their first Corn Hole Tournament that was a great success and a perfect event for a very cold Manitoba winter's day.

The organizers even went as far to find some decorations with corn cob blow-ups and a photo background of a field of standing corn plants.

And what is an Elkhorn Elks event with out its in-house made fresh, hot popcorn?

The event brought contestants from all over Westman and eastern Saskatchewan area, both Elks club and non-club members with a mixture of all ages. The final count

was 24 teams, with the finals being filled with excitement.

However, from my own point of view, there is no special skill in playing a winning game. For the most part it is just good luck, pure and simple, except maybe the scoring is a bit like horseshoes.

All during the event there was the constant sound of a solid bang when the bean bags hit the hollow corn hole platforms.

After every match, scores would be posted and teams would move along to the final match events.

Throughout the events light refreshments, snacks and bar service were available. In between matches there was lots of visiting, while card games and crokinole games were also played.

The corn hole games started on Friday night and ended late Saturday afternoon, followed by a great hot supper, with lots of var-

iety served by Kliever Kat-
ering of Elkhorn and the family crew. Throughout the afternoon while I was there, the hall was filled lots of laughter, cheering on of the teams and a great way to enjoy a cold Manitoba winter's day.

Said Kevin Tutthill, Elks member and event organizer, "What to do on a miserable cold weekend? Throw some bean bags! We hosted a cornhole tournament in our hall that had great community

support, and great support from the wider area. We had 24 teams from as far away as Altona, Virden, several Saskatchewan teams, and many local Elkhorn Teams.

"The winning team ended up being Bruce and Ceanna Kyle, 2nd Cyndi and Natasha, 3rd Sodie and Tutt.

"It was a great weekend, and as always the Elkhorn Elks # 381 truly appreciated the community support."

Caldwell's presentations reach thousands of kids, parents

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Recent information posted by Val Caldwell received more than 44K Facebook views. The real-life story she shares reflects the threat of online predators.

Here's Val Caldwell's recent post:

"Friends, with the permission of the family I am going to share with you a cautionary tale about online safety and how quickly things can turn...."

"I had a call from a Mum who was concerned about a conversation she found on her 13-year-olds TikTok account.

"The conversation was, according to her son, with a 12-year-old girl who goes to a school in a nearby community that he had met at a local event.

"Mum had noticed he was on his device a little more than usual and had found him talking to someone later at night when he snuck his device into his room.

"After checking his device and reading the conversation her Mama instincts were in overdrive, so she reached out to me to see what I thought.

As soon as I read the conversation, I instantly felt it was a situation of grooming.

"It was not what I would normally see from a 12-year-old girl. The context was very flirty and bordering on sexual.

"Mum's instincts were 100 per cent correct.

"After speaking to their son again, he did admit that he didn't know her in person and that he had met her on Roblox.

"The account has since been reported and blocked on both TikTok and Roblox.

"This is a perfect example of why parents/guardians need to periodically check devices and accounts, especially those of younger children.

"The parents had all the right rules in place, no adding or talking to people you don't know in person, no devices in bedrooms, but kids are kids and they will find a way to work around rules—most of us can relate to that if we think back to our own childhood.

"Predators are VERY good at what they do. They know exactly how to connect with kids and manipulate them.

"This all occurred in 5 days.

"Situations like this are exactly why I am such a big proponent of ongoing education and conversations with kids and adults.

"Kids need to hear it again and again and most importantly they need to hear the part that helps them know what to do when it happens to them.

"Thankfully, Mum's hypervigilance caught the situation in time, before anything bad could happen.

"I applaud the parents for having the rules in place, following up on them, checking devices and accounts and most importantly trusting their instincts when something felt off.

"The online world is complicated and evolving at such a rapid pace it is hard to stay on top of everything. But having clear rules and guidelines is a good start. Also, anticipating that at some point they are going to test the boundaries—especially if they have an adult on the other side of the devices guiding them in all the ways to sneak around and break the rules.

"Please talk to the kiddos in your life about online harms, and let them know they can come to you regardless of what has happened.

"And, as always assure them that there is not a single thing that they could ever do that would make you stop loving them.

"Who they are and what they do are NOT the same!"

www.facebook.com/val.caldwell

Caldwell travels and speaks widely on this topic, educating adults and kids about Internet safety in an age when even small children can find their way onto sites like SnapChat.

She's travelled some 13,840 kms in 2025 and spoken to a total of 7,857 kids and 1,255 adults. She's booked for this school year and has also done two trainings for Child and Family Services.

People regularly reach out to this Kenton woman who has amassed years of experience in working to protect kids from predators.

"You'd be amazed at the number of people who reach out," she says. At least weekly she hears from someone, and recounts a recent story out of Winnipeg where a seven-year-old was groomed by a perpetrator from the UK.

Her aim—to provide kids with enough tools, so that when it happens, they can come to an adult, they should not be driven to a forever bad choice. "No mistake should ever be a death sentence."

NOTE: Hamiota Collegiate principal invites people to come and hear Val Caldwell at HCI on Feb 5, 6:30-8:30 pm for her "bridging the gap" presentation.

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SPORTS

FELDMAN RIDES TO MBMX LADIES OPEN TITLE



Savanna Feldman won the 2025 MBMX Ladies Open championship.

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Using 2024 as motivation, Virden's Savanna Feldman captured the 2025 MBMX Ladies Open championship.

The daughter of Mitchell and Amber Feldman racked up 351 points - 42 more than her closest competitor - over nine races to earn the Manitoba motocross title in her class. The Virden Collegiate Institute Grade 9 student had placed sixth in the

Ladies Open in 2024. She said it "fuelled me to push myself harder for the next season."

"Winning the Ladies Open class to me was a very fun and exciting experience," Feldman said. "I set goals and, after three years of hard work, it has finally paid off. It was a very big accomplishment for me and a very big step up. I couldn't have done it without Stokes MX Training, the Cosgrove family, all my moto family and sponsors and my parents, who are my biggest supporters."

Regarding her parents' encouragement, Feldman said, "They support me throughout the motocross season by making sure that I have everything that I need to have a safe race. They get me to and from practices and races. In the winter, they have taken time to travel to the states, for me to attend Arenacross, which was another great experience and learning curve."

A variety of organizations have stepped up to support Feldman. Her sponsorship team includes Crude Energy Services, Westside Powersports, FXR Racing, and 6150579 MB LTD (Twyla and Mark Manser).

About five or six years ago, Feldman attended her first dirtbike race. She said, "I found it to be very entertaining and wanted to challenge myself, which is why I chose to start motocross."

Now headed into her fourth year of competition, Feldman's passion for the sport has only grown. She said, "I love motocross because it's a very competitive sport and it keeps me very busy throughout the summer. It is also a great way to stay mentally and physically fit. It's something I love doing and I've met a lot of great people along the way. It has also allowed me to be a part

of a great motocross family and community."

Other area MBMX competitors who placed in the top 10 of the 2025 season standings included Keegan Rempel (seventh, 2 Stroke Open Junior); Gavin Rempel of Kenton (second, Open Intermediate; third, 250cc Intermediate); Jayden Leslie of Elkhorn (fourth, 250cc Intermediate; fourth, Open Intermediate); Sawyer Barnesky of Virden (sixth, 250cc Intermediate; sixth, Open Intermediate); Sam Cosgrove of Virden (sixth, 250cc Pro; ninth, Open Pro); Ryker Rowan of Elkhorn (ninth, 85cc 7-11 Years Old); and Mike Waterfield of Elkhorn (third, Plus 50 B).

Trailer parking enforcement reviewed

By Dale Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Mayor Tina Williams says street parking is a problem.

A recent RCMP initiative resulted in several trailers being removed from streets in Virden. There are long-standing by-laws governing how long vehicles, including trailers, can be parked on streets but enforcement has become more complicated. Cory Nixon is now contracted with the Town of Virden to provide building inspection, development officer and bylaw enforcement services. The RCMP can address some issues, but they lack sufficient members, and municipal processes are not currently well set up to easily issue fines or manage widespread enforcement.

While the town now has its own by-law enforcement capacity the preferred approach is voluntary compliance—using reminders and direct communication rather than enforcement—aiming to resolve most cases through door-to-door contact rather than penalties.

Instead, residents are encouraged to find other places to park trailers such as private property, friends' yards, rural properties or seasonal storage options. However, if people don't comply with the by-law these penalties are available. Mayor Williams said, "Now that we have our own bylaw enforcement, we may look more towards that."

Mayor Williams feels that there are several problems with street parking of trailers. She said, "Snow clearing, yes, but in the summertime when you park camper trailers... you can't see near corners where kids have to go around them on bikes... That's not safe." And added that sometimes sidewalks are blocked or have cords stretched across them further contributing to unsafe conditions.

Keeping the oil patch story alive: new push for oil museum

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

A committee is planning an exciting future to create a place for what is currently only a virtual museum - the Manitoba Oil Museum and Interpretive Centre (MOMIC).

Archived material, some of which is online, tells of the importance to the people of the region when oil was discovered at Virden in 1951.

MOMIC was developed by a group of people around Virden in the late 1980s and early 1990s to celebrate and promote oil extraction in Manitoba. Some of these people were landowners, industry workers, regulators, hotel owners, and restaurant or grocery store owners but they had a common connecting thread; they directly or indirectly benefited from the oil extraction industry.

On Jan. 13 Craig Lane and Terry Johnson from the newly formed Manitoba Oil Museum committee attended the RM of Wallace-Woodworth council meeting. They noted that oil history is largely absent from local

education and public spaces, even though many residents and families have deep roots in the industry. Johnson and Lane proposed the creation of a Manitoba Oil Hall of Fame and museum to recognize individuals, companies, and contributions that have shaped the region.

This effort represents at least the third attempt to advance the project, and similar ideas have been discussed for roughly 20 years. They pointed to examples in Saskatchewan, where an Oil Hall of Fame operates successfully with annual inductions and community events, as a model they hope to adapt locally. Their intent is to celebrate the past while re-establishing oil as a defining part of the area's identity. The museum and Hall of Fame are intended to be regional in scope, not limited to one municipality. The committee hopes to recognize contributions from across south-west Manitoba and beyond. Lane said, "There's people that cut their teeth in this part of the world in the 50s and then later on who have moved around the world. We're hoping

that we can put together a list of probable inductees, (with) men, women, and corporate structures."

As plans move forward Lane and Johnson realize that this effort will take time to do the work properly and they aren't in a hurry to get a building for the museum. Past efforts to establish a museum have yielded many documents and memorabilia. Over the years many community members have contributed items—often family heirlooms tied to grandparents and earlier generations involved in the oil industry—resulting in a substantial and historically rich collection. All this material needs to be sorted and curated before a building is identified. The Town of Virden has agreed to provide space in the recreation centre for Hall of Fame displays. Photos of inductees will be displayed there for a year before being transferred to the future museum.

Lane stressed the importance of telling young people about the historical and ongoing role of oil and agriculture in southwestern Manitoba.

Interactive displays are most effective and there are some available now, including two interactive units, a scale model of a service rig and a derrick, as well as a large interactive display built by a farmer and donated several years ago. Lane said, "I'd love to take kids there and educate them a bit. I think that's part of what we're missing in the town. We're an oil town. We need to educate the kids on our past, and oil's not bad no matter what you read on the internet. It's a part of who we are in the town, and I think we should be proud of it. That's why Terry and I worked to start getting this oilfield museum and the Hall of Fame going."

Current plans include a banquet to be held April 9. Lane explained, "We've got everything booked. It'll be a supper and induction ceremony for three people and a company... We'd like to have one living inductee, two deceased inductees and a company... We want to make it a gala event to celebrate those people's involvement in the oil patch."



Please join us for the showing of The Chosen Season 5 "The Last Supper" at the Derrick Theatre in Virden. Showtime is 7:30 p.m. every Tuesday for 8 weeks starting February 3, 2026. Optional discussion follows each episode. Admission is FREE!

Frost and Flair Fashion Show brings big energy, bold style, and thrifted glam to Oak Lake



Cara Taylor, modeling a fresh outfit at the fashion show on January 24.



"The princess" Madelynn Rookes in her beautiful red gown.

By Ev Nolan
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Oak Lake Community Hall came alive on January 24, 2026, as Thrift and Thrive transformed the space into a buzzing runway of creativity, confidence, and community spirit at its first ever Frost and Flair Fashion Show. From the moment the doors opened, it was clear this was going to be something special.

Music filled the room, winter inspired décor shimmered under the bright lights, and stylish guests packed the hall, ready to cheer, shop, and celebrate sustainable fashion. The atmosphere felt electric, equal parts fashion show and community party, with excitement building as everyone waited for the first model to step onto the runway. Cameras were out, smiles were everywhere, and the energy in the room was impossible to miss.

The Flair show kicked things off at 1:45 pm and immediately set the tone. Models from all ages strutted, posed, and owned the runway in expressive outfits that proved second-hand fashion has personality for days. Each look brought surprise and creativity, from playful layers to unexpected pairings, and the crowd responded with loud applause and cheers. It was impossible not to feel inspired watching everyday thrifted pieces turned into statement looks that felt both fresh and fearless.

Between shows, the energy did not slow

down. Guests mingled, browsed the shopping area for one-of-a-kind finds, and lined up at the RFNOW Sparkle Mocktail Bar, which added a splash of fun and flair to the afternoon. Conversations flowed easily as people shared favourite outfits, thrifting tips, and excitement for what was still to come. Volunteers and organizers could be seen smiling proudly as the room stayed full and lively.

At 3:00 pm, the Frost show raised the style stakes even higher. Winter ready looks featuring well known brands like Aritzia, Tripp, Eric Michael, Joseph Ribkoff, Baby Phat, Frank Lyman, Danier Leather, BOS and Co, Chinese Laundry, and Fly London hit the runway with confidence. Seeing recognizable labels styled in fresh, modern ways made one thing clear. Sustainable fashion can be just as polished, trendy, and exciting as anything new!

What made Frost and Flair truly shine was its heart. Admission was by donation, and all proceeds went directly back into the community to support local programs and services. Knowing the event was making a real difference added an extra layer of pride and purpose to the day, reminding everyone that fashion can be fun while still giving back. Fusion Credit Union provided cups, napkins, coffee and desserts for the event.

Shopping continued until 5:00 pm, and many attendees left with bags in hand, big smiles, and fresh inspiration. The Frost and Flair Fashion Show was bold, joyful, and full of momentum.

If this first event was any indication, Thrift and Thrive has officially set the runway for something big. Frost and Flair was not just a fashion show. It was a celebration, and the community showed up in style!

Body-worn cameras significant step for MFNPS

Submitted
By MFNPS HQ

The Manitoba First Nations Police Service (MFNPS) is proud to announce that we now have full deployment and use of Axon body-worn cameras at all our 12 detachments. In 2025, we began a systematic deployment of this important technology one detachment at a time.

The adoption of body-worn cameras represents a significant step forward in enhancing transparency, accountability, and community trust in policing. These devices provide an accurate and objective record of interactions between MFNPS officers and community members, strengthening public confidence while supporting officer safety and professionalism.

"Body-worn cameras are an import-

ant tool that will help us continue building strong, positive relationships with the communities we serve," said Chief of Police Jason Colon.

The MFNPS utilizes this technology in a way that reflects our values and priorities. Training has been provided to officers to ensure responsible and effective use, aligned with best practices and the highest standards of policing.

The Manitoba First Nations Police Service remains committed to modernization and strengthening trust with the communities we serve through innovative tools, professional excellence, and cultural respect.

Along with several other communities, MFNPS serves Canupawakpa Dakota First Nation near Pipestone and Birdtail Sioux First Nation near Birtle.

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Council considers water issues and policing

By Dale Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Water Services

At the Jan. 20 regular Virden Town Council meeting, Chief Administrative Officer Rhonda Stewart informed council that the annual five-year capital planning application to Manitoba Water Services Board must be submitted by the end of March. Stewart said, “I’m hoping that by then we’ll have a little bit better idea on our treatment plant. We won’t know...what it would cost for upgrading the pumps and (treatment) plant...”

Besides recent changes in the water system following a change of well source, the future of Virden’s water tower future has yet to be decided. The tower needs repair or replacement. Stewart said their application could include a rough estimate.

The Town of Virden just released a water quality update stating: “On Jan. 20, operators began the adjustments to the Town of Virden water treatment system. These adjustments are being made using the proposal that the Town’s Engineer provided to the Office of Drinking Water for the optimization of treatment to reduce the arsenic levels in the water. Further adjustments are planned for January 26. These gradual, incremental changes are intended to ensure that the current water quality is not adversely affected.

“On Wednesday, Jan. 28, arsenic samples will be collected from the treated water, at the plant, and will be sent to the laboratory for full analysis. This sampling program will be ongoing for a period of time, with all results being shared with the Office of Drinking Water and the Medical Officer of Health. The Town’s Engineer will continue to work with the operators in monitoring the treatment system, in order to optimize the arsenic removal.”

The drinking water quality advisory issued Dec. 19, 2025, remains in effect until arsenic levels in the treated water are below the guideline limit.

RCMP report

Corp. Eduardo Giannico attended the Jan. 20 Town of Virden council meeting to present the monthly report and staffing update. For December, the detachment was short by one member as well as one member on long term suspension.

December offence statistics showed relatively low numbers across several categories, including parking offences, failure to stop, remaining at the scene of an accident, harassing communications, and assault with a weapon.

Coun. Marc Savy asked, “Is the detachment still doing the new shifting (arrangement) that Sergeant Doan talked about?” Corp. Giannico replied that the new schedule remains in place for approximately another 28 to 30 days before reverting to the old system. Under the current arrangement, members work a five-days-on, four-days-off rotation, which provides better coverage and improved work-life balance for constables.

Staffing levels are improving, with two members returning from parental leave and one returning through a graduated return-to-work program. This has allowed the detachment to regain some operational capacity.

Coun. Bruce Dunning questioned a figure in the annual report related to mental health calls and asked, “The reported number, is that low, high, average?” It was noted that there were 54 actual incidents in that category and council agreed that was a high number.

Corp. Giannico confirmed that he will be transferred to another detachment in March but will continue to live in Virden.

Local Improvements

Council approved an amendment to a local improvement borrowing bylaw to authorize borrowing for water and sewer main replacement and road base reconstruction on Routledge St. East. The borrowing amount of \$550,000 was confirmed. The annual payment on the loan will be \$124,326.85 over five years, with total interest of \$71,634.29.

A borrowing bylaw was also amended authorizing spending for overlay and shoulder repairs on several streets, including 6th Ave. South, Lyons St. West, PR 257, and Kent St. between 6th and 7th Ave. South.

Tax recovery

Council will continue contracting with Taxservice for a three-year term. Mayor Tina Williams explained, “If we do have to go to tax sale, these are the people that take care of the details for us.”

Chief Financial Officer Anna Macksymchuk said, “For the 2024 taxes outstanding, I sent out 56 letters. I anticipate by February 14th to only have approximately five or six that will go on the list to Taxservice. Generally, most of the people that are on the list get things either paid up or enter into a tax payment agreement. In the 10 years that I’ve been here, we’ve only ever sold two properties.”

All fees charged by the service are added directly to the property owner’s tax account; the Town itself incurs no cost.

U13 Provincials

Council approved a sponsorship request related to a U13 provincial event. They agreed that hosting carries significant costs, including ice time and recognized the economic benefit of bringing a large number of visitors to town. The Town will provide \$500 in sponsorship.

New CAO

Council passed a formal motion appointing Neil Smith as Chief Administrative Officer for the Town of Virden, effective March 2, 2026.

Western Caucus

Coun. Marc Savy attended a meeting of the Western Caucus on Jan. 9. He reported that Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations Glen Simard provided an update focused on municipal matters. The second presentation was given by Jason Little, Chief Operating Officer of Emergency Response for Shared Health. Savy said, “He’s got a lot of good ideas and is willing to work with all of us at the municipal level. And they had a meeting with the Shared Health managers last week to discuss more ambulances.... He feels that in three years the EMS shortage will be a thing of the past.”

Firefighter rescue

Coun. Savy stated that Station 1 of the Wallace District Fire Department attended a rescue operation for a missing person early on Monday, Jan. 19. He said, “I think if it hadn’t been for Firefighter Davidson, Firefighter Henry, Firefighter Hunt and Chief Nixon, that person would be dead right now.”

Savy noted that while EMS and police were present, they were not equipped to enter the terrain, relying instead on drone technology. The firefighters’ ability and determination were critical. A strong recommendation was made that these firefighters be formally commended, noting that such life-saving work is often taken for granted by the public.

IMPORTANT NOTICE

Melita Passport Clinic

Saturday, February 14
Passport Clinic: 10AM - 2PM
Legion Memorial Hall (95 Main St)
Melita, MB

Passport Applicants Must:

- (1) Be a resident of Brandon-Souris
- (2) Book a timeslot before February 11th by calling my office at 1-204-282-0707 or emailing grant.jackson@parl.gc.ca
- (3) Read and comply with all information on the passport checklist page

To renew your passport, it must be expiring within the next 12 months.



204-282-0707
Grant.Jackson@parl.gc.ca



SPORTS

DRAPER TAKING BIG STEP FORWARD IN SECOND SEASON WITH OIL CAPITALS

By Robin Wark

EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Virden Oil Capitals.

As of Jan. 25, the son of Erin and David Draper had already surpassed the assist and point totals he posted last season and equaled his rookie goal output. Entering this week, Draper had eight goals, eight assists, and 16 points in 32 games. In 2024-25, as a Manitoba Junior Hockey League rookie, the forward posted eight goals, seven assists, and 15 points in 51 games. What has allowed the 18-year-old to put up points this season?

"I'd say being more confident and experienced in the league made a huge difference this season, as well as having a tight core with the team allowing chemistry to be built," Draper said.

There is the old adage that hockey players are made in the summer. In the warm months of 2025, Draper put in the work. He said he did not focus on one part of his game more than the others, but rather, "I just had a well-rounded off-season getting stronger and improving my skills as a whole."

That hard work has paid off. On Jan. 4, Draper scored a hat trick against the Swan Valley Stampede. The 6-foot-2, 174-pounder has had five games this season where he recorded two or more points.

Oak Lake Beach's Tyson Draper is enjoying a strong second season with the

"Tyson is a big, strong guy who has always had an ability to score," Virden head coach Tyson Ramsey said. "His game has come a long way in his time with us and he is still a young guy. He is his best when he is simple, physical and shooting the puck. He is very hard to defend when he is structured in his own end, plays in straight lines and finishes checks up ice. We are excited for what lies ahead for Tyson."

Draper played at the U15 AAA level with the Southwest Cougars and continued his development in 2022-23 with the Elkhorn-based U17 AAA Canadian Ice Bandits. Following that season, he was auto-protected by the Oil Capitals.

During his time with the Ice Bandits, Draper also appeared in two games with the U18 AAA Southwest Cougars. He spent the 2023-24 season with the Cougars and played three games with the Oil Capitals before earning a full-time roster spot with the junior club for the 2024-25 campaign. Draper credits his family for playing a major role in his hockey journey.

He has appreciated what his family has done to help him get to where he is today.

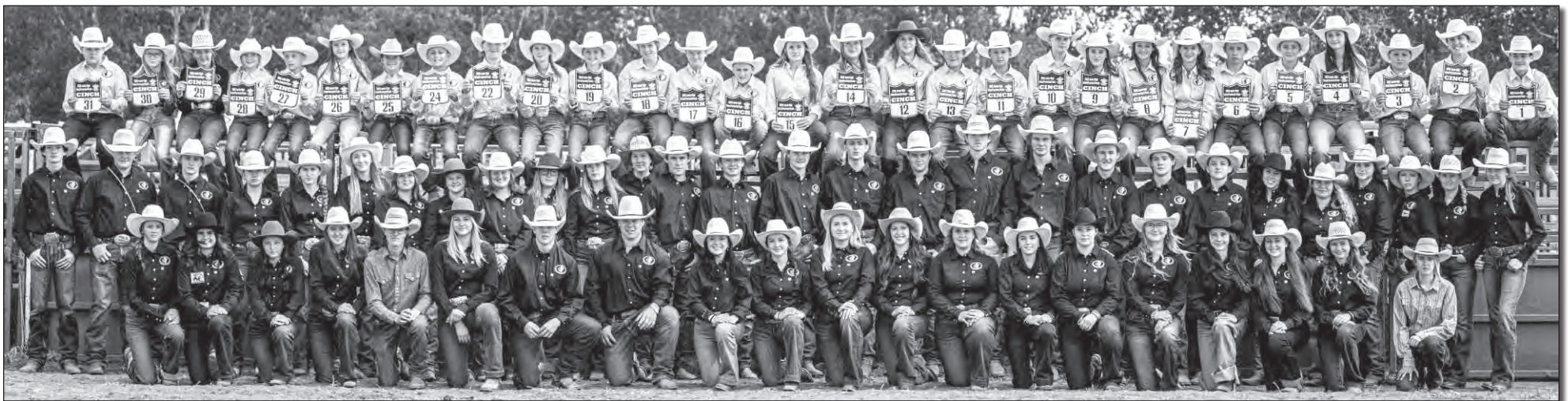
"My family has been a huge part of my hockey career," Draper said. "They have supported me all the way from the first time I tied my skates. I've had the privilege to play in my hometown, allowing my parents to attend nearly every game and give constant support."



PHOTO BY VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS

Oak Lake Beach's Tyson Draper is having success close to home with the Virden Oil Capitals

The Manitoba High School Rodeo Association Members are at an All-Time High in VCI



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Submitted

BY DENVER GOMPFF

The Manitoba High School Rodeo Association is experiencing rapid growth throughout the province, and many of its members attend high school in Virden, Manitoba. Thirteen out of 106 members in MHSRA all come from VCI. VCI has the largest number of kids in the association compared to any other school in Manitoba. To compete in MHSRA, students must maintain passing grades in at least 75% of their classes. They must submit report cards twice a year to demonstrate that they have been attending school and maintaining their grades.

Contestants compete at multiple rodeos a year with the end goal to qualify for the Canadian and National Finals. The top four people in each event qualify to compete in Nationals held in Lincoln, Nebraska, alongside competitors from all over the world. To qualify for the Canadian

Finals in Vermillion, Alberta, you have to finish in the top six in the standings for your event. At Canadians, contestants compete against kids from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario. Twelve of the 13 students from VCI who compete in MHSRA are currently qualifying for the Canadian High School Finals Rodeo, with the spring rodeos still left. In the spring, there will be 14 rodeos, including the junior and high school Manitoba finals. Eight of those rodeos will be held in Oak Lake, Manitoba, in May. Junior high finals will be held in Gilbert Plains. The high school finals have not been determined yet for where they will be held, but in past years, finals have been in Virden, Oak Lake, and Richer, Manitoba.

If you ever get a chance to go and watch one of these events, it is highly recommended that you go and check it out. The rodeo family is like no other sport. You can see people helping and cheering on the same people that they are trying

to beat in the same event. If you know nothing about rodeo, MHSRA is the perfect place to go and get a feel for what it is all about. People are always willing to help and explain what each event entails. The MHSRA community is very welcoming and encourages people to join the association and help grow the sport of rodeo and meet some great people at the same time.

Greg NESBITT
MLA for Riding Mountain

204.759.3313
Toll Free 844.877.7767
gregnesbittmla@mymts.net
#7 - 515 4th Avenue
Burlington Place, Shoal Lake, MB

Governments of Canada and Manitoba announce lower Agriinsurance premiums, making life more affordable for producers

Submitted
By MB GOVERNMENT

The governments of Canada and Manitoba have launched a new pilot program that rewards farmers for adopting sustainable management practices with lower premiums as part of the 2026 AgriInsurance program, federal Agriculture and Agri-Food Minister Heath MacDonald and Manitoba Agriculture Minister Ron Kostyshyn announced today.

“AgriInsurance is a vital tool for Manitoba producers, helping them manage risk and stay resilient in the face of unpredictable challenges,” said MacDonald. “By working closely with the Manitoba government, we’re ensuring farmers have the support they need to protect their operations as they adapt to changing conditions and can continue growing the high-quality food Canadians rely on.”

The 2026 AgriInsurance program, administered by Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation (MASC), features updated crop insurance dollar values and will provide Manitoba farmers with predictable coverage for crop production and quality losses caused by natural perils, helping them manage risk and plan confidently for the upcoming growing season.

Total coverage for 2026 is expected to reach \$4.3 billion, and farmers will benefit

from lower premium rates for most insurable crops. For annual crops, the average premium for producers will be \$11.46 per acre in 2026, compared to \$13.01 per acre in 2025.

“Manitoba farmers continue to face challenges from unpredictable weather and global market volatility,” said Kostyshyn. “AgriInsurance helps protect their investments and provides a foundation for long-term success. We’re proud to introduce enhancements that reward sustainable practices and expand coverage to meet farmers’ evolving needs.”

As part of its ongoing efforts to support sustainability, MASC is piloting the Forage Advantage incentive, offering a 15 per cent discount on Forage Establishment Insurance premiums for perennial forage crops grown on designated land. Additional discounts may apply to Basic or Select Hay Insurance or Forage Seed Insurance once the forage crop enters production the following year. The 2026 program also includes new coverage for meadow fescue grown for seed.

The AgriInsurance program is designed to provide predictable protection for producers against natural perils such as drought, excess moisture or other extreme weather event, as well as diseases and pests. Manitoba maintains a high level of participation, with over 90 per cent of an-

nual crop acres and more than 7,300 farms enrolled in the program.

Also, for the 2026 crop year, the list of damaging species will be expanding as part of the Wildlife Damage Compensation program. This change will lead to compensation for crop damage caused by blackbirds and raccoons, and livestock injury or death caused by vultures, eagles, hawks, ravens and other corvidae species.

The governments of Canada and Manitoba support AgriInsurance and Wildlife Damage Compensation under the Sustainable Canadian Agricultural Partnership (Sustainable CAP).

For more information on AgriInsurance, contact a MASC Service Centre or visit www.masc.mb.ca.

Time to do better for our communities

By Courtney Kstesky
GILBERT PLAINS CAO

This is not something that I would typically post about publicly, but it needs to be talked about. This is simply my opinion from being involved in the municipal world as both a member of council and now as a CAO. Take it as you wish.

Across many communities, there’s growing concern about the shortage of Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs). People are asking why – and the answer is uncomfortable, but important.

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

In just the past few weeks alone I have personally experienced all of this. Everything from being called Coco Puff on a Facebook forum to someone commenting on my for sale post on my personal business page “That’s called karma... lmaooooo” to constant public criticism for past employees’ actions and decisions that we as current staff and council are only trying to fix. When professionals are routinely questioned, blamed or attacked personally for complex decisions made within legislation, council direction and limited resources, burnout follows.

We operate in high-pressure environments, balancing governance, legislation, budgets, staff management and community expectations.

Yes, we should be held accountable, but we are also human. Constant criticism without respect or understanding makes it harder to recruit new leaders – and harder to keep the good ones we already have.

Yes, as CAOs we learn to have a thick skin, to let things roll off our backs, but when its day after day of constant negativity, or the public thinking they know every policy, procedure, bylaw and governing act better than anyone else, its draining.

We have all seen in many areas across the province what happens when municipalities are forced to hire someone simply because “they were the best candidate” with absolutely zero or very limited municipal experience. If we want strong, capable leadership in our municipalities, we need to change the conversation. Constructive dialogue, respect and understanding aren’t just “nice to have” – they are essential to attracting and retaining the professionals our communities depend on.

It’s time to do better. Good leadership doesn’t disappear on its own. Sometimes it’s pushed out, not by councils, but by the very people they are trying to help. So here’s some advice for those that care about the success of your community:

- 1. Criticize ideas – not people**
Disagreeing with decisions is fair. Name-calling, personal attacks or questioning someone’s integrity is not. Focus on the issue, not the individual and learn to respect decisions you may not agree with.
- 2. Understand roles and limits**
CAOs and municipal staff implement council decisions and follow legislation. Not every outcome is within their control.

- 3. Pause before posting**
Social media amplifies frustration. Taking a moment before posting – especially when emotions are high – can prevent harmful, permanent damage to real people and reputations.
- 4. Ask questions before assuming intent**
Many municipal decisions are complex and constrained by budgets, bylaws or provincial legislation. Asking “Can you explain why?” goes much further than “This is incompetence.”
- 5. Use proper channels**
Concerns raised through official processes (emails, delegations to council, public meetings) are more likely to be heard and addressed than public shaming online.
- 6. Respect that public servants are human**
Municipal leaders live in the same communities, shop at the same stores and raise families locally. Words carry weight long after a meeting or comment thread ends.
- 7. Recognize positive work**
Silence often follows good decisions, while criticism is loud. A simple thank you, positive comment or acknowledgement goes a long way toward morale and retention.
- 8. Model the behavior you expect**
Civility is contagious. When residents engage respectfully, it sets the tone for others – for future leaders considering whether this work is worth it and for those considering moving to the community.

Healthy communities aren’t built by tearing people down. They’re built through respect, accountability and constructive engagement – even when opinions differ.”

= CLASSIFIEDS =

Help Wanted

BECOME PART OF OUR GROWING TEAM!



Valleyview Co-op in VIRDEN, MB is looking for a **Summer Student** to fill a **SALES AGRONOMIST** position at our Virden Farm & Ranch Centre.

Are you a student looking to gain hands-on experience in agronomy and agricultural sales? As a Student Sales Agronomist, you’ll assist our team in providing crop recommendations, field scouting, and customer support while learning the ropes of agronomy services and input sales. This is a great opportunity to develop skills in crop protection, soil management, and customer relations in a supportive, team-oriented environment.

Apply by submitting your application through the careers section on Valleyview Co-op’s website at www.valleyviewco-op.crs or scan the QR to apply for current opportunities.



Coming Events



2026 KIRKELLA COMMUNITY PASTURE BOOKINGS

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The Sales Agronomist is a customer-focused role responsible for growing agronomy sales by building strong, trusted relationships with producers. Working directly with growers, this position identifies agronomic challenges, delivers practical input recommendations, and drives sales of seed, fertilizer, crop protection, custom application, and crop supplies services. This role is ideal for someone who enjoys being in the field, talking with producers, building business, and seeing the results of their efforts in strong customer relationships and sales growth.

Apply by submitting your application through the careers section on Valleyview Co-op's website at www.valleyviewco-op.crs or scan the QR to apply for current opportunities.



Public Hearing

PRAIRIE VIEW MUNICIPALITY UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE PLANNING ACT

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING ZONING BY-LAW AMENDMENT

Prairie View Municipality, under the authority of The Planning Act, will hold a PUBLIC HEARING at the below listed location, date, and time during which the Council will receive written or verbal representation from any persons who wish to make them in respect to the following application matter:

PRAIRIE VIEW MUNICIPALITY BY-LAW NO. 2025-08 being an AMENDMENT to the PRAIRIE VIEW MUNICIPALITY ZONING BY-LAW NO. 2018-15, as amended.

DATE & TIME: February 10, 2026, 9:00 am (0900 h)

HEARING LOCATION: Prairie View Municipality Council Chambers located at 678 Main Street, Birtle, MB

PROPOSAL: To amend parts, sections, subsections, and bulk standard tables of the existing Zoning By-law 2018-15. Rezoning of Crandall and Birtle properties.

SECTIONS AFFECTED: Parts 2, 3, 4, and 6, plus

Table 3.2 - Use & Site Requirements: "AG" Agricultural General Zone

Table 3.3 - Use & Site Requirements: "GD" General Development Zone

Table 3.4 - Use & Site Requirements: "RR" Rural Residential Zone

Table 3.8 - Use & Site Requirements: "CC" Commercial Central Zone

Table 3.9 - Use & Site Requirements: "CH" Commercial Highway Zone

Table 3.10 - Use & Site Requirements: "MG" Industrial General Zone

Table 3.11 - Use & Site Requirements: "I" Institutional Zone

Table 4.1 - Animal Unit Conversion Factors

Map 2: As shown in Schedule "A2"

- Birtle rolls 1350 & 1360 east of HWY 83, south of Queen Street be rezoned from dual zones of "CH" Commercial Highway Zone and "AG" Agricultural General Zone to be all "AG" Agricultural General Zone.

- Birtle roll 52580 be rezoned from dual zones of "RS" Residential Serviced Zone and "OR" Open Space / Recreational Zone to be all "RS" Residential Serviced Zone.

Map 8: As shown in Schedule "A1"

- The entire "GD" General Development Zone in Crandall between NW -35-13-25W and NW-36-13-25W be rezoned from "GD" General Development Zone to "RR" Rural Residential Zone.

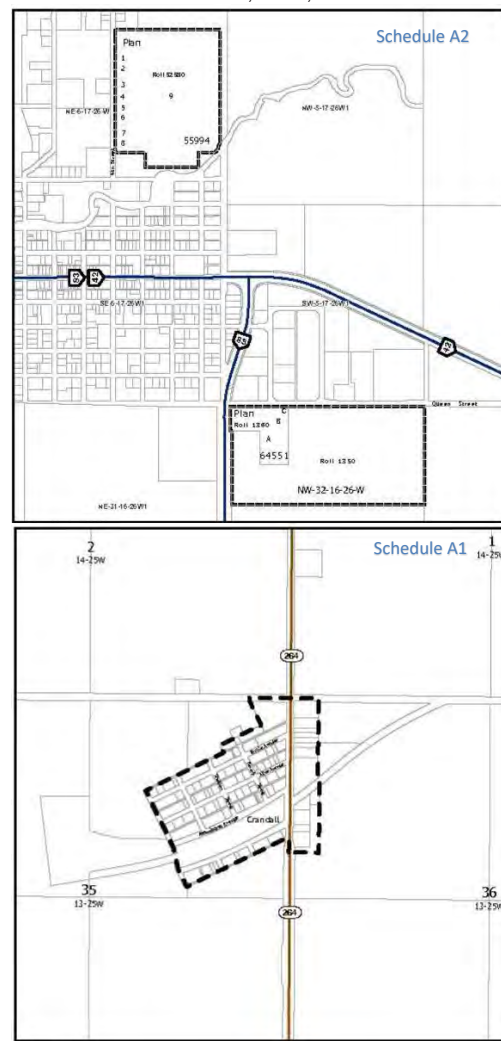
The current Zoning By-Law and a copy of the amendment proposal and maps will be available for review and download on www.midwestplanning.ca.

A copy of the above amendment proposal and supporting material may be inspected at the Mid-West Planning District office during normal business hours. Copies may be made, and extracts taken there from, upon request.

Representations may be made verbally or in writing at the public hearing.

If you have any questions, please call at 1-888-919-1740 or email devofficer@midwestplanning.ca

Lisa Hamilton, DEVELOPMENT OFFICER,
MID-WEST PLANNING DISTRICT



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The Facility Foreman reports directly to the Chief Administrative Officer of Hamiota Municipality. The position is responsible for the management and operation of the Hamiota and District Sports Complex, which is a wintertime hockey and curling arena, as well as the Hamiota Municipal Park, which has the main ball diamonds, agricultural grounds, miniature golf and the Hamiota Aquatic Centre, the community's outdoor swimming pool. Staffing and day to day operations of the Aquatic Centre is the responsibility of the Recreation Director.

The successful candidate will be a self-motivated manager with the ability to work unsupervised and allocate and direct staff. The position requires the Facility Foreman to work evening and weekend shifts year-round. Ice making and grounds maintenance experience is considered an asset however, training is available for suitable candidates.

To apply, submit your salary expectations along with a resume and cover letter clearly marked "Facility Foreman" to;

Facility Foreman Hiring Committee
Box 100, 75 Maple Avenue
Hamiota Manitoba R0M 0T0
E-mail: info@hamiota.com

A review of applications will begin Monday, February 2, 2026

For further information and a detailed job description please phone or text (204) 764-0828 or by email info@hamiota.com

Thank-you to all applicants for their interest in this position, however, only those selected for further consideration will be contacted.

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Wallace-Woodworth council hears Hamiota health report

By Dale Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Hamiota medical services update

At the Jan. 26 regular council meeting of the RM of Wallace-Woodworth, councillor Diana MacDonald attended a Hamiota Health Centre Stakeholders meeting. She provided a details from recent health-related meetings, reporting that six new international nurses had been brought in to the Hamiota facility.

At the health centre, five doctor positions remain staffed and the facility continues to accept new patients. Lab staffing remains limited to one person, meaning services are not always available and emergency room availability remains strained.

Shared Health is attempting to recruit nurses from Winnipeg, but staffing challenges persist. The facility is currently down one full-time nurse and approximately 1.8 health care aides. Coun. MacDonald said reliance on agency nurses may become more difficult and it can be difficult to find local accommodation for new staff.

Emergency room closures continue, but a schedule is in place through the end of March.

At the personal care home, staffing levels were reported as relatively stable. Recruitment efforts are ongoing, including outreach to graduating students. Facility upgrades were discussed, funded by the Hamiota District Health Board including improved internet service, and recent interior painting. A replacement therapeutic tub was identified as a future need.

The physician report noted that a resident had been on site for several months and that the facility remains open to hosting students. Lab and X-ray services continue to be a concern. Rural Week is scheduled for May 25 to 29, with two students expected.

Distribution of donations

Council approved applications for donations for several cemeteries and community groups received between July 1 and Dec. 31, 2025, totaling \$22,410.

A donation of \$250 was approved to support the U13 provincials to be held in Virden on March 13 – 15.

Other business

The resignation of Kenzie Krutkewich from the Border Regional Library board of directors was accepted with regret.

A resolution was passed to appoint Nicholas Zuck as the municipality’s Weed Inspector for 2026.

Does Facebook support local?

Has your organization ever called up Facebook and asked them for a donation to your cause? Local business rely on local support to exist.

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SPORTS

OIL CAPITALS RACK UP WINS IN MJHL PLAY

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

With a pair of victories last weekend, the Virden Oil Capitals extended their winning streak to five games.

As of Jan. 25, the Oil Caps have earned at least a point in each of the eight contests they have played in January. With a 6-0 shutout of the Northern Manitoba Blizzard and a 6-3 victory against the Winnipeg Blues, the Virden team improved its record to 23-10-2-0. As of Jan. 25, the Oil Caps sat atop the Manitoba Junior Hockey League's MGEU West Division.

"Obviously, getting all four points was the goal and we were able to accomplish that," Virden head coach Tyson Ramsey said of the team's successful weekend. "We continue to push the pace offensively. Our defensive zone is getting better and we are getting great goaltending. Our power play has been strong as of late, and I feel like we have a confidence within our group up and down our lineup."

The Oil Caps played the Swan Valley Stampeders on Jan. 27 after the Empire-Advance deadline. The Virden squad hosts the Steinbach Pistons on Jan. 31. The next night the Oil Caps are in Winnipeg to take on the Monarchs.

Oil Caps 6, Blizzard 0

Rookie goaltender Micky Gross of Cornwallis recorded his second shutout of the season. He turned away 17 shots at home on Jan. 23.

"I think that the shutout on Friday was a full team effort," Gross said. "Everyone played really hard in all three zones with hard backchecks and timely shot blocks, and, obviously, we buried our chances, which made my job pretty simple."

Oak Lake Beach's Tyson Draper recorded a goal and an assist and was named the First Star. With a goal and an assist, hometown product Bryce Bryant was tabbed as the Second Star.

In addition to Gross, other rookies also made their mark in the contest. Lucas Laramée had a goal and an assist. He was the Third Star. Rookies Dysen Drake and Jett Deschamps also found the back of the net. It was the first goal of the season for Deschamps, a defenceman.

"I have been so close all year and have been wanting to get this monkey off my back forever and I didn't really expect that it was gonna happen when it did ... when Brooks (Siemens) came around the net, I saw an opportunity to jump down to the ringette line, so I called for it and he gave a great pass where I could quickly release it towards the net, which would get tipped by their own player and ended up reaching the back of the net," said Deschamps.

He finished with two points on the night. So did veteran Colten Worthington, who scored and recorded an assist.

Keagin Kelln made 41 saves for the Blizzard.

Oil Caps 6, Blues 3

London Hoilett had the Tundra Oil & Gas Place faithful cheering with a goal just 41 seconds into a Jan. 24 contest. The goals kept coming as Virden led 3-0 after the first period and 5-0 at the second intermission.

Defenceman Nate Schaefer had three assists on the



PHOTO BY VIRDEN OIL CAPS

Virden Oil Caps gather on the ice for their Saturday night game on January 24.

night. He was selected as the First Star. Hoilett, the Second Star, finished with two goals. Rookie defenceman Miquel Bonin was the Third Star and had an assist.

Besides Hoilett, scoring for the Oil Capitals were rookies Tyson Ulmer and Bryan Laing, as well as veterans Worthington and Liam Goertzen. Virden netminder Braxton Burdeny made 19 saves.

Aiden McDonald and Leathen Bent had the Blues' goals. Justin Perreault started and made 10 saves on 15 shots. In relief, Kannen Kirkwood stopped 26 of the 27 shots he faced.

Third time's the charm! Virden SAIL was able to finally host our Christmas dinner

Submitted
BY KRISTA PEDERSON

What was supposed to happen December 18, then the 19th, finally happened on January 22! It was still a frigid day, but we were so happy to enjoy a lovely dinner together.

Vickie and Yvonne cooked for 150 people. Not all showed up at the Legion hall, but had their meals delivered instead because of the cold. We enjoyed a tasty roast beef dinner with Yorkshire pudding, potatoes, gravy, vegetables, and salads.

And of course, dessert!

We're so thankful to the volunteers who helped us out. From setting up tables to serving the food, keeping us topped up with juice and tea, to sweeping the floor.... The volunteers helped with all of it. Thank you so much!

The door prize was a co-op gift card, which is sure to be appreciated!

Debra Naylor, Elisabeth Archambault, and Krista Pederson pulled out the Christmas carols for one last holiday-themed gathering. "So long" till next year, "Silent Night" and

"We Wish You a Merry Christmas!"

With Christmas, finally behind us, we look ahead to other things in this new year...Dances!

Oak Lake's dance on Friday, January 30, 7pm with The Fugitives. \$20 tickets available at the door.

And in Elkhorn, Thursday, February 5 from 2-4pm, featuring Ed James's collection of 40's and 50's music. Tickets are five dollars. Please email Karen at elksail@mymts.net to reserve your spot.

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SPORTS

BANGA SET TO PURSUE SOFTBALL DREAMS IN VERMONT

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Viriden’s Alexa Banga is excited to take to the diamond at Vermont State

University Castleton.

Recently, the daughter of Darin and Nicky Banga committed to play softball and study at the New England school. The VTSU Castleton Spartans play at the NCAA Division III level.

“One of the biggest selling factors of VTSU was the coaching and atmosphere,” Banga said. “The girls aren’t just a team and the coaching staff aren’t just coaches. It’s like a big family. Everyone genuinely cares. To be able to be a part of that family is amazing.

“Playing softball at university has been a dream of mine since I started T-ball when I was four and my dad was my coach. I fell in love with the game. Having the opportunity to achieve those dreams that I have wanted for so long is an indescribable feeling. I am going to work hard both on and off the field. I owe it to my younger self’s dreams.”

The Viriden Collegiate Institute student appreciates everything that her parents have done over the years to help make a post-secondary opportunity a reality.

“Ever since I was a little girl, they have been so supportive of everything I do, whether that’s spending hours driving me to ball and flying around the USA to tournaments to help me get committed, to giving me courage and support in school, all while making sure I still have time to be a teenager.

“Without them, I wouldn’t be anywhere near where I’m at today. I’ve been asked a few times how I’m so okay with moving over 30 hours away. I know that my family will always be there for me whether it’s five minutes away or 30 hours away. They have always encouraged me to go out

and explore the world, to start my own life. Knowing I have that support behind me makes it a lot easier.”

Last summer, Banga suited up for the U17AAA Westman Magic. Head coach Dawson Tanner described her as a go-to catcher and a middle-of-the-order hitter who excelled at throwing out baserunners. She also competed in travel ball with Triple Crown Sports. In a Facebook post announcing her commitment, the organization stated in part:

“Alexa’s journey has been built on hard work, dedication, and consistency — from countless tournaments and practices to endless hours spent in the cage. Watching her grow as both an athlete and a person has been something special, and this next chapter is so well deserved.”

Many things factored into Banga’s decision to choose VTSU Castleton, which had an on-campus fall 2025 enrollment of 1,414. This included her desire to pursue a career in physical therapy.

“When I first went to Castleton, it immediately felt like home,” Banga said. “I met Coach Manny (Manuel Travieso), who is an assistant coach, in Las Vegas on October 24-26 while I was playing with the TC Bulldogs. He immediately showed interest in me and saw a lot of potential. On my visit to Vermont, I met Coach (Eric) Kraut, who is the head coach, and he was so welcoming to me and my mom. He reminded me a lot of my travel coach, Faron Asham, which was so comforting.

“The University itself is perfect for me. It has a small student population and a small campus. The professors actually get to know you and care for you. Obviously, Vermont is beautiful. The scenery and mountains are amazing. I have never seen anything like it before. The schooling there is exactly what I am looking for, and is the best schooling to help me become a physical therapist. It really couldn’t get



PHOTO BY TRIPLE CROWN SPORTS

Alexa Banga pictured with TC Bulldogs head coach Faron Asham, signed to play softball at Vermont State University Castleton.

much better.”

She has been accepted into the school’s exercise science - pre-physical therapy program. Banga said:

“Three years ago, I broke my leg badly in a softball collision and had to do a lot of physical therapy for it. I couldn’t play in provincials and nationals when we were hosting both. I was heartbroken. I was so scared I wouldn’t be able to play in the winter. My physical therapist made sure I would be back as soon as possible. She made my problems seem like the most important, even though I’m sure there was much worse she had to deal with. I felt seen. Knowing how hopeful she made me feel, I want to be able to give that same feeling back to people and help them live their best lives.”

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