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JANUARY 23, 2026 | EMPIRE: VOL 121 NO 23 / ADVANCE: VOL 140 NO 25 | PUBLISHING FRIDAYS

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VCI band students play their hearts out at winter concert



Grade 7 band.

PHOTO BY CHARLOTTE ARTYSHKO



VCI band performing Game of Thrones theme song.

By Charlotte Artyshko
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The Virden Band Program filled the air with music as it welcomed the community to its Winter Concert held at Virden Collegiate Institute Thursday, January 14. Featuring performances from Virden Junior High and Virden Collegiate Institute, the evening was a celebration of the growth, dedication and collaboration of the student musicians.

For the performers, the concert marked an important milestone in their musical education, as they continue to learn new and challenging pieces. The Grade 7 class demonstrated how far they have come from reading music and connecting notes to

rhythms and fingerings. The Grade 8 students have developed independence and strong communication skills while the VCI band continues to grow both in numbers and musicianship focusing on blending, listening, and performing as a unified ensemble.

“The concert is a chance for students to reflect on their skills and identify areas of improvement” said Band Director Ms. Tyra Zander, now in her fifth year with the program. “This reflection becomes especially meaningful as they work toward the Spring Concert.”

see more photos and highlights from the concert on page 2...

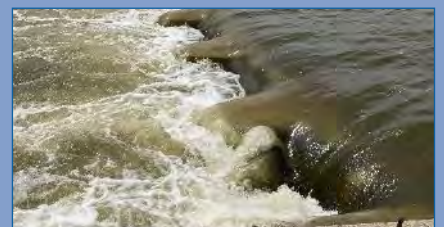
VIRIDEN OIL CAPITALS

HOME GAME
FRIDAY, JANUARY 23
VS. NORTHERN MANITOBA
BLIZZARD
PUCK DROPS AT 7:30PM

Inside...



GUN BUY BACK P3



OAK LAKE DAM P8

THESE DEALS ARE FROST-TASTIC!

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Firefighters make a snowy rescue



Emergency response vehicles on the rescue mission, Jan. 19.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

A team of four Virden area firefighters rescued a person who could have frozen to death in the countryside.

It was just after 12:30am Monday when the RCMP detachment received a call from a male in distress who had been outside for a few hours at the time of his call.

The caller remained on the line with dispatch while police attended the location along with EMS and WDFD. He could hear people calling out for him but was unable to walk.

Fire Chief Cory Nixon related the details of this rescue that began very early on Monday-Jan. 19.

Emergency Medical Services (EMS) called the Wallace District Fire Department (WDFD) for assistance to locate and rescue a person after he became lost on foot in a heavily wooded field, pocketed with sloughs near Road 66N along Road 152W.

Nixon explains, "On arrival, we organized with RCMP and EMS on locating the person. We had a general idea of the area through GPS of the person's phone."

However, to spot the individual it required a search light. RCMP launched a drone and within minutes of the launch they located the person, laying down in the extreme cold, in the snow.

Next would come the challenge of getting to the person and getting them back to the road.

Guided by the RCMP drone spotlight, four mem-

bers from WDFD's Station 1 waded through thick brush, chest deep snow, and cattails to the individual.

Nixon said, "We found the best path to them and proceeded in on foot. The snow in the sloughs was chest deep on average and once we got into the bush, we found ourselves crawling through the snow under brush at points. It took our crew a total of 1 hour and 8 minutes to get into the bush, secure the patient and get the person back to EMS at the road.

"As it was through deep sloughs filled with snow and cattails, then into a heavy wooded area, we could not utilize rescue toboggans, skidoos or our tracked RTV."

The crew of four slowly evacuated the patient on foot, on a tarp, through rough terrain from the field under the much-welcomed guidance of the RCMP's drone spot light.

"We placed the person on a rescue tarp and a specialty rescue canvas provided by EMS. The canvas held them in place and has handles for carrying and the tarp acts as a crazy carpet and wraps up to keep snow off the patient.

In the final stretch of the 0.4-mile trek, the exhausted crew transferred the patient to RCMP, EMS, and with help from Virden Towing they worked together to remove patient from the -28-degree life-threatening elements and into much needed warmth.

The RCMP report that the person was conscious and was transported to hospital.

Fire department train-

ing for ground search and rescue, and for winter survival helped this rescue to go right.

"It is amazing how multiple agencies can come together and quickly organize and activate a rescue plan," said Nixon. "Each organization has their specialty and this rescue would not have been possible without each organization there."

Debriefing sessions help the rescuers process their efforts and the pressures faced in such life and death situations.

"We hold an in-house debrief for all situations we attend where we talk about the incident, how everyone feels about it, and potential improvements for next time."

Virden winter band concert



Grade 8 band with dust bunny props.

PHOTO BY CHARLOTTE ARTYSHKO



Rehearsal before the concert.

continued from page 1

The program offered a wide variety of musical styles ranging from the foundational "Hot Cross Buns" to more theatrical pieces. A crowd favourite was Dan Adam's "Revenge of the Dust Bunnies" which featured Grade 8 percussionists Evander Barrate and Zane Paupanekis performing on vacuum cleaners. The VCI band displayed its versatility by performing Michael Brown's arrangement of the Game of Thrones theme, the evocation "Under the Ice" by Tyler S. Grant and the seasonal classic "Sleigh Ride". Every piece was chosen to both challenge students and engage the audience.

Band students held a raffle basket fundraiser that was drawn at the end of the performance with proceeds going toward festival fees, travel, and venue costs. Zander emphasized that the program thrives on the "village" behind it including parents, the school division, bus drivers, staff and

community support.

Community support plays a vital role in sustaining the program. Attendance at concerts, generous donations, and fundraiser participation demonstrates that music has a valued place in Virden. These contributions also help maintain and repair instruments throughout the year and in the summer months, ensuring students are ready to learn each fall.

The Winter Concert was just the beginning of a busy season for the young Virden musicians with upcoming concerts and festival performances.

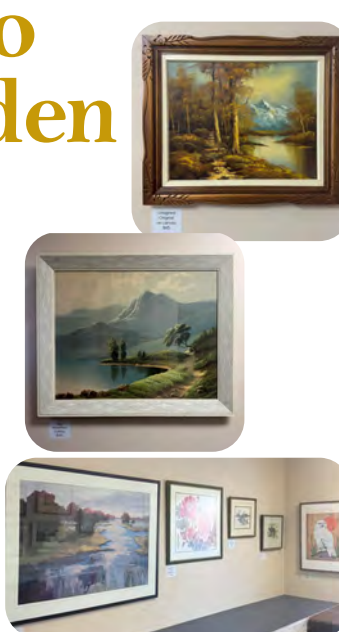
"The most rewarding part is seeing the students energized, proud of their accomplishments and eager for their next performance," says Zander. "Our message to the community is clear: we are back. This school year will be filled with music, performances, and opportunities to watch these young musicians continue to grow."

New to Virden

The Virden Empire Advance is pleased to announce that in partnership with Rob Waddell (@shoestringpicker on Instagram) we have opened an Art Gallery at the Virden Empire Advance building at 305 Nelson Street in Virden.

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

For more information call Ken Waddell at 204-476-6214



Celebrate
lifes milestones

Births Birthdays Congratulations
Anniversaries Engagements Weddings
Graduations & More!

...by announcing them in the Empire-Advance!

📞 204.748.3931
📧 sales@empireadvance.ca

Email sent to all PAL card holders



An AR-15 restricted gun.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

By RCMP
CDN FIREARMS PROGRAM

Notice to individual firearms owners assault-style firearms compensation program (ASFCP)

The Canadian Firearms Program facilitated the delivery of this notification on behalf of Public Safety Canada and has not shared or disclosed any licence holder names, addresses or personal information with Public Safety Canada. Please ensure that your email is up-to-date with the Canadian Firearms Program to receive direct program updates. Alternatively, updates will be available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/campaigns/firearms-buyback.html>

This notice is being sent to all holders of a valid Possession and Acquisition License (PAL).

As part of various actions and programs to tackle gun violence in Canadian communities, beginning in May 2020 the Government of Canada deemed prohibited more than 2,500 makes and models of firearms. Should you own one of these prohibited firearms, thank you for safely storing and not using that prohibited firearm.

In prohibiting these particular firearms, such as the AR-15, the Government of Canada also committed to compensate eligible businesses and PAL holders who are impacted.

The purpose of this notice is to provide you with the opportunity to be compensated should you own one or more of these prohibited firearms.

Over 12,000 of these prohibited firearms were successfully collected from businesses from across Canada. More than \$22 million in compensation has been

provided to these businesses.

To determine if you own a prohibited firearm, please search the list of 2,500 makes and models. The list is available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/campaigns/firearms-buyback.html>

If you do not own one of these prohibited firearms, you do not need to do anything more.

If you do own one of these prohibited firearms, and you wish to participate in the ASFCP and apply for compensation, you must first declare the prohibited firearm(s) in your possession.

You may do so during the nation-wide declaration period, which begins on January 19th, 2026, and ends on March 31st, 2026. After March 31st, 2026, declaration requests will no longer be processed.

To complete the declaration or for more information about the ASFCP, please visit: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/campaigns/firearms-buyback.html>

It is important to note that an amnesty has been in place since 2020. This amnesty ensures every impacted PAL holder can hold onto the prohibited firearms until the end of the amnesty.

This amnesty is scheduled to end on October 30th, 2026.

All prohibited firearms and devices must be disposed of or permanently deactivated prior to that date. If you remain in possession of an impacted firearm following this date, you will be noncompliant with legislation.

Thank you for your continued commitment to safe firearms practices and compliance with all firearms rules and regulations.

Additional Information for the ASSAULT-STYLE FIREARMS COMPENSATION PROGRAM

Compensation will be determined primarily on a first come first served basis, based on the date your declaration is submitted and the availability of Program funds at that time. To increase your likelihood of receiving compensation, pending eligibility, you are encouraged to submit your declaration as early as possible. Submitting a declaration does not guarantee you will receive compensation.

To complete the declaration or for more information about the ASFCP, please visit: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/campaigns/firearms-buyback.html>

This webpage also contains information on: the list of eligible Assault-Style Firearms (ASFs) and their compensation amounts; other options for compliance with the prohibitions; and the Amnesty Orders.

Firearms owners in Saskatchewan or Alberta should consult their provincial authorities for any additional laws or regulations that may impact participation in the ASFCP.

Should you require further assistance, or a paper declaration to apply by mail, or if you would like to receive information in Indigenous languages (Mohawk, Anishinaabe (Ojibwe), Inuktitut (South Baffin), Cree, Algonquin, Dene, or Mi'kmaq), please contact the ASFCP Contact Centre at 1-833-759-4551.

Reminder: while the compensation program is voluntary, compliance with the law is not. Impacted firearms and devices must be disposed of, or deactivated by the end of the amnesty period on October 30th, 2026.

If you do not wish to return your firearm under the Program, alternative options are available to you before the amnesty period expires on October 30th, 2026:

Having the firearm deactivated at your own expense by a licensed business authorized to perform deactivations. Procedures for this option are available at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/campaigns/firearms-buyback.html>

Arranging with your local police to hand-in your firearm – there will be no compensation provided.

Gun owners have until March 31 to express interest in gun compensation

By The Canadian Press
SUBMITTED BY RCMP MEDIA

OTTAWA – The period for gun owners to declare interest in a federal program offering compensation for turning in or permanently deactivating their guns begins today.

Since May 2020, Ottawa has outlawed about 2,500 types of guns, including the AR-15, on the basis they belong only on the battlefield.

Public Safety Canada says firearm licence holders will be notified of the declaration period, which lasts through to March 31, and how they can take part

In the spring, owners whose declarations are approved will be invited to finalize their claims and schedule appointments to turn in their guns to the RCMP, local police or a mobile collection unit.

The government says compensation will be determined primarily on a first-come, first-served basis.

Firearm rights advocates and the

federal Conservatives have denounced the program as a poor use of taxpayer dollars that targets law-abiding gun owners.

Prohibited firearms and devices must be disposed of — or permanently deactivated — by the end of an amnesty period on Oct. 30.

Public Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree said over the weekend that the deadlines are real and should be heeded.

The government says anyone found in possession of a banned firearm or device after the amnesty period could face criminal prosecution.

Owners of banned guns who do not take part in the program can also comply with the law by deactivating their firearms at their own expense, turning them in to local police for no compensation, or exporting them if they hold an export permit.

This report by The Canadian Press was first published Jan. 19, 2026.



TRANSFER WEALTH WITHOUT CREATING FAMILY CONFLICT
Passing down wealth is more than a financial transaction—it's a chance to secure your family's future and honor your legacy. Yet, without careful planning and open dialogue, this process can spark tension and even divide loved ones. The good news? With the right approach, you can transfer wealth smoothly while strengthening family bonds.

Start with Open Communication - The foundation of a smooth wealth transfer is transparency. Families often avoid discussing money because it feels uncomfortable, but silence can breed misunderstanding. Begin by sharing your intentions early. Explain why you've made certain decisions—whether it's dividing assets equally, prioritizing specific needs, or supporting charitable causes. When heirs understand the reasoning behind your choices, they're less likely to feel blindsided or resentful.

Consider hosting a family meeting or series of conversations. These discussions don't need to reveal every dollar amount but should clarify your goals and values. For example, you might say, "Our priority is ensuring everyone feels supported and that our family traditions continue." Framing the conversation around values rather than numbers helps keep emotions in check.

Create a Comprehensive Plan - A verbal promise isn't enough. Formalizing your intentions through legal and financial planning ensures clarity and reduces ambiguity. Work with professionals—estate planners, financial advisors, and attorneys—to draft documents such as wills, trusts, and powers of attorney. These tools not only protect your assets but also outline how they should be distributed.

Trusts, for instance, can be invaluable for minimizing taxes and controlling how wealth is accessed. They can also prevent conflicts by setting clear rules. Similarly, designating an impartial executor or trustee can help avoid situations where one family member feels burdened or accused of favoritism.

Address Potential Hot Spots - Conflict often arises from unequal distributions or sentimental assets. If you plan to leave different amounts to your children, explain why. Maybe one child has special needs or another received significant support earlier in life. Transparency reduces speculation and resentment.

Sentimental items: like heirlooms or property—can be even trickier than money. Ask family members what matters most to them and document those preferences. Sometimes, a simple conversation about who gets Grandma's wedding ring can prevent years of hurt feelings.

Revisit and Update Regularly - Life changes: marriages, births, divorces, and financial shifts—can all impact your plan. Review your estate documents every few years or after major events to ensure they still reflect your wishes. Keeping your family informed about updates reinforces trust and prevents surprises.

In conclusion, transferring wealth isn't just about numbers; it's about relationships. By prioritizing communication, creating a clear plan, and addressing emotional considerations, you can pass on your legacy without passing on conflict. Start the conversation today—your family will thank you tomorrow.

Mutual funds and other securities are offered through
Aviso Wealth, a division of Aviso Financial Inc.



Tundra

By Chad Carpenter



Let us picture your community

This week I am writing about an important item for our towns and villages, all the communities that make up the coverage area of our three newspapers, the Rivers Banner, the Virden Empire-Advance and the Neepawa Banner & Press. If you only read a few of this week's lines, please pass on this information to all your friends, family members, co-workers and your customers. Combined, the three papers are distributed to over 50 towns and villages, free of charge.

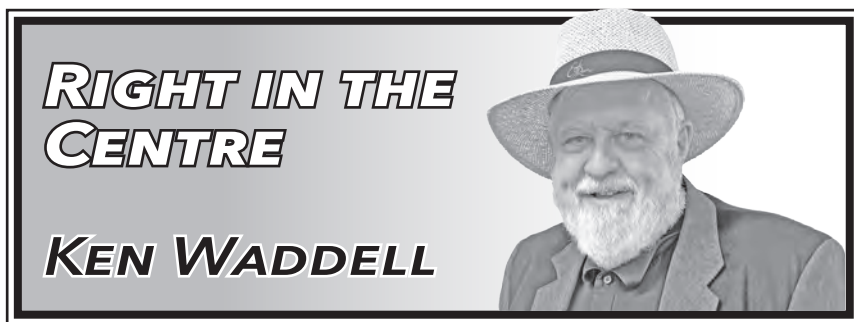
To do a better job of coverage of all 50 communities, we need your help. In days gone by, newspapers would be able to have a reporter or photographer at many events within the area. But those 50 communities involves a driving distance well over 120 miles from one end to the other. We can't be everywhere, it's impossible, so here's what I'm asking. When you are at events, hockey games or tournaments for an example, please send us a picture or ask someone who is taking pictures to send us a photo. Here's the emails to use:

kwaddell@neepawabanner.com

riversbanner@outlook.com

virdenempireadvance@outlook.com

We would especially like to have photos of youth and community activities, such as winners of hockey tournaments or action shots. If you are in charge of minor hockey in your community, we would really like to hear from you with pictures from games or tournaments and team pics. We really like team pictures of all sports. Bonspiel winners are good too. Please include the



names of those in the picture.

Photography has come a long way during our years of the newspaper business. We used to take pictures with a film camera, develop them in a dark room or drive them to a photo developer.

There used to be developers in several towns. For black and white pictures, we had our own dark room.

That all changed over 25 years ago when we bought our first digital camera. That was a huge breakthrough and I still have that first camera. It was a dandy. Then everybody got digital cameras and then cell phones became pretty good cameras. Nearly everybody has a cell phone today and they do take pretty good pictures.

That said, there are some suggestions. Try to square the photo up and don't cut off peoples heads, shoot the picture with the sun or a main source of light behind you. A bright sunny window in the background can really mess up a pretty good photo. A big enemy of a good photos are hats, especially ball caps and cowboy hats. A lot of good looking faces have been hidden in the shadows of a favourite cap or hat.

Take a few shots as it's inevitable that someone in the picture will have their eyes closed.

We want to show off as much as we can about what is happening in

your community and you can help very directly by sending us photos at the above emails.

At the risk of repeating myself, we simply can't be in all our towns and villages, but we do want to give as much coverage as we can. My wife and I have been at this business off and on now for nearly 60 years, full time for almost 37 years. We want to do as much as we can to keep your papers full of news and photos and you can help us and our staff to keep your local paper strong.

Our circulation numbers are very good at over 12,000 for the three papers combined and over 4,000 on-line.

And the best news, it's free, BUT we do need ads to keep things going. Advertising is our main source of income, and we do appreciate our customers very much.

In a world of turmoil, and with so much false information flying around, the local paper is the best source of reliable and accountable news about what matters the most to us all.

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.



'Just a little more time...'

Gabrielle Roy captured many of my thoughts and musings in "The Road Past Altamont". The first section revealed a young girl's relationship with her grandmother, addressing aging, loss of abilities, and yes, death. We examine impressions, emotions and human relationships in every section of the book. In the second portion, the young girl forges a relationship with an elderly man in the neighbourhood. It would be fair to say they become kindred spirits, understanding each other, having time for each other, as the world at large spins on. She is eight, often unwell and rather frail; he is eighty four, independent and rather frail. During a prairie heat wave they slip away for a day at the shore of Lake Winnipeg, taking time to share thoughts and sip deep of the cup of communing - with each other, the vast changing lake and the ever restless clouded sky.

Sitting together, the old man in a black suit, and the young girl in her Sunday dress with ribbons in her hair, they draw the stares of the swirling crowds. They are oblivious to all but the present. The shared thoughts go deeper. They speak of aging and death. "And, he continued, it's sad to die young. Because one hasn't had time to learn and love enough...but when one is old, it's natural." The phrase, 'learned enough...loved enough' catches the attention of the young aspiring writer. "Ah! Because you have learned and loved enough on this side?" After a pause the wise one replies "Learned enough...loved enough...I don't know. Perhaps one has never learned and loved enough. I would like just a little more time. I suppose one would always like just a little more time."

Those words echoed through my being. I, who am thankfully well in body, mind and spirit, desire a lot more time. I can't imagine that I have learned and loved enough! The lass dreams of travel. The elder recalls his travels. I am caught betwixt, I dream and I recall.

The dreaming and recalling does not apply solely to travel. All aspects of life and living are encompassed in this tension. I have learned much from life; hard lessons, scaring lessons, sacred lessons, life changing lessons and so many lessons of loving. Love for self has been the most challenging lesson for me. I find it easy to love others, and I find it essential for me to love the Creator and Sustainer of all life, of my life. This call to love myself is threatened by every memory of past folly - and there are many! It is eroded by my perceived list of failures and 'not enoughs'. My perception of personal value is influenced by my early years - where hard work, good grades, practical achievements were the benchmark for personal value. That's my perception. I was not a stellar scholar, a natural beauty or a gifted artist, but, by golly, I could work hard...

I would like a little more time. There are books I wish to read, places I wish to visit, skills I wish to develop. And, ah, no and...There are people to love. Generations. Past. Present. Future.

Empire Advance
Serving Virden and area since 1885

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Yearly Subscription Rates (excluding taxes): \$76 in Manitoba, \$85 elsewhere in Canada
Canadian Publications Mail Sales Product Agreement #40069240

Funded by the Government of Canada
Financé par le gouvernement du Canada



Members of:
mcna Manitoba Community Newspapers Association

News Media Canada
Médias d'Info Canada

PUBLISHED EVERY FRIDAY
AD DEADLINE: TUESDAY 12
PM PRIOR TO ISSUE DATE

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Online sellers beware

Urgent PayPal email turns out to be phishing scam

By Michael Blume
RCMP MEDIA

A phishing scam targeting users of online marketplace sites has been circulating locally, prompting warnings from cyber-security experts and consumer protection bodies.

The scam begins with what appears to be a legitimate email claiming to be from PayPal, stating that a payment

is “intact” and urging the recipient to complete a transaction “as soon as possible” due to supposed “new policies” and “Seller Protection guidelines.” Such language—vague policy references and urgency—are common tactics used by fraudsters to pressure victims into acting without verifying details.

Recipients are then instructed to send a “Pick Up Fee” of \$100 CAD via Interac

e-Transfer to a named “Transport Agent,” with promises that a PayPal “confirmation email” will follow showing a credit of \$220 CAD once the fee is paid. Messages often include personal-sounding backstories—such as claims of recovery from surgery—to build sympathy and trust. Cyber-fraud experts warn these are classic red flags of phishing scams designed to steal money or

banking credentials.

Such scams exploit online classified and marketplace platforms, where buyers and sellers may not meet in person and are more likely to rely on digital communications and payments. Scammers can send fake payment notifications or direct victims to phishing sites that harvest login information, leading to financial loss.

Consumers are urged to remain cautious when engaging in online transactions. Never click on links in unsolicited messages, especially those

that ask for banking details, passwords, or require transfers before verifying the legitimacy of a buyer or seller. Legitimate services such as PayPal will not ask for personal information via email or text message, and will direct users to log in only through official apps or websites.

If you suspect a message is fraudulent:

Do not reply to the message or contact any phone numbers provided.

Log in directly through the official PayPal (or other

service) website to verify account activity.

Forward suspicious emails to dedicated fraud reporting addresses (e.g., phishing@paypal.com for PayPal scams).

Report the incident to local law enforcement and the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre.

Manitoba RCMP and consumer protection agencies recommend vigilance when shopping or selling online, particularly on marketplace and classified platforms, to avoid falling victim to increasingly sophisticated digital scams.

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

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@viriden.ca

Caboose Restoration Fundraiser

CP Station Prints

All aboard! Now you can own a piece of Viriden’s history while fueling fundraising efforts for **restoration for the Caboose at the Historic CP Station.**

Unframed prints by renowned Canadian artist William Hobbs are available for only \$30 each at the Town Office - while quantities last.

Want to support the restoration event more? Donations are welcome - tax receipts will be provided.

Don’t miss your chance, before these prints leave the station for good.

Employment Opportunity 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.

Please forward resumes, complete with covering letter to:

Faye Pope, Office Manager
Box 310, Viriden, Manitoba, R0M 2C0
Phone: (204) 748-2440
Email: office.manager@viriden.ca

Public Programming

Check out the **Town of Viriden – Parks & Recreation** Facebook page for information on upcoming public skating, sticks & pucks, and more!

For questions or to submit programming suggestions, please email events.program@viriden.ca or call the Town Office at 204-748-2440

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
January	2.25%	\$ 22.50
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.

Dog and Cat Licenses

Did you know?

An animal license is like a free ride home for your pet. If an animal is found running at large, an up-to-date license will help us to bring your friend home safely.

Pet licenses are available for purchase at the Town Office for all cats and dogs over 6 months of age.



2026 Garbage and Recycle Schedules

Available online at www.viriden.ca/p/garbage-recycle or at the Town Office

Next Council Meeting

February 19 and March 3

Council Meetings start at 7:00 PM

HELEN DRYSDALE

OUT OF HELEN'S KITCHEN

Tofu peanut stew

1 454g package extra-firm tofu, drained	1 large onion, diced
2 Tbsp. oil such as canola or avocado, divided	3 cloves garlic, minced
1 tsp. minced ginger	1 tsp. curry powder
1 tsp. cornstarch	2 cups water or vegetable broth
1 cup canned diced tomatoes, drained	1/2 cup crunchy peanut butter
2 Tbsp. lime juice	4 cups baby spinach leaves
noodles of your choice	

Cut tofu into 1/2-inch cubes. Over medium heat, in a large frying pan heat 1 tablespoon of the oil until hot. Sauté the tofu on two sides until lightly browned, 3-4 minutes. Remove from the pan. With the remaining oil sauté the onion until lightly browned. Add the garlic, ginger and curry and sauté for 30 seconds. Add the cornstarch to the water. Stir in the tomatoes, peanut butter, lime juice and water and simmer for 5-7 minutes. Stir in the spinach and the tofu and cook for two minutes more. To prepare noodle bowl: Cook noodles in boiling water according to package directions. Drain the noodles. Serve the stew over cooked noodles.

Tofu lettuce tacos

1 454g extra firm tofu, drained	2 Tbsp. oil of choice
3 cloves garlic, minced	1 tsp. chili powder
1/2 cup orange juice	1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. red pepper flakes or to taste	12 medium butter lettuce leaves
1 avocado, diced	1/4 cup cilantro leaves, chopped
2 cups shredded cabbage	1 cup crumbled tortilla chips

Cut the tofu into 1/2 inch cubes and blot with a paper towel. In a large nonstick frying pan heat 1 tablespoon of the oil. Sauté the tofu on two sides until lightly browned, 3-4 minutes. Remove from the pan. Sauté the garlic in the remaining 1 tablespoon of oil for 30 seconds. Add the chili powder, orange juice, salt and pepper flakes. Simmer for 3-4 minutes. Return tofu to the pan and stir to coat with the sauce. Serve in the lettuce leaves with the avocado, cilantro, cabbage and tortilla chips.



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**EFFICIENCY
 MANITOBA**

Census accuracy, rural services highlight RMWW council meeting

Wallace-Woodworth Jan. 13 council meeting

By Dale Davison
 EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Per-Capita funding concerns

Council discussed an email from Statistics Canada regarding the upcoming 2026 Census. Reeve Clayton Canart raised concerns about the accuracy of population figures from the previous census, noting that the count was off by an estimated 10 to 15 percent. Census accuracy is critical because many funding formulas are based on per-capita numbers, so errors can have significant financial implications.

Canart said, "This number is so important to our per capita funding and last time, we felt the number was very inaccurate. This is something we should get on as a council, a municipality, to put up some advertising and an explanation of how important this is to funding for the area of getting accurate numbers."

To promote census participation, he suggested using local newspapers and other means of communication to encourage retirees or community-minded individuals to serve as census employees as they might be motivated to ensure accurate data collection.

Western Caucus

Coun. Mark Humphries attended the annual meeting of the Western Caucus, a collaboration of municipal councillors, reeves and mayors that meets to discuss concerns in western Manitoba.

Glen Simard, Minister of Municipal and Northern Relations described the ongoing work to redesign the Manitoba Municipal Board. The board is the section of the provincial government that rules on property assessment and planning appeals. The minister explained that once the reorganization is complete municipalities will see faster and more transparent decisions by the municipal board. Coun. Humphries said that Western Caucus members suggested increasing rural representation on the board, and the minister acknowledged this concern, noting that the current board is heavily weighted toward urban perspectives and that this imbalance is being considered.

Provincial grants

Minister Simard also discussed the GRO and From the Ground Up grant programs, saying that roughly 760 applications had been submitted, with about 260 approved. He explained that successful applications tended to focus on community projects aimed at seniors and youth.

Rural ambulance shortages

Ambulance shortages and staffing challenges have been a problem for years, and statistics show that rural areas remain significantly underserved. A question was raised about the former volunteer ambulance system that once operated in places like Elkhorn, where trained volunteers, though not necessarily paramedics, provided transport. Many rural municipalities once invested heavily in ambulances, equipment, and volunteer training. It was suggested that a two-tier model could be reintroduced, allowing patients to choose between immediate transport by trained volunteers or waiting for a fully staffed paramedic ambulance. Coun. Val Caldwell said, "Well, right now 12 of the 36 ambulances are currently not running in this region because of technical issues." Even where ambulances exist, there are not enough personnel to staff them. Although training initiatives are in progress to increase the number of ambulance drivers these new drivers would likely be stationed in major urban centres such as Winnipeg, Brandon, Portage, and Steinbach.

Coun. Val Caldwell attended the Westman Emergency Group meeting and reported that the new budget has been approved. The budget requests an increased RM contribution from \$7,500 to \$10,000. Caldwell suggested a resolution for the next AMM conference about Manitoba 511 road condition reports. She said that "It is more of a liability right now than anything because it's not being updated correctly and something bad is going to happen because it says roads are open and RCMP are saying don't drive on those same roads."

Coun. Diana MacDonald reported that the final Prairie West Recreation meeting

took place in December. All remaining matters were completed, finances were dispersed, and the organization was finalized. She indicated the RM's share of the remaining funds was approximately \$32,000.

At the Woodworth Fire Department meeting nominations for chief, deputy chiefs, and captains were completed, with all positions remaining unchanged. Chris Routledge remains chief, with Lane Routledge and Brie Sangster as deputy chiefs, and Doug Roseveare and David Logan as captains.

The department received \$25,000 from the Richardson Foundation toward the rescue truck chassis and an additional \$2,000 donation from Ag Days. Training plans were also discussed, including scheduling for water rescue, wildland fires, structure fires, vehicle extrications, and grain rescue, alongside regular weekly training.

Reeve Canart attended the fire board meeting. Station 1 submitted a report indicating that in 2025 the station responded to 96 calls. These included motor vehicle collisions, structure fires, wildland fires, vehicle and implement fires, gas leaks, false alarms, and other incidents.

Coun. Barb Stambuski reported on the Elkhorn auto museum meeting where discussions included whether the RM's grant policy applies to the museum and a review of the board's structure. The board is currently short two members, who must be residents of the RM. To address awareness and recruitment, the board plans to distribute a newsletter-style mailout in Elkhorn and surrounding areas. This would provide updates on museum activities, the snow plane project, and calls for board members. The mailout would also include advertising for a museum manager position and summer student roles.

Oil museum proposal

Terry Johnson and Craig Lane attended the meeting to outline a proposal related to the region's oil industry heritage. They expressed concern that the community lacks a clear identity tied to the oil industry, despite oil being an important part of the economy and history of southwest Manitoba.

Oak Lake Dam rehabilitation project focuses on long-term safety and flood resilience

By Ev Nolan
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure is moving forward with a comprehensive rehabilitation and reconstruction project at Oak Lake Dam, aimed at addressing long-standing erosion concerns, renewing aging infrastructure, and ensuring the continued safety and reliability of water management at Oak Lake for decades to come.

The rehabilitation project includes several key components designed to strengthen the dam's overall structure. Work involves regrading and armoring the west dike with rock riprap, reconstructing the spillway, and regrading a small portion of the east dike. These upgrades are part of a broader effort to address deterioration that has occurred over time due to natural forces and repeated exposure to high water conditions.

When asked what specific erosion issues prompted the need for this rehabilitation now, according to Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure, the concrete spillway at Oak Lake Dam is approximately 60 years old and has reached the end of its service life. As with many aging water control structures, prolonged exposure to water flow, freeze-thaw cycles, and environmental stress has reduced its effectiveness. Reconstructing the spillway is a critical component of maintaining the dam's functionality and ensuring it continues to operate safely under a range of conditions.

In addition to the aging spillway, the dam embankments and dikes have experienced erosion over the years. This erosion has been driven largely by wave action and ice movement, particularly during periods of high water. Significant high-water events, including those in 2011 and 2014, contributed to accelerated wear on the structure. The current rehabilitation work is intended to address these vulnerabilities and reduce the risk of future damage during similar events.

Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure notes that "once completed, the rehabilitation of Oak Lake Dam is expected to extend the service life of the structure by approximately 50 years. This long-term outlook reflects the scale of the work being undertaken and the import-

ance of the dam within the region's water management system", when asked how this rehabilitation fit into the broader long-term management plan for Oak Lake Dam.

Residents and property owners around Oak Lake may be concerned about potential impacts on water levels during construction. However, the department has indicated that "lake water levels are not expected to be affected by the rehabilitation work. Spillway reconstruction is planned to take place during low water conditions in the late fall and winter, a timing choice intended to minimize any potential disruption. Dike construction activities are also not anticipated to affect water levels or nearby properties."

From a broader perspective, the rehabilitation project is designed to support the long-term viability of the existing water management regime at Oak Lake. Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure states that the work will improve the dam's resilience during major flood events, helping it better withstand extreme conditions while continuing to function as intended.

Ongoing monitoring plays an important role in the management of Oak Lake Dam. The department conducts monitoring of the structure each year during spring runoff and during other high-water events. This monitoring helps identify changes in condition, performance, and potential areas of concern. Monitoring activities will continue throughout the construction phase of the rehabilitation project to ensure issues can be identified and addressed promptly.

Communication and coordination with local authorities have also been a part of the project planning process. Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure has engaged with the Rural Municipality of Sifton throughout the design phase of the rehabilitation work. The department has indicated that this engagement will continue during construction, with the municipality being kept informed of progress and key milestones.

The Oak Lake Dam rehabilitation project reflects ongoing efforts by Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure to maintain critical water control infrastructure across the province. By addressing erosion, renewing aging components, and improving flood resilience, the



East dike to be rehabilitated.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS



Oak Lake Dam weir structure.

project aims to ensure Oak Lake Dam continues to serve its intended role safely and effectively well into the future.

Construction-related monitoring, coordination with municipal partners, and careful scheduling during low water conditions are all part of the department's approach to managing the project while minimizing impacts to the surrounding area. As work progresses, Manitoba Transportation and Infrastructure will continue its established monitoring practices and communication with local stakeholders.

Four Seasons named among RVBusiness Magazine's Top 50 dealers



SUBMITTED PHOTO

At the awards gala Four Seasons is awarded (L-R): RVBusiness representative, Nathan Eberle GM Four Seasons Regina, Sacha Chacun GM Four Seasons Medicine Hat, Alex Renard CEO of Four Seasons Dealership Group, Chad Fehr Winnipeg Sales Manager, Marie Grainger Regina Sales Manager, Kyle Parker GM Four Seasons Winnipeg, RVBusiness representative.

Submitted
BY BRITT LAWSON

Four Seasons was awarded RVBusiness magazine's Top 50 RV Dealers in North America, recognized during a gala awards ceremony held during the RV Dealers Association Convention in Las Vegas.

The program honours dealerships that demonstrate excellence in business practices, customer service, employee training, market-

ing, service operations and community involvement. Winning the award signifies that a dealership is considered among the very best in the industry.

Dealerships are nominated anonymously by RV manufacturers and invited to complete a detailed application highlighting business practices, marketing, employee training, innovative service operations, community involvement and commitment to customer

care. An independent panel of judges then reviews submissions over two days before selecting the Top 50.

Four Seasons' CEO Alex Renard said the recognition reflects the dealership's unwavering focus on customer satisfaction.

"Four Seasons has built a reputation in the RV industry for taking care of our customers better than anyone in North America. From the first conversation, through the buying journey, and into

truly unmatched after-sale support, every person on our team understands what it means to stand behind our customers.

"We've grown from humble beginnings in a small rural farming community to become one of Canada's largest RV dealers by staying true to the core principles instilled by Peter Dillon, Don Gray, and Rob Denolf: if you take care of your customers, they'll remain your customers. Being named one of North America's Top 50 RV Dealers is an honour—and it motivates us to keep raising the bar for service, trust, and long-term relationships."

The recognition comes as Four Seasons prepares for indoor show season across Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Manitoba's Largest RV Show & Sale kicks off Feb. 6 at Brandon's Keystone Centre. With more than 100 units indoors, the event will feature a wide selection of

new fifth wheels and travel trailers. The show reflects the same customer-first approach that earned the dealership its place among RVBusiness magazine's Top 50 RV Dealers in North America.

"Our Indoor Shows reflect how we do business, with the customer experience leading every decision. Free admission and free parking ensure families can attend, explore the latest travel trailers and fifth wheels, and choose the RV that's right for them," said Renard.

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Emergencies Act Challenge: government did not meet thresholds

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA) reports that the Federal Court of Appeal has delivered a historic victory for the rule of law by ruling in favour of their arguments in the Emergencies Act case.

The Emergencies Act allows the federal government to enact wide-reaching orders without going through the ordinary democratic process—but only once stringent legal thresholds are met.

The Federal Court of Appeal confirmed last Friday, Jan. 16, that the federal government did not meet these thresholds when it invoked the Emergencies Act in February 2022.

It was Feb. 14, 2022 when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau invoked the Emergencies Act after a trucker's 'freedom convoy' where thousands demonstrated at Parliament Hill, in Ottawa and blocked border points elsewhere across Canada.

(The convoy arose when a trucker vaccine mandate (ArriveCAN) was put into effect, requiring truckers be vaccinated against COVID-19 in order to cross the US-Canada border. The protest lasted about 18 days demanding vaccine mandates be lifted.)

Catharine Tunney for CBC News posted on Feb 17, 2023, "By invoking the act, the federal government gave law enforcement extraordinary powers to remove

and arrest protesters—and gave itself the power to freeze the finances of those connected to the protests. The temporary emergency powers also gave authorities the ability to commandeer tow trucks to remove protesters' vehicles from the streets of the capital."

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association took the government to court on the basis that there was insufficient justification for an Emergency Act to be enacted across Canada.

For The Canadian Press, Jim Bronskill, Feb 04, 2025 said: "In his January 2024 ruling, Federal Court Justice Richard Mosley said he revisited the events with the benefit of a more extensive record of the facts and the law than the government had when it proclaimed a public order emergency."

"Lawyer Michael Feder, representing the government, told the Federal Court of Appeal on Tuesday it was unfair of the judge to fault federal decision-making using "20/20 hindsight."

The government appealed the 2024 ruling, seeking to uphold Trudeau's Emergency Act. The appeal was struck down.

CBC coverage last week, Jan. 16, 2026, by Katherine Tunney quotes three judges on the appeal court: "As disturbing and disruptive the blockades and the convoy protests in Ottawa could be, they fell well short of a threat to national security."

In their report the CCLA noted that the law defines

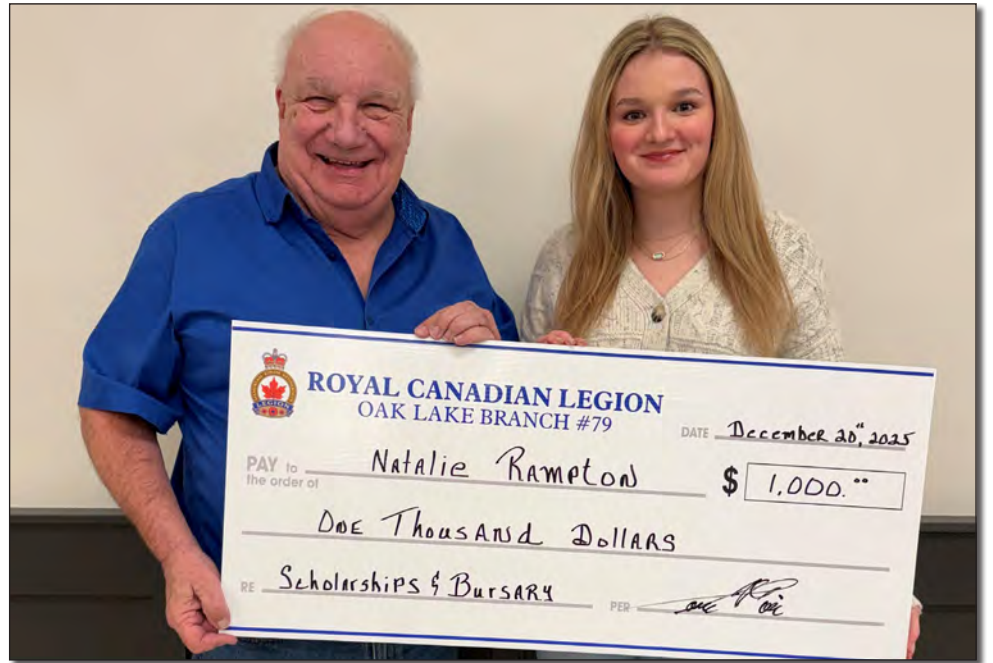
a national emergency as a situation that "cannot be effectively dealt with under any other law of Canada." Further, a public order emergency can only be invoked when there is "a threat to the security of Canada" as defined by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act.

"While the extraordinary powers granted to the federal government through the Emergencies Act are necessary in extreme circumstances, they also threaten the rule of law and our democracy," said Howard Sapers, CCLA's Executive Director. "The courts are responsible for ensuring that the government does not invoke these powers arbitrarily, and CCLA's mandate is to raise these important issues for judicial scrutiny."

CCLA notes that their judicial review challenging the federal government's invocation of the Emergencies Act was not an endorsement of the "Freedom Convoy" protests. They agreed that, given the protracted timelines and the extent of the disruption, the police needed to dismantle the blockades.

However, the CCLA maintained there was no "public order emergency" as contemplated under the Act, and certainly not one that extended across the entirety of Canada. Existing laws could have—and should have—been used to address the situation, rather than the Emergencies Act.

Natalie Rampton receives scholarship from Oak Lake Legion



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The Oak Lake Royal Canadian Legion Branch #79 have awarded their first ever post-secondary scholarship to a local girl, Natalie Rampton of the Oak Lake/ Kenton area. Her father is Cameron Rampton and her grandparents are Stan and Pat Rampton, all local farmers. Natalie is in her second year at Midland University in Nebraska. She is pursuing a degree in Mathematics/ Accounting. She plays goal for the Midland Warriors Ladies Hockey team. The Legion members are proud to support her in her academic and personal goals. The cheque is presented to Natalie Rampton by branch president, Cameron Moir.

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SUBMITTED PHOTO

Miniota/Elkhorn C-Hawks U13 winners of the Yellowhead Region earned a spot at provincials in March.

Miniota News

Submitted

BY LINDA CLARK

The Miniota Annual Bonspiel and Skunky Dozen tournament was held the weekend of January 15-17.

Placing in the Skunky's Hockey Tournament went to 1st Elkhorn, 2nd Reston and 3rd Birtle. Also playing were teams from Miniota, Kenton and Brandon.

Also, a high school bonspiel was held on Jan. 15. Bonspiel winners were: 1st – Rob Curtis, Chelsy MacInnis, Cassandra Clark and Lesli Burke; 2nd – Desmond, Jaylene, Luna and Belle Stone and Ryleigh Warkentin and 3rd – Mac & Pat Lelond, Rob & Marilyn Warkentin and Carson Brown.

A busy rink all weekend despite the weather! Congratulations to the U13 Miniota/Elkhorn C-Hawks team for a great showing at Minnedosa this past weekend in the Yellowhead Region play for a spot to attend Provincials. Miniota team members are: Kade Lelond, Mason Poppel, Cole Armitage, Callan Howard, Jaxon Sheane, Trace Brown and Conner Salt; and Elkhorn team members are Zane Waldner, Landon Cousins, Jazlynn Lowes, Lane Jebb, Duncan Shepherd,

Max Gieni, Kasper Bickerton, Aiden Canart and Turner Mitchell, along with coaches Nat Howard, Tyler Mitchel, Jeff Poppel and Kelly Sheane and Managers Brittany Cousins and Ashleigh Poppel. The U13's won all five of their games and are now off to Provincials at McCreary on March 13-15. Congratulations and Good luck at Provincials!

Despite another stormy day, Robert and Brenda Still hosted a birthday tea at Parkissimo Lodge to celebrate Margaret Still on the occasion of her 90th birthday on Jan. 18. Happy Birthday, Marg!

"Every act of kindness speaks peace to the world, love to the heart, and light to us all." Mary Davis

Isabella News

The Dushnicky family proudly hosted their 2nd Annual Isabella Big Buck Night on Friday, Jan. 9. Despite the storm, there was a great turnout. There were 38 entries which matched up with 10 categories. Men's – Derek Lane, Brenden Brown; Ladies – Meagan Bell, Megan Brown; Youth's – Callum Priestley, Lelond Meir; Better luck next year – Dennis Bonchuk; Ugly – Logan Armitage; Archery – Tanner Williams and Mule Deer – Cruz Dushnicky. Out of the ladies and men's categories, they had not one but two couples win this year, one couple who was a runner up last year. Congratulations to the winners and a thank you to all who sponsored and volunteered to make this evening a success.

Escaped SK prisoner has Brandon connections: Do not approach. Public to report any sightings

Yorkton RCMP asks public to report sightings of Robert Racine

By Michael Blume
RCMP MEDIA

On January 14, 2026, at approximately 11:40 a.m., Yorkton RCMP received a report of an escaped prisoner.

Investigation determined the prisoner, who is serving a sentence at the White Spruce Training Centre, was last seen on Ball Road in Yorkton around 11:35 a.m. on January 14.

Since receiving the report, Yorkton RCMP have been searching for the prisoner, checking places he is known to frequent and following up on information received.

As a result of continued investigation, 57-year-old Robert Racine is now charged with one count, being unlawfully at large, Section 145(1), Criminal Code (Information #90568550).

Officers continue searching for him and ask the public to report all sightings and infor-



SUBMITTED PHOTO

57-year-old Robert Racine still at large.

mation on his whereabouts.

Robert Racine is described as approximately 6' tall and 200 lbs.

He has blue eyes.

He has connections to the Regina and Brandon, MB area but his current whereabouts are unknown.

If you see Robert Racine, do not approach him. Call your local police of jurisdiction.

BEST LAID PLANS

Submitted

BY KRISTA PEDERSON

Whether it is the weather or technology, we have had to change our plans this week!

Most recently, the Elkhorn Community Meal and the Virden Music Jam, both fell prey to bad weather.

As far as technology goes, most of SAIL's phones have not been working. If you have tried to get a hold of Krista, Vickie, Karen, Kristina or Tanis, your message has not come through. We're working on the issue! You can still contact us through our Facebook page, or in person, or text/call Julie.

Exercises and coffee continue to run at the Legion Club Room, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday at 9:30am.

Our Toonie Transportation continues to run on Wednesdays, thanks to a renewed grant from Age Friendly Manitoba, and a collaboration between the Town of Virden, the New Horizons Center, the Virden Handi-van, and SAIL. Whether it's lunch, errands, walking at Tundra, or playing cards at New Horizon, give us a call to arrange. Julie's cell 204-851-7100, is the one to call (or text!)

And going back to the top, do you know where the quote is from? I didn't...It's from a Robert Burns poem: "The best laid schemes o' mice an' men/Gang aft a-gley,/ An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,/ For promised joy" (Translated as: The best laid schemes of mice and men/ Go often askew,/ And leaves us nothing but grief and pain, / For promised joy!) So now I know something new.

Despite our "best laid plans", much has gone awry in the last few weeks!

PREVENT

SLIPS & FALLS

- #### 1 No Shortcuts

Ensure your pathway is clear.

In parking lots, pick the safe route.

Do not climb over snowbanks or obstacles.
- #### 2 Wear sensible footwear

 - Non-slip sole (avoid leather or plastic soles)
 - Deep tread, not flat
 - Wide, low heel
 - Consider using cleats
 - Dry boots before walking indoors
- #### 3 Hold On

Use at least one handrail.
- #### 4 Careful leaving your car

Look to make sure the ground isn't icy before stepping out.

Carefully place both feet on ground, hold the door frame and steering wheel for support.

Reach for belongings only after securely standing.
- #### 5 Stay focused

No texting while walking.

Watch where you are going to avoid hazards.
- #### 6 Take it slow

Short, flat, careful steps.

Step carefully on fresh snow as ice could be hidden underneath.

Thank You

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For their generous Grant in 2025 offered to support HandiVan operations.

Additional Thanks to the Directors of the Virden and Area Foundation for choosing the Virden & Area HandiVan for this Grant.

The HandiVan service operates to provide an option for transportation of disadvantaged persons living in or visiting Virden, RM of Wallace Woodworth and the Northern portion of the RM of Pipestone.

Thank-you!

Virden & Area HandiVan Committee

SPORTS

HOILETT'S IMPACT GOES BEYOND THE SCORESHEET FOR OIL CAPITALS

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The Virden Oil Capitals knew London Hoilett would be a key contributor this season, but his true impact has been even greater than most could have imagined.

Joining the Manitoba Junior Hockey League club after three seasons in the Western Hockey League, the 20-year-old has brought leadership, offensive production, experience, and much more to the Oil Caps. This season, Hoilett is an assistant captain and, as of Jan. 18, the Oil Capitals' second leading scorer.

"There are not enough words to describe what London has meant to this team on and off the ice," Virden head coach Tyson Ramsey said. "He is a selfless leader, his work ethic on and off the ice is off the charts, he has a positive effect on every part of the game, and he works just as hard off the ice in the gym. London is one of the most respectful young men I have ever coached and he is a great teammate. He scores, he defends, he plays on the power play, kills penalties, and plays against the other team's best players. London is the perfect example of what we want our players to be on and off the ice."

Hoilett has emerged as an offensive force in the MJHL. As of Jan. 18, the 5-foot-11, 186-pounder was second on the Oil Capitals in points with 33 in as many games played. Virden's own Bryce Bryant led with 47.

Hoilett had scored 18 goals, which placed him second on the Oil Caps behind Bryant (19) and 13th in the MJHL. Hoilett's six power-play goals put him second on the team behind Rhylan Baxter's eight. He led his team with two shorthanded goals. What has allowed him to be a prolific goal scorer for the Oil Capitals?

"The whole environment here has given me the confidence to shoot the puck and trust I'll hit my spot," Hoilett said. "We've got a ton of great players that know how to

make plays under pressure. I just try to find open space, and I know my teammates will find me."

Back in 2022, Hoilett signed with the Virden team. However, he cracked the roster of the WHL's Calgary Hitmen. Hoilett split the past three seasons between the Hitmen and the Vancouver Giants. He has embraced being back in his home province.

"I've enjoyed every part of playing here in Virden for my last year of junior," Hoilett said. "The guys here have great attitudes towards pushing each other every day. The coaching staff has been amazing this year, trusting me in key moments which I believe has really helped to grow my game so far."

Off the ice, Hoilett has appreciated the opportunity to billet with Tyler and Serena Strachan and their two daughters, Emery and Austin. He said, "It's been such a privilege to get to know these wonderful people that have opened up their home to me. They make my job super easy. I'm able to come to the rink every day with a belly full of delicious food and a good night's rest. All on top of the fun activities we play at home."

Another aspect the Winnipegger has enjoyed about playing in Virden is being closer to home. My mom, Tracy Hoilett, is a diabetes educator at a Winnipeg hospital.

"She's loved being able to drive in and watch me play in person, as opposed to me being all the way in Vancouver the last few years," Hoilett said. "Having her there is sometimes just the extra push I need and an awesome reminder of where it all started and why I love the game!"

Hoilett's late father, Trevor, was a standout in several sports. His athletic accomplishments included playing junior hockey with the Selkirk Steelers, basketball at the University of Manitoba, and professional football for the Winnipeg Blue Bombers.

While athletics are certainly in Hoilett's blood, he also



PHOTO BY VIRDEN OIL CAPITALS

London Hoilett has contributed to the Virden Oil Capitals in many ways in his only season with the club.

has talent in other areas - such as music. Hoilett releases songs on YouTube and Spotify under the moniker Ty Kiddo. In 2023, the WHL used his song "Vibe 2 Night" for a season launch video.

"Music has and will forever remain a passion of mine," Hoilett said. "It's a lot like hockey, in which there is always room for improvement, which keeps things fun and exciting. For the last three years, I have dove into learning the guitar and all the things that go into producing an instrumental track so that I can have full creative control and freedom for my future projects. I love the idea of starting with nothing, and turning it into a unique feeling that's never been replicated before."

OIL CAPITALS RACKING UP WINS IN 2026

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The Virden Oil Capitals are off to a strong start in 2026.

Since Jan. 1, the local Manitoba Junior Hockey League team has racked up five wins. Its lone setback was an overtime loss, which still earned it a point in the standings. Last week the Oil Capitals beat the Dauphin Kings 3-2 at home and shut out the Winnipeg Blues 4-0 on the road.

"I think we have just been playing really well as a team," Virden head coach Tyson Ramsey said. "Our guys have done a great job understanding what makes us successful and have been working hard to stick to our game plan. It's been pretty cool to watch."

As of Jan. 20, the Oil Caps topped the MGEU West Division with 44 points thanks to a 21-10-2-0 record. The Kings were second with 43 points on a 21-15-1-0 record.

Poor weather postponed the Virden team's Jan. 18 road game against the Selkirk Steelers. The Oil Capitals start a four-game homestand on Jan. 23 when the Northern Manitoba Blizzard visit. On Jan. 24, the Winnipeg Blues are in town. The Oil Caps host the Swan Valley Stampeders on Jan. 27 and the Steinbach Pistons on Jan. 30.

Oil Caps 4, Blues 0

Oil Capitals goaltender Braxton Burdeny made 19 saves to post his fourth shutout of the season on Jan. 17. He said: "What allowed me to get the shutout was just how well we defended the other night. So many guys were laying out to block shots and our breakouts were quick and clean. The guys were playing so well in front of me and made my job as simple as it could be, especially when we only give up as many shots against as we did."

The 20-year-old Winnipegger spent the first two seasons of his junior career with his hometown Freeze. His first MJHL shutout came earlier this season. As of Jan. 18, Burdeny led the league in shutouts. He was second in wins with 14 and fourth in goals against average at 2.54.

Rookies Bryan Laing and Dysten Drake lit the lamp in

the first period to give Virden a 2-0 lead over the Blues. Drake's goal came on a power play. Bryce Bryant and Cohen Lewko scored in the second period to put Virden up 4-0. Liam Goertzen had three assists for Virden.

Bryant was the First Star with a goal and an assist. Lewko, who also had a goal and an assist, was the Second Star. Blues netminder Justin Perreault made 43 saves on 47 shots. He was the contest's Third Star.

Oil Caps 3, Kings 2

At home on Jan. 13, the Oil Capitals earned a big win against the Kings. The teams were knotted at 1-1 after two periods of play. In the third frame, Brooks Siemens and Cohen Lewko scored to put Virden on top, 3-1. The Kings' Joey Kubas scored on a power play in the final 30 seconds, but the visitors were unable to tie things up.

"We got behind early and stuck with it," Ramsey said. "Getting scored on first didn't faze us and we were able to battle back. We had a real good start to the third and got a couple goals and were able to get it done. Our special teams were good and we got great goaltending."

Rylan Gage scored for Dauphin in the first period. Kings goalie Hunter Bauer made 42 saves.

Lewko scored in the second period to tie the game at 1-1. His two goals netted him the First Star. Colten Worthington had two assists and was named the Second Star. Bryant,

the Third Star, had an assist. Burdeny stopped 31 of the 33 shots he faced. Wawanessa's Shane Elder was called up from the U18 AAA Southwest Cougars for the game.

Burdeny Recognized

Burdeny's strong week earned him recognition as one of the MJHL Stars of the Week. He had two wins and made 50 saves.

Lewko's Busy Week

After lighting the lamp twice against the Kings, Lewko was called up to the Western Hockey League's Saskatoon Blades. He played for the Blades in two home games on Jan. 14 and 16. Lewko returned to the Oil Caps to record two points against the Blues. As of Jan. 18, Lewko has played in 10 games for the Blades this season.



Journey For Sight 2026 Saturday, January 24

The Virden Lions Club to welcome Lions Journey for Sight Snowmobile riders at Tim Hortons on Saturday January 24, 2026.

Come out to the Virden Lions club Hall at 230 Nelson Street, Virden, Manitoba, on Saturday, January 24th, 2026 and donate to this most worthy cause. Local Lions members will be there to receive your donations from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

All proceeds go to the Lions eye Bank of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario. Objectives: procurement and evaluation of eye tissue to be used for corneal transplants.

Come on out and have coffee and donuts while you make your donation. Income tax receipts will be issued for donations of \$20 and above.

Used eyeglasses will also be accepted when you come with your donation on January 24th.

Come one come all! See you Saturday, the 24th, at the Lions Hall!!!

----- We Serve -----



Police Report

Westman RCMP Service Report for Jan 4 to 17

Submitted
BY WESTMAN RCMP

During the two weeks, Westman RCMP received a total of 93 calls for service. Some of these calls for service include 24 traffic offences, 4 Wellbeing Checks, 6 Mental Health Related, 5 False Alarms, 7 911 Acts, 1 Assistance to Canadian Agencies/General Public, 2 Assaults, 3 Coroner's Act - Sudden Deaths, 3 Utter Threats, 3 Fail to Stop or Remain at Accident Scene, 3 Fail to comply with Order and 6 Mischief files.

On Jan. 6, 2026, RCMP received a report that an 18-year-old male bound by a court ordered curfew was not at his residence during curfew hours. He was later located and placed under

arrest for an outstanding warrant from another jurisdiction and remanded into custody for failing to comply with the conditions of his release. He will appear in court later this month.

On Jan. 9, 2026, during routine traffic patrols in the Town of Virden, a 25-year-old male was pulled over for driving while disqualified, a Traffic Offence Notice was issued, which carries a fine of \$672, and the vehicle was towed and impounded. On January 11, in the RM Wallace-Woodworth, a 32-year-old female was pulled over for also driving while disqualified, a Traffic Offence Notice was issued, which carries a fine of \$672.

On Jan. 9, 2026, during routine traffic patrols in

the Town of Virden, an 18-year-old male was pulled over for use of a cellular telephone or other hand-operated electronic device while driving a vehicle, a Traffic Offence Notice was issued, which carries a fine of \$672 and a 72-hour licence suspension. Later in the day a 38-year-old male in the Town of Virden was also pulled over for use of a cellular telephone or other hand-operated electronic device while driving a vehicle, a Traffic Offence Notice was issued, which carries a fine of \$672 and a 72-hour licence suspension.

On Jan. 10, 2026, a traffic stop was conducted in the Settlement of Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, the 35-year-old male driver admitted to

consuming alcohol, cannabis, and cocaine. Roadside tests were completed which showed positive for cannabis and cocaine, as well as the alcohol. The driver was arrested and brought back to the Virden RCMP Detachment, the vehicle was towed and impounded for a minimum of 60 days. Breath tests conducted at the detachment yielded results of 190, 160, and 170 mg %. The driver was later released on an Appearance notice for court in March. His license was also suspended for 3 months.

On Jan. 11, 2026, during routine traffic patrols within the RM Wallace-Woodworth, RCMP observed a vehicle travelling at a high rate of speed. Radar confirmed a speed of 166km/hr in a 110 km/hr zone. RCMP initiated a traffic stop, and the driver was issued a Traffic Offence Notice for Speeding, which carries a fine of \$783. The driver was also issued a Serious Offence Notice. RCMP also observed a second vehicle in the RM of Sifton travelling at a high rate of speed. Radar confirmed a speed of 130km/hr in a

100 km/hr zone. RCMP initiated a traffic stop, and the driver was issued a Traffic Offence Notice for Speeding, which carries a fine of \$442.

To report a complaint or non-emergent incident to RCMP please call 204-748-2135. For general inquiries or administrative requests including criminal record checks please call the administration line at 204-

748-2046 Ext. 3. If you are reporting an emergency, please call 911.

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

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REF MEMORIES

REF TO
WRITER
GERRY
NOLAN



I just happened to see Randy Kalynuk the other day and we were reminiscing about some games we were involved in as officials and "how hot it was in the kitchen". We were referring to North Central Hockey League games between Roblin and Russell. Those were tough, tough games. I was involved in several of those games when you only had one referee and was also involved in several games as a linesmen.

The rivalry between the two teams was huge and the rinks were full of spectators. I mean 600 to 800 people. It was loud and boisterous. There was lots of tension as the games were usually close, but man these teams hated each other.

One night I remember in particular in Russell, I started calling penalties early and often. I tried to let them play but the

teams were having none of that.

The game I refer to I called 47 minor penalties and probably should have called 47 more, there were that many. There were also misconducts and several fights and game misconducts. Both teams were guilty of the roughing and stick infractions.

I often wondered what if I had just let them play and whoever survives, so be it. I just could not do that, someone would have been seriously injured for sure.

I was in Roblin with Randy Kalynuk and Bill Hayward. Randy was the head referee and he encountered the same type of game, he will confirm what I am sharing in this story.

After the game, you are exhausted, and you replay the game. We had about a 2-hour trip

home from Roblin and I had an hour and half trip home from Russell. This gave a lot of time replaying the game and even when you got home it was hard to settle in to sleep. I always believed if a referee had to call more than 15 to 20 penalties in the game, that was on the two teams. Here I was calling 47 minors plus misconducts and game misconducts.

We were not the only officials to have this happen to us, as others shared their games when things were ugly as well.

As both Randy and I got older it was nice to take your linesmen with you so you could talk about the game. We would talk about calls that we made or missed and what we could do differently, be it positioning or whatever.

Randy Kalynuk was one of the best officials I ever worked with. He was honest, positive and always there for me as we dissected games together.

As I write this story I feel like I am right back there on those nights. I am feeling a little tense already. Time to end this story for now!



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CLASSIFIEDS

Help Wanted

FORT LA BOSSE SCHOOL DIVISION SENIOR ELECTION OFFICIAL

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

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

Written applications from interested individuals will be accepted until February 27th, 2026 addressed to:

Secretary-Treasurer
Fort La Bosse School Division
PO Box 1420
Virde n, MB R0M 2C0
Email: kreid@flbsd.mb.ca
Phone: 204-748-2692

Manitoba Community Newspaper Association Province Wide Classifieds

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Coming Events

VIRDEN NEW HORIZONS

Notice of Annual General Meeting
270 Nelson St W
Monday, January 26th 2026
at 1 pm.

Anyone wishing to attend is welcome.

an online auction. These lands are situated in the Rural Municipalities (RM)s of: DALLAS/RED ROSE - NORTHERN AFFAIRS ACT, GILBERT PLAINS, KELSEY, MOUNTAIN & SPRINGFIELD. A complete listing of Agricultural Crown Lands available for rent can be found online at: https://www.manitoba.ca/central/Assets/res/leases_and_permits/properties.html. The online auction will take place from February 23 - February 27, 2026, hosted by Garton's Auction Service: <https://gartonsauction.com>. For additional information, please contact your nearest Manitoba Agriculture (MA) Agricultural Crown Lands District Office (or via email at agcrownlands@gov.mb.ca) or call Real Estate Services Branch at 1-866-210-9589. A listing of MA Agricultural Crown Lands District Offices can be found online

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Obituary

IN LOVING MEMORY
LESLEY NYKOLIATION
 APRIL 30, 1948 - JANUARY 10, 2026



With her three daughters by her side, mom peacefully passed away at the Brandon Regional Health Centre on January 10, 2026, at the age of 77 years.

Mom was born on April 30, 1948, at Holland Manitoba and attended Holland School where she made many lifelong friends. She worked as an x-ray technician in Winnipeg for 1 year at St. Boniface Hospital. At the wedding of mutual friends, mom met Stanley Nykoliation, a young farmer from the Lenore area, in the R.M of Woodworth. Shortly after, Mom and Dad were married, on October 26th, 1968. Together they raised three daughters on the mixed grain and cattle farm. It was through these years, where her days were balanced between tending to a large garden, preparing meals for many while ensuring chores were done. Mom's care and compassion extended beyond those that mattered most, and you would often see her tending to a weak calf.

Being gifted a piano from her grandmother, this was the starting point for a lifelong passion for music, playing for her church as a young girl and being called upon to play at special events throughout her lifetime. Mom learned to sew from her mother and became an exceptional seamstress, sewing our Halloween costumes, dresses for weddings, and repairing zippers and buttons. Mom never shied away from the hard work of farm life. This work ethic was always softened with Sunday games and laughter, visits with the neighbours, and the occasional trip to town for ice cream or a meal out.

After 34 years of farming the decision was made to sell the farm, and they moved to their acreage, just outside of Brandon Manitoba. Early retirement years were spent travelling south for the winter to Needles California reconnecting with lifelong friends. Tending to the acreage and garden was a passion of hers but even more loved her time with her children and grandchildren.

In July 2023, seven years after dad's passing Mom was delighted to move to her new home in Monterey Estates. She quickly embraced this retirement community and they enthusiastically embraced her. Through evenings spent playing cards, potluck lunches, happy hour and chats in the cul-du-sac, mom thrived. She always had a coffee on and was willing to stop what she was doing to have a visit.

Mom was predeceased by her husband, Stanley, son Jeffrey, father and mother, Jerry and Annie Glorieux, sister Cecilia, and father-in-law and mother-in-law Mike and Jennie Nykoliation. She is survived by daughter Donna (Bernie Adam) their children Ciera Adam and Cortnee Brace, and her children Theo and Emery; her daughter Gail (Josh Finn) and her children Em and Laura; her daughter Rhonda (Dean Oakden) and their children Payton and Hunter; her best furry friend, Toby; as well as many cousins, nephews, nieces and friends near and far.

A Celebration of Mom's (Lesley) Life was held at Memories Chapel on Thursday, January 15, 2026, with interment at the Brandon Cemetery. A reception followed at the Ukrainian Reading Association Hall.

Donations in memory of Mom can be made to a charity of choice.

Rest your tired hands, Mom.



Condolences: www.memorieschapel.com

Help Wanted



FACILITY FOREMAN

This is a permanent full-time position with attractive benefits in Hamiota, Manitoba.

The Hamiota & District Sports Complex along with the Hamiota Municipal Parks Board are searching for an individual to assume the position of Facility Foreman.

Hamiota and surrounding area has a community of 1300 people located one-hour northwest of Brandon on Highway 21. It is in the middle of everything good in Westman.

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.

Help Wanted



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

BUILDING, PLANNING AND MUNICIPAL BY-LAW INSPECTOR

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

Duties and Responsibilities

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

Skills and Qualifications

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

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

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT/RECEPTIONIST

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

Duties and Responsibilities

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

Skills and Qualifications

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

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

LANDFILL SITE ATTENDANT – KENTON

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

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

Description and Qualifications

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

Interested candidates should submit a resume with three professional references by:
 E-mail: info@wallace-woodworth.com

Mail/Drop-off: R.M. of Wallace-Woodworth Municipal Office
 154023 PR 257 Box 2200 (Corner of 83 Hwy & PR 257) Virden, MB R0M 2C0

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

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Manitoba government freezes the price of milk

Manitoba maintains lowest milk prices in Canada to keep cost affordable

Submitted
By MB GOVERNMENT

The Manitoba government is freezing the price of milk for 2026, keeping the price of milk affordable in the province for consumers and ensuring producers receive fair compensation, Premier Wab Kinew and Agriculture Minister Ron Kostyshyn announced today.

“An everyday essential like milk should not cost a lot, especially when we consider how important it is to kids’ healthy development. We’re freezing the retail price of

milk for 2026, so it stays within reach for families looking to make healthy choices,” said Kinew. “The previous government let the price of milk jump by 25 cents, but we’re taking action to keep Manitoba’s milk prices the lowest in Canada. It is good news for parents who find themselves restocking the fridge every week.”

The Farm Products Marketing Council has the legal authority to set regulated milk prices in Manitoba, including the price producers can sell their product, the price of which wholesalers

can distribute the product and the price of which retailers can sell to consumers. Its decisions are guided by a legislated responsibility to balance producer sustainability with consumer protection.

“Manitoba’s dairy producers are the backbone of our local food system. They deliver high quality, safe milk every day, support good jobs in rural communities, and uphold some of the strongest animal care and sustainability standards in the country,” said Kostyshyn. “Their commitment to innovation and

responsible farming helps keep milk affordable for families while ensuring a stable, reliable supply across our province. We’re proud to work alongside producers who reflect the best of Manitoba’s agricultural tradition and its future.”

In 2022, the regulated price increased by a total of 25 cents, implemented through two separate orders from the government of Manitoba. This adjustment was larger than the combined increases over the previous decade. Last year, after reviewing updated cost data and market condi-

tions, the council reduced the regulated price by one cent. This decrease demonstrates the council’s commitment to ongoing oversight and its mandate to ensure prices remain fair, transparent and responsive to changing economic pressures.

“Our team of registered dietitians work with schools to ensure children and youth have access to a wide variety of nutritious food everyday,” said Clara Birnie, community dietitian and grants manager, Child Nutrition Council. “There are many barriers to accessing

nutritious foods and cost is one of them. These types of initiatives, which regulate the price of staple foods, are a positive step towards helping Manitobans meet their nutritional needs.”

Manitobans will continue to benefit from the province’s regulated pricing model, which ensures stability and affordability for a staple product found in households across the province. The Manitoba government is currently in the process of studying ways to further reduce grocery costs for families.

Manitoba Pork 2026 forecast

By Cam Dahl, GM
MANITOBA PORK

How did Canadian agriculture fare in 2025? What trends will continue from 2025 into 2026 and what does that mean for export dependent farmers?

A year ago, I predicted that 2025 would be filled

with global uncertainty that disrupted markets. I was hoping that this forecast would be proven wrong, but unfortunately it was not. Our neighbour to the south is focused on “America First”. U.S. policies are moving away from supporting free and open trade. Canadian agriculture faced a short period

of tariffs but ultimately was protected by the Canada-U.S.-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA). However, we don’t know if this will continue until the end of 2026 as CUSMA is up for review. This is the most important policy file for the 90 percent of farmers in Canada that depend on international markets.

The agreement will either be extended to 2032, put into a cycle of annual reviews, or terminated. The outcome of the review will determine the fiscal sustainability of many farms across Canada, including Manitoba.

Tariffs are a threat, but they are not the only protectionist measures faced by farmers and food processors. The revival of country-of-origin labelling in the U.S. and individual state legislation that is fragmenting the North American market (e.g., Proposition 12 in California) are just two other examples of protectionist policies threatening Canadian agriculture and food exports, and the U.S. is not alone. China has targeted agriculture commodities in retaliation for Canadian tariffs on electric vehicles. The European Union continues to block Canadian agricultural and food exports using non-tariff trade barriers.

Uncertainty in world trade is costly for both Manitoba farmers and processors. Unfortunately, this uncertainty will remain throughout 2026 and will likely intensify during the review of CUSMA. Securing the North American market, offsetting the cost of trade uncertainty, and trade diversification need to be at the top of the policy list for all governments in 2026.

Food and agriculture need to be top of mind at every Canadian negotiating table in 2026. Canadian governments and negotiators need to be continuously reminded that food and beverage processing is the largest manufacturing sector in Canada with sales worth about \$175 billion. The sector accounts for over 20 percent of total manufactur-

ings sales. Meat products comprise the largest proportion of the food manufacturing sector in both Manitoba and Canada. If agriculture and food are left behind in trade discussions, livelihoods in every region of Manitoba will be significantly impacted.

Manitoba hog farmers continue to be world leaders in disease prevention and management. The entire sector has recognized the need to work together to effectively protect the health of animals under our care. Sometimes this means that parts of the value chain take actions that are not in their short-term fiscal interest but will deliver long-term benefits to the entire sector. This level of collaboration is not often found in other countries or regions. Manitoba’s pork sector should be congratulated for this accomplishment.

Working with the entire value chain to prevent and mitigate disease impacts is a key priority for Manitoba hog farmers in 2026. This includes preventing diseases like Porcine Reproductive and Respiratory Syndrome and Porcine Epidemic Diarrhea virus where possible and limiting their spread when it is not. We are also working with processors, veterinarians, transport companies, and Manitoba’s Office of the Chief Veterinarian to keep foreign animal diseases like Foot and Mouth Disease and African Swine Fever out of Manitoba. Again, collaboration is the key factor in developing effective disease prevention and response plans.

On the economic front, 2025 was a profitable year across the hog sector. Profitability is being driven by strong pork demand

around the world, relatively affordable pork prices for consumers, especially when compared to beef, disease pressures in other pork producing regions, and reasonable feed costs. I expect profitable conditions to continue into 2026, at least for the first half of the year. Profitability in the second half of 2026 will depend in large part on the world trade situation.

Given current profitability, 2026 should be a year of renewal and growth for Manitoba’s hog sector, but investing in the future is difficult when markets and trade patterns remain uncertain. Financing barns with a 25-year lifespan becomes more costly and difficult with growing uncertainty. Manitoba’s Economic Development Plan recognizes the impact of international uncertainty on the province’s investment climate and recognizes the need to reduce our reliance on trade with the U.S. a priority for 2026 will be to develop ways to partner with government and industry to offset some of these financial risks and costs to facilitate industry renewal.

In some ways, 2026 will likely look a lot like 2025. We will continue to see significant trade and market uncertainty, with the potential to see this uncertainty increase going into the CUSMA review. Positive profitability should continue, based on strong demand, disease pressure in other jurisdictions, and manageable feed costs. The question at the end of 2026 will be whether the potential negatives coming from the political environment outweighed the natural potential positives of the market.

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SPORTS

SPORTS NOTES: U13 BROWN WINS TOC, KINNAIRD CLAIMS MANITOBA OPEN TITLE

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Virден Minor Hockey's U13 Brown team claimed the Rural Tournament of Champions title close to home in Elkhorn.

"Our team was re-energized after the holiday break," head coach Lonnie Brown said. "The team really embraced the structure that we had been working on through the first half of the season and went into the weekend with the mindset that we wanted to build momentum from the first game to the last."

The U13 Brown squad now advances to the Brandon Tournament of Champions. The 55th edition of that tournament runs Feb. 5-8 for the U13 co-ed age group.

"As coaches, we are excited to see the kids compete against some different teams," Brown said. "The players will be excited, as it's a prestigious event that has been happening annually for 55 years. Also the fact that they earned the chance to compete at this tournament makes it a little extra special."

The local team was a perfect 4-0 at the tournament in Elkhorn. It defeated the Hartney Devils in the final 6-3. Slone Brown, Garrett Gompf, and Boeden Higginbotham were named Tournament All-Stars.

"Elkhorn did a terrific job of hosting the Rural TOC," Brown said. "It's easy to tell that the volunteers take great pride in hosting that event. I was really pleased with the quality of officiating that we experienced throughout the weekend. They also did

a great job with the opening ceremonies and skill competition on Friday evening."

The Elkhorn Rink/Elkhorn District Community Centre Facebook stated, "Our small town rink is able to host these large tournaments because of all our amazing volunteers."

Each year, the Elkhorn event features a puck drop in honour of someone who passed away. This year it honoured Ross Gieni. The Elkhorn Rink/EDCC Facebook posted that "Ross was a huge supporter of Elkhorn Rink. He never hesitated to donate and never asked for anything in return. His biggest joy was his grandkids and family." Gieni's wife, Susan, and sons, Chris Matt, dropped the puck while his grandson, Max, took the draw.

Playing for U13 Brown are Garrett Gompf, Austin Rowand, Braxton Murray, Kesler Brown, Langley Gerrard, Chase Hodgins, Willow Hodson, Bauer Challner, Boeden Higginbotham, Slone Brown, Carson Mooney, Khaill Douglas, Mason Koop, Braxton Goulden, and Conner Elliott. Virден Minor Hockey's U11 Corbett won the Rural TOC in Hamiota. Look for more on that team in a future edition of the Empire-Advance.

Kinnaird Wins Manitoba Open

On Jan. 19, Jay Kinnaird skipped his Virден Curling Club rink to the Manitoba Open bonspiel championship. The rink included Cory Zdan, Kris Kinnaird and Brent Hoffman. Reportedly they are the first Virден rink to win the bonspiel since its inception in 1889.

"Looking back, we just played really consistently

for the eight-game run," Jay Kinnaird said. "It never really entered our minds that we might have a shot at winning a bonspiel of this size - until Sunday - so we just enjoyed ourselves and things went our way."

The Kinnaird rink defeated Holland's Jeremy Sundell 6-5 in the final at Winnipeg's Assiniboine Memorial Curling Club. They won the Asham Curling Supplies A Event and earned a berth into the Bunge Championship, which is the Manitoba Men's Provincial Curling Championship. That event is held Feb. 3-8 in Selkirk.

It will be Jay Kinnaird's third appearance at the championship. Zdan and Kris Kinnaird will be playing at the provincials for the second time. Hoffman will compete there for the first time.

Local Players Named to Winter Games Teams

Six players from the local area have been tabbed to compete in hockey at the 2026 Manitoba Winter Games. The prestigious event runs March 1-7 in Thompson.

On the female side, Virден's Kinsley Robertson, Oak Lake's Langley Gerrard, and Reston's Andie Williamson were picked for Girls West - Team One. Pipestone's Payton Flannery is on Girls West - Team Two. The coaching staff for that squad includes head coach Anita Vachon of Oak Lake and former Virден resident Emma Ramsey, now of Brandon, as an assistant coach.

Recently named to West Boys - Team Two were Virден's Grady Hay. Cohen Canart of McAuley was selected for West Boys - Team One.

OIL KINGS SCORE 11 IN DETHRONING OF THE ROYALS

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

The Virден Oil Kings' offensive prowess was on display last week.

At home, the senior hockey team defeated the Deloraine Royals 11-5 on Jan. 15. It was the Oil Kings' third-highest goal output this Tiger Hills Hockey League season. They had previously beaten Wawanesa 14-2 on Jan. 9 and Sandy Bay 13-1 on Nov. 2.

"We really came out firing on Thursday," Virден coach Tyler Campbell said. "It's a team we could potentially play in playoffs, so we wanted to really make a statement. After two wins last weekend, we wanted to keep the momentum rolling, which we did."

The two teams were to tangle in Deloraine on Jan. 16 but poor weather forced the game to be postponed. The Oil Kings (11-4-0-0, as of Jan. 18) visit league-leading Killarney (14-0-0-0) on Jan.

23. On Jan. 24, they are the home team versus Boissevain (8-5-0-0) in Elkhorn.

On Jan. 15, the Royals struck first. The Oil Kings then caught fire. They scored four straight goals to lead 4-1 at the first intermission. Virден scored three times in the second to hold a 7-1 lead. In the final frame, both teams scored four times.

The Oil Kings were three-for-three on the power play. They killed off both of the Royals' man-advantage opportunities.

Shawn Bowles scored a game-high four goals and recorded five assists for nine points. Brad Bowles lit the lamp twice and had four assists for six points. Brad is the THHL's leading scorer with 56 points in 14 games. He came to the Oil Kings last season due to the Miniota-Elkhorn C-Hawks taking a leave of absence. Shawn, a fellow former C-Hawk, joined the Oil Kings earlier this month.

"Brad playing with his

twin brother, Shawn, who was recently added, makes us just that much better," Campbell said. "They are so good playing together, it's actually very unbelievable to watch. Both are hard-nosed, play both sides of the puck. It's been a treat having them on our team after years of having to play against them."

Tanner Koroscil potted two goals. With five assists, he racked up seven points on the night. As of Jan. 18, he was second in the THHL in scoring with 35 points.

Oil Kings defenceman Nolan Wallace scored twice and had an assist against Deloraine. Jaden Browning-Lozinski also scored for Virден. Defenceman Keifer Johnston had two assists. Oil Kings goalie Duncan Paddock made 19 saves in goal.

Jackson Hofer scored a hat trick for the Royals. Eric Sorenson and Jeremiah Jacques had the team's other goals. Shea Martin stopped 23 shots.

The Workers Compensation Act Legislative Review

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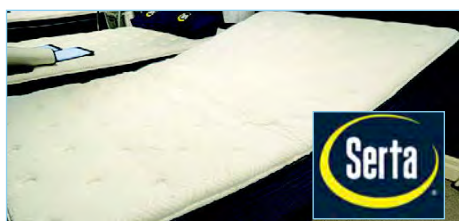
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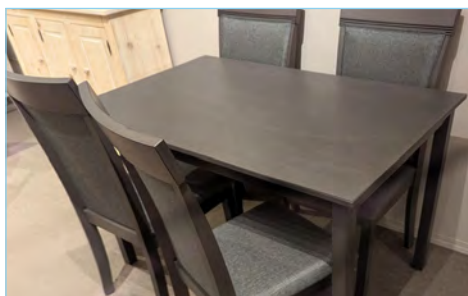
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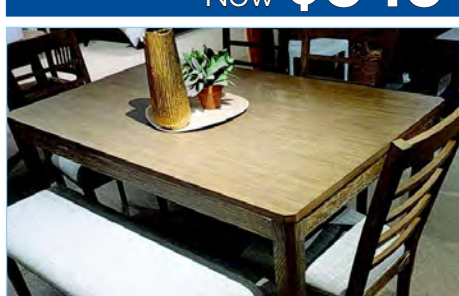
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