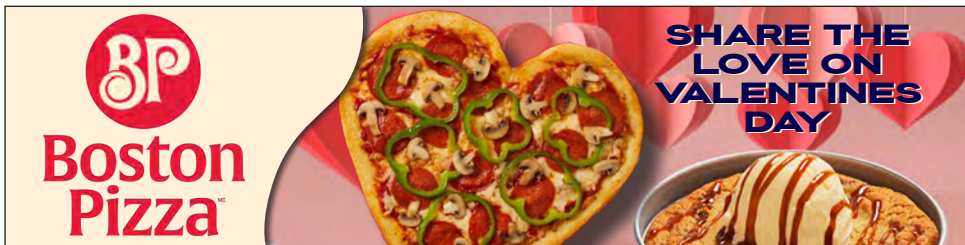


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FEBRUARY 6, 2026 | EMPIRE: VOL 121 NO 25 / ADVANCE: VOL 140 NO 27 | PUBLISHING FRIDAYS



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LIONS CLUB JOURNEY FOR SIGHT 2026



SUBMITTED PHOTO

On Saturday, January 31, the Virden Lions Club gave their donation to Lion Brad Henderson for the Journey for Sight 2026. All proceeds go to the Lions Eye Bank of Manitoba and Northwestern Ontario. Virden Lions Club received \$1,340 in donations during the time they were open. Pictured left to right: Lions Alex Sundell, Gerald Ogilvie, Al Elliott, Brad Henderson, Lion Graham Hume, Lion Paul Pennycook and Lion Alex Grieve.



HOME GAME
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 6
VS. DAUPHIN
KINGS
PUCK DROPS AT 7:30PM

Inside...



VETERAN TOM SEDGWICK *P2*



OIL CAPS WIN IN OVERTIME *P8*

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2025
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Savings: -\$10,000

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Was: \$67,865
Savings: -\$10,000

Now: \$57,865

2025
Jeep Grand
Cherokee

Veteran Tom Sedgwick honoured with legion's Centenary Medal

Both Mr. Sedgwick and the RCL share 100th birthday



SUBMITTED PHOTO

On behalf of RCL Woodworth Branch No. 118 president Vaughn Wilson presents Veteran Tom Sedgwick with the Royal Canadian Legion Centenary Medal on Jan. 28.

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Hamiota's Tom Sedgwick was presented with the Royal Canadian Legion Centenary Medal last week, the very first Centenary Medal from the RCL Woodworth Branch No.118.

Legion president, Vaughn Wilson said, "Only members of the Legion can purchase these medals and we wanted to honour our last remaining WWII Veteran by presenting the Centenary Medal to Tom first."

Mr. Sedgwick was raised in the Hamiota municipality where he and his wife Eleanor farmed and raised their girls.

In a recent interview at Birch Lodge care home where Mr. Sedgwick now lives, he spoke very highly of his time as a young man in the Canadian Armed Forces. "It was the best time of my life," he said. Despite the army's gruffness, as a young person enjoyed the camaraderie and sense of belonging and said he did a lot of growing up in those two years, having joined the Regular Forces as an 18-year-old in 1944.

Mr. Sedgwick will celebrate his 100th birthday on Feb. 20.

When the Hamiota Legion Branch folded, Mr. Sedgwick became a member of Woodworth Legion. The visit from Legion President Wilson and the presentation of the RCL Centenary Medal was a thrill. Mr. Sedgwick said, "It's a great honour to receive it."

For the medal presentation Mr. Sedgwick also received a letter from the Legion:

"On behalf of the Woodworth Legion Branch No.118 it is my pleasure to present you with the Royal Canadian Legion Centenary Medal. At our recent regular meeting of membership, we unanimously approved the issuing of this special Medal to you.

"We also recognize that you are the only surviving WWII Veteran in our membership and it is equally significant that you are in your 100th year with your special birthday fast approaching - congratulations on both counts!"

Legion's foundations and future

The Royal Canadian Legion was formed from the merger of three organizations: the Great War Veterans Association (GWVA), the Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League (BESL), and the Army,



PHOTO BY ANNE DAVISON

Tom Sedgwick as a young soldier.

Navy, and Air Force Veterans in Canada (AN-AVETS).

Founded in 1925 at the Unity Conference, the Legion's mission was clear: support Veterans, advocate for their rights, and ensure Remembrance. On July 17, 1926, the organization was incorporated by a special Act of Parliament - now recognized as the Legion's official anniversary. In 1960, Queen Elizabeth II granted a Royal Charter, officially renaming it The Royal Canadian Legion.

This year, while individual legion branches will celebrate the national RCL 100th anniversary, watch for other initiatives planned for this special year including membership incentives.

MJ's launch Kid-Crafted Creations



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Examples of accountability tags for Wallace District Fire Department, custom made by MJ's Kid-Crafted Creations. Accountability tags help to keep track of crew members on a site.

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

We know there's lunch, coffee and treats of all kinds available within MJ's Coffee Bar & Bistro, but when you're there, be sure to look for something else. That's the work of young entrepreneurs - Cayden, 12, Mackenzie, 10 and Logan, 8 - MJ's Kid-Crafted Creations.

Proprietor and mother, Michelle explains, "MJ's Kid-Crafted Creations is a project my three boys started after receiving a 3D printer for Christmas. They design, print, and help finish each piece themselves, and we sell their creations locally as a fun way for them to learn creativity, responsibility, and a bit

about running a small business."

Accountability tags for the fire department are of a more serious and functional nature.

"The accountability tags were a special custom order made for the Wallace District Fire Department," says Michelle. "These tags are used by fire halls to help keep track of firefighters during emergency situations. Each firefighter carries a tag that can be placed on an

accountability board or system when they enter a scene, helping officers know who is inside and ensuring everyone is safely accounted for."

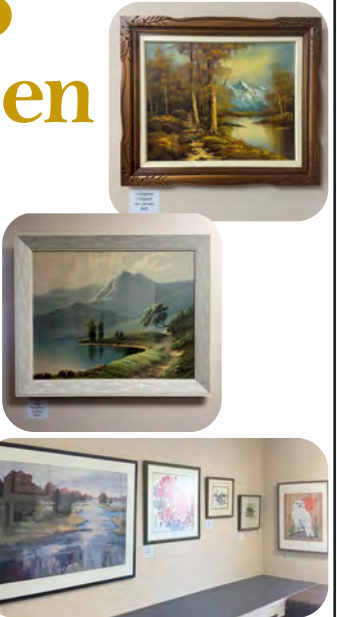
She adds, "The boys were really proud to work on their first custom community order and to create something that supports local first responders."

The new Facebook page, MJ's Kid-Crafted Creations, shows off the boys' projects.

New to Virden

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

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



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

VIRDEN LIONS HALL



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Hall capacity is limited based on current Manitoba Public Health restrictions/guidelines; renters and attendees must comply with up-to-date Manitoba Public Health Orders.

Toonie Transportation program



SUBMITTED PHOTO

The popular Toonie Transportation program will continue to provide seniors, indeed all handi van travellers, with an incentive to get out and about. Manitoba Association of Seniors Communities (Age Friendly MB) presents S.A.I.L./New Horizons/Town of Virden with a cheque in the amount of \$3,600 in support of the Toonie Transportation program for 2026, (L-R): Krista Pederson and Julie Mason (SAIL), Brenda Tonn (Age Friendly), Jared Jaffray (Virden ACAA) and Walter Heaman (New Horizons Centre).

The Fugitives performed for another fantastic SAIL fun event



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

When the music starts to play....



...The crowd starts to dance!

By Tanis Podobni
SAIL COORDINATOR

On Friday evening the Oak Lake Hall was home to an evening of some SAIL fun. The classic country music sound of 'The Fugitives' dance band kept the toes moving for those who enjoy dancing and it kept the fingers tapping for those who enjoy just sitting listening to the music.

Dancing is an excellent form of exercise; the movement helps us maintain mobility and it's a great exercise for the brain as well.

If just listening is your thing, that's great too, visiting and meeting new people is equally as good!

Music is a universal language, speaking to all!

The Chosen plays in Derrick Theatre

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Season 5 of The Chosen is showing on the big screen in Virden's Derrick Theatre. Throughout the remaining winter months of February and March, all eight episodes will be shown, followed by a special treat to top it off.

Just over 2000 years ago historic events took place in and around Jerusalem. The life and times of Jesus Christ under Roman occupation has been told and re-told over the centuries, but never in as captivating a production as The Chosen series.

Season four ended with the raising of Lazarus, while season five immediately follows, focusing on Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus' public preaching in Jerusalem, his teaching in the temple, the growing tension with authorities. The season also prominently features the Last Supper, the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus' betrayal, and his arrest. The season concludes in a way that clearly sets the stage for season six of the seven season show.

Robert Eslinger, one of a group sponsoring the showing in the Derrick Theatre, explained that seasons one through four were screened over the past three years to an enthusiastic audience.

We asked Robert more about why they're airing The Chosen.

Q: What brings the series back for another year?

ROBERT: "It's so powerful, you've just got to watch the next one, and then the next one, and the next one, so it's very strong that way. It's gathered a huge worldwide following, and it really brings the Gospel story to life, and opens doors to new and renewed faith."

Q: What has the audience response been like other years?

ROBERT: "People are happy to come and they enjoy it, and they're always looking forward to the next week or the next season. Attendance has been strong. We pack a lot of people in there, and I would say we're hoping more will come."

Q: Has The Chosen impacted you?

ROBERT: "Yeah, I

would say it has. It's certainly caused a reawakening in me...."

Q: While the script follows Biblical text, there's a lot of humanity, a lot of just plain folks in this. The actor playing Christ, Jonathan Roumie, admits in an interview that he has gone through a personal catharsis as well.

ROBERT: "Yeah, those are some big sandals to fill, I think."

Q: Some pervasive themes throughout the series would include family conflict, clashes with Rome's military and even the beheading of John the Baptist. So, among some amazing miracles, there were some dreadful events. Describe the tone or feeling that The Chosen leaves with the viewer?

ROBERT: "The first five seasons, it's been really largely a joy to watch. There's some things that happen that make you think, of course."

Q: How are you able to provide free admission? Is there a church behind this?

ROBERT: "The show is available for free, there's no cost to presenting the show. And then some folks are doing what's necessary to have the facility available. There's a group of people that are involved with this that span a number of the denominations in the community."

Q: The first showing was Feb. 3 with showtime at 7:30; There's eight

episodes, about an hour a piece. How can people find the show if they want to catch up or re-watch?

ROBERT: "They are available on The Chosen app and they're all on Amazon Prime as well. So there's a way people can circle back and catch up or watch them again. My wife and I have watched them over and over again."

Q: I understand this shows well on a big screen. What else makes attending in the Derrick Theatre attractive?

ROBERT: "Folks are invited to stay after... we've usually had a little discussion, study session afterwards to talk about what happened, and maybe talk through the scriptures or the prophecies that underlie it."

Q: Who facilitates this?

ROBERT: "Myself, sometimes. Sometimes we have Marjorie Andrew and or Brock Andrew, and they're very gifted in this."

Q: Final thoughts?

ROBERT: "The last thing for people to keep in mind, in the other seasons, we've tended to cap them off with showing a Christian movie the week after. We've done, I Can Only Imagine, Jesus Revolution and Unsung Hero, and we plan on doing the same in late March or early April with a title that as of yet remains to be determined. It'll be another free event where everybody is welcome."

Thanks and appreciation

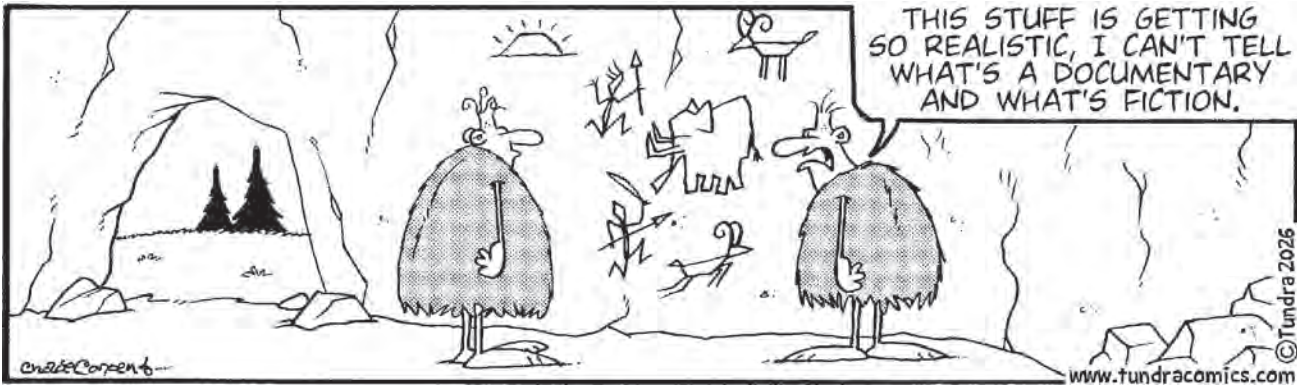
The Elkhorn Cemetery Association would like to extend their great appreciation and thanks for donations received from July 1 to December 31 2025 from the following:

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| • Bubba & Glynis Lund | • Ken & Sandra Jones |
| • June Pedlow | • Ray Jebb |
| • Harry & Lynne Bajus | • Kim & Garth Mitchell |
| • Sharon Leslie | • Murray Carradice |
| • Marguerite Black | • Don & Heather McElroy |
| • Lillian Jackson | • Bernice Hey |
| • Patricia Siple | • Patricia Wolfe |
| • Kevin & Wendy Orr | • Evelyn Clarke |
| • Thelma Turbak | • Allen & Carol Bartley |
| • Margaret Martin | • Glynis Van Damme |
| • Jeff & Wanda Howard | • Rick & Carol McCaig |
| • Mike & Leanne Rookes | • Gerry & Jean Gatey |
| • Linda Bullock | • Rose Marie Bartley |
| • The Bickerton Families | • Walter Heaman |

Many thanks to Caretaker Kaleigh Kyle and all the volunteers for the hours of work done each year. We also wish to take a moment to acknowledge the passing of our long-time cemetery volunteer, Bob Thomson. His care and passion for making our cemetery a warm and inviting place for all will not soon be forgotten. We send our most sincere condolences to his family.

Thanks again!

Tundra
By Chad Carpenter



Recognizing the truth

After my column last week I received some feedback. A reader took exception, saying the “column should have been more balanced”. I agree, the column should have been better written.

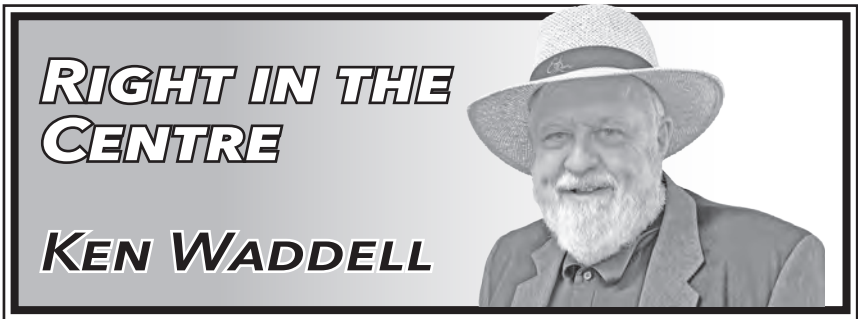
The reader went on to say, “Yes, people need to be careful about where they get their news in the social media, but even moreso from the main steam media. The CBC, Global, and CTV are not only one-sided and biased, but also corrupt in taking it upon themselves to report what people say when they never said it. I believe we are in a position where only God can fix this mess. People need to get their heads out of the sand.”

The reader went on to attach a link that clearly shows that CTV did a very obvious “cut and paste” on a speech by Pierre Poilievre, Leader of the Official Opposition.

This past week, the Conservative Party of Canada held their convention.

Pierre Poilievre made his convention speech, the party had the leadership review vote. Pierre came out of that vote with over 87 per cent approval.

In the run-up to the vote, mainstream media such as the CBC, bent over backwards to weave as much doom and gloom into the narrative. It was quite funny to watch actually. Their predictions were all over the map and included conjecture that more CPC MPs might cross to the Liberals. That may happen, but polls show that 51 percent of Canadians believe it is unethical. At the CPC convention, a young woman named Jasmin Laine spoke. It was an intriguing speech and I would encourage everyone to listen to it. You can find her speech online by simply typing



her name in the search engine.

Laine said politics isn’t about Right and Left, it’s about right and wrong. Perhaps her pun is intended, but she is correct in the number of ways she points out that current left-wing policies are wrong. She went on to explain that in truth there is freedom. I think we heard that somewhere before. It’s in the Bible and it was often quoted by Gary Doer when he was premier of Manitoba. Laine maintains that current liberal policies in Canada today are designed to keep our citizens fearful and hopeless. Much of what we are fed in the media is full of fear, anxiety and hopelessness.

Government policies have built up so many regulations that it’s tough to build anything from streets and highways to houses to pipelines and manufacturing facilities. Pierre Poilievre is correct on many points but there’s one that ranks highest in my mind and that the government needs to get out of the way. Government permit processes are ridiculous. It takes five years to get all the government agencies to approve a simple housing sub-division. I know this because I have watched it happen in my hometown of Neepawa.

On another front, government doesn’t need to control guns, they need to control criminals. Governments shouldn’t be handing out drugs, they need to take addicts off the streets

and place them in proper institutions. If they can’t, or won’t get off drugs, let them stay in an institution where they are less likely to harm themselves or others. I would also suggest that there are many government programs that need to be phased out. Industries such as dairy, poultry, gas and oil, many manufacturing pieces and yes, even news media organizations, are subsidized. That needs to be phased out gradually as dependency has been built into the systems and it would be jarring to cut off programs immediately. Grants are now just a way of life and subsidies simply increase costs.

It’s a small majority of Canadians that feel we need high levels of government regulation and subsidies. That majority is just enough to eke out yet another Liberal government. That means that every business, every movement and every idea has to be hidebound in dependency on the government. Just look around and ask yourself how beneficial it is to be dependent on the government. It doesn’t work for welfare recipients, businesses or First Nations communities. In fact, it isn’t really working well for anyone. To recognize that truth is the pathway to freedom and prosperity.

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.



Binge watching...

Some time ago I cancelled any television connections. I do have a smart set so there are literally hundreds of channels available for watching. Most old series, but current news is there. ‘The Antiques Road Show’, the one from Great Britain is my go to. I love seeing the places I have been privileged to visit being featured as host sites—cathedrals and castles and museums. The items brought for analysis are fascinating and there are times I wonder if any of my treasures are valuable! They’re not...

Much of my leisure watching is on my laptop, youtubing my way through the hours. Here are two series that I spend much time with; ‘Who do you think you are’, and ‘DNA Detectives’. Folks searching for their family history, trying to enlarge their definition of who they are, and what in the past may be shaping them. I think I get that. My family has done a remarkable job of detailing our past. There is a modest collection of the Toews, Groening, Born and Friesen family history. I have a bit on the Martin side, my maternal grandmother’s starting point. I recognize how very fortunate I am to have known two complete sets of grandparents and one complete set of great grandparents. They were not distant beings, but story tellers and history keepers. More the grands than the great grands, but that’s pretty natural. Great grandpa Born was an intuitive gardener. At one point working in the Morden Experimental Farm, and known for embarrassing great gran when he would casually pick weeds in other’s gardens... as natural as breathing. Great gran I knew as a sitter... after carrying and bearing fifteen children, raising thirteen to adulthood, she earned the right to sit! A lot of descendants there... I heard the stories of the trauma and despair of the Russian Revolution, the murders and starvations, the immigration, the life saving work of the Mennonite Central Committee (a school program provided half a cup of powdered milk and a bun; the bun often saved for home where it could be shared). Little wonder that the MCC still plays an important role in Mennonite life.

I came from a line of teachers and seekers, musicians and artists, homemakers of exceptional standards. Workers of land, survivors and make doers. Those early ancestors were mostly farmers with the occasional teacher/preacher. My childhood included bits of all of that. I chose not to learn how to knit or crochet, sewing was a necessary skill. We worked wool from shearing the fleece to washing, carding and creating the batting for quilts. Gardening was from planting to weeding to processing, canning before we had a freezer. And there was always books, and music.

I acknowledge that I am blessed with a fairly thorough genealogy. And yes, there are a few rascals in the batch. I have a clear understanding of my inherent values, characteristic traits and physical likeness. Much as, as a youth I prayed to be adopted, there is my face on my great aunt on my mothers side... Now to maintain these records for the next generations...

Manitoba Government tables regulatory accountability report

Report outlines steps to improve efficiency, free up time for Doctors

Submitted
By MANITOBA GOVERNMENT

The Manitoba government has tabled the 2024-25 Regulatory Accountability and Red Tape Reduction Report, demonstrating a clear and focused approach to reducing barriers to economic growth, improving access to health care, and enhancing services, Innovation and New Technology Minister Mike Moroz announced today.

“Making government smarter and more efficient means we can deliver better health care, lower costs, and better services for Manitoba families,” said Moroz. “From freeing up doctors to spend more time with patients, to getting more housing units built faster, we’re making sure our government works for Manitobans.”

The report highlights progress to improve gov-

ernment efficiency and outlines new initiatives aimed at delivering results for Manitobans, noted the minister.

Key initiatives include:

- working with Doctors Manitoba to cut unnecessary administrative tasks for clinicians by more than 10 per cent, saving an estimated 75,300 hours annually — equivalent to 227,000 additional doctors appointments;
- launching [medinav.ca](#), an online booking system for same-day and next-day appointments, reducing administrative work and making it easier for Manitobans to access care. To date, more than 50,000 appointments have been booked through [medinav.ca](#);
- eliminating sick note requirements to allow doctors to see more patients;
- introducing a streamlined digital intake system

for housing development funding;

- lowering costs for businesses by pre-clearing thousands of transport trucks at weigh stations;
- implementing digital evidence management within Manitoba Justice, reducing transcription and storage costs for video evidence;
- streamlining construction of new schools and lowering costs, while delivering high-quality schools that meet community needs; and
- improving other digital services through tools such as Track My Plow and MBReady, as well as online licensing and benefits platforms.

The Manitoba government continues to welcome feedback on reducing red tape and barriers to improving services through the Red Tape Reduction website here: <https://gov.mb.ca/reduceredtape/submissions.html>.

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

Employment Opportunities

- Summer Employment
- Green Team
 - Head Lifeguard
 - Assistant Head Lifeguard
 - Lifeguard Instructor
 - Assistant Lifeguard

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

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

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

Upcoming Council Meetings

February 19 and March 3

Council Meetings start at 7:00 PM

Tax Prepayment Discounts

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

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

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

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



2026 LEGACY GRANT PROGRAM

Southwest Business & Entrepreneur Legacy Grant 2026!

Are you an entrepreneur, small business owner, or rising innovator in the Southwest region? This is your chance to receive support to grow your ideas and strengthen your community.

Categories include:

- * Innovation & Technology
- * Young Entrepreneur
- * Business Excellence
- * Growth & Expansion
- * Community Impact
- * Start Up Launch

Eligibility:

- ✓ Sole proprietors
- ✓ New or emerging start ups
- ✓ Registered small businesses
- ✓ Youth owned or student led businesses
- ✓ Residents of participating municipalities

Applications open: February 2, 2026
Deadline: March 23, 2026
Announcement: April 10, 2026

Learn more or apply at: www.swbusinessexpo.com

Request For Pricing/Proposals

- Until February 13, 2026**, the Town of Viriden is currently accepting:
- Hayland Tender Proposals
 - Pricing for:
 - Equipment & Materials
 - Sidewalk Repairs
 - Asphalt Patching
 - Hydrovac & Vac Truck
 - Tree Trimming & Removal

For more information, please visit: www.virden.ca/p/tenders-and-requests or contact the Town Office.

HELEN DRYSDALE

OUT OF HELEN’S KITCHEN

I am not sure I could be a full time vegetarian. I do practice meat-free days and have vegetables play a starring role in my meals. Dishes that emphasize the use of grains and legumes are high in protein, rich in fiber, low on fat and easier on the budget. Creating meat free meals for your family that they will actually want to eat doesn’t have to be difficult. Here are a few ideas.

Crustless Tex-Mex Quiche

- | | |
|---|------------------------|
| 2 Tbsp. lime juice | 2 tsp. brown sugar |
| 1 tsp. ground coriander | 1 tsp. ground cumin |
| 1 tsp. chili powder | 1/2 tsp. salt |
| 2 Tbsp. oil | 1 Tbsp. oil |
| 1 small onion, diced | 1 clove garlic, minced |
| 1 1/2 cups milk | 5 eggs |
| 1 1/2 cup grated cheddar cheese | |
| 1-540 mL can black beans, drained and rinsed | |
| 3-4 cups sweet potatoes, cut into 1/2 inch pieces | |

Heat the oven to 375 F. Spray a deep 10-inch pie plate (or casserole dish) with cooking spray. In a large bowl, combine the lime juice, brown sugar, coriander, cumin, chili powder, salt and oil. Add sweet potato and toss. Transfer to a cookie sheet and roast until just barely tender, about 20 minutes. While sweet potatoes are cooking heat the one tablespoon of oil in a frying pan. Add the onion and sauté for several minutes. Add the garlic and sauté for one minute more. Set aside. Remove the sweet potatoes from oven and lower oven temp to 350 F. Transfer sweet potato to pie plate. Sprinkle the onions and garlic over the potatoes. Sprinkle beans over sweet potatoes, sprinkle cheese over beans. In a large bowl, whisk milk and eggs. Pour over sweet potatoes, beans and cheese. Bake until top is browned and eggs are set, about 35-40 minutes.

Lentil pasta soup

It’s a simple one-pot soup meal you can throw together in about 45 minutes.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 2 Tbsp. oil | 1 onion, diced |
| 2 celery stalks, diced | 2 garlic cloves, minced |
| 7 cups vegetable or chicken broth | 2 carrots, sliced |
| 1 1/4 cups dried red lentils | 1 tsp. dried rosemary |
| 1 tsp. dried thyme | 1 tsp. dried oregano |
| 1/4 tsp. red pepper flakes | 1 540 mL can diced tomatoes |
| 1 cup pasta shells (mac/rotini) | salt and pepper, to taste |

In a large pot over medium heat add the oil. Then add the onion and celery. Sauté for about 4 minutes. Add the garlic and sauté for one minute more. Stir in the broth, carrots, lentils, rosemary, thyme, oregano, and red pepper flakes. Bring to a boil. Turn the heat down and let the soup to simmer for about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the lentils start to soften but are still firm at their centers. Stir in the tomatoes and pasta. Bring the soup back to a boil, then lower the heat and allow it to simmer for about 15 minutes longer, until the lentils and pasta are tender, stirring occasionally. Remove the pot from heat and then season the soup with salt and pepper to taste. Enjoy.

Rice and bean casserole

Aahhh, beans and rice, a favourite of mine. Not only is rice with beans eaten the world over, this basic dish has been filling hungry people on a limited budget for centuries. This recipe cooks in the oven and makes a family sized amount. This simple recipe yields an inexpensive entree or filling side dish all made in one dish!

- | | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| 2 cups long grain rice | 1 Tbsp. chili powder |
| 2 tsp. cumin | 1 dried oregano |
| 1 tsp. each salt & pepper | 1/4 tsp. cayenne pepper (optional) |
| 1/4 cup oil | 1 650 mL jar tomato salsa |
| 2 cups water | |
| 2-540 mL cans black or kidney beans, rinsed & drained | |

Preheat the oven to 350 . Pour rice into a large casserole dish; season with chili powder, cumin, oregano, salt, pepper and cayenne pepper. Add in the oil and stir until rice is thoroughly coated. Add the beans, salsa, and water and stir until evenly combined. Cover tightly with heavy-duty aluminum foil. (You can use a casserole dish with a lid instead of the foil.) Bake in the oven until rice is tender, about 1 hour and 15 minutes. If the rice is not fully cooked return to oven for a few more minutes. If the rice is too dry add a bit more liquid. Fluff with a fork and serve hot.

Letter to the Editor

RE: Federal Government Firearms Buy Back Program

I am a senior living in the Westman area and most of my adult life I have been a recreational firearms user. I’m not a hunter, but a competitive target shooter, (not very good!) some historical reenactment events and other presentations, such as Royal Canadian Legion events, as I am a Legion member. All my firearms were legally bought, registered, stored and transported per the laws of the land. I also hold a valid PAL card.

Recently I received an email from Public Safety Canada, regarding a federal government plan to buy back certain types of once legal firearms, to ideally make Canada a safer place after the very tragic school shooting in Montreal many years ago. As a former educator I found the shooting to be a horrific event as all classrooms should be safe learning places.

In this government email I received, there were certain phrases that caught my attention. The first being that there is a deadline to take part in the buyback program and that financial compensation will be based on a first come first served basis. So, to be part of this buyback program, I must also fill out an online application and my efforts will be considered.

However, the email also says if I wait past the deadline date of March 31, 2026, I am out of luck for the program. And do I even have the skill set to fill out a government online application?

I’m in my 80th year and my computer skills are not that of a younger person.

The email went on with what I would consider a veiled threat when it says, “if you remain in possession of an impacted firearm following the cutoff date, you will be non-compliant with the legislation.”

In a follow-up to that in the Brandon Sun newspaper dated Jan. 30, 2026, page A7 about the firearms buyback program, Federal Government Safety Minister Gary Anandasangaree said, “The gov’t says anyone in possession of a banned firearm or device after the amnesty period will be breaking the law and could face criminal prosecution.”

So, in my 80th year on this planet, can I look forward to wearing an orange jumpsuit off to jail? If I do not comply on time, can I expect an RCMP or other enforcement agency to be at my door in a surprise late at night visit? I’m beginning to have fears of a USA style I.C.E. Agents visit to my home! If that is the case I am concerned for the safety of my wife and myself, in an otherwise safe rural Manitoba community with friends and neighbours.

Over the years, as a recreational firearms user, I have done everything legally asked of me to ensure the proper use and safe ownership of firearms, but now, how did I end up in this dilemma? At the writing of this missive, I am concerned, and nearing afraid of what the future might hold for me!

-Ed James,
Elkhorn, Manitoba

Police Report

Westman RCMP Service Report for Jan. 25 to Jan. 31

Submitted
By WESTMAN RCMP

During this week, Westman RCMP received a total of 51 calls for service. Some of these calls for service include 16 traffic offences, 2 911 Acts, 2 Assistance to Canadian Agencies/General Public, 6 Assaults, 2 Traffic Collision(s), 1 Breach of Peace, 5 Mischief files, and 3 Suspicious Person files.

On Jan. 25, Westman RCMP received notification of a 911 hang up from dispatch occurring in the Town of Oak Lake where shouting could be heard in the background. Members attended the residence and it was determined that a domestic violence assault occurred and resulted in the arrest of a 56-year-old male, charged with one count of assault. He was lodged at the Virden RCMP detachment and released on an Undertaking to appear in court in April.

On Jan. 25, Westman RCMP received a dispatch for a pos-

sible suicidal male in the Settlement of Sioux Valley Dakota Nation. Members attended the residence, no one answered the door, but music could be heard and lights were on in the residence. RCMP breached the door as there was potential for the occupant to be incapacitated and unable to answer the door. Members announced they were RCMP and entered the residence. They located an intoxicated 40-year-old male in the primary bedroom, he attempted to attack officers and stated there was a gun in the room. He was arrested under the Mental Health Act initially and then attempted to escape custody before being detained in the police vehicle. He was remanded into custody and charged with x2 counts of Assault on a police officer, Resists/obstruct a peace officer and fail to comply with undertaking conditions. He was later released on a Release Order to appear in court in April.

On Jan. 26, during routine traffic patrols in RM Sifton,

RCMP observed a vehicle travelling at a high rate of speed. Radar confirmed the 41-year-old male drivers was driving at a speed of 139 km/hr in a 110 km/hr zone. A traffic stop was conducted, and the driver was issued a Traffic Offence Notice for Speeding, which carries a fine of \$429.

On Jan. 28, during routine traffic patrols in the RM Pipestone, RCMP pulled over a vehicle for driving an unregistered vehicle. The male driver was issued a Traffic Offence Notice for Driving an Unregistered Vehicle, which carries a fine of \$298.

On Jan. 31, during routine traffic patrols in RM Wallace-Woodworth RCMP observed a vehicle travelling at a high rate of speed. Radar confirmed the 24-year-old male drivers was driving at a speed of 158 km/hr in a 110 km/hr zone. A traffic stop was conducted, and the driver was issued a Traffic Offence Notice for Speeding, which carries a fine of \$678.

SPORTS

BONIN, LARAMEE DEVELOPING AS OIL CAPS ROOKIES



PHOTOS BY VIRDEN OIL CAPS

Virden Oil Capitals #5 Miguel Bonin



Virden Oil Capitals #19 Lucas Laramee

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Virden Oil Capitals rookies Miguel Bonin and Lucas Laramee are contributing where they can while adjusting to the Manitoba Junior Hockey League.

Laramee, a 6-foot, 185-pound forward from La Broquerie, had scored four goals and collected seven points in 21 games, as of Feb. 1. Hailing from Winnipeg, Bonin, a 6-foot-3, 190-pound defenceman, had recorded four assists in 14 games.

"Both are young guys who are in and out of the lineup,

but they are finding their way," Virden head coach Tyson Ramsey said. "Lucas is a big body, skates well, and has a great shot. He likes to play physical and can get in on the forecheck and finish checks to turn pucks over.

"Miguel is also a big guy who skates well and also has a good shot from the line. When he takes away time and space and uses his long reach and stick to his advantage, he is very hard to play against in our end of the rink. They will both be very good players in our league and we are excited to watch them develop here with us."

The 2007-born Bonin played last season for the U18 AAA

Central Plains Capitals. Laramee, who was born in 2008, suited up for the U18 AAA Eastman Selects. Moving up to the MJHL required some adjustments for the young players.

"Junior A is a lot faster, physical and skilled," Laramee said. "It makes for every game and practice a harder and better experience."

Both Bonin and Laramee had the opportunity to get a taste of junior hockey before joining the Oil Capitals. Laramee suited up last season for one game for his hometown La Broquerie Habs of the Capital Region Junior Hockey League. Bonin got into two regular season contests for the St. Boniface Riels of Manitoba Major Junior Hockey League. He also competed in six playoff games, scoring a goal, and winning a league championship. The team also included former Oil Caps goalie Owen LaRocque.

"Playing a couple of junior games with the Riels helped me adjust to the speed of junior hockey faster and develop my game at a higher pace of play than regular AAA games," Bonin said. "It also helped me see how junior hockey works before coming to the Oil Capitals, which was really fun and cool.

"The best part of playing with the Riels was that it allowed me to experience what it takes to win a championship - give it all every time, flush a loss, and have confidence in teammates stepping up together to play as a full team."

With the Oil Caps, he hopes to earn a championship ring as well. As the playoffs approach, Bonin and Laramee are showing what they can do. Bonin was named the Third Star in a Jan. 24 win over the Winnipeg Blues. He had an assist in that contest. In three games between Jan. 23-27, Laramee collected two goals and four points. He was the Third Star in the first game of that stretch. What allowed him to be successful in late January?

"What I've noticed the most is I've been more confident in terms of offensiveness," Laramee said. "I've been more aggressive and that comes with being able to trust our defence and goalies and even linemates in case it doesn't go well."

Off the ice, he billets with Becky Brown and Rowdy and Sam Revoy. Bonin lives with Lance, Janice, Isaiah, Evander, and Allister Barrate. Both are enjoying their time in Virden.

"Playing for the Oil Capitals, I've really enjoyed the group of guys and how close we are as a whole group," Bonin said. "I've also enjoyed the journey and process of junior hockey and seeing what it takes to have success in this league."

TODER HELPS OIL KINGS SUCCEED

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

On Jan. 31, Layne Toder got the Virden Oil Kings rolling with the opening goal of a contest against the visiting Souris Elks.

The Oil Kings went on to win 11-1. Virden goalie Duncan Paddick stopped 19 of the 20 shots he faced. A defenceman in his first season with the Oil Kings, Toder contributes at both ends of the ice. As of Feb. 1, he was sixth on the team with 18 points in 17 games. He had scored six goals.

"Layne's strengths are just his ability to see the ice," Virden coach Tyler Campbell said. "He's played in the Western League. You can tell his ability to slow things down and make good plays. Layne doesn't ever seem to get caught."

An Elkhorn product, Toder manned the blue line for the Western Hockey League's Calgary Hitmen for parts of three seasons. His junior career also included time with the Manitoba Junior Hockey League's Portage Terriers and Dauphin Kings. Toder won a MJHL title with the Terriers in 2016-2017. At Red Deer Polytechnic, he was part of three Alberta Colleges Athletic Conference championship teams over four seasons.

Toder and the Oil Kings will soon be starting what they hope to be a long Tiger Hills Hockey League playoff run. The Virden team's final regular season game was slated to be played in Deloraine on Feb. 4 after the Empire-Advance deadline.

As of Feb. 1, the Oil Kings sat in fifth place in the



PHOTO BY DALE DAVISON

In the final home game of the regular season the line of Shawn Bowles, Tanner Koroscil and Brad Bowles were a scoring threat all night.

THHL standings with a 13-5-0-0 record and 26 points. The top four teams will get a first-round bye. The Oil Kings entered the week two points behind fourth-place Minnedosa Bombers (14-3-0-0).

The top 12 of the THHL's 14 teams make the playoffs. The fifth, sixth and seventh place teams will choose, in order, their opening round opponents. In the second round, the top three teams will choose who they will face.

In the win last week over the Elks, twin brothers Brad and Shawn Bowles each posted seven points. Brad scored four goals, while Shawn had one. Shane Price found the back of the net twice. Elisha Bambridge, Dillin Stonehouse, and Tanner Koroscil also scored for the Oil Kings. Stonehouse and Koroscil each had five points. Jaden Browning-Lozinski recorded two points.

Josh Archambault scored Souris' goal. Yuel Willem made 25 saves.



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

SPORTS

OIL CAPITALS BLAZE THROUGH JANUARY, EXTEND WINNING STREAK TO EIGHT GAMES



Oil Caps win in overtime at Friday, Jan. 30 game against Steinbach.

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

While it was cold outside in January, the Virden Oil Capitals heated up Manitoba Junior Hockey League rinks with their play. The squad compiled a 10-0-1-0 record during the first month of 2026. Head coach Tyson Ramsey said he believed it was a team record for January. Last week, the Oil Capitals added three more victories. They beat Swan Valley 7-1, the Steinbach Pistons 4-3 in overtime, and the Winnipeg Monarchs 4-1. Those victories extended the team's winning

streak to eight games. What has allowed the Oil Capitals to be successful?

"I think we played consistent hockey for the most part," Ramsey said. "If we got away from our game, we were able to get back on track quickly. We got good goaltending, we defended hard as a group, and got timely scoring. Our power play was also very good. Real good efforts up and down our lineup."

As of Feb. 3, the Oil Capitals topped the MJHL's MGEU West Division with a 26-10-2-0 record. On Feb. 4, the team played the Northern Manitoba Blizzard after the Empire-Advance deadline. The Oil Caps host the Dauphin Kings on Feb. 6 and play in Niverville on Feb. 7.

Ramsey's Contract Extended

The organization announced that Ramsey's contract had been extended for four years - through the 2029-30 season. Ramsey was the MJHL Coach of the Year in 2023 and, as of Feb. 3, had a 195-118-22 regular-season record and was 16-11 in the playoffs.

"Tyson's impact on our program goes far beyond wins and losses," team governor Bob Berry stated on the Oil Caps' website. "He has built a culture of accountability, development, and professionalism that aligns perfectly with what we want the Virden Oil Capitals to represent in the MJHL."

On the website, Ramsey stated, in part, "I am so appreciative of the support our hockey club receives from season ticket holders, business partners and fans and there is no other place I would rather be. ... I'm very excited to continue working with our hockey operations, office staff and players as we push toward our goal of winning MJHL championships."

Players Recognized

Oil Caps forward Colten Worthington was named one of the MJHL Stars of the Week on Feb. 2. He recorded two goals and five assists over three games.

Braxton Burdeny was named the MJHL's McMunn & Yates Goaltender of the Month for January. He posted seven wins in as many starts. Burdeny had two shutouts in January and now has four on the season. He made 174 saves on 185 shots in January.

Nate Schaefer was selected as the league's Safe Work Mani-

toba Defenceman of the Month. He racked up 17 points, including three goals, in 11 games. Schaefer had five assists in one contest against the Blizzard.

Bryan Laing earned the Chevrolet Rookie of the Month award for January. He had five goals and 10 points in 10 games.

Last Week

On Jan. 27, the Oil Capitals galloped in the last two periods on the way to a 7-1 victory over the Stampeder. Worthington scored in the last five minutes of the opening frame. It seemed to spark the hosts as they scored three in the second period and a trio in the third. Tyson Ulmer, Brooks Siemens and Lucas Laramée lit the lamp in the second period. The Oil Caps got goals from defencemen Lincoln Black-Greaves, Schaefer, and Austin Osiowy. The Stamps' lone goal came from Trace Langan in between Virden's sixth and seventh goals. Oil Caps goaltender Burdeny stopped 20 shots. For Swan Valley, Easton Falls made 38 saves.

The Oil Capitals trailed the Pistons, 2-0, after the first period at home on Jan. 30. That deficit increased to 3-0 about 13 minutes into the second frame. Hometown product Bryce Bryant got Virden on the scoreboard with just over a minute left to play in the period with a power play goal. Siemens and Worthington scored power play markers in the first two minutes of the third to knot the score at 3-3. London Hoilett scored the game winner with the man advantage 2:08 into overtime. Burdeny turned away 30 shots.

"I thought the second and third periods were real good for us," Ramsey said, "We got behind early on a couple turnovers and a bad bounce but in the second and third we generated numerous chances five-on-five and then our power play was able to take advantage of some undisciplined play by the opposition. A real good win."

In Winnipeg on Jan. 31, the Oil Caps scored twice in each of the last two periods to beat the Monarchs, 4-1. Laing and Hoilett, on a power play, scored in the frame. Siemens and Bryant had third period goals before the Monarchs scored. Virden goalie Micky Gross allowed one goal on 36 shots.

REF MEMORIES



Officiating a hockey game is a tough job. The penalties are quite often controversial amongst the fans, it is a no-win situation for the officials. The hardest penalty to call was interference. Who is running the interference? Whose piece of ice is it? Hard decision to be made! The player without the puck who gets knocked down by a player from the other team should be assessed a minor penalty. Some are easy to call, but others are difficult because

are a lot of gray areas! What about a penalty shot call? If a player has a clear-cut breakaway a penalty shot can be assessed if the player is impeded in any way where his opportunity to score is taken away. I think I only ever called maybe 3 penalty shots as I felt if the player got a good shot off at the goalie, a 2-minute penalty would be assessed for the infraction that had occurred. Teams get upset if a penalty shot is called. I never understood that! A penalty shot is one shot and what is the success rate of taking that shot? If you watch shootouts, you know the success rate is not very successful. It is a one and done play! If the player who is taking the shot scores, well you have 2 minutes that you would not have had to play the game at full strength. It is very interesting to hear what teams would choose in a particular situation. Anyway, enough about penalty calls for now. Until next time!

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Flowers for Valentine's Day



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Red roses are closely tied to Greek and Roman mythology as the flower that symbolizes love, passion and beauty.

Submitted

BY PATRICIA HANBIDGE

As we get closer to February 14th, floral shops become very busy, and the price of purchasing flowers increases. When I am doing floral classes, I never schedule them for right around Valentine's Day as the product price is too expensive. I often wonder how trends develop over time, so I thought a bit of history surrounding this special day would be interesting.

Valentine's Day originated from a mix of Roman, Christian and romantic traditions and evolved to include gifting flowers. I get that gifting flowers is a beautiful gesture as

who doesn't smile when presented with a beautiful arrangement—or even a single stem of something bright and beautiful? For me, my life is enhanced because throughout the year I buy flowers for myself and don't even need a special occasion. This all began in the 18th century.

If we go back even further, the origins of this special day was linked to the Roman festival of Lupercalia which was a celebration of fertility. This day is named after a 3rd-century Christian martyr – St. Valentine and Pope Gelasius I declared February 14th as St. Valentine's Day around 496 AD. Geoffrey Chaucer linked the day to romance in the 14th century, associating it with spring and courtship.

King Charles II of Sweden introduced the Persian tradition of Floriography or the language of flowers to Europe. Specific blooms and colours of flowers conveyed secret messages. Victorian people used flowers to express their emotion and had specialized dictionaries to help people to understand the sentimental meanings of bouquets. Floriography was popularized in the 19th century as it allowed people to convey sentiments that were deemed improper to express verbally. How the flowers were arranged and even how the ribbon was tied held specific meaning. Talking bouquets or tussy-mussies were used to communicate complex emotions. Today, floriography continues to influence floral design, wedding planning and the symbolic giving of flowers, adding deeper and more thoughtful meanings to arrangements.

Red roses are closely tied to Greek and Roman mythology as the flower that symbolizes love, passion and beauty. It was believed that the red rose was the favourite flower of Venus/Aphrodite who are the goddesses of love, beauty and fertility. Roses continue to be the top choice for people today to purchase and to express love.

Some common colours of Valentine's flowers have special meanings. The red rose expresses deep love, passion and romance. Pink flowers convey admiration, joy and gratitude and yellow flowers convey friendship and new beginnings. White flowers, not surprisingly, convey purity and innocence.

Specific flowers also have meanings. The orange blossom conveys innocence and forget-me-nots remembrance. Delphiniums are considered haughty and hydrangeas heartless. Cabbage/kale depicts profit or wealth and sunflowers convey adoration, loyalty and happiness. What an interesting way to build an arrangement!

Hanbridge is the Lead Horticulturist with Orchid Horticulture. Find us at www.orchidhort.com; by email at growyourfuture@gmail.com on facebook @orchidhort and on instagram at #orchidhort. Tune into GROW Live on our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/orchidhort> or check out the Youtube channel GROW...



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Manitoba has highest inflation rate among Provinces: Consumer Price Index

Submitted
By PC CAUCUS MEDIA

WINNIPEG — On the heels of Wab Kinew and his NDP increasing Manitoba Hydro rates by 4% on Jan. 1st, the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics is confirming that the Consumer Price Index for Manitoba rose by 3.7% in Dec. 2025 compared to Dec. 2024, with food costs jumping a whopping 5.9%.

“This is outrageous. Manitoba families can’t afford higher hydro bills in the midst of an affordability crisis,” said Midland MLA Lauren Stone, PC Critic for Finance. “Wab Kinew says he’s going to conduct a ‘study’ to look at ways to keep grocery prices down, yet the inflation rate for food is up nearly 6% year over year. The premier needs to act by lowering taxes, not by launching another do-nothing government study.”

All eight major CPI categories show price increases compared to Dec. 2024, and six of eight have an increase in growth compared to the previous month’s year-over-year change. Food costs had the largest increase, up 5.9%. Shelter costs are up 3.6% year

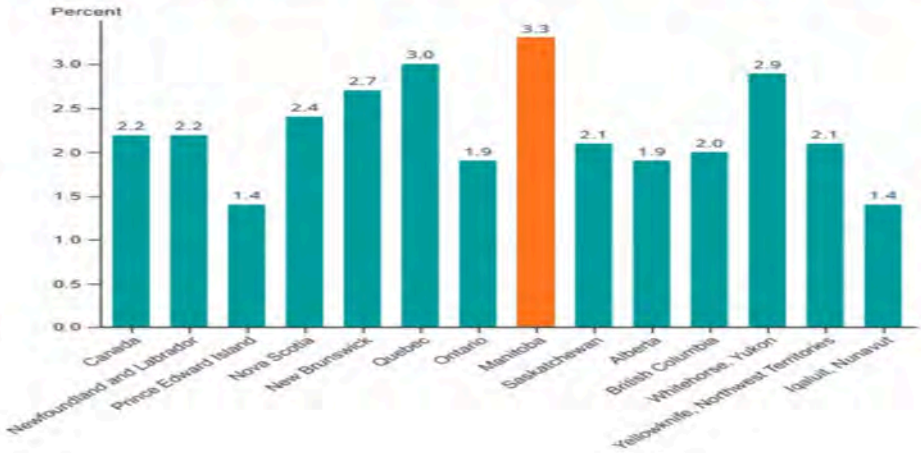
over year, making it more difficult for Manitoba families to save for a down payment or upsize their home. Manitoba’s all-items Consumer Price Index increased by 2.7% on an annual average in 2025, the highest rate among provinces and far above the national increase of 2.1%.

“Wab Kinew and his NDP are taking Manitoba families in the wrong direction. Instead of making life more affordable, the NDP are making life more expensive,” said La Vérendrye MLA Konrad Narth, PC Critic for Economic Development. “Wab Kinew keeps saying he’s going to bring grocery prices and the cost of living down, but Manitoba is spiraling in the opposite direction and Manitoba families can’t keep up.”

Manitoba Harvest reported a 30% jump in food bank usage in the last year. Approximately 40% of clients are employed, representing a 66% increase from the previous year. This includes individuals working full-time who cannot keep up with rising costs. About 68% of food bank users are women, often managing households. Nearly 21% of children under 18 in Manitoba live in food-insecure homes.

Manitoba Has Canada’s HIGHEST Inflation Rate

Source: Stats Canada (January 2026)



Letter to the Editor RE: Wetlands

When is a retention pond not a retention pond? When it is a wetland! So, what is the difference? Why should we worry about it?

We have a Class 4 wetland just south of Patricia Ave. (in Brandon) and west of 18th St. (highway 10). There are plans to develop this land and if the developer has its way, the wetland will be replaced by a retention pond. A wetland is an area we find in and as part of nature— it is not man-made. A retention pond is man-made.

A wetland is defined as land that is saturated with water long enough to promote wetland or aquatic processes as indicated by poorly drained soil, vegetation, and other biological activity adapted to a wet environment. The depth and duration of water present in a wetland will result in formation of wetland soil characteristics and growth of specific plant communities adapted to growing in wet conditions. So, just as there are streams, rivers, and lakes, there are wetlands.

Plants in wetlands are grouped into vegetation zones. The deeper the wetland is, the more vegetation zones are present and an increase in types of plant species present.

Now a retention pond is man-made. An area of land is scraped out with enough depth to hold water i.e. a pond. Plants in this cultivated basin tend to be weedy (noxious), while in a wetland, it is dominated by native species.

How do wetlands work? What is so important about them? Wetlands act like sponges, soaking up rain and melting snow and slowly releasing water during drier seasons. In the wetlands, the higher classes 3, 4, and 5 have a greater capacity for flood and drought prevention. This is because of increased ability to store water, especially during storms and release water during drought conditions. They have extensive connections with ground water and factor in the re-charging of ground water. Wetlands clean our water, they trap and store carbon, thereby mitigating against climate change. Many wildlife species use wetlands as a place to rest, feed, and raise their young.

A retention pond is a body of water designed to manage stormwater run-off in developed areas. This water often carries pollutants, chemicals, and bacteria from roads, lawns, and commercial sites. It can bring in nuisance pests that then travel to nearby homes and businesses. They can emit a variety of noxious odors associated with blue-green algal blooms.

But, why have this debate? If a developer owns the land the wetland is on, can’t they just go ahead and drain it and fill it in? The answer is that wetlands are important and valuable. Manitoba has actually enshrined a commitment to no net-loss of wetlands in the Water Rights Act. Under the Water Rights Act and the Water Rights Regulation, a water licence will NOT be issued for the drainage of Class 4 and Class 5 wetlands. This means that the wetland has a boundary and from that has a 50-meter buffer zone. The Act also means that 5e works or projects cannot change the natural boundary of the wetland by reducing its area or result in the reduction of the class of the wetlands as it exists under normal conditions. Beyond that buffer zone, let the development march on.

In the article detailing the Plan for South Village, our City planner—Andrew Mok — state\$, and I quote: “The wetland (not the retention pond—my words) is definitely important to retain”. “It also plays a key role in drainage” (as pointed out in my notes above). “So, we appreciate the necessity of maintaining the wetland integrity”.

The plan (see the Brandon Sun—Tuesday, Jan. 13/26) shows a giant oval retention pond. This giant oval is exactly where the wetland is. So again, I ask, “when is a retention pond not a retention pond?”

Scott Blyth
Brandon Manitoba ~ e-mail: sochocdoc@hotmail.com

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SPORTS

MITCHELL, WESTMAN READY TO WATCH AS SANHEIM SKATES FOR CANADA

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Like many Westman residents, Elkhorn's Garth Mitchell will be tuned in when Travis Sanheim takes to the ice for Canada at the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games.

It will be the first Olympics for the son of Elkhorn's Kent and Shelly Sanheim. The Canadian men's hockey team opens its Olympic schedule on Feb. 12 against Czechia. It is also slated to play on Feb. 13 against Switzerland and Feb. 15 versus France.

In Italy, Sanheim will be cheered on by a strong contingent of supporters. His parents, wife Alex, siblings Kali, Shondalee and Taylor and their partners, his parents-in-law and brother-in-law, and close friends and fellow Elkhorn products Brett Orr and Josh Martin, along with their partners, are all slated to make the trip.

There will also be countless supporters back in Manitoba pulling for Sanheim. Mitchell, who coached him during his hockey journey, will definitely be one of them.

The Philadelphia Flyers' Sanheim is one of many former players Mitchell has watched go on to play in the National Hockey League.

"I will be tuned to every one of Trav's games, for sure," said the retired former CAO at the RM of Wallace-Woodworth of the Olympics. "It never ceases to amaze me to sit on my couch or in the stands and watch these amazing young men play at the highest level. Experiencing this is truly surreal. It's awesome to see good things happen to good people who have worked so hard for their dream like Travis has."

Mitchell recalls that Travis and twin brother Taylor, who went on to a successful junior career, attended his powerskating/hockey schools right from the start of their careers. Of Travis, he said, "His desire and sheer love of being on the ice was very evident right from year one."

Later Mitchell coached the Sanheims on the U18 AAA Yellowhead Chiefs. He described both experiences as a privilege.

"Trav always understood the importance of working hard and the value of playing the game the right way," Mitchell said. "He was fortunate to have a cohort of five to six local guys who were very competitive and spent thousands of hours on the ice - pushing each other's development."

During his time coach-

ing Sanheim, Mitchell said he was impressed by many aspects of his game.

"Trav was always an excellent mobile skater with strong puck skills," he said. "He was extremely coachable and had a very strong hockey sense and always understood the importance of sharing the puck at the right times. Probably the most impressive though was his desire for the game and the willingness to do all the extra work it takes to be an elite player."

Sanheim is now on his ninth NHL campaign - all with the Flyers. The 6-foot-4, 222-pound defenceman had six goals and 17 assists for 23 points in 54 games, as of Jan. 31, this season. He led the Flyers and was in the top 20 in the league in ice time at 24:02 per game.

Over the years, Mitchell said he has been "so fortunate to get to coach so many great people and great players." During his time with teams such as the Chiefs and Virden Oil Capitals, Mitchell coached future NHLers Sanheim, fellow Elkhorn product Sheldon Kennedy, Rick Berry, and Sioux Valley Dakota Nation member Zach Whitecloud, who plays for the Vegas Golden Knights. In addition, while coaching the West U17 team at the World Under-17 Hockey Challenge for three years and Team Manitoba at the Canada Winter Games, he worked with 14 other players who made it to the NHL. Mitchell coached Strathclair's Conor Geekie on Team Manitoba. On Team West, he worked with Calvin Pickard, Dylan McIlrath, Jaden Schwartz, Mark Stone, Quinton Howden, Ryan Murray, JC Lipon, Chris Driedger, Ryan Pulock, Derrick Pouliot, Damon Severson, Chandler Stephenson, and Brendan Leipsic.

MJHL REPORT

MJHL HOCKEY DEREK HOLTOM

The Virden Oil Capitals are surging in the standings. They also have their Head Coach and General Manager Tyson Ramsey locked up for several more years.

The Oil Capitals announced last week that Ramsey has signed a four-year contract extension, taking him through the 2029-30 season. A four-year deal in junior A hockey is pretty rare and quite exceptional.

Since taking over the former Winnipeg Saints franchise, Ramsey has guided the Oil Capitals to a 193-118-22 record and a winning playoff record of 16-11. The Oil Capitals are also one of the top teams in the MJHL in terms of attendance.

This is great news for the franchise, which is already riding high as Virden has vaulted their way into top spot in the MJHL's West Division in the last month. They even knocked off the Steinbach Pistons last week, serving notice to the rest of the East Division that the West has some strong teams as well.

Speaking of the East Division, the Niverville Nighthawks officially clinched the first playoff spot for the

MJHL playoffs.

The leading team in the MJHL beat the Winnipeg Blues 5-1 Friday night, while the Selkirk Steelers lost 4-3 to the Swan Valley Stampeders in a shootout. The end result means that the Nighthawks are officially in - and that's before the month of February.

The Nighthawks are actually starting to pull away from Steinbach in the East Division. With only two regulation losses in 40 games Niverville does seem to be the team to beat this year.

But as they say, it's not how you start, but how you finish. And several teams in the MJHL are on the ascent. Heading into action Saturday night the Waywayseecappo Wolverines are 7-2-0-1 in their last 10 games. The Steinbach Pistons are 7-2-1-0 in their last 10. The Virden Oil Capitals are 9-0-1-0 in their last 10, and the Winkler Flyers are 8-2-0-0 in their last 10.

Heck even the Swan Valley Stampeders were 6-4-0-0 in their last 10 games. Lots of teams are getting hot as we approach the last six weeks of the regular season, so let's not anoint the Nighthawks league champions just yet.

The Manitoba Liquor and Lotteries Players of the Week are headlined by Aidan Herring from the Waywayseecappo Wolverines. The team captain scored four goals and four assists for eight points in three games to earn the honour.

Next up is goaltender Chris Quizi from the Steinbach Pistons. He won both of his starts, posting a 1.00 GAA, a .966 save percentage, and one shutout to earn the recognition.

The final winner of the week is forward Ben Groome from the Swan Valley Stampeders. In three games Groome scored five goals and added two assists for a seven-point week.

A few suspensions came down last week, including a one-game holiday to Swan Valley's Jaxson Haley for taking part in a one-man fight.

Sandro Dell'Acqua from the Winnipeg Monarchs also earned a one-game suspension for being assessed a five-minute major.

There's a good chance he wasn't going to play the next game at any rate - his needless and baffling major came late in the game against the Swan Valley Stampeders, allowing them to score a late tying and the overtime winner.

That's what makes junior hockey so interesting. You never know what mistake a young player will make that can turn a game around.

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Manitoba 

OLYMPICS

REF TO WRITER GERRY NOLAN



The winter Olympics are to begin on February 6 and I, for one, cannot wait for the action to start. It is one of my favourite times

to watch athletes compete against one another in search of the gold medal!

Hockey is one of my favourites as you may guess,

but I like the competition in other sports as well. Figure skating is one sport that I do not understand the judging in, all I know that in the past we seemed to get screwed over by the Soviet judges.

These athletes spend hours trying to reach the point of being named to the Olympic roster. The thing I like is they work their buns off trying to reach for the ultimate goal.

I like amateur athletes who work so hard. Every night I see professional athletes who get paid millions take the night off, while Joe fan is paying hundreds of dollars just to watch professional play. I would take an Olympic event any day. I know at very least the amateurs are giving it their all.

There are some dangerous events like the bobsled and the skeleton event, that are extremely dangerous.

One of my personal favourite events is speed skating. Man can they fly around that track. It is not

for the faint of heart to watch them speed around the track. Should one fall they could get cut badly. I find it very exciting!

One of my most favourite memories was watching Jon Montgomery running down the streets with a jug of beer in his hand, celebrating victory. I hope we have some more Jon Montgomery moments in this year's games. Good luck to the Canadian team, we stand behind you in victory or defeat, and enjoy your moment, you deserve to be Canadian proud!

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Obituary

IN LOVING MEMORY JIM MACARTHUR



It is with heavy hearts we announce the passing of Jim MacArthur on Wednesday, January 21, 2026. His loss has left a profound emptiness in the lives of his family and friends.

Jim was born on September 1, 1944, to George and Marjorie MacArthur of Brandon. Throughout his school years he developed a love for horses and eventually cattle. After graduating from Vincent Massey, Jim began work in the advertising sector of Labatt's Brewery. Later, he worked for Imperial Oil and at the same time began building a small herd of cattle.

In 1968, Jim met his life partner Bev and they married in 1973. With the purchase of a farm north of Virden, Jim and Bev established their cattle and grain operation. They built many friendships through showing cattle in the United States and Canada and hosting cattle-related events at their farm.

While farming, Jim started working at the local livestock auction mart, owned by Manitoba Pool and then Heartland Livestock. He eventually became the manager, an ideal career for a man who loved to visit with everyone. Jim enjoyed his job. He had a deep respect for his staff and customers, many of whom became true friends.

Throughout his life, Jim had the unique privilege of counting his childhood friends among his closest companions. After retiring, the travel bug bit, and together with this special group—and others along the way—they created countless memories through extensive travels, from cruises to B&Bs in the South.

Jim will be dearly missed by his wife Bev, his beloved Corgi Sadie, his sister Marion (Wayne) McLeod, niece Robyn (Rick) Denbow and their children Reese and Ryan, nephew Tom (Tara Lynn) McLeod and their children Olivia and Kara.

A private Celebration of Jim's life will be held in the summer.

Flowers are gratefully declined. Donations in memory of Jim may be made to the Brandon Regional Health Centre Foundation for the Western Manitoba Cancer Centre (where he volunteered), 150 McTavish Avenue East, Brandon, MB, R7A 2B3 or the Brandon Humane Society, 2200-17th Street East, Brandon, MB, R7A 7M6.

Arrangements with Memories Chapel 204-727-0330
Condolences: www.memorieschapel.com

Obituary

IN LOVING MEMORY STANLEY EDWARD WARD



Stanley Edward (Stan) Ward passed away at WestMan Nursing Home, Virden, Manitoba Friday, January 30, 2026 at the age of 89 years.

Born on August 16, 1936, Stan spent his childhood years growing up and attending school in Saskatoon, SK. Following High school, he remained in

Saskatoon where he welcomed daughter, Susan, in 1961 followed by son, Bruce, in 1963. Stan moved to Regina for work in 1970 and in November of that year married Lynn Stalker. Stan and Lynn welcomed son Trevor, in June of 1975 and treasured their 2 short months with him before moving to Brandon in 1976. That summer they welcomed daughter, Tracey.

Stan bought an insurance agency, which would later be known as Ward Agencies, in 1980 which saw the family move to Virden, MB. Virden was home until 2010 when they built their lake front property at Oak Lake Beach. Many lake days were enjoyed before returning to Virden in 2020. Weslaco, Tx was their winter home for several years. Although there are too many careers and jobs to list, Stan took pride in owning his business, being heavily involved in the community and being a member of many groups and associations. Stan's children and grandchildren were the lights of his life, and he cherished any time spent with them.

Left to mourn are his wife of 55 years, Lynn; daughters Susan (Scott) and Tracey (Evan); son Bruce; grandchildren Travis, Chris, Brian, Logan, Samantha, Taris, Darcie and Alix; along with many cherished friends and family. Stan was predeceased by his infant son, Trevor; his parents Ed and Erma; brothers Frank, Bert and David; sisters-in-law Ruby and Joan; brother-in-law Lee and his parents-in-law Jim and Violet Stalker.

A Celebration of Life will be held at a later date. Interment will be in Virden Cemetery.

For those who so desire, in lieu of flowers, memorial tributes in memory of Stan may be made to Virden AUD Theatre P.O. Box 1982 Virden, MB R0M 2C0 or to Virden and District Health Auxiliary Remembrance P.O. Box 2526 Virden, MB R0M 2C0.

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The tender must include loading and hauling of approximately 35,000 cubic yards of gravel to be delivered within the boundaries of Two Borders. Gravel hauling must be completed by June 30, 2026, weather and road conditions permitting.

Tender awards may include all or a portion of the Municipality.

All tenders must include the following:

- A list of equipment used (minimum of 2 trucks)
- Expected start and finish dates.
- Hauling – cost per cubic yard/per mile.
- Loading – cost per cubic yard.

Please contact the Melita Municipal office at 204-522-3263 for further details.

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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
Virden, MB R0M 2C0
Email: kreid@flbsd.mb.ca
Phone: 204-748-2692

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Help Wanted



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Competition: #2025-26-46

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Working directly with agricultural producers, Adjustors are responsible for assessing crop loss for the AgrInsurance, wildlife, hail programs and inspections for additional programs, all in accordance with established policies and procedures. MASC has 12 Service Centres throughout the province. Adjustors will work primarily from home but will report to a Team Leader at their closest Service Centre.

MASC values excellence, integrity, and accountability. We strive to enhance existing products and develop new products, transform service delivery to enrich the client experience, pursue customer driven organizational change, and maximize performance, engagement, and development of all employees.

MASC has five core competencies: communication, decision making, initiative & innovation, leadership, and organization. Competencies relate to every position at MASC and along with the technical requirements, are included in the qualifications for all positions at MASC.

QUALIFICATIONS:

- Grade 12 education or an equivalent combination of high school education and related experience.
- Experience working in agriculture.
- Experience paying attention to detail and maintaining accuracy, including numerical.
- Experience interpreting and applying policies and procedures.
- Analytical, problem solving and decision-making experience.
- Ability to work independently with minimal supervision.
- Ability to maintain confidentiality.
- Mathematical aptitude.
- Ability to use Microsoft products (SharePoint, OneDrive, Excel, Word, Outlook, PowerPoint) in a cloud-based environment.

CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT:

- Must be legally entitled to work in Canada.
- Must possess a valid driver's licence, access to a vehicle and the ability to travel within the Province of Manitoba.
- Must be physically capable of performing duties including climbing grain bins, walking on rough terrain and working in adverse weather conditions.

MASC provides employee training. Work is assigned on a casual basis throughout the year with the main workload from spring until early winter. Workloads vary depending on the number of claims and inspection requests MASC receives.

SALARY: \$20.85 – \$23.84 hourly
CLOSING DATE: February 28, 2026
COMPETITION: #2025-26-46

HOW TO APPLY:

If you are interested in this position, visit our website www.masc.mb.ca and apply online.

We believe diversity strengthens our ability to provide excellent customer service in a positive work environment. We encourage all to apply. Only those selected for further consideration will be contacted.



www.masc.mb.ca

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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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Woodworth Royal Canadian Legion

Branch #118

monthly report

By Vaughn Wilson
WOODWORTH LEGION PRESIDENT

At the January 6, meeting of the Woodworth Legion Branch #118 the following information was presented:


1. The revised Woodworth Legion by-laws came into effect November 25/25
2. The most recent Military Recognition book volume 16 is available online
3. The Woodworth Legion archives are to be compiled and placed in a safe off site location
4. The Royal Canadian Legion Centenary Medal will be presented to our only surviving WWII veteran member Mr. Tom Sedgwick. It is significant that Mr. Sedgwick will be celebrating his 100th birthday in February 2026.
5. There are 12 rinks entered for the Legion Bonspiel to be held January 9th and 10th. There will be soup and sandwiches for lunch and the Ladies Auxiliary will prepare a roast beef supper on Saturday for curlers and the community.
6. A motion was passed to donate \$500 each to the Kenton and Lenore Bonspiels.

A lengthy discussion was held regarding the 100th Anniversary of the Royal Canadian Legion about how we can celebrate it at our local Branch #118. Centenary Medals and free membership were discussed.

The Royal Canadian Legion Centenary Medal signifies the organization's 100th Anniversary (1926-2026) honouring its century of supporting Canadian veterans, promoting remembrance, and serving communities. It recognizes members and volunteers for their dedication to the Legion's mission, symbolizing its proud history, ongoing renewal, and future endeavors. The Medal is authorized for wear starting January 1/26 to mark this significant milestone.

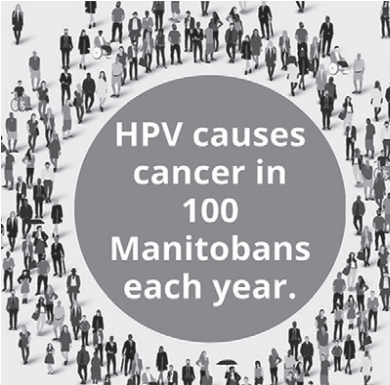
During the 100th Anniversary year of the Royal Canadian Legion all new members can join for free in 2026. Your membership will help strengthen the Legion and our support for Veterans, Remembrance, and our communities across Canada. There are many great ways to get involved help and have fun through your local Woodworth Legion Branch #118.

Greg NESBITT
MLA for Riding Mountain



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SPORTS

U11 TEAM CHEERS SOUTHWEST COUGARS TO VICTORY



PHOTO BY TERRI LYNNE LAWRENCE

Tanner Lewis speaks to the U11s in the Southwest Cougars dressing room.

By Anne Davison
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

When the Southwest Cougars AAA U18 were cheered on by their namesake team the U11 Southwest Cougars Major Gold in Souris arena on Jan. 25, the chemistry was there and the Cougars recorded an important win. The home team pulled off a 4 to 3 win against the top-ranking Winnipeg Bruins in an overtime shootout, a brand building experience for both Cougars teams.

Head coach of the U18 Cougars, Tanner Lewis and coaches of the U11 Cougars, Monty Lawrence (head) and Tristan Dietrich (assistant) got together in the Souris arena to watch this game turn into an important Cougars victory.

Lawrence has a strong connection with the team where he was a player in 1997/1998 when they won the championship. So, this night, when the Cougars won against the Bruins, he said, "It was actually really awesome."

Lewis agreed. "It was a real cool experience for both our team and the U11 team." He said the Cougars had been battling for position with four other teams. "We haven't been playing the best since Christmas, and that was a big win for us. We were really good all week, and especially that game. Monty even said it to me - hopefully that's a turning point - and I agree with him."

Game night atmosphere was charged. "It was a great display of hockey for our team and the U18 AAA league," said Lewis. "I could hear the young U11 team cheering on our team during the game and in overtime when we had to kill a 4 on 3 penalty. On top of that, for them to be part of the celebration on the glass after the shootout win is something I'll remember as a coach for a long time."

Regional development

This is the first year that Hockey Manitoba has sanctioned the U11 regional team under the Southwest Cougars. Team manager Terri Lynne Lawrence said, "It's a pilot project that we have tried our very best to make an incredible experience for our U11 team."

She said that the most powerful and heart-warming moment was when the Cougars veteran, Kole Beard scored on the shootout, and then pointed right at the U11 fans dressed in their Cougars jerseys, throats hoarse cheering for them in the stands. "He skated directly over to them to celebrate the win as if they were ONE team." The entire Southwest Cougars bench poured out on the ice and skated over to the U11s and although separated by glass the kids showed they were Cougars at heart.

The U11 Southwest Cougars Major Gold team are players born in 2015 making them the major age group within U11. (Nine-year-old players have their own separate team.)

Coach Monty explains the Major Gold team of about 17 players come from a wide geographic area, including Carberry, Souris, Killarney, Boissevain, Hartney, Virden, Reston, Wawanessa and Deloraine. These players not only play extra games beyond their minor hockey teams, but the

regional aspect means they play with different teammates and against different teams.

"There are two regional tournaments that were kind of set up for us, but we've also played a team from Minot and all of the Brandon A1 teams," says Monty.

U18s mentor U11s

Lewis said, "For 10-year-olds to be exposed to our program at such an early age, it hopefully creates some more interest in kids striving to be a Southwest Cougar one day."

He noted the importance of being good examples to the younger players. "We have always told the boys the influence that they have within their own communities and around the region, but for them to see it for themselves can put it in a whole new perspective."

"The U11s were welcomed into the Cougars' dressing room for a fun question and answer period for our [young] men to learn from," said Terri Lynne. "It also put the U18s in a leadership position that made them realize how important their presence is in the eyes of the up-and-coming generation of hockey players."

To have their own well organized dressing room is a point of pride for the U18 Cougars. Lewis said, "We've done a good job, as an organization, maintaining it and making sure that we keep it clean and doing some upgrades to it."

He adds, "This was the first time that we've had a team in for a tour of our room and a Q and A with our players and myself of what playing AAA hockey is like and what our program is about."

But that wasn't all. The U11s came prepared for a hockey practice following the game and they were joined by the U18 players where both teams did their favourite drills together. It meant a lot to the youngsters.

"They got to pass it to them (U18s), they got to get a pass back and shoot," said Monty. "And then I got the older boys to take my coaching board and show their favorite drill to my boys. And then they got to do the big boys' - the big Cougars' - favorite drill, which was I think, pretty awesome for them."

Terri Lynne tells their own son's reaction. "My son, Gabriel Lawrence, a defenseman on the U11 Gold team, said this was one of the best days of his life! He loved it all!"

She said that the young guys "need great leaders to look up to. Hockey isn't just about the sport - it is about integrity on and off the ice!"

Monty confirmed that attitude. He said that it's a physical game and body contact will come at the 15U level, but it's important to teach the skills, the right way to use the body and how to be aware on the ice.

"You want to make the game fun, and you want to make it about your team and camaraderie, and that's, I think, everything for me right now." He acknowledged that winning is fun but said, "It's the sportsmanship and respecting your opponents, and you're playing the game for the right reasons, and you're playing it because it's thrilling and exciting."

FORMER SKATE VIRDEN ATHLETES REFLECT AFTER NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS



PHOTO BY GRANDMA LORRAINE

Breken Brezden waits for her results.

By Robin Wark
EMPIRE-ADVANCE

Two athletes who once trained with Skate Virden will be watching the 2026 Winter Olympic Games with a unique perspective.

Dauphin's Breken Brezden finished 12th in the senior women's event at the Canadian National Skating Championships in Gatineau, Que. Marty Haubrich, who is from Dubuc, Sask., and his partner Rebecca Laiu captured the bronze medals in junior pairs at nationals. Brezden and Haubrich both used to train in Virden and are now based in Ontario. The Canadian National Skating Championships were used to select Canada's skating for the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympic Games.

"Of course, I'm excited to watch and cheer for the women's event in Milano, but I'm also really looking forward to seeing Stephen Gogolev skate - as I thought his short program was really fun and polished at nationals," Brezden said.

Breken Brezden

Brezden's strong performance at nationals came after a fall and early winter campaign where her number of competitions was limited due to injury. She said:

"I had a great time performing at nationals, as the arena in Gatineau was packed and full of energy and support. I've been injured for a lot of the season - so it was also nice being able to put out decent skates considering there were moments where I wasn't even sure if I'd be prepared or healthy enough to compete."

Brezden trained in Virden with Patty Hole for several years. She said, "Training in Virden with Patty Hole really laid the foundation for my jump technique, my skating skills, and also taught me to love being a competitor and a performer. I also have a lot of great memories with the friends I made at Skate Virden and the summers spent at the Virden campground."

Marty Haubrich

It was the first nationals for Laiu. Haubrich won silver in junior pairs in 2022 with Summer Homick. He also has competed in senior pairs at nationals. Regarding the success this time around, Haubrich said, "I think we have a great support team and are able to train in a great environment in Brantford and Milton. My partner, Rebecca, and I put in a lot of work this season to start our partnership and train for nationals, so it was nice to see everything come together when the time came."

He said that training in Virden with Hole was "a very special experience. She helped me start my career in the pairs discipline and helped me to get set up where I currently live and train in Ontario with my current coach. Not only did she help me with my own skating she helped introduce me to coaching, which I have continued and will continue to do throughout my career."

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