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Voice

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Making Christmas bright

Sydney Dyck (left) and Crystal Rempel were among the many Winkler and District Christmas Cheerboard volunteer elves wrapping presents for the 400+ families receiving care hampers last week. For the full story, see Pg. 2.

PHOTO BY ASHLEIGH VIVEIROS/VOICE

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getinformed

Winkler Christmas Cheerboard distributes 440 hampers



PHOTOS BY ASHLEIGH VIVEIROS/VOICE

Cheerboard volunteers spent two days last week wrapping presents and pulling together grocery gift cards for the 440 households receiving care hampers this holiday season.

By Ashleigh Viveiros

Hundreds of families will have food on the table and presents under the tree next week thanks to the work of the Winkler and District Christmas Cheerboard.

Volunteers took over the Meridian Exhibition Centre early last week to wrap hundreds of children's presents and pull together the food "hampers"—grocery gift cards to local businesses—for upwards of 440 households in the Winkler area.

"On paper it was 436, but we had a couple extra in the end, so I think that it could be 440 this year," said presi-

dent Crystal Rempel, noting that's up from the 418 distributed last year.

"We've had great reports from the drivers, that they were received so well and people were just so grateful," she shared. "And how a lot of them, this is maybe the first year having a hamper. It's tougher times for people and so this is a welcome relief, especially during the Christmas season."

The store vouchers gives families the flexibility to shop for themselves, ensuring they're getting groceries they truly want and need.

"It's a dollar amount per each member of the family for Co-op," Rempel

explained, "and then we had various vouchers, like to Spenst Bros. for a pizza, a bag of peanuts from Sunny Day, a loaf of bread from Valley Bakery, and a bag of potatoes from Kroker Farms.

"And the children age 12 to 18 all got gift cards to either Janzen's Hobbyland or Canadian Tire, while the younger kids all got a wrapped toy."

There were also gift bags for expectant mothers full of items for the newest member of their families.

"One woman, she did a whole bunch of sewing for us. There was a table full of newborn toques to toddler to older kids that we could put in the ham-

pers. And some beautiful diaper bags that she sewed ... just beautiful."

The outpouring of community support for the Cheerboard each year is humbling, Rempel said.

"We're so appreciative for their support of our group and what we're trying to do. We couldn't do it without the community rallying around us."

As of last week, fundraising was at about \$87,000 of the campaign's \$150,000 goal. The Cheerboard is making a final awareness-raising push in the weeks before and after Christmas in the hopes of reaching that target.

"We often find we'll still have some funds trickling in through January," Rempel said. "We work on faith that we'll get there, trust that it'll all come together, and it always does."

You can make a donation to the Winkler and District Christmas Cheerboard online at winklercheerboard.com.

A festive holiday advertisement for GBH Law Office. The background is dark with a gold border. The text "Happy Holidays" is written in a large, red, cursive font. Below it, in a smaller, gold, sans-serif font, is "FROM ALL OF US AT". At the bottom, the "GBH LAW OFFICE" logo is displayed in white and gold. The ad is decorated with red Christmas ornaments and a pine branch in the top left corner.

A festive holiday advertisement for the Western School Division. The background is a snowy winter scene with a snowman wearing a black hat and a yellow scarf. The text "Merry Christmas!" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font at the top. Below it, in a smaller, red, sans-serif font, is "Wishing our students, families, staff, and community a warm and joyful Christmas season!". At the bottom, the Western School Division logo is displayed, featuring a tree and the text "WESTERN School Division Morden, Manitoba" and "Rooted In Caring, Committed to Learning". The phone number "(204) 822-4448" and the address "4 - 75 Thornhill St., Morden, MB" are also included.

“I was just crying and laughing”

Newest Morden-Winkler Habitat for Humanity family celebrates the good news

By Ashleigh Viveiros

A Morden family is wrapping up 2025 on a high note thanks to the news that they have been selected to be the recipient of the Winkler-Morden chapter of Habitat for Humanity's next house.

Mustafa and Najah and their four children—Malak, 10, Manar, 8, Ayman, 5, and Mayar, 2—have officially signed a partnership with Habitat that will see them move into the home the chapter hopes to build in Morden in 2026.

When they got the call earlier this month, there was a great deal of celebration, the couple shared.

“It was just screaming,” laughed Mustafa.

When the Habitat reps contacted them a few weeks ago, asking if they could stop by for a chat, Najah said they didn't want to get their hopes up too high after months of going through the selection process.

“I was scared to ask what the decision was ... but when they came they said we had big smiles on our faces, and I was just crying and laughing. We waited for this news a long time.”

The Syrian family immigrated to Canada as refugees in 2019, first settling in Carman before moving to Morden in 2022 so Mustafa could start a new career as a welder at Farm King.

“We found a better opportunity for work ... I was looking for a better future,” he said, noting that's what drew them to Canada as well. “We were looking for a good future—not just for us, but for our children.”

“Morden is a nice place,” added Najah. “People are very kind here, helpful. It's safe. My kids, they have lots of friends here now from school. We like it here.”

Since coming to Canada, the family have lived in several rental homes, finding themselves multiple times having to move after their various landlords announced intentions to remove their properties from the rental market.

Being a Habitat family will finally mean some stability for Mustafa and Najah and their kids.

“It's a big meaning for us,” Najah said. “Peace of mind, safety, less stress for us and for our children—everybody will be happy. And the kids, they will be feeling comfortable and maybe focused more on their schoolwork and success in school because

they're not thinking about moving again.”

The cost of housing made owning their own home a near impossible dream for the family.

“It's hard,” Mustafa said. “We can't afford to buy a house because all the houses sell for high and the rent is also very high. So almost we need to work one job and a half to two or four [jobs] to make it work.”

“That's why Habitat is a very, very nice program,” he said. “It's a really good program to give families a better future.”

“A better life,” added Najah.

They will be the seventh family in Morden-Winkler to achieve home ownership through the Habitat program, which provides families with zero per cent mortgages with no money down and monthly payments geared towards their income. Families also must contribute 500 hours of “sweat equity” in the program by volunteering in their communities or on the build itself, once it gets going.

Those volunteer hours are an integral part of the Habitat program, noted Christina Falk, who is the chapter support manager for Habitat for Humanity Manitoba and is also involved with the Winkler-Morden chapter.

“We think it's a hugely important part, especially in our rural chapter areas, because it not only creates that volunteer spirit which Habitat for Humanity is known for, but it also really connects families to their community,” she said. “You make new friends, you learn new things about your community, and you realize that you are needed in the community. There's so many groups doing wonderful things in Morden and Winkler, and they all need help, and I think some people just don't know the value that they hold in being able to offer that help.”

It also helps put a face to the selected family for the many generous donors who make the Habitat builds possible, Falk added.

For Mustafa and Najah, the volunteering is an opportunity to thank the community for being so supportive and welcoming.

“Volunteering, it makes us more connected to the community,” said Mustafa.

“We are happy to do it and we are ready to do it,” Najah added.

They've already started reaching out to various non-profits to see how they can get involved.



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Mustafa and Najah and their children Malak, Manar, Ayman, and Mayar are looking forward to owning their first house thanks to Habitat for Humanity, which hopes to build that house in Morden in 2026.

INCREASING NEEDS

The chapter received more interest from potential families than ever this time around, and the selection committee certainly had a tough decision to make, Falk shared.

“There is definitely increasing need across both Morden and Winkler,” she said. “It's just getting more and more difficult for people to get a home, and rent is not going down—it keeps going up.”

The selection committee's decision comes down to a lot of factors, in-

cluding a family's ability to take on a mortgage, their current living situation, community references, and even the age and number of kids they have.

“We have a very rigorous application and interview process and we look at all aspects of a family's financial situation,” Falk said, noting Mustafa and Najah demonstrated incredible money management skills, incurring very little debt since making their home in Canada.

Continued on page 5

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Many Hands hosts its holiday meal



Many Hands Resource Centre in Morden brought the community together Dec. 9 for its annual Christmas season meal, which filled the hall at the Morden Alliance Church. "This event was open to everyone. It was simply our way to bring people together," said executive director Mariyam Tsygankova. "We know Morden is home to many different cultures, and this was our way to celebrate that diversity and also our community support. This was also a chance for us to say thank you and celebrate the season together."

PHOTOS BY LORNE STELMACH/VOICE



THANK YOU

At Eden, we are thankful for an engaged and supportive community. From fundraising event participants to business sponsors to faithful donors, your contributions fuel the vital work we do for those facing mental health challenges every day. We couldn't do it without you, so from all of us at Eden, we wish you a Merry Christmas and a Joyous New Year.

2025 SPONSORS



United Way campaign over halfway to goal

By Lorne Stelmach

The annual United Way Pembina Valley campaign continues on to the end of the year, but it still has a ways to go to reach its goal.

Representatives last week shared the 2025 campaign has thus far received just over \$73,000 in donations.

"We're so very grateful to the many individuals and business who have donated so far," said board vice-president Cathy Sandercock. "We're well over halfway to our goal of \$125,000 with a few weeks still to go in the year. If you haven't donated yet, there is still time."

She acknowledged they were a bit behind where they would like to be at this point of the campaign.

"We are lagging behind this year,

and it's a bit of a concern to us," she said. "We're asking people to remember, if there's organizations they like to support, they know some of the key non-profits that we do support, and it just means they are not having to spend their time fundraising. They're spending their time providing the services to the people who need it most, and that's what we like to approach."

All donations large or small can go a long way, Sandercock noted.

"There were 19 organizations last year that got support from us," she said. "And we were also able to do a substantial donation to

the Genesis House transition housing project, and we were really proud to be able to do that.

"We hope we can continue providing that kind of support, but we can only work with what we are given," Sandercock added.

"We have a number of major fundraisers going on in our area, and there's only so many pieces to the pie, so we recognize that," she acknowledged. "We really will appreciate any

donations we receive by year-end, and hopefully we can get a little closer to our goal."

Donations to the United Way campaign can be made at via e-transfer to unitedwaypembinavalley@gmail.com or online at unitedwaypembinavalley.ca. Cheques can be mailed to United Way, PO Box 758, Morden, MB, R6M 1A7 or dropped off at the Winkler Senior Centre or the Morden Activity Centre.

> HABITAT FOR HUMANITY, FROM PG. 3

"It is really, really hard in this economy to have a lower income and have little or no debt and manage your money really well that way," Falk said. "The families we partner with not only have a need, but they also have demonstrated their ability to manage their money well, and we want to make sure that they are honoured and appreciated for that."

Having to bounce around multiple rental residences is unfortunately a common story for many families.

"Their housing situation is pretty typical of a lot of local families that are renting," Falk said. "They've struggled to be able to stay in one place for any length of time because they're often renting houses—because they have four children, they need the space of a house—and their landlords will sell the property and then they have to move again.

"This is a problem we're seeing over and over again with families ... it disrupts everything for children when you're moving so often."

The plan is to build Mustafa and Najah's new, more permanent in Morden, but in order to do that the chapter needs to find some available land.


"They want to stay in Morden, and our goal is to build in Morden, but it is very hard to find a lot to build on right now in Morden," Falk said.

"So if anyone out there has a lot—whether it's an infill lot, which would be amazing, or in a new development in town ... any kind of land that we could build on, please reach out," she said, noting that while a donation or discount on the cost of land is always a welcome and generous gift to the non-profit, they are willing to purchase property at fair market rate to make the next house happen. "We really want to get this build started in May."


With several Habitat homes already up and running in both Morden and Winkler, all generating mortgage payments, the chapter finds itself having to come to the community less for financial support than it has in the past, but some help is still needed.

"We actually are quite blessed and we have a good amount already towards the next build," Falk said. "We're probably looking to fundraise about \$50,000 more, but that depends on the land costs."

You can make a donation to the Winkler-Morden chapter of Habitat of Humanity online at habitat.mb.ca/chapters/winkler-morden/ or get in touch with them via email to info@wm.habitat.mb.ca.




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OUR SISTER PUBLICATIONS



Is Morden losing its magic?

In one sense the answer to the question posed in the headline is yes. The Morden Magics gymnastics team has announced its intention to relocate to Winkler after 36 years in the city.

In another sense, once again the answer may be yes, but it is far more complex. The sense I am speaking of is the increasing struggles the city has had over the years.

This is not the first major athletics club to make a move from Morden east to Winkler. In 2023 it was announced that the Pembina Valley Orioles Manitoba Junior Baseball team would be moving, citing increased opportunity for development and growth it could not achieve in Morden.

In the case of the Magics, years of having to deal with issues of access to the (perhaps ironically named) Access Event Centre finally led to the city suggesting the club consider finding a new location. Boy, did they find one. Having a daughter who spent 10 years with the Magics I am not unfamiliar with the frustrations and struggles the club has endured trying to be provincially competitive while dealing with inconsistent access to space.

Even back then, more than 15 years ago, I thought the club needed a different location.

Of course, now the city has expressed shock at the decision to not

simply vacate the centre but the community. I do wonder, however, what they expected. Where else did the city imagine a club of that size relocate? There is no other suitable location in the city of Morden.

While it is clear there have been communication issues all around, anyone who has had anything to do with the Magics over the past two decades would not be surprised with the move.

As with most changes that, on the surface, appear to reflect poorly on the city, the typical civic response will most likely be defensive echoing often used and frankly worn-out rhetoric along the lines of “we’ve done and are doing everything we can, everything is fine here, nothing to see, move along...”

Athletics clubs, libraries, museums, parks and recreation services, adequate housing, and a decent commercial/industrial tax base to offset the burden from residents are critical to a successful, growing community. Morden is or has been struggling in nearly every one of these categories, and not just recently—for years.

Running a city is not easy. There are a million moving parts and many of them you don’t really even control if

you are on council or senior administration ... you watch and you hope and you try to design policy that seeks to build, strengthen and grow the community.

Running a city in an increasingly connected regional community is even harder. There are those who would seek to resist this for fear of losing distinctiveness. Just as there are others (like me) who believe we are stronger together so let’s pull in that direction.

A city or community’s council works hard. Senior administration works hard. As residents, we don’t always get to see that, which is why when things like losing an athletics club happen it might appear as if no one tried to stop it.

I’m looking forward to council taking the bull by the horns on all these issues and stepping forward in bold, courageous, creative leadership.

The best approach would be a leadership that over-communicates and is transparent in all things. A leadership that offers a detailed plan on how Morden can be brought to a place of thriving growth and community development. A leadership that inspires and leads by example before Morden loses more of its magic.



By Peter Cantelon

Letter policy

The *Voice* welcomes letters from readers on local matters.

Please keep your letters short (excessively long letters are less likely to be published), on-topic, and respectful.

The *Voice* reserves the right to edit, condense, or reject any submission.

Please include your full name, address, and phone number for verification purposes. Your name and city will be published with your letter. We do not print anonymous letters.

Send your letters to us by e-mail at news@winklermordenvoice.ca.

All columns and letters published on our Get Heard pages are the personal opinions of the submitting writers. They are not objective news articles, nor are they necessarily the viewpoint of the Voice.

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View the *Voice* online at www.winklermordenvoice.ca or altonavoice.ca

BTHC Fdn. donates \$5M to hospital expansion

By Lorne Stelmach

The expansion of Boundary Trails Health Centre (BTHC) got a major boost last week with a significant contribution from the BTHC Foundation.

The foundation on Nov. 9 presented Southern Health-Santé Sud with its second installment payment, bringing its total contribution to the expansion to \$5 million.

It is now halfway to a \$10 million pledge to bring expanded and enhanced health care services closer to home.

"This is just exceptional to have the support from the community," said BTHC Foundation board chair Brent Menzies. "I'm just thankful for the community support because without them, we wouldn't be here."

He added it is great to see the expansion moving along so well.

"It's exciting to see. Everything is coming together, and it's a wonderful facility. It's going to be great for patients."

"It's incredible to see how the community has come together so quickly to raise the money ... it's really exciting to see," said Joel Nelson, director of health services at BTHC. "I'm often getting comments from staff or

people coming in to the facility, commenting on how big the expansion is and how excited that they've seen the progress."

Nelson also commented on what the project is going to mean for health care in the region.

"It allows us to expand services within the community. It gives new work spaces for staff to engage in care with patients and also provide that high-quality care that we take a lot of pride in at our facility," he said. "We know that there's needs within the community, and we want to meet those needs."

Kyle MacNair, implementation lead for the RHA, oversees capital projects for the region and he noted it is good news all around with not only the significant financial support but the progress of the expansion project.

They are now at a point where they are starting on staff training in preparation for starting to move things over to the new community services building.

The next phase then will be renovation of the existing hospital space with work slated to start next spring and continue into 2027.

"It's fairly extensive, about a third of the hospital will get renovated,"



PHOTO BY LORNE STELMACH/VOICE

On hand for the Boundary Trails Health Centre Foundation contribution last week were Kyle MacNair, implementation lead for Southern Health-Santé Sud, Joel Nelson, director of health services for BTHC, Shannon Samatte-Folkett, BTHC Foundation executive director, and Brent Menzies, BTHC Foundation chair.

MacNair noted, citing how key aspects of the project will include more emergency services as well as a new operating room theatre, a larger cancer care unit, and an expanded ambulatory care unit

As far as the new 24-bed in-patient unit, he anticipates they will be starting to take patients into the new space

in the new year.

"Every day we're working on recruitment and retention of staffing," MacNair added. "We're not going to expand all 24 beds on day one. We're going to do a phased expansion as staffing is brought on ... it's progressing every day."

Elite Crushing lends Christmas Cheer a helping hand

By Lorne Stelmach

The Morden Christmas Cheer Board received a significant financial boost recently from a local business.

As the Morden Thunder hockey team faced off last Monday (Dec. 8) against the Guns 'N Hoses team of Morden police and firefighters, Elite Crushing presented a \$10,000 donation to support the campaign.

"We challenged businesses and the people of Morden to donate to Morden Christmas Cheer, and we offered to match all donations up to \$10,000 last week. They hit the \$10,000, so we donated the full amount," said Levi Wiens.

He was glad to be able to make the donation for something that is so worthwhile and makes a difference for so many families in Morden.

"It's a good cause, and we're happy to see how much the community supported it," said Wiens. "We're happy to do it."

Cheer board representative Sandi Buhr said the support was very much appreciated.

"It's very special. This time of year

we need every donation we can get, and Elite Crushing really helped us," she said.

It was especially helpful as the cheer board found itself in a tough financial position after having ended up in a deficit last year.

The non-profit packed and delivered 384 hampers in 2024 and is projecting to be at over 400 this year, but it was already having a hard time keeping up with the rising costs and demand last year. Donations were significantly lower than in other years, and that coupled with higher expenses caused them to use up most of their surplus.

As a result, the board made the decision to reduce the value of the hampers by 25 per cent this year to ensure they could cover costs.

"We are definitely in need of the support, and the community is coming out and doing a really good job raising funds and donating toys and non-perishable food. We're very grateful," said Buhr.

She added they were grateful as well for the support shown at the Morden Thunder Christmas Cheer game, which raised over \$5,200 along with



PHOTO BY LORNE STELMACH/VOICE

Sandi Buhr, Ali Wiens, and Chelsey Delaquis of the Morden Christmas Cheer Board were pleased to receive a \$10,000 donation from Levi Wiens of Elite Crushing in Morden.

a full truck of food and an SUV full of toys.

"There's always a big turnout. Lots of people come and bring lots of toys,

food and it's just a good time."

Morden Christmas Cheer delivers its hampers this week.

Pen pal program continues to build bridges

By Ashleigh Viveiros

A program that reaches out across the generations continues to build relationships in our community.

For the past several years, teacher Tasha Roberts' students at Emerado Centennial School in Winkler have been paired up with older adults in the Senior Pen Pal Program.

This year there are 22 kids and 20 seniors from the Winkler Senior Centre and the Gateway Resources senior activity program taking part, sending letters back and forth on a monthly basis.

"It's an awesome program," Roberts said. "The kids love it, and it's a fun opportunity to connect with seniors in our community in a way they normally wouldn't do ... the added bonus is we're making writing fun for them."

The program often leaves a lasting impression on the kids.

"I have students from prior years who see their pen pals walking down the hallway and they're so excited to see them again," Roberts shared. "Kids in Gr. 8 were coming out of their rooms to say hi to the pen pal they had when they were in grade five or six."

Gr. 6 students Katelyn, Ben, and Gabe share they've been having a blast getting to know their elder counterparts.

"I really liked interacting with the se-

niors and playing bingo with them," Gabe said, referring to the Christmas party held earlier this month where the pen pals got the opportunity to meet each other for the first time.

"I love hearing about their stories," Ben said. "I didn't know that we actually have a lot in common."

Ben and his pen pal have shared memories of the many pets they've had through the years, and have come to realize they both enjoy crafting.

Katelyn and her pen pal share a love of sports.

"She has a granddaughter in U15 AA, and I play hockey too in U13, so we usually talk about hockey and sports and all that type of stuff," she said.

It's been pretty cool, the kids say, to hear about what life was like for their pen pals as kids, and to share a bit about what it's like to be growing up right now.

For senior participant Mary Ann Sawatzky, that glimpse into modern childhood is what has kept her coming back to the program year after year.

"I really enjoy interacting with younger children, and I think it's just such a good opportunity to exchange ideas," she said. "We don't have any young grandchildren anymore, so this is a really good opportunity to get to know what younger people are thinking nowadays."

Corresponding with a middle



SUPPLIED PHOTO

The Senior Pen Pal Program participants met each other for the first time at a Christmas party at Emerado Centennial School earlier this month.

schooler through the year makes it very clear how much children learn and develop in that time, Sawatzky noted.

"Each year the students start off with the letters, by the end of the year you can really see their thought processes have matured and their writing skills have improved. It's so good to see that."

Another longtime participant on the senior side of things is Patsy Wharf, a member of the Gateway Resources activity program for retired seniors living with intellectual disabilities.

"This is my third pen pal," she shared. "What I like about it is you get to meet your pen pal, and write letters to the person you have."

The Christmas party earlier this month was another highlight for Wharf, who is looking forward to the next gathering of the group in spring.

"We had lots of fun ... we won three Bingo games," she said.

"It is fun writing to school students ... learning different things about my pen pal," Wharf added. "She likes things that I like, and it doesn't matter that [I am] a senior."

The program operates with support from a grant the senior centre received from the Manitoba Association of Senior Communities, which helped cover the costs of the goodies at the Christmas party and will also be used for the year-end gathering.

"IT'S A FUN OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH SENIORS IN OUR COMMUNITY IN A WAY THEY NORMALLY WOULDN'T."



SUPPLIED PHOTO

Pizza and dainties were on the menu at the pen pal program's holiday party this month.

Three more local measles exposure sites

By Voice staff

Public health officials with Manitoba Health, Seniors and Long-Term Care are notifying the public of three new measles exposure sites in southern Manitoba.

Anyone at the following locations on the specified dates and times is asked to monitor for symptoms until the identified date:

- C.J. Dyck Arena at 31 Arena Rd., Plum Coulee, on Nov. 29 from 12:30 p.m. to 4:15 p.m. Monitor symptoms until Dec. 21.
- Gospel Mission Church at 855 15th St., Winkler, on Nov. 30 from 9:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monitor symptoms until Dec. 22.
- Landmark Cinemas at 777 Norquay Dr., Winkler, on Dec. 7 from 3:30-6:10 p.m. Monitor symptoms un-

til Dec. 29.

Public health is also asking anyone who was at these locations during the specified times to check their immunization records and ensure they are up to date with measles vaccine (MMR or MMRV).

If symptoms occur, contact your health care provider. It is best to call ahead before showing up at a clinic or hospital so that staff can take steps to reduce the exposure of other people to this highly contagious virus.

Further information on measles, exposures and immunization is available at www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/diseases/measles.html or individuals can contact Health Links-Info Santé at 1-888-315-9257 toll-free in Manitoba.

Local missions team up to send sizeable aid shipment

By Lorne Stelmach

A joint effort of three local charitable organizations saw the fruits of their labour realized last weekend with a major shipment of soup and clothing heading out from Winkler to Ukraine.

The collaboration involved Southern Gleaners providing soup mixes, Faith Mission providing warm clothing, and Mission Eurasia arranging and paying for the freight and the distribution of the product at its destination.

Volunteers from the various groups gathered at Faith Mission in Winkler Dec. 13 load the container.

Representatives saw it as a wonderful story of cross-agency caring and partnership which put boots on the ground locally to meet needs half a world away.

"My heart has always said why does each ministry have to do all of their own thing? Why not do the things we do well in the areas where we're represented and partner? And that is what this represents," said Martin Harder, board chair for Mission Eurasia Canada. "I would just emphasize the generosity of our community ... you see how big of an impact you can have around the world."

"We are working together," said Abe Janzen, chair of Southern Gleaners. "Many hands make light work is how the saying goes, and that's happening here today. The Ukrainians are coming to ship product to their compatriots."

From its headquarters in Reinfeld,

Southern Gleaners takes unmarketable vegetables and dices, dehydrates, and packages them into soup mixes which are distributed to Christian mission organizations to feed hungry people both close to home and internationally.

"We salvage. We get vegetables that are not for sale ... then the volunteers come to process those vegetables and make sure that whatever we produce is something that they would eat themselves, and then we dehydrate it and package it into a soup mix," Janzen explained.

He saw this effort as a prime example of an opportunity to do something good and worthwhile and especially in the spirit of the Christmas season.

There were 12 full pallets of soup loaded to be shipped out, and it was estimated each pallet had enough to provide 65,000 meals. From Winkler, the shipment was going to Winnipeg then to Montreal before being shipped overseas.

"Now in wintertime especially, the need is great," noted Harder. "It's so exciting to be able to work together."

"The need is there," agreed Jake Elias of Faith Mission. The Winkler-based non-profit accepts donations of used clothing and other items for those in need in Ukraine and former Soviet Union nations.

"We've been very blessed that we can ship their soup mix," Elias said in praising the involvement of Southern Gleaners.

"We have had containers that have



PHOTOS BY LORNE STELMACH/VOICE

A partnership between Faith Mission, Southman Gleaners, and Mission Eurasia saw a shipping container full of food and clothing go out to those in need in Ukraine last weekend. It should arrive there in a few weeks. A similar shipment sent this summer is slated to arrive before Christmas.



got [to their destination] in five weeks, which is amazing," he added, noting a shipment sent out to Kyrgyzstan this past summer will arrive by Christmas.

"A lot of people see the need and see the devastating pictures of the war in Ukraine and just feel that they can help and want to help," Elias said.

Western SD lobbying for Discovery Trails expansion, second high school

By Lorne Stelmach

Western School Division continues to make its case for two major capital project priorities in Morden.

The need for an eight classroom addition at the new École Discovery Trails school as well as a new second high school were the primary focus at a recent meeting with a deputy minister of education for the province.

Superintendent Stephen Jaddock was joined by board chairperson Darcy Wolfe "to just make sure that the needs of Western School Division, in terms of our space issues, was heard at the highest level and making sure that we are moving forward with what we would like to do in terms of addressing those space issues," Jaddock shared.

The two projects are both top priorities, but there is perhaps some greater urgency for the addition at École Discoverers Trails school.

"It has already been in the planning. The school was built with that expansion in mind," noted Jaddock.

"Now, with next year having all the K-8 French Immersion students and the K-8 English students there in the catchment area, it's going to be at its load capacity and more, so we just want to make sure that those issues are known to the minister of education."

They also stressed the need for a new high school in addition to Morden Collegiate.

"We are at capacity in terms of the high school numbers of students as

well," said Jaddock. "So both of those projects were talked about, and we want to make sure that we're leaving no stone unturned in terms of just making known what we believe needs to have to happen in the immediate future."

He remained hopeful they are being heard, with another meeting already set to talk about projected enrolment and space issues with other government representatives.

"We're bursting at the seams, and we need to do right by our families and our students to make sure that we house them appropriately and they have the space they need to do their learning," said Jaddock.

Meanwhile, there was also a meeting with Mayor Nancy Penner and

members of Morden city council. Those meetings usually happen on a regular basis, but Jaddock noted they haven't taken place for awhile.

"This was good just to get back on that track again and to have those conversations with our city government, our mayor and councillors, to talk about our plans and builds and what things actually look like for our space constraints for the school division," he said.

"It's great to be on the same page," Jaddock added. "We both, at the school division level and at the city level ... want to make sure that we're singing from the same song book, so to speak."

get informed

Morden Gr. 1 student wins provincial fire safety award

By Lorne Stelmach

The youth of Morden would seem to be very aware and knowledgeable about fire prevention and safety given their ongoing success in an annual province-wide contest.

A student from Morden was selected as the Grade 1 winner in the Office of the Fire Commissioner's provincial home fire escape plan contest held in conjunction with Fire Prevention Week.

This year's winner is Misha Patel from Mme. Grenier's class at École Discovery Trails School. As part of her award, she received a \$200 Toys "R" Us gift card, and her entire class also received fire safety swag bags.

"She is the third consecutive winner that Morden has had in this contest," noted Morden Fire & Rescue captain and public information officer Jonathan Baumgart after making the presentation at the school Dec. 11.

The theme of the contest this year focused on changing smoke detector

batteries. Baumgart noted he finds that Gr. 1 students are generally quite receptive to learning such safety tips, and it is great to have them do the fire escape plans for their families as well.

"They tend to take that information; they go home and share it with their families, so that's an age group that we like to do that with," he said.

Baumgart said they appreciate that the local schools are so receptive to the department coming in to do presentations to the students.

"We are fortunate where, as a department, we are allowed to come into the schools, and they give us the opportunity to talk to the students about fire prevention, and in turn, they also help push that message ... students are able to take it home," he said.

"Our success in this contest really comes from the school division and the families and their efforts to do the contest, take the time to make a home fire escape plan and submit it for the contest," said Baumgart. "I'm



PHOTO BY LORNE STELMACH/VOICE

Misah Patel (front, holding certificate) won the provincial fire escape plan contest.

fortunate that when I do come, I do we're talking about, and this is that get their attention ... they know what age group that absorbs it."

> WESTERN SCHOOL DIVISION, FROM PG. 9

He also sees the city as potentially being in a position to help lobby the province.

"It's important for the city of Morden to have their education needs looked after, and we work together to see that happen," said Jaddock.

"These types of meetings are very important, and we have to make sure that we continually revisit them and make sure that individuals know at the top levels what our needs are here."

Western School Division is asking the province for support to add eight more classrooms at Discovery Trails.

PHOTO BY LORNE STELMACH/VOICE



Christmas cookies galore



PHOTO BY LORNE STELMACH/VOICE

St. Paul's United Church offered an array of yummy baked treats last Friday as part of its annual cookie walk. Proceeds from collecting \$10 for a dozen cookies and baked treats supports the church's outreach program. "Last year we raised just over a thousand dollars overall, which is pretty good," shared Sue Nelson, who noted they also raise money through their soup and pie luncheons. Money is donated to a variety of local organizations, such as Morden Christmas Cheer, Genesis House, Caring and Sharing, and the Many Hands Resource Centre. "We love doing this because it's also fun," Nelson said.

Portage-Lisgar MP holds open house

By Lorne Stelmach

Portage-Lisgar MP Branden Leslie welcomed the holiday season break from government duties, but he didn't step away without using the opportunity to meet with constituents in his riding.

Leslie held his annual Christmas open houses Dec. 13 at his Winkler constituency office and then Dec. 14 at his office in Portage la Prairie.

The overriding theme of his message and what he has been hearing from his Conservative supporters is there have been a lot of promises made by the Liberal government but very few of them have been delivered on so far.

"We have tried our level best to hold the government's feet to the fire on what the priorities are," he said. "Frankly, the government achieved extremely little this parliament ... their own legislative agenda was extremely light.

"The government didn't put forward a lot of ideas and a lot of policies. Particularly coming out of an election, when we were going to build faster and better than ever before," Leslie said. "We are not seeing the results of that, and we've been holding the government to account for their failures, for delivering a whole lot of promises to Canadians ... nothing has changed."

Leslie said the open houses offered a great opportunity for him to connect with constituents one-on-one and hear their questions and concerns.

"It's a good way just to connect with people ... hear what's on folk's minds."

He noted he was particularly hearing a lot about Bill C-9, which is aimed to amend the Criminal Code and address hate propaganda, hate crime and access to religious or cultural places.

The legislation amends the Criminal Code to, among other things, repeal the requirement that the Attorney General consent to the institution of proceedings for hate propaganda offences, create an offence of wilfully promoting hatred against any identifiable group by displaying certain symbols in a public place, create a hate crime offence of committing an offence under that Act or any other Act of Parliament that is motivated by hatred based on certain factors, create an offence of intimidating a person in order to impede them from accessing certain places that are primarily used for religious worship or by an identifiable group for certain purposes; and create an offence of intentionally obstructing or interfering with a person's lawful access to such places.

Leslie said they see this as a highly unnecessary change to the Code and



PHOTO BY LORNE STELMACH/VOICE

Portage-Lisgar MP Branden Leslie chats with a constituent at the Christmas open house he held in Winkler last weekend.

something that could potentially be an "attack on freedom of religious expression that's been hotly debated in Parliament."

He sees another overriding issue that is of the most concern to most everyone now:

"The biggest issue is the cost of living," Leslie said, citing how families are "seeing the costs increasing at grocery stores ... how high prices are of pretty much everything, how wages are continuing to stagnate.

"People are making the best of it, and a region like ours, they're still incredibly generous," he added.

Leslie also briefly commented on being in Opposition as well as having

recently had a couple Conservative MPs leave to sit with the Liberal government.

"Obviously, some extenuating circumstances with a couple of individuals who felt the need to cross the floor to the Liberals," he said. "I can tell you I am not going to be one of those individuals. I would be surprised if there are any more. In my view, our team is very united.

"I certainly would rather be in government," he noted. "I am confident that Canadians are going to see past the results of the government that we have had in place for the past nine months here. We continue to focus on issues that people care about."

Province adding doctors to Health Links-Info Santé telephone service to help reduce ER wait times

By Patricia Barrett

To reduce emergency room referrals and help people access the appropriate level of health-care services they need, the provincial government is adding doctors to the Health Links - Info Santé health-advice phone line.

Provincial health, seniors and long-term care minister Uzoma Asagwara said in a Nov. 27 news release that by adding physicians to the telephone service, patients will have direct access to primary care.

"I know many Manitobans have had the experience of calling Health Links, only to be told to go wait for hours in an emergency room," said Asagwara. "By adding physicians to the service, we're giving patients direct access to primary care on the phone and helping to reduce unnecessary referrals to emergency care. It means more peace of mind for patients and less pressure

on the health-care system."

Health Links-Info Santé is a bilingual telephone health advice line that's staffed by nurses and available 24-7 seven days a week. People can obtain guidance for non-emergency health issues. Depending on a patient's clinical needs, the nurses may refer patients to their family doctor, a walk-in clinic, urgent care facility or emergency department.

Health Links-Info Santé receives on average 400 calls per day. Of those calls, an average of 40 patients are triaged to emergency departments each day, says the news release. In the first 10 days of the new physician service, 160 patients were transferred to speak with a doctor and only 10 of those patients were triaged to an emergency department.

Emergency room wait times in Winnipeg hospitals vary by site. St. Boniface's ER, for instance, showed a wait

time of over six hours as of 3 p.m. on Dec. 14, according to the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority's online ER wait time schedule. By contrast, Health Sciences Centre's adult ER had a wait time of under three hours. HSC's children's ER had a wait time of over five hours. Grace Hospital's ER showed a wait time of six and a half hours.

CBC News reported last month that between five and 15 per cent of ER patients across the country left without being seen in 2024. Manitoba was the second-highest at 13 per cent that year.

During its election campaign in 2023, the now NDP government promised to re-open three hospital emergency rooms - at Seven Oaks, Concordia and Victoria hospitals - that had been closed and turned into urgent care centres by the previous Progressive Conservative government. The

NDP said it will take eight years to get those three ERs reinstated. The Victoria Hospital's ER is already in progress and scheduled to re-open in 2027. The NDP also promised to build a new ER for the Eriksdale hospital.

In the meantime, the government is trying to link patients to the appropriate level of care they need and help reduce overcrowding and long wait times in ERs.

In November a doctor was made available on the Health Links service from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Another doctor is scheduled to join the service this month, which will provide physician availability overnight for 24-7 service.

The government said it also plans to add nurse practitioners to the telephone service, and that if further medical assessment is necessary, NPs can transfer patients to a doctor.

You can call Health Links-Info Santé toll free at 1-888-315-9257.



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SUPPLIED PHOTOS

Devin Williams (left) and Brandon Black with the Christmas ornaments they and other Linden Place residents made and are selling to raise funds for Eden Foundation.

Eden residents selling handmade ornaments

By Ashleigh Viveiros

The residents of Eden's supportive housing program are doing their part to support the mental health agency this holiday season.

Linden Place's five residents have spent time this fall creating Christmas ornaments through their Learning With Purpose program.

They're selling them for \$30 a set, with proceeds going to the Eden Foundation, Eden Health Care Services' fundraising arm.

Supportive housing manager Eric Lai explains the Winkler facility pro-

vides round-the-clock care for people recovering from mental health challenges. It's a transitional home environment in which residents can live for a few years before moving into more independent housing.

"We are the only residential care transitional home for people with mental health challenges in Manitoba south," Lai said, noting the need for these and other supportive housing options continues to grow.

The Learning With Purpose program at Linden teaches residents life skills, like working with their hands and budgeting. They also focus on

giving residents the opportunity to give back to the community, which is how these Christmas ornaments came about.

"My team and I, we help people to help themselves," Lai said. "And we try to create some creative and sustainable projects."

In September, residents made pins in honour of Orange Shirt Day, and they were a huge hit.

"It gave us more confidence to extend our Linden Place project, so before Christmas we decided to make these ornaments with [a note] with our residents' signature and a thank-you letter inside."

They told Eden Foundation marketing and events manager Tyson Deceuninck about the project, and he welcomed the opportunity to begin selling the ornaments at the foundation's Light Up the Night celebration a few weeks ago.

"Historically the foundation has sold Christmas ornaments, but they're normally ones that are just manufactured with the Eden Foun-

dation logo on them," he shared. These ornaments, handmade by people involved with Eden, certainly trump those, providing a much more personal touch.

"I'm genuinely so proud of our staff and residents at Linden Place for taking on this initiative," Deceuninck said. "It has such a pure intent."

The residents were pleased to be able to do something that supports the agency that has so supported them, Lai said.

"They can get more confident because they are not only the receiver—sometimes they can be a giver as well."

The ornaments are clear with origami stars and tinsel inside. They're available in red, green, blue, orange, yellow, and purple. Each set comes with four ornaments in a decorative tin and a thank-you note.

You can purchase yours at the Eden Winkler offices on Main St. (inside the ALG Professional Centre) until Dec. 23.

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This Christmas Season



What's *Your* Christmas Story?

We received so many creative entries for our writing contest this year! Here are our winners, along with a few other favourites.

GRAND PRIZE, KINDERGARTEN TO GR. 4: BENNETT JOHNSTON, GR. 2, WINKLER

THE SNOW TRACKS

It finally snowed! I had been waiting for snow the whole year, and I was outside making the biggest snowball EVER!

Then I saw them: tracks! Not like dog or bird tracks, these were weird. They were BIG and round with squiggly lines inside, like someone stepped in the snow with spaghetti shoes.

I looked around. No one was there. Just me and the tracks. They went toward the woods behind our house. Mom says not to go too far, but ... what if it was a snow monster, a Yeti, or Santa's reindeer? Or a secret treasure? I HAD to know.

I started following them. My boots made crunch-crunch sounds, like potato chips. The tracks kept going and going. Sometimes they disappeared under the bushes, but then I'd find them again. I started thinking, "If this

is a monster, what do I do? Throw snowballs? Pretend to be a tree?" My heart was beating fast, like when you're about to open a present.

Then I heard something. A jingling sound, like tiny bells. My stomach did a flip like a pancake. The tracks stopped at a big tree with icicles hanging down like sparkly swords. Under the tree was ... a door. A real door! It was round and glowing blue like a night light.

I whispered, "No way!" Then the door opened a little. I peeked inside and saw a tunnel made of ice. It was glowing like a frozen rainbow. And then—BOOM!—a tiny creature popped out. It had pointy ears and a hat that looked like a candy cane.

It smiled and said "You found the Winter Path! Want to see where it goes?"

I nodded so hard that my hat fell off. The creature laughed and grabbed my hand. We went through the door, and suddenly everything was shiny

and magical. Trees were made of crystal snowflakes floating like balloons. Tiny animals wore scarves and skated on frozen ponds. It was like a secret winter world. I almost screamed because it was so awesome!

The creature told me they were getting ready for the Snow Festival, and they needed help hanging star-shaped lights. So, I helped! I climbed sparkly ladders and hung glowing stars while the creatures ran around giggling. They gave me hot cocoa that tasted like melted chocolate bars. One threw glitter at me and now my hair looks like a disco ball!

Then the festival started. The sky exploded with colours: pink, green and gold. Everyone cheered. I drank hot cocoa that tasted like melted chocolate bars mixed with magic. BEST. DAY. EVER!

Then the creature said, "Time to go home, but you can come back if you follow the tracks again."

I walked through the door and



WHOOSH—I was in my yard. The tracks were gone. Like they never existed. But in my pocket was a tiny glowing star.

So now I know: If you see weird tracks in the snow, FOLLOW THEM. You might find a candy-cane-hat creature and a secret winter world. Or maybe a snow monster. (But probably the cool world thing.)



Merry Christmas!

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Wishing you a *Blessed* New Year

GREENHOUSES
VANDERVEEN'S

What's *Your* Christmas Story?

GRAND PRIZE, GRADE 5-8: JOANNA JOY OMIDIORA, GR. 7, SCHANZENFELD

FALLING FOR CHRISTMAS (LITERALLY)

This was not how I expected my first night on the job to go.

I was dangling from Santa's sleigh, the sack of presents slipping from my hands. I grabbed for the drawstrings, but the wind tore them away from me. Santa yelled my name, but the storm swallowed his voice. The bag plummeted as fast as my heart.

December's supposed to be the most wonderful time of the year, right? Not this one. I was tired, grumpy, and over-

worked—and now airborne against my will.

After the sack disappeared, I turned to see Santa looking crushed, like every cookie he'd ever loved had been stolen. Then the sleigh jerked, and suddenly I was falling too.

Mid-plummet, I yanked my parachute—because splatting like the elf last year wasn't on my wish list. As I drifted down, irritation bubbled up. Why had the head elves picked me—Twitch—to ride the sleigh? My whole name screams "can't sit still." Delivering gifts on foot? Sure. Sitting calmly in a blizzard? Not my strong suit.

Still complaining, I slammed into a tree. Snow exploded everywhere. I detached my chute, retracted the rig (thank you, elf school), and climbed down. A soft thump landed beside me. A note. From Santa.

*Dear Twitch,
Beside this note is a radar. "Sack" mode finds the presents. "Santa" mode finds me. Recover the sack and meet me. You have 10 hours, or Christmas is cancelled—and you're no longer an elf.*

P.S. If you break or lose the radar, you're screwed.
—Santa

Fantastic. Christmas rested on me. I switched to Sack Mode; a blinking red dot appeared, as bright as Rudolph's nose, and off I went.

The snow thickened into a blizzard. The wind shoved me down every few steps until I finally collapsed face-first and stayed there. Why bother? Christmas felt pointless, and I didn't even want this job.

Then came a soft jingle.

I looked up. Standing before me was Dasher—the peppiest, fastest, and most annoyingly cheerful reindeer alive. A note hung from his neck:

You have eight more hours. Do it for the kids.

That line punched me right in the chest. If I failed, some kid somewhere would wake up to nothing—thinking Santa didn't care. I couldn't let that happen. Also, suddenly time flies.

I climbed onto Dasher. "Go, boy." Nothing. I clicked, tapped, begged—still nothing. Dasher looked at me like I offended his family tree.

Then, with the slowest, sassiest move ever, Dasher pointed to the bottom of the note:

P.S. Dasher only moves when you say something nice.

"You've got to be kidding me." He frowned. "Fine," I said through gritted teeth. "You are... fast." No reaction. "And... helpful." Nothing. "And you have a ... very shiny coat."

That did it. He puffed his chest out like he won an award, crouched, and launched. I barely hung on as we rocketed towards the dot. Snow whipped my face, the radar beeped wildly—we were close.

Then Dasher skidded to a stop, launching me into a snow bank.

"A little WARNING next time would be great!" I sputtered. He just smirked.

Strange tracks snaked into the trees ahead. Big ones. Definitely not normal. "Oh perfect. Mystery footprints. Merry Christmas to me." Dasher nudged me forward. The radar blinked faster.

We followed the prints until a bright red scrap fluttered in the branches. I sprinted toward it and found a clearing—there, sprawled over the sack, was a snow gremlin. Imagine a feral kid hopped up on candy. That's the guy.

I crept forward, told Dasher to stay (and he listened)—then crunched a branch. The gremlin snapped awake, snarling. Classic. But like most troublemakers, he had a sweet tooth. I tossed him a few candy canes, luring him away just long enough for Dasher to charge in and headbutt him into what looked like oblivion.

I grabbed the sack, hopped back on, and offered the obligatory compliment: "You're majestic, okay? Now go!"

Riding back to Santa, I realized something: sure, I dropped the presents—but I also saved Christmas. And that changes a guy. Even a twitchy elf like me.




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What's *Your* Christmas Story?

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

THE SNOW GLOBE ADVENTURE

One Christmas morning, Julie and her family went to her grandma's house for breakfast.

When they arrived, Julie jumped out of the car and gave her grandma a big hug. The smell inside the house was amazing—pancakes, eggs, and cinnamon rolls! Everyone was so hungry, so they washed their hands, sat down, and ate together.

After breakfast, Julie asked, "Grandma, do you have an attic?"

"Yes, my dear," Grandma smiled.

"Can I clean it for you?"

"Of course, sweetheart!"

Julie ran upstairs, excited for an adventure. The attic was full of dusty boxes, old books, and spiderwebs. While cleaning, she found a beautiful snow globe with three little golden stars on it. Inside was a shiny castle surrounded by snowy trees.

Julie pressed one of the stars, and suddenly all three started glowing! She shook the globe—and in a blink, the world began to spin.

When the spinning stopped, Julie was no longer in the attic. She was standing in the snow, right in front of the castle from the globe!

"Where am I?" she whispered.

A small fox with bright blue eyes appeared and said, "Welcome to Winter Wonderland!"

Julie gasped. "You can talk?!"

The fox grinned. "Of course! I'm Shiloh. What's your name?"

"I'm Julie."

Shiloh wagged his tail. "Come on! You must meet the Wonderland Queen."

Inside the glittering castle, the Queen sat on a silver throne. "Shiloh," she said, "you've found the Globe Keeper!"

Julie shook her head. "Me? I'm not a keeper. I was just cleaning my grandma's attic!"

The Queen smiled kindly. "You shook the globe, and it chose you. Winter Wonderland is melting, and only you can save it. You must find the missing crystal and join it with the one we have."

Shiloh's ears drooped. "Your Majesty ... that crystal is in Polar Bear Valley."

The Queen raised an eyebrow. "Is that a problem?"

"N-no, Your Majesty," Shiloh said quickly.

Julie turned to him. "Why are you scared?"

Shiloh sighed. "Polar Bear Valley is full of traps, avalanches, and three giant polar bears who guard the crystal. To pass, you must beat them in chess."

Julie's eyes sparkled. "Then what are we waiting for? Let's go!"

Their journey began. They dodged arrows, crossed icy mazes, and climbed up steep cliffs. Suddenly the ground rumbled.

"Avalanche!" Shiloh shouted.

Snow poured down the mountain, but Shiloh pulled out a magic carpet from his backpack.

"Get on!" he yelled.

The carpet whooshed into the sky and carried them safely to the top.

At the peak stood three huge polar bears waiting by a crystal that glowed like the moon.

"You shall not pass," one growled. "Unless you beat us in chess!"

Julie sat down bravely. The game began. The bears were clever, but Julie thought fast.

"Checkmate!" she said with a smile.

The bears stared in shock.

"No one has beaten us in a hundred years!" the biggest one said. "Fine, the code to open the gates is: Polar Bears Rule!"

The gates opened, and Julie took the crystal.

"We did it!" she said. They jumped on the magic ice slide that led back to the castle, twisting and spinning all the way down. Everyone cheered when Julie combined the two crystals. The snow sparkled brighter than ever before.

Shiloh smiled. "Thank you, Globe Keeper. You saved our world."

"Goodbye, Shiloh," Julie said, waving.

In a flash, she was back in the attic, holding the snow globe. Inside, Shiloh waved at her from the tiny castle.

Julie smiled and whispered, "That was the coolest adventure ever."

—Emir Raimzhanov,

Gr. 6, Parkland Elementary School

JULIE AND THE MAGIC SNOW GLOBE

One cold, blustery morning in early December, Julie Withersteps sat on her soft, pink bed feeling awfully bored.

Her eighth birthday had passed two days before, and she was already tired of her new toys. Absentmindedly, she picked up the snow globe that she had received for her birthday. It had a red cardinal with a woodland scene in it.

She shook it as hard as she could. Suddenly she was sitting atop the bright red cardinal that was in her snow globe.

This world was smaller than her own; she was half the normal size that she usually was. The cardinal though, was much bigger than usual.

She was flying high above a winter wonderland with snow-capped mountains, fluffy snow, gently sloping pine trees, and all sorts of woodland animals. It looked just like her snow globe.

Eventually the cardinal dropped gently into the branches of a thick pine tree covered with soft snow.

Julie slid off the cardinal, saying to herself, "I'll call you Rosie!"

She landed beside Rosie, enjoying the quietness.

Suddenly, a terrifying sound from above startled her, making her fall off the branch she was sitting on.

A giant brown and white eagle landed on the ground beside her in a gust of wind. The eagle screeched, chasing Rosie away, saying, "Run away, or I'll catch you!"

Julie ran, falling and hurting herself so many times when, of all things, a snowstorm came. She ran so hard, she thought her lungs would burst into a million pieces. She kept hearing the loud eagle behind her.

Finally, when she thought she would die, she hit something hard. Julie's clothes were tattered and torn. Then she heard yelling, and she went unconscious.

Julie woke up after a while and both the eagle and the snowstorm were gone. She got up and looked around her.

She walked a ways ahead and noticed a sign made out of gingerbread that said, "Welcome to Gingerworld!"

All of a sudden a bunch of gingerbread people came and said, "Hello Julie! Welcome here!"

She was invited into the village made out of gingerbread and walked

Continued on page 18



MENZIES MEDICAL CENTRE

Holiday Hours

December 19	10AM-5PM
December 24	8:30AM-12PM
December 25	CLOSED
December 26	CLOSED
December 31	8:30AM-3PM
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Merry Christmas



Happy New Year



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DATE	CLINIC	URGENT CARE
WED 24 DEC	8:30 AM - 2 PM	8 AM - 2 PM
THURS 25 DEC	CLOSED	CLOSED
FRI 26 DEC	CLOSED	CLOSED
SAT 27 DEC	CLOSED	8 AM - 12 PM
SUN 28 DEC	CLOSED	CLOSED
MON 29 DEC	8:30 AM - 5 PM	8 AM - 6 PM
TUES 30 DEC	8:30 AM - 5 PM	8 AM - 6 PM
WED 31 DEC	8:30 AM - 2 PM	8 AM - 2 PM
THURS 1 JAN	CLOSED	CLOSED

What's *Your* Christmas Story?

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

From Pg. 17

into one of the cozy, warm houses that was there.

Julie asked, "Do you have any extra clothes here? The ones I'm wearing are ruined."

"Yes we do!" said one of the women, "I'll be right back."

When the woman came back, she was carrying a pink and white checkered dress with soft, black leggings and tan coloured moccasins.

In the house, while sitting on a soft chair, she was given a piece of hot gingerbread with tons of cream cheese icing and sour patch gummies. She was also given some candy cane hot chocolate by a gingerbread woman.

As she enjoyed her sweet treats, she was told more about the eagle. She learned that the eagle's name was Windheart and that he bothered just about everyone in the winter wonderland. Also that his size was ten times bigger than a normal eagle.

Soon, one of the tallest gingerbread men approached Julie and said, "This is your bird, right?"

"Rosie!" Julie yelled.

With Rosie nestled on her finger, she continued sipping her cup of hot chocolate, when one of the gingerbread women said, "If you want to live here, the house next to this one is empty."

"Yes!" Julie exclaimed.

Then the woman took her to the house and it was just as Julie liked. Soft, warm, comfortable, and cute,

too. There was even a bird perch for Rosie.

The next day, there was a huge party for Julie to welcome her to town. There were fun games, delicious food, mostly gingerbread, and much fun and merriness.

After the party, Julie went to her new house and fell asleep on her bed, thinking, "Welcome to Gingerworld!"

When she woke up, she was sitting on her bed at home with her snow globe in her hand.

"What a strange dream," she thought to herself before running to tell her mom about her adventure.

As she headed to the kitchen, she realized she was still wearing the checkered dress and black leggings she had been given in Gingerworld.

—Vivian Giesbrecht,
Gr. 5, Stanley

MYSTERY OF TRACKS— CHRISTMAS EDITION

It was a snowy day, the kind where the air smells like Christmas cookies, when I suddenly noticed tiny footprints dancing across the snow.

Well ... I had nothing else to do, so obviously I became a DETECTIVE. Detective hat on. Black glasses on. Serious face activated.

After about 67 steps (yes, I counted, I'm a professional), something magical popped up: an ELF HAT. Just lying there. In the snow. Like it had quit its job at the North Pole!

I grabbed it and kept following the tracks until they led me to a tall building with a big sign saying *Voice*.

"What?!" I almost jingled like a Christmas bell. It was my favorite newspaper company—and the elf

tracks marched straight inside like they owned the place.

I stepped in carefully, very detective-like, and saw a man.

"Eh ... excuse me ..." I whispered, trying not to sound like a confused Christmas squirrel.

"Oh, hi girly! Wait—" He paused, squinted, and then, "That's my hat!"

He flashed a smile brighter than a holiday ornament. "Thank you!"

I said bye, and he added, with the confidence of someone who drinks hot cocoa for breakfast: "Yes, I am an elf!"

I laughed. "Ha-ha! Goodbye, Mr. Elf!" and jogged home, feeling like I'd just solved a North Pole mystery.

I mean ... I knew elves aren't real. (Probably.)

But something poked my brain. He did have big, pointy elf ears ...

So I dashed back and peeked through a tiny window.

Inside, he was printing newspapers but his ears? Gone. Then I spotted a table with a pair of fake elf ears. Just lying there like they were drying after elf swimming lessons.

I slipped on the snow, fell dramatically, and laughed so hard I scared a passing snowflake. "Ha-ha-ha!"

Best. Christmas. Mystery. Ever, I thought, and headed home, feeling like a junior detective of the North Pole.

—Olivia Pogrebnaya,
Gr. 6, Morden

THE PRESENT

One cold winter night, Santa was riding his sleigh. Just then he saw a snow storm coming up ahead. He did not know what to do. He was pushing and pulling his sled, it was a rough

ride.

Then, one of his presents fell out. But Santa did not notice. So he just kept going.

He kept delivering presents, living-room after livingroom. Then, when he stopped at the last house, he looked in the sack and saw ... nothing!

Just then, one of Santa's elves called him on the phone, and said, "One of your presents is stuck in the snow!"

Santa was filled with joy! But still sad because he didn't know how he'd get it in time, as it was almost morning.

As the sun was rising, Santa had an idea! Since Santa was back at the shop he asked one of the elves to help him find the gift. They looked all around town. Then the elf had an idea!

The elf said "Why don't we check the forest?"

"HOHOHO," said Santa "Let's go!"

As they went to the forest the elf remembered where he had seen the present. Thankfully they found the gift. But it was already late, for the sun had already come up.

Santa said, "HOHOHO what do we do?"

The elf said "I can go!"

"Really?" asked Santa

"Yes!" said the elf

"If you say so ..." Santa said

And off he went.

As he got there, the family was already up.

The elf called Santa on the phone and said "Santa! Santa! Everyone is up and got a gift, except the little girl!"

"OH, NO! What if they see you? You will lose your job!" said Santa

The elf went into the chimney anyway. As soon as the elf touched the ground, the family saw the elf. The elf slowly stepped to the Christmas tree. The family just stared. The elf put the gift under the tree.

When the elf tried to get back up the chimney, he couldn't get up. So he tried to call Santa, but it didn't work. And worst of all, he lost his job. The elf was scared.

The little girl went up to the elf and said, "I've never seen you before, are you an elf?"

"Yes!" the elf replied

The little girl asked her parents if the elf could stay with them. They said yes! They had lot of fun together and lived happily ever after.

—Hazel Wiebe, Gr. 4

Thanks for Adding So Much Joy & Beauty to Our Year!

We wish you a wonderful holiday season!

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Continued on page 31



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Your FARM



Celebrating a 10-year collaboration to help feed the world

By Jennifer McFee

After planting the seeds of collaboration a decade ago, two organizations continue to reap the rewards — and share them around the world.

Canadian Foodgrains Bank and global agri-business Bunge (formerly Viterra) are marking 10 years of partnership in the fight against global hunger. Through this initiative, Bunge allows company land near select elevators to be farmed by volunteers. The resulting crop proceeds go back to the Foodgrains Bank to help fight hunger around the world.

Canadian Foodgrains Bank is a partnership of 15 churches and church agencies working together to end hunger. In the 2024-25 budget year, the Foodgrains Bank provided \$74.6 million of assistance for nearly 1.2 million people in 37 countries.

Bunge is an agri-business solutions provider with a team of 37,000 employees who partner with farmers around the world to move agricultural commodities from where they're grown to where they're needed. The company has a history of 200-plus years with a presence in more than 50 countries. Bunge and Viterra combined in July to become one company.

On Wednesday, Dec. 3, representa-

tives from both organizations gathered to celebrate the 10-year milestone at Bunge's Rosser-based terminal.

Bunge territory manager Kent Klimpke said the two organizations have been supporting each other since 2015.

"Bunge is providing land around select elevators in our asset network," he said. "The land is farmed by local volunteer farmers who graciously donate their time to growing and harvesting those crops, with the proceeds of each year's crops supporting the Canadian Foodgrain Bank's hunger assistance programs."

Kyle Jeworski, head of Bunge in Canada, said the company is pleased to support the fight against global hunger.

"We have the benefit in Canada of having surplus. We produce an abundance. And to be able to give back is very meaningful for us," he said.

Food insecurity remains a challenge in many areas of the world, and that's why it's important to support the great work done by the Foodgrains Bank each year, Jeworski added.

"We've also been providing the Foodgrains Bank with a donation of \$5 per tonne of crops donated through our elevators. It's another way that we can get the local farming commu-



PHOTO BY JENNIFER MCFEE

Bunge territory manager Kent Klimpke, Canadian Foodgrains Bank director of resources and public engagement Christina Philips, and Kyle Jeworski, head of Bunge in Canada, gather at the company's Rosser-based terminal on Dec. 3 to mark 10 years of partnership in the fight against global hunger.

nity involved," he said.

"We deal with 35,000 farmers across Western Canada, and we're getting

those communities and farmers more connected. We're proud of the partnership."

Since 1983, Foodgrains Bank has provided more than \$1 billion of food-related assistance with over 100 international partners to address global hunger and worked in 70-plus countries around the world.

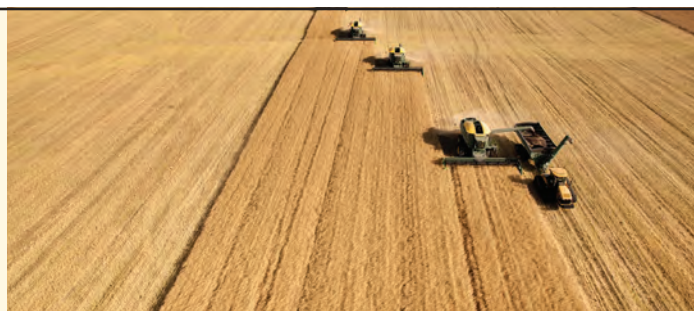
Christina Philips, director of resources and public engagement for Canadian Foodgrains Bank, said 30 volunteers helped out with five growing projects around Bunge terminals in 2025 in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

"We're definitely very appreciative of Bunge's continued support with this new organization. This past calendar year, donations that Bunge has facilitated through local supporters have reached \$350,000 and Bunge itself has supported that with an additional \$3,000 that's a matching grant," she said.

"Last year through our work at Canadian Foodgrains Bank, we were

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getinformed

Empty Stocking Fund delivers hampers to 256 families

By Ashleigh Viveiros

Thank to the generosity of the community and its many volunteers, the Rhineland Empty Stocking Fund was able to make the holiday season a little brighter for hundreds of people in the Altona area last weekend.

Saturday morning, the organization's army of volunteers mobilized to deliver a record-setting 256 care hampers to families in need in Altona, Gretna, Rosenfeld, Plum Coulee, and throughout the Municipality of Rhineland.

That's up from about 240 hampers last year, and represents 467 adults and 408 children, shares committee chair Ang Dueck, noting they've seen the need increase significantly the last several Christmases.

"We've had a lot of people moving into the area from other communities and even other countries," she said. "And the cost of groceries is always going up."

Each recipient family receives wrapped presents for their children and grocery gift cards to the local IGA and Co-op scaled to the number of

people in the household.

The gift cards give recipients the opportunity to purchase food their family will actually use, Dueck explained.

"We have such a diversity of cultures in our communities," she observed. "This way they can go get what they need to make what they want."

The campaign is made possible thanks to the donations that pour in from the community at large each year.

"The community is very supportive of us," Dueck said, noting that with rising grocery costs, this year's campaign budget is about \$75,000,

and they're still very much collecting donations to cover those costs.

Donations can be dropped off at the Access Credit Union branches in Altona or Plum Coulee or sent by e-transfer to rhinelandesf@gmail.com.

"Thank you to all the volunteers that came out to do the driving for the deliveries, and to the community for their donations, and to our Empty Stocking Fund board for all the work that they've done," Dueck said.

"THE COMMUNITY IS VERY SUPPORTIVE OF US."



SUPPLIED PHOTO

From left: Rhineland Empty Stocking Fund board members and volunteers Ruth, Mark, Ken, Ang, Liz, and Ben take a quick break for a photo before getting back to work distributing care packages to 256 families in the area.



SUPPLIED PHOTOS
A couple dozen delivery drivers came out Saturday to help the Rhineland Empty Stocking Fund get its hampers out to recipients in time for the holidays.

GrainFox provides 2026 market outlook and releases AI assistant

By E. Antonio

GrainFox delivered its annual grain market outlook and announced a new artificial intelligence tool during its Bin to Bank webinar on Nov. 19.

GrainFox chief market analyst Neil Townsend and AgResource Company founder and president Dan Basse outlined the top 10 variables expected to influence grain markets in the year ahead, citing global supply and demand, geopolitics, weather volatility and trade relations as key drivers.

GrainFox's Variable Countdown
10 – Breakout candidates (barley, oats and durum):

Townsend said tightening global supply and increased offshore market activity are creating renewed interest in several crops. Canada's durum crop was described as "representative," making transactions easier, while oats emerged as the strongest breakout candidate due to U.S. market dynamics and trade relationships.

"If I had to pick one of the three in terms of having a bit of an uprise from here, it would be oats," Townsend said.

9 – Black Sea war and export potential:

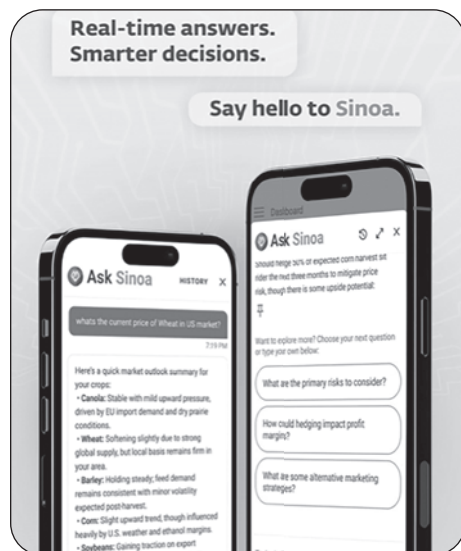
Basse said worsening conditions in the region continue to threaten export infrastructure, raising concerns similar to those seen in 2021. While wheat remains oversupplied, he expects global availability to gradually decline into next year if disruptions persist.

8 – India's pulse supply:

Townsend said India's domestic supply situation does not currently support higher prices, which could result in stricter import policies. He noted this poses challenges for Canada, adding he does not see conditions that would create a major upswing in pulse prices.

7 – South American weather:

Basse said favourable weather is currently supporting corn and soybean planting, particularly in Brazil.



Sinoa provides users with fact checked, data-backed answers in minutes, setting the program apart from typical AI bots.

If conditions hold into early January, Brazil could plant a 180-million-tonne soybean crop, though weather risks remain a constant concern.

6 – Macroeconomics:

Townsend said inflation pressures following the pandemic have created affordability challenges, though agriculture has performed relatively well compared to other sectors. He cautioned, however, that economic uncertainty continues, with recession fears frequently resurfacing.

5 – U.S. exports and balance sheets:

Basse said U.S. farmers produced a corn crop comparable in size to the combined corn and soybean output of Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. He expects export demand to remain strong, with end stocks for corn, soybeans and wheat remaining ample.

4 – Demand:

Townsend said demand for Canadian wheat is solid but lacks the growth momentum seen in previous years, particularly with limited expansion in biofuel initiatives.

"It's not that demand's poor, it's just that it doesn't have that built-in dynamic growth that it had for many

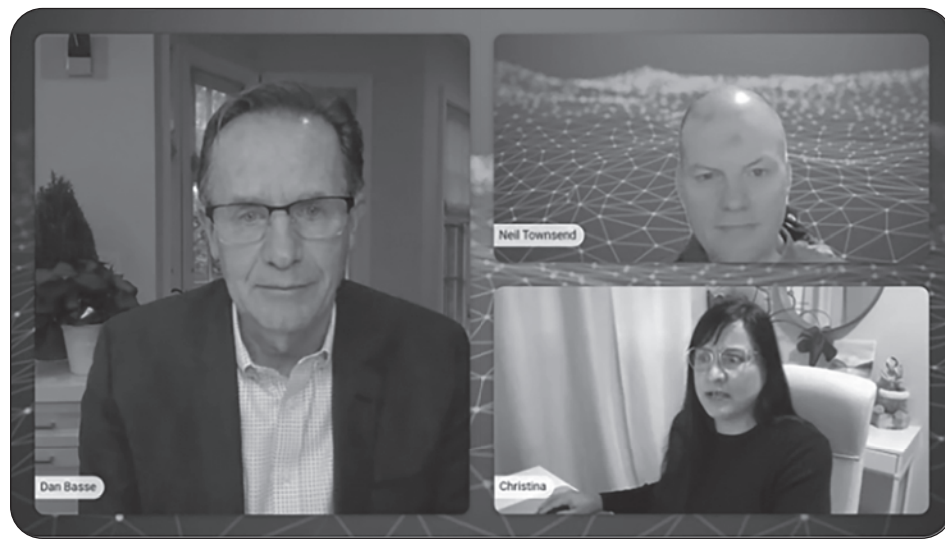


PHOTO SUBMITTED

Neil Townsend, GrainFox Chief Market Analyst, and Dan Basse, founder and president of AgResource Company, addressed their, "Top 10 Variable Countdown" list impacting the 2026 grain market, while Christina Wood, GrainFox director of marketing and communications, announced Sinoa— GrainFox's new AI tool.

years," he said.

3 – U.S.–China relations:

Basse described the relationship as an ongoing economic conflict, particularly around soybeans, and said the global ag trade landscape is becoming increasingly fragmented as countries align with competing power centres.

2 – Canada–China relations:

Townsend said unresolved trade disputes, including restrictions on Canadian canola, continue to slow negotiations. He added that the lack of perceived equality between the two countries complicates efforts to restore full market access.

1 – Donald Trump:

Basse said former U.S. president Donald Trump remains the biggest wildcard in global markets due to uncertainty around tariffs, trade policy and political influence.

"I have not been at an ag conference this year that didn't bring up President Trump as being the big unknown," he said.

GrainFox also announced the launch of Sinoa, an AI-powered grain market assistant it describes as a major AgTech advancement heading into

2026.

"Sinoa is a major leap forward for AI-powered ag intelligence," said Mark Lepp, CEO and founder of GrainFox. "This isn't just a chatbot — it's an AI grain market analyst built for real-world decision-makers."

According to GrainFox, Sinoa draws from more than 20 years of proprietary data, including historical pricing, fundamentals and seasonality, to generate real-time, explainable insights tailored to individual users. Responses are built through live analysis rather than prewritten answers.

"Producers and commercial agribusinesses don't just get a market summary — they get a deeper, personalized understanding of what that information means for them," said Richard Surrendrakumar, GrainFox's chief product officer.

Access to Sinoa requires a GrainFox membership subscription. More information, including a recording of the Bin to Bank webinar, is available through GrainFox's website and social media channels.

> CANADIAN FOODGRAINS BANK, FROM PG. 20

able to support 1.1 million people. In a world where there's too much hunger, every person that we support makes a difference, whether that's emergency food in times of crisis such as war or drought or whether that's long-term sustainability where we are seeing families able to grow their livelihoods and thrive. Bunge's support is definitely making a difference, and we're very grateful for it."

Andy Harrington, executive director of the Foodgrains Bank, also shared a few reflections for the occasion.

"Over the past 10 years, Viterra — now Bunge — has played a vital role in helping us respond to global hunger," he said.

"Their support has made it easier for Canadian farmers to give, and that generosity has translated to tangible impacts for families experiencing hunger around the world. Together, under the new Bunge name, we will continue to make a difference for the 720 million people around the world experiencing hunger and food insecurity."

In the past decade, the partnership has facilitated the donation proceeds of thousands of tonnes of grain, helping to fund emergency food assistance, nutrition programs and agricultural training implemented by local partners of Foodgrains Bank members.

Canadian Foodgrains Bank programs are undertaken with federal government support provided through Global Affairs Canada. Assistance from the Foodgrains Bank is provided through its member agen-

cies, which work with local partners in the developing world.

In Manitoba, more than 30 growing projects took place in 2024 spanning more than 3,000 acres of land, with groups of farmers working together to harvest a crop and donate the proceeds to the Foodgrains Bank. This year's numbers aren't available yet, but these altruistic efforts continue in 2025 and 2026, along with other fundraising efforts from Manitobans to support this work.

Winnipeg Livestock sees strongest cattle market in years

By E. Antonio

Shrinking herds, strong demand push prices to new highs

Winnipeg Livestock Sales Ltd. is reporting one of the strongest cattle markets in recent memory, fuelled by shrinking herd numbers and growing global demand for North American beef.

Field representative Scott Anderson said the auction yard continues to see steady volumes move through the ring, even as prices surge.

"In the past year, we've seen cattle prices double from previous all-time highs," he said. "That is why things are so expensive in all areas of the market. The supply isn't there while the demand is — and the cost of beef is going to the moon."

He said the strength stretches beyond Canada's borders with foreign buyers increasingly active in the market.

"North America is exporting more beef than ever as foreign buyers are choosing North American products," Anderson said. "It's encouraging to see the market stay this strong even though there seem to be fewer cattle available each year."

Lower feed costs have also helped support pricing, Anderson added. Weather has not had a significant effect this year, allowing markets to remain relatively stable.

One moment of uncertainty came when former U.S. president Donald Trump suggested beef prices should drop for consumers — commentary that briefly shook cattle markets.

"Some comments suggested beef should be cheaper for consumers, but that comes at the expense of the producers," Anderson said. "If retail prices go down, cattle prices have to go down too. That created a general sense of negativity in the markets."

The situation has since settled after signs the U.S. government intends to support beef producers.

"At the end of the day, the question we're always asking is, what is a market-ready fat steer going to be worth? Producers work back from there," he said.

Winnipeg Livestock Sales hosts cattle auctions every Friday and goat and sheep sales on the first and third Wednesday of each month. The business also acts as an agent for The Electronic Auction Market (TEAM), which runs virtual sales on Fridays.

Those online platforms have widened access for buyers and sellers, Anderson said. Brokers often represent dozens of producers, bringing competition into the ring from well beyond Manitoba.

"It's buyer beware. Good cattle bring higher prices with the beauty being in the eye of the beholder," he said. "Our job is to sort and show the cattle well so buyers know what to expect."

He said auction markets also provide financial security producers don't always receive in private sales.

"When livestock sells here, producers can pick up their cheque that day. There's no worry about being scammed by a buyer," he said. "Through a licensed and bonded market, you know you'll be looked after."

Heading into 2026, Anderson expects strength to continue and encourages producers to keep cattle in top condition if they want to capture the top end of the market.

"With prices at all-time highs, there are big discounts on animals that come into the ring looking tired or unwell," he said. "Cattle that look bouncy and shiny always bring a premium. Keep them vaccinated, fed and cared for — you never want them sick or dead before they reach the market."



SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Winnipeg Livestock Sales hosts weekly cattle auctions and biweekly sheep and goat sales, and says the cattle market remains strong heading into the new year.



Canada's Food Price Report expects family of four to pay almost \$1,000 more for food in 2026

By Patricia Barrett

As if they weren't already struggling to afford food, Canadian consumers are in for another food price hike that predicts a family of four having to pay almost \$1,000 more for food in 2026.

The 16th annual Food Price Report from Canadian researchers is painting a bleak picture of food costs.

Led by Dr. Sylvain Charlebois from Dalhousie University, a forecasting team and several academics from universities across the country, the report titled *From tariffs to tables: tracking the forces behind Canada's 2026 food prices* expects overall food prices to increase by four to six per cent in 2026.

The report estimates that a family of four, consisting of a man (aged 31-50), a woman (aged 31-50), a boy (aged 14-18), and a girl (aged 9-13), could spend up to a maximum of \$17,571.79, an increase of up to \$994.63 over last year.

"Food affordability remains a top concern for Canadian consumers. A quarter of Canadian households are considered food insecure and nearly 2.2 million people visited food banks in Canada on a monthly basis this year," states the report. "Although inflation was relatively steady in 2025, food prices are still 27% higher than they were five years ago, and consumers are feeling the strain of these higher prices at the grocery store.

Nearly 85% of Canadians reported that their household food expenses have increased in the past 12 months. Moving into 2026, this is unlikely to change."

Last year, the researchers predicted a family of four having to spend up to a maximum total of \$16,833.67 on food. The report's prediction was pretty close. Based on "observed changes" in 2025, a family of four spent 16,577.16, a difference of \$256.51.

Consumers won't be getting a break on the cost of basic food items in 2026.

The researchers are anticipating price increases across major food categories such as bakery (2-4 per cent increase), dairy and eggs (2-4 per cent),

vegetables (3-5 per cent), fruit (1-3 per cent) and seafood (1-2 per cent). Meat prices are expected to spike by 5-7 per cent. Restaurant food is anticipated to cost 4-6 per cent more.

To derive their estimates, researchers used a number of factors that can impact Canadian food prices including the effects of the climate crisis on food production, U.S. president Donald Trump's tariffs and trade disputes, shifts in the food manufacturing and retail landscape, labour markets, policy changes and the Canadian dollar outlook.

"This year, all eyes were on the on-

What's *Your* Christmas Story?

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

From Pg. 18

THE FOOTPRINTS OF SOMETHING

It was a snowy night, and I was trying to sleep, but I couldn't stop staring out the window. The snow was falling so gently, and I couldn't wait to build a snowman in the morning. Then suddenly, I saw something strange—a big shadow moving outside! It looked like a tall figure walking in the snow. I couldn't see it clearly because it was dark, but it made me so scared and curious. I kept thinking all night, what if it was a monster? Or a ghost?

When morning came, I jumped out of bed, brushed my teeth, and got dressed super fast. I ran downstairs and asked, "Mom, can I go outside?"

She said, "Not yet, have breakfast first."

I sighed, "Okay..." After eating my cereal, I started to put on my winter clothes.

Mom said, "Wait, take Goldie for a walk!"

"Fine," I said, and grabbed Goldie's leash.

As I walked Goldie through the fresh snow, I saw something that made me stop. There were huge footprints—way bigger than a normal person's! My heart started beating faster. I decided to follow them. They led me all the way to the forest. I started thinking—what if it was that same figure I saw last night? I was a bit scared, but I felt braver because Goldie was with me.

The footprints stopped near a cave. I felt nervous, but I wanted to know the truth. I took a deep breath and went inside with Goldie. And there — right in front of me—was a real, sleeping Yeti! I gasped and almost screamed! I grabbed Goldie, and we ran out of there as fast as we could.

When I got home, Mom asked, "Where were

you?"

I said, "Just walking the dog!" She wrapped Goldie in a blanket and gave me hot chocolate. I sat on the couch, still thinking about the Yeti. Was it really real?

That evening, during dinner, I was so lost in thought that I barely ate. Later, I went to my room and found a book about Yetis. It said they're just made-up creatures. But if they're not real—then what did I see? I was so confused! Then I remembered my homework question in ELA: "Do you think Yetis are real?" I wrote, "Yes, I think they are ... but I'm not sure."

That night, I looked out the window again. The same shadow was there! This time I couldn't take it anymore—I got dressed quietly and sneaked outside. The Yeti saw me and started running! I chased it through the snow as fast as I could. I even found an old bike and started pedaling after it. But it was too fast, and I lost it. I was so upset, but I went home and climbed back through my window before Mom could notice.

The next morning, Mom let me go out early again. I went straight to the cave. I couldn't believe what I saw—the Yeti was there again! But then it did something weird ... it unzipped its fur suit! And out came my three friends: Jacob, Mark, and Edie!

They were laughing so hard. "You should've seen your face!" they said between giggles.

I couldn't believe it. It was all a prank! I started laughing too. I invited them over to my house and told my family everything. Everyone laughed so much that my cheeks hurt.

That night, we all drank hot chocolate and told funny stories. I learned one thing for sure—there may not be real Yetis, but there are definitely real

friends who love to make you laugh!

—Ailin Raimzhanova,
Gr. 6, Parkland Elementary School

MY FUN CHRISTMAS!

La La La! Hi, I am Savannah and I love Christmas. Every year I do lots of singing at my gatherings. Although it's loud, I love to do it. My favourite song is *Joy To The World*.

I also love to go to church. It is so fun! But the most important part is learning about God. I love God more than anything.

Every year I help decorate the tree and I love to do it. I did not put on the star this year. I have a mitten that I put on the tree and every morning I check it and I sometimes find something in it.

On Christmas I always put Christmas presents under the tree and on Christmas Day we open them and it is so, so, so, so exciting and fun!

—Savannah, Gr. 2, Blumenfeld School

GRAYSON'S ADVENTURE

One day Grayson was playing outside, looked down at the ground, and saw lots of footsteps. He followed the footsteps. When the footsteps ended, he saw a humongous Christmas tree.

He looked up in the sky and saw something. It flew lower and lower. When it was close enough to see, it was the legendary Noorah, the arctic fox who lights up the night sky for Santa by shining the Northern Lights. She wanted Grayson to hop on her back to go somewhere. He hopped on her

Continued on page 31

> FOOD PRICE REPORT, FROM PG. 23

going trade dispute with the United States. The inflationary impacts of tariffs and counter-tariffs will continue to be felt next year as trade tensions reshape the economic landscape. The dispute has created uncertainty in the market, as well as supply chain disruptions and declining demand for Canadian exports," states the report. "With that said, Canada is actively strengthening relationships with other international trading partners to build resilience and global competitiveness. Canada's removal of almost all counter-tariffs on U.S. imports should also help ease upward inflationary pressures on goods."

The federal Liberal government's GST/HST tax break on most food items for all Canadians from mid-December 2024 to mid-February 2025 was "staggering" in terms of its effect on food inflation, dropping to -0.6 per cent in January, the first time food inflation had been in negative territory since 2017, states the report.

Depending on what part of the country they live in, Canadians could be paying below or above the national average of food price increases. Last year, Manitoba and Ontario paid more for food but showed "average" changes. British Columbia, Saskatchewan and the three maritime provinces paid above the national average. Alberta, Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador paid below the national average increase in the cost of food.

The forecast for 2026 shows Manitoba and B.C. falling below the national average of food price increases.

"Some provinces are projected to shift direction compared to 2025 - for example, British Columbia and Manitoba are expected to fall below the national average in 2026 after performing above or at average levels in 2025. In contrast, Ontario and Quebec are forecasted to see above-average food price increases next year," states the report. "The estimates offer important guidance for policymakers and con-

For 2026, the report uses the same food categories as previous years and makes the predictions show in Table 1:

TABLE 1: 2026 FOOD PRICE FORECASTS

CATEGORIES	Anticipated Change %	Uncertainty Range*
Bakery	2% - 4%	+/- 0.85
Dairy & Eggs	2% - 4%	+/- 0.40
Fruit	1% - 3%	+/- 0.40
Meat	5% - 7%	+/- 1.12
Other	4% - 6%	+/- 0.87
Restaurants	4% - 6%	+/- 0.87
Seafood	1% - 2%	+/- 0.40
Vegetables	3% - 5%	+/- 0.85
Total Increase in Food Prices	4% - 6%	+/- 0.70

*The uncertainty range tells you how much the actual price change could reasonably vary above or below the forecast, based on historical volatility and model error (1 standard deviation).



CANADA'S FOOD PRICE REPORT 2026

A family of four are expected to pay \$994.63 more for food in 2026 compared to last year.

sumers by highlighting emerging regional pressures and potential affordability challenges across the country."

Despite some Canadians facing less severe food price increases, American tariffs will continue to impact inflation and global markets, and it's "unlikely" food prices will notably decrease anytime soon.

"For the food industry, tariffs have meant increased costs and price volatility for businesses, which ultimately get passed down to Canadian consumers at the store," states the report. "While the isolated impact of the tariffs on food prices is difficult to gauge, the tariffs and counter-tariffs have increased grocery costs."

sports & recreation

Hawks fall to Winnipeg teams

By Lorne Stelmach

The male U18 Pembina Valley Hawks had a tough weekend in dropping a pair of games to the top teams in the league.

After falling 7-2 against the Winnipeg Bruins Friday night, the Hawks were edged 5-3 by the Winnipeg Thrashers Sunday.

Four unanswered second period goals did in Pembina Valley against the Bruins, as it expanded Winnipeg's 2-1 first period lead to 6-1 after 40 minutes.

Cole Secord's 17th goal of the season partway through the first period was the lone marker for the Hawks, who were outshot 46-26. Brody Peters stopped 23 of 28 shots before being relieved by Koen Bleznuk, who then stopped 16 of 18 shots.

The Hawks let the game against the second-place Thrashers get away from them as they held a 3-1 lead partway through the second period before Winnipeg got one back and then put it away with three more in the final frame.

Secord had his 18th of the season with the other goals coming from Mason Leite and Logan Delicate. Peters made 37 saves as the shots were 42-26



PHOTO BY RICK HIEBERT/VOICE

Pembina Valley Hawks netminder Brody Peters keeps a sharp eye on the incoming puck in Sunday's 5-3 loss to the Thrashers.

in favour of Winnipeg.

It left the Hawks sitting in seventh place at 15-9-0-1 for 31 points, which has them five and six points behind

Eastman and Southwest and just one point ahead of Parkland.

Pembina Valley has a good chance to close the gap this week with a pair

of games against Eastman Wednesday and Saturday before hosting the Thrashers Sunday.

Female Hawks fall to Ice, best Lightning

By Lorne Stelmach

The female U18 Pembina Valley Hawks had a pair of games this past week against teams at the opposite end of the standings.

After by edged 2-1 last Wednesday by the Winnipeg Ice, who closed out the week in first place, the Hawks then outscored the last-place Interlake Lightning 7-5 on Saturday.

The Hawks battled hard with the Ice—who came into the game in second place in the standings behind the

Eastman Selects—but Pembina Valley came up just short.

The Ice grabbed a 2-0 lead in the first period before Casey O'Brien's seventh goal of the season brought the Hawks to within one in the second, but Pembina Valley was not able to get the equalizer.

Madison Froese helped keep the Hawks in the game with 26 saves as the Ice had a slim 28-27 edge in shots on goal.

Against Interlake, Pembina Valley

led 2-1 after one period before the game was tied at three at the second intermission.

The third period then saw an offensive explosion with the Lightning initially taking a 5-3 lead before the Hawks closed it out with four unanswered goals.

Payton Manness had a pair of goals for the Hawks with the other markers coming from Rylee Harms, Bree Pearce, Leah Klassen, Sophia Cox, and Delaney Darby. Hannah Bannis-

ter made 24 saves as the Hawks outshot Interlake 40-29.

Pembina Valley remains in seventh place at 6-8-0-1 for 13 points, but they are just one point back of the Winnipeg Avros and Central Plains and three behind Yellowhead.

The Hawks have a pair of tough games this week against the top two teams, facing Eastman Friday and the Winnipeg Ice Sunday. In between those two games is a rematch against last-place Interlake on Saturday.



Junior curlers shine



PHOTO BY RICK HIEBERT/
VOICE

The Winkler Curling Club hosted Curl Manitoba's U13 and U15 youth spiels last weekend, drawing teams from all across the region and beyond. Above: Winkler's Team Krahn (left) and Team Voth (right) in action in the U15 event. Left: The U13 tournament was won by Winkler's Team Suderman. Fellow Winklerites Team B. Friesen clinched silver while Altona's Team Froese took home bronze. Right: Altona's Team Friesen came in second behind Fargo Moorehead's Team Hoff on the U15 side. Coming in third was Winkler's Team Krahn.



Royals' road game postponed; Bombers edged by Red River

By Annaliese Meier

The Winkler Royals were unable to take the ice Friday night after their road game in Warren was postponed due to a mechanical issue affecting the ice. The contest will be rescheduled at a later date.

Despite the idle weekend, Winkler remains atop the SEMHL standings at 7-0-1, holding first place with 15 points through eight games. The Royals return to action at home this week, hosting the Red River Wild on Friday, Dec. 19, before welcoming Ile des Chenes on Sunday, Dec. 21.

MORDEN EDGED DESPITE THIRD-PERIOD RALLY

The Morden Bombers were in action once last week, dropping a hard-fought 5-4 decision to the Red River Wild.

Red River built a 3-0 lead through the opening period before Morden mounted a third-period push. Cade Kowalski and Mike Rey scored just 25 seconds apart early in the final frame to pull the Bombers within one, and Jory Mullin added a late goal to keep the game close.

Red River reclaimed momentum with goals from Troy Lehmann and Jonah Wasylak, the latter sealing the outcome with an empty-net marker that stood as the game-winner. Morden outshot Red River but was unable to capitalize on three power-play opportunities.

Aaron Brunn made 33 saves for Morden in the loss.

The Bombers now sit at 5-5 on the season and will not return to action until Dec. 28, when they host Red River in a rematch.

WILD EARN ROAD WIN, FACE BUSY WEEKEND

The Red River Wild picked up a key 5-4 win over the Morden Bombers, building an early three-goal cushion before holding off a late Morden push. Jonah Wasylak led the offence with two goals, including an empty-net marker that stood as the game-winner.

ner, while Jayden Catellier earned the victory in goal with 40 saves.

Red River returns to action this weekend with a pair of road games, visiting the league-leading Winkler Royals on Friday, Dec. 19, before travelling to Warren on Sunday, Dec. 21.

Mudbugs split pair of games in HTJHL play

By Annaliese Meier

The Red River Mudbugs split a pair of games in Hanover Tache Junior Hockey League action last week and sit eighth in the standings with a 7-8 record through 15 games.

Red River opened the week with a 7-4 road loss to Macdonald on Friday, Dec. 12. Goals for the Mudbugs came from Reegan Stoesz and Tyson Froese in the first period, followed by third-period tallies from Ethan Clace and Gavin Hildebrandt.

The Mudbugs rebounded at home on Sunday, Dec. 14 with a 4-3 win over Landmark. Red River scored once in the second period before adding three third-period goals from Griffin Hilderbrand, Caden Krahn and Xander Dyck, with Dyck netting the game-winner.

Red River returns to action Thursday, Dec. 18 at 8 p.m. when they host the East St. Paul Gators, followed by a Saturday, Dec. 20 road game in Niverville at 8 p.m.

Flags fly high at Twisters Multicultural Night



PHOTOS BY SIOBHAN MAAS/VOICE

The Pembina Valley Twisters welcomed newcomers representing 10 nations to watch their Saturday night game. For some, it was their very first hockey game.

By Siobhan Maas

Ten nations were represented at Friday's Pembina Valley Twisters' game for Multicultural Night, an opportunity for many newcomers living in the Morris area to watch a hockey game for the first time.

"We live in small communities and it's amazing to see the diversity that lives here," noted Kalia Kruse, a settlement worker with Regional Connections. "The world comes to us and events like this have citizens meeting

people from other countries. We get to see how people are different."

Sandra Sanchez moved from El Salvador 10 years ago and watched her first hockey game at the event.

"I don't understand hockey, only softball and soccer," she said. "But I love winter. I love feeling the cold on my face."

Pat Schmitke, co-owner of the MMJHL team was "excited to share his love for the game" with the community's newest members.



Winkler Flyers losing streak hits four games

By Ashleigh Viveiros

The Winkler Flyers are looking to get back on the winning side of things after a tough few days in MJHL action.

The junior team's losing streak hit four games after falling to Neepawa, Niverville, and Winnipeg this past week.

Playing in Neepawa last Wednesday, the home team was up 2-0 before Niklas Gudmundson got the Flyers

on the board in the first.

Liam Carlone tied it up early in the second and Gudmundson got his second of the night a few minutes later, but the Titans added three that period to head into the final frame up 5-3. They added two more unanswered goals to secure a 7-3 victory.

Liam Russell was called to make 27 saves in net for Winkler. The Flyers outshot the Titans 35-34.

The team lost by an even wider

margin a few nights later in Niverville against division front-runner the Nighthawks.

Kam Thomas and Tanner George scored for Winkler, but the Nighthawks got eight goals in response to take the night.

Both Russell and Leif Ekblad spent time in net for the Flyers. Ekblad made 17 saves off the 23 he faced. Russell stopped 11 out of 13. Winkler's offensive lines sent 20 the other way.

Things were a bit more evenly matched Sunday night in Winkler against the last-place Winnipeg Monarchs.

Winnipeg was up 2-0 when George scored late in the second. Noah Stott got the tying goal a few minutes into the third, and then Charlie Weaver did the same 10 minutes later. But when the Monarchs scored with less than two minutes to go on the clock, Winkler wasn't able to catch up. The visitors took it 4-3.

Winkler won the shots battle 48-25. Ekblad made 21 saves in net.

Winkler closes out 2025 with an away game in Selkirk Tuesday night, in Steinbach Friday, and then back in Winkler against the Blues on Saturday.

The Flyers at press time were in fifth place in the MGEU East Division with a 14-13-1-2 record and 31 points. They trail the fourth-place Steelers by just one point. Topping the standings are the Nighthawks in first, the Pistons in second, and the Terriers in third place.

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We also extend our sincere thanks to our hardworking team in Administration, Editorial, Sales & Marketing, Graphic Design and Distribution, whose dedication brings each edition to life week after week.

Wishing you peace, joy and a prosperous New Year.

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WINKLER POLICE BOARD PUBLIC NOTICE

The Winkler Police Board quarterly meetings will be held on **January 21, April 8, July 8, and October 14 of 2026 at 12:30 p.m.**

Meetings are open to the public and will be held at City Hall, 185 Main Street, Winkler, MB.

Anyone wishing to come forward with a delegation is asked to contact the City of Winkler Administration Office a minimum of 14 days prior to the meeting.

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OBITUARY



Bishop Peter Elias

"The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." In the morning of December 4, 2025, God called home a beloved husband, dad, grandpa, and great-grandpa, a bishop, and a friend and mentor to many, Peter Elias.

Left to cherish his memory is his wife, Susan; daughter Rachel and John Driedger, and children Susanna, (and Zachary), Bethany and Peter Fehr, Abigail, Zipporah, and Keren; daughter Rebecca and Bill Friesen, and children Sasha and Maria Friesen, (Liam, Logan, Lincoln, and Millie), Roseanne and Andrew Wieler, (Brooklyn and Natalie), Marcus and Anna Friesen, Kayli, Jayna, Twila, Ivana, and Emmalyn; son Andrew and Katherine Elias, and children Angela and Rodney Peters (Cowen and Leander), Alexandria and Willy Thiessen (and Korbin), Alayna and Trevor Friesen, Andrianna, and Arlinda; daughter Esther and Ben Friesen, and children Hannah, Ruthanne, Lillian, Samuel, Naomi, and Josiah; son Peter and Kathy Elias, and children Kyle, Jerusha, Michaella, and Joda; son Daniel and Leah Elias, and children Myles and Cassidy; two brothers and three sisters and their families, his mother-in-law Mary Heppner, two brothers-in-law and three sisters-in-law and their families, and the entire church family and many friends.

The funeral Service was held on Thursday, December 11, 2025, followed by a burial at the Blumenfeld Cemetery.

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NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING



**UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE PLANNING ACT
NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING**

On the date, time and location shown below, a **PUBLIC HEARING** will be held pursuant to Section 46 of *The Planning Act of Manitoba* to receive representations from any persons who wish to make them in respect of the following matter:

THE MSTW PLANNING DISTRICT BY-LAW 1-2025 TO ADOPT A REVISED MSTW PLANNING DISTRICT DEVELOPMENT PLAN TO REPLACE BY-LAW 1-2014, AS AMENDMENTED.

HEARING LOCATION: RM OF STANLEY COUNCIL CHAMBERS
23111 MB-14 #1, Stanley, MB R6P 0B1

DATE AND TIME: JANUARY 7, 2026 at 7:00 P.M.

GENERAL INTENT OF BY-LAW 1-2025: The primary goals of this development plan are to provide a framework to guide decisions on the management of land use, infrastructure, environment and transportation to meet the needs of the citizens of the Planning District. The Plan's vision includes preserving and enhancing the district's livability through principles of land use management, sustainable development, conservation of agriculture and natural environmental assets, economic development and nurturing regional partnerships.

AREA AFFECTED: All lands within the boundaries of the City of Morden, RM of Stanley, RM of Thompson and City of Winkler

FOR INFORMATION CONTACT: Glen Wieler, MSTW General Manager
180 5th Street, Unit D
Morden MB R6M 1C9
Phone (204) 822-6223

A copy of the above proposal and supporting material may be inspected at the location noted above during normal office hours, Monday to Friday. Copies may be made and extracts taken therefrom, upon request.

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EMPLOYMENT

SUMMER EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES



SEASONAL JOB OPPORTUNITIES

TERM: early May – end of August 2026 (40 hours per week)

PROGRAM ASSISTANT

DUTIES: The position requires water testing, computer work for watershed planning, project monitoring and compliance checks, shelterbelt maintenance, trail maintenance, participating in educational events and tours, newspaper article writing and assisting with water and soil projects within the district, and other duties as assigned. **This position is based out of Manitou, MB, but involves travel throughout the entire district.** A district vehicle will be provided and/or mileage will be reimbursed.

TECHNICIAN ASSISTANT

DUTIES: Assisting with water and soil projects within the district; including surveying, construction, hauling supplies and materials to job sites, water testing, computer work for watershed planning, shelterbelt maintenance, trail maintenance, participating in educational events and tours. This position requires you to work in wooded areas, swampy lands, and inclement weather. You will likely encounter insects, snakes and other outdoor rodents, so you must be comfortable working independently in this setting. **This position is based out of Manitou, MB, but involves travel throughout the entire district.** A district vehicle will be provided.

Applicants must meet the requirements of the Canada Summer Jobs and Green Team eligibility criteria (be between the ages of 16 – 29), have a valid drivers license, be physically fit and able to work outdoors in all weather, be self-motivated, demonstrate strong communication skills, have the ability to work independently, and experience with operation of quad, various mowers, trimmers is considered an asset.
The successful candidate must provide their own transportation to and from the office each day.

Please submit resumes with 3 references and cover letter to:
Pembina Valley Watershed District, Attn: Lexine LeBlanc
Box 659, 261 Main Street, Manitou, MB R0G 1G0
Phone: 204-242-3267 Fax: 204-242-3281
E-mail: administrator@pvwd.ca

Application Deadline: Wednesday January 14, 2026
PVWD would like to thank all applicants, however, only applicants selected for an interview will be contacted.

What's *Your* Christmas Story?

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

From Pg. 18

back and she flew through the sky super fast.

Noorah brought Grayson to Santa and his sleigh in the sky. Grayson hopped into Santa's sleigh. As he watched, Noorah shone the Northern Lights into the sky and it was a beautiful sight to see.

Out of nowhere, a blue bear stuffie came onto Grayson's lap. He loved the stuffie so much he said thank you to Noorah a thousand times. He wished he could keep it forever.

Santa told him he could keep the blue bear and Grayson's eyes sparkled because he was so happy.

—Grayson Sumner, Gr. 3, Winkler

A MAGICAL JOURNEY

Julie shook a snow globe and found herself transported to a magical winter wonderland. It was a white winter place. There were animals, trees, and there were acorns everywhere.

Julie walked on. Then after awhile she looked down and she noticed her hands were furry and her ears were much, much longer and she had a cotton tail. She had turned into a rabbit!

She hopped on and noticed a sign that said "Bethlehem." Then she went to a stable and saw a baby lying in a manger. And his name was Jesus.

—Everly Harder, Gr. 3, Reinland

A CHRISTMAS EVE SURPRISE

"Wait for me!" Jorden shouted as he ran up the hill, snow flying up behind him.

"Hurry up!" Emma called back.

"Come on!" "Slow poke!" Dex and Cleo yelled, already on top of the hill, sleds in hand.

"Okay, I'm here," Jorden panted, out of breath from climbing up the hill.

"I'll go first!" hollered Cleo. She grabbed her sled, took a few steps back, and took off down the hill.

"Me next!" Emma exclaimed, as she followed Cleo down the hill. The other two followed and soon they were all running up the hill and sledding down non-stop.

Before long, it began to get dark and the friends started to walk back home, when suddenly, they saw something fall from the sky about twenty feet away.

"Let's go check it out!" yelled Dex, already running toward the object. The others followed behind and soon

found themselves standing beside Dex, looking down at what had fallen. It was a large bag, filled with colorful presents.

"No way, it can't be, is it?" said Emma.

"Santa's bag of presents!" exclaimed Dex.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, are you sure?" questioned Jorden.

"Of course it is, it's Christmas Eve after all" Cleo said confidently.

"Well, what should we do with it then?" asked Emma.

"Keep it!" shouted Jorden.

"No way, if it is actually Santa's, we should give it back" argued Emma, ignoring Jorden's idea.

"But how?" asked Dex.

The four of them fell silent, unsure what to do, when finally Cleo spoke up, "Maybe we should look inside, there might be something that can tell us how to find Santa."

"I still think we should keep it" mumbled Jorden, arms crossed.

Emma stuck her head inside the bag and searched for a clue. At first she didn't see anything, then, just as she was about to give up, something caught her attention. Out of the corner of her eye she saw a shimmering piece of silver paper with writing on it. Emma grabbed the piece of paper and slowly stood up.

"What is it?" asked Dex.

"I don't know" whispered Emma uncertainly.

"Let me see that" demanded Jorden, ripping the paper out of Emma's hand. Jorden flipped the piece of paper over and read it to himself.

"What does it say?" asked Cleo with anticipation.

"It's useless," scoffed Jorden, as he threw the paper to the ground in frustration.

"It's just a name tag" he said.

"Let me see that" challenged Dex, pulling it out from Jorden's hands. Just then, gold lettering started to appear on the other side.

"Whoaaaa" gasped Dex in amazement, as he started to read the words that were slowly appearing. The paper read:

If you can see this message that means that I have lost my bag of presents, in order to get them back to me and save Christmas, you must contact the elves.

"Well, what now?" asked Cleo confused.

"I guess we have to find the elves, but how?" responded Emma.

"Or, we could just keep it and move

on," suggested Jorden.

"NO!" shouted all of the friends in unison.

"Ok, ok" said Jorden, finally dropping the idea.

"Let's look around some more and see if we can find anything else that could lead us to the elves," suggested Dex.

The four of them all started looking around the bag when finally one of them spotted something.

"Look, there's a phone number on the bottom!" said Emma excitedly.

"Does anyone have their phone?" asked Dex.

"No, nope, not me" they all responded, as they checked their pockets.

"My house isn't far from here, I can run back and get mine" offered Cleo.

"Okay, go," encouraged Emma as Cleo started to take off.

The three of them waited for Cleo to come back. After about five minutes, Cleo returned out of breath, phone in hand. She started to dial the number from the bag. The first time around there was no answer, but the second time she called, there, was, an answer. "Hello, you've reached the North Pole," said a small cheerful voice on the other end.

"Hi," answered Dex. "Umm, we have Santa's toy bag and the note said we were supposed to call you."

"Oh yes, we've been hoping someone would call, thank you!" said the elf, sounding relieved. You could hear a keyboard clicking on the other end when finally the elf said. "We found your location, and we'll be there in ten minutes!" exclaimed the elf and hung up.

"Well, I guess we just wait then" said Cleo letting out a deep breath.

"This is so cool. See, aren't you glad we did the right thing Jordan?" asked Dex.

"I guess but it still would have been fun to keep the presents."

—Zaharra Hildebrand, Gr. 8, Morden

DINO PATROL TO THE RESCUE

It was Christmas Eve night. Santa was delivering presents. While flying over the dinosaur forest one of his present sacks fell out of the sleigh and onto Holo, who let out a ROAR!

Tri and the rest of the dinosaur gang came running.

"Oh no," cried Tri. "It's one of Santa's present sacks! A little help?"

Everyone laughed.

"Ok," said Stomper, pulling the sack

off Holo.

"What do we do?" asked Rocky.

"What we always do," said Speed. "We make a plan!"

"Right," said Rocky.

"This is the plan," exclaimed Tri. "Pack up steak, cookies and hot cocoa and we will go after Santa and give him his sack back before it's too late, ok?"

"OK!" everyone chorused.

TOOT TOOT TOOT!!

Holo looked into the darkness. "It's the train," he exclaimed!

"If we are fast enough we can catch it," Allo said grabbing Santa's sack. Everyone took off in a rush toward the train, grabbing food as they went.

"Jump," shouted Brave!

THUMP!

They all landed in the boxcar. All of a sudden the door slammed shut.

TOOT TOOT!

The train took off. An hour later, Rex called out, "I see Santa!"

Sure enough, Santa was on the roof of a house.

"Santa's leaving!" cried Tree.

"How do we get out?" Splasher asked.

"Leave it to me," Pack said.

"And me too!" exclaimed Spike.

BAM BAM BAM! Pack thumped against the door with his head and Spike hammered the door with his clubbed tail.

CRACK!

The boxcar door broke open and they all tumbled out, laughing.

"Guys! Santa's flying away!" shouted Dawn.

"She's right," Tri said. "He's getting away!"

"Run," Speed shouted!

They ran until they reached the bottom of a tall cliff.

"This is your job, Brave," Tri said.

"Aye aye, sir!" Brave responded.

Brave picked up Santa's sack with his teeth and climbed and climbed and climbed. At the top of the cliff, Brave jumped, throwing Santa's sack toward the sleigh. Santa's sack flew through the air and landed in the back of his sleigh!

"Mission accomplished!" cheered Brave.

Then they all returned home. The next day they found presents everywhere!

—Anastasia Klassen, Gr. 3, La Rivière

CHECK OUT NEXT WEEK'S EDITION FOR A FEW MORE HONOURABLE MENTIONS!

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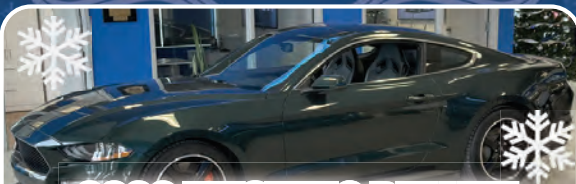
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season delivers all the
best to you and your
loved ones!**

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who have supported our
business, thank you for
believing in us. It's been a
pleasure serving you, and
we look forward to seeing
you in 2026.

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