

# Plain & Valley

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## Volunteering in Nigeria

Kim Kennett's experiences volunteering with CUSO-VSO for a year in Nigeria

BY KIM KENNETT

On October 15, 2010, I left Saskatchewan to travel to Nigeria to work with CUSO-VSO for a year. CUSO-VSO (Canadian University Overseas/Voluntary Services Overseas) recruits volunteers to work on long-term sustainable solutions through community economic development, education, democratic governance and the sustainable use of natural resources. Volunteers help build social infrastructure by passing on their expertise and experience to those who need it most, working collaboratively with local people to equip them with the skills they need to exercise their basic human rights.

My placement is in a town called Kafanchan in central Nigeria, about two hours northeast of Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. My employer is the Fantsuam Foundation, a Nigerian not-for-profit organization focused on alleviating poverty and disadvantage. Volunteers such as myself are provided with accommodation as well as paid a "living wage" of \$10.40 a day to cover food and other day-to-day necessities. It's not much by Canadian standards, but quite sufficient here.

I am here in Nigeria to work with Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVCs) in an HIV/AIDS program. As a "Small Business Advisor," I will be working with youth aged 13-21 years to help them develop business and vocational skills to become more self-sufficient.

For orphaned and vulnerable children in Nigeria, life is often a daily struggle for survival. Many face tremendous pressures in having to care for family members who are ill (and they themselves may also have HIV/AIDS), manage a small business to provide for their families—and somehow

manage to attend school and pay school fees. This is an incredible burden for a child. Many two-parent families with healthy family members struggle to survive in the current economic climate in Nigeria.

Thousands of children every year in Nigeria are rescued from situations involving sexual abuse/

"Ghana is Africa for beginners; Nigeria is Africa for the very experienced traveller."

exploitation, domestic servitude, trafficking or forced child marriage and are placed in orphanages. In many instances, the child has been accused of being a "secre" or witch and have been tortured. Belief in Juju or witchcraft is still very common here.

There are currently 195 children enrolled as OVCs with the Fantsuam Foundation. Enrollment in the program is available to children from infant to 17 years. Priority is also given to those children who are considered most vulnerable, those children who are HIV positive (accounts for approximately 10 per cent of OVCs); from a household where one or both parents have died as a result of HIV/AIDS (i.e., single or double orphan); caring for one or both parents who are sick with HIV/AIDS; and/or at risk of physical abuse, sexual exploitation, starvation or other plights.

Since 2001, the Fantsuam Foundation has been providing supports for OVCs through the provision of various supports, including school fees, uniforms, shoes, bags and exercise books; free medical treatment and counselling services; and microfi-

nance loans to help finance small businesses.

Fantsuam works with the Gidenbege Orphanage for Boys run by ECWA (Evangelical Church of West Africa) which currently houses 22 OVCs. Over the past year, five boys were reintegrated with families through continuous dialogue with parents, nutritional support and

counselling. Fantsuam also placed children with two families in the community.

At present, there are no supports offered by Fantsuam for OVCs over the age of 17. One of my tasks is to build a program that will support a broader age range of children through a skills acquisition program focusing on leadership/life skills, business skills, computer skills and vocational skills. Included in the program will be apprenticeship opportunities.

Many of these children face insurmountable obstacles that those of us living in circumstances of abundance cannot even begin to understand. By extending opportunities to vulnerable children, Fantsuam is enabling them to become more effective individuals, family members and members of the community. It's efforts such as these, small as they may be, that will, over time, have a life-changing effect on the lives of children in helping them to lead positive and sustainable lives.

Nigeria:

Some Background

At 149 million, Nigeria ("Niger area") is the most

populous country in Africa and the eighth most populous in the world. In fact, one out of every five blacks in the world is Nigerian. There are more than 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria and more languages than anywhere else in the world, with the exception of India. English is the official language.

Nigeria gets a bad rap, and deservedly so in some respects. Telephone and email/Internet scams, corruption, religious clashes – all of these have contributed to Westerners' perceptions of Nigeria as a "terrible" place. But that's certainly not all there is to Nigeria.

Nigerians are very proud people, renowned for their outspoken views on a number of issues. They are friendly, family-oriented and from what I have found, always willing to help you out. You have to bargain for almost everything here and most Nigerians are very fair in their dealings. Few would ever physically harm you.

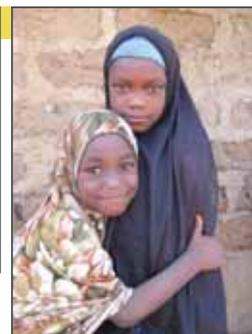
Nigeria gained its independence from Britain on October 1, 1960. Since that time, there have been a number of military coups. At 9.7 million, Lagos is the largest city in Nigeria was originally the capital; however, it was decided in the 1970s that a more central capital city should be built, resulting in Abuja (population 143,000) which became the capital in 1992.

In February 2010, the current Acting President, Goodluck Jonathan, assumed the presidency after the former President, Umaru Yar'Adua, remained in Saudi Arabia



Kim Kennett photos

Above: Kim Kennett



for an extended period being treated for a heart ailment. He has since died, but where he died (whether in Saudi Arabia or Nigeria) is shrouded in secrecy. (Interestingly, if a Christian is president, then it has been the practice to have a Muslim as vice-president and vice versa.) A general election is scheduled for next spring and most volunteers feel great trepidation about it.

Poverty abounds, as it does in most developing countries. About 80 per cent of people live at a subsistence level; over 90 per cent live below the poverty line. There is garbage strewn in many places, the result of a lack of infrastructure and money to provide garbage pickup and disposal. You'll not see any garbage receptacles here! The cities are crowded, dirty and noisy—and the exhaust from cars and motorcycles is almost overwhelming. There seem to be no rules of the road or speed limits, so traffic can be more than a bit scary!

Most of us have also heard about the clashes between the Muslims and the Christians over the past year or so. The north is primarily Muslim and the southeast is mostly Christian. In 2000, the introduction of shari'a or Islamic Law fuelled conflict

in northern Nigeria. VSO volunteers are not allowed to travel to some parts of the country because of security risks, most notably the city of Jos, about three hours northeast of Abuja.

There has been ethnic unrest in Nigeria for decades. Some of us may remember the Biafran War of the late 1960s when the Ibo-dominated southeast attempted to secede and establish the Republic of Biafra. Two and a half years of civil war followed, resulting in the Ibo being forced back into the republic after more than one million people died.

The oil boom of the 1960s and 70s in Nigeria ended in the early 80s when the price of oil crashed. Nigeria found itself \$18 billion dollars in debt, a crisis that it has never recovered from. Infrastructure has been neglected and agriculture, once the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, has been neglected. Once a major exporter, Nigeria now imports most of its food. There is also now a shortage of oil here which is ironic. And, although there are two major rivers (the Niger and the Benue) that could be harnessed for hydro-electric power, electricity is seldom available in many areas of the country.

Continued on page 2

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# Volunteering in Nigeria

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There are also many health issues here. Less than 70 per cent of the population has access to health care. About 3.1 per cent of the adult population 15-49 years of age is living with HIV/AIDS. Nigeria is also one of the only African countries where polio is still epidemic. Twenty percent of all children die before they reach age five. The life expectancy is just over 50 years.

Education for Nigerian children is free and compulsory for the first nine years. There are, however, eight million children out of school and the quality of education children receive varies greatly. Less than 30% enrol in secondary school. Teachers are often unqualified and untrained.

Because of the burgeoning population, deforestation is also a huge problem in Nigeria. According to the West Africa Lonely Planet guide, 95 per cent of the original forests have been cut down for firewood. Although it is possible to see wild game such as elephants, lions, antelopes and in Yankari National Park about 225 km east of Jos, most of the national parks are devoid of infrastructure and wildlife. The local bushmeat trade threatens mammals further.

Nigeria is not for the faint of heart. The Bradt guide to Nigeria states that "Ghana is for Africa for beginners; Nigeria is Africa for the very ex-

perienced traveller". I can't lie—I've wanted to come home more than once, but I'm gradually becoming more comfortable. I'm hoping that continues to be the case!

Living and Working in Nigeria

All the VSO volunteers who work at the Fantsuam Foundation live in Kagoro, about a 15-minute drive from Kafanchan. Living in Kagoro is like stepping back into another era, except a lot of people have cell phones! For the most part, I am enjoying living here.

The volunteers live in a compound consisting of two houses behind a gate and walls (or at least partial walls on two sides—the back is completely open). There are two men who provide 24-hour security. The VSO volunteers who live here have also hired a local woman and man to do laundry and clean the houses.

There's been no power where we live since mid-September. One of the volunteers has rigged up solar panels on the two houses with batteries so that we can try to extend our evenings. He regularly exchanges the car battery in his house with the one in our car to keep it charged. On weekends (or sometimes during the week, if there's general agreement), we use our gas-powered generator to light the houses so we can stay up a little later socializing or doing what-

ever we want to do.

We don't have a refrigerator so keeping food that will spoil for any length of time is impossible. Our stove is a two-burner gas stove (no oven) and we use kerosene lanterns or candles in the evening. There is running water part of the day, but it's not always predictable. Our water comes from a nearby mountain stream and we boil and filter the water for drinking and cooking.

Needless to say, without refrigeration, our diet is very limited. We seldom eat meat; eggs serve as our main source of protein. We have an outdoor oven for cooking pizza if someone brings cheese home from the city. On Saturdays, we can also buy a whole barbecued chicken from a local fellow. There are a few local eateries that serve the usual: rice and beans, yam and beans, pepper soup or egusi (made from ground melon seeds, often with crayfish) served with pounded yam.

We have an old Peugeot car (circa 1975) that we drive to work every day. It's always a challenge to get from our compound to the office at Fantsuam without hitting something or someone (or something or someone running into you). I don't know that I'll ever work up the nerve to drive here. Drivers are erratic, the roads are in poor condition and there are few rules of the road. Every

trip into town means swerving around potholes, having near misses with okadas and other cars, pedestrians and assorted animals. And, oh, the horns and the exhaust...

There's usually power at work; if not, Fantsuam has a generator. It's at work that we plug in all the equipment we need to recharge: cell phones, computers, rechargeable batteries, etc. And, of course, it's from work that we can access the Internet to keep in contact with home.

One of the stops on our way back to Kagoro when work ends at 4 p.m. is the local market where we can buy vegetables to replace the ones disintegrating at home. (Parking is always a lesson in offensive driving—and then there's taking your life in your hands walking across the road...) Haggle, chaos, noise and confusion—we try to get through as quickly as possible. Or we might stop closer to home at "Two-Storey"—a shop stocked with goods in a higgledy-piggledy manner. After making our purchases, we hurry back to the village to make our dinner before it gets dark.

Quite a few of the volunteers living here become involved in the community, whether it's helping children with schoolwork or assisting adults with improving their English-speaking skills. Some of the more recent VSOs also raised the funds to build a local primary school. Needless

to say, the VSO volunteers have a good reputation in the community.

Going for a walk in the village on weekends is always fun. The kids (and there are many here!) get so excited when they see us, yelling "butare, butare, butare" (white man). From near and far they come running to take your hand and walk with you—or they want you to give them a "high five" as taught by one of the previous volunteers. (The same one who brought them all "babies"—dolls—and "mos-tos" or "dinkies"—cars—one Christmas so now we still get pestered for them.) Some of the younger ones who can't yet talk will come and hug your leg. We are all called "Auntie" or "Uncle." And do they love getting their photos taken! Get out a camera and they come out of the woodwork! The kids are just delightful. The adults, as well, are very friendly, calling out "Sannu" (hello) and "Ina Kwane"/"Good morning" or "Good afternoon" when we walk by.

Another highlight of the weekends is attending the Saturday market in Kagoro which hits full steam about 10 a.m. There's everything for sale from vegetables to chickens to housewares and shoes. As soon as the sun is on the horizon, the women start coming down Kagoro Mountain to the market, their loads of firewood, produce or

cooking oil balanced precariously on their heads. Often they have babies on their backs and are wearing flip flops or even bare feet! Having climbed the mountain several times, I know it's not an easy trek, even in hiking shoes and with only a daypack!

It's also interesting to go out on Sundays and see the local people dressed up in their finery for church. Nigerians are very religious people who attend church faithfully and they are also very particular about their dress. Attending one of the churches here is another option for a weekend activity (there both Protestant and Catholic churches, as well as the local mosque). We also tend to get quite a few VSOs coming to visit because we have extra bedrooms and Kagoro offers the opportunity for those stuck in the city to spend a bit of time in the countryside. A highlight for visitors is making the trek up Kagoro mountain, about a one and a half hour climb. It's a world away from the rest of Nigeria.

I wouldn't say it's exactly serene and peaceful in Kagoro. Compared to a Nigerian city maybe, but there's still lots of commotion and noise. Generators, okadas, the mill across the road that grinds grain, roosters, dogs, celebrations... creating noise just seems to be an inherent part of the culture!

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 <p><b>2008 Chev Silverado 2500 Reg. Cab 4x4</b> Duramax, 87,000 kms</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>\$31,990</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.5em; color: white; background-color: blue; padding: 5px;"><b>NO PHOTO AVAILABLE</b></p>  <p><b>2008 GMC Sierra 2500 SLE 4x4</b> 6.0 Litre, 60,000 kms, SK PST Paid</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>\$23,990</b></p>	 <p><b>2008 GMC Sierra SLE EXT 2WD</b> 5.3 L, Z71, 17,000 kms</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>\$21,990</b></p>	 <p><b>2007 GMC Sierra 2500 SLT Crew</b> Duramax, Loaded, Leather, 129,000 kms, SK PST Paid</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>\$32,990</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 1.5em; color: white; background-color: blue; padding: 5px;"><b>NO PHOTO AVAILABLE</b></p>  <p><b>2007 Chev Silverado 2500 Reg Cab 4x4</b> 6.0 Litre, 86,000 kms</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>\$20,990</b></p>	 <p><b>2007 GMC Sierra SLE Crew 4x4</b> 41,000 kms, 5.3 Litre, SK PST Paid</p> <p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>\$25,990</b></p>
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# Ninth annual fundraiser: Kinsmen Lotto 365 under way again

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK

Buying a Lotto 365 ticket has become an annual tradition for a lot of people.

"I have people starting to ask me about buying tickets in September, and we don't start selling tickets until mid-December," says Ryan Thorn of the Moosomin Kinsmen Club.

"It's really become its own thing. We send out a reminder to last year's buyers—we send those reminders out to 1,000 buyers, and a lot of them buy a ticket again.

"Support is very strong in the local area and also in the surrounding areas," said Thorn. "When we get to the radio remote, I often recognize the names of the ticket buyers—a lot of them are repeat buyers, too."

This is the ninth year the local Kinsmen Club is running Lotto 365. Each year for the past eight years, it has raised on average \$40,000 a year—more than \$300,000 in total—which has been turned over to local causes from the Southeast Integrated Care Centre to the Community Theatre.

"The community of Moosomin is strong, it's growing, and this is our way of helping out," said Thorn. "The expansion at the golf club wouldn't have happened without the lotto, the curling club may have had trouble keeping going, but the hospital's been the biggest beneficiary for sure.

"This year we will buy the walk-in cooler for the Moosomin Food Bank, we'll be helping the Kinettes out with playground equipment, and again we'll give \$10,000 each to the golf club and the curling club.

The Kinsmen Club is healthy and growing, but a few years back, it was made up of just a handful of guys, which made the lotto a big job. "We have always had community volunteers who come forward and help with the lottery," said Thorn.

"The Kinsmen members are always really proud of what we've been able to do with Lotto 365. When some of the new members went to the first cheque presentation, you could see the pride on their faces. You could see they were realizing that cheque presentation was what all the hard work was for."

Lotto 365—in which the top prize is \$1,000 a week for a year and 12 other prizes of \$1,000 and \$500 are awarded—was the brainchild of



Ryan Thorn of the Moosomin Kinsmen Club presents a cheque to Heather Riffell of the Community Theatre committee, representing proceeds of the 2010 Lotto 365.

former Kinsmen member Terry Barros.

Over the years it has supported several local causes, and has given the top prize to winners from Russell, Virden, Moosomin, Canora, Tisdale, Whitewood, and other communities.

Thorn said it's never difficult to determine where the proceeds should go as there is no shortage of needs for the support.

"This year the Food Bank needed assistance, and asked us for help, and it's great to be able to help," he said. "There's always some group that needs the assistance. You can't be flippant about it. You've got to make sure it's a cause, like the food bank, that would have to do a lot of fundraising to get that sort of mon-

ey on their own, and that it's something that will benefit the whole community. We debate it at meetings, and I think we've always supported very worthy causes and projects."

While many repeat customers buy tickets every single year, the promotion still relies on a radio remote at the end of the sales period to complete the sales.

"For a couple of days, we have shifts of three to four people manning phones, running credit card machines, and that's the crunch time," says Thorn. "It's very busy,

but it's a lot of fun. We keep close track of the sales at that point, because we want to sell exactly 1,300 tickets."

There have been only two years when the lottery hasn't completely sold out.

"The second year we went to 1,500 tickets and added some extra prizes, and didn't sell out," said Thorn.

"We went back to 1,300 and we've pretty much stuck with exactly the same formula every year since then, because we've had some success with this formula, and we don't want to mess with it. We know what we're doing."

Thorn said other groups and service clubs from other communities have often asked how the Kinsmen run such a successful fundraiser year after year.

"I definitely have people ask us how we do it," he said. "The first three or four years it was hard, hard work. You have to put a lot of hard work in right off the bat. You've got to have a budget to satisfy the liquor and gaming board. But once it becomes an annual thing and people expect it, it becomes a lot easier. There are people who make a special trip to town to buy a ticket."

About half of the tickets are sold in the local area. "We have good support from right around here, from all the communities around Moosomin," said Thorn. "So many people who live in those communities see the value in what we're doing."

The lottery is the local Kinsmen Club's biggest project of the year.

"From when it starts in mid-December to when it wraps up the first week of February, we're always selling tickets or talking about it. This is our big one, and it's very well supported within the club. Everyone works on it."

So far this year, ticket sales have been steady. "If people want to support it, we hope they will buy their tickets soon," said Thorn. "The quicker we sell out the better."

Anyone who wants to buy a ticket can contact any Kinsmen member or see the ad on page 19 for purchase information.

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**Method of Payment:**  
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# This dog's too old for new tricks

Oh the empathy I have for Pavlov's dog. I always assumed the famed Russian physiologist Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936) had only one incredibly well-studied dog, but apparently, he actually used many dogs in his experiments. I can relate to all of them.

Not only do I salivate when the smell of food activates my senses, but, like Pavlov's dogs, I also salivate at the ringing of a dinner bell (or the opening of a fridge). I unintentionally took Pavlov's study one step further, proving to myself that salivation can also occur at the thought of a chocolate brownie and the watching of a Food Network show.

As for Pavlov, he studied the physiological effects of eating in dogs, shedding light on the larger concept of conditioning, or the idea that dogs and humans connect a stimulus (the thought of a brownie) to a reflex (salivating, then proceeding to eat the whole pan).

If Pavlov had used me as his study subject last week, he would have surely shouted "eureka, this is a classic case of conditioned reflex." And if he had studied me this week, he would have lamented, "get a new dog, this one's too old for new tricks."

The stimulus in this study was "garbage" and the reflex was putting it in a brand new can, located in a brand new place. Having been fully conditioned for the past eight years to put garbage under the sink,



Christalee Froese

this experiment would measure the amount of time it would take to "recondition" my reflex to use the new and improved garbage can.

As added incentive, the space-age, stainless-steel receptacle came with a motion sensor and a self-opening and self-closing lid. This spectacular Christmas gift from my brother would serve not only as an efficient new means for waste disposal in our kitchen, but it would show how adaptable I am to change!

On the first day, I was battling about 50-50, delighting in the new garbage can's ability to detect my every move while still responding to the old conditioning by throwing a few Kleenexes and granola bar wrappers under the sink.

I expected to improve my disposal average as the week went on, however, even removing the old can from under the sink did not have the desired effect.

Eight years of conditioning led to a pile of paper towel and tea bags accumulating on the cupboard floor where the former garbage bin had been located.

Now it's week two, and I would have expected some new conditioned responses to have taken hold. After witnessing the pile of garbage below the sink, the mind should have started to pick up the visual cues, and the putrid smell, directing me over to the space can.

But, no. The space can remains relatively empty, while the space below the sink continues to fill. If only the new shiny garbage can had the mental acuity to shout out, "hey, that's the wrong spot" when it witnessed me instinctively opening the cupboard door below the sink. That's next year's model.

Having fully confirmed over the past two weeks that I am not as adaptable to change as initially hypothesized, all that remains is the dream that the new can could be shrunk in size and shoved beneath the sink.

That would bring this whole unnecessary study of Pavlovian theory to an abrupt end and a fitting conclusion: you can't teach an old dog new tricks.

Christalee Froese welcomes comments at [Lcfroese@sasktel.net](mailto:Lcfroese@sasktel.net) or visit [www.westwords.net](http://www.westwords.net).

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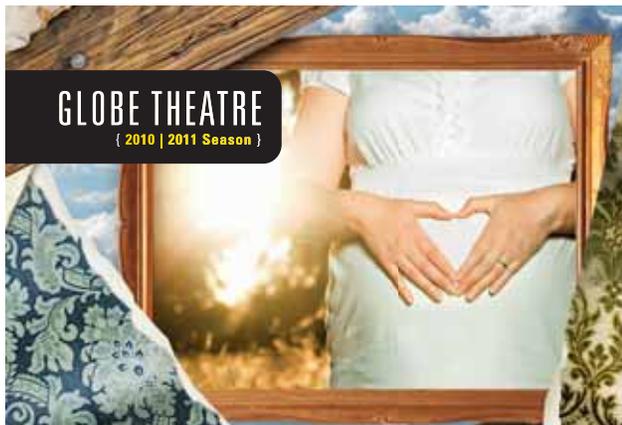
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# Plans coming together for Snowbirds show in Moosomin

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK  
Plans are coming together for a show by the Snowbirds, the Canadian Forces' aerobatic team, tentatively scheduled for June 22 in Moosomin.

Local organizers have been working on plans for the show, and are awaiting official word that Moosomin is approved to host the event.

Moosomin is on the tentative show schedule, but the schedule will not be approved until later this month.

"We're confident we have everything in place—we're just waiting for the official word," said Bill Thorn of the organizing committee.

"We have made a site selection—we'll have the event at the Moosomin Airport, and we're working to try to get the airstrip at the Rocanville mine as a staging area.

"We're also working on getting supporting acts. The Snowbirds' show is 30-35 minutes, so we're looking at bringing in some vintage aircraft, some model planes, a group of clowns from the Regina Shriners, a group of stage performers—a few things to fill out the evening."

The evening will kick off with a barbecue supper and entertainment.

Organizers are expecting to attract 5,000 spectators, which will require some logistical co-ordination. There will be about 75 vol-

unteers on the ground for the day of the show.

"We're working on getting parking set up, and we'll be paying close attention to traffic control," said Thorn.

"We had looked at three or four different areas, that area seemed to have the best potential to handle it. We have good access to parking out there, we wanted something relatively near to town, it's close enough we thought we could run a shuttle service back and forth, the RM and the airport are very receptive, and the landowners quite enthused. They will work around us for their cropping needs for the few acres we need to use."

While there is no charge to host the Snowbirds, the local committee will be responsible for accommodations for 30 people with the Snowbirds, and for getting jet fuel to the staging area.

The Shrine Club raised the idea of bringing the Snowbirds to town, but a committee has been set up with representatives of virtually every group in town.

Any money raised by the event—which Thorn expects could bring in \$5,000 to \$6,000—will go to buy tables and chairs for the Moosomin Communiplex and Convention Centre.

"The main point isn't to make money but to bring a world class show to town," said Thorn.



Organizers are hoping to attract 5,000 people to a Snowbirds show tentatively set for June 22 at the Moosomin Airport. The Snowbirds' 2011 schedule will be announced later this month.

Left: A scene from a previous Snowbirds show.

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# Area sees population explosion

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK  
 The Moosomin area continues to experience growth, according to the latest population figures from Saskatchewan Health. The health ministry keeps track of population based on health cards issued. According to Saskatchewan Health, there were 2,733 people living in Moosomin on June 30 up from 2,496 a year earlier, an increase of 227 people. The town of Rocanville had 1,188 residents on June 30 according to the health ministry, an increase of 148 people from a year earlier. The town of Wawota saw its population increase to 694, Wapella saw its population increase to 470, Maryfield saw its population increase to 395, Spy Hill saw its population increase to 260, the village of Welwyn saw its population increase to 200, and the population of Tantallon rose to 140. The smallest centres did not see an increase in population, however. The town of Fleming has seen its population decline to 72, a drop of 10 from a year earlier, and the village of Fairlight now has a population of 55, down four from last year.

Moosomin and Rocanville have been dealing with the problems that come with growth for the last several years, dealing with inadequate water and sewer infrastructure, insufficient commercial and residential building lots and the need to develop new streets to accommodate development. "There's a lot of things that have happened to get Moosomin growing and there are lots of things going to happen," says Moosomin Mayor Don Bradley. The town of Moosomin plans to develop new residential building lots at the former Moosomin Union Hospital site this year to accommodate residential growth. The town's water system can handle a large increase in population, but the lagoon system needs to be expanded. The town of Rocanville is working on a residential development, Cameron Crescent. The town has had to do a lot of work to accommodate the growth. "We've started water and sewer work," says Rocanville Mayor Daryl Fingas. "We've expanded the lagoon, we're doubling the water reservoir, adding another pump."

Town councils in



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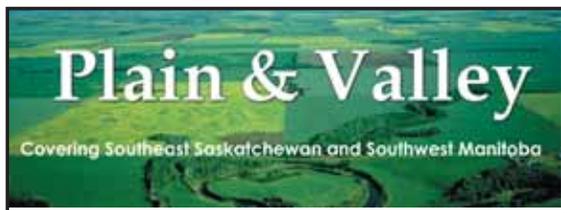
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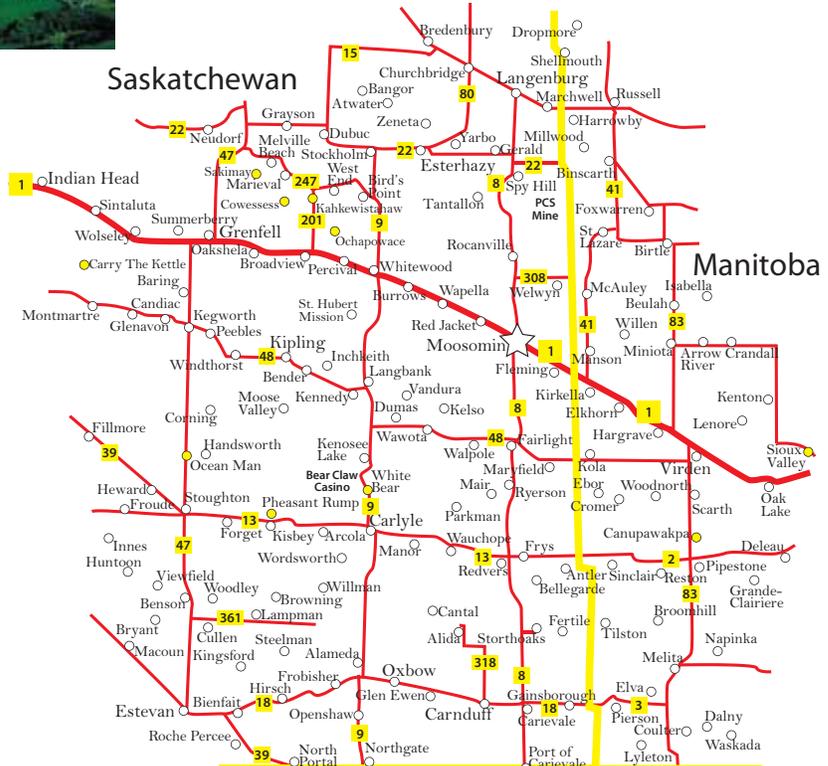
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# Toth plans to run again in 2011

Toth one of three longest-serving Saskatchewan MLAs

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK  
Don Toth has represented Moosomin in the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly for a quarter century, and he plans to run again in the election set for this fall.

Toth is one of three MLAs still serving who were first elected in 1986—the other two are NDP MLAs Pat Atkinson and Kim Trew. Trew has already announced that he will not be running again in 2011.

Toth was elected as a Conservative in 1996, and served as part of the Grant Devine government's last term. The Devine Conservatives were defeated in 1991, and Toth then served four terms in opposition—first as a Conservative and then as one of the original members of the Saskatchewan Party. Toth was elected to his sixth term in 2007 and became part of the first Saskatchewan Party government.

He was elected speaker of the Legislative Assembly on Dec. 10, 2007, a role he still fills.

Toth said he gave a lot of thought to whether he would let his name stand for a seventh term as Moosomin MLA, but based on what his constituents have told him, he has decided to run again.

"A lot of people have asked me if I'm running again, and have encouraged me to seek another term," he said.

He said he has learned to accept the disappointments along with the victories in his years as an

MLA.

"Over the years, we've won some battles and lost some battles," he said. "It's a challenge to sit in a caucus. Your project may not move ahead as quickly as you would like it to, but as long as it is part of a long-term plan, you know you're going in the right direction."

He said he has always enjoyed the role of MLA.

"Over the years I've been privileged to serve the constituency," he said. "It's been an honor to serve the constituents of Moosomin and help with their affairs."

"It's always good to know you've done your best to assist constituents. You work hard, you do your best, you see how you have influenced decisions, and the public doesn't always see that."

He said several achievements stand out in his mind.

"For a number of years we talked about the twinning of Highway 1. Although it was the NDP that eventually completed it, I was pleased to see it completed," Toth said.

He is also proud that the Southeast Integrated Care Centre in Moosomin was built in his time as MLA.

"The announcement of the Moosomin hospital was really important for our whole constituency," he said. "Some people who write letters to the editor didn't think I raised the issue enough, but peo-

ple, if they had followed Hansard, would see I raised the issue a number of times."

"The only disappointment is we had to settle for the number of beds the government deemed was sufficient. I think it needed more. When I discuss this with the minister, the challenge we have in moving forward is there are 13 projects that have been announced but that we haven't moved forward with yet. The problem is we have some other facilities that are much older. They're aging facilities."

Toth said that notable among the other accomplishments he is proud of is the reduction of education property tax.

"I'm glad this government has taken this issue seriously, and we have seen the burden taken off of property to fund education. That is an issue I looked at over the years."

"I'm also happy to see the whole positive outlook in the province I'm seeing over the last few years. People are thinking of Saskatchewan in a new way. No doubt the development in the oil patch, the development at Rocanville with



Don Toth

PotashCorp, those are all positive for the province. Not only does it mean jobs for the Moosomin constituency but for the area in general. There's a real positive sense that people have about our province, about what we can be."

Toth said he hasn't had a lot of disappointments as an MLA, but always kept his expectations tempered with "the knowledge you need to work with other individuals, other MLAs, and you aren't always going to get what you want when you want it."

"What I have found over the years is people are appreciative of whatever you can do to assist them. People are thankful for what

you try to do for them."

In his 25 years in the legislature, Toth has seen government from three different perspectives—from the government benches, from the opposition benches, and from the Speaker's chair between the two sides.

He said keeping his perspective as speaker is difficult. "I've chatted with former speakers, and they've had the same feeling I've had. The difficulty is trying to feel you are a part of the government and the independent office of speaker. Endeavoring to be that independent voice and trying to bring the sides together, you begin to wonder if your colleagues appreciate what you're doing. There are some challenges there. I've been told that, if you've got both sides of the house mad at you maybe you're making the right decisions."

"The most important part is that the office of the speaker is treated with respect. To maintain that, it has to be clear that your decisions haven't been made simply because you're a member of one party."

Toth said there is more he would like to see accomplished as an MLA.

"When I was first elected, a lot of my commitment was Highway 48. The minister has made a

commitment to complete that final section of the highway. I'm sensing that we're getting to the point that we may see things moving forward for the final phase of Highway 48 which would add more to the economy of the area."

"I also want to see the integrated facility in Kipling move forward. I'm looking forward to sitting down with people from the area who have worked long and hard to see the project move forward. "Also Grenfell has an aging nursing home facility, and I would like to see that community move forward with replacing the aging facility."

"I'm pleased to see the Regina-Qu'Appelle Health Region has moved that up their priority list. In the last year and a half it has become a priority for them."

"At the end of the day I would like to see the final phase of the changes to the education tax on property come into effect. There have been some struggles on that front, but we may see some movement there as well."

A date has not yet been set by the Moosomin constituency association for a nominating meeting, but the executive is expected to meet soon to set a meeting date.

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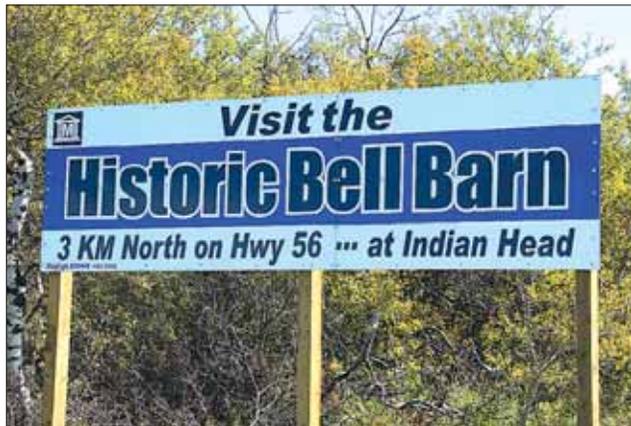
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A sign on Highway 1 gives directions to the Historic Bell Barn.



Visitors study one of the information panels in the interpretive center.

# Bell Barn attracts many visitors in first season

Following the grand opening last summer, the Historic Bell Barn at Indian Head was open to visitors for a total of 50 days. It was open consecutive days from July 25 to Labour Day (September 6) and then weekend days only for the remainder of September.

During those 50 days, an overall total of 2,865 visitors toured the Bell Barn Interpretive Centre and explored the loft and viewing tower of the rebuilt round stone barn. While that means the average number of visitors per day was 57, the days with the highest attendance were four Sundays—July 25 with 165 visitors, August 1 with 142 visitors, August 8 with 114 visitors, and September 5 with 116 visitors.

As people entered the barn and paid admission, they signed a visitor registry, indicating their name and place of origin. This enabled the Bell Barn Society to carry out a simple analysis of visitors, which yielded some interesting results.

A total of 1,485 visitors (52 per cent of the overall total) lived within one hour's drive of the site. This included people from Indian Head, Regina, and all of the other communities and the rural area within 80 km of Indian Head. An additional 725 visitors (25 per cent of the overall total) came from farther away in Saskatchewan.

The remaining 655 visitors (23 per cent of the overall total) came from

outside Saskatchewan. For the most part, this group included travellers off Highway 1 and people visiting relatives and friends in the Indian Head and Regina areas. The visitor registry showed that the province providing the highest number of visitors was Alberta with 213 and that 71 visitors called the United States home. A total of 35 visitors came from various overseas locations.

In addition to the above numbers, special events held at the Historic Bell Barn during its first season also attracted significant numbers of people. An estimated 700 people attended the grand opening on July 24, approximately 200 people attended Marilyn Malo's art show and

sales over the September long weekend, and 123 tickets were sold for the Olde Tyme Barn Dance held in the loft on October 2. Booked tours brought in another 109 visitors.

Recently, Jerry Willerth, acting chairman of the Bell Barn Society, indicated that the Society was satisfied with the visitation numbers for the Historic

Bell Barn's first season of operation. "We need to keep visitation up now to cover the cost of operating and maintaining the site," he said. "As the potential of the building becomes more known, we hope to have more special events held there too. The barn dance in October was so successful that we are planning to hold barn

dances on the last Saturday of every month from May to September in 2011. As well, Marilyn Malo is hoping to make her art show an annual event in the loft."

Anyone wanting more information on the visitor analysis or on rental of the Historic Bell Barn can contact Jerry Willerth at (306) 695-2086.

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FEB. 4	FRIDAY	BRED COW SALE	11:00 AM
FEB. 9	WEDNESDAY	REGULAR SALE	9:00 AM
FEB. 16	WEDNESDAY	PRESORT FEEDER SALE	10:00 AM
FEB. 21	MONDAY	LOUIS RIEL DAY	CLOSED
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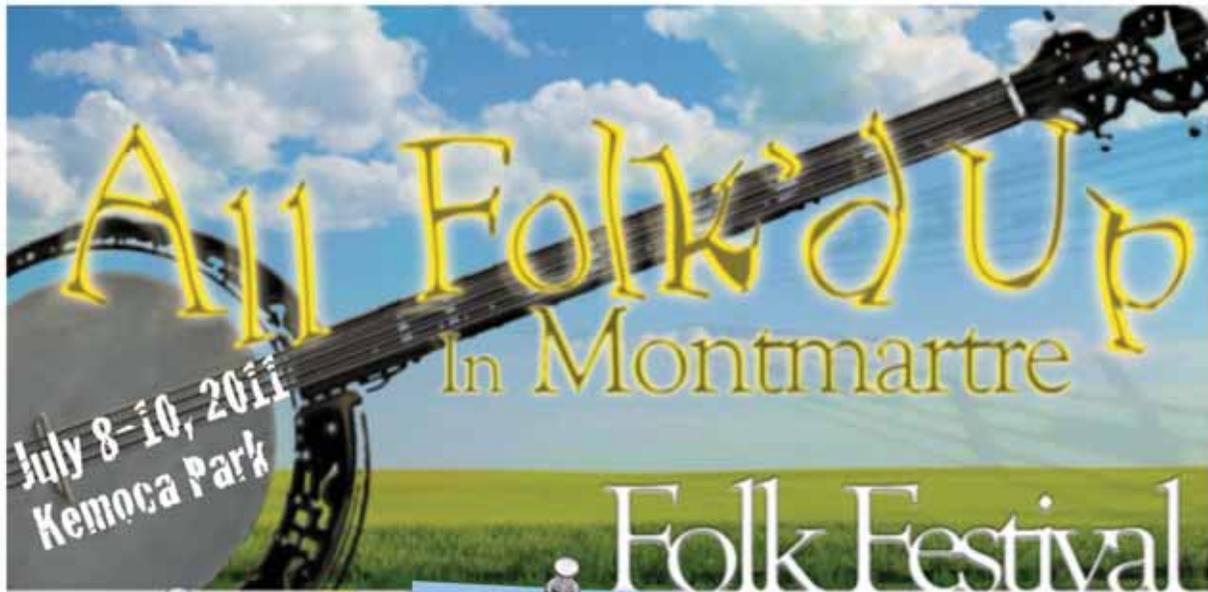
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# It's past your bedtime!

Ah, new year's. A time for resolutions, typically focused on living more healthily.

Apparently the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, not trusting us to do it ourselves, has decided to make our resolutions for us: it's started 2011 with a series of stories lecturing Canadians on how unhealthy their lifestyle is, and started something called the "Live Right Now" initiative.

Yes, apparently determined to live up to its nickname as "The Mother Corp," CBC is telling us to eat our vegetables, quit watching TV and go outside and play, always wear clean underwear in case we're hit by a truck (okay, I may have made that one up) and, most motherly of all, to "go to bed, it's past your bedtime!"

Apparently a CBC poll has revealed that six out of 10 Canadians get about one hour less than the six to eight hours of sleep recommended for most adults. (Ironically, since our clock radio is set to the CBC, I was actually awakened the other day by the CBC telling me I wasn't getting enough sleep.)

Although I personally don't think it's the job of a national news organization to nag its listeners, I can't argue with the fact that sleep deprivation is a growing problem.

Whether you blame the advent of electric light or the advent of the internet, which keeps millions of people staying up late playing games, catching up on email, Twittering, Facebooking, or watching their 37th consecutive YouTube video of cats doing something cute, there's no doubt we're one sleepy bunch.

Lack of sleep does more than just make you grouchy, too. The CBC quotes Dr. Rachel Morehouse, medical director of the Atlantic Health Sci-



Edward Willett

ences Sleep Centre in Saint John, as saying lack of sleep can affect your metabolism, contributing to obesity and Type 2 diabetes; your immune system, making it harder for you to fight off general infections such as colds; and your mental health, contributing to clinical depression.

And, of course, lack of sleep decreases your ability to learn, focus and be alert, and has contributed to an unknown number of accidents and disasters worldwide, from individual car crashes to things on the scale of the Exxon Valdez oil spill.

Research into the physical cost of sleep deprivation is continuing. To give just one example, just this week the results were released of a study conducted by a team at the University of Colorado, led by Associate Professor Kenneth Wright, which quantified for the first time the energy expended by humans during sleep.

The finding? Missing one night of sleep drains as much energy from you as walking slightly less than two miles.

The study included seven young adult subjects, all of whom were required to stay in bed for the entire three days of the study. Their diets were carefully designed to meet their individual daily energy requirements, and they had exactly the same meals at the same times during each of the

three days.

The first day consisted of 16 hours of wakefulness followed by eight hours of sleep. Days two and three included 40 hours of sleep deprivation (one sleepless night), followed by eight hours of recovery sleep.

The researchers found that the amount of energy expended by their subjects during 24 hours of sleep deprivation was about seven per cent higher than during a typical night of sleep. (Interestingly, energy expenditure during the eight hours of recovery sleep was about five per cent lower than normal, because they slept more soundly than usual.)

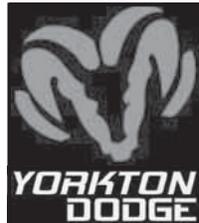
The metabolic cost of sleep deprivation would have been higher if the subjects hadn't been confined to bed, Wright suspects, since typically people don't spend sleepless nights lying down.

The research is of interest not only to scientists who are still trying to figure out exactly what sleep does for us, but also to those who are trying to figure out what lack of sleep does to us. And Wright is quick to point out that just because the metabolic cost of skipping a night's sleep is equivalent to a long walk, skipping sleep is hardly a safe or suitable alternative to exercise, and in fact (as I noted earlier) has been linked with obesity.

Probably a good thing he clarified that. It's all too easy to imagine the supermarket tabloid headlines: "I Didn't Sleep For A Week and Lost Five Pounds!"

With the CBC currently nagging us to both lose weight and get more sleep, the cognitive dissonance would be devastating.

Edward Willett is an award-winning writer of fiction and non-fiction from Regina.



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## Communication key to Russell's revitalization

BY MONIQUE MCKAY

Robin Mack, Community, Education and Recreation Facilitator with the Town of Russell, credits communication between the different groups promoting economic and regional development with the remarkable scale and success of recent revitalization projects—the Main Street Revitalization Project (MSR) and the Russell Regional Multiplex.

A committee for the MSR project was struck in 2005, and the design and development guidelines for the downtown revitalization were finalized and adopted in August of 2010.

The goals of the committee are to create an 'Old World' ambience in downtown Russell, reflecting the diverse backgrounds and histories of the people who have made the area what it is today, to attract and support unique boutique-style shops and businesses, to increase the festivals and events hosted in the community while increasing the professionalism and attraction of the area's many current events, and to develop a sustainable regional economy based on the growing tourism industry.

"The area abounds with tourism and recreational opportunities year-round," said Mack.

"With the ski hill, the lakes . . . just because of the wealth of natural resources, there are so many possibilities."

Already a visit to downtown Russell is unforgettable, especially for a hockey fan. Main Street is dominated by a series of wooden arches spanning the wide street, rescued from the Town of Dauphin's old ice arena.

"Recreation facilities across Canada are all reaching the end of their lifespans at the same time," said Mack.

"It's a serious issue. We called in some provincial consultants because our ice plant and free-standing arena were no longer viable. After a lot of examination, they suggested a multi-purpose, year-round complex."

An element of the new design was to incorporate efficient energy and renewable resources, so when the Dauphin rink came down, the committee asked itself how the wooden arches could be incorporated into the Russell design.

"We'll never see the like of these arches on our planet again," said Mack.

"These glue-laminated arches of Douglas Fir are made of lumber in dimensions that we'll never again see; the trees are harvested too soon."

The arches were rescued from Dauphin seven days before they were to go to a land-fill site.

A Winnipeg architect had been hired to design the new

Multiplex, and he envisioned the arches out-of-doors, where they grace the town today.

To ensure the sustainable viability of the the MSR, the town has dedicated \$1.5 million over ten years to the project.

"You need money to attract money," explained Mack. "This gives the groups seed money, and they've since received grants."

The agricultural industry, upon which the Parkland has been traditionally reliant, has been in decline for some years, according to statistics. However, with a proposed 18-hole premier golf course in the works, a thriving ski hill, and literally hundreds of cottage properties coming on-line for development, the road to sustainability could be wide open for the area.

Located on the #16, #83, and #45 highways, "All of this activity in the area needs a strong and charming hub of retail and services," said Daymon Guillas, co-chair of the MSR.

"That is the goal of our Main Street Revitalization program."

A significant part of that project is the Russell Regional Multiplex, currently under construction.

'A place for all ages,' as the project is being marketed, will include an NHL-size arena with climate-controlled seating for 700, a 3,000 square-foot fitness studio, a 1,000 square feet of multi-purpose space with specialized dance flooring, a media room for visual arts projects, a 1,200 square foot concourse space suitable receptions and trade shows, and 3,000 square feet of prime retail space which will contribute to the long-term sustainability of both the Multiplex and the Main Street revitalization project.

The design also includes office space, a part of which is dedicated to the Royal Canadian Legion. The Legion had spearheaded the construction of the Russell Memorial Arena fifty years ago, "and we wanted to continue to recognize their contribution," said Mack.

"We lost our community theatre, which is a huge loss to an area like this," explained Mack. "So we installed a drop-down screen in the rink. We can lower the safety netting and host movie nights."

"This is a once-in-a-generation project that will serve the needs of the entire population for fifty years or more. This \$8.1 million project has been a lot of years in the making; there have been a lot of people with lots of great suggestions."

Four million dollars of the budget has been met by the Government of Canada and the Government of Manitoba as part of the Building Canada fund. The committee has a comprehensive capital fundraising plan in place, which can be viewed on-line.

The project has some high-profile supporters.

Theoren Fleury, 2002 Olympic gold medalist, issued a written statement to the fundraising committee.

"I would like to congratulate the Town of Russell on being one of the most progressive small towns in Canada. I am so proud to be from Russell. I always let people know how the sports facilities in my home town helped make me one of the best hockey players in the world. The Russell Arena was my second home. . . There is nothing like winning, and the Town of Russell is, and always will be, a winner in my books. Good luck with your new endeavor. I can't wait to take a face-off on your new ice."

2010 Olympic gold medalist Jon Montgomery is quoted as saying a key component to his athletic success was "access."

"I had access to facilities," Montgomery said in a press release in support of the Multiplex, "in a community that valued the power of sport and the people who make it possible."

"The Russell Memorial Arena was one institution in my formative years in Russell that defined what it was like to grow up on the prairies. We spent countless hours within its walls learning what it was like to work hard, work together to achieve, how to set big goals, and how to realize anything is possible."

The spirit activating the people of the Asessippi Parkland seems to echo very much the sentiments expressed by their gold medalists, and as demonstrated by the stories in this special section on the area. From progressive performing arts with Vagabond Theatre to innovative educational programs like the dual diploma program at Major Pratt School, the region is dynamic on more than just the economic fronts. Landmark relationships are being forged, such as the partnership between the Park West School Division and the Waywayseecappo First Nation, and the strengthening connection between New Zealand, Australia, and Manitoba's premier winter resort. Targeted, sustainable development is the goal of the entire region, as demonstrated by a determined group of entrepreneurs in the tiny Village of Inglis.

Turn the page to learn more about the Parkland and its people.



The arches gracing Main Street in Russell, Man. are a striking example of recycling in action.



The Asessippi Ski area is the main winter attraction in the Asessippi Parkland area of western Manitoba. Asessippi has four beginner, 13 intermediate and eight advanced ski runs. It also offers three downhill tubing runs. Asessippi is located north of Russell, Manitoba, and has become a top winter attraction in Western Manitoba.

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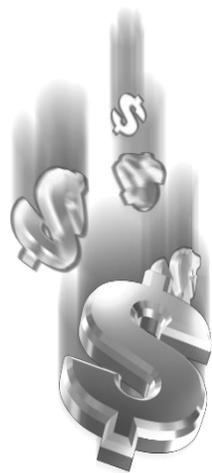
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# Visitors making most of time in Canada

BY MONIQUE MCKAY

If you ski Blackcomb, Banff, or Kicking Horse, chances are very good that the young man or woman manning the lift, finding you the best fitting pair of boots in the rental shop, or teaching your child the basics has an Australian or New Zealand accent.

Now Manitoba's top ski destination, Assessippi Ski Area and Resort, has jumped on the bandwagon, hiring youth from overseas for the second year in a row.

"There's a history in the ski industry in Canada . . . to hire people from that part of the world," explained Newell Johnston, general manager at Assessippi.

"It's part of their culture to do an 'OE'—an overseas experience—and they're interested in a winter experience."

Johnston began looking overseas for his seasonal staff after a "great experience" with a couple three years ago.

"She was from Scotland and he was from Australia," Johnston recalled. "We just had such a great season with them; so much enthusiasm."

For the current season, 18 men and women, aged anywhere from their late teens to their late twenties, have traveled half way across the world to work in the rental shop, at reception, on the lifts, and as instructors at the busy prairie ski resort north of Russell, Man.

Andy Cameron, Janelle Pattle, and Nick Aitken are three of the youth from New Zealand. The three are outgoing, enthusiastic, and easy to talk to. They hadn't met before this trip, although they identified each other pretty quickly in the immigration line or at the airport bar in Vancouver. "We'll be mates for life," they agreed.

Recruited for the Assessippi positions by a company that specializes in overseas work experience for residents of New Zealand and Australia, Cameron, Pattle, and Aitken came on what is called a working holiday visa, entitling them to work in Canada for one year. Australians can stay and work for two years.

Between the three of them, they've been to the U.S., Australia, Greece, China, Fiji, throughout South America and across Europe. When one of the boys mention Hong Kong, the other two were suitably impressed.

"Where haven't you been, man?" Pattle asked.

He shrugged modestly. "Africa. Still on the list," he said matter-of-factly.

It is part of New Zealand's and Australia's culture for their youth to work abroad. "Everybody does it," said Pattle. "If you talk to someone who hasn't been overseas . . . that's very rare."

All three of them have also traveled New Zealand extensively, with Aitken claiming there's only one town in the small country he has yet to visit.

"You haven't missed anything," the other two, who have been there, agreed.

"The best thing to do is to travel your

own country first," said Cameron. "I can't believe how many people live here who have never seen the ocean; you've got three of them!"

The group chose Canada—and small town Manitoba—for a variety of reasons.

"I wanted to get a true feeling for actual Canadians," said Aitken. "I come from a country of small towns too," although Auckland, his hometown, is New Zealand's largest city with 1.3 million people.

"I've wanted to come here ever since I started skiing," said Cameron. "And for the people."

Pattle agreed. "Everywhere you go people always say how nice the Canadians are."

The resort provides the visiting workers with a place to live and a vehicle. The 18 youth share a ten-room bunkhouse with a kitchen and two bathrooms.

"It's like a hostel, except we don't have to lock up our stuff," explained Aitken.

Meetin new "mates!" is what Cameron most hopes to gain from his Canadian experience, and the other two agree. Seeing Canadian wildlife and the northern lights also rated high on their 'to-do' list.

None of the visitors seem to be experiencing any major culture shock.

"Canadians are pretty similar," to New Zealanders said Cameron. "Pretty relaxed."

"I don't feel like I'm halfway around the world," said Pattle.

There are a few difference in the weather, however.

"It was minus 25 here," said Pattle, "and at home it was 25 degrees—a fifty degree difference. That's hard to wrap your head around."

All three of them are loving their jobs.

"Absolutely insane!"

"Hectic!"

"Great—lots of schools!"

That's how they described the busiest days at the Assessippi hill, with big grins on their faces.

The interview over, the three of them headed for the lifts, looking forward to a day of skiing and boarding on their day off; among the perks of the job are free rentals, lessons, and lift passes.

Back in the general manager's office, Newell Johnston recalled his recruiting visit to New Zealand and Australia.

"I thought it was great, if a bit of a whirlwind tour; five cities in eight days in the two countries."

Johnston is as enthusiastic about the foreign workers as they are about the Manitoba experience.

"We want them to have a fantastic experience. I love Canada and it wouldn't hurt our country at all if they applied to move here. They're very enthusiastic, and interested in our country. And when you mix with people who bring that much excitement it really heightens your own experience; you see your country and your job with new eyes."

There are no current plans to expand the foreign worker program at Assessippi.



Monique McKay photos

From left: Andy Cameron, Janelle Pattle, and Nick Aitken—all from New Zealand—are working at the Assessippi resort for the season.

"We are at capacity for accommodations and every post is manned," said Johnston. "Everyone is trained and is doing a good job. They're a great crew again this year; we're very happy with them."

Johnston described what he called their "settlement program."

"We meet them at the airport in Regina with a charter bus, and we take them out to eat, and to go shopping. We advise people not to buy too much winter gear before they come to Canada; it's cheaper here and better suited to our climate. Then we set them up with local banking, local cell phones . . . We've learned along the way so we help them."

Johnston is satisfied with the staffing situation at Assessippi.

"Each year over the past three years we have increased our rate of return—experienced staff coming back—until we're at nearly 60 per cent. So that makes the difference with training and mentoring."

Assessippi continues to grow in popularity as a recreation destination for people nearby and from abroad as well. Established for only twelve years, the hill is described as a friendly place to ski and snowboard with lots of annual special events to keep it fresh.

"Once people discover what they've got right here they think twice about driving ten to fourteen hours, or more, to ski," said Johnston.

Above all, it's about having fun. "The number one thing I stress is 'What are we here to do?' We're an outdoor recreation facility—you gotta have fun."

That mission statement has certainly been impressed upon the working visitors from overseas.

"It's awesome; we're having the best time!" declared Pattle before heading off for her day on the hill.

"I'm going to make the most of my year in Canada."



A patron at Assessippi's Ski Area and Resort prepares to descend one of the hill's 25 runs on the day before New Year's. Despite frigid temperatures the hill was busy with people taking advantage of a few days off.



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# Vagabond keeps performing arts vibrant

BY MONIQUE MCKAY

When you think of quality amateur theatre, or progressive performing arts, perhaps the first things to leap to your mind aren't Binscarth, Man. and the Vagabond Theatre.

Perhaps they should be.

The Vagabond Theatre Company is a thriving group of small-town actors, singers, costume makers and set designers which annually produces a musical, a theatrical production, a children's production, and facilitates a week-long summer theatre camp for youth aged 4-13.

"There are only 400 people in Binscarth," says Ursel Boucher, Vagabond's secretary-treasurer. She's sitting in the spotless kitchen of her guest house on the main street in Binscarth. She confides the population of the town in a lowered voice, as though the shrinking population of the rural prairies were a potentially harmful secret.

"In a community like this," she continues, "... Binscarth is a bedroom community (of nearby Russell). We're never going to grow commercially. So we focus on something unique—We're very proud of the Vagabond Theatre Company.

"It's true that we need businesses to keep the smaller communities going, but people are so mobile now.

"There's so much life outside of the cities, so much culture. We have a perfect lifestyle here; we have all the culture and heritage we could want here. We just have to tap into it. In Manitoba we're proud of what we have and what we can do. There's a lot of loyalty; people keep coming back to see us perform. It's good to be proud."

"Tapping into the talent pool in and around the community of Binscarth is exactly what Vagabond Theatre has been doing for the past eleven years.

The theatre group grew out of a singing group called The Village Singers, which was perhaps best known for its Christmas program. As the group began to age and interest began to wane, Jamie Bradshaw approached Boucher and asked her, "Don't you want to do something different?"

In the small town of Binscarth, a theatre adjacent to the community hall had been used for little except the annual village Christmas pageant for many years since its construction half a century ago. For most of the year, that half of the building had remained closed and vacant.

"Let's start a group," Bradshaw proposed.

"It's really good for the hall," Boucher says. "We're supporting the community hall and that's one more thing that's not dying in Binscarth."

Before the Vagabond Theatre Company started paying the Binscarth Community Hall a monthly rent for use of the theatre, the hall really had no reliable, regular source of income. So beyond feeding the community culturally, the theatre group is contributing practically as well.

"Some people, when we started, said 'You're really going out on a limb here; this isn't going to fly.' But years later here we are," Boucher says.

"In the fall of 2002 we performed our first musical, *The Music Man*," said Boucher. "It was a whole community affair—everyone from the whole area took part. There are a lot of people around here interested in the arts. It's just been a matter of us coming together."

Even though Boucher has been involved with Vagabond since its inception, she is continually amazed by the talents showcased by the people in Binscarth and the surrounding communities. On a recent production of *Nun-crackers*, a spin-off of the theatre's popular *Nunsense*, Boucher thought that the mother-and-daughter team who were responsible for the stage setting were "just amazing. It's amazing, the talented people we have. We've lived here thirty years and we had no idea they could do that!"

"We have a lot of talent in our communities, and years of practice now. We have people who do speech training, a lot of musicians and music teachers, we have people



**From left:** Rheeane Gray, Katherine Miller, David Howell, Pam Elliot, and Betty Senger, in the recent production of *Nun-crackers*. Four communities are represented in this picture.

who go to acting workshops... We try to get as many people involved as possible. You can see the actors, the set designers, everyone... grow over the years. Those of us who started years ago—you can certainly see the difference. You draw on the talent you have in the community.

"When you think of the size of the communities involved, it's amazing the talent contained within them. They just need an opportunity to showcase that talent."

It would be naive to suppose that the Vagabond Theatre could be self-supporting. Even in the city arts and theatre groups rely extensively upon grants, sponsors, and fundraising.

"We try to do everything as cheaply as possible while still looking professional," says Boucher.

In addition to membership and ticket sales, the group relies on a number of grants—including an annual grant for the summer youth theatre camp—and sponsors.

"The mines have helped us, the Royal Bank, the credit union—we get a lot of matched donations—the Still Foundation out of Brandon—we scrounge from wherever we can."

Currently, the primary aim of the theatre is to sustain itself artistically by cultivating new members, especially among the local youth.

"We want especially to keep the kids in the arts; that's our biggest ambition," says Boucher.

"The music and vocal arts festivals really contribute; it gives the young people a taste, some experience and exposure."

Roseanne Kelly of Rocanville, Sask., and her family have become regular participants in the company's productions.

"Last year it was *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and they (the children) did *Alice in Wonderland*, and the fall before that we all participated in *Tom Sawyer* as a family."

"We participate mostly because it is such a phenomenal experience for the kids. They get such a different take on performing. The calibre of what they do for a small town in Manitoba is impressive. They really strive to be professional; it's top-notch performance. It's fun; the kids have formed some amazing relationships up there."

Tannis MacFarlane-Kelly—also of Rocanville—and her family took their five-year-old daughter Megan to the youth camp, called Actin' Up, for the first time last year.

Megan has been participating in the local Music Festival for three years now, and was played the part of a squirrel in Vagabond's production of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.

"She loved dressing up and being on stage and singing—in Vagabond it's all of that together," explains MacFarlane-Kelly. "They get to do dance, and drama, and singing. We had heard good things about the camp, and she likes to perform. She likes festivals and learning poems, and so we like to foster that."

Boucher is a passionate advocate for the benefits of participating in the performing arts.

"It gives people confidence, children and adults alike. And exposure to the arts; when we first moved here you had to go to Winnipeg to see anything."

Kelly echoed Boucher's sentiments. "It teaches them (the kids) to work with others. The performing arts expand them, give them greater depth. They just wouldn't be doing it if it wasn't available rurally; if we had to drive to Winnipeg or Regina we wouldn't be able to do this."

MacFarlane-Kelly feels that her entire family really enjoyed the week-long camp.

"We camped at the Binscarth Park and Pool. It's like a family vacation for us too. There's a full-sized pool and a park for the kids; we had a great time, campfire time, marshmallows and all that."

"Parents are involved too; it's not something where you drop them off and walk away. It becomes a real family thing to do."

"No matter what you do around here, you're traveling, whether you play hockey or are in 4-H or whatever, you have to travel. This is close to home and we had some family time too. Even if all it was was a week away from the farm, that would be great too—but it's so much more."

Boucher feels that part of the theatre's longevity and popularity to date is due in part to the 'rural return' phenomenon experienced across Saskatchewan and Manitoba; men and women in their thirties and forties who are moving back to their rural small towns after starting their careers and families elsewhere.

"Little by little they're coming back. They went out and were exposed to different things, so they come back more open-minded. Bringing back all of those experiences really enriches the community, and the fact that they're coming back really makes the difference."

The upcoming season for the company includes *Wingfield on Ice* (March 6), *The Curious Savage* (April 1, 2, 8, 9), and *Honk Jr.*, the youth production (May 11, 12, 13, 14).



A scene from 'Actin' Up', the Vagabond Theatre's annual theatre camp for youth.



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# Russell high school teaches additional skills

BY MONIQUE MCKAY

The graduating class of 2011 at Major Pratt School in Russell, Man., will see the usual honors handed out during their year-end ceremonies; diplomas, scholarships, achievement awards, and bursaries. Unusually, however, four Grade 12 students will graduate with a dual diploma; not only will these four young women walk off the stage with their full high school credits, but they will be certified Medical Care Aides as well.

In a unique pilot project that began three years ago, when the current graduating class was in Grade 10, the Parkwest School Division and the Assiniboine Community College (ACC) collaborated on interweaving a conventional student's high school curricula with that of a community college student's striving for certification to work with the infirm.

As a result, four youth will finish school this year a couple of years ahead of their peers, ready to enter the work force with some higher education—and some experience, thanks to their practicums in the local nursing home—under their belts.

Paulette Huberdeau and Cassandra Kowalchuk, both 17, will graduate with the dual diploma this year.

Both young women plan to further their careers and their education, attending the University of Manitoba to become nurses.

"I've been interested in nursing since Grade 7," said Kowalchuk. "I thought this (course) was an opportunity to see what it was really like before I took four years of university."

"I just wanted to try it," said Huberdeau of her choice to participate in the program. "It was something that appealed to me."

The course is taught in one of two ACC classrooms housed within the school building. Instructors are in Brandon, and the classes are held via teleconference, with live interaction between the Russell students and their college teachers.

"The teachers have been really good," said Huberdeau. "They're mostly nurses. We probably get more (one-on-one instruction than students attending the Brandon college) because we're a super-small class. . . . We get more attention. It's more focused on us individually. We do get to ask more questions."

Kowalchuk feels that she and her peers in the course are now better prepared for university.

"In school you can ask for a make-up test," she said. "Not in university. The tests are all multiple choice, which you have to get used to."

The experimental program seemed to develop naturally after the two schools became physically intermeshed; ACC used to have a downtown location in Russell, but over time it became impractical. Major Pratt School had a couple of classrooms and an administrative space the col-



Monique McKay photo

Major Pratt School Grade 12 students Paulette Huberdeau, far left, and Cassandra Kowalchuk, far right, are two of four students who will both finish high school with not only their diplomas, but as certified Health Care Aides, thanks to a program facilitated within the school by the Assiniboine Community College. Colleen Nernberg, centre, is the Administrative Assistant at the College's Russell location, which operates out of the same building as the K-12 school.

lege could access, and an educational collaboration was a reasonable evolution in the relationship between the two educators.

"It beats going across town," said Kowalchuk.

The program has also enabled the students to grow closer to their community.

"The people we work with in the care home—we know them. We go to school with their grandchildren, their great-grandchildren," said Kowalchuk.

Colleen Nernberg, the college's administration assistant, said the college was interested in "continuing with this program, and possibly other options. It's all under consideration."

Major Pratt School Principal Darcy Kowalchuk would love to see the college expand their offerings, especially to something in hospitality and tourism.

With over 500 students from Russell, Inglis, Binscarth, Wayweseecapo First Nation, and neighboring communities, the school is right in the centre of the burgeoning development scene around Assinippi Ski Area and Resor-

and the Lake of the Prairies.

"With the construction and the lake development . . . There are lots of really good opportunities to live in your home community and make a good living, if you want to," said Kowalchuk.

A comprehensive K-12 school, it is part of Major Pratt's mandate to provide as many educational and vocational opportunities as possible to its student body. Every student in the school cycles through woodworking, metal shop, textiles, and foods, their art class is taught by a working artist, and in contrast to altogether too many schools, Major Pratt's French and Band programs are expanding instead of contracting.

The school's relationship with the community college is something the administration—and the students—hope will continue to grow stronger.

When asked what their friends and peers thought of their impending dual diploma graduation, Kowalchuk and Huberdeau both laughed.

"They wish they had signed up!"

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# Hemodialysis unit coming to Russell Health Centre

BY MONIQUE MCKAY

Ten years ago, the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority (ARHA)—then the Marquette Regional Health Authority—approved the construction of a hemodialysis unit at the Russell and District Health Centre in Russell, Man.

The centre serves over 5,000 people, including seven municipalities and two First Nations communities. Built in 1970, the centre is rated at 32 beds, is staffed with four physicians and 30 full-time, part-time, and casual nurses, providing services as diverse as pre- and post-natal care, minor surgery, and a chemotherapy program.

The community has waited a long time for the new six bay hemodialysis unit, which in its first stage will be able to serve 12 patients. "It is a strong need," said Area Manager Diane Ciprick.

"In Canada we have a high incidence of diabetes and renal failure is a side effect of diabetes; diabetes is very much on the rise, in our community as in others across Canada."

Healthy kidneys remove excess fluid, minerals, and wastes from the bloodstream. If they fail, harmful wastes build up in the body, blood pressure may rise—and stress the heart—and the body may retain too much fluid, thus failing to produce enough red blood cells.

'Hemodialysis' means cleaning the blood. Blood is withdrawn from the body by a machine and passed through an artificial kidney called a dialyzer. The dialyzer has two spaces; a space for blood and a space for dialysis fluid. Dialysis fluid helps remove waste products from the blood, which if left too long in the bloodstream would soon lethally poison a person. These two spaces are separated by very thin artificial membrane. Scientists and researchers are continuously striving to improve this membrane; the more efficient it becomes at removing more toxins from the contaminated blood, the healthier a person suffering renal failure can become.

Each hemodialysis treatment normally takes between four and five hours; some people call treatments a 'run.' Most patients require three runs a week, but certain people need more frequent or longer treatments.

Leanne Cheyne of Russell and her family have been coping with her mother's renal failure since the spring of 2009.

"She has a disease called systemic sclerosis," Cheyne explained.

"It starts by attacking the skin, and then moves on to other organs. Her kidneys were the first to go. We had to take her into the Health Sciences Centre in Winnipeg because she went into acute renal failure.

"In the fall of last year we brought her back to Brandon; she was stable enough to move closer to home. Then in October we brought her home, but between my dad and I we had to drive her to Brandon every second day for

dialysis."

The constant traveling took its toll on every member of Cheyne's family. Not only did her mother, who was already tired from her illness, struggle to cope with the four-hour round trip on top of four hours of dialysis several times a week, but it was trying for Cheyne's 70-year-old father and her four-year-old daughter.

"In August of last year my mom had a stroke," Cheyne continued.

"She's no longer stable enough to travel, so we had to place her in a care home in Brandon, because there's no dialysis here."

Will Cheyne's mother be stable enough to return to her home town once the new unit opens up in Russell?

"Absolutely," the medical receptionist answered.

"For sure we'll bring her home. I'm driving to Brandon every weekend and my father is going several times a week. In the weather, it's even harder on him."

Accessing dialysis services far from home costs more than stress and time; it's financially expensive too.

"The expense of going to Brandon every weekend . . .

You have to get there, you have to eat. I'm still paying for the summer we were in Winnipeg. And my daughter doesn't enjoy going to Brandon every weekend," said Cheyne.

Cheyne and her family are eagerly anticipating the opening of the hemodialysis unit in Russell.

"I'm so excited," she said. "I keep looking in the window. I wish I could work in there, but I'm not a nurse. It's going to change our lives."

Ted Bartlett, Project Supervisor for the Russell Hemodialysis Project, said that the construction of the new addition is "70 per cent complete" and on target to be ready for the new staff and training period in March of 2011. It is anticipated that the unit will be operational by May 2011. The project is funded by the Provincial Renal Program at a cost of \$4.9 million.

According to Ciprick, five staff members will come on at Russell; two LPNs in 0.45 positions and three RNs in 0.6 positions, along with some Health Care Aides. It's possible some of the current staff at the Health Centre will cycle into the dialysis unit, and will then have to be replaced in their former postings.



Inside the Hemodialysis Unit under construction at Russell and District Health Centre.

Many people in the community have wondered at the long delay between approval for the project and its realization; ten years is a long time to wait.

"It was originally delayed because of the physical incorporation of the unit into the hospital," explained Ciprick.

"We were in design development between 2006 and 2008," elaborated Bartlett. "We determined that a renovation was not practical, so we went with an addition."

"They had talked about taking ten beds," Ciprick continued. "An addition was the better option . . . Since the original decision, our in-patient services have increased. We're a real hub, and we need to provide good service to our communities."

"I'm looking forward to our centre providing this service too, and really enhancing the quality of life of our patients and their families."

Once operational, the six stations, or bays, will operate Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Six patients will be served in the morning, and six in the afternoon. The unit will operate between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. At this point, the maximum case load for the new hemodialysis unit is twelve patients, although the system was designed with room for expansion.

Who qualifies for the program in Russell will be de-

termined by the physicians in consultation with the nephrologist (kidney specialist) and the Manitoba Renal Health Program, which is based in Winnipeg.

The tender for building the hospital's addition was awarded to T.L. Penner Construction in March 2010. To the delight of the nurses and patients in wing off of which they are working, they have "kept it clean and quiet," said Ciprick. The spacious wing

efficiently incorporates the specialized needs of a dialysis unit, including a dedicated water treatment room for the machines and a tech room especially for repairs. The main hospital has also gained another office space for the nurses and a new patient lounge on a wing that previously had none.

Designed in light wood with false stone feature walls, the new space resembles a hotel lobby more

than a hospital unit. Airy and bright with lots of windows, the design is unique in that it is the first dialysis unit designed so that patients can look outside instead of at a wall or at each other. "We're hoping to involve the community on some level," Ciprick explained, gesturing towards the white expanse outside the floor to ceiling windows in the dialysis space, where come spring, a garden could bloom.

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Inglis' famous 'elevator row', the last row of original elevators standing in Canada.



## Inglis aims for targeted development

BY MONIQUE MCKAY

Inglis, Man., is a town of 200 with big aspirations. Located two miles off of Highway 83 between Russell and Roblin, it's the closest community to the Assessippi Ski Area and Resort and is nearby the Lake of the Prairies cottage development. Branded as "the friendly place to be," the town's Inglis and Area Business Group is striving to help their town develop with the area.

Leslie and Evan Tait moved to Inglis from Fort McMurray, Alta., three years ago. The couple describe themselves as "semi-retired." The Taites operate the Assessippi Park Concession during the park's summer season and are passionate about their adopted town year-round.

"We want to make things happen," said Leslie. "It's in all of our best interests; not everyone operates a seasonal business. We're in the heart of the Assessippi Parkland and we want to let people know that we're here, and that we have what they need."

For a community of its size, Inglis has a surprising 46 members in its Business Group.

Real estate and insurance agent Karen Goralluk has lived in Inglis for all of her married life. When asked what makes her such an aggressive booster of her little town—Goralluk has successfully marketed Inglis as far afield as England and Belgium—she replied, "I think that in the beginning I didn't know what we had. Then driving through the valley here people look around and say 'Wow—this is beautiful.' And as I grow older and mature, I realize yeah. They're right."

"The people make it good. It's a laid-back way of life. It's got everything you need."

Goralluk repeated a sentiment that had already been expressed by several people making their lives in Inglis.

"Why would you want to live anywhere else?"

Jerri-Lynn Halwas owns Jordie's Food Mart and has been living in Inglis since 2004. Also a member of the Business Group, Halwas said "Inglis has done really well so far keeping up with the area. I'd like to see that continue."

Halwas is satisfied with the quality of life Inglis has afforded

her since her move.

"If it isn't right here, everything you could ever want is a short drive away. We're right in the heart of everything. Winnipeg is a day trip away, so you can get your fix of the city. It's cheaper than buying a cabin and just spending your weekends here—we have the cabin lifestyle year-round."

"Culturally, everything you could want is here too," continued Halwas.

The community participates in Home Roots, a house concert program that brings talented musicians from across Canada into nearby living rooms on an almost monthly basis, and the Vagabond Theatre, based in Binscarth, is popular with Inglis residents. The local hotel makes a point of booking live bands when possible, and although Inglis is definitely a quiet little town, people are quick to shut down the myth that there's "nothing to do" in this quiet little town.

Ryan and Jenny Kuempfer have owned the Inglis Hotel for the past two years.

"We were everywhere," said Ryan. "Vancouver, Vancouver Island, Salmon Arm. . . . We had a few reasons to come here. My job required me to be away, and I wanted to be home. Another reason was affordability; we would never be able to buy a business like this in B.C. This way it's a jump start to life."

"We've been busy," Ryan continued. "Everyone's been supporting us, even before we purchased the place. We had looked at multiple businesses like this, mainly in Manitoba. But we saw the potential here."

The Kuempfers, who have a young son, were really attracted to the community.

"Everyone's really close here. In a town like this, nobody really has to worry about much. We had a girl on a work visa from Scotland for a year and it's been a culture shock for her to go back home. On her Facebook page she posted how hard it is to realize she just can't go for a walk at any time of night any more; she has to be careful what streets she takes. She's having a hard time getting used to that again."

"There's lots to do around here—the lake's nearby, the ski



Monique McKay photos

Trish Lee owns a small business in Inglis. Members of the Inglis Business Group, Lee and her partner hope to contribute towards targeted growth in their small town.

hill's nearby—it's the outdoor lifestyle. We all love it. Lots of people used to just hunt and fish here but now they live here. There are a few Americans looking around for a place to live right now."

Ryan would like to see the town grow, but maybe not too much.

"It would be great if there was a developer out here building family houses; I'd like to see something like that. Not condominiums!" he laughed.

Trish Lee, formerly of Toronto, is also in favor of controlled, targeted growth for Inglis.

"I was looking for a change of lifestyle," said Lee of her move from Toronto. She runs a boutique, Secrets From the Garden, which is housed in the same building as Inglis Country Service, which she helps her partner operate.

"I opened up a boutique last year and do maybe 80 shows a year," says Lee. "We have a gas station and a shop. We can fix everything from small engines to airplane engines. . . . Not that we ever have repaired an airplane engine here, but we could!"

Lee's business is slowly grow-

ing, and she would like to see growth in Inglis too. She views the town as being unique and special, and would like it to stay that way.

"I hope it stays small, becomes more ecologically aware, and more holistic. I think word of mouth really pays off. I want that hometown boutique thing for the town. I'd like to see some very niche growth; I'm a niche person, something tailored and unique. I think we can thrive on that; in a long, environmentally sustainable way. I did the marketing and money thing for many years, and it's not all about that."

Lee is developing a 'green roof' for her business this coming year, and hopes to offer medicinal and culinary herbs to the public. She is also working toward opening a farmers and artisans market for the summer of 2012.

Corey Leclerc, owner of the Prairie Grill restaurant, moved to Inglis from Vancouver in 2000. For him and his family, the opportunities for their children growing up in the community were the biggest draw.

"My wife was from this area," explained Leclerc.

"We came out for Christmas and the restaurant was for sale. That's the business I was in, so we decided to go ahead and buy it—make a change in our life. It was a good decision. We have two kids. They love it; the freedom and security, to be able to walk around town, to walk to school and whatnot. Our school (K-Grade 8) is one of Manitoba's top schools, if not in Canada. It was featured in *Today's Parent* magazine not so long ago."

Leclerc also feels Inglis is ripe for growth.

"A lot of the advertising of the area is done for us because of the ski hill. There's a lot of room for small businesses, and we're in an area where it's not hard to travel for a job."

"You're guaranteed lower property taxes, safety, a better quality of life; it's a fair trade off. We'd like to see more small families in the area. It's a really good community, it's so close and we all watch out for each other."

Unlike too many small rural communities, Inglis doesn't only want development, it's ready for it. The town has been aggres-

sively investing in infrastructure over the past five years. The entire town has reverse osmosis water running through its taps, and the lots are serviced with natural gas and town sewer. The lagoon was recently upgraded and high-speed internet service is available. Also, the town has developed five new lots over the past two years, after observations were made that although there are several smaller 'starter' or perhaps retirement homes available, there was nowhere for a young or professional family to build.

Members of the business group admitted readily that there isn't full-time, year-round employment available in the town of Inglis. However, there is aggressive hiring in the nearby towns and the members insist there is lots of room for growth and development of business in Inglis itself, especially for contractors or small businesses, "like a bakery," said Halwas. As the community nearest to the park and resort, Inglis hopes to style itself as the ideal destination for the year-round tourists for shopping and supplies.

The biggest draw to Inglis has always been the row of historic grain elevators that stand sentinel over the town; the 'five prairie giants' are internationally recognized as a unique and enduring architectural symbol of the Prairies, representing one of the most important periods in the development of Canada's grain industry from 1900 to 1930.

Tours of the elevators are conducted during the summer, and maintaining and promoting the elevators is a source of pride to the people who live in their shadow.

However, the Business Group is eager to promote the idea the Inglis is more than just a place to visit perhaps once or twice for historical edification; they hope more people will recognize the opportunities Inglis is offering, now and in the future.

To support that aim, the business group has been marketing the town through real estate sales, with their website, and is now making use of more modern networking tools by developing a Facebook page and a Twitter account.



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