

Thunder Bay

Source



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YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

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Safeway shuffle

Longtime Court Street store to close, be renovated and will reopen as a FreshCo in 2022 /5



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NEW NAME COMING: Sobeys, Safeway's parent company promised to work with affected employees when the Court Street store closes and later reopens as a FreshCo.

PHOTO SUPPLIED



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Tikinagan
Child & Family Services

The Tikinagan Live-in Foster Parent experience

When children and youth come into foster care, they might be experiencing change for the first time. At Tikinagan Child and Family Services, nurturing Live-In Foster Parents play a crucial role in helping them adapt, making them feel safe and supported during transitions.

Betty Maud, who spent four years as a Live-In Foster Parent for Tikinagan, knows how important it was to make a difference for children and youth. She said her goal was to always provide a safe environment, where children and youth could become themselves.

“As time went on, I really, really enjoyed seeing them relax,” recalls Maud. “They would have that humour. They would start laughing, they would start doing little silly things. Just to see that showed me that they were being more comfortable, more trusting.”

As a caregiver, Maud engaged the children in aspects of family life from choosing what groceries to shop for meal planning to taking them to appointments and community events.

“It made them feel important, that their input was important, too.”

Live-In Foster Parents work with Tikinagan to ensure Ministry standards are met and carried out in the home, providing a sustainable and encouraging environment for children while Tikinagan covers all living expenses.

Tikinagan provides ongoing support for Live-In Foster Parents,

including debriefing and weekly meetings with staff. For Maud, the training at Tikinagan was “a real bonus,” educating herself on first aid and suicide prevention. Live-In Foster parents also receive respite once a month.

Though used for the short-term, Live-In Foster Parents are an important part of the community and the Tikinagan service model Mamow Obiki-ahwahsoowin, which means “everyone working together to raise our children.” Maud took her part in the community seriously.

“As a live-in foster parent, you are the community and you are helping. Every child matters.”

An Anishinawbe Ojibway originally from Manitoba with 10 grandchildren of her own, Maud says she used her own life experiences as a Live-In Foster Parent, including her childhood when she remembers who paid attention and encouraged her.

“I always think with each foster child that I’ve have had: it’s about riding the tides with them, through the ups and downs – the ‘lumps and bumps’ I always say – and we get through it. I walk with them through it. Every child needs that encouragement, they need validation. As a Live-In Foster Parent, you’re definitely making a difference.”

For more information on being a Live-In Foster Parent with Tikinagan, visit tikinagan.org or call 1-800-465-3624.

Learn more at tikinagan.org or call 1-800-465-3624



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LOCAL NEWS

Net decision delayed

City council divided over outdoor rink controversy

CITY HALL
By Ian Kaufman – TB Source

Hockey nets won't be back at the City of Thunder Bay's outdoor rinks for at least two more weeks, after being yanked by staff worried their presence was encouraging violations of Ontario's lockdown rules.

Mayor Bill Mauro's push to reverse that decision was blocked at city council Monday, despite winning clear majority support.

Councillors voted 9-4 to adopt his motion to bring back the nets along with a plan for greater enforcement, pending review by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit.

However, the motion couldn't find the two-thirds support needed to ratify it for immediate implementation, partly because one supportive councillor left the meeting prior to the ratification vote.

Instead, supporters had to beat a retreat and defer ratification by two weeks, by which time it may be a moot point: Ontario's lockdown could end three days later, on Feb. 11.

The procedural wrangling, which took around two hours and involved several re-votes, left councillors at the time confused, and ultimately frustrated.

"We argued for two hours for nothing," concluded Coun. Albert Aiello.

City staff began removing hockey nets from outdoor rinks on Jan. 21, apparently at the suggestion of the health unit.

Staff were concerned over reported violations of lockdown regulations that prohibit team sports on outdoor rinks, limit the number of people on the ice to 25, and require two metres of distancing be maintained at all times.

Mauro joined many residents in calling for the nets to be put back the next day, saying the city's response was overly punitive.

Many were enjoying the nets while respecting the rules, he said Monday, arguing the city should do more to enforce them before taking away badly-needed recreation opportunities.

Will support

"We haven't been doing our compliance effort," Mauro said. "If we can't get people to adhere to [the rules], I'll be the first person to put up my hand to say we've got to close the rinks completely."

A lack of clarity over exactly what advice the health unit had given the city clouded Monday's decision.

Parks manager Cory Halvorsen told councillors it was his understanding that on Jan. 20, the health unit required the city to pull the nets.

By contrast, medical officer of health Dr. Janet DeMille said Friday the agency didn't issue any mandatory orders.

"This wasn't a directive from the health unit to remove the nets," she said. "It was more of a collaborative discussion with the city on different options they might have to reduce [violations]."

That uncertainty left some councillors uncomfortable.

"We're going by anecdotal conversations here," said Coun. Trevor Giertuga, who suggested direction from health authorities should come in writing.

City administration maintained removing the nets was simply a case of following provincial regulations.

According to Ontario's lockdown regulations, outdoor rinks "may only open if... team sports are not



TOUGH DECISION: Thunder Bay removed nets on its outdoor rinks, saying people weren't adhering to COVID-19 rules.

practised or played [and] sports that are likely to result in individuals coming within two metres of each other are not practised or played."

General manager of development services Mark Smith said that left little room for interpretation.

"The order is clear," said Smith. "In my mind, replacing nets on rinks will not augur in support of compliance... I don't seek to defend the order. I'm thinking in terms of, can we comply with [it]?"

Several councillors pushed back, saying that interpretation of the rules was unreasonable and inconsistent.

"There are other examples of city services we're offering in the community right now that are a much greater risk than outdoor hockey," said Mauro. "And yet, this is the one we seem to have landed on."

"These rules are becoming very arbitrary and nonsensical," said Coun. Shelby Ch'ng. "Who's going to stand up and say, this is really not making sense?"

'Dangerous' precedent

Others, however, worried the motion set a dangerous example that it's possible to choose which public health advice to follow.

"It goes against the advice of the health unit, the advice of our staff, [and] the regulations of the province," said Coun. Mark Bentz. "I think we're overstepping our bounds, in some ways."

"Yes, it's painful, things don't make sense for many people, and there are contradictions out there. But I don't believe the city should be viewed as facilitating team sports when we're being told public amenities shouldn't be."

A vote to ratify the decision was unable to reach the two-thirds threshold required under council rules – largely because two supporters, Ch'ng and Coun. Brian Hamilton, left the virtual meeting prior to the ratification vote (Ch'ng later returned and was included in a re-vote).

Council proceeded to vote 9-3 to defer ratification by two weeks, to Feb. 8.

Weather Forecast

WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
 Sunny Probability of Precipitation: 0% HIGH -15 LOW -26	 Sunny Probability of Precipitation: 10% HIGH -13 LOW -21	 Mainly sunny Probability of Precipitation: 20% HIGH -10 LOW -16
SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
 Scattered flurries Probability of Precipitation: 40% HIGH -5 LOW -6	 Mainly cloudy Probability of Precipitation: 30% HIGH -4 LOW -8	 Mainly cloudy Probability of Precipitation: 10% HIGH -4 LOW -10

NO FRILLS



POINTS DAYS



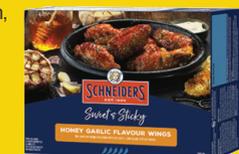
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LOCAL NEWS



OUTBREAK: Dozens of prisoners at the Thunder Bay District Jail have tested positive for COVID-19.

Prisoners moved

Inmates transferred because of COVID-19 outbreak

HEALTH

By Gary Rinne – TB Source

The spokesperson for correctional officers at the Thunder Bay District Jail says the COVID-19 outbreak is far from over, but he's glad the Ministry of the Solicitor General is taking steps to reduce the inmate population.

Bill Hayes, president of the OPSEU local at the jail, says there were only 90 inmates in the jail on Monday, although five new arrivals were expected.

Hayes feels there needs to be fewer than 100 inmates at the site in order to provide enough space to slow the spread of the virus.

On the weekend, 30 prisoners who tested negative for COVID-19 were transferred to the Toronto South Detention Centre, on the heels of a previous transfer last week.

More space

"It's definitely a start. It opens up some more space in the institution. It's a juggling match to try and find some space to separate the COVID cases and the potential COVID cases," Hayes said.

He said the last time the jail population was down this low was in the spring of 2020.

As of Monday afternoon, there were nine active COVID-19 cases among inmates, and

14 involving correctional officers.

However, according to Hayes, inmates in another block have been placed on droplet precautions pending the results of tests.

"Even sitting in the 90s right now, we're still finding it difficult with all these COVID cases in here. We basically drop the count as much as we can, safely move these people out of the institution, get it under control, then safely move them back," Hayes said.

Although COVID-19 test results usually come back in 24 hours, he said, "we find that contact tracing takes too long."

"It's definitely a start. It opens up some more space in the institution."

BILL HAYES

Not a one-time thing

Testing has to be repeated periodically, among both inmates and staff.

Hayes has been tested four times over the past couple of weeks.

"At least I know, and I can be confident coming into work and not passing it on as an asymptomatic carrier," he said.

The outbreak at the Thunder Bay Correctional Centre also continues.

As of late Monday, the Ministry of Correctional Services reported 43 active COVID-19 cases among inmates there, and five cases involving staff.

The total of 48 cases is four more than what was reported last Friday.

Hayes said about 10 inmates from the correctional centre who tested negative were transferred to Toronto on the weekend.

Hospital draw soars past \$132K

THUNDER BAY

By Leith Dunick – TB Source

The Thunder Bay Regional Health Science's Foundation's first 50/50 draw is taking on a life of its own.

As of Tuesday morning the estimated take home prize had soared past \$132,000, the money raised being used to purchase equipment at the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre.

The first early bird draw, worth \$500, will be held on Friday.

Tickets are \$10 for five numbers, \$20 for 30 numbers and \$50 for 150 numbers and are available exclusively at www.thunderbay5050.ca.

Only people who are physically in Ontario at the time of purchase may buy a ticket.

The grand prize will be drawn for on Feb. 26.

LOCAL NEWS

Vaccines delayed

HEALTH
By Leith Dunick - TB Source

Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences is reworking its roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine as supplies begin to dwindle over the next few weeks.

Pfizer, who is supplying vaccines to Canada, plans to close its European manufacturing facility briefly to retool it to ramp up production, but will stop shipping the vaccine to Canada and Europe during the pause.

In a release issued on Monday night, the hospital, which is in charge of distributing the Pfizer vaccine, will only provide first-dose vaccinations to long-term care residents in the coming weeks, with the goal of having everyone inoculated by Feb. 5, pending availability of the vaccine.

Long-term care residents are expected to get their second dose

within a 21- to 27-day window. All other groups will be under the directive to expand the allowable second dose time period to up to 42 days.

The hospital said the plan to vaccinate northern, remote First Nations will also continue during the slowdown of supply.

The public is being asked to be patient.

“Clearly, given these unplanned changes in vaccine availability, many scheduled appointments will need to be rescheduled. People who had appointments will be contacted directly.”

More than 2,600 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Thunder Bay, including 100 per cent of long-term care residents who requested it. About half of long-term care staff have been vaccinated too, some already having been given their second dose.

The hospital did not offer up senior staff for interviews for this story.

Safeway rebranding

BUSINESS
By Ian Kaufman - TB Source

A north core grocery store is in for a makeover in 2021.

The Safeway on Court Street North will close in the spring to re-brand under discount grocery banner FreshCo, parent company Sobeys Inc. announced Monday.

That will see the store closed for four to five months for renovations beginning in the spring, the company said. However, the pharmacy located inside will remain open throughout, at a temporary location “at or nearby the current Safeway store.”

New approach

FreshCo will offer low prices and diverse offerings, including multicultural options, the company said in a release. It will price match, offer a double-fresh guarantee, and offer rain

checks with 10 per cent off through its in-stock guarantee.

The company will work with the unions representing affected Safeway employees to ensure all terms of the collective agreements are met, it said.

Employee options

“We will also work with the respective unions to provide options to impacted employees, including the opportunity to work at Safeway stores within the network or in the new FreshCo locations.”

An opening date for the Thunder Bay store has not yet been confirmed.

The conversion is part of a plan by Empire Company Limited, which owns the brands, to convert about a quarter of Safeway and Sobeys locations to FreshCo outlets by 2022.

The company on Monday also announced six new FreshCo locations in Alberta.



REBRANDING: Safeway has operated on Court Street for decades.

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- Shop at Neighbourhood Stores** instead of ordering from large online retailers.

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Editorial

EDITORIAL

Nets had to be removed

City council members are trying to be the good guys.

On Monday, by a 9-4 count, council voted to return hockey nets to its outdoor rinks. But because they wanted to ratify it on the same night, and because Couns. Brian Hamilton and Shelby Ch'ng ducked out before the meeting ended, they didn't get the two-thirds approval needed to do so.

It will have to wait until Feb. 8.

This flies in the face of public health, specifically the Thunder Bay District Health Unit.

The health unit, in conjunction with the City of Thunder Bay, was a factor in the decision to remove the nets in the first place.

Why?

Because simply put, the public wasn't following the rules. Reports of hockey games being played were routine, not to mention the lack of physical distancing and too many people on the ice at any given time.

We're in a pandemic. Had the hockey-playing public followed the rules, the nets would still be in place.

The only real solution, other than removing the nets, is round-the-clock supervision, which is costly and puts city workers in the firing line.

Skaters can still skate and practice their hockey skills, individually. They just don't have nets to shoot at. Get over it.

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City needs revitalization

To the editor:

Once a vibrant port-community driven by the forestry and railroad industries, and boasting a strong, skilled blue-collar workforce, Thunder Bay is now a city struggling to survive, thanks in part to outside forces that have conspired over time to change history. However, the fact that we have failed miserably to re-define ourselves during the decades since can only be attributed to short-sighted leadership from within.

Any remaining industry in Thunder Bay is now on life support and, covid aside, we are seriously in need of something else to revitalize the area and bring back permanent, well-paid quality jobs.

The critical lack of employment is driving our youth and others away; there is little in the way of affordable housing and seniors, still able to live independently, have nowhere to go when wanting to sell their homes and downsize. Our infrastructure is in deplorable condition and getting worse with time.

If ignored much longer it will be too late to play catch up anytime soon, if ever; numerous complaints point not just to the lack of maintenance, but the sub-standard workmanship that goes into what little is being done.

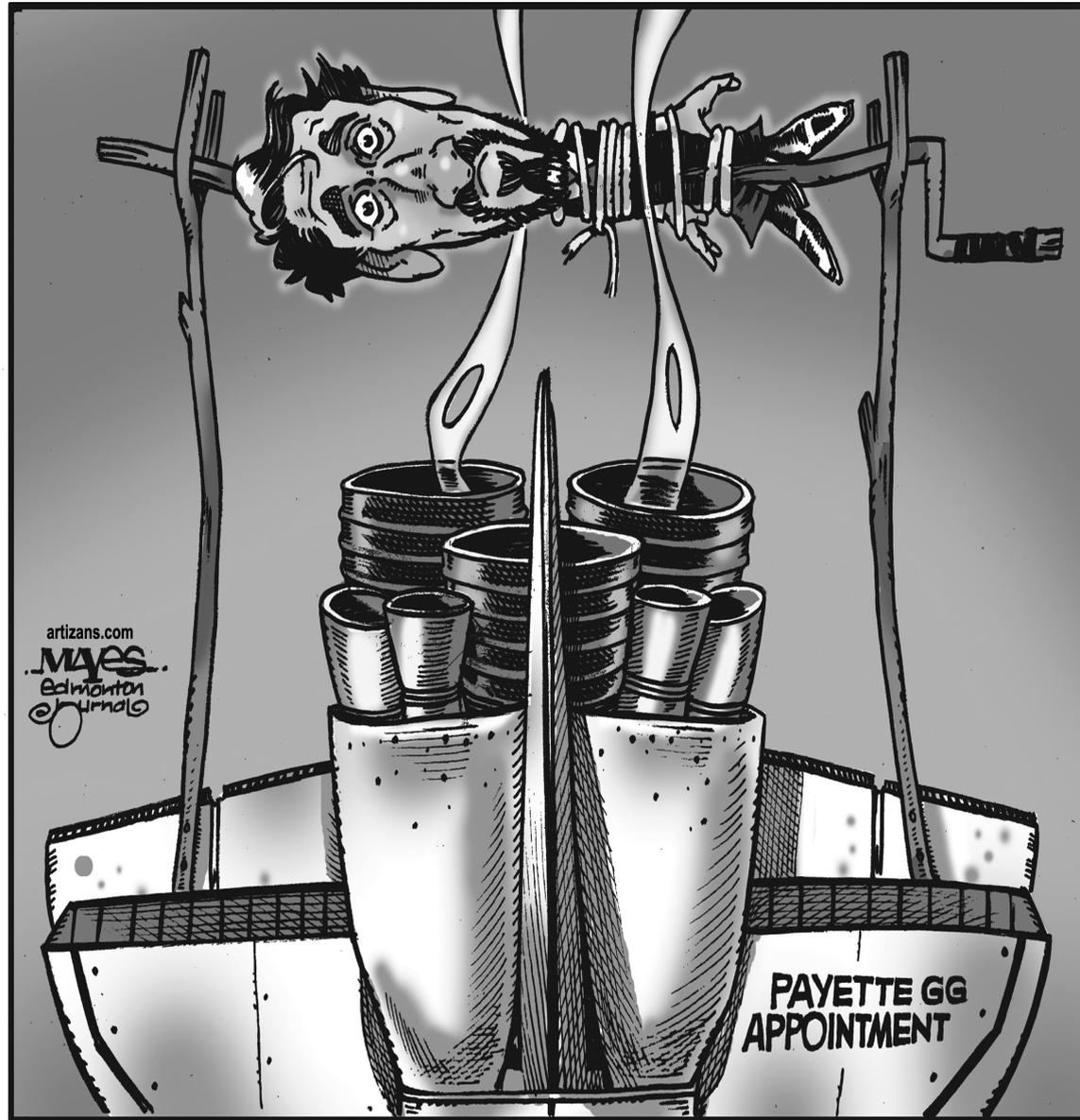
Unfortunately, the contracting out of these services has also driven up costs in addition to sacrificing quality and efficiency; the retail industry in Thunder Bay is unstable; as fast as one store opens, another one closes and we are overrun with 'fast cash' outlets and pawnshops attesting to the growing poverty here; efforts to beautify our city are largely unimaginative, sporadic, and void of any city-wide planning.

Sadly, Thunder Bay has become an unattractive, unappealing place with little draw for its own residents let alone tourists. It suffers from a serious lack of vision amongst city leaders and administrators and brings to mind an old saying...vision without action is a "dream"; action without vision is a "nightmare". At the very least, Thunder Bay has become an embarrassment.

In an article posted on tbnewswatch.com published on Jan.13, called "Councillors see trouble ahead as city launches 2021 budget process," tax comparisons with other communities across the province (hoping to justify future tax increases) beg the question as to whether or not council is attempting to compare apples to oranges.

I would be interested to know, for instance, what quality of service other Ontario cities of like size enjoy with respect to industry & business, housing, culture, tourism and entertainment, and taking into account

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



diverse tastes and age groups.

Though it pains me to say it, I strongly suspect that our sister communities enjoy a far superior lifestyle and aesthetic appeal than Thunder Bay because, as noted earlier, on all of the above fronts this city is severely lacking...and no serious effort is being made to change that reality regardless of the taxes collected.

Adding insult to injury, residential taxpayers, as the article confirms, continue to bear a heavier burden every year as industrial and commercial enterprises push for lower taxation; also, as tax rates rise, that two to three per cent annual tax hike begins to represent an alarmingly higher cost to households that are barely hanging on, and whose salaries or pensions remain stagnant or increase over time by amounts barely able to cover inflation.

Most disturbing of all, the projected increases in municipal taxes from 2022 to 2024 are being floated at a time when the fallout from covid

alone, the full extent of which is yet to be determined, is also poised to cause infinite financial pain in the very near future and over the long term; yet the mayor and council, with the exception of one member, remain unconcerned.

Who's to say we'll see a drop in rates by 2025?

Perhaps council of the day will find another reason to keep rates high, or decide that taxpayers, having become resigned to the higher rate should simply carry on. Thank you, Mr. Bentz, for speaking out on our behalf. Your insight and compassion are noted and very much appreciated. I can say with some assuredness that your voters will remember you at the polls.

The question then remains, just where are our tax dollars going? It appears to me that the lion's share is going toward simply keeping the city bureaucracy afloat, and that includes some very enviable annual salaries in excess of \$100K (more than are noted in other municipalities).

The remainder are going to feed what some call "vanity" projects that might put a feather in council's cap but continue to put the cart before the horse.

It is long past time to let taxpayers see some real results for their hard earned tax dollars and I don't mean Event Centers or Indoor Soccer Fields

For far too long, many on city council have enjoyed the seat of power and grown too close to the forest to see the trees.

I blame us, the voters, who have allowed laziness and/or apathy to prevent us from stepping up to the plate or simply voting at all.

So here's your challenge Thunder Bay. In the next election, demand change for fresher, more modern and efficient ways of looking at the world because if we don't, what we see is what we'll continue to get, and what we'll continue to pay dearly for in more ways than one.

Louise Fisher,
Thunder Bay

Perspective

Canadians in for crude awakening

U.S. President Joe Biden killed the permit for the Keystone XL pipeline on Day 1 of his presidency

OPINION

By J.R. Shermack
Special to TB Source

Canadians have a lot on their minds right now but if there is one thing that most of us are not really concerned about these days, it might be the Keystone XL pipeline.

The only things we want to see coming down the pipeline are groceries, economic relief and vaccines – we aren't even thinking about crude.

Nevertheless, crude oil oozed back into the headlines last week and in one sense it was a welcome change to the troubling news that dominates the media and makes us nervous.

The shelving of this pipeline project will not directly affect the daily lives of most Canadians although a few in Alberta (especially Premier Kenney) may have to switch to plan B.

It is a long, complicated story that has become a crude reality.

This major pipeline extension was first proposed in 2008 and when you look at its troubled past it was a questionable business plan right from the get go.

Environmentalists worried

Despite claims of minimal ecological effect Keystone XL immediately faced mounting opposition and calls for more oversight, safeguards and environmental protection.

The American State Department continued to insist that its impact would be minimal while protests and civil disobedience led to arrests on



OIL'S NOT WELL: Construction on the Keystone XL pipeline began last year, but its future is very much up in the air in 2021.

both sides of the border.

The project was further delayed by continued opposition and debate in the courts, government departments and through the media.

The pipeline remained under scrutiny and was reviewed, reassessed and re-routed until early in 2012 when President Obama, facing an ultimatum, rejected Keystone.

Canada was free to submit an alternate proposal to deal with the unresolved issues and we did just that

in the hopes of reversing the cancellation.

The political wrangling went on until 2015 when a newly elected U.S. senate defied the president and approved Keystone.

Obama vetoed the bill – stakeholders appealed to the government and citizens in both countries, saying it was in everybody's best interest to end the delays.

The Obama presidency ended and the next four years brought renewed

hope to oil producers – the new administration was pro-Keystone and supported its construction.

More cross border wrangling, construction costs reaching \$8 billion and rising and strong opposition remained while the terms of the project were renegotiated.

In spite of serious concerns voiced by Indigenous and environmental groups, construction began in 2020 just in time for the coming U.S. election.

And when the votes were tallied Joe Biden was elected President and as promised, he cancelled Keystone XL, maybe for good this time.

That's how crude oil captured the headlines

It was described as a gut punch for Alberta Premier Jason Kenney who invested \$1.5 billion in the project and further guaranteed a \$6 billion loan.

Albertans were counting on an estimated \$30 billion in tax and royalty revenues once the pipeline became operational.

Legal action?

Now Mr. Kenney may spend the rest of his mandate in court fighting for compensation and demanding consequences for cancelled contracts and mismanaged negotiations.

Detractors have always been worried about the environmental impact of flooding the American market with tar sands oil, one of the dirtiest fuels in the world.

But even without the Keystone pipeline Canada will be increasing its crude oil exports to the U.S. by well over 4 million barrels per day before 2025.

The lives of average Canadians may be in turmoil right now but the situation in the oil patch is as normal as it ever was.

This is the crude reality that we aren't really concerned about right now.

But even if the headline does catch your attention it's a welcome relief to have something different to worry about for a while.

A look back in history:

The Huronic on the rocks

On 5 August 1928, the Northern Navigation Company's passenger steamer Huronic piled onto the rocks on Lucile Reef. Three tugs tried to free the liner but to no avail. It took a large grain freighter, the Midland Prince, to do the job. More than 100 lives were saved.



HOW TO WRITE US:

Letters to the editor are most welcome. Those kept to 350 words or less have priority.

The Thunder Bay Source reserves the right to edit submissions for content and clarity. All attempts will be made to preserve the core argument of the author.

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your VOICE

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LOCAL NEWS

Beyak retiring from Senate

DRYDEN, ONT.
By Doug Dlaczuk – TB Source

After years of scrutiny for comments made about residential schools, Senator Lynn Beyak of Dryden announced her retirement from the Upper Chamber, but continues to stand by her divisive comments.

Beyak made the announcement on Monday, which marks exactly eight years since she was first appointed to the Senate in 2013 by then Prime Minister Stephen Harper.

“The opportunity to serve all Canadians – and especially those people whose voices often don’t get heard – is an honour and a privilege I treasure,” Beyak said in a statement.



FILE
STEPPING DOWN: Sen. Lynn Beyak.

Beyak generated controversy in recent years after she defended the residential school system saying it

was well-intentioned and posted letters with racist comments towards Indigenous people to her website.

In 2019, the Senate suspended Beyak with pay and she was required to undertake cultural sensitivity training. She also issued an apology, saying her actions were unhelpful to the conversation around the issue.

In October, it was revealed that Beyak illegally donated to Donald Trump's reelection bid in the United States. In December, the Senate tabled a motion to suspend Beyak from the chamber but with her retirement the motion will no longer be heard.

In her statement announcing her retirement, Beyak continued to defend her comments.



GUNS GONE: This handgun was among the weapons police seized as part of Project Valiant.

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Project Valiant a \$2.7M success

CRIME

By Karen Edwards – Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

For more than five years, the Thunder Bay police force and its partner agencies have been dealing with a high-volume of individuals travelling from southern Ontario to traffic drugs in the northwest.

Through a virtual news conference on Thursday, Jan. 21, Thunder Bay police announced the results of a major joint-forces police investigation involving several agencies in southern Ontario which resulted in the seizure of \$2.7 million worth of street drugs.

Despite the massive seizure of drugs and arrest of 12 individuals, police said they continue to be “plagued” with more individuals ready to take over for those who have been arrested.

“Any given day, our highways have couriers bringing more drugs to our communities,” Det.-Insp. John Fennell of the Thunder Bay Police Service said Thursday.

“It has been made very clear from our investigations and the people being charged that much of this illicit drug trade is coming from southern Ontario,” he said.

Several police forces were involved in the operation called Project Valiant including Ontario Provincial Police, York Regional Police and Canada Border Services Agency. The operation was led by the Thunder Bay Police Service.

“Our gang and gun problem is real and it needs to be taken very seriously by our legal

system and our government,” Fennell said. “As much effort as we put into these initiatives we continue to be plagued with a steady stream of new persons taking over for those we have been able to charge.”

The investigation took place from August 2020 to December 2020. Approximately six search warrants were conducted in Thunder Bay and one major search warrant was executed in Markham, Ont.

As a result, police seized 11.9 kilograms of fentanyl, 1.55 kilograms of cocaine, more than 4,000 pills of fentanyl, 846 packages of cannabis edibles for the black market and eight capsules of hydromorphone.

Furthermore, police seized several weapons including 10 rifles, four shotguns, one crossbow, two high-capacity magazines, two tasers and thousands of rounds of ammunition.

Police also located and seized four cars, one motorcycle, more than \$120,000 in Canadian cash, fake government identification and drug trafficking paraphernalia.

The project’s lead, Det.-Sgt. Dan Irwin, said during Thursday’s news conference, the long-term impact of initiatives such as Project Valiant aimed to address the high volume of illicit drugs coming into the community from southern Ontario is minimal.

“It makes an impact at the beginning but like Det.-Insp. Fennell said as soon as we make arrests unfortunately the highways and the planes are full of individuals coming from the south to continue to sell fentanyl, cocaine, crack cocaine, and various other drugs,” he said.

TB Life

people | health | home | food | leisure

Winter clothes enhance outdoor fun



**KEITH
AILEY**

THE GOOD LIFE

After three months of relative warmth, temperatures in the Thunder Bay area have dipped down a little closer to normal recently. While the long-term forecast shows that we will be seeing above-average temperatures again very soon, this little cold spell had me trying to remember my cold weather layering system.

For those of us with a desire to get outside for some exercise and fresh air every day, a few simple tricks and some wise clothing choices can make any winter activity enjoyable, whether we are taking a leisurely walk with the dog or doing some high intensity Nordic ski intervals.

Focus on your core. If your core area is warm, your heart will just keep pumping warm blood to your fingers and toes.

However, once we start to get cold at our core, blood flow will be more focused there to protect our vital organs. The side effect of this evolutionary efficiency is that less blood will flow to our fingers and toes, meaning cold and numbness in those areas.

Protect your extremities. Mitts are best for perpetually cold hands but I like the dexterity gloves provide for fatbiking and skiing.

For this reason, I will usually select gloves with a fleece lining and a leather palm as I have found those to be the warmest option with five fingers.

For the feet, wool socks are great as they retain heat, even when wet. However, for unmatched comfort, it is

hard to beat the T-Max Heat socks made primarily with acrylic. One great tip is to put on a fresh pair of dry, warm socks just before heading outside.

Swing your arms and jump around. If your fingers do get cold, try swinging your arms around like windmills. Forward or backward, it doesn't seem to matter but twenty rotations per arm will send warm blood rushing to your finger tips and, like magic, they'll feel great again.

The same effect can be had for frozen feet by running or jumping around on your toes. Of course, if you are easily embarrassed, there are chemical "hot pocket" style hand and toe warmer packs that are also effective.

The key with these is to open the package and leave them exposed to the air for five minutes before jamming them into your gloves or boots.

Dress in layers. A thin merino wool or a synthetic base layer (or two) under a thermal layer will keep you comfortable while a waterproof, windproof and breathable outer shell will protect you from wind and snow.

This system allows you to shed layers if the temperature rises, and it will help you regulate your body temperature to stay comfortable with varying activity levels.

Heads up. Wearing a toque will serve to keep the heat in and make you feel warm for low-intensity activities like walking. When you are working up a sweat, a thermal headband will allow moisture to escape while still protecting the sensitive skin on the ears and forehead.

Regardless of the temperature trend, we have so many exciting outdoor activity options that knowing how to dress for any adventure, in any temperature, is practically essential knowledge for the hardy people of Thunder Bay.



STAYING WARM: Brook Ailey takes advantage of a fresh coat of winter snow, while dressed for a high-intensity Nordic competition.

PEPITA JONES



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Snowarama going virtual

THUNDER BAY
By Ian Kaufman -TB Source

Easter Seals Ontario is appealing to local snowmobilers to continue their historic support of the organization's Snowarama fundraiser, despite some COVID-19 adjustments.

The pandemic has hampered fundraising efforts, while increasing the need for the charity's services, organizers said.

"The pandemic has really hit Easter Seals children hard," said Easter Seals Ontario president Kevin Collins. "They've lost access to therapy and other support services as well as social activities."

The organization helps children with physical disabilities purchase assistive mobility and communications devices and offers summer camp opportunities, among other services.

A virtual version of the popular Snowarama event will be particularly crucial to local fundraising efforts, said senior development officer Rhonda Harrison, after several other events were cancelled due to COVID-19.

"It's been a challenge to do any fundraising for these kids," she



BACK IN BUSINESS: Emily Pike and Tony Swader, president of the Grand Portage Trail Riders, help kick off the 2020 Snowarama for Easter Seals Kids.

said. "A lot of our fundraising has been put on hold – our celebrity hockey classic, our roast."

The local Snowarama has traditionally been held at the Grand Portage Lodge and Casino. The 17th annual event in 2020 drew more than 150 riders, raising \$46,000 for the cause.

This year, participants can register online and complete the ride on their own schedule anytime between Jan. 23 to Feb. 28.

Riders can win prizes including a generator, gift certificates, and more. Those interested can learn more at Snowarama.org or call (807) 345-7622.

Frozen fingers a wintertime reality

Fingerless gloves have helped alleviate some of the frigid problem

Yes, this January will probably go down in the weather annuals as being one of the warmest.

Certainly is in my fifty-one years of living in Northwestern Ontario. However...

There are those days that intrude into our tropical warmth that remind us of what January is more typically like in terms of temperature: mid-January traditionally twix minus thirty and minus thirty-five - frozen car seats, square tires.

Not this year fortunately. But when those occasional chilly days and nights register (I keep a close watch on the thermometer), if you are wise, you bundle up; you swath your bod in layers to keep Jack Frost from invading.

However (and this is where the "however" bit comes in), there are those times when doing a chore and the wearing of gloves doesn't work, at least for me. I'm a paid up, card carrying member of the Klutz Consciousness Club.

Manual dexterity and I have yet to meet. So, when a task presents itself in winter involving the use of my hands, many times (I've lost count) often I have to remove my gloves to execute deeds a simple as undoing a clasp in order to hook up a full water pail in a horse stall to turning the air blue while trying to get the danged power take-off of the snowblower onto the back of Big red, my ancient tractor. I've written about this ordeal before.

Chilling out

Somewhere in all those years of playing Farmer Fred, the Unhandy Handyman, I must have truly frozen the digits on my hands.

Don't recall when. It is amazing how many times I had to remove my gloves to accomplish a task that I couldn't while wearing the cumbersome things.

Perhaps it wasn't a single episode but an accumulation of times over the years that slowly took its toll.

How do I know?

Lately, especially over the past two winters, I've noticed that even when my hands are packed in warm gloves while working in the barn or outside, the tips of my fingers rapidly get cold, sometimes painfully so.

I don't stop working; I retract my fingers from the fingers of the glove and curl them against the palm of my hand to bring back warmth. It usually works but only

temporarily. Where I especially noticed this problem was when I was on board Red snowblowing.

Snowblowing after a good dump usually requires me and Red blowing snow off of the main driveway that is actually a large oval, the parking area in front of the barn, the yard in front of the barn on the other side of the dividing fence so that pushing the wheelbarrow to fetch wood shavings is easy (we use wood shavings as stall bedding), the lane to Mt. Crumpet where I dump the cart full of manure, and the lane in front of winter paddock to make it easy to bring horses in and out or to run the hose to their water trough.

It took awhile but eventually after much discomfort to my hands while snowblowing, I procured a pair of giant, fingerless gloves.

These gloves did the

trick.

No more frigid fingers. The only drawback is that I can't use them for any work involving manual dexterity - too cumbersome. I've had these gloves for several years and unfortunately the leather has worn and the right-hand glove keeps being gored by the stick throttle located just under the steering wheel.

So, every time I go to turn, the glove scrapes against the end of the throttle and now there is a large hole.

Old tricks insufficient

Duct tape didn't work in case you were going to recommend it as a repair solution.

I was working in the barn last week when it was unusually frigid out and my fingers quickly let me know that they weren't happy even though I had donned a pair of thick gloves.

When I mentioned my freezing fingers woes to my wife, Laura, it was she who posited the theory that I must have frozen my fingers in the past such that it doesn't take much for my digits to get cold.

The recent American Presidential inauguration featured a photo of Senator Bernie Sanders seated in a chair, his face covered in a mask, but sporting a large pair of warm, woolen mittens.

When questioned, the Senator replied that he was just trying to stay warm.

Well, Facebook has gone crazy with people posting 'memes' of Senator Saunders seated in every possible situation - inserted into famous photos or paintings and on, and on.

Those mitts look mighty warm though! (Except we couldn't help but notice that Senator Saunders was not wearing a warm hat.

Doesn't he know that most of the heat escapes your body through the head?)

Perhaps I have warm mitten-envy.



FRED JONES
RURAL ROOTS

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IN THE bay

arts | entertainment | culture

Promising Young Woman provocative



**MARTY
MASCARIN**

MOVIE TALK

P*Promising Young Woman* (Shaw PPV) is being heralded as a searing drama/vengeance thriller dealing with the nightmarish ramifications of sexual assault, buttressed by a gritty, edgy performance by Carrie Mulligan.

This is an unsettling topic certainly in need of exploring, bringing into focus victim rage and shame, indifferent societal culture, and institutional injustices.

Promising Young Woman has noble intentions complemented by Ms. Mulligan's usual standout work. However, the film does overload the game.

The script by director Emerald Fennell relies heavily upon stereotypes, one-dimensional characterizations, and melodramatic situations to simplistically drive home its points.

Mulligan plays Cassie, a standout med student who dropped out of college several years previously to look after her lifelong girlfriend and fellow drop-out Nina, the victim of a sexual assault rendered by some fellow students. Cassie is suffering from PTSD resulting from Nina's dark plight.

Cassie is living with her parents, slumming as a coffee house barista by day, while by night she feigns drunkenness in bars to lure slimy men into her own game of sexual one-upmanship to jolt them into moral consciousness.

Pained by loss, Cassie sees males and females alike are ripe for a startling wake-up call, as far too many remain unaffected by such traumatic incidents and attendant attitudes.

Females take their lumps along with males. A distant female classmate (Connie Britton) also barely recalls the case, other than the need to preserve scholastic reputations of both the school and the accused perpetrator using the lame 'innocent until proven guilty' axiom, with little amplification.

Cassie exacts cunning, ironic revenge by turning the tables on both.



FEMME FATALE: Carrie Mulligan plays Cassie, a former med student who dropped out to care for her lifelong girlfriend, while living a double life at night.

These scenes acknowledge sad truths, but they also deprive the two women a moment of cathartic realization in getting Cassie's point. Ditto for most of her other targets.

Commendably, this is not a cheap female version of *Death Wish*. For darker content, one refers to Isabelle Huppert in *Elle* or Noomi Rapace in

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo.

While worthy points are struck, there is a reliance on stereotypes. Construction workers, road raging misogynists, opportunistic bar flies, and booze swilling stag party attendees are all painted with the same one-dimensional brush.

Even the lone nice guy is guilty of a not-so-nice memory. The dark side of

male nature is getting justifiably pilloried. Nice guys can be abusers too. Genuinely decent guys are AWOL here.

There are clichés, including characters getting so blind drunk they cannot recall what happened the night before, the kind of hoary go-to plotting one finds in *Coronation Street*.

Promising Young Woman is provoca-

tive, a basic function of effective art. Some will applaud compelling truths while others may see contrived set-ups. Mulligan's bravura portrayal carries the film.

In the end, ingenious Cassie does get the last laugh, but by paying a perilous price.

(Note: Beware of triggering potential and the significant "premiere" fee.)

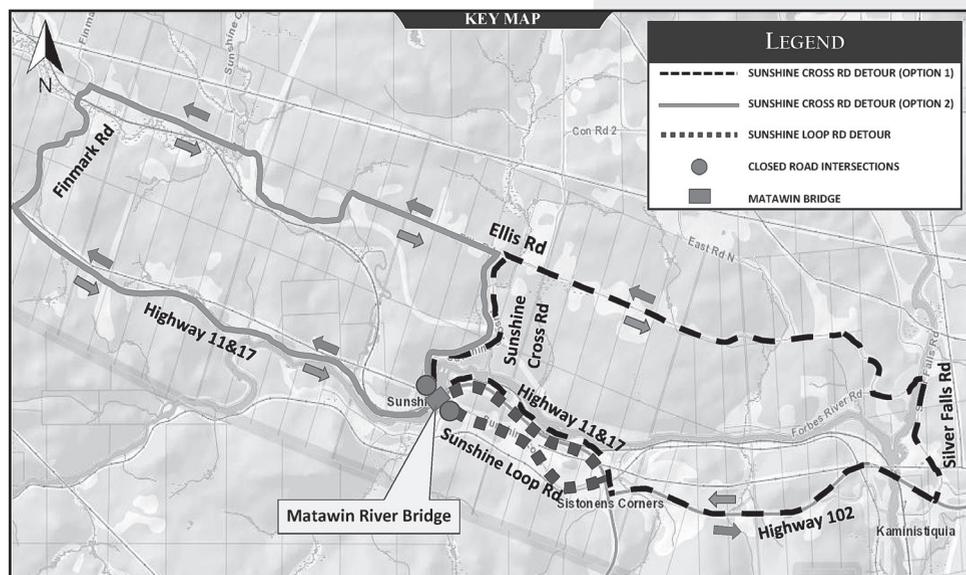
Notice of Study Commencement

Preliminary Design and Class Environmental Assessment for the Rehabilitation of Matawin River Bridge, Sunshine (G.W.P. 6080-17-00)

THE STUDY

The **Ministry of Transportation (MTO)** Northwestern Region has retained the services of **Planmac Engineering Inc.** and **TSI Inc.** to complete the Preliminary Design and Class Environmental Assessment (Class EA) for the rehabilitation of the Matawin River Bridge. A Key Map of the bridge location is provided below.

Bridge works will include rehabilitation of the structure, repair to the abutments and wingwalls, repair to or replacement of the barrier walls and sidewalk, and removal and replacement of the existing pavement. One lane of traffic will be maintained across the bridge during construction. The project is currently listed in the Northern Highways Program with a target completion date of fall 2022 pending environmental approvals, regional priorities, and available funding.



Road Closures

To accommodate the construction works, closure of two (2) direct accesses to Highway 11/17 will be required at Sunshine Loop Road and Sunshine Crossroad. The closures would take place during one (1) summer construction season.

Two (2) detour routes are currently being considered to accommodate the closure of Sunshine Crossroad as shown on key map:

- Option 1: heading east on Ellis Road resulting in an increase of approximately 18 minutes travel time; and,
- Option 2: heading west on Ellis Road resulting in an increase of approximately 20 minutes.

The detour route for the closure of Sunshine Loop Road would result in an increase in travel of approximately 5 minutes.

THE PROCESS

This study is following the approved planning process for Group 'B' projects under the *Class Environmental Assessment (Class EA) for Provincial Transportation Facilities (2000)*. The Class EA includes public consultation, an assessment of the potential effects of the proposed project and identification of measures required to mitigate any adverse effects.

There is the opportunity for public input throughout this process. A Transportation Environmental Study Report (TESR) will be prepared at the end of the study to document the process and results. The TESR will be available for public review and comment. However, if it is determined there are no significant environmental effects, the ministry may step down the project to a Group 'C' project. If the ministry determines a step-down is appropriate, a TESR will not be prepared. A notice advising of this decision will be published and a review period will be provided for public comment.

CONSULTATION AND COMMENTS

If you have any questions or comments, or if you would like to be added to the study's mailing list, please contact either of the following Project Team members:

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For communication supports or to request project material in an alternate format, please contact one of the Project Team members listed above. Information will be collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. With the exception of personal information, all comments will become part of the public record.

Inventor featured in movie

FILM

By Doug Dlaczuk -TB Source

It's been a film at least three years in the making of a man whose life has been intriguing people across the region for more than 40 years.

The Thunder Bay Museum recently released *In Search of Wendell Beckwith*, a documentary film by filmmaker Jim Hyder about the fascinating life of a reclusive man who lived in the Northwestern Ontario wilderness.

"We are really excited about the end product," said Michael DeJong, curator and archivist with the Thunder Bay Museum. "It has been a labour of love for Jim and his film team to produce this documentary. It feels great to see it come to fruition for sure."

Hyder began formally working on the film in 2018, but it's a project with roots dating back to 1972 when he first learned of Wendell Beckwith.

Beckwith has become somewhat of a folklore legend in Northern Ontario. Originally from Connecticut, he pursued an education in science and engineering and was credited as the inventor of the sapphire nib for Parker Brothers Ball Point Pens.

In 1961, after working briefly at the Gravity Institute in New Hampshire, Beckwith met Harry Wirth, a wealthy businessman who wanted to start a wilderness retreat in Northern Ontario. Having already left his wife and children with a trust, Beckwith travelled with Wirth to Armstrong.

The goal was to find somewhere isolated, with both men described as being reclusive. Eventually they travelled north and built several cabins on Best Island in the middle of Whitewater Lake approximately 40 kilometres north of Armstrong.

"There was a significance as to why he chose where he did and that's an interesting thing in and of itself," DeJong said.

"He needed somewhere isolated. They eventually found their way to Armstrong and from there they decided to go north, which is only accessibly by canoe and plane.

He came to this notion that there was a significance to where he lived. He referred to it as the centre of the universe, so it's interesting in the way it related to Northwestern Ontario geographically."

Throughout his time in wilderness, Beckwith pursued his interests in science and engineering. He crafted intricate devices out of wood to make scientific measurements and artistic models and sculptures. The cabins he built were a popular destination for travellers in the area but have since fallen into disrepair.

The Thunder Bay Museum provided many archived materials as well as taped interviews with Beckwith for the film.

IN THE BAY

The Masked Dancer fails to live up

Two years ago, I admitted with some shame that I had become addicted to a Fox reality show called *The Masked Singer*. The series included quasi-celebrity judges along with a host still re-building his image after being fired from *America's Got Talent*, Nick Cannon.

Despite all the reasons to change the channel, I was immediately hooked on the singing contest that had varying degrees of celebrities performing in crazy disguises.

The voices were often surprisingly good and the idea of non-singers risking their reputation by singing in public had me rooting for them.

As the show picked up fans (apparently, I wasn't alone in my shame), the quality of the performances and the level of celebrity also rose. And the background story clues made it a fun game to play as a viewer trying to guess their identity.



So as *The Masked Singer* wrapped its fourth season, it wasn't necessarily a surprise that producers introduced a spin-off. The problem was it was *The Masked Dancer*.

Using the same format as the original, *TMD* has celebrities in full body disguise including a headpiece performing "dance" routines. And yes, it's as painful to watch as it sounds.



UNDER RAPS: Ice T Is was the disco ball.

In some cases, I've seen more actual dancing on *Lip Sync Battle*. The back-up dancers are stellar. However,

the rest is like a cross-between watching the groomsmen rock out on the dance floor at a wedding at midnight, and the dance recitals I've sat through in which the kids (and some of the adults on stage) were applauded just for making it to the end of the song without throwing up.

Sure, *TMD* has a couple of competitors that have real dance chops. The *Tulip* premiered with a fabulous tap routine and followed it with a contemporary duet. However, one of the oft-so-brilliant judges guessed her to be a gymnast, claiming that her choreographed back bend "could only be done by a gymnast." (Apparently, he's never seen *So You Think You Can Dance*. Or any other real dancer for that matter.)

But even the trained dancers have trouble performing under all that material, latex and prosthetics. Although not as heavy and claustro-

phobic as *TMSinger* costumes, these Dancer outfits are still weighty. And watching the Hammerhead Shark try to hip-hop while holding on to his headpiece's bulging eyes was laughable.

Fortunately, the camera work is breaking all the rules of serious dance shows. The shots jump around from angle to angle, often focusing on head shots or the various back-up dancers, hiding the missteps of the stars and avoiding comparisons to the real dancers behind them. And with a few compliments from the judges, viewers are left to believe they performed admirably.

While there are certainly moments of fun, *TMD* is, thus far, a poor relation of the original. The question remains: will it survive long enough to entice a higher quality of performance next season like its older cousin did? Or will Season 1 be the last dance?

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

ACROSS

- 1 Dept. of Motor Vehicles (abbr.)
- 4 Serum (pref.)
- 7 Adjacent (abbr.)
- 10 Electric catfish
- 11 Fr. business abbreviation
- 12 Nonchalant
- 14 Accountant (abbr.)
- 15 Call
- 17 Ten (pref.)
- 18 Pay for another
- 19 N.Z. woody vine
- 20 And other: abbr. (2 words) (Lat.)
- 22 Freedom, briefly
- 24 Orbit point
- 27 Underwater telegraph
- 31 Field (Lat.)
- 32 Aviv
- 34 Trolley
- 35 Punctuation mark

DOWN

- 1 Carplike fish
- 2 Wahoo
- 3 Video display terminal (abbr.)
- 4 Red

ANSWER TO PREVIOUS PUZZLE

F	I	S	C	D	E	C	R	A	M	A
Y	M	H	A	D	A	H	E	R	I	N
K	A	I	N	T	R	E	G	A	M	O
E	M	A	I	L	A	L	A	L	I	A
	S	C	A	L	P	E	L			
A	B	B	D	E	A	A	I	S	H	A
S	E	A	R	C	P	B	A	G	A	L
V	E	N	U	S	S	A	X	D	B	L
	N	A	C	E	L	L	E			
B	A	R	I	T	E	V	A	G	U	E
A	D	E	N	A	A	A	D	O	N	A
A	D	A	T	R	B	I	E	R	U	C
L	A	L	O	A	T	L	M	E	S	H

- 5 A (Ger.)
- 6 Of the kidneys
- 7 Pointed (pref.)
- 8 Port. lady
- 9 Male person
- 10 Energy unit
- 13 Yarn measure
- 16 Auditory
- 18 Equipmentless
- 21 game
- 22 Earth satellites
- 23 Wash
- 24 Political action committee (abbr.)
- 25 Vanity
- 26 Eur. Economic Community (abbr.)
- 28 Keeler (2 words)
- 29 Youth
- 30 Woman: obs.
- 33 Pass to the side
- 36 Death (pref.)
- 38 Quaker pronoun
- 40 Provide with food
- 42 Legal proof
- 43 Tumor (suf.)
- 44 First Chin. dynasty
- 46 Hereditary factor
- 48 Strong-scented
- 49 Sprite
- 51 Ostrichlike bird
- 52 Amazon tributary

	1	2	3		4	5	6		7	8	9		
10					11				12			13	
14					15				16				
17					18				19				
		20	21			22			23				
24	25					26			27		28	29	30
31						32			33		34		
35						36			37		38		
						39			40		41		
42	43	44			45				46		47	48	49
50					51				52				
53						54			55				
						56			57				
									58				

WORD SEARCH

E	N	O	L	A	A	R	O	T	U	N	D	E	D	P
S	K	L	O	Y	A	M	S	A	L	P	O	U	O	L
S	Y	R	E	V	E	T	E	W	I	R	B	Y	O	R
K	T	R	E	L	O	A	D	X	M	S	S	C	S	E
Z	I	N	R	L	E	T	U	P	H	C	A	T	I	
W	R	N	E	E	P	X	D	L	U	O	U	M	U	P
O	A	N	D	T	H	D	M	L	L	D	R	I	A	P
M	L	N	N	L	L	T	K	A	S	D	E	T	N	I
A	U	S	O	E	Y	H	E	F	I	I	S	N	O	N
N	G	I	Y	T	E	C	I	N	V	E	M	I	R	S
R	N	T	D	E	C	T	F	W	E	R	X	E	T	R
A	I	U	C	A	R	E	S	O	L	U	T	E	S	A
E	S	A	D	E	R	P	X	D	Y	S	S	E	A	P
Y	I	E	H	N	R	E	Z	P	L	T	T	N	L	P
S	T	A	O	C	R	E	V	O	S	B	A	L	B	A

- Alone
- Astronauts
- Blabs
- Blast
- Cadet
- Chair
- Downfall
- Emirs
- Erect
- Every
- Export
- Impulsively
- Inferno
- Intimacy
- Kindly
- Letup
- Muddle
- Nether
- Nicity
- Nippier
- Obscures
- Overcoats
- Parsnip
- Plasma
- Preys
- Radium
- Raven
- Reload
- Resolutes
- Rotund
- Shoddier
- Singularity
- Stern
- Stolen
- Tents
- Tepee
- Tests
- Woman
- Yolks
- Yonder

Sudoku

Fill in the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9.

						1		
		6		1	4			7
	4		6				2	
				7				5
	5		2					8
2	7			8				4
			4	9	1		6	2
				7		5		
			8		2			

DIFFICULTY: ★☆☆☆

ENIGMA™ CRYPTOGRAM

Enigma cryptograms are created from quotations and proverbs from around the world. Each letter stands for another letter. Hint: "R" = "O"

"ARIGUAD UP JLJZ NRPI OC
SRKZIJPC. UI UP IGJ SGJHXJPI RT
XNJHPKZJP, SRPIP ARIGUAD, HAW
SRALJCP MKSG." — JZHPKIP EUMHA
PREVIOUS SOLUTION: "What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." — Author Unknown

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Kakabeka vies for Hockeyville title

HOCKEY

By Gary Rinne – TB Source

The prospect of winning the title of Kraft Hockeyville Canada 2021 is generating excitement among users of the Norwest Arena, in particular the Kam River Fighting Walleye Junior A hockey organization.

The rink – located just east of Kakabeka Falls off Highway 17 – has been entered in the competition to host an NHL exhibition game and receive up to \$250,000 in arena upgrades.

Abby Dzuba, sales and marketing coordinator for the hockey team, calls the contest "an amazing opportunity."

"We decided that NorWest Arena definitely would be a great contender for Kraft Hockeyville, just to increase community involvement and for local businesses, especially with lockdown right now. We kind of wanted to do something that could help the community out. So we applied for a nomination story last week and it's really gained some traction," Dzuba said in an interview.

The building is owned by the municipality of Oliver Paipoonge, but Dzuba said the hockey club has some ideas for how the grand prize money could be spent, including a video scoreboard.

"We're looking to increase seating for families, build a press box...and also get a screen, maybe...just to enhance the arena so we can do trade



IMPROVEMENT FUND: The Norwest Arena is vying for the title of Kraft Hockeyville and up to \$250,000 in arena upgrades.

shows and other events for the community as well."

Dzuba said efforts are underway to gain traction for the nomination through social media, and there's already been a lot of support from local businesses and community partners.

The scoring system is set up so that nominees gain the most points when supporters submit stories about the

rink. Additional points can be gained by sharing the story on Twitter, or adding photos or videos.

"Pretty much all we need from the community right now is to go onto the page, post pictures of Norwest Arena saying why it's such an important part of the Oliver Paipoonge community," Dzuba said.

"I think we could really take this home," she added, saying that with so

many activities currently shut down by COVID-19, it would be an amazing opportunity to have an NHL pre-season game in the Thunder Bay area sometime in the future.

Nominations close on Feb. 14.

The four finalists will be announced in March, with the winner in subsequent voting getting the grand prize.

The three runners-up will each receive \$25,000 for arena upgrades.

Springer, Yates give Blue Jays instant credibility

Since I clearly don't do football predictions well, I think I'll focus this week's column on the Toronto Blue Jays and the job the team has done restocking its roster.

What a 24-hour span it was, the team first announcing it had signed closer Kirby Yates and then a day later, marquee free-agent centrefielder, George Springer.

At 31, Springer is just the type of player the Blue Jays needed to add to their burgeoning crop of young, future stars, as the team attempts to open its contention window wide open.

He brings 30-plus homerun potential, but unlike Randal Grichuk, who he'll replace in centre, he's a good bet to hit .270 or better, draw 65 walks and play just below Gold Glove defence to boot.

Springer gives the team a legitimate lead-off hitter, and also brings a championship pedigree – albeit a tainted one – having won a title with the Houston Astros in 2017.

He's been an all-star in three of the past four seasons and in the most valuable player discussions three times as well.

More importantly, a big-name signing like Springer sends a signal to the rest of the free agent class that the Blue Jays front office means business.

With the likes of Vladimir Guerrero Jr. Bo Bichette, Lourdes Gurriel Jr., Cavan Biggio and Nate Pearson, Toronto is primed to take a run at both Tampa Bay and the New York Yankees in the AL East. Both teams have question marks

entering the 2021 season, both centred around their pitching staffs.

That said, the Blue Jays don't exactly have a rotation that sets the world on fire. After Hyun-Jin Ryu, nothing is set. The team is hopeful Nate Pearson can become the dominant pitcher they believe him to be, but beyond that, it's up in the air. Tanner Roark, Robbie Ray and Ross Stripling don't exactly strike fear into the opposition.

The Jays have been linked to any number of free agents, including Masahiro Tanaka, Trevor Bauer, Jake Odorizzi, and were rumoured to be in the trade hunt for Cincinnati's Luis Castillo, who would cost a boatload to obtain.

Talking to them is one thing, bringing them aboard is another.

It's why I like the signing of Yates. Admittedly, he had a terrible 2020, going 0-1 with a 12.46 ERA in six appearances for San Diego.

But he was filthy good in 2018 and 2019, finishing ninth in the Cy Young Award voting in the latter year, and led the league with 41 saves.

Add him to a bullpen that already contains the likes of Rafael Dolis and a healthy Jordan Romano and any pitcher considering Toronto as a landing spot has to like their odds.

The team could use another bat or two, preferably a player who can man the hot corner and keep Guerrero, slimmed down or not, either at first or as a designated hitter.

The pitchers are the key. Land one or two, and this team will certainly be a contender.



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