

The Gaspé **Spec**

ESTABLISHED • MAY 1975

VOLUME 46 / NO 50, DECEMBER 16, 2020

Contract 400119680
\$1.50 (Tax included)

Santa's Village in Paspebiac more popular than anticipated



Gilles Gagné

PASPEBIAC – Paspebiac's initiative to put up the North Pole Village at the municipal rest area is generating such popularity that the expectations of the town's culture department are already shattered, in a positive way! Close to 200 children had deposited a letter for Santa Claus two weeks prior to Christmas.

Chantale Robitaille, the Town's director of culture, explains that the initiative was organized in the same spirit that prevailed for the recycled bicycles that decorate the municipality in the summer, a project for which Paspebiac won a Quebec-wide award among the Villages-relais of the province.

Cont'd on page 29



Siblings Jace (9) and Kayley Whalen (6) of Port Daniel, were eager to sit on the ski-doo's at Santa's village.



Friends Kylianne Horth (7) and Danika Huard (9) of New Carlisle, check out Santa's clothesline.



Brothers Chase Reid (12), Chance Reid (8) and DeShawn McWhirter (2) of New Carlisle.



Cole Flowers-Fitzgerald (10) of New Carlisle was one of many local children who mailed letters to Santa in the special drop box.





Time spent with family is an opportunity to take care of yourself

These uncertain times may lead to negative emotions or anxiety. Regularly engaging in physical activities that you enjoy, especially outdoors, could help you feel better.

[Québec.ca/gettingbetter](https://quebec.ca/gettingbetter)

 Info-Social 811

The court suspends Louisette Langlois' requests

Nelson **Sergerie**

CHANDLER - The Superior Court is suspending Louisette Langlois' request to squash the October 9 decision by the Municipal Commission relating to the request for a stay of proceedings and to contest the notice of hearing on sanction which had been rejected by Judge Sandra Bilodeau.

Judge Pierre Nollet considers this action premature since the sanction has not yet been issued against Chandler Mayor Louisette Langlois by the commission, which had found the elected official guilty of 20 of the 21 breaches of the Municipal Code of Ethics.

The court expects a judicial review appeal once the sanction is issued and will allow amendments to the motion up to 30 days after the commission's decision.

Both the mayor's lawyer,

Charles Caza, as well as those of the Town and the commission accepted the decision rendered in half an hour on November 26.

A contested appeal

The Municipal Commission had filed a request for a declaration of abuse and dismissal a few days before the hearing.

The commission considered that the mayor's request is without legal basis, referring to the many requests made during the proceedings before her. The commission argues that the mayor's approach is only intended to save time, as her term expires in less than a year.

A \$3.5 million garage

Chandler could build its future municipal garage for \$3.5 million, taxes included.

The firm Habitat Construction Matane Inc. presented the

most basic tender for a revised complex in the Pabos Industrial Park.

Less than \$500,000 separate the seven companies that made a proposal, the highest being nearly \$4 million.

Councillor Bruno-Pierre Godbout, who campaigned for a smaller infrastructure, is satisfied. "I said last spring that the revised project would open the door to several bidders and that we would have a project acceptable to citizens. The outcome proves us all right," says the elected official.

The mayor, Louisette Langlois, is waiting for the analyzes of the submissions to be completed before commenting.

The elected official would have liked the original project at a cost of \$5 million to be carried out because it better meets the needs of the Town.

Police report

Isaac Moffat-Swasson, 30, from Listuguj, charged with armed robbery, forcible confinement and uttering three death threats, has found a lawyer. Most of his court appearances this year were delayed because he did not have a defence attorney but on December 9, he informed Superior Court Judge Raymond W. Pronovost that Marcel Guérin will now represent him. A resident of Sorel, Mr. Guérin has represented other people from the Gaspé Peninsula in the past.

The charges laid against Isaac Moffat-Swasson are linked to events that occurred on February 21, 2019, in Listuguj. He will return to court on April 8, 2021, at which time a trial date could be set. Initially, the trial in that case was scheduled to take place in December but it was repeatedly postponed because the accused could not find a lawyer.

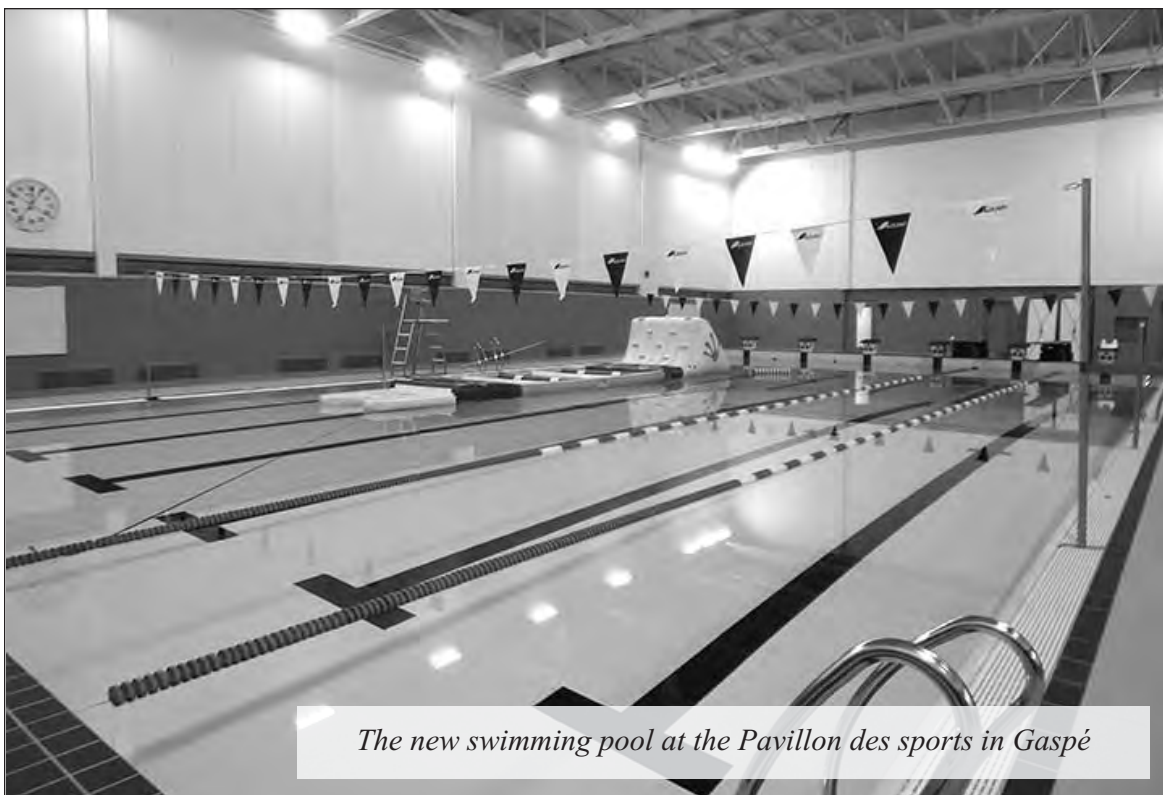
Isaac Moffat-Swasson will also return to court on December 18 for the charges laid against him in another case, the April 30, 2019 damage he allegedly caused at the New Carlisle prison. He presumably broke a toilet bowl, a sink, pipes, smashed electronic devices and other prison equipment. A wing of the prison was closed following those actions.

Marcel Guérin is expected to represent him in that case as well, points out Maxime Rocheville-Paradis, the crown prosecutor for the two files.

Until January 4, the Sûreté du Québec is conducting a province-wide concerted operation to stop driving under the influence of alcohol, or drugs or both. The operation's importance is increased by the absence of driving services like Nez Rouge this year because of the pandemic.

On an annual basis between 2014 and 2018, collisions attributable to alcohol consumption have caused 90 deaths, which corresponds to 26% of fatal road accidents. Accidents caused by alcohol also seriously injured 210 people, for 13% of the total. They also slightly injured 1,750 people, for 5% of the total.

During the same stretch, 36% of the drivers that died in road accidents had consumed legal or illegal drugs. Also, 21% of the deceased drivers had cannabis in their blood. Moreover, 37% of the deceased drivers aged 16 to 24 had cannabis in their blood, as well as 18% of the drivers aged 25 or more.



The new swimming pool at the Pavillon des sports in Gaspé

Photo: N. Sergerie

Inauguration of the new swimming pool at the Pavillon des sports in Gaspé

Nelson **Sergerie**

GASPÉ - The new swimming pool at the Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles sports pavilion in Gaspé welcomed its first swimmers on November 30.

The \$3 million project provided the CEGEP and the Town of Gaspé with a modern facility.

"Our aquatic infrastructures now comply with safety and development standards and are more inclusive for people with reduced mobil-

ity," says CEGEP director Yolaine Arseneau.

The new pool is 2.8 centimetres longer permitting the times achieved by swimmers in competition to be certified. It has been given a new coating and the water drainage pipes have been changed. The entire floor covering of the aquatic complex has been redone. The changing rooms have been renovated and are more accessible to people with reduced mobility.

Quebec contributed \$1.2 million, the CEGEP con-

tributed \$900,000, the Town of Gaspé advanced \$700,000 and the MRC de la Côte-de-Gaspé \$200,000.

"Having a healthy swimming pool in an environment like ours makes an important contribution to improving the quality of life and the betterment of our citizens. It's also a vector of attraction," suggests the mayor, Daniel Côté.

Since it was built in 1973, the pool was used 95% of the time by the citizens of the Greater Gaspé area.



PUBLIC NOTICE RENOREGION PROGRAM INSCRIPTION

RÉNORÉGION program

INSCRIPTION PERIOD

The town of Gaspé wishes to inform the household owners that they can subscribe to the RÉNORÉGION program from **January 18 to January 29 of 2021**. The program provides financial assistance in the form of a grant that varies, depending on household income, between 95% and 20% of the cost of eligible work.

ADMISSIBILITY CRITERIA

TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR A GRANT, UP TO A MAXIMUM OF \$ 12,000, HOUSEHOLD OWNERS SHALL MEET THE FOLLOWING CRITERIA:

- The building must be occupied as the main residence;
- The municipal evaluation of the residence cannot exceed \$ 115 000 (building only);
- To be eligible for a maximum grant, have an annual household income not exceeding \$ 24 000 for a household of one (1) person or couple and \$ 45 000 for a household of twelve (12) people or more (according to the 2019 assessment notices);
- Not having received financial assistance from the RénoVillage or RénoRégion Program during the last 10 years.

People who are interested may make a phone appointment with the responsible to fill in the registration form.

Urbanism department:

Phone: 418-368-2104 ext. 8530
Email: urbanisme@ville.gaspé.qc.ca

BEFORE the appointment, the responsible must have received:

- Notices of assessment federal and provincial for 2019 of EVERYONE who lives in the house

N.B. Other eligibility conditions may apply and the granting of financial assistance is conditional on the sums being allocated for this program by the Québec government to the Côte-de-Gaspé MRC.

Gilles Gagné
Commentary



McInnis Cement: opacity makes it hard to assess the upcoming deal

Opacity has often been the rule since the McInnis Cement project was officially announced, on January 31, 2014. Despite the humongous amount of public and para-public money injected into it, the presence of one private investor at the onset of the venture, the Beaudier holding, has put a lid on most information that would be interesting to know, considering the direct and indirect participation of Quebecers in the deal.

"Direct" because Investissement Québec injected \$350 million in the project, a loan of \$250 million and \$100 million in shares. It is the financial arm of the Quebec government and, by extension, of Quebecers. Until very recently, it was not possible to get a glimpse of what was happening to that money.

Finance minister Éric Girard provided a hint when he said on November 12, while presenting Quebec government's economic update, that we had to expect a \$378 million hit on the Investissement Québec money that supported McInnis Cement. So Quebecers were not given hints in close to seven years and then, poof, that money has vanished.

Economy minister Pierre Fitzgibbon, who is experiencing ethics problems these days but who has the quality of expressing things clearly, admitted on December 10 that the accounting loss of Investissement Québec looks more like a \$472 million hole, including the running interest on the \$250 million loan announced in 2014. Considering its low rank as a creditor, there is a slim chance, he added, that Investissement Québec will see again a small part of that money, maybe 15 years down the road, if the joint venture is very profitable. Let's not hold our breath on that possibility.

Now, the Caisse de dépôt et de placement, the indirect part of public support because it is supposedly run independently from the government, remains in a better position of recuperating some of the \$415 million or so invested and lent to McInnis Cement. With a stake of 17% in the new enterprise once the Port

Daniel facility is merged, or absorbed, by Saint Mary's Cement, the Caisse will certainly make profits, now that a seasoned operator will preside over the Gaspé plant.

That facility stands a chance to be very profitable in the near future. It is a modern plant in a world of mostly old and very old plants. A look at the other facilities of Saint Mary's Cement illustrates quite well that reality. The Saint Mary's, Ontario, plant was built in 1912, while the other facility in the same province, at Bowmanville, was built in 1968. In the United States, the plants of Dixon, Illinois, and Charlevoix, Michigan, were respectively built in 1906 and 1967.

So a plant erected between 2014 and 2017 like Port Daniel's stands a good chance of being more profitable than the old facilities of the company. If Votorantim Cimentos is to close a facility in the foreseeable future, it will likely be in Ontario or in the United States, although some of those plants have been upgraded.

The Bowmanville and Charlevoix cement plants are located along the water, which provides them, like Port Daniel, a net advantage, as shipping is the cheapest way to deliver cement. The old plants of Saint Mary's and Dixon would therefore appear more vulnerable, at first glance.

The important aspect to watch with regards to Port Daniel is how Votorantim will consider a plant that has been acquired for a relatively low price, given the fact that an important creditor like Investissement Québec is currently not receiving money after investing a lot in the project.

The Gaspé Peninsula has seen initiatives that have folded after an acquisition at a cheap price by a company supposed to rejuvenate a plant. Tembec was practically given the Chandler paper mill in 2001 and neglected the plant's modernization project to such an extent that in January 2004, it was stopped after engulfing \$312 million of private and public funds. The private part mainly came from the Solidarity Fund of Quebec's Federation of Labour, not Tembec.

The same pattern almost killed McInnis Cement. Flaws in its conception and the opacity that surrounded the initial stage of the Port Daniel facility construction led to a \$444 million cost overrun. It must also be noted that since the plant's production debut in June 2017, "improvements" of close to \$200 million were added to McInnis Cement in Port Daniel and in new terminals.

Why were those "improvements" needed two years after production start? How is it that some of the input has to be unloaded in Belledune, New Brunswick, and trucked at a high cost to Port Daniel, thus hampering the plant's capacity to turn profits? Could those opera-

tional characteristics have been avoided with a plant neatly designed at the beginning? Could better storage capacity have been planned before building the facility?

We might know one day. So far, those "improvements" were always explained through the same canal, "cement is selling well and we need to expand." Fine, but the plant still has not reached its projected capacity. Do we see there another planning shortcoming?

From the outside, with very little information from Votorantim and the *Caisse de dépôt et de placement*, speculations rule.

Competitors will keep complaining for a while because Votorantim Cimentos now buys for a low price an almost brand new cement plant whose initial designing flaws have been mostly corrected with para-public money.

Environmentally speaking, will the Quebec government, through Investissement Québec among other ways, negotiate to make sure that the emissions coming out of the Port Daniel plant can be monitored in a continuous way and through data sharing with the public? Let's bet that this option has not been thought of by governmental authorities.

The Port Daniel plant is here to stay. Things could have been handled quite differently over the last decade. The three different political parties that formed the Quebec government during that span were not always clever in the way they envisioned regional development.

A financially leaner project could have been implemented in Port Daniel had the Parti Québécois and the Liberal Party not been obsessed by political gains. As for the Coalition avenir Québec, François Legault spent two terms in the opposition while hammering on wind energy and McInnis Cement to make electoral progress in Montreal and Quebec City, where Gaspé Peninsula bashing is a popular activity for some people. His government might have approved the coming of Votorantim as a way to embarrass the other parties. Hopefully, further improvements will turn the Port Daniel plant into a cleaner and more profitable facility. Montrealers will eventually care about something else.

Note: This is the last paper of 2020, a year that will stand out for many reasons, not always good ones. There is one thing that has proven good for the Gaspé SPEC over the years and it is the contribution of the volunteers, in many aspects of our production. Some of our volunteers have not been able to deliver their usual contribution because of the COVID-19 pandemic but this crisis will have an end, and we will be glad to greet you again. A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all of you.



Guest Commentary
Emma Buckley

Keeping the past present

Looking out the kitchen window the other day, I realized something had changed, though I couldn't put my finger on what it was. Still the same golden field, rising gently toward a line of dark fir trees on the horizon. Still the same large barns, their roofs coppery with rust. Suddenly, I realised what was amiss. Normally I see three barns. This morning there were just two.

The barn's disappearance caused a surprising sadness. I searched on my computer for some photographs of it I had taken a year ago. In the photos, its faded planks glow in the afternoon light, and two horses feed contentedly in front. How I enjoyed having this timeless, rural presence in my day-to-day! My eyes kept returning to the newly naked spot in the landscape, marked only by a scattering of beams on the ground. How long had the barn been standing there? How many days of hard work took place in and around it? How many children had run through it, laughing?

Perhaps I find the local barns so intriguing because there were none where I grew up. Whether we are just driving up the road or taking a trip further afield in Quebec, I always look for them, tucked away behind the houses. The barns near our house are over a hundred years old. They have their own particular beauty, with their long form and sloping gambrel roofs, but more importantly, they speak to us. They narrate a chapter of the past, revealing the way our ancestors lived and worked, helping us to understand and appreciate their lives. For me, they spark the imagination.

The families that built houses in our area early last century built their barns at the same time. The barns near our place originally housed machinery, animals - most families kept some cattle and chickens - and kept the hay dry. A barn was essential to a life on the land. Since then, the way we live and work has fundamentally changed. We buy our meat and milk at the supermarket. A life lived off the land is now an exception, not the norm. The raison d'être for most of these barns has gone. Additional factors such as maintenance costs, insurance, and gradual neglect all propel this structure toward its slow demise.

Sometimes the destruction of our historic buildings is not gradual, but quite deliberate. In my 20's I lived in Brisbane, the capital of Queensland, on Australia's east coast. Today, Brisbane is a diverse and cosmopolitan city, but forty years ago it was the seat of a highly conservative and repressive government, led by

the Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen. If civil liberties and police integrity were casualties of Joh's reign, so too was cultural heritage.

Under Joh's governance, Brisbanites awoke to find that iconic buildings had simply disappeared, wiped out overnight by the wrecking ball wielded by Joh's

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Published every Wednesday by:
Les Publications de la Côte Inc.
(Sea-Coast Publications Inc.)

(Taxes included)
1-year (paper or digital): \$46
6-months (paper or digital): \$25
Outside Canada:
1-year paper \$165 digital: \$46

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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada.
We acknowledge special funding from the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications.

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Statistics show that Gaspesian lobster fishermen had another banner year despite COVID crisis

Gilles Gagné

SAINT-GODEFROI – Gaspesian lobster fishermen experienced another banner year in 2020 despite the COVID crisis. According to Fisheries and Oceans Canada's preliminary statistical report, the volume of catches countered, in great part, a decrease in prices.

The landings of the 160 lobster fishermen of the region increased by 21.25%, from 3,026 metric tonnes in 2019 to 3,669 metric tonnes in 2020. The price declined sharply due to the pandemic, a 23.9% drop from \$6.78 per pound to \$5.16.

The value of those landings nevertheless reached \$41,706,690, compared to \$45,034,228 in 2019. It is a 7.4% drop, but at the beginning of April, the fishermen were wondering if there would be a season, considering the low prices on the market.

The landings of 3,669 metric tonnes represent an all-time record for the region. The previous record had been attained in 2019.

The good results of the 2020 lobster revenues in the Gaspé Peninsula are essentially attributable to the fishermen's decision to postpone the beginning of the season by two weeks, from April 25 to May 9.

The COVID crisis looked far from promising in March, considering that some Nova Scotia buyers were not offering

a price to their fishermen, while others were paying \$2 per pound. In New Brunswick, a quota was imposed to hundreds of lobster fishermen because of the apprehension that the market would not take the products.

In the Magdalen Islands, another record was set as 6,214 metric tonnes of shellfish were delivered to the wharves. It is 15.5% more than the 5,364 metric tonnes of 2019. The price fell by 25.56%, from \$6.65 to \$4.95 per pound. The overall revenues of the 325 Magdalen Islands lobster fishermen fell by \$10.8 million, to \$67,700,154. However, the Magdalen Islands fishermen often receive a significant end of season price adjustment, says Ali Magassouba, economist for the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The figure of \$67,700,154 should, therefore, increase for the next statistical report of the ministry, over the first quarter of 2021.

"In the Gaspé Peninsula, the price was \$5.15 per pound and in the Maggies, it was set 20 cents lower, at \$4.95. I expect the Magdalen Islands price to climb close to the price paid in the Gaspé Peninsula," says Mr. Magassouba.

Such an adjustment in the Magdalen Islands would add about \$2.7 million to the total value of their lobster landings.

The only other Quebec re-

gion delivering large lobster quantities, the North Shore, presented a profile similar to the two others, an increased volume, 423 metric tonnes instead of 384.2 metric tonnes a year ago, but a lower average price, \$4.75 per pound compared to \$5.73 in 2019. The 10% rise of volume was more than offset by the 17% price fall, for an 11.9% decline in total revenues - \$4,431,251 this year instead of \$5,031,107 last year.

The significant catches made around Anticosti Island are redistributed according to the place of residence of the fishermen.

Quebec-wide, the lobster landings reached an all-time record of 10,306 metric tonnes, which is 6.5% higher than the 9,376 metric tonnes of 2019. The revenues decreased by 20%, from \$142.2 million to \$113.9 million because of a 24.8% drop in prices. Ali Magassouba stresses that the Mag-



Photo: G. Gagné

The catches reached record levels in the Gaspé Peninsula this year and the price did not plummet as sharply as expected.

dalens Islands data will likely change Quebec's overall picture somewhat.

For the first time since Fisheries and Oceans Canada has started keeping accurate track of annual economic data in 1984, the value of lobster landings in Quebec, \$113.9 million, has surpassed the value of snow crab landings, at \$93.7

million, thus taking first place among commercial fishing species.

The overall snow crab revenues might still increase significantly at the end of the year though, as Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands processing plants usually pay the final adjustment around Christmas time.

No big surprises in Gaspé budget

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ - The 2021 budget of the Town of Gaspé will be very similar to the previous budget. Nonetheless, this last period before the November 2021 elections will still be complex due in large part to the current pandemic, says Gaspé mayor, Daniel Côté.

Development work continues, but will not contain major expenses or major cuts. There is no question of speculating on the tax rate. "We cannot presume. There is a new assessment role that will come into effect - the airport's operating deficit, etc. How are we going to deal with it on budget? Will there be government compensation? There are too many unanswered questions to comment on the status of tax increases," says the mayor.

The Rivière-au-Renard Industrial Park

Gaspé is opening the door to relaunch discussions with the Quebec Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to municipalize the Rivière-au-Renard Industrial Park.

The Town is placing conditions on an update of the 2013 study on infrastructures when the work was estimated at the time at \$6 million, an upgrade of the 1996 management agreement, including indexation of the payment of a sum of \$50,000 which has never been adjusted; and to reimburse the invoice for the maintenance work which is approximately \$250,000.

Once these conditions have been met, the Town will be ready to discuss matters. "We will not agree to do the work for the ministry. We have already done that with other ministries with the results we know and the discussions generated. Let me give you the example of the Anse-au-Griffon wharf. Once that is all done, we can sit down and negotiate a handover. If none of that is done, they will organize themselves with their park," said Mayor Côté, without any hesitation.

To self-employed workers and small businesses

SADC

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Main criteria

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*Eligibility criteria apply

Gaspé: Construction of the new Ministry of Transport service centre will begin in the spring

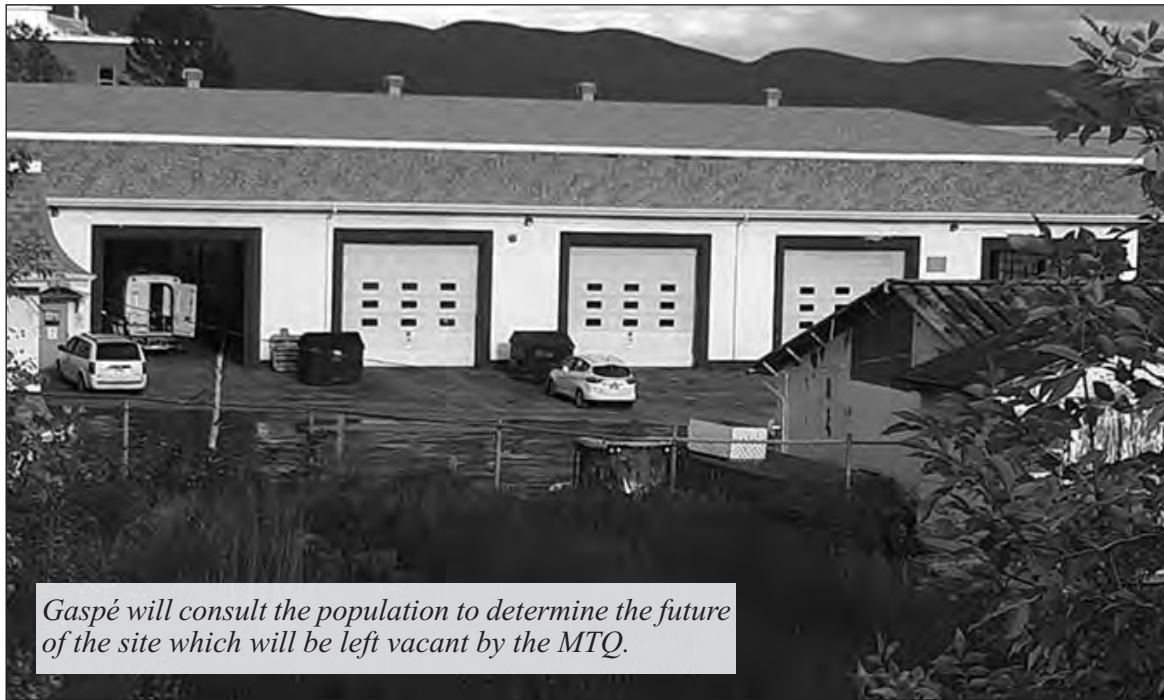
Nelson **Sergerie**

GASPÉ - The future Ministry of Transport service centre in Gaspé will cost \$22.9 million, including the plans and specifications.

The tender for the building was launched on September 14. At the start of the pandemic, this issue was included in Quebec's Bill 61 in order to speed up work. It no longer appeared in the Bill 66 tabled in September.

The lowest construction bid was submitted by Marcel Charest et Fils of Saint-Pascal de Kamouraska for \$13.2 million.

Six companies have shown interest in the project which will be carried out in the Augustines' Industrial Park, a



Gaspé will consult the population to determine the future of the site which will be left vacant by the MTQ.

Photo: N. Sergerie

large lot on rue des Pommiers, opposite the LM Wind Power plant.

Negotiations for the pur-

chase of the land have not been finalized with the Town of Gaspé.

The *Société Québécoise*

des infrastructures, which ensures the compliance of the lowest bidder, indicates that the centre will have three garage

doors on the side of the Rolling Equipment Management Centre and three doors on the Ministry of Transport side. It will also contain an unheated warehouse for the ministry. In the centre of the building, a three-storey office section will be shared between the centre and the ministry. There will also be an area for storage of abrasives and other materials.

Work will begin in the spring and the centre will be ready in fall 2022. "That's excellent news. It's been talked about for several decades and now it's happening. I hope we can consult people at the same time as the new sports centre. It will be an opportunity to see what people want to do with their downtown area," explains Gaspé Mayor Daniel Côté.

Family Ties named Quebec Charity of the Year

Diane **Skinner**

NEW CARLISLE: - New Carlisle: Family Ties has been named "Quebec Charity of the Year" by CBC Radio. Heather MacWhirter, Executive Director was very excited to hear that Family Ties was chosen holiday charity for 2020. She tells us that everyone works so hard to support their members and the community. She adds this refers not only to the dedicated staff. She is quick also to thank a wonderful Administrative Council, and the support of over 70 volunteers and families who helped to accomplish their mission. Heather points out that they are also grateful for great partners and an inclusive community.

Family Ties is a grass roots community organization and being recognized will highlight and showcase the work they do for the entire province.

Carolyn Taylor, an employee at Family Ties, was driving to work one morning and she heard that CBC was looking for nominations. She listened to the guidelines and thought that Family Ties should apply.

Heather received a message from CBC asking questions about Family Ties and how they would accept donations. The organization is a registered non-profit in Quebec and a registered charity



Participants in the Baby & Me program at Family Ties. From left to right: Elliott Arsenault-Briggs, Rayna Almond, Rayah Main, Thomas Leblanc-Gonthier, Jasmine Thompson-Flowers and Kaleb Hayes.

with Revenue Canada.

The next day she received a phone call to say that they were in the running and then another call came. It confirmed that Family Ties was indeed chosen. Normally only one Montreal-based charity is chosen but this year for the first time two charities have been chosen: Tyndale St-Georges Community Centre in Montreal and Family Ties from the whole province of Quebec.

As part of this recognition and honour, during the weeks of December 7 and 14 a variety of interviews with staff and members will take place to be aired on three CBC programs: Breakaway, CBC Quebec A.M. and the Morning Show. These will be shared on Family Ties face-

book page.

During the pandemic, Family Ties, a "Maison de la Famille," is considered an essential service. Many of the programs are still offered with sanitary measures being respected. This is done by reducing the number of participants on site and not recruiting new members. Munchkin Mansion Play-school, youth groups, Destination Family, collective cooking and Baby & Me are all still happening physically. The Canadian Heritage Photography project Now You See Us is virtual through Zoom at the moment. The Trading Post is still open by appointment only.

Their website is up and operating and they are able to accept donations. Heather in-

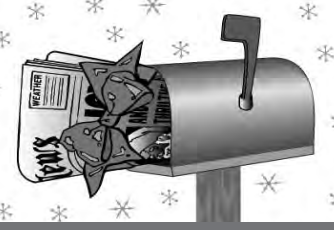
vites everyone to check it out. New content is added daily, and they are proud of the site. Community members continue to make many positive comments about how Family Ties has continued to support them through the pandemic. These include "Family Ties makes us feel like family and gives us positive motivation."

The next step in the evolution of Family Ties is a new building restructuring plan thanks to funding from Cana-

dian Heritage Official Languages Community Spaces Fund, Caisses Desjardins and the MRC of Bonaventure. This plan will improve access to the building, including moving the kitchen and library to the main floor as well as the creation of a designated youth space. Many of the members have a wide range of physical disabilities or challenges. This project will address key priorities of universal accessibility and safety by moving core programs and services to the main floor level. Heather adds, "This has been asked for by our members for years and now we can finally make it a reality, however, the condition of the building is worse than previously thought, therefore translating into additional costs; in fact, about \$100,000 in additional costs! Despite this, we are committed to this project as it reflects the needs of our members and we plan to accomplish it this year."

Heather and the staff of Family Ties would like to say, "Merry Christmas to our families and the community and thank you for your trust and support throughout the year."

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The Gaspé Spec



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Life Association fundraising stymied by COVID times

Cynthia Dow

“Our finances are alright, but we’ve had a poor year raising money because of COVID,” Shirley Duncan said of the situation of Life Association, an organization that runs a foster home in New Carlisle as well as providing various activities for adults with intellectual challenges.

Mrs. Duncan has been the president since the group’s establishment about 25 years ago. She noted they had held their annual general meeting on November 24 by Zoom, a first for their organization. “It was quite successful. We were impressed with ourselves for trying something like this for

the first time,” she told SPEC.

The association has two budgets: one which covers the operations of the residence, Vimy Place, and its foster parents, Peggy Dalgleish and Clayton Smith. This budget is entirely covered by the provincial government under the auspices of the *Centre de readaptation* located in Bonaventure. On a regular basis social workers, nurses, educators, and inspectors visit to make sure Vimy Place is run properly.

Mrs. Duncan said the association is very happy with their live-in foster parents, “who are meant for the job and go above the call of duty” to keep the residents of Vimy

Place happy. “It’s a very happy place. You can feel the atmosphere when you go in there. It’s very friendly and warm. They have a huge living room and, in the summer in the backyard, they have a swing, a small swimming pool, and a gazebo.”

A second budget under the control of the association covers repairs to the building, which they own, and special activities for the members, six of whom live at Vimy Place. Other members attend the summer camp and the socialization class provided at The Anchor by Eastern Shores School Board.

“We normally raise a lot of money ourselves through teas

and dinners and so on. We get a lot of donations by writing to various organizations and churches, but we didn’t do that this year because of the COVID situation. Normally we’d raise \$3,000 with our fundraising activities and another \$3,000 or so from donations. This year we’ve only had two donations so far, \$500 each from the New Richmond Rotary Club and the Cascapedia Women’s Institute.”

Mrs. Duncan explained that the association has enough resources to get through their fiscal year until June 30, but they will have to hold a fundraising campaign this coming spring if they

want to be able to offer the summer camp activity in 2021.

“Our biggest expenditure is the summer camp: we pay five or six aides and a very favourable rate at the Bible Camp. We try to have other activities as well, such as summer games on the beach, a visit to the Bioparc and Christmas dinner for all the ESSB students in the program at The Anchor.

We are hoping once spring comes, we’ll be able to have a fundraising campaign to cover these costs.”

Should you wish to donate to the Life Association, their Treasurer is Richard Flowers.

Federal aid for airports: well received in Gaspé

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ - The mayor of Gaspé is pleased with the openness shown by Ottawa in helping airports, but remains cautious after the announcement in the economic update presented on November 30.

Daniel Côté notes that the envelope will be insufficient. “If Gaspé has a deficit of \$1.6 million and there is \$65 million for all of Canada, I don’t think we will be able to compensate for all the losses, hence the importance to have the provincial (government) in the background with a complementary program to what

the federal government is working on,” says the mayor.

Daniel Côté still hopes for the help as mentioned by the Quebec Minister of Transport, François Bonnardel, however, concrete signs have not yet been given.

The losses at Michel-Pouliot Airport are caused by the suspension of commercial flights last summer continuing into the fall.

On November 2, Gaspé passed a resolution calling for aid from Quebec. Mr. Côté says the main customer of the airport during the heart of the pandemic was health services. Health services are provincial



Photo: N. Sergerie

and air transport is federal. This justifies their requests for aid.

At the time, the elected official mentioned a tax increase of 10 to 15% if no level of

government came to support the Town of Gaspé on this issue.

Marked drop in traffic at Forillon

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ - Forillon recorded a 14% decrease in the number of visitors, but daily admissions have risen sharply.

The decrease in attendance can be explained by the opening being delayed and the camping capacity being cut in half due to the pandemic. This explains the drop in attendance. In total 146,200 visited the park.

The occupancy rate of campsites was almost 100% in July and August, but only 53% of the sites were available to comply with sanitary regulations

“We expected fewer, considering the decrease in our (rental) accommodations since we welcomed fewer campers. All in all, this is a perfectly acceptable decrease considering the circumstances,” explains manager Frédéric Sainte-Croix who is in charge of visitor experience.

Daily admissions rose 5% in July, 20% in August and 21% in September, but fell 70% in October due to the absence of cruise-ship passengers and Europeans.

No visitors or employees contracted COVID-19 during the season that ended on Thanksgiving.

Parks Canada will adapt the services offered in 2021 according to the health rules that will be in effect next spring. Consequently the reservation centre will only open on April 21 rather than January. This postponement is to avoid the situation experienced in the spring of 2020 when early reservations had to be cancelled due to the imposition of strict rules last March.

In 2019, the park welcomed 169,984 visitors, which was a 3% increase from 2018.



CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES:

Construction of new railway bridges to be accelerated

Temporary bridge on Road 299 to be ready within five weeks

Gilles Gagné

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES – Quebec’s Department of Transport announced on December 9 that the construction of the two new railway bridges in Cascapedia-St-Jules will be accelerated so that they will be completed by December 30 at the latest.

The acceleration of the bridges’ construction was necessitated by the December 6 permanent closure of the two old railway bridges, which had been constructed between 1890 and 1894.

The east bridge was damaged slightly by the flooding that occurred on December 1 and 2, but as a result of that, a more a serious problem involving structural damage was discovered.

Preliminary tests and inspections on the old bridges took place on December 5 and at that time the structural damage was not apparent.

On the morning of December 6 during the passage of three locomotives, a test before the expected circulation of a windmill blade train, a structural beam moved side-



Workers of the Gaspésie Railway Society are giving a hand to Hamel Construction in the rush undertaken to finish the two new bridges before the end of December.

Photo: G. Gagné

ways.

After that the Gaspésie Railway Society made the decision to permanently close the two old bridges, and contacted Transports Québec to advocate expediting the completion of the two new bridges.

While announcing the positive decision about the new railway bridges, Transports Québec also stated that the Kilometre 12.5 bridge at White Brook, heavily damaged by the same Grand Cas-

capedia River flood, will be replaced within four to six weeks. Considering that the announcement was made on December 9, it will be less than five weeks, by mid-December.

As for the two railway bridges, they were supposed to be open to traffic for the summer of 2021. Since undertaking the \$22.4 million job in July 2019, the contractor, Hamel Construction, was able to carry out their construction faster than expected.

“We were expecting a delivery of the bridges over the spring. The fact that they are delivered at the end of the month is really ideal,” reacted Éric Dubé, president of the Gaspésie Railway Society, the transporter in charge of operating freight trains between Matapédia and New Richmond.

Freight trains cannot circulate between New Richmond and Nouvelle since December 1 because the flood created such a log jam that hundreds

of trees piled up and touched parts of the new and old bridges. The logs had to be cleared before carrying out an inspection on the bridges. That operation took three full days.

This is when the Gaspésie Railway Society consulted Transports Québec to accelerate the completion of the new bridges, due to the pointlessness of putting efforts into refurbishing bridges that will be replaced.

The windmill blade train supposed to pass on December 6 will remain in New Richmond until the end of the month. An empty windmill blade train scheduled to arrive on December 12 or 13 will be loaded in Nouvelle just west of the Leclerc siding which is the terminal where cement cars initially loaded in New Richmond, are filled to capacity.

Until the new bridges in Cascapedia-St-Jules are functional, all the cement is and will be loaded in Nouvelle.

“In January, there will be no limitation of loads on the

Cont'd on page 9

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FLOOD:**▶ Cont'd from page 8**

Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges. We will pass on new bridges. We will be able to load all the cement in New Richmond," points out Éric Dubé.

Since 2017, because of the limited bearing capacity of the Cascapedia-St-Jules old railway bridges, the Gaspésie Railway Society was forced to share cement car loading between two terminals, in New Richmond and Nouvelle.

Transports Québec, the owner of the line since 2015, imposed a restriction of 10 fully loaded cars per week on those structures, but no weekly limit if the cars were just partially loaded in New Richmond, at two-thirds of their capacity. The traffic created by McInnis Cement in New Richmond and Nouvelle often reaches 40 cars per week.

Claire Pouliot, spokesperson of Transports Québec, points out that the acceleration of the railway bridges' construction will cost \$1.5M more than the projected tag of \$22.4M "as \$800,000 will go to damage repairs and \$700,000 for work acceleration."

She stresses that it will not be necessary for the contractor to work around the clock, seven days a week, to deliver the bridges on or before December 30, since the closure of the old bridges will facilitate the contractor's task "they had to stop work when a train was passing, for safety reasons."

Since December 7, workers of the Gaspésie Railway Society have been helping Hamel Construction in the rush to finish the two new bridges before the end of December. Those workers started removing the rails for the eventual installa-

tion of the new railbed, a few metres to the south.

A temporary bridge at White Brook soon

As for the Road 299 bridge at White Brook, it will be replaced by a temporary structure before the end of January, adds Ms. Pouliot.

"The work is already started," she says. The remains of the former bridge have been used since the day following the flood as a passerelle for the 11 people residing between Kilometer 12.5 and 17.

A better passerelle was installed and was functional as of December 12.

Claire Pouliot says that the floods of December 1 and 2 caused damage amounting to \$11M to the Gaspé Peninsula road network under the responsibility of Transports Québec.

The mayor of Cascapedia-St-Jules, Gaétan Boudreau, who had promised to keep a close eye on the situation in the aftermath of the flood, expressed relief upon reading the message he received from Transports Québec.

"The lack of a bridge prevents the municipality from properly serving the citizens living on the other side of White Brook. Our fire truck can't go to the other side, or an ambulance or any emergency vehicle. The new passerelle allows us to give certain services, like running errands. The Cascapedia River Society leaves a vehicle there for that purpose. Transports Québec will then put a used bridge bought in 2018 when Trout Brook destroyed the Road 299 bridge. They had bought two used bridges. The first one was well installed. We call it our temporary-permanent bridge now. It was supposed to be replaced this year but the COVID crisis Mayor Boudreau.

The standoff continues between nurses and the CISSS

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ - The nurses are asking the Board of Directors of the Gaspé Peninsula Integrated Health and Social Services Centre (CISSS) to make ten commitments to ensure the safety of staff and users during the pandemic, but the members of the board rejected this request at the time.

The document from the Union of Nurses, Auxiliaries and Respiratory Therapists of Eastern Quebec was sent by a bailiff to the members of the board. The president of the SIIIEQ, Pier-Luc Bujold, aims to stabilize the care teams while 30% of the staff are on sick leave according to his assessment.

"We have seen abominable, disrespectful things, a lack of consideration for the capacity of workers who do more than their employment contract and have done so for many years," says Mr. Bujold, who was accompanied for the occasion by the president of the Centrale des unions du Québec, Claire Montour to support the process.

The mobility of staff from hot to cold zones, sometimes during the same shift, is also a major concern for union members.

The request, delivered on the morning of December 3,



The president of the CSQ, Claire Montour and the president of the SIIIEQ, Pier-Luc Bujold.

Photo: N. Sergerie

was rejected the same afternoon by the CISSS board of directors.

"The directors have already signed commitments by accepting their mandate. This commitment is already firm, whole and total on the part of the administrators. What is mentioned (in the document) is part of some of the elements in which we are hard at work on many sites," replied the chairman of the board of directors of the CISSS Richard Loiselle.

Refusal to sign

The union responded to the refusal by qualifying the

directors' refusal to sign as bad faith.

"The CISSS did not even respect the letter of understanding in which it undertook no later than May 1, 2020 to increase and stabilize positions at the CISSS de la Gaspésie," says Mr. Bujold, arguing that the CISSS does not keep its word.

He invites the administrators to see the reality on the ground rather than listen to the administrators. "If it really is that everything is done right, why don't they sign. The fact of not signing is proof that it isn't," concludes Mr. Bujold.

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I wish you all a peaceful holiday season and a happy New Year!

Méganne Perry Mélançon
Deputy of Gaspé

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Photo: N. Sergerie

The municipal council of Gaspé is working to find a solution to the 2021 budget.

A road between the Augustines Industrial Park and Sandy Beach

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ - Gaspé is taking the first step in the construction of a road linking the Augustines Industrial Park to the Port of Sandy Beach.

The council adopted a resolution on December 7 to find funding to study this road which would divert heavy traffic from the current road network.

"To facilitate the development of the Augustines Industrial Park, we must promote intermodality with the port and the railway. The highway project has been in our boxes for three years. We are in the fundraising stage and then the plans and specifications stage and we could go into construction mode, probably in 2022," says Mayor Daniel Côté.

The project is estimated between \$8M and \$10M.

The development of the industrial port zone was slowed down by the change of government, the pandemic and the transfer of ownership of the Sandy Beach wharf from Ottawa to Quebec.

The road is the first item and the second being the promotion of the Rivière-au-Renard Industrial Park, to promote fisheries-related services.

A difficult budget to make

Gaspé is still juggling the solution to be applied in preparing the 2021 budget, while the apprehended deficit of \$1.6 million for 2020-2021 at Michel-Pouliot airport weighs heavily in the balance.

While Ottawa has moved forward in its economic statement to compensate airports, Quebec has indicated its intentions but is slow to come forward.

The mayor recalls that the airport remained open between the end of Air Canada flights and the arrival of Pascan in order to allow ambulance and SOPFIM planes to land.

"We are in a year of a pandemic where the financial situation of citizens is difficult. We do not intend to completely pass the operating deficit on to the citizens' tax account. There may be an impact, but we are in a budgetary exercise to spare the citizens as much as possible."

The Town could draw on its surplus to save taxpayers. The budget will be tabled on December 21.

Loss of 2,500 jobs in one year

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ – The Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands posted a deficit of 2,500 jobs in one year.

Statistics Canada reveals that 31,400 people were employed in November compared to 33,900 at the same time last year.

The number of part-time positions increased by 700 as 1,000 full-time jobs were cut last month.

One hundred more people were receiving employment insurance benefits in October.

The unemployment went from 8.9% in October to 9.2% in November.

Four-thousand people withdrew from the labor market in one year.



Ottawa protects owner-captain status

Photo: N. Sergerie

Ottawa protects owner-captain status

Nelson Sergerie

GRAND RIVER - The status of owner-captain is now protected by Ottawa.

With this regulatory amendment, the policy of separating fleets by prohibiting certain types of companies from holding licences in the coastal fishing sector, becomes concrete.

Former Minister of Fisheries and Oceans Dominic LeBlanc expressed his government's desire to change the law

in 2018.

Concretely, this policy means that fishermen must exploit their fishing licences themselves and reap the benefits in order to prevent companies from becoming both fishermen and processors of the resource.

"Businesses can no longer acquire fishing licences. Foreign companies that decide to buy Canadian companies where there would have been associated permits, well, we would

have been killing our local economy," indicates the the Member of Parliament for the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands, Diane Lebouthillier, in a press briefing on December 10.

A dispute in the Maritimes led Ottawa to consider this issue. It's one way for Canada to protect its food sovereignty, says Ms. Lebouthillier, when 33% of the economy of Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands depends on the fishing sector.

Teachers at Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles are getting impatient

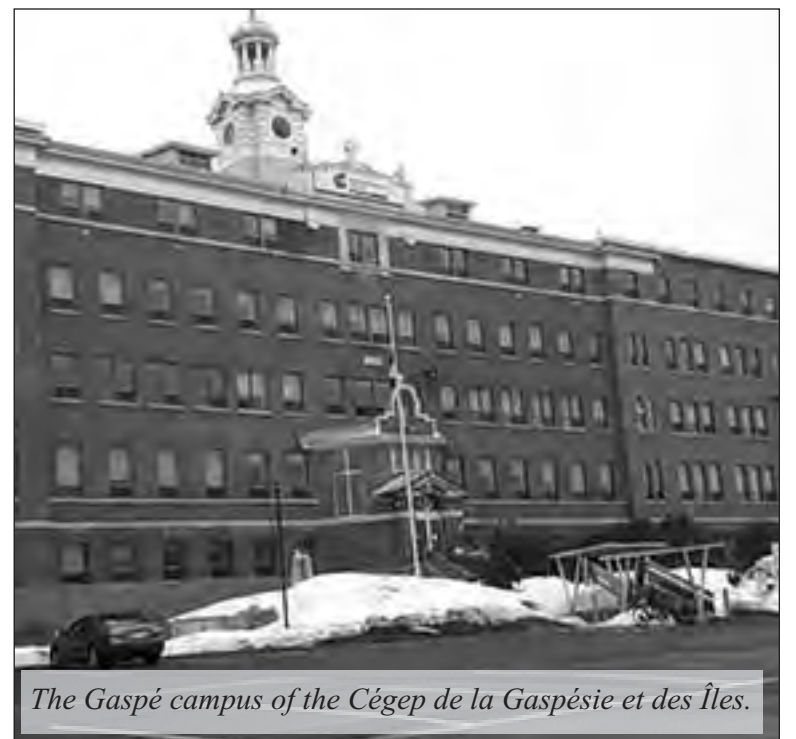
Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ - Professors at the Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles are getting impatient with the slowness of negotiations with Quebec.

Those negotiations were initiated in October 2019, but a blockage persists according to the president of the Union of teaching staff at the Gaspé campus, Isabelle Bisson-Carpentier.

The financial framework is unacceptable and leaves little room for maneuvers to improve working conditions. "The financial framework has not changed a bit. What we are offered is a little less than \$200 per teacher per year to solve a lot of problems. This is clearly insufficient," emphasizes Ms. Bisson-Carpentier.

The fight against insecurity, the teaching task and work-family reconciliation are targeted. Distance education, in place before the pandemic, needs to be marked out and requires additional resources. Pressure tactics will be gradually put in place if nothing moves at the negotiating table.



The Gaspé campus of the Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles.

Photo: N. Sergerie

The Education Workers Union too

On December 8, teachers and support staff in the Gaspé began voting on pressure tactics to speed up negotiations with Quebec.

The Eastern Quebec Education Workers Union is holding six meetings in the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands to gauge the pulse of its members and the results were due on December 15.

The president, Anne Bernier, explains that Quebec

does not want to go outside its financial framework. "At the last negotiations, in 2015, for teachers, there was an \$80 million settlement. Right now, there is between \$43 million and \$50 million on the table, depending on the opening. It's not much."

Ms. Bernier wants a strong mandate to send a clear message.

The pressure tactics will be disclosed at the appropriate time, depending on the progress of the negotiations.



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