

Service Canada targeted by hackers; hundreds of workers deprived of EI benefits for weeks

Gilles Gagné

CARLETON – Hundreds of workers in at least four regions of Quebec have been deprived of employment insurance benefits for weeks because hackers managed to infiltrate the Service Canada registration system. The fraudulent scheme has been going on since September and has gradually grown over the past five months.

Workers in the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands, Lower Saint Lawrence, North Shore and Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean have so far been the main targets of hackers in Quebec. Service Canada has not yet returned SPEC's calls but it seems clear to organizations helping workers that the scheme hit recent employment insurance claimants first.

"That fraud works with software. It's not people behind



Photo: G. Gagné

Citizens checking their file on the Service Canada site are sometimes shocked when they find that their identity has been stolen.

a desk trying to get in touch with the workers. Organized groups, the mafiosi of this

world, have set up that software. They have lists of names, with social

insurance numbers. As it is software that works to enter the Service Canada system, it hits several times," explains Nadia Mongeon of the Mouvement action-chômage Pabok of Chandler.

"When it enters the Service Canada system, the software will change the address of the customers in order to have the money. It is the postal address or the email address that is changed," adds Ms. Mongeon.

"If the Service Canada system misses a fraudulent attempt, if it doesn't detect it (the software), the money goes into an account if the worker has chosen direct deposit, or into a post office box elsewhere, if the worker gets cheques," she says.

The Mouvement action-chômage Pabok has been helping seasonal workers or people who occasionally receive employment insurance benefits in the Chandler area and the rest of the Gaspé Peninsula for a little over 25 years.

"We started getting a few calls in September, but it was relatively low. Then, in October, November and December, it only increased. We get a lot of calls in January. I received three new cases only this (January 17) morning and our organization is not the only one to be contacted," notes Nadia

Mongeon.

Hackers file claims on behalf of people who receive employment insurance benefits, but also on behalf of currently employed workers. The office of Bloc Québécois Member of Parliament Kristina Michaud located in Price, near Mont Joli, recently received a worker who was on his first claim for benefits. His file was already opened by hackers!

In that kind of case, the fraudster can thus collect a few cheques before Service Canada discovers the scheme. Hacking usually gets stuck when a real claimant and a fraudster make a claim on the same social insurance number.

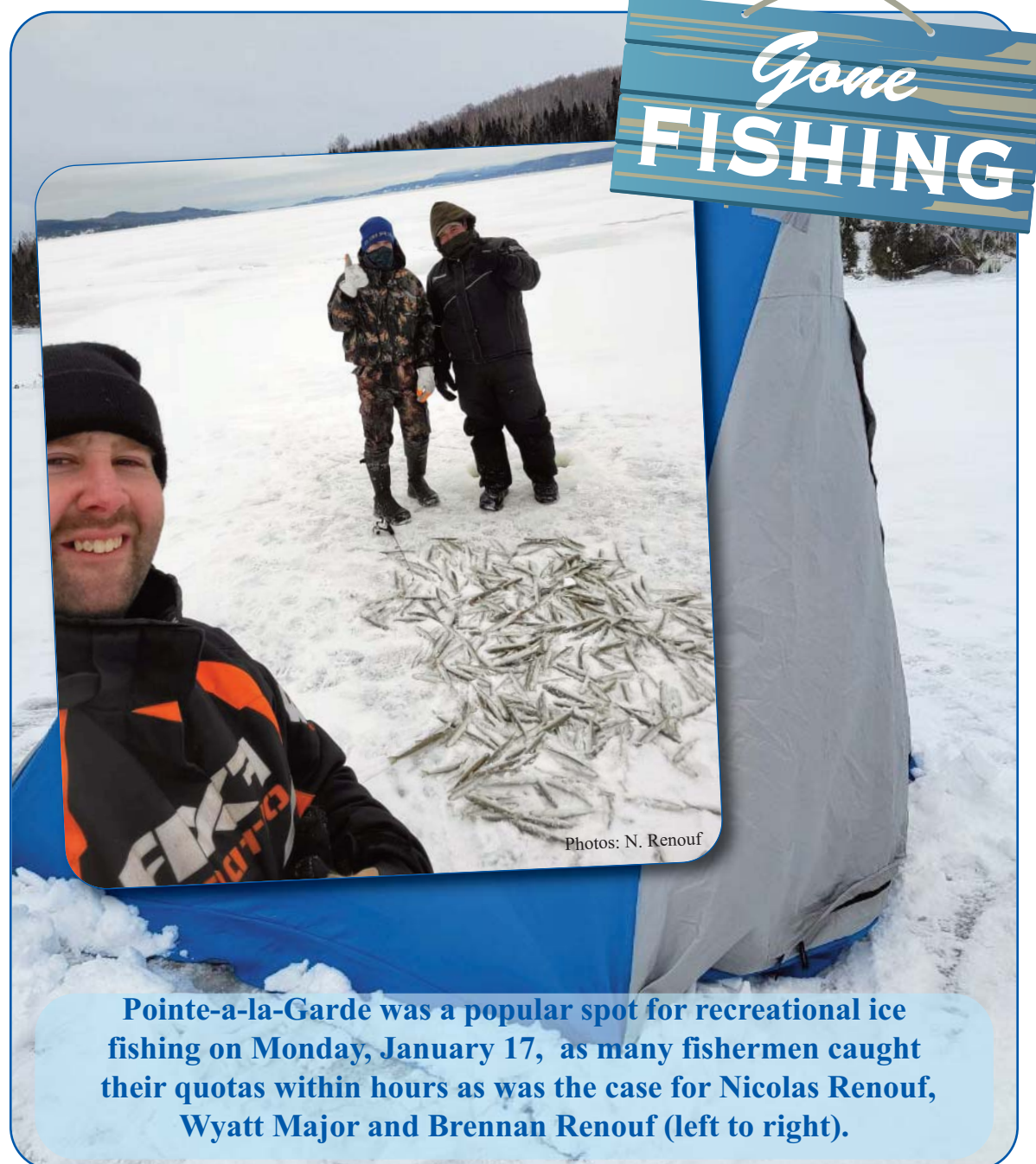
"Government computers block payments when they see that fraud has occurred. When the file number is frozen, the service provider must contact the investigators to inform them of the problem. Those investigators usually inquire about voluntary departures, dismissals. Now, they investigate software files. They are totally overwhelmed," observes Nadia Mongeon.

She finds that workers affected by fraud can go two months without income.

"Some workers have started to get benefits again. It goes according to the level of financial fragility: the most pressing cases are settled first, like families with children before single people. They (Service Canada employees) are processing the November files as of now. Usually, for a payment file, a week or two and it would be settled. Presently, they cannot tell. It's really not fixed. Sometimes, I sympathize with the (government) investigators whereas usually, I am rather confronted with them when I try to advance the files of the workers," points out Nadia Mongeon.

SPEC attempted in December to speak to workers affected by the fraud but they declined to be named.

"People are embarrassed to talk about it even if they are not responsible for the situation.



Photos: N. Renouf

Pointe-a-la-Garde was a popular spot for recreational ice fishing on Monday, January 17, as many fishermen caught their quotas within hours as was the case for Nicolas Renouf, Wyatt Major and Brennan Renouf (left to right).

Caribou maternity enclosures

Nelson **Sergerie**,
LJI Journalist

GASPÉ - On January 19, Quebec provided information on what is being done to protect the caribou in the Chic-Chocs Wildlife Reserve and the Park de la Gaspésie.

Enclosures are being created while waiting for the protection plan of the species which could come only in 2023.

The Quebec government had announced last summer the construction of enclosures which would serve to protect the small caribou population.

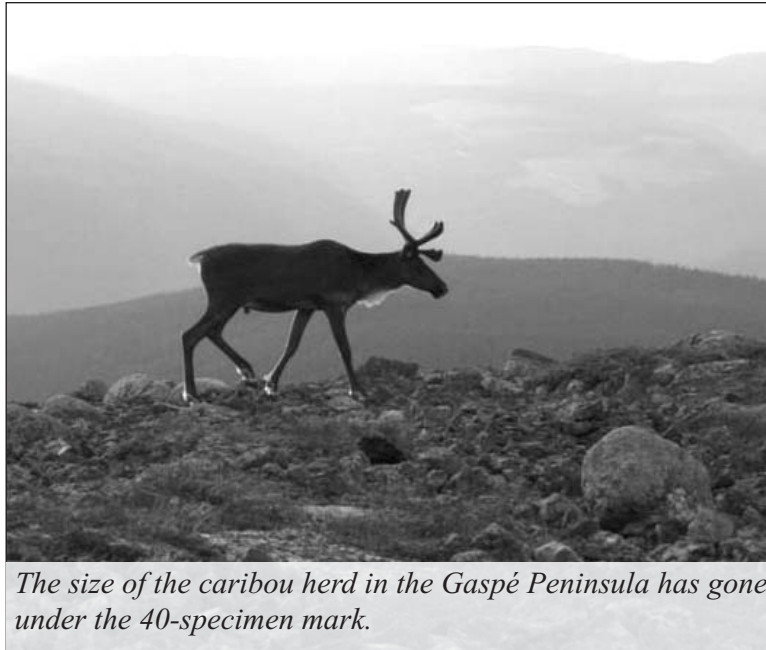
In the region, this protection consists of two maternity pens currently under construction at Mount McGerrigle and Mount Albert.

The sites of 15 hectares each, whose construction began last fall, are only 35% complete due to the weather and the difficulty in obtaining materials.

The two parks will make it possible to accommodate five pregnant females on each site.

"Only the pregnant females are put in the enclosures in March. They are released in August with their fawns in order to protect the fawns from predators," explains the project coordinator at the Ministry of Wildlife, MéliSSa Chatelain.

Even if the enclosures are not finished, the ministry remains confident. "There will be a single capture operation and, above all, we are talking about pregnant females. We would be (by capturing 10 females) within the margins of



The size of the caribou herd in the Gaspé Peninsula has gone under the 40-specimen mark.

Photo: G. Gagné

great success. The size of the enclosures will be sufficient," specifies the spokesperson for the ministry, Carl Patenaude Levasseur, implying that there might be much less than 10 females.

Already seen elsewhere

This experiment has already been tried elsewhere. "There are examples that date back in terms of maternity pens. I am thinking of what was done in Alaska and the Yukon. There has been success with this capture and release dynamic," says Patenaude Levasseur.

The cost of the enclosures, the construction of which will be completed in the fall of 2022, is \$1.1 million and the technical installations such as electric fences or artesian wells will cost \$400,000.

A sum of \$100,000 per year is set aside for surveillance and security.

Not many

The species is fighting for its survival. The last survey carried out in the fall of 2020 by the ministry revealed that the total number of caribou has fallen below 40.

During the survey conducted by air, 19 caribou were observed in the Mount McGerrigle sector, while 10 caribou were observed in the Mont Albert sector for a total of 29, whereas observations in 2019 counted 34.

In the Logan sector, no caribou were observed during the air survey.

Quebec has appointed an independent commission to make recommendations for the survival of the species. However, several of those involved are questioning the work since no caribou specialists were included in the planning.

The commission will begin its work this winter, and is planning a regional tour of the Gaspé Peninsula.

Fred the groundhog will make his prediction without an audience

Nelson **Sergerie**,
LJI Journalist

PERCÉ - Groundhog Day will once again take place in a virtual format this year.

Fred's prediction on February 2 in Val-d'Espoir will be without an audience due to the Covid-19 situation in the province.

"If we had wanted to do it, it would have brought too many responsibilities in terms of hygiene and surveillance and we did not have the volunteers to do that," explains the promoter, Roberto Blondin.

Year after year, 300 to 500 people traditionally attend the prediction, in a tightly roped off area, which does not promote social distancing.

Last year, the Gaspé Penin-



Fred will make his forecast without an audience again this year.

Photo: N. Sergerie

sula drew much attention as some 10,000 people watched the prediction on TV or on social networks.

Fred was even mentioned in the National Assembly last year in an exchange between

Premier Francois Legault and Liberal leader Dominique Anglade.

Out of 12 predictions, the groundhog has an average success rate of 75% in determining the spring prediction.

EI FRAUD:

▶ *Cont'd from page 1*



Photo: Courtesy of Nadia Mongeon

In her attempts to help workers dealing with Service Canada, Nadia Mongeon sees that the ministry's civil servants are overwhelmed with identity theft cases and fraud.

They don't quite know what to say. Saying that you are suffering from financial problems affects your pride. It's amazing how people can handle situations. It's winter. It was Christmas. People have gone into debt. It's not funny," explains Ms. Mongeon.

She encourages workers to file a complaint with the Sûreté du Québec (SQ). Sgt. Claude Doiron, spokesperson for that police force for the Gaspé Peninsula, the Magdalen Islands and the Lower Saint-Lawrence regions, specifies that the SQ has been receiving complaints "every day" since the beginning of the EI identity theft that started in the fall of 2021.

"We invite people to file a complaint. We open a file. The worker refers the file number to the government. If we can trace the source of the fraudster, we'll do it. We share information with other police departments across the country. There are investigations that are progressing," says Sgt. Claude Doiron.

He politely refused to rate the degree of cooperation received from Service Canada in order to protect the integrity of the investigation.

Without success, SPEC also tried to contact a spokesperson for Service Canada to get an idea of the number of identities stolen so far and the amount of money defrauded.

Nadia Mongeon has no idea of the scale of the fraud but she believes that the number of people deprived of employment insurance benefits is "more than hundreds" in the four targeted regions.

She worries about the time it will take to correct the situation, for workers to receive their benefits but also for large-scale identity theft to stop.

"It's not so easy, when it's a

software that makes the attempts, compared to a person behind the computer with the IP (Internet protocol) address. Software is untraceable. My opinion is that Service Canada will have to hire hackers to deactivate this software. The software works day and night. It is never tired. I have a client who saw her data change four times. I don't think Service Canada can change its computer system that much and in any case, it does not seem to be done quickly," notes Nadia Mongeon.

In order to get a local idea of the problem's magnitude, SPEC contacted the office of Diane Lebouthillier, Member of Parliament for the riding of Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine and Minister of the Canadian Revenue Agency.

"Indeed, we are well aware of these types of cases. We deal with it on a regular basis in our constituency offices. All cases are taken very seriously and referred to the appropriate authorities within the government," says Ms. Lebouthillier.

At the office of the Avignon-Mitis-Matane Matapedia riding Member of Parliament Kristina Michaud, it is specified that the Bloc Québécois colleagues are working together to determine the main sectors of action of hackers. The Bloc Québécois Member of Parliament for Thérèse-de-Blainville, Louise Chabot, spokesperson for the party for labour issues, will oversee the file.

Significant data thefts have been carried out in recent years in financial institutions, private companies and government departments. After exchanging with Service Canada employees, Nadia Mongeon is under the impression that the stolen lists of data "come from financial institutions."

GASPÉ: Three major infrastructure files underway

Nelson **Sergerie**,
LJI Journalist

GASPÉ - The file for the road between the Augustines Industrial Park and the Port of Sandy Beach is progressing, but Gaspé is not yet in a position to provide all the details of the file.

Considering, elected officials wanted a positive response before the holiday break, discussions took place then. An agreement has yet to be signed with the provincial government, but the latest communications allow for progress to continue.

“We are not ready to make an announcement, but we have made a lot of headway and it should be settled during the month of January, but we have enough assurance to allow us to pursue the acquisitions, the final plans and specifications. We have enough guarantees on that,” says the mayor, Daniel Côté.

The elected official prefers not to give a precise amount, but the project is estimated at approximately \$20 million including construction, expropriations, paving and related costs. Quebec would fund about 80% of the bill.

All that is missing is the decree to launch the loan bylaw. The construction site must be launched in May, which gives a tight deadline. The opening is scheduled for September.

Gaspé Airport

After rejecting bids for the new hangar in November, Gaspé is moving forward even if the bill will be higher than anticipated. Estimated at \$3.5 million, the lowest proposal is \$3.8 million, even though certain elements have been refined.

Ottawa is footing 90% of the bill, leaving the Town of Gaspé with a balance of about \$400,000. “It’s a bit higher than we expected. On the other hand, we need these hangars to ensure the continuation of the development of the airport,” explains the

mayor.

The agreement with Ottawa also provided for the paving of the parking lot and the plans and specifications for the new terminal, elements that were set aside after discussions with the government.

“We are going to resubmit projects in the near future,” he said. Gaspé has very preliminary plans for the new terminal, which could cost around \$10 million.

Rivière-au-Renard, Fishing Capital

The Town of Gaspé is dividing the Rivière-au-Renard Fishing Capital file, in two.

The multimedia component is being done in parallel with the main project. A call for tenders for the media component has taken place and the Town is analyzing the proposals received.

The administration is also looking for additional funding.

The Town had rejected in September the bids for the project estimated at \$6 million. The lowest received was at \$7.2 million.

Submissions will be relaunched at the end of February for the main project with the goal of opening the offers at the end of March or the beginning of April.

If the offers are suitable, we could hope for a start of construction this summer. We reviewed the entire project to reduce costs in the hope of awarding the contract,” says Mr. Côté.

The main project includes a beach replenishment, water games, a redevelopment of the banks that will include a promenade with a view of the boats docked at the wharf, but more conservative than originally proposed.

The project is scheduled to be completed for 2023.



Police report

On January 12 at the New Carlisle Courthouse, Freddy Boudreau, 42, from New Carlisle, was charged with five counts linked to a juvenile pornography case. He faces two charges of having distributed juvenile pornography, two charges of having accessed juvenile pornography and one count of having produced juvenile pornography.

“In the latter case, the charge reads: “make child pornography through written material that advocates or counsels sexual activity with a person under the age of 18 years,” explains Criminal Prosecutor Maxime Rocheville-Paradis.

The first two charges of having distributed child pornography cover two periods with a time span sufficiently distanced to refrain from merging the two files. The first period allegedly took place between November 2017 and September 2018, while the second period took place between April and November 2020.

With regard to the charges of having accessed child pornography, the two periods covered by the charge are between November 2017 and September 2018 in the first case, and between April and November 2020. There as well, the span between the two periods led to the laying of two distinct charges.

A former New Carlisle town councillor, Freddy Boudreau, was released with conditions by Quebec Court Judge Celestina Almeida following his January 12 court appearance. His next court appearance is scheduled for March 14. As of January 12, he had not yet acquired the representation of a defence attorney. The investigation in that case took form officially in January 2021 when a Sûreté du Québec squad made a bust in Freddy Boudreau’s house and seized some items. “That operation led to the warrant issued on January 6 (2022) and executed through the January 12 arrest and court appearance of the accused,” says prosecutor Rocheville-Paradis.

Paul Boudreau, 71 years old, from New Richmond, had his trial on January 12 and 13 at the New Carlisle courthouse. He faced charges of indecent assault and obstruction of justice. The indecent assaults allegedly took place between 1973 and 1979 in New Richmond. The victim was a minor boy at the time. Paul Boudreau “entered a plea of guilty on the second charge, which is related to a 2019 attempt to convince the alleged victim to withdraw his complaint by giving him \$20,000,” explains Criminal Prosecutor Maxime Rocheville-Paradis. The case was presided over by Quebec Court Judge Celestina Almeida. She will render a decision on the first charge on May 13. Initially, Paul Boudreau was charged in November 2020.

Dany Lebrasseur, a 50-year-old man who has committed several violent crimes over the past 20 years, has been incarcerated since his January 14 trial at the New Carlisle Courthouse, where he entered a plea of guilty on charges of assault with a weapon, assault causing bodily harm, breach of conditions, harassment, uttering death threats towards family members and towards a police officer in a Port Daniel-Gascons house. The events took place in April 2021. He admitted to attacking a person with an iron bar. Judge Celestina Almeida sentenced him to a four-year penitentiary term.

In previous cases, Dany Lebrasseur was sentenced to 43 months of prison in 2014 for extortion as well as break and enter. In 2004, the man was sentenced to six years in prison for firing shots at the now defunct Gentlemen’s Club, in Port-Daniel, while people were inside. The last sentence imposed to Dany Lebrasseur came as a result of an agreement between the criminal prosecutor and the defence attorney.

The Sûreté du Québec is investigating a mischief as well as a break and enter that occurred before January 15 at the Paspebiac Historical Site. During the incident the door to the site’s powder keg was damaged. That small building was constructed around 1788, about 234 years ago. A passerby notified the management of the site on Saturday, January 15. “The incident was reported to the police on Monday morning (January 17). A plank was removed from the powder keg’s door. The investigators did not see fresh tracks in the snow and so it’s difficult to determine when the act was committed. Nobody penetrated the powder keg. We understand people’s concern because of the historical value of the building. The file remains open and we are looking for clues. We are also checking the location regularly,” explains Sgt. Claude Doiron, spokesperson of the Sûreté du Québec.

A Pascan Aviation aircraft made an emergency landing at the Michel-Pouliot Airport in Gaspé on January 19. Preliminary information suggests mechanical difficulties led the pilot to return to the airport. However, the co-owner of Pascan Aviation, Yani Gagnon, explains that the situation was triggered by an indicator on the fuel gauge, that for an unknown reason, was not constant. That convinced the pilot to return to Gaspé. “It was a minor issue that did not warrant deploying emergency services,” notes Mr. Gagnon, referring to the fact that the firefighters and paramedics were dispatched to the airport. The aircraft landed without a problem. Another plane came to Gaspé to pick up the passengers.

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The number of COVID cases declined in the region, but the 50th fatality occurred

Gilles Gagné

MARIA – The number of new COVID-19 cases decreased during the January 14 to 21 week in the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands. The Public Health Board reported 152 new cases during that week, compared to 540 such cases between the eight days that spanned between January 6-14.

Unfortunately, the region's 50th fatality was reported on January 12. It was the first fatality since October 15.

On January 6, a new method was implemented to count daily COVID cases, as the testing rules were changed in order to adapt to the intense outbreaks caused by the Omicron variant.

Since January 5, the PCR tests used to detect cases of COVID-19 are only for specific groups, namely

healthcare workers and patients with symptoms consistent with COVID-19 in an acute care unit, people with COVID-19 symptoms living in residences for seniors or handicapped citizens, and people without symptoms admitted or who will be admitted within two days to an acute or special care unit.

Since the January 6 implementation of the new calculation method, 692 cases have been reported in the region.

On January 21, Avignon MRC was also ahead in the number of active cases with 50, followed by 41 cases in the Percé Rock MRC, 38 cases in Haute-Gaspésie, 34 cases in the Bonaventure MRC, 17 cases in Côte-de-Gaspé and nine cases in the Magdalen Islands, for a total of 189 active cases in the region.

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As of January 21, six people were hospitalized because of the coronavirus. It was the average number of the week, marked by peaks of eight and lows of five.

As of January 17, the vaccination rate reached 88% for the first vaccination on the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands, and 82% for the second or third doses. In Quebec, the corresponding rates reached 85.2% and 79%. In all cases, it was an increase of less than one-half of 1%. Regional vaccination rates are released once a week, four days before SPEC's deadline.

Editorial page

Gilles Gagné

Commentary



Inflation rate kicks in It might be the case for a while

According to Statistics Canada, the inflation rate reached 4.8% in December, which is much higher than the usual annual rate of about 2%. It was also the highest rate in 30 years, in fact, since the 1991 economic downturn.

The pandemic mainly triggered the extra 3% people are paying for food, cars, housing and building materials, to name a few budgetary items. In a way, we are lucky in Canada because the corresponding inflation rate in the United States was a sturdy 6% in December.

The pandemic-related causes are tied to problems in the supply chain. In other words, numerous manufacturing plants have stopped their production for various periods since the beginning of 2020 and, in many fields, the demand has outmatched the supply. The supply chain woes are complicated by a shortage of containers and other logistics drawbacks, including crossborder complications and a shortage of truck drivers.

The first pandemic months led to an economic activity reduction which could have transformed an economic downturn into a major depression. However, most industrialized countries came up with vigorous stimulus programs.

In a matter of weeks over the spring of 2020, the demand for a wide range of goods picked up. People witnessed a rare occurrence of an economic downturn, employment-wise, doubled with rising consumption! That strong demand coupled with a shortage of some goods convinced a high number of companies to express a common reaction in our capitalist world; let's increase prices!

For a while, most economic analysts were talking about transitory inflation, as in short term. We no longer hear that word.

There might be a good reason for that. Most industrialized countries experience a shortage of manpower. With that shortage comes a race to find qualified and even unqualified workers, as well as managers.

Underpaid labourers currently see a good opportunity to get better pay, all the more justified by the inflation rate.

Currently, the 4.8% inflation rate doesn't encompass the rising salary of workers, which remains to take full form.

As always, minimum wage workers and low income seniors are hit harder by inflation than the rest of society because their salary increase and the adjustment of their retirement benefits will not allow them to drastically change their fate.

Even if the minimum wage increases from \$13.50 to \$14.25 an hour on May 1, which represents 5.5% more, it will not revolutionize the budget of the workers receiving it. They will remain poor.

It is different for people earning higher salaries. A lot of them can currently use the shortage of manpower leverage and get much better revenues. When you already earn \$100,000 a year, getting a 20% increase gives you some real "wiggle" room.

Usually, in lengthy inflationary periods, and it is permitted to think that we have entered such a stretch, wage increases account for two-thirds of the inflation rate.

The current rate of 4.8% in December did not include much wage increase because that phenomenon is only starting.

Does that mean that the inflation rate could hit 14 or 15% eventually? It would be premature to predict so. In all likelihood, some of the supply chain problems will gradually be alleviated.

Moreover, most private employers and governments will hardly be able to cope with strong increases in wages.

The governments of industrialized countries will soon have to curtail their expenditures because some of them are paid through loans and the governments' central banks are expected to increase interest rates and reduce inflationary pressures.

Most governments are therefore expected to reduce their budgets over the next few years, to preserve their credit score, to aim for an eventual balance between their expenses and their revenues and to avoid being penalized by the interest fees applied to their recent economic stimulus programs.

In a way, rising interest rates will increase inflation, because it will augment household budgets and all the expenses made on credit cards and through loans, such as the ones reimbursing registered retirement saving plans.

However, rising interest rates will also force debt conscious citizens to reduce their demand for goods, which will likely reduce prices and, by extension, inflation.

We are still experiencing a relatively mild inflation bout, compared to what Canadians lived between 1975

and 1978. At the time, the inflation rate was regularly over 10% yearly! It lasted a few years. It was mainly triggered by the rise of oil prices by the world's main producers in 1973, as they made people believe that there would be a shortage in the short term.

After refraining from doing so, the federal government led by Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau adopted a wage and price control law in December 1975 which limited wage increases to 10% in 1976, to 8% in 1977 and to 6% in 1978. The act was repealed the following year.

We haven't reached that level of intervention by a wide margin. Although Conservative party leader Erin O'Toole uses petty politics to call the recent period "Justinflation," the current inflationary stretch is a worldwide phenomenon.

Truth be told, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau must now be careful with public expenditures. The COVID stimulus programs were justified although some control measures applied to spend that money wisely and efficiently remain to be proven.

Justin Trudeau runs a minority government and he has often used the wide range of stimulus programs politically.

People affected by the pandemic must still receive some kind of support but the federal government must also reassure the Canadians that public expenditures are part of a plan taking into account the necessary wisdom that must rule those spendings. It is not clear that such wisdom has always been deployed as of now.

The Gaspé Spec

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Photo: N. Sergerie

Louise Langlois during the CMQ hearings in Gaspé, in July 2020

Chandler wants former mayor to repay \$230,000

**Nelson Sergerie,
LJI Journalist**

CHANDLER - Already authorized by a resolution passed a year ago, Chandler is going to court to claim \$230,411 from former mayor, Louise Langlois, in the saga surrounding the Municipal Commission's 180-day suspension from January to July 2021.

The resolution adopted in January 2021 underlined, in particular, that the reproaches held against Louise Langlois resulted from gross or intentional faults, by making her personal interest predominate, from having taken actions in an intentional and premeditated manner, all to achieve her ends.

The argument was repeated in the motion to institute proceedings for reimbursement of defence costs filed on January 17 at the Percé courthouse.

The attorneys for the Town of Chandler mention, in particular, that "the decision rendered (...) on December 21, 2020, is overwhelming with regard to the defendant and makes it possible to establish that the defendant's acts or omissions are gross and/or intentional and/or separable faults of the exercise of her functions."

They add that the former mayor "has multiplied the procedures, some of which are useless, unfounded and truncated in view of the evidence presented before the CMQ."

In December 2019, Louise Langlois was cited for 21 breaches of the Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct for elected officials of Chandler.

After hearings in July 2020, the commission concluded that the former elected official was guilty of 20 breaches, in particular, conflicts of interest in December 2020.

Before the sanction hearing, Ms. Langlois had tried to obtain a stay of proceedings, challenged the sanction notice issued against her, going so far as to ask to reopen the investigation, requests rejected by administrative Judge Sandra Bilodeau.

The former mayor went to the Superior Court where she was dismissed in July 2021 and suffered the same fate in October 2021 before the Court of Appeal.

Chandler paid \$267,000 in this case, including \$252,330 to Ms. Langlois for her defence. By subtracting taxes and other fees, the Town estimates the amount at \$230,410.97.

Moreover, an additional invoice of \$8,016 was paid subject to obtaining the details at the January 17 council.

A formal notice was sent to Ms. Langlois on December 22 to reimburse the costs, but the attorney for the former elected replied by refusing to pay on January 11.

She left politics last November and hasn't returned Spec's calls.



Gaspé hopes to once again see cruise ships in Gaspé Bay.

Photo: N. Sergerie

Cruise ships: Gaspé hopes for another season in 2022

**Nelson Sergerie,
LJI Journalist**

GASPÉ - Even though there's recently been several COVID outbreaks on cruise ships in warm seas, Destination Gaspé remains hopeful to have a cruise ship season in 2022.

The Omicron variant is making waves on the planet and the cruise industry hasn't been spared. Just recently, people aboard a Norwegian Cruise Line ship found themselves stranded on board after the cruise was cancelled after departure. The boat had left New York for the Caribbean and no return date is scheduled.

The executive director of

Destination Gaspé, Stéphane Sainte-Croix, remains hopeful, mentioning that none of the 27 stopovers planned on Gaspé have been cancelled.

"As long as the borders are not closed and as long as the industry does not put an end to its activities elsewhere on the planet, we remain very positive," explains Mr. Sainte-Croix, adding that the industry has adapted to health measures and returned to sea in the last year, especially since the borders have remained open for almost a year, which promotes tourism.

Preparations

Destination Gaspé has

restarted tasks needed to welcome ships. "The specifications for operations, reception and tourist products are updated. Several projects are already underway to be fully ready from next May," says Mr. Sainte-Croix.

The first ship should drop anchor in Gaspé on May 22 and the last call is scheduled for October 29: a total of 18,832 passengers and crew members are expected.

The last ship to anchor in Gaspé dates back to October 2019, a season that saw 25 ships and 17,000 people. Twenty-five stopovers were cancelled in 2021 and 47 in 2020. The economic benefits were estimated at \$7.5 million in 2018.

Happy Retirement!



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service, we wish her a
well-deserved retirement!
Thank you for so many
wonderful years!

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Record high temperatures in the Gulf of St. Lawrence in 2021 could affect fish stocks

Gilles Gagné

CHANDLER - The general trend of water temperature is warming in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and 2021 was a year in which several high temperature records were broken, according to the annual report on oceanographic conditions carried out by the team of Peter Galbraith, researcher at Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

According to Mr. Galbraith, an expert in physical oceanography, “we are slowly heading towards winters where the absence of ice will be the norm” on the St. Lawrence.

During a conference on January 18, Peter Galbraith noted in his presentation that in the gulf, the cold intermediate layer and the deep waters both broke high temperature this past year.

The waters of the gulf are divided into three layers: surface waters, the cold intermediate layer and deep waters. In the deep waters of the gulf, at 150, 200, 250 and 300 metre water depths, new heat records were reached throughout the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

For example, the data that Peter Galbraith's team collected shows that the average temperature at a depth of 300 metres was 6.9 degrees celsius in 2021, which is unheard of, while the 30-year average is 5.7 degrees celsius.

If the surface water is influenced by the warming air temperature over the gulf, ocean currents explain the increase in deep water temperature.

“The deep waters of the



Photo: G. Gagné

The weather is much hotter now than it was prior to the year 2000. It heats the Gulf of Saint Lawrence waters, creating the opportunity for many leisure activities but it could negatively affect a lot of fish stocks.

Gulf of St. Lawrence are a mixture of the waters of the Gulf Stream and the cold waters of the Labrador currents and this mixture is increasingly rich in water from the Gulf Stream,” indicated Peter Galbraith, pointing out that the latter are warmer, saltier, but also less rich in oxygen.

“We are at 10% (oxygen) saturation in deep waters. So, it's starting to be dangerous; it shouldn't reach anoxic conditions,” that is to say areas completely devoid of oxygen. “We are going towards that

quietly, but we must not go there,” added the researcher.

Ice-free winter would become the norm

In 2021, the ice on the gulf did not appear until the third week of January, and “there are places where there has never been ice during the year on the Gulf of Saint Lawrence over very large areas,” says Peter Galbraith.

It has only happened five times that no or very little ice has formed on the Gulf of St.

Lawrence. That phenomenon occurred in 1958, 1969, 2010, 2011 and now in 2021, explained the researcher, specifying that before 1958, “it is known that the winters were cold enough that there was always ice,” even if no scientific data was compiled.

The absence of ice in winter means there will be more erosion, “a major issue,” according to Peter Galbraith.

The presence of ice protects the shores in at least two ways: by forming a shield along the coast but also through putting a sort of lid on the sea during major storms, thus reducing the size of the waves when they can form. Smaller waves, when they reach the shore, reduce the effect of erosion compared to major waves.

Moreover, the presence of ice also contributes to reducing the absorption of the heat coming from the sun, as the colour white reflects sun rays while the dark blue of a sea free of ice absorbs the heat coming with those rays.

The erosion of the shores of the St. Lawrence is already leading to the loss of riparian strips, wetlands, private land and threatens road infrastructure, but also wildlife habitats. “You can think of the harp seal that comes out on the ice to give birth,” said Mr. Galbraith.

Among the victims of rising water temperatures, he also includes the northern shrimp, which is present everywhere in the St. Lawrence estuary and in the northern part of the gulf, at depths varying between 150 and 300 metres, in “the cold intermediate layer” of the St.

Lawrence. Warming water threatens its habitat.

According to Ouranos, a consortium of climatology researchers, the temperature and the drop in oxygen concentration in the marine habitat of northern shrimp “could affect the viability, profitability and sustainability of this fishery,” which represents hundreds of million dollars in exports in Eastern Canada, including Quebec’s maritime regions like the Gaspé Peninsula.

Snow crab, which is much more sensitive to changes in water temperature than lobster, could also pay the price for short-term gulf warming.

“The snow crab is one of the species that cannot really move” towards another ecosystem and “it is very affected by what is currently happening with the cold intermediate layer; its habitat,” says Peter Galbraith.

Other species, such as redfish, however, seem to adapt to the warming of deep waters. The population of this fish is growing rapidly in the St. Lawrence.

“What is good for one species is not necessarily good for another. Deep, warm temperatures are very good for redfish, but not as good for northern shrimp,” indicates Mr. Galbraith, specifying however “that a healthy climate is a climate which does not vary too much.” Whereas currently the climate shift observed in the St. Lawrence “is unheard of,” he concludes.

(Some statistics are from Canadian Press)

Magazine Gaspésie on the lookout for English storytellers

Natalie Chicoine, LJI Journalist

GASPÉ: Magazine Gaspésie, a local historical review, associated with Gaspé’s Musée de la Gaspésie is looking for anglophone storytellers.

The local francophone history magazine, which goes to print three times per year, is collaborating with Vision Gaspé-Percé Now to offer translation services to the anglophone community.

English-speaking individuals with a passion for history or a flare for storytelling are able to submit their stories, memories and research in 600 to 1250 word text proposals with the

possibility of being featured in the publication as well as on Magazine Gaspésie’s website.

Officially launched in 1963 and formerly known as the *Revue d'histoire de la Gaspésie*, the magazine has been and still is an invaluable source of material and entertainment for researchers and readers with an interest in local history and culture.

According to Vision Gaspé-Percé Now (VGPN) the project has been in the works since last year, when VGPN approached Magazine Gaspésie hoping to find a way to get anglophone content featured in the historical review, and began discussing various ways that

they could make this happen.

Now, Magazine Gaspésie is able to count on VGPN to provide translation services for anglophone submissions. “It is our hope that anglophones from all around the Coast will feel confident in sharing their stories and will seize the opportunity the partnership is bringing,” says Anne Nober, the arts and culture coordinator at VGPN.

Selected texts will be published in French in the magazine, but the original English version will be featured on the site. In order to leave some time for translation, anglophone submissions will need to be submitted one month before the

official deadlines as mentioned on the website. Although each issue is thematic, submissions are being invited from a number of historical perspectives. Here are a few examples of some of the things that the Magazine Gaspésie is hoping will pique an interest: The unforgettable figures of Gaspesian history, as well, as the (often) untold stories of Gaspesian women. It can also be just memorable events that might bring up a fond memory of life on the Coast.

For more details go to www.magazinegaspesie.ca, look for the “your magazine” tab, drop down and select “propose a text”



Photo: Courtesy Magazine Gaspésie
Most recent edition of the magazine, volume 203, published October 2021: At the confluence of worlds. This edition features local authors focused on the history of the peninsula.

2021 shrimp season was good

Nelson **Sergerie**,
LJI Journalist

GASPÉ - The 2021 shrimp season was similar to that of 2020. However, in terms of profitability, the impact of the sharp increase in diesel fuel prices has led shrimp fishermen to dig deeper into their pockets to cover expenses.

The statistical data hasn't been finalized, but the Office of shrimp fishermen of Quebec estimates that shrimpers fished almost all of their quota of 18,000 tonnes allocated for 2021.

"In terms of capture, it should look pretty much like last year. Overall, almost all of the quota was caught, but we do not have all the figures from processors," notes the director of the Quebec Shrimp Fishermen's Office, Patrice Element.

Fishermen obtained better



The director of the Quebec Shrimp Fishermen's Office, Patrice Element.

prices in 2021 than in 2020, when the Régie des Marchés Agricoles et Alimentaires du Québec granted tariffs of \$1.48 per pound for large shrimp; \$1.15 per pound for medium ones and \$0.96 per pound for small shrimp.

"But this difference was negatively offset by the fact that the shrimp was a little smaller on average than last

year. In total, that still gives us an average price of something like \$0.10 or \$0.11 per pound more than last year, but even then, it's not definitive," says Mr. Element.

"Primarily, with the increase in the cost of diesel and the general inflation that everyone has had to deal with, it is certain that the operating costs have been much higher this

year than last year. Even if we had a slightly higher average price than last year, the profitability was not necessarily better than last year," explains Mr. Element.

The shrimp market is doing better in the post-pandemic period and everything suggests that the upturn will continue.

The quotas will be revised this winter with the various industry players and scientists, but even if the shrimp is smaller, it is not bad news.

"There are always variations, but more small shrimp is not necessarily bad news. It will grow and reproduce. It's not fun for sales prices, but it's encouraging for the renewal of the resource," he notes.

"Two and three years ago, there was a lot of discussion

about the sustainability of the resource. I imagine that we will have those discussions again this year. There seems to be stability. Will it be a little more? Will it be a little less than last year? We will see, but it is much better than what we saw with the declines of 2015, 2016 and 2017," says Mr. Element.

It was the first year of the joint plan which included the fishermen of Matane. Some adjustments had to be made with the addition of the Fruits de mer de l'Est plant.

"I think the collaboration of the Fruits de mer de l'Est as part of their integration is to be commended," says Element.

In 2020 and 2021, the quota was set at 17,999 tonnes. In 2019, it was at 17,335 tonnes.

Intermunicipal Energy Board takes a leap

Nelson **Sergerie**,
LJI Journalist

SAINTE-ANNE-DES-MONTS - An important turning point could be taken by The Gaspé Peninsula Magdalen Islands Intermunicipal Energy Board and the Alliance de l'Est, which are trying to convince Hydro-Québec and the government of Quebec to create a partnership.

After obtaining a skill set at the solar and storage level; the Alliance, in place for five years now, sees this last element as an opportunity because once the energy is sold by contract; the organization could store the surpluses.

"It gets even more interesting. If Hydro-Québec wants to buy what we store, there are business opportunities. Storage is becoming a very interesting tool for the Energy Board," says the president of the board, Simon Deschênes.

The credibility of the Alliance, which consists of the Gaspé Peninsula-Magdalen Islands Intermunicipal Energy Board and that of the Lower Saint Lawrence, as a representative of the communities and its gaining visibility on the Quebec and Canadian scene, brings it to a new level.

The Alliance wants to play a major role in the Quebec government's energy transition and is specifically targeting New York State's electricity purchase project with Hydro-Québec, which requires the supply of 1,400 megawatts of existing wind energy.



The president of the Gaspé Peninsula Magdalen Islands Intermunicipal Energy Board, Simon Deschênes.

"1400 megawatts is a lot and the Alliance de l'Est wants to be involved. We want to play a significant leadership role in the energy transition as a whole in Quebec," says Simon Deschênes.

In July 2020 the Alliance submitted projects for the MRCs of L'Islet and Montmagny totalling 1,200 megawatts of wind energy to the Quebec government, including six 200-megawatt wind farms that could inject \$6.4 billion into the economy.

"We don't want to create false hopes. We should not have expectations, but the representations are there. Minister Jonatan Julien, like the government, is sensitive to what the energy transition will be like in Quebec. I sincerely believe that we have a chance of being the key player alongside the government and Hydro-Québec in what will happen in the coming months and years," says Mr. Deschênes with confidence.

It is at this point that storage could become important for the future.

Before the holidays, Hydro-Québec had launched calls for proposals for 480 megawatts of energy from renewable sources and another 300 megawatts reserved for wind power.

The text mentioned that the community should be a 50% shareholder of future projects; with Quebec content targeting 60% of overall spending; a maximization of regional content up to 35%, either from the MRC where the project will be located or from the MRC of La Matanie or the Gaspé Peninsula-Magdalen Islands region and contracts for a period of 30 years.

Bids must be submitted no later than July 21.

The additional needs by 2029 were estimated at 1,400 megawatts and Quebec even mentioned that a significant part would be reserved for wind power.



Photo: Tourism Percé / Facebook

Percé wharf once again draws concern over shifting sediment

Tesia Hackett, LJI

PERCÉ: Earlier this week, the mayor of Percé, Cathy Poirier, raised concerns over the town's wharf and the walkway along it. Poirier claims that dredging work that was not completed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans has left a side of the wharf vulnerable and fears that winter storms and tides affecting the flow and accumulation of sediment could possibly render the wharf unsafe.

In 2016 the wharf at the east end of Percé was damaged by a winter storm that hit much of the Gaspé Peninsula. With many local operators affected by the damage, the situation caused a debate between municipal and federal governments over who was responsible for the upkeep of the wharf.

Since 2014 the Town of Percé had obtained commitment from the federal government to rebuild the wharf following a handover to be completed in 2016. In a press release issued July 12, 2018, by the Canadian Government Member of Parliament Diane Lebouthillier, on behalf of Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of the Federal Department of Fisheries Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, announced that the federal government would transfer ownership of this property to the government of Quebec.

The transfer was in connection with the Government of Canada's Small Craft Harbours program whose key objective "is to transfer ownership of harbours that are not widely used by fishers, or that are used primarily for recreational boating and tourism." The government pointed out that "the port facilities in Percé are mainly used for tourism purposes."

As part of the transfer of ownership, the government of Canada announced it would proceed with its commitment

Cont'd on page 11



Time to make an appointment for your COVID-19 booster dose.

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Get the booster dose and follow all health guidelines to protect yourself from COVID-19 and its variants.

2021, an excellent year for Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie

Transporter shows record of 4,636 freight cars hauled for a 10% increase

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND – The Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie increased its freight traffic by 10% in 2021, to reach 4,636 carloads. The transporter under municipal control thus showed its best results in its history. In fact, one has to go back to 1998 to find a higher number of carloads along the Matapédia to Gaspé line.

Back in 1998, the line between Matapédia and Chandler belonged to Chemin de fer Baie-des-Chaleurs, a company controlled by the Quebec Railway Society. The section between Chandler and Gaspé belonged to the Corporation du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, the ancestor of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, or Gaspésie Railway Society.

In 1998, the Gaspesia mill in Chandler and Smurfit Stone's linerboard plant in New Richmond were still in operation, and the Murdochville copper smelter was still active as well. There were 5,653 carloads that year.

The 4,636 carloads of 2021 followed years of 4,323 carloads in 2018, 4,236 in 2019 and 4,202 in 2020. So, 2019 and 2020 were marked by small declines of 2% and 1% in traffic.

Luc Lévesque, director general of the transporter, is satisfied to see a 10% increase in the 2021 numbers.

"Our traffic has been either increasing or has been stable since 2013. Small drops of 1% or 2% mean stability. Year 2021 was the busiest year on the line in more than 20 years, in fact, in close to 25 years. It is very, very good but I still haven't reached the 5,000-carload mark yet. I sure hope that we will reach that milestone in 2022 because it will be hard to match for a certain period after 2022, considering that we will lose the windmill blade traffic next year," explains Mr. Lévesque.

LM Windpower, the blade manufacturer based in Gaspé,



Photo: G. Gagné

The director general of the SCFG, Luc Lévesque, is satisfied with the 2021 results but he wants an acceleration of the line upgrading in order to maintain and increase the current traffic

will switch to 107-metre-long units in 2023, and they will all be exported to the United States by ship. The current blades are 47 metres in length. LM Windpower has been exporting its whole production to the United States since the fall of 2016. Rail shipments started in December of that year and they have become the main source of revenues for the Gaspésie Railway Society, whose annual revenues hover around \$10 million. The blades are trucked from the Gaspé plant to the New Richmond transshipment facility because the line is under repair east of Caplan.

"We sure hope that in the not-so-distant future, we will haul blades again. In the meantime, we are working very hard at landing input traffic for LM Windpower or the Port Daniel cement plant. It is extremely hard to get that traffic because the transportation patterns are already in place. We know that yearly, hundreds of containers from overseas arrive at the LM plant in Gaspé by truck. They are trucked from Montreal. We would like to receive the containers in New Richmond and eventually in Gaspé," points out Mr. Lévesque.

The railway company prefers to not provide exact numbers about its customers'

traffic but the windmill blade traffic of 2021 was about stable compared to that of 2020, when 1,790 cars left to reach LM Windpower's American customers.

The cement traffic of Votorantim, the new name of the Port Daniel plant, was a tad smaller, carload-wise, than that of LM Windpower in 2021.

"In the case of the cement plant as well, there are big possibilities of getting our share of the input received by Votorantim but as long as the track is not reopened between New Richmond and Port Daniel, it will be very difficult to change current transportation patterns. We would also like to get the New Brunswick-bound cement traffic but as long as there is transshipment involved in New Richmond for a relatively short distance like Port Daniel-Moncton, we will likely not get it. CN also has to reopen on a regular basis its line between the Bathurst to Miramichi stretch for freight purposes," analyzes Mr. Lévesque.

Wood chips and lumber traffic were up

The main explanation behind the Gaspésie Railway Society traffic increase is linked to the Groupe Lebel sawmill in

Nouvelle, formerly known as Temrex. The plant was acquired on April 30 by a company based in Rivière-du-Loup, the same day Votorantim announced the official acquisition of the Port Daniel cement plant.

Groupe Lebel's woodchip traffic increased by 39% in 2021 compared to 2020, and lumber shipments also increased by 51%. Luc Lévesque doesn't release exact numbers in carloads in that case again, to the customers' request.

"The sawmill didn't reach traffic numbers but they are somewhat better than the 2020 numbers. The woodchip traffic is good because the (White Birch) Rivière-du-Loup paper mill is operating well. The lumber traffic depends on factors we have no control over," points out Mr. Lévesque.

He is still trying to land some of the Saint-Elzéar Association coopérative forestière sawmill lumber traffic and talks are regularly held on that topic but no agreement has been reached yet.

"We depend on Canadian National's rates because our traffic is shipped out of our line and that company's strategy is to increase its profits with the existing traffic. It means increasing rates," remarks Luc Lévesque.

He is anxious to see an acceleration in Transports

Québec's planning pace of upgrading works needed between Caplan and Gaspé. The ministry can count on a budget of \$280.8 million to realize that mandate, including \$45.8 million allotted by the federal government in August 2019.

"Since the announcement of the complete line refurbishment in May 2017, an amount of \$80 million has been spent and we cannot count on one additional mile of track," says Mr. Lévesque.

Transports Québec has not issued a single call for tenders for the restoration of a railway bridge since June 12, 2020, which is more than 19 months ago. Upgrading the bridges has been the designated priority of that line for close to 15 years.

A meeting with Transports Québec about the work that must be carried out on the line is scheduled for February 3.

In 2020, Transports Québec committed to reopening the line as far east as Port Daniel before the end of 2022, an unlikely outcome now, considering that four important bridges remain to be either replaced or upgraded between Caplan and the cement plant. Seven smaller structures must also be refurbished between the same points.

The passenger trains of VIA Rail will not come back as long as the line is not functional, at least to New Carlisle.



Photo: G. Gagné

The increase in lumber and wood chip traffic was the main factor behind the record numbers of 2021.



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 **Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles**

Snow angels: Fun in the snow

Diane Skinner

Were you surprised to hear a few days ago that a neighbour did not know what a snow angel is. What kind of childhood does not include the joy of making snow angels? For those not familiar with snow angels, it is a design made in fresh snow by lying on your back and moving your arms up and down and moving your legs from side to side. When you stand up and look down, you should see the form of an angel in the snow.

Is there any skill involved in making a snow angel? Not really, but a few helpful hints may help. The snow is best when not too deep, but fresh and powdery and try to find a spot that has not been walked on. Heavy or sticky snow does not work as well. (That is the snow we call packing snow.)

A snow artist should have a clean canvas. The movement of your arms creates the angel wings and the movement of your legs creates a gown.

According to Guinness World Records, the record for the most snow angels made in the same area at the same time was in North Dakota in 2007 when almost 9,000 snow angels were



Photo: D. Skinner

Have you made a snow angel yet this winter?

made. The previous record, a distant second, was held by Michigan Technological University where almost 4,000 snow angels were created.

Note that a Guinness World Record was made right here on the Gaspé for the largest turnip grown!

Some birds unwittingly create a type of snow angel when they land in fresh, powdered snow and swish their wings. This is a rare

sight so if you see it, be sure to take a photo.

If you are fan of the TV series, *The Simpsons*, you may have seen the episode where Homer makes a snow angel which he turns into a snow devil!

Snow is for more than shovelling. A lot of fun can be had in the snow from skiing, snowshoeing, skidooring, hiking, making snowmen and snow fort building to making snow angels.

Fun in the snow challenge

- Make a snow angel or angels and take a photo of the finished product and send it into *The Gaspé Spec* for a future issue.
- Maybe some schools will want to try for a large group of snow angels?



Writing contest has category for French second language writers

Natalie Chicoine, LJI

For the third year, the Gaspesian francophone newspaper, *Graffiti*, is holding its annual writing contest with a \$250 prize awarded to winners in their respective categories. The call for submissions is once again open to writers to whom French is a second language in both adult and student categories.

Each year, the theme changes and allows aspiring writers a certain artistic liberty to both interpret and express thoughts centered around a given concept. This year's 2022 theme is focused around the idea of the "Bubble." "This could be anything having to do with a bubble," says Phillippe Garon, spokesperson for the competition; "The connection with what we are experiencing is quite direct. Is there a way to share touching or funny stories about it, or go completely elsewhere like champagne bubbles or bubbles in a good hot bath, or even the bubbles related to comics? There are different variations of the word bubble from which we can draw inspiration." Garon hopes to see people participating and sharing their literary talents and thoughts with the people of Gaspé, even if the French language is not their mother tongue.

Adults of 18 years or older, submitting in the French second language category, are being asked to write texts of approximately a thousand words while student texts are 500 words each. The winner's work will be published in the *Graffiti* newspaper as well as on the *Graffiti* website. The deadline for the adult categories is Friday, February 25, and Friday, April 29, for student categories.

Last year, Jacobina Spaninks won in the French as a Second Language category. Her story was inspired by the 2021 theme of the "Family Portrait" and follows a young woman with a love of the works of Molière and a love of language and of travel as she grows and finds strength and peace of mind in the Gaspesian landscape. Her text is available to read on the *Graffiti* website.

Submissions can be sent to Nadia Leblond, *Graffiti* general manager at direction@graffici.ca.

Reflections

by

Diane Skinner Flowers



Be kind! Be kind! Be kind!

We are all COVID fatigued. Tired of masks, distancing, sanitizing, long lineups in grocery stores, getting the third shot, (will there be more?) and showing our vaccine passports? We all are exhausted by this, because as we reach the milestone of having COVID in our lives for almost two years, it was something that we never, ever expected. Nevertheless, it is here and still affecting our lives and we cannot even predict how this will unfold in future days and months.

This is a stressful time for most people and the long-term effects are evident as people struggle with the constant stress of our curtailed lives. We can look back to how we lived before COVID and compare it to now and "the before" looks a whole lot better - less worry, lack of disagreement over how to face COVID, no food shortages and prices that we could handle. That was then and this is now and it's different.

There is a saying that "It is easier to see the beginnings of things and harder to see the end." Not always so. COVID has clearly changed things since mid-March 2020. Times have been and will continue to be challenging.

Many psychologists feel that the state of our mental health has been impacted by all this unrelenting stress. We are not all in agreement about how to handle the virus and that has been destructive to family, friends and neighbourly relationships.

It is, I believe, important to respect free choice yet most have accepted, even welcomed, the availability of the vaccines but not everybody. Will this, or has this, caused an irreparable chasm of different beliefs? It looks like it has for some. Families have been ripped apart by vastly differing views. Can these important personal relationships be repaired over time? Will neighbours trust each other?

Until this pandemic ends, and scientists tell us that all pandemics do, what can we do and how do we conduct our daily lives?

In one word, let's move forward with kindness: to ourselves and others and also to those whose beliefs do not align with ours. We are together in this: we breathe the same air, shop at the same stores and potentially meet face to face numerous times a day.

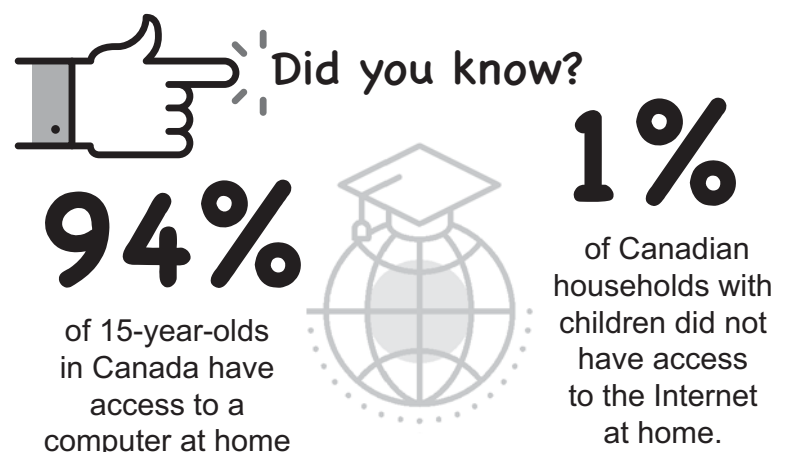
Be kind to staff in stores. They are feeling these stresses too. Be kind to essential workers of all kinds and there are so many who are keeping this world going: medical staff, truck drivers, retail workers, newspaper and radio staff, teachers and support staff and many more. They keep us fed, dispense our medications and if we become infected with the virus they care for us.

It is a dark and difficult time for our planet with many more challenges knocking at the door: climate change, political instability, job insecurity and quickly rising prices.

Choose to carry on with kindness and astonish yourself with acts of kindness.

Stay safe

The facts: Quebec reported 3,425 COVID-19 hospitalizations and 88 more deaths attributed to the virus on January 19, 2022, including a four-year-old girl "due to circumstances related to COVID-19."



Winter driving: Ice and snow. Take it slow.

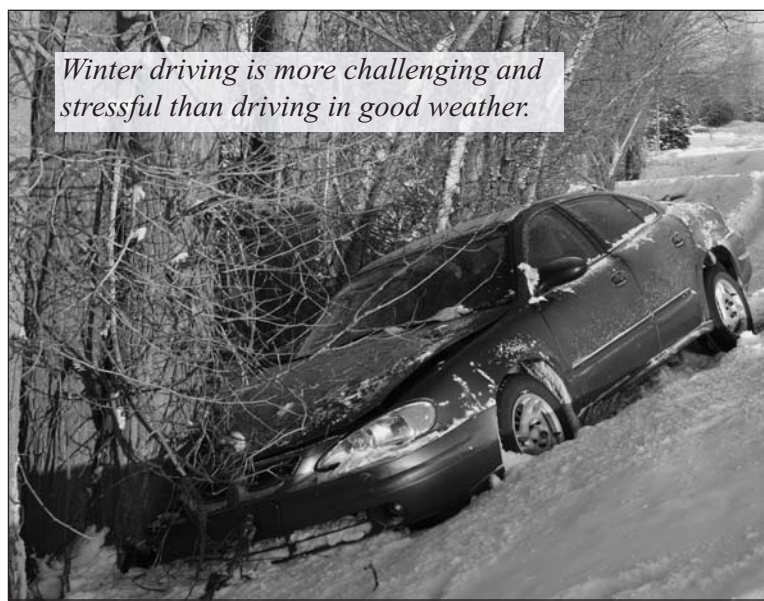
Diane Skinner

For most, driving in winter is more challenging and stressful than driving in good weather. Depending on the weather conditions, the roads can be difficult to downright dangerous. Be mindful of the following and be safe, for yourself and others.

Visibility: First line of defense is your own vehicle. Keep your windows clean. Clear all the snow off your car. Keep the washer fluid full so that you can clean your windows often. Spray from other vehicles can cover your windshield. Back windows should be cleared and cleaned thoroughly. If any of your wipers are not working well, it may be time to replace them.

Keep your headlights, signal lights, and rear lights clear.

Use your defroster to keep



windows clear in order to increase your view of the road.

Black Ice: When we hear that there is black ice on the road, it puts us on high alert immediately. Black ice is a thin coating or glaze of ice on the road. It is not always visible as we drive but when we brake, we are well aware of the ice. It is considered by road experts to be one of the

deadliest of all winter road hazards.

The best way to protect yourself is to slow down. If you need to stop, brake slowly, and keep the steering wheel steady with no sudden jerky motions.

Be aware that black ice is commonly found on bridges and overpasses. Slow down.

Speed: Winter roads are

not optimum for hard braking or quick acceleration. If you are on a slippery patch of road, gently pump your brakes if you need to stop. Quick braking can cause your brakes to lock. If this happens stay calm and reduce your speed. The best way to drive safely is to drive more slowly in bad road conditions. Slow and steady should be your mantra.

Making good choices: This is even more critical in winter and the recurring theme is take your time. Be patient if the driver in front of you is driving slowly. They may be less experienced drivers, be more anxious or have children in their vehicle. Sometimes the best decision is to stay home. Wait for the storm to end and for the roads to be cleared.

Keep your gas tank full: The most obvious reason for keeping the tank full is you do

not want to run out of gas in a storm or blizzard. An additional benefit is a full tank of gas increases the weight of your car and provides better traction. This is a real plus when the roads are slippery.

Safety is in your hands. It is not automatic.

WHARF:

▶ Cont'd from page 7

of upgrading the wharf before the Quebec government becomes the official owner.

Official upgrading of the wharf was completed in 2020 and carried out by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The \$6.4 million investment upgraded the wharf as a breakwater in an "L" shape where the cruise ships could be moored inside with a walkway along its entire length. The new wharf was built 230 metres long, 30 metres longer than the old one. No impact study for the new wharf built in the geologically and culturally significant town of Percé was available.

By April 2021, an accumulation of sediment along the wharf required dredging to allow for vessels to safely access the wharf. This led to once again another debate over responsibility over the wharf and the removal of the sediment. Lobster fishermen caught in the middle had to move operations to the L'Anse-à-Beaufils wharf, located a few kilometers west of the town. The dredging eventually took place in time for the wharf to open for the tourist season with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans footing the bill.

However, once more, this time in December, the wharf would require more dredging as sediment once again began shifting and accumulating. Dredging was implemented by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and completed in mid-December. The fishermen, forced to redirect operations to the L'Anse-à-Beaufils harbour because of the silting, never returned to use the Percé wharf. The federal government claimed this would be the last time they would intervene.

Poirier is asking the two levels of government, Ottawa, which carried out the dredging and Quebec, which now owns the wharf, to find a solution to protect the infrastructure.

Shopping for winter boots

Diane Skinner

You need new winter boots! So what do you have in mind: the least expensive pair, the cutest pair, safest ones, or the same as the ones you have now but since they are worn out you are going for a repeat?

Boots need to do more than look good. They should protect your feet from wet, cold, slushy and snowy weather. Sorry to say but in deepest, coldest winter weather go for function over fashion. If you can find a pair that fulfill both of those, you have hit the boot jackpot!

When buying boots consider the following:



It is the time of the year when we may need to shop for new winter boots.

Photo: D. Skinner

Height of boot

Depending how much time you spend outside, choose a tall boot if you are going to be walking through deep snow. The bonus is they

will keep your calves warm. Shorter boots are easier for walking.

The sole

Most winter boots have rubber soles which is good because that keeps out wetness. Traction (the grip) is extremely important because who wants to slip and fall? If the sole is smooth, do not buy them. The more "texture," as in crevices and grooves in the sole, the better.

Insulation

The lining of boots varies greatly. Thinsulate is a good choice because it keeps you warm but is not heavy. In addition, it is great for wet and slushy conditions. Not all Thinsulate is the same – they are labelled with a number and the higher the number the warmer your boot will be. You may choose wool

lining which is super cozy but likely more expensive.

Materials

The upper part of the boot should be water resistant. Some are labelled as being pretreated and waterproofed. That is good. Obviously, suede boots, though they look fashionable, are not a good choice for Canada's winters.

The fit

Never, ever, choose a boot that is tight on your foot because your feet will freeze! Leave room for toe wiggling and the addition of thick socks if needed.

Closures

Boots that tie can be slower to put on, which is a pain, but those will give you a tighter fit, which is good. Boots that have zippers or just pull on are convenient but do not protect your legs and feet as well.

A tongue

Yes, a tongue. You know those flappy pieces inside a boot or shoe helps to keep snow and water out of your boot.

If you need new boots now, the good news is most styles are on sale. Best of luck finding a boot which combines good protection and good looks!

Gaspesian Winters

On the Gaspé, winters can be harsh with very cold temperatures, lots of snow and brutal north winds. January and February can be crisp and clear at night, when the silence of walking on the snow would hardly wake up a sleeping owl.

The many small towns along the Coast experience much of the same weather. When we go outside, we freeze our butts off, just to visit a neighbour or go shopping.

We may complain about winters but the beauty that winter brings as winds and snow shape the landscape is amazing.

What a sight when those snowflakes fall on the outside, while inside we are warm, enjoying a bowl of chilli or cup of hot chocolate in the comfort of our own home. It's even more cozy to watch a movie decked out in a sweater, with warm socks, and blanket. Watching the fire in your fireplace can also add a nice touch of warmth to your home.

Keep that coffee pot brewing as a friend may stop by and enjoy a few sweets.

Ken Ross, New Carlisle

Snow Walker: Get out and walk!

Diane Skinner

Walk Well, My Brother is a short story written by Farley Mowat and in 2003 it was made into a Canadian film called *Snow Walker*, based on the short story. It is about a bush pilot who fights for survival accompanied by a young Inuk woman. The small plane in which they are travelling crashes in the Northwest Territories.

Walking in the snow in winter does not have to be about survival but rather you can get out and enjoy the beauty, fresh air and physical exercise. Being outside is also a boost for mental health and a reduction of stress. Go with family, a friend or a group and it can become a great social time as well. This can be most enjoyable if you are well-prepared for your snow walk.

Dress appropriately

Footwear is crucial, so cute little boots are not the goal. Boots that are good for low temperatures, waterproof

and slip resistant are the best. Warm socks will keep you outside longer – there is nothing like cold feet to send you back inside quickly.

Warm gloves or mittens and a warm hat or toque are important because we lose body heat through the extremities, such as hands and head.

Dress in layers which will provide the most warmth for your body. Layers are helpful if you get too hot, because you can remove a layer or two.

The best jacket should be windproof and waterproof. If you are out walking and it is snowing, particularly wet snow, it can seep through and your enjoyable walk will change quickly. If you want to lie down and make snow angels, the waterproof jacket will be a bonus.

Plan your walk

Choose a route that is appropriate for everyone in the group. If you go a long distance and it is a struggle to make it home, everyone in-

cluded will be reluctant to go snow walking again. You may want to choose a route that is more sheltered such as through the woods on a trail. This will mean you will not be as likely to be affected by the wind. If you want to go for a beach walk, be certain that your hat or hood is warm and pulled tightly around your head.

Plan to be home before dark as the trails become more difficult to navigate after the sun sets. Be on the way home by 4 p.m.

Consider walking poles or a wooden cane or stick which will be helpful if you encounter icy patches or need to climb hills.

Depending on how long the snow walk will be, pack a few easy-to-carry snacks or even a thermos with hot tea or cocoa.

Caution

If you decide to walk solo, do not stray too far into the woods, carry a cell phone and/or tell a friend where you plan to walk.

Walking in the snow is an enjoyable family activity.

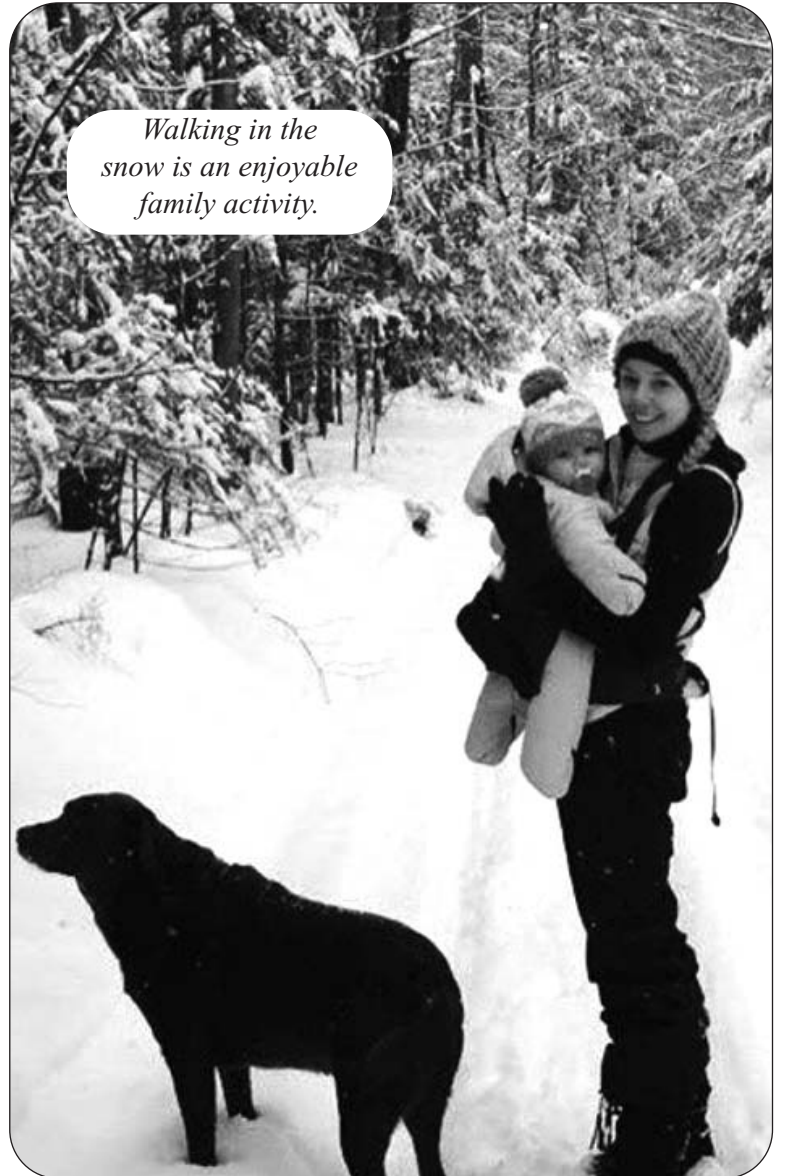


Photo: D. Skinner

Saying goodbye to January

Diane Skinner

Appropriately, the month of January is National Hot Tea Month, the perfect weather for sipping a steaming cup of your favourite tea! These particular days have already passed us by but January also celebrates Chocolate-Covered Cherry Day (January 3); National Bean Day (January 6); National Dress Up Your Pet Day (January 14); and National Penguin Day (January 20). By the time you read this article you may have time to celebrate National Puzzle Day (January 29). Anything is an excuse to celebrate what is traditionally the coldest month of the year.

An additional happening that occurred earlier this month was the “Perihelion.” This is defined as the point in the earth’s orbit when we are closest to the sun. Sadly that does not translate into warmer days. For those who like trivia,

the Earth is about 90,000,000 miles from our star, the sun.

January takes its name from the Roman god Janus. He is known as the protector of gates and doorways which symbolize beginnings and endings. If you see a depiction of the god Janus, he will have two faces, one looking to the past while the other looks to the future. It is also appropriate for January as it is the gateway into the new year 2022.

The months of both January and February did not exist in the ancient Roman calendar at all. In fact, the ancient calendar had just ten months in it.

Since we live in the Northern Hemisphere, it is a new beginning, not only by the calendar, but as the days begin to lengthen and the amount of daylight begins to increase by about two minutes every day.

January’s full moon is called the Wolf Moon and

we are now heading towards the February full moon, the Full Snow Moon, which will occur on Wednesday, February 16.

It’s cold out there and with the winds giving us an often brutal windchill, what is the best way to warm your innards? Soup and stews! Chicken soup, which was featured in last week’s Spec, is not only delicious but healing if you are not feeling your best.

Another hearty soup, chock full of veggies, that is perfect for the cold days of January and February is Minestrone! Some refer to this soup as Italian Vegetable Soup because it includes a tomato broth with loads of vegetables, wine, pasta and lovely aromatic herbs including garlic. Feel free, of course, to make this recipe your own by omitting any ingredients and adding others as you like!

Hearty Italian Soup

Ingredients:

2 to 3 cups vegetable broth
1 large can crushed tomatoes
1 teaspoon honey
2 to 3 tbsp. oil
¼ cup white wine
1 cup thinly sliced mushrooms
3 minced garlic cloves
2 finely chopped white onions
1 or 2 thinly sliced zucchini
1 green pepper sliced very thin
1 cup small pasta shells (or whatever style of small pasta you enjoy)
1 can of chickpeas or kidney beans (rinse first)
1 teaspoon of basil, oregano, a bit of thyme
2 bay leaves (remove before serving)
Salt and pepper to taste

Directions:

Sauté garlic, onion and mushrooms in hot oil. Stir with wooden spoon.

Add tomatoes, honey, wine and vegetable broth

Add seasonings and cook over medium to low heat for about 1 hour.

Add kidney beans or chickpeas, zucchini, green pepper and cook until the veggies are tender, about 20 minutes. Allow to simmer a bit longer. This allows the flavours to meld.

Serve with a crusty baguette and cold butter.

This soup will “warm the cockles of your heart” meaning something that gives us that warm, fuzzy and comforting feeling.

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Announcements



Obituaries



BUTTLE DOBSON: Diane

It is with our sadness that we announce the passing of Diane on December 20, 2021, at the age of 72 at her residence in New Carlisle.

She is predeceased by her mother Isabella Mercier; father Walter Buttle; sister Carol and brother Terry David.

Beloved wife to Ken Dobson and loving mother to Terry (Edith). Cherished grandmother to Jessica and Megan and her pride and joy her great-grandson Connor. She leaves to mourn also her sisters: Irene and Sandra; many cousins; nieces; nephews; and dear friends.

*Our lives go on without you,
But nothing is the same.
We have to hide our heartaches,
When someone speaks your name.
Sad are our hearts that love you so,
Silent are our tears that fall.
Living our lives without you here,
Is the hardest part of all.
Gone but not forgotten.*



MACWHIRTER: Betty

Betty MacWhirter of Cascapedia-St-Jules passed away with family by her side at Residence St. Joseph in Maria on January 15, 2022, in her 89th year.

Beloved wife of the late Arthur MacWhirter. Loving mother to Jimmy, Jean (Terry), Shirley (Ted), Isabel (Morris), Philip (Sylvie), Tommy (Elaine), Dorothy (Russell), Patricia, Sandra (Gary), Wendy (Kevin) and Jennifer (Jamie). Proud grandmother of 16 grandchildren and 15

great-grandchildren. Predeceased by her son John. She also leaves behind her brothers Jack, Art and Brian as well as her sister Joan.

Betty was a faithful member of the United Church and dedicated her life to serving others. She was highly respected in her community and anyone who had the pleasure of knowing her, adored her. She was one of a kind and will be forever missed.

Due to pandemic restrictions, a funeral service will be held at a later date. Donations can be made to the Alzheimer's Society.



MARSH: Philip (Phil) 1948-2022

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Philip Marsh on Saturday, January 15, 2022, at the Tracadie Hospital, New Brunswick.

Born on June 27, 1948, in New Carlisle, Quebec, he was the son of the late Leonard Marsh and the late Kathleen Gallon. He leaves behind his wife, Yvette Rioux-Marsh, with whom he spent the last 55 years of his life.

He was the beloved father of Marcel (Céline Thibodeau), Marco (Magalie Haché), Philip Jr. (Luce Larocque) and Daniel (Marie-Claude Cormier). His love had no bounds for his 14 grandchildren, Jonathan (Kelsey), Alice, Liliane, Zachary, Maica, Sandrine, William, Marilou, Louis, Cloé, Antoine, Katherine, Frédérick and Rose, and for his great-granddaughter, Valeria. He will be sadly missed by his brothers and sisters, Viola (André Arsenault), Hilda (the late Jacques Leblanc), Myra (the late George Arsenault), Lenny (Christine Cole), Wayne, Darlene (Rene Ludee), Terry (Leeanne Mac Donald), and Tracy (Louis Fitzpatrick), as well as by his brothers and sisters-in-law Fernand (Lise Godbout), Thérèse (Raymond Chiasson), Gisèle (late Charles-Édouard Roy), Paul-Émile (Nicole Ferron), Sylvio (Carmelle Chiasson), Arthur (Valérie Godin), Livain (Diane Chiasson), Claude (Sylvaine Gesaume), Gaétanne (Patrick Altimas) and Pierre (Louise Pichette). His goddaughter Tammy Leblanc (Eric) and her brother Joey (Mandy Clark) held a special place in his heart, as well as a large number of nephews, nieces, and cousins.

Besides his parents, Phil was preceded in death by his sister Carol (Danny Beebe), his father and mother-in-law, Joseph Rioux and Yvonne Mercure, as well as his brothers-in-law, Patrick (late Evangeline Duguay), Rosaire (Emmeline Kenny), Roland (late Marie-Mai), Jean-Guy (Paulette Sonier) and Paul Richard.

Phil lived in New Brunswick for almost 50 years, where he raised his family and had many

friends who were very dear to him. Although he moved away, his heart was always in his beloved Gaspé, which he saw every day from the window of his cottage on the other side of the Baie des Chaleurs. The funeral will be held at a later date. Funeral arrangements are in care of Bulger-Haché Funeral Home Shippagan, New Brunswick. (506) 336-2370 lucienhache@nb.aibn.com.



In Memory

SAWYER: Doris (Hall)

In loving memory of a dear mother who passed away 12 years ago on January 25, 2010.

*You can only have one mother,
Patient, kind and true.
No other friend in all the world
Will be the same to you.
When other friends forsake you,
To mother you will return.
For all her loving kindness,
She asks nothing in return.
Sweet Jesus, take this message
To our dear mother up above
Tell her how much we miss her
And give her all our love.*

Lovingly remembered and missed by your family

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Deadline: Wednesday at 4 p.m. to appear in following week's issue.

Obituary/ Wedding: \$40 (picture +\$5) for up to 300 words.

If it is more we will give you a quote.

All other announcements:

\$30 (picture+\$5) for up to 20 lines.

If it is more we will give you a quote.

Items must be typed and can be submitted by mail or online.

LINDA LEMORE-BROWN FOUNDATION

Annual General Meeting

The meeting will be held via Zoom on February 15, 2022.

For the Zoom like, please contact Ashley at ashley@casa-gaspe.com or message the Linda LeMore-Brown Foundation facebook page



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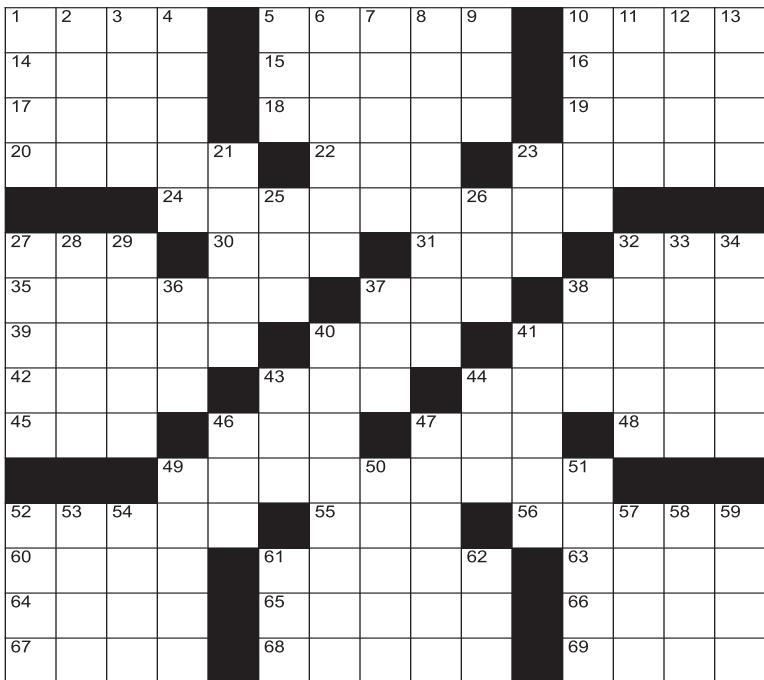
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On the lighter side...



CROSSWORDS



CLUES ACROSS

1. Common request
5. Department in France
10. Fungi cells
14. Famed inventor
15. Hillsides
16. Cold wind
17. La ___ Tar Pits, Hollywood
18. Resembling a doddering old woman
19. Geological periods
20. Assists
22. Comedienne Gasteyer
23. Jewish spiritual leader
24. English soccer club
27. Body art
30. No (Scottish)
31. Clumsy person
32. Swiss river
35. Belittled
37. Luxury car
38. Single sheet of glass in a window
39. Monetary units
40. Supervises flying
41. Indian term of respect
42. Breezed through
43. The bill in a restaurant
44. Flower cluster
45. Moved quickly
46. Shooters need to do it
47. High schoolers' test
48. Split pulses
49. Salts
52. Breaking Bad actor ___ Paul
55. Set ablaze
56. Semitic Sun god
60. Nervous system cells
61. Tourist destination Buenos ___
63. A way to bind
64. Behave uncontrollably
65. Feels concern
66. Sportscaster Andrews
67. Subway dwellers
68. Astrological aspect
69. You may take one

CLUES DOWN

1. Swedish rock group
2. Serbian
3. Away from wind
4. Actor Oliver
5. Helps little firms
6. Intricately decorative
7. American state
8. Type of tumor
9. Midway between east and southeast
10. On a line at right angles to a ship's length
11. Fruit of the service tree
12. Grouch
13. Romanian city
21. Units of loudness
23. British Air Aces
25. Small amount
26. Hem's partner
27. Turkic people
28. Member of the banana family
29. Liam Neeson franchise
32. Expressed pleasure
33. Inward-directed part of psyche
34. Insurgent
36. Unhappy
37. Gateway (Arabic)
38. Fundraising political group (abbr.)
40. Well-known
41. Satisfies
43. '___ death do us part
44. Jailhouse informant
46. French river
47. A cotton fabric with a satiny finish
49. Drenches
50. Clouds
51. Companies need to make them
52. Created from seaweed
53. One's school: ___ mater
54. A type of act
57. Member of Russian people
58. Neutralizes alkalis
59. Monetary unit
61. Play a role
62. Midway between south and southeast

Why do we say...

by Gary Briand

"Caught red-handed" is a very old expression that comes from Scotland of the fifteenth century. It came into English as "to be taken with red hand" and meant to be caught in the act like a murderer whose hands were red with his victim's blood.

Sir Walter Scott in *Ivanhoe* has the first use of the phrase to describe someone caught in the act of committing a crime. Not long after Scott's day and long after it became "caught red-handed." French Canadian friends of mine in Douglastown who insist that I speak to them in English told me that last year they had left a child's bicycle on the side of their thawing-out driveway. The father of the house noticed an older man parking his car, opening up the trunk and lifting up the bicycle to put in his car. The homeowner immediately intervened. He later asked me how in English to describe the incident. "Easy," I said, "you caught him red-handed."

WORD SCRAMBLE

Rearrange the letters to spell something pertaining to the beach.

D S E U N



Answer: Dunes

ARIES – Mar 21/Apr 20

Your affection for someone could affect your impression of a certain situation, Aries. You need to take a step back or remove yourself from the situation.

GEMINI – May 22/June 21

You may learn something about a person if you're willing to get involved in deep conversation, Gemini. Have a talk with someone you're eager to get to know.

CANCER – Jun 22/Jul 22

Cancer, a heavy load at work is manageable. Challenges keep you engaged and you thrive on the pressure. Enjoy the responsibility and all that comes with it.

LEO – Jul 23/Aug 23

Sometimes you need to put passion ahead of stability, Leo. That means explore all possibilities when it comes to relationships. You may connect with someone unexpected.

What is old becomes new again!

Before



After



COURAGE ISN'T HAVING THE STRENGTH TO GO ON, IT IS GOING WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE STRENGTH.



HOROSCOPES

VIRGO – Aug 24/Sept 22

Virgo, you may be able to move through chores and other things on your to-do list quite quickly this week. That opens up opportunities for some rest and relaxation.

LIBRA – Sept 23/Oct 23

Libra, a chance to take a leadership role in your community is on the horizon. Take advantage of this unique opportunity and give it your all.

SCORPIO – Oct 24/Nov 22

Scorpio, this week you may be pulled in two directions, but it's nothing you haven't handled in the past. Look to trusted confidantes for advice and even a little help, if necessary.

SAGITTARIUS – Nov 23/Dec 21

Sagittarius, find some time to delve into your passions. Figure out what piques your interests and pursue it with your customary energy. Others will admire your enthusiasm.

CAPRICORN – Dec 22/Jan 20

Getting romance off the ground this week may seem like climbing Mount

Everest, Capricorn. Mixed messages may cloud the waters. Keep finding a way to connect.

AQUARIUS – Jan 21/Feb 18
Aquarius, think about what you can bring to the table at work, and then promote your strengths to the higher-ups. They may be slow to come around but you'll catch their attention.

PISCES – Feb 19/Mar 20
Pisces, if you are feeling overworked, you may have to ask others to pitch in and take on a bigger share of the tasks at hand.

FAMOUS BIRTHDAYS

JANUARY 23

Doutzen Kroes, Model (37)

JANUARY 24

Matthew Lillard, Actor (52)

JANUARY 25

Lil Mosey, Rapper (20)

JANUARY 26

Wayne Gretzky, Athlete (61)

JANUARY 27

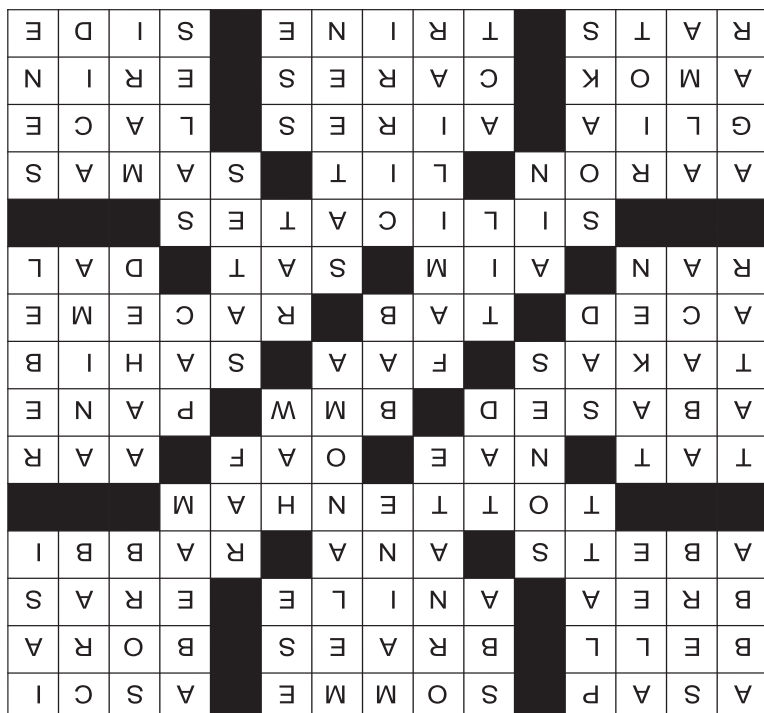
Noah Schnacky, Singer (25)

JANUARY 28

Joey Fatone, Singer (45)

JANUARY 29

Adam Lambert, Singer (40)



72 Hours

With a little preparation you can be ready for (almost) anything

Diane Skinner

Local emergencies can happen at any time and for a myriad of reasons, extreme weather being the most common. Emergencies occur with little or no warning so it is a great idea to be prepared, just in case. A little preparation can pay off big time. How to be ready? Create an emergency kit that will last for 72 hours.

You may think that these challenges cannot happen where you are, but the list of possibilities can make us rethink that belief. The Canadian government lists these potential happenings that may require an emergency kit. (Many are highly unlikely, but the climate is changing and we are experiencing more extreme weather): avalanches, earthquakes, extreme cold, extreme heat, floods, hurricanes, landslides, storm surges, tornadoes, wildfires, pandemic emergencies, and prolonged power outages.

If an emergency occurs, you and your family will need some basic supplies. The recommendation is that the kit should contain necessities for the next 72 hours. You may have some of the suggested supplies such as a battery operated or wind-up flashlight but it also helps to have the items in an easy to retrieve spot. In an emergency you want to have items easy and quick to find.

Make certain that all family members know where the emergency kit is located. It is best to keep the emergency kit items in a backpack or small suitcase.

You can buy emergency kits that contain many, but certainly not all, of these items. Check out the Canadian Red Cross on their website. If you have to leave your home, prepare to gather all medications you need and make certain that wherever your "safe place" is, it will allow pets if you have pets. There are many sad stories about people who are evacuating having to leave family pets behind. To paraphrase the military credo, "No man (or pet) should be left behind."

Basic Starter Emergency Kit

- 2 litres of water per person for each of the three days
- Food, such as granola or energy bars, dried fruits, canned foods
- A manual can opener
- Battery-powered flashlight or a wind-up flashlight
- Batteries
- A first aid kit
- Cash (Bank machines may be down.)
- Propane tank for BBQ filled so you can cook on the BBQ

More complete Emergency Kit add-ons

- Blankets and sleeping bags
- Hand sanitizer
- Cell phone charger
- Pet food
- Infant formula
- Activities for children such as puzzles, toys and books
- Work gloves

KN95 or N95 masks

You found some? Look after them!

Diane Skinner

Almost two years into the pandemic and we still need to wear masks to protect ourselves and others! You have visited your local drugstore and searched online in the elusive hunt for KN95 or N95 masks. Perhaps you have been lucky to find some! If not, keep on hunting because scientists tell us that they are the very best at preventing transmission of the COVID virus, particularly the highly transmissible Omicron variant.

If you have some of these masks, or when you do acquire some, the big question is how long do they last? At some point it will become necessary to throw them out.

There are no exact and firm guidelines for how long the KN95 or N95 masks should be worn and this decision will be based on your judgment call. If your mask is dirty or starting to rip, sadly, it should go in the garbage. Sometimes the straps get stretched so that you no longer have the tight fit that is required. Then it should go.

If a visual inspection seems to pass the test, keep on using your mask. Many sites recommend that you use the brown paper bag method to rotate your masks, assuming that you were lucky enough to acquire multiple masks. Brown paper bags, what we used to call lunch bags way back, are readily available at Dollar stores and are very inexpensive and fully recyclable.

After each day of wearing your KN95 or N95, place it in a

brown paper bag and label it. This will do two things: prevent the mask from contaminating any surfaces or infecting someone. As the mask sits in the brown paper bag any virus particles on the mask will die.

It's not that the bag has any magical cleaning properties. It keeps the mask away from others while the virus that may be on it can no longer infect. In addition, if your mask is slightly damp from you breathing on it, the time it spends in the brown paper bag will allow it to dry completely.

So, how many KN95 or N95 masks do you need? Definitely more than one, ideally ten but that likely may not be available to you just yet. Strive to have five for each person in the household. Label paper bags with each wearer's name!

Rotate your masks every day. Number your brown paper bags and add your name or initial. Keep your masks in this rotation until it appears that they are loose or stained. Masks are no fun, but neither is COVID, whether you became infected or if you pass it on to someone else.



Photo: D. Skinner

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