

IDENTITY THEFT AND EI FRAUD: Two workers tell their story and share concerns about the attitude of Service Canada

Gilles Gagné

CARLETON – Two workers, a Gaspesian and a woman from Laval, were not very reassured after recently being victims of identity theft and employment insurance fraud. Guillaume Leblanc, from Nouvelle, and Maggie Larocque, from Laval, are seriously wondering how, and especially when, Service Canada will succeed in stopping a phenomenon that has probably affected tens of thousands of people.

A 38-year-old carpenter, Mr. Leblanc, managed to resolve his problem on February 15, when he finally received the benefits to which he had been entitled since December. He went two-and-a-half months without income, including the one-week waiting period between December 3, the date of his job termination, and December 10.

He would normally have received a first benefit payment between Christmas and New Year's Day.

“By consulting my online file and looking at my bank details, I saw that there were numbers there that I had never seen. It was not my Caisse Desjardins branch number and not my account number. I found it was a National Bank account in Mascouche! It was between Christmas and New Year's Day. I could not do anything. I tried to reach someone at Service Canada on January 3 and 4 and the line was cut while I was on hold,” says Mr. Leblanc.

On January 7, he drove to the Service Canada office in New Richmond, the first of several hundred-kilometre round trips from his home.

“I saw that the agents did not seem surprised by my case. I am told that an agent will call me in the next five days but I still do not know exactly what is happening in my file,” he adds.

There followed an array of broken promises of calls and meetings which led to very lit-



Photo: G. Gagné

Guillaume Leblanc wonders when the frauds and identity thefts that affect part of Service Canada's activities will stop.

tle, except that on January 14, Service Canada agents increased the level of urgency of Guillaume Leblanc's case. He believes that his file has been targeted for fraud but he was not informed of this by the federal department.

“I finally understand what happened to my file on January 19, when I see the article from Le Soleil explaining identity theft linked to employment insurance fraud. I've been rebuilding my credit rating for a few years and now this is happening. Without having had a cash reserve and my parents, I would have experienced real problems. I think of those who did not have the same options,” he says.

On January 21, faced with another broken commitment from Service Canada, namely a call from an agent that again did not come, Guillaume Leblanc returned to the New Richmond office, where the degree of urgency of his case was increased to maximum.

He now knows that a fraudster asking to be served in English opened an account bearing his name at the branch of the National Bank in Mascouche, near Montreal, and that his ben-

efits covering a period of two weeks were deposited there, for an amount slightly higher than \$1,000. The account was closed shortly after the deposit.

His file was subsequently frozen, as is the case for tens of thousands of people, defrauded or not, but whose Service Canada file has been targeted for misappropriation of benefits.

“I get by in English but I would not ask to be served in

English in a Mascouche bank branch,” points out Guillaume Leblanc.

On January 23, when he had just waited unsuccessfully for a call from Service Canada, he returned to the New Richmond office. “I explained to them that I am still here, that I have come too many times not to know what is happening with my file. The agent sends an email to the supervisor of agents,” he says.

How many cases?

Gilles Gagné

CARLETON – While in early February, spokespersons for the Department of Employment and Social Development Canada assured SPEC that since September, in Canada, the total number of fraud cases and identity thefts stood at 10,000 cases. The numbers coming from other sources differ.

Member of Parliament Louise Chabot, the Bloc Québécois labour critic, notes after an exchange held with Minister Karina Gould, of Employment and Social Development Canada, also

responsible for Service Canada that the number of complaints being processed would instead be closer to 93,000.

Guillaume Leblanc spoke with people from Mouvement Desjardins as part of his efforts to protect his credit rating, and they told him that the number of cases being processed amounted to more than 100,000. Desjardins was the victim of a major data leak in 2019.

So far, the Department of Employment and Social Development Canada has not divulged any estimation of the amount of money that has

On January 25, after 22 days of questioning, an investigator calls him and explains how the fraud scheme works.

“It's software that makes attempts to change addresses and makes claims for benefits. The software does not take a break. It always works, and it makes thousands of retries, continuously. The lady tells me that my investigation is complete, that I have to see Desjardins and take security measures,” says Mr. Leblanc.

As he still had no guarantee as to the eventual date of deposit of his benefits, he decided to write to the Member of Parliament for the neighbouring riding, Diane Lebouthillier, also Minister of the Canada Revenue Agency. The investigator advised Guillaume Leblanc not to spare the details. The minister's staff responds quickly and maintains contact, which has been lacking at Service Canada.

“The money was deposited on February 15 in my account,” he sighs. It is clear that the people at Service Canada are overwhelmed by the scale of the fraud, even if additional personnel have been called in to help. My sister works and there

Cont'd on page 11

been defrauded from the government.

Police forces including the Sûreté du Québec have received numerous daily calls from people who have been defrauded through identity theft and employment insurance fraud schemes since September.

“I was told about that possibility but I mainly concentrated on solving my problem. Now, it might be a little late to report it to the police because my case is solved. I am not sure that adding my name to a big list would change things,” points out Guillaume Leblanc.

Two large snow storms hit the Gaspé

Nelson **Sergerie**

GASPÉ - Between 20 to 35 centimetres of snow fell, along with freezing rain, during the storm that hit the Gaspé Peninsula on February 22.

According to Environment Canada, the Parc de la Gaspésie received the largest quantities ranging from 25 to 35 centimetres.

Gaspé received 28 centimetres and the Bay of Chaleur area received 20 centimetres of snow. However, in the latter, up to five millimetres of freezing rain fell towards the end of the storm.

Three avalanches occurred during the night of February 22/23 on Highway 132 be-

tween Gros-Morne and Manche-d'Épée in Haute-Gaspésie, causing the authorities to close this section of road to clear the way. A snowplow became stuck while trying to clear the road. Fortunately, no injuries were reported.

The section of Route 198 between Murdochville and Anse-Pleureuse was also closed due to the risk of avalanches.

The Orléans Express bus service suspended its departures from Rimouski to Gaspé on February 22 in the afternoon and from Gaspé to Rimouski on February 23 in the morning.

Another storm had hit the Gaspé Peninsula only five



This snowplow was trapped in an avalanche on Highway 132 in Haute-Gaspésie

Photo: Courtesy of Annick Curadeau

days earlier. On the night of February 17, 26.6 centimetres fell in Gaspé and between 15 and 25 centimetres elsewhere

in the region.

According to Agrométéo Québec, 22 centimetres fell in New Richmond and 18 cen-

timetres in New Carlisle. Nearly 20 centimetres hit the Percé region during the snow-storm.

Once again, several transport services such as Orléans Express and those of the Régie intermunicipale de transport Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine (RéGÎM) were disrupted.

By February 23, 116 centimetres of snow had fallen in Gaspé during the month of February, compared to a normal of 63 centimetres.

With the amounts of snow that fell in February, the Gaspé region will most likely reach the seasonal average of 258 centimetres between October and February 28. So far, as of February 23, 246 centimetres has fallen.

20 months later, Transports Québec finally publishes a call for tenders to repair a railway bridge

Gilles **Gagné**

CAPLAN – Twenty and a half months after the publication of the last call for tenders to replace a railway bridge in the Gaspé Peninsula, Transports Québec announces that another bridge, that of Ruisseau-Leblanc in Caplan, is the subject of a call for proposals until March 28.

The February 24 announcement came three weeks after a press release from the ministry postponing the reopening of the Caplan-Port-Daniel portion of the Gaspé rail network for two years, in 2024 instead of 2022. This press release also revealed that the reopening of the Port-Daniel-Gaspé section, scheduled for 2025, is no longer characterized by a timetable, although the intention to go to Gaspé is maintained.

The postponement had earned Transports Québec an array of criticism considering that, before February 24, the last call for tenders for the replacement or repair of a railway bridge dated back to June 12, 2020. The bridges have been identified since at least 2010 as a priority for the Gaspé Peninsula network.

Transports Québec specified on February 24 that other calls for tenders will follow before the end of winter to repair the bridges at Bonaventure, Shigawake and the bridge spanning over the Petite Rivière Port-Daniel, west of the village's station. Located at the municipal limit of Caplan and Saint-Siméon, the Ruisseau-

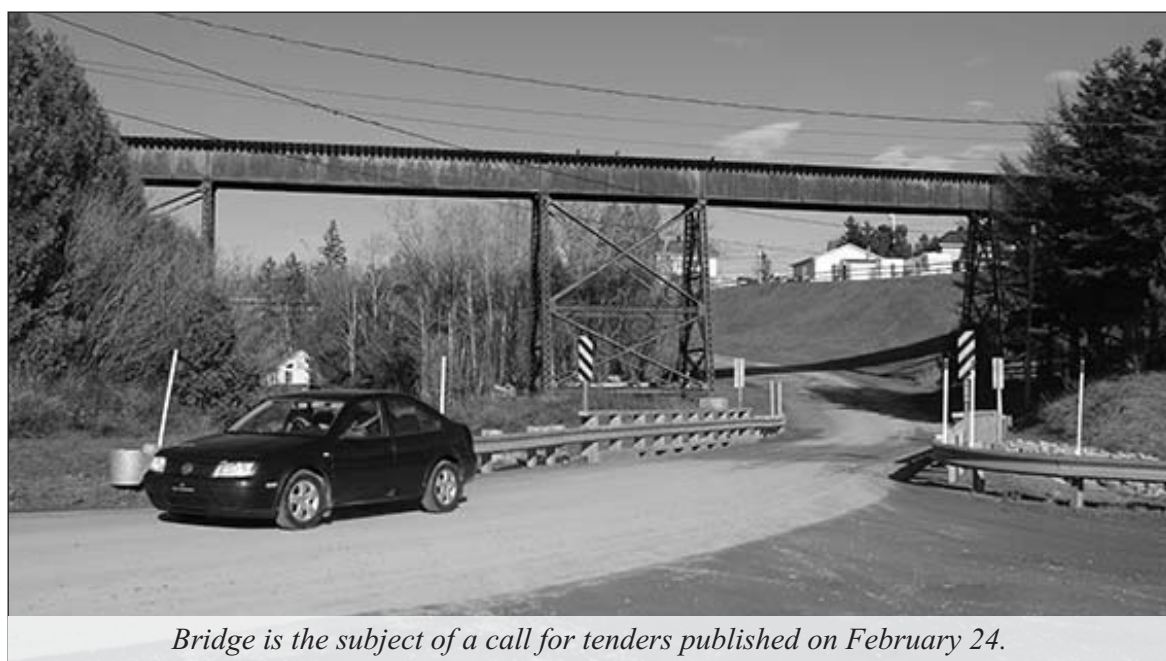


Photo: G. Gagné

Bridge is the subject of a call for tenders published on February 24.

Leblanc Bridge should cost between \$5 and \$10 million, according to the call for tenders' specifications.

Although he finds the repair delays imposed by Transports Québec "unforgivable" and denounced the "incompetence" of certain elements of this ministry, Bernard Babin, of the Coalition of Gaspésians for the future of the train, sees in this call for tenders "a breath of fresh air, a glimmer of hope, a distant light at the end of the tunnel," he says.

"The comments, the criticisms of the last few weeks have had an effect. It comforts us to see that the Government of Québec considers our criticisms, while the work is progressing at a snail's pace. I have better hopes of seeing the VIA Rail passenger train return to New Carlisle in 2023, in a first step before Gaspé. I would like Premier François Legault to intercede with Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, to put

pressure on VIA Rail in this regard," adds Mr. Babin.

Does he believe that Transports Québec only published the February 24 call for tenders to silence the discontent raised by the postponement of the reopening of the Caplan-Port-Daniel rail stretch? "I am confident that the ministry has taken note of the importance of the economic activity that the railway represents in the Gaspé Peninsula, and that the passenger train is also important for the Gaspé residents. I think they understood that we had to speed up the pace, that the machine must start again," he concludes.

Currently, the two main customers of the Gaspésie Railway Society, namely LM Wind Power of Gaspé and Votorantim Cimentos of Port-Daniel, must transport their production by truck to the rail transshipment centre in New Richmond, created in 2016 to compensate for the fact that the

railway was put in a dormant state on two-thirds of the network in 2015.

Transports Québec invokes the increased complexity of the

mandates to be carried out and the sectors affected by coastal erosion to justify the postponement announced on February 3. The people of the Coalition of Gaspésians for the future of the train do not understand, however, that structures erected with very rudimentary technical means 100 or 120 years ago pose such a challenge, considering the current means.

Transports Québec has owned the Matapédia to Gaspé line since March 2015, when the former owner, the Gaspésie Railway Society, a municipal entity, filed for the protection of the court, amidst financial problems. The Gaspésie Railway Society remained the freight train operator in the meantime until now.

Keep Your Keys Safe!

If you lose your keys with a War Amps tag attached, we can return them to you by courier, free of charge.

"A few days after I lost my keys, they were returned from The War Amps. It was the first time in my life that I have jumped with joy!"

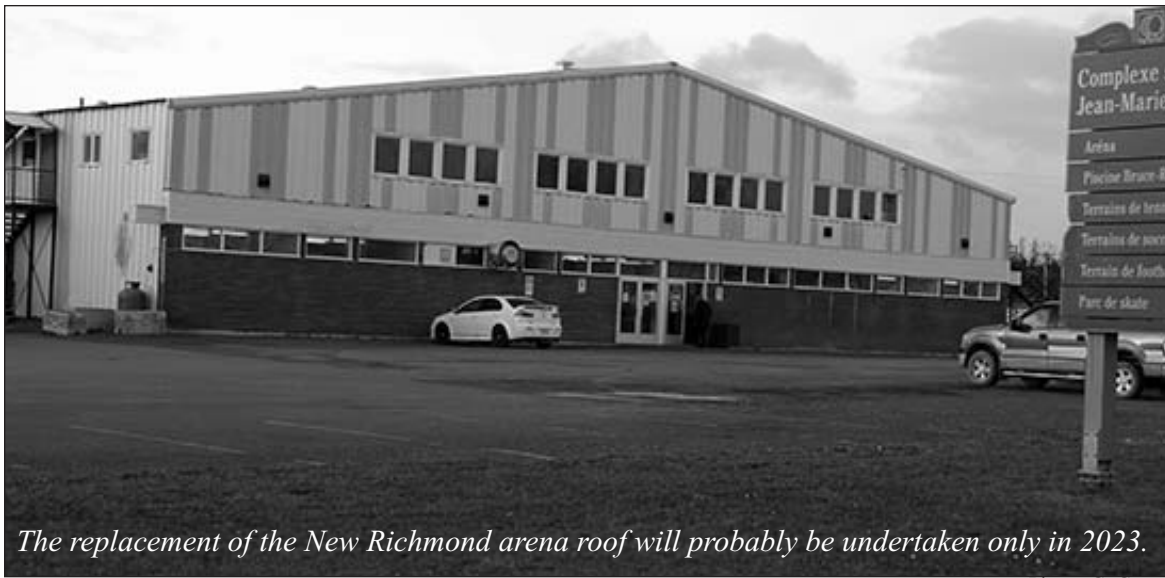
– Sara

Order key tags online.



The War Amps

1 800 250-3030 • waramps.ca



The replacement of the New Richmond arena roof will probably be undertaken only in 2023.

Photo: G. Gagné

Town of New Richmond likely to delay arena roof replacement

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND – Having received tenders that were much higher than expected, the Town of New Richmond administration has to reconsider how the arena boards and roof will be replaced and decide if both operations will be carried out simultaneously or in two phases. The latter option seems more likely.

The municipal administration opened the tenders pertaining to the rink boards and the roof on February 16 and was surprised to see that the lowest bid, submitted by Construction Béton 4 Saisons, for an amount of \$2,262,708, taxes included, greatly exceeds, in certain respects, the anticipated budget for which the council had obtained the required permissions.

Despite being the lowest bid, the rather high amount was attributable to the current inflation situation, the price of materials and labour, and other factors beyond the Town of New Richmond's control. A year ago, the council was hoping to get both jobs completed for about \$1.4 million, which is \$862,000 less than the lowest bid.

While considering the administrative and legal delays with which a municipality must deal with, the municipal administration is working to solve the issue in order to allow work to be carried out as quickly as possible.

"Discussions are currently taking place to establish the best strategy to apply. Decisions will be made shortly and will be communicated as soon as possible. We would like to reiterate our desire to ensure the long-term sustainability of the arena and, thus allowing future generations to skate and play hockey," explains Mayor Éric Dubé.

"We are currently trying to find solutions for the replace-

ment of the roof and the rink boards. We think the roof can wait another year but not the boards because we have to replace one-third of them with the installation of the new cooling system. That operation takes place in an area that must be dismantled in order to replace the plumbing and install the cooling equipment. The rink boards were built in 1969, when the arena was opened. They are made of two by four planks and the top is rotten and no longer sturdy. The roof is leaking over our heads this year and keeping it just means that it will leak next year as well, if we must split the boards and roof contracts," adds the mayor.

"We can wait for the roof but it doesn't make sense to replace the boards only partially. If we split the contract, we will opt for the boards. It is not only a matter of money. It is an administrative question. In order to replace the roof this year, we would have to award the contract within three weeks. It is not possible," says Mr. Dubé.

Delivery time must be taken into account. From the day the order is made, it takes six months to get the metal roofing sheets delivered to a construction site. The replacement of the roof would only start at the end of September then, which would hamper next season's opening. "The arena will be open next fall," assures Éric Dubé.

Moreover, if the Town of New Richmond quickly finds grants to fund the new roof but must, nevertheless, borrow more money for its share of the project, four additional months are required to go through a municipal loan compulsory process.

"We will likely prepare the roof replacement for the summer of next year. That kind of work cannot take place in the winter if we are to keep the arena open," points out Mayor

Dubé.

The municipal administration has asked lawyers for advice in order to know if the Town of New Richmond can use only one part of the February 16 call for tenders, the part related to the boards, instead of running another call for bids specifically for that purpose, or for the purpose of the roof.

Éric Dubé expects the boards to cost about \$500,000.

A major contract was awarded in the summer of 2021 to equip the arena with a brand new mechanical room at a cost of \$1.4 million. It will be delivered in the spring. That new cooling system will work with ammonia and will be much more efficient. The Government of Quebec is a partner in that upgrading project to the tune of \$800,000.

The Town of New Richmond council expected the cost of the arena refurbishment to be between \$5 million and \$6 million in 2021. A new arena would now cost about \$10 million. The project was not retained in the last round of the PAFIR program by the provincial and federal governments to fund recreational infrastructures. That program contributes a grant of two-thirds the cost of an arena refurbishment or a new construction. After being refused in the program, the municipal administration decided to go with an initiative that will be carried out in phases.

"Going through phases will be more costly, however, in the current context, because we were refused the PAFIR program, it might be the best way to maximize governmental support. We don't know if, at the end of the line, we would have received more money than if we had been chosen to do it in one shot. One thing for certain is that the way we are forced to do things will take more time," concludes mayor Dubé.

Police report

At approximately 1 p.m. on February 18, police officers from the Rocher-Percé Sûreté du Québec detachment carried out a drug trafficking search in a Chandler apartment building on René-Lévesque Blvd. East. They discovered 225 prescription pills, 162 methamphetamine pills, two mock firearms, material used for drug trafficking and a certain amount of cash.

During the search, the tenant, Benoit O'Connor, 43, was arrested by the police and then taken to the Sûreté du Québec station from where he appeared before the Quebec Court Judge Richard Côté by videoconference.

"The man, a known recidivist in drug trafficking, subsequently remained detained pending his return to court," says Sgt. Claude Doiron, spokesperson for the Sûreté du Québec. Benoit O'Connor faces various charges of drug possession and drug trafficking. The police investigation, which is ongoing, tends to show that the suspect has been trafficking narcotics from his residence for some time. He was waiting for a decision in similar matters when he was arrested. As the SPEC was reaching its February 25 deadline, Benoit O'Connor's bail hearing was scheduled for February 28 at the Percé courthouse.

A Percé couple found guilty by the Human Rights Tribunal of exploiting two disabled people has won a case to file an appeal. Convicted by default in a judgment imposing a reimbursement of \$97,000 in June 2020, a verdict that was later annulled. Marie-Josée Comeau and Roger Vibert were again sentenced to \$86,505 in damages on December 16. The couple allegedly sexually, financially and psychologically exploited the victims between 2012 to 2015. The Court of Appeal should decide in the spring whether breaches of procedural fairness, in a particular context where the applicants invoke their own vulnerability, are admissible.

A rare pimping case in the Gaspé Peninsula was brought before the Percé Courthouse on February 2 with the appearance of a 26-year-old woman and a 41-year-old man, both from Gaspé. Josiane Dufresne is accused of having led a minor to offer or render sexual services for money. As the SPEC reached its February 25 deadline, the woman was scheduled to return to court on February 28 for her bail hearing.

Kevin Plante is suspected of having obtained from a minor sexual favours in exchange for money. He is also suspected of sexually assaulting the minor. He was released and will return to court on March 24 for a pro forma preliminary hearing at the Percé Courthouse.

The charges are linked to an event that allegedly occurred on September 13. Josiane Dufresne has a criminal record but for similar matters. Kevin Plante doesn't have a criminal record but he must respect a set of conditions to remain free between now and his next court appearance, including a communication ban with the victim. The man and woman were arrested on February 2. Judge Janick Poirier imposed a publication ban on any details that could lead to identifying the victim. The prosecution had previously been authorized on January 26 by Quebec Court Judge Denis Paradis.

A collision involving a car and a school bus occurred on February 22 in Miguasha at about 12:45. The school bus was travelling at 40 kilometres per hour just before the accident, according to its driver. "Sûreté du Québec officers were called to intervene at the scene of that accident. The bus driver was turning into a driveway and it seems the driver of the car was caught off guard by that manoeuvre. The vehicle collided with the rear of the bus. Seven children were on the bus. They were transferred to another bus, and brought to the hospital where their parents were waiting for them. None of the children were injured. The three occupants of the car received minor injuries. One of them had to be removed from the vehicle by the jaws of life. There is no foul play tied to that case," explains Sgt. Claude Doiron, Sûreté du Québec's spokesperson.

THEGASPESPEC.COM
418-752-5400
specs@globetrotter.net

COVID-19 claims a 54th life in the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands

Gilles Gagné

MARIA - The Quebec National Institute of Public Health announced one Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands fatality in the report presented on February 23. It was the region's 54th death attributable to COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020.

As of February 24, 13 people from the region were hospitalized, a peak since the start of the coronavirus crisis. That same day, the National Institute of Public Health was reporting 289 active cases in the region, a number on the rise for a few days, following days of 40 and 36 new active cases among the clientele now selected for testing.

As of February 24, the Institute of Public Health confirmed an outbreak that had been suspected at

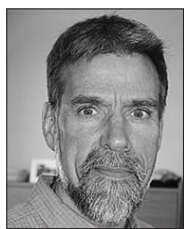
Maria Hospital for a few days. Nine of the region's 13 people hospitalized for treatment of the coronavirus were located in Maria. These people are in isolation in a wing of the hospital with dedicated staff to prevent the spread and adequate protective equipment.

One of the factors that would explain the situation is that patients are admitted to the hospital for another health problem and test positive on arrival. An outbreak is declared as soon as there are two reported cases.



The number of hospitalized Gaspésians has hit an unprecedented number over the last week of February.

Editorial section



Gilles Gagné
Commentary

Ukraine war can only make losers, everywhere

Russian president Vladimir Putin triggered chaos on February 23 when he ordered his army to invade and take control of the democratic country of Ukraine. The effects of that war will be felt all over the world for a long time, whether people are conscious of that reality or not.

There are currently war scenes in Ukraine that are reminders of what happened between 1999 and 2001 in Chechnya, a conflict that lasted until 2009 if we include some interruptions. Back then, Russia opposed the ambitions of some Chechen people to gain their independence.

This time around, a dictator, the right word to describe Vladimir Putin, wants to integrate Ukraine in an attempt to rebuild the past empire of Russia, more or less defined by the former Union of Socialist Soviet Republics, or USSR. He sees himself as the new czar, able to give Russia the lustre of yesteryears.

Through invading Ukraine, Vladimir Putin dismissed an international agreement signed in 1994. In that deal, signed three years after the dismantlement of the USSR, Ukraine agreed to give up on its nuclear weapons, in exchange for a non-aggression pact from Russia. In 1994, Putin had started his political career but he was still five years from accessing power.

Less than 28 years later, Ukraine finds itself with the "short end of the stick," having abandoned a disassembling, controversial and fearful arm, nuclear weapons, to satisfy Russia, which has ironically been building its army since Putin's arrival at the helm of the country.

Since February 23, people all over the world watch helplessly as neighbourhoods are bombed, civilians leave the country and other people, unable to flee, seek shelter. All that is taking place because a 69-year-old dictator, obsessed with a personality cult like almost every dictator, wants to rule without consideration for other political options.

He has been known for putting people in prison or flatly eliminating potential or real opponents, thus flouting democracy. In a country renowned for its economic woes, he has accumulated an indecent fortune, evaluated at tens of billions of dollars, maybe over \$100 billion. His best friends are oligarchs maintaining and enhancing corruption in all levels of Russia's society.

Vladimir Putin was called a "genius" by former United States President Donald Trump for the way Russia invaded Ukraine! Truth be told, when a man of little intellect calls another man a genius, it doesn't mean much.

As the SPEC was reaching its February 25 deadline, the Russian army looked close to controlling Ukraine's capital, Kyiv. Masses of people were fleeing towards neighbouring countries west of Ukraine. The United Nations specialists were saying that as many as 5 million Ukrainians were likely to leave their country in the short to medium term.

What will happen to the other 35 million Ukrainians? Will they experience civil war conditions for the next few years, the way the Syrian population was put through when Bashar Al Assad decided to stop all attempts to challenge his control of Syria.

Enter the role of the world's democracies. So far, countries like the United States, Germany, France, Canada and the United Kingdom, to name a few, have implemented economic measures to hurt Russia. They will have to be fine-tuned and accentuated in order to have a real impact on the Russian economy.

Who will suffer? The poor class of Russia will take the blow at first, as it happens everywhere to vulnerable cross-sections of the population. However, anything that can affect Vladimir Putin's support in his country will help. The president will remain a very rich man, no matter how hard the Russian economy is hurt but his supporting cast might find the game less appealing.

If Russia suffers deeply from a vigorous boycott of oil and gas exports to other European countries, Putin's popular support will plummet. As long as he controls the army, he will remain in power but what if the country cannot afford paying all of its soldiers?

What if China doesn't support Russia as much as necessary to assure the country's economic viability? The Russia-China alliance, demonstrated during the last Olympic Games, as Putin attended the opening ceremonies to tell president Si Jing Ping that he would not invade Ukraine before the end of the Beijing event, might not last very long. China is watching closely the reaction of the world's democracies, the main market for the products made by the Chinese.

Above all, China wants to dominate the world economically. Si Jing Ping is another head case but he has understood over the years that a military domination of the world is quite unlikely, as there are enough potent atomic bombs to destroy the planet 10 times. Vladimir Putin's ambition is different. It is mostly self-centred and he wants to impress his population. Moreover, he doesn't care about the opposition millions of Russians express towards the current conflict.

Officially, Russia wants to negotiate with Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky, as Vladimir Putin requests another demilitarization step to be taken, as in 1994. In reality, he wants to control that country and cannot accept Ukraine's will of being recognized as a nation maintaining close ties with Western Europe. That is a shame for Putin, who sees Zelensky as a puppet of the United States.

Putin affirms Russia has undertaken "a special military operation" to stop Ukraine from committing "genocide" which currently sounds like a silly fabrication. The Russian president fails to recognize Ukraine's legitimacy, and adds that Ukrainian lands historically belong to Russia. This view is considered by Ukrainians as an attempt to erase more than 1,000 years of history.

Putin's strategy remains puzzling. He allegedly does not plan a military occupation, and seemingly favours disarmament and the removal of Ukrainian leaders. However, through stating that the country is illegitimate, it is hard to see how Russians could only install a new leader and leave!

Thousands of civilians will likely die in Ukraine over the next few weeks. Hundreds have already fallen. They are people who were the poor victims of Russia's blind bombings, or proud Ukrainians who will never accept the Russians' domination and will fight foreign soldiers with inadequate weapons and training.

Vladimir Putin might be blinded by his crazy ambition. He has weaknesses, starting with his toxic and selfish goals. Nobody is unstoppable forever. In the meantime, people from all over the world must find solutions to support Ukrainian people. It will undoubtedly require some patience.



BOARD OF DIRECTORS:
President: Roger Wise
Vice-President: Elaine Sexton
Secretary: Maria Chatterton
Directors: Hayden Sams,
Bonita Annett, Bethany Paetkau,
Patricia Ste-Croix Annett

Publisher:
Penny MacWhirter
News Editor:
Gilles Gagné
Office Manager:
Joan Imhoff

JOURNALISTS:
Nelson Sergerie
Diane Skinner
CONTRIBUTORS:
Cynthia Dow,
Jeanie LeLacheur

208-B Gérard D. Levesque
New Carlisle, Que.
G0C 1Z0

Tel: 418-752-5400
spec@globetrotter.net
thegaspespec.com

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

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

SPEC welcomes letters to the editor on subjects relevant to topics covered by the paper. Letters must be kept within 300 words or less and may be edited for clarity or to remove any slanderous, sexist, racist or homophobic statements. We reserve the right to reject any letters. Opinions or letters published do not necessarily reflect the editorial policies or beliefs of this newspaper. All letters must bear the handwritten signature of the writer and include the address and number(s) for verification purposes. (Address & phone number will not be printed.). The Publisher shall not be liable for slight changes or typographical errors that do not lessen the value of an advertisement. The Publisher's liability for other errors or omissions in connection with any advertisement is strictly limited to publication of the advertisement in any subsequent issue or the refund of any monies paid for the advertisement.

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

Canada Québec

Member of:
QCNA, CARD

News Media Canada
Médias d'Info Canada

CMC
AUDITE

Community groups ask for better government funding

Gilles Gagné

MARIA – About 50 representatives from community groups in the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands took part in a demonstration on February 24 in Maria. The demonstration was part of a Quebec-wide movement consisting of 4,000 community groups who claim a yearly global budget increase of \$460 million is needed in order to offer better services and pay their staff properly.

The 4,000 community groups are part of the Coalition of Regional Tables of Community Organizations, often referred to by its French acronym CTROC. Closures, strikes and mobilization activities took place between February 21 to 24 throughout Quebec. In the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands, a budget increase of \$20 million annually would be needed for



The 50 demonstrators walked between the Maria church and the hospital, where one of their leaders, Jacynthe Leblanc, explained why the community groups' funding must be increased.

Photo: G. Gagné

the 103 community organizations.

In Maria, approximately 50 people gathered and walked from the church to the hospital, where long-time activist Jacynthe Leblanc read a manifest summarizing the requests of the community groups.

“As inequalities and injustices increase, the pressure on community groups augments. Supporting community organization means supporting marginalized, impoverished and discriminated people. We couldn't repeat enough that past austerity measures made the population more fragile and increased social inequalities. In a context where the climate crisis might have a greater impact on poor and vulnerable people, the government must urgently implement a series of structuring actions to reach social justice and reduce inequalities, notably through a major reinvestment in public services and social programs,” she said.

Ms. Leblanc also explained that the annual funding conferred to all the community groups must be calculated while taking into account the

operational cost increase, which stands at 3.25% yearly. “The community groups are not there to make up for the services abandoned by the government or be used as cheap subcontractors. The autonomy of our groups is too frequently threatened, as much by administrative practices as by proposed law changes, which we must regularly intervene against,” stresses Jacynthe Leblanc.

“Due to the pandemic and labour shortages, the underfunding that affects our organizations has grown, dramatically reducing our capacity to meet the urgent needs of the population. Imagine how we can counter the labour shortage with our underfunded budgets; we just can't,” she concludes.

Quebec-wide spokespersons Claudelle Cyr and Benoit

Larocque point out that community organizations are much more than service providers, as they are also places of socialization that energize communities. Because of their roots, they meet the needs of their members, and they actively support communities to take charge of themselves. They are also major employers in several municipalities in Quebec.

The demonstrations of the last week of February were a way to sensitize the Quebec government, given that the annual budget will be tabled at the end of March.

“What will happen to these precious spaces, mutual aid and regaining power for the citizens of our regions? There is an urgent need for better support in order to promote local democracy, and not forget their great contribution to the social and economic vitality of a multitude of localities, which makes our towns and villages stronger,” stresses Benoit Larocque, co-spokesperson for the CTROC.

“Our community organizations are on the brink! What will happen to these precious spaces, to mutual aid and to the importance of regaining power for the citizens of our regions? There is an urgent need for better support in order to promote local democracy, and not forget their great contribution to the social and economic vitality of a multitude of localities, which increases our towns and villages solidarity,” concludes Benoit Larocque.

External labour is expensive at the region's CISSS

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ - The Gaspé Peninsula Integrated Health and Social Services Centre has spent \$21 million on external labour so far in the 2021-2022 fiscal year to maintain the services offered through the regional health network.

This amount covers the period from April 1, 2021 to January 29, 2022. It does not take into account the costs that will occur in February and March. This is more than the \$15 million budgeted for the 2020-2021 fiscal year.

The CISSS says it has always had the practice of not using independent labour. “However, two situations have changed over the past three years. First, we had the pandemic. Due to the pandemic, people were withdrawn (from work) and we had dedicated teams and new services to develop. Additional of beneficiary attendants and nurses were dedicated to certain sectors. We did not have enough manpower to meet the needs of the population. Our main mission is to meet the needs of the population and our service offer,” explains the president and CEO, Chantal Duguay.

In the next year, the objective is to bring back a recovery plan in relation to “this plague.”

Ms. Duguay also notes that four years ago, the use of independent labour was for nurses and sometimes for respiratory therapy. “Today, we are talking about beneficiary attendants, special education technicians, social workers, audiology. We are talking about all the trades that are absent or in short supply. It is this aspect that concerns us,” explains Ms. Duguay.

Looking for a solution

The Human Resources Department and the departments concerned are working to implement different recruitment levers. Several measures have been taken to recruit nurses.

“The international plan that was announced this week (by Quebec) means that 60 people have been recruited for us, in the Gaspésie. It will make a difference,” she notes.

The CISSS also works with educational institutions to train beneficiary attendants, administrative officers, and service assistants.

“We will have to work more intensely for specialized educators, and we currently have a program with the University of Quebec in Rimouski so that our social work technicians are trained with a bachelor degree,” says Ms. Duguay. The CEO notes that many measures are in place.

“All of this means that we currently have more independent labour than we would have liked,” concludes Ms. Duguay.

Capitation Campaign (Tithe) 2022 for your Parish

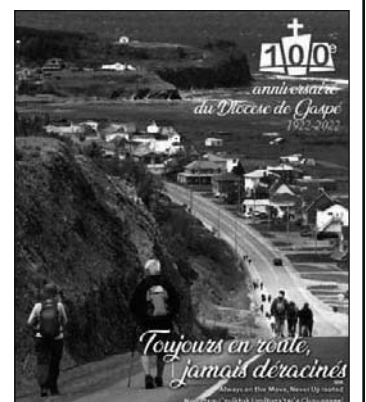


At the beginning of this year 2022, as we live in the context of the fifth wave of Covid 19, I address each and every one of you, brothers and sisters, of the Church that is in Gaspésie and the Magdalen Islands. First of all, allow me to express to you my solicitude and my great concern at the heart of this situation which, on several levels, in one way or another affects you all in your families, in your services and in your parishes. The latter, without your support, are in danger of dying, already some are in serious difficulty and this saddens me. That is why, counting on your generosity, your understanding, and above all on your attachment to your Christian community, I eagerly invite you to generously subscribe to the 2022 capitation campaign for your parish that begins now. I think we may remind ourselves, with faith and hope: "Together, we can make the difference".

Brothers and sisters, you already know that the mission of the Church and therefore of each parish is to proclaim the Gospel. Although the current economic situation is faltering due to the pandemic and our parishes are particularly affected, I make this urgent appeal to you to financially support your parish by paying your annual tithes. In this special year of the centenary of the founding of the Diocese of Gaspé, let us boldly renew the efforts made by Archbishop François-Xavier Ross to give our communities a new incentive with the theme: "Always on the road, never uprooted".

Thank you for your sharing, generosity and solidarity!

† Gaétan Proulx, O.S.M. Bishop of Gaspé



Member for Gaspé fears the region will be hit by a major housing crisis in July

Nelson **Sergerie**,
LJI Journalist

GASPÉ - The lack of housing in the Gaspé Peninsula and Quebec continues to garner various reactions and pressing demands on the Legault government to resolve the issue.

The Member of the National Assembly for Gaspé and spokesperson for the Parti québécois on Housing, Méganne Perry Mélançon, is the most recent politician to address concerns. She is calling for a change to resolve the shortage.

She says she is worried to see the most recent statistics on the lack of housing in Gaspé where the vacancy rate was 0.8% in 2021 according to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation and information collected on the territory.

The MNA fears a major crisis on July 1. The PQ is proposing five elements to reduce the pressure on people looking for rent: refinance the AccèsLogis program to guarantee the immediate construction of 10,000 social housing units, while raising the target to 5,000 per year; abolish clause F of leases, which allows unreasonable rent increases; establish a public rent registry; impose a 15% tax on foreign investors and in all towns with a post-secondary institution; and fund student social housing projects.

"It cannot be a few small

solutions. You really must give it a shot. The groups tell us: it is social housing that will be able to remove this pressure on the housing crisis in the region and in Quebec. Several measures must be put forward quickly to try to resolve the crisis," says Ms. Perry Mélançon.

UMQ is also calling for change

On February 18, the Union of Quebec Municipalities also called for measures to counter the shortage. If the trend continues in Gaspé, new housing projects will rent for more than \$1,300 per month.

In the Municipal Declaration on Housing, the union has included a list of suggestions: the deployment of a new program of 4,500 new social housing units per year for all of Quebec; increased support for municipalities and various organizations in the housing sector so that 13,400 additional affordable housing units per year are made available to the population of all of Quebec. The document also targets maintaining a program aimed at creating social housing, in addition to a program aimed at creating affordable housing; the authorization, for municipalities that so wish, to act as agents in the application of the programs of the Government of Quebec, so that they can play a central role in the prioritization and

supervision of projects carried out on their territories and the completion of financing for housing announced under the AccèsLogis program but not yet completed.

"These items total some

\$1.5 billion a year. It's taking tough measures and that's what we're asking the government to do," says UMQ president Daniel Côté, who notes that construction costs have skyrocketed and access

to property is becoming increasingly difficult.

"That's why it takes government intervention. If we fail in controlling construction costs, can we limit (or curtail) the bill?" asks Mr. Côté.

What to do before seeking medical attention during the pandemic.



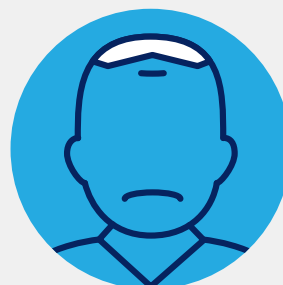
I've tested positive for COVID-19.

BEGIN TREATMENT AT HOME



I have questions about my health.

CALL INFO-SANTÉ 811



I have concerns or I'm in a difficult situation.

CALL INFO-SOCIAL 811



I want to renew my prescriptions.

SPEAK TO YOUR PHARMACIST

[Québec.ca/HealthNeeds](https://Quebec.ca/HealthNeeds)



Photo: N. Sergerie

MNA for Gaspé, Méganne Perry Mélançon

Quebecers are not able to visit sick family members who are hospitalized in Campbellton, New Brunswick

Nelson **Sergerie**,
LJI Journalist

CARLETON-SUR-MER: - Elected officials are once again criticizing the difficulties relatives of sick Quebecers hospitalized at the Campbellton Hospital in New Brunswick have faced in order to be at their bedside.

The prefect of the Avignon MRC, Mathieu Lapointe, claims that in the last year he is aware of at least a dozen Quebecers who have died or had to live in solitude while ill since their loved ones were refused access to visit.

"For various reasons, they are refused simply because they come from Quebec. People who die alone in the hospital without being supported by their loved ones, it is unacceptable for us," denounces the prefect who says that the Gaspé Peninsula Integrated Health and Social Services Centre has put pressure on the Vitalité health network, responsible for the Campbellton Hospital.

According to Mr. Lapointe, the directive for access to Quebecers, did not get transmitted to those working in the facility. "There is no listening from the staff who are on the floor and there is discrimination against Quebecers. This is unacceptable," adds the prefect.

In February 2021, a son who had not been able to ac-

company his dying father had filed a complaint, hoping that the situation would not happen again. A year later, the population is still grappling with this problem.

The Member of the National Assembly for Bonaventure, Sylvain Roy, is also critical of the situation. He has recently been approached by citizens who have experienced a similar situation when a loved one passed away.

"Let us make sure that we no longer have to endure the inhumanity of the Campbellton Hospital. If they are not able to self-regulate, we must solve the problem. We give them \$10 million a year and we are treated like cattle. At some point, enough is enough!" says an appalled Mr. Roy.

The MNA mentions that a solution to the issue has already been considered in the past. "We must have points of service either in Matapedia or Pointe-à-la-Croix to welcome people in palliative care," says the elected official.

He does not understand these measures (limited access to Campbellton hospital) when COVID-19 has slowed down considerably.

CISSS is aware of the situation.

The Gaspé Peninsula CISSS is aware of the problems raised by the elected offi-

cial who have recently spoken with members of the families involved.

The president and CEO of the Gaspé Peninsula CISSS, Chantal Duguay, has had discussions in recent weeks with the mayor of Saint-François-d'Assise on this issue and meetings were also recently held with the Vitalité Health Network to ensure that this situation does not happen again.

Vitalité Health Network reacts

At the Vitalité Network, the communication and engagement director, Jean-René Noël, writes in an email that the network "in the red alert general phase, visits are prohibited in all establishments. This measure is necessary to limit the spread of the COVID-19 virus and to protect vulnerable patients in our hospitals, as well as healthcare workers."

This red alert has been in effect since December 31 due to the Omicron variant.

Exceptions apply for patients who are entitled to a designated support person.

"The Network recognizes that these restrictions are difficult for patients and their families. We encourage people to use, if possible, technological means to stay in contact with a hospitalized loved one," concludes Mr. Noël in his statement.



MEDIA SMARTS

The following acrostic poem is by grades 4 and 6 of Fermont School

Acrostic Poem

C - COVID is really disturbing, annoying, and always on T.V.
O - Optimistically, I think COVID will end.
V - Victoriously we will stop the COVID virus.
I - I don't like it and I miss spending time with my friends.
D - Dangerous for some people.

By Megan, Olivia, Matteo, Leany
 Grades 4 and 6
 Fermont School



Business & Professional Directory



DIANE LEBOUTHILLIER
 MP • Gaspésie—Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine
 Serving the English-speaking community of our beautiful region!

Grande-Rivière office 418 385-4264	Magdalen Islands office 418 986-1489
Sainte-Anne-des-Monts office 418 764-2890	New Richmond office 581 355-0060

Email: diane.lebouthillier@parl.gc.ca



AXIO
 arpenteurs-géomètres inc.
 land surveyors
 151B, Avenue de Grand-Pré, Bonaventure (Québec) G0C 1E0

Alexandre Babin, Arpenteur-géomètre
 C abag@axioag.com
 Guillaume Lapierre, Arpenteur-géomètre
 C glag@axioag.com

Membre de l'Ordre des Arpenteurs-Géomètres du Québec

418 534-3113 / info@axioag.com
axioag.com



LFG CONSTRUCTION

PROUD PARTNER IN YOUR CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS FOR MORE THAN 45 YEARS!

constructionlfg.com

T 418-364-7082 / 1-844-664-7082

Gaspésie—Les Îles | Côte-Nord | Bas-Saint-Laurent

BUILDINGS ENERGY AND CIVIL ENGINEERING INDUSTRIAL MECHANIC



ENERGY
 TRANSPORTATION GROUP

Are you **Driven to be Different?**

Discover our career opportunities!

www.shipENERGY.com



Photo: Courtesy of Forillon Park

Forillon campgrounds should still be very busy in 2022.

Forillon Park's 2022 season looks promising

Nelson Sergerie, LJI

GASPÉ - The 2022 season at Forillon Park looks promising with 2,698 reservations being made since the opening of the reservation centre on February 10.

This is a 328% increase compared to 2020 data. In 2020, 821 reservations were made on the first day, January 16, which was already the best start in the 12 years between 2009 and 2020.

The park management prefers to use the 2020 data for comparison to obtain a more accurate portrait of the reality due to the pandemic.

Last year, the centre only opened on April 21 and recorded 6,230 reservations.

The park says that "this demonstrates the strong interest in Forillon National Park as a tourist destination of choice," adding that there are still good sites for campers.

This year, the Des-Rosiers, Petit-Gaspé and Cap-Bon-Ami campgrounds will be 100% open, both campsites and ready-to-camp units.

In 2021, 28,400 overnight stays were recorded.

Expectations will be high because, in 2021, attendance at the park was the best in 20 years, with 181,000 visitors.

Several new features were offered including the new reception and discovery centre in Cap-des-Rosiers and the addition of Oasis tents to the accommodation component.

New play sets for children were also installed at the south sector recreation centre.



Photo: G. Gagné

The plans and specifications of the Villa Pabos upgrading project are now ready.

Progress in files at the CISSS

Nelson Sergerie,
LJI Journalist

Progress in the Maria hospital file

GASPÉ - The emergency and intensive care unit at the Sainte-Anne-des-Monts Hospital Centre will be refurbished at a cost of \$7.2 million.

The project, which requires a total investment of nearly \$13 million including the preparation, plans and specifications, will take place within the current walls of the building built in 1973.

"When I talk about complete redevelopment, it's a trajectory redevelopment that was done with the Sainte-Anne-des-Monts clinical team, which dates back several years and which we managed to complete," explains the director of technical services of the Gaspé Peninsula Integrated Health and Social Services Centre, Harris Cloutier.

Rather than being managed by the Société québécoise des infrastructures, the CISSS will be responsible for the site.

"The start of construction will take place in the next month and end, subject to all reservations, in January 2023," adds Mr. Cloutier.

The file was settled at a speed rarely seen. Only two years elapsed between the submission of the project and the start of the work.

The Minister of Health at the time, Danielle McCann, was convinced of the project after a "private" visit.

"Nurse Marthe Isabelle had taken the minister and her team around the emergency room. It was a home run. She was the one who sold the project," notes CISSS President and CEO Chantal Duguay.

yet. We are just at the start of the work," adds Ms. Duguay, who isn't near ready to decide whether the new establishment will be in Maria or Carleton-sur-Mer.

Villa Pabos call for tenders

Finally, the project for a new pavilion and renovations of the Villa Pabos de Chandler is progressing with the filing of plans and specifications soon.

The work is now estimated at about \$60 million. Tenders are expected to go out this summer for construction in the fall and be completed by the end of 2023.

The 36 individuals residing at Chandler Hospital will be transferred to the Villa. The project will also improve the quality of life of the 62 current users of the establishment.

Obtain maximum TAX SAVINGS by trusting your tax returns to H & S TAX RETURN SERVICES

For fast, accurate service at competitive rates, rely on over 35 years experience in tax preparation.

FOR AN APPOINTMENT

Call Donna Harrison at 418-759-5790 or Louis Sexton at 418-392-3485 during regular office hours.

PLEASE NOTE: Because of major renovations at the Family Ties building, our office will be at the

New Carlisle Municipal Hall
(138 Gérard D. Levesque Blvd)

Thursdays from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Email taxes.serviceshs@gmail.com



Services d'Impôts H & S
H & S Tax Return Services

Get in the know!



Name: _____

Address: _____

Canada (taxes are included in prices)

1 year \$46 6 mths \$25

Outside Canada: 1 year \$175 Digital \$46

Send cheque or money order to: The Gaspé Spec
208-B Gérard D. Levesque Blvd. New Carlisle, Quebec G0C 1Z0

Business & Professional DIRECTORY

Grenier, Grenier & Grenier LAWYERS



Réal Grenier, b.a.ll.l.
Jules Grenier, b.a.ll.l.

96 Gérard D. Levesque Blvd, P.O. Box 519
New Carlisle (Quebec) G0C 1Z0
Tel.: (418) 752-3308 • Fax (418) 752-6935



Gagnon Claveau Law Firm

Isabelle Gagnon
Attorney and family law mediator

Ann-Chloé Boudreau
Attorney

418-392-3542
www.gagnonclaveau.com
info@gagnonclaveau.com

Fully
bilingual
services in
the whole
Gaspé
peninsula



Tremblay & Barriault, notaires inc
Notaries & legal counsel

Gaël Tremblay, notary
Serge Barriault, notary

119B Perron Blvd West, New Richmond, Que.
Tel.: (418) 392-5282 • Fax: (418) 392-6155
E-mail: gaeltremblay@notarius.net

FULLY
BILINGUAL
SERVICE

Our services :
Support | Training | Tools

TECHNOCENTRE
TIC

Leading the region's digital transformation

ITC Technocentre Gaspésie-Magdalen Islands
163, Commerciale Street West, office 101
Chandler (Qc) G0C 1K0

technocentre-tic.com

Local Advertising That Makes the Cut



VILLAGE
Real Estate Agency

Suzanne Landry

CERTIFIED REAL ESTATE BROKER AEO
418-752-0792
suzannelandry@royallepage.ca
www.suzannelandry.ca

Friendly bilingual service
from Matapedia to Port Daniel
19 years experience

Forage Moreau Inc.
418-392-9501
Mathieu Mercier - Driller/Owner



- Artesian Well Drilling
- Budgetary Price
- Bilingual Service
- RBQ: 5672-1467-01

foragemoreaumercier@gmail.com



By Appointment

Richard Ste Croix

Denturologist

Construction and repair of dentures.
We also make dentures on implants.

9 Adams Street, Gaspé Tel.: (418) 368-1525
Quebec G4X 1E5 Fax: (418) 368-1542



OHMEGA
Going beyond and reliable sir

Electricity - Plumbing
Automation
Industrial computing
Counter sales

3 Rue Cerisiers
Gaspé, Québec G4X 2M1
Tel. (418) 368-5425
Fax (418) 368-7290
www.groupeohmega.com

To reach the anglophone
population, advertise in
The Gaspé Spec!

Contact our
Advertising Representative
Heather Imhoff
581-233-2062

gaspespec.revitalization@gmail.com



Pro Pieds de la Baie

Roxanne Major N.D.
Foot Care Technician

Service in the comfort of your own home.

418-752-3670

NEWPORT TO NEW RICHMOND

Free advice with every visit!



AVAILABLE TREATMENTS

- Health Checkup / Thick nails
- Nail maintenance / Corns / Calluses
- Nails with fungus or mushrooms
- Ingrown toenails / Plantar warts
- Preventive care for diabetics
- Massage on certain reflexology points
- Insurance receipts available
- Appointment only / Bilingual service
- Gift certificates are available



Dr. Pascal Cyr
Optometrist



Dr. Stacey Starrak
Optometrist

CLINIQUE D'OPTOMÉTRIE



L'ÉMERILLON

LENSES CRAFTED ON THE PREMISES

PASPÉBIAC: 104 Gérard D. Levesque Blvd West • 418-752-5553

CHANDLER: 260 René Lévesque Blvd East • 418-689-5553

MARIA: 435 Perron Blvd West • 418-759-5553



BILINGUAL
SERVICE

MEMBER
OF



Canada's Largest Network of Optometrists

Les
Pétroles
C. Poirier inc.

SUBSIDIARY OF



DISTRIBUTORS OF PETROLEUM PRODUCTS:

DIESEL, FURNACE OIL, STOVE OIL, DEF, GAS AND MOTOR OIL

BONAVENTURE
125, Route 132
Bonaventure QC G0C 1E0
418 534-2777

CHANDLER
125, Route Leblanc
Pabos QC G0C 1K0
418 689-2595

Proud to serve you!

harnoisenergies.com

Announcements

Obituary



PATTERSON: Melrose

Melrose passed away on Sunday, January 23, 2022, at the Hôtel Dieu Hospital in Gaspé at the age of 56.

Melrose is survived by his sister: Myrna (Dale); two brothers: Alvin (Tilly) and Laughlin (Sue); sister-in-law Barbara; nieces; nephews; and many friends.

Melrose is predeceased by his mom: (Eva); dad: (Carleton) and brothers: Emery and Vernon.

He will be missed by many. Funeral to be held at a later date.

The New Carlisle
Funeral Association
extends sympathy to the family of
Lyll Gallon Renouf

Please note that The Gaspé Spec office is temporarily closed and employees are working from home offices.

Customers can continue to reach us by phone
418-752-5400 or
by email at specs@globetrotter.net

PHOTO QUALITY

When submitting a photo for this page, please send in a digital photo (.jpg) to specs@globetrotter.net.

You can also send your photo by mail.

It is essential that the photo is not a copy printed at home or by the funeral home.

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.



Four Generations of Monument Craftsmen

HIGHEST QUALITY - BEST PRICES

MONUMENTS, MARKERS, CEMETERY LETTERING,
LASER DESIGNS AND PORTRAITS

SALES REP:

Steven Imhoff

418-752-6041

Covering Port Daniel to New Richmond

CLASSIFIED PAGE

COAST ROUND-UP

GASPE:

Gaspé Cancer Foundation

Please be advised that the annual renewal of your membership card is coming due in March and this year you will receive in your civic mailbox, the blue renewal form to be returned with your cheque of \$12 (per person). If you would like to renew before then, you can mail in your

cheque to The Gaspé Cancer Foundation, PO Box 6078, Gaspé, G4X 2R6, or contact: Tony Patterson at gaspe45@hotmail.com to make an e-transfer. You can also visit our webpage at fcg-gcf.com to renew your membership with PayPal, or make a donation. Tax receipts mailed out for donations over \$10. Thank you all for your continued support, and remember your support is helping a cancer patient.

NEW CARLISLE:

Royal Canadian Legion Branch #64

New Carlisle Legion Branch #64 will hold their general meetings on the first Tuesday of each month. Next scheduled meeting will be April 5, 2022 at 7 p.m. at 1 Mount Sorrell, New Carlisle.

NEW CARLISLE:

Ladies remember 1984?

Did you make a dress for Loyalist Days? If so Heritage

New Carlisle would be delighted if you would consider donating it to the Centre. We are able to give you a receipt for donating an item. Think about it please!!

ROTARY CLUB WINNERS

The winners for the week of February 20 are: Suzan Boudreau, Yves Bérard, Claudine Gallant, Bill Dow, Claire Routhier, Manon Philibert and Stacey Starrak.

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

**Wednesday, March 2
SHIGAWAKE**

3:00 p.m. Ash Wednesday service at St. Paul's

**Sunday, March 6:
SHIGAWAKE:**

9:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist at St. Paul's

NEW CARLISLE:

11:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist at St. Andrews



ARIES – Mar 21/Apr 20

Aries, an exciting relationship may soon develop after you socialize with friends. If you already are involved romantically, someone you meet could be an important ally.

TAURUS – Apr 21/May 21

Unexpected changes are the name of the game this week, Taurus. This could mean anything from learning a new skill to having to train a new coworker.

GEMINI – May 22/June 21

Gemini, there's potential to meet someone interesting on a trip you will be taking shortly. Strike up conversations with

those around you, as you never know what will happen.

CANCER – Jun 22/Jul 22

Cancer, do not be discouraged when something seems like an insurmountable task. You just have to find the right help and then you'll quickly master the job.

LEO – Jul 23/Aug 23

An unexpected phone call or text from someone in your past could come your way soon, Leo. Whatever the news, don't let it scare you. You'll do fine.

VIRGO – Aug 24/Sept 22

A significant sum of money could be coming your way shortly, Virgo. It may be a bonus or some sort of repay-

ment. Be pleased at the windfall and utilize it wisely.

LIBRA – Sept 23/Oct 23

Libra, an exciting group activity involving a number of your friends is on the horizon. You may be wondering whether to go. Don't pass up the opportunity.

SCORPIO – Oct 24/Nov 22

Exciting prospects and fortunate events seem to be in your orbit, Scorpio. Enjoy this bit of good luck that garners much of your attention and could have further benefits.

SAGITTARIUS – Nov 23/Dec 21

Sagittarius, are you feeling adventurous lately? Now may be a good time to enter a race

or try something daring, like sky diving. Let your instincts guide your decision.

CAPRICORN – Dec 22/Jan 20

Your mind is attuned to learning new lessons. If time permits, enroll in some college courses or explore trade school offerings. This will enable you to expand your mind. AQUARIUS – Jan 21/Feb 18 This is a good week to travel or to make the arrangements for it, Aquarius. The journey promises to be an exciting time that you will remember for a while.

PISCES – Feb 19/Mar 20

Pisces, bizarre dreams may invade your comfort levels.

Don't try to analyze their meaning too much, but be aware of symbolism.

FAMOUS BIRTHDAYS

FEBRUARY 27

Josh Groban, Singer (41)

FEBRUARY 28

Luka Doncic, Athlete (23)

MARCH 1

Jensen Ackles, Actor (44)

MARCH 2

Rebel Wilson, Actress (42)

MARCH 3

Camila Cabello, Singer (25)

MARCH 4

Draymond Green,

Athlete (32)

MARCH 5

Eva Mendes, Actress (48)

EI FRAUD:

▶ *Cont'd from cover*

was employment insurance fraud in her case as well. The fraudsters had two disbursements while claiming benefits for her! It's still worrying," adds Mr. Leblanc.

The experience has left him with some fears which will be there for the foreseeable future.

"There were nights where I lost sleep, during these two-and-a-half months, because I did not know how I was going to make ends meet, with my girlfriend and my 15-year-old son. But money is what it is. As my father says, there are people out there who thrive on lending you some. I still wonder what fraudsters can do with my name. They have my social insurance number. Desjardins entered into an agreement with Equifax to monitor my credit for six years. If there is a request for a credit check for me, I will be consulted. It is clear in my mind that my file would not have been settled so quickly in the end without Member of Parliament Lebouthillier, but she is there for that," he says.

"It is clear to me that Service Canada does not have enough investigators to deal with these identity thefts and

frauds. I didn't feel any urgency to fix the problem. They don't know what to do with it. I'm happy that my file has been settled, but I have the impression that people will be surprised when they receive their T4 slips, such as people defrauded without their knowledge and for whom benefits have been deposited in an account opened by the fraudsters," says Guillaume Leblanc.

In the meantime, in Laval

Since the first publication of articles in Le Soleil and SPEC regarding that joint identity theft-employment insurance fraud in January, many people have come forward to confirm a major problem, but they did not often want to testify, except anonymously.

Elsewhere in Quebec, Maggie Larocque, a social reintegration worker from Laval, was the victim of identity theft in October and had her benefits frozen after Christmas while receiving employment insurance sick benefits, due to the severe effects of Ménière's disease. This ailment causes seizures, manifests through dizziness, hearing loss, migraines, loss of balance and vision problems.

After receiving the benefits between October 24 and De-

cember 21, she has not received a penny since, as of February 23 it had been two months without benefits. Most disturbing is that in the two months, she has not received any confirmation from Service Canada that she has been the victim of identity theft or fraud.

"They haven't told me yet. They haven't confirmed it to me, but with all the fraud cases, I connected the dots. What tipped me off was when I applied for benefits. They needed a note from my doctor. During my call to check if I could get the note that Service Canada wanted, the agent asked me: 'Did you apply yesterday?' I hadn't. That's what made me believe that a fraudster had made this request," says Maggie Larocque.

So far, the only reference to identity theft from Service Canada has come from the complaints officer, who said "maybe you had fraud in your case."

If Ms. Larocque had reached the complaints division on January 7, it was because her file was stagnating, due to dropped calls, the impossibility of staying on the line and talking to a human being, calls not being returned within the promised time frame, five days or one day, depending on which officers she was talking to.

"I was recommended to apply for social assistance! You have to be very poor for that. My spouse must make less than \$1500 and this is not the case. It has been Christmas since receiving my last benefits. We did not exaggerate but we gave gifts. In my head, everything would be fine," notes Maggie Larocque.

A technician told her at the beginning of January "that it happens that employment insurance does random checks," and that she must accept this situation, which could be resolved in 21 days, or in a few months, because of the staggering number of files to revise due to the fraud phenomenon!

"Seriously, they're cutting sick people's income for random checks? I am flabbergasted, furious and speechless at such a lack of humanity," reacts Ms. Larocque.

During her disputes with Service Canada, she emerged from a complicated situation with her private insurer, a result of Ménière's disease. "I had just gone 18 months without income. We were forced to sell the house during this period and find a rental for ourselves," she sums up.

When her file was blocked at Service Canada in December, Maggie Larocque had "a

small cushion, but not \$10,000. A cushion which had been difficult to accumulate. My son must have braces for his teeth. It costs \$2,700. I can't stop everything. I also must consult a ton of specialists for Ménière's disease," she says.

She will return for surgery on March 9 to correct, she hopes, the main problems of her inner ear, also hoping for a resolution of her disputes with Service Canada.

"Why is it up to us to bear the burden of the government's deficient computer system, vulnerable to the point of being defrauded? Why was an emergency plan not thought out beforehand by the leaders, in the event that such a piracy situation arises, to protect the population? I still cannot believe that a mechanism that is supposed to protect its population in times of physical and mental illness or precarious employment, leaves us in an even more precarious situation," concludes Maggie Larocque.

Guillaume Leblanc points out by the same token that "if you owe Service Canada a dollar today, you owe \$1.15 tomorrow! In this case of fraud and identity theft, we will not receive any compensation for all the problems that the flaws in the system cause us."

CREATIVE WRITING



A little bit of this and a whole lot of that

I did something this morning that I haven't done in a long time. I looked at myself in a full length mirror. I haven't done this in a year because I thought I would be heartsick at the sight. So many things have changed in the years that have passed. Lots of my parts are scary now. As I stood there turning from this way to that and hoping not to gag, I discovered that what I saw wasn't so bad. I still have most of my parts even if they are shaky or changing shape. Years ago when things were moving around and losing elasticity, I was disgusted by what I saw. I'm at the point now that what I see has worked very hard for me and for others.

When I was off work last year because most of my parts were wacky and the doctor said I had to take time off, I discovered the joy of baking and sharing with people. At first people wanted to pay me but then they realized that I was doing it for fun, and now they take it when I offer it. It gives me a chance to get out and see some of the people I work for and to see others that appreciate what I do. Why wait until Christmas or some special occasion to do something for someone when you can do it now?

I have a question for you. Why is it when you do something for a man for nothing, like if you bake something for him or give him a gift like a mop to do his floor, does he look at you suspiciously and right away reach for his wallet?

I don't think women are like that or not the ones I've been in contact with. What do they think I am after? Why can't I just do something for someone without a price tag attached? What's happened to everyone?

I would like to say to anyone who has seen me at the stores and who has gone out of their way to say hello to me that I don't always recognize you because of the stupid mask. Someone said they knew me by my blond hair. I didn't know that I still had some. Most of it has gone grey or white so it came as a surprise to me. I've decided this past year not to let the holidays drive me crazy like they do every other year. This year I celebrated being alive.

*Celebrate being in the lives of people who love us for who we are.
Take the time to enjoy life and the people who are in it.*

- Bonita Baird

SNOWFALL

It's early morning, and I'm just out of bed. I gaze out the bedroom window. Snowflakes tumble past. It's snowing, I think, AGAIN. And as soon as I think of that word, "again", I feel a crushing weight on my shoulders, as if they carried the burden of all the snow that had ever fallen.

Until that morning, I'd been okay with winter. It wasn't my favourite season (that would be spring), but I'd accepted it cheerfully. All that had changed with a single word. Now, I was dreading winter and waiting for it to be over. In a flash, I'd created an ongoing story of misery, of never-ending tragedy, and all because the weather didn't suit. Was I starring in a bad comedy?

I decided then and there to drop that story of woe, that imagining of yesterdays and tomorrows and focus instead on now. I looked out the window. It's just snowing, I thought. It's snowing. (Shrug.)

Bad things happen. ("Bad" here being loosely defined as anything that doesn't suit my preferences.) This is a given: Bad things will happen. What isn't given is how we'll respond. Too often, we make things worse by our judgments about what's happening, by what we tell ourselves. Typically, we load on the intolerable adjectives—you know the ones I mean—those gems that are guaranteed to produce the most mental and emotional suffering: always, never, again. These words make whatever's happening into an ongoing tribulation so that we feel like the Biblical Job and tumble into self-pity. They create a story of martyrdom by circumstances that time travels out of the present moment and into the past and future. What was momentary becomes ongoing, a moment's dismay transformed into suffering.

This needn't be. Mindfulness reminds us to be here now. Just here. Just now. Paying attention. Watching, the snow ceases falling. Change comes. Always.

A few days later came a heavy snowfall. At dusk, I looked out my kitchen window. The snow had stopped falling and lay pristine across the expanse of the backyard. Not a breath of wind, all was still. The snow lay mounded and heavy on the branches of the evergreens, on the spruces and fir trees. And the leaf trees--the birches, cherries, rowans, and aspens--it outlined every branch, creating lacy networks against the darkening sky. Truly magical. A wonderland of beauty. My heart swelled with thanksgiving. Just this. Just here. Right now. Happiness.

- Contance Brochet



Where Did I Come From? Your Family History

**If you really would like to know where you came from, read on!
This is about digging into (and preserving) some of your *Family History*.**

One very interesting way to preserve your *Family History* is to put together a document entitled *The Descendants of (certain persons)*. The chosen family heads can be from any earlier generation. A good place to start is *The Descendants of (your Grandfather and Grandmother)*. Their names would be at the top of a chart, followed by the names of all their children and their spouses (the second generation including your parents), followed by the names of all their children and their spouses (that's you - and your siblings and your cousins), and continuing to the next younger generation. A chart containing a box for each person (with spouse) will be shaped like a Christmas tree - but the base of the tree becomes very wide very quickly. Something like the example at the bottom of this article.

Each box would contain two names (where applicable) plus dates. The example here shows my Chisholm Grandparents, both born and raised in New Carlisle.

Andrew Hastwell Chisholm (1861 - 1939) m. Annabella Hall (1862 - 1919)

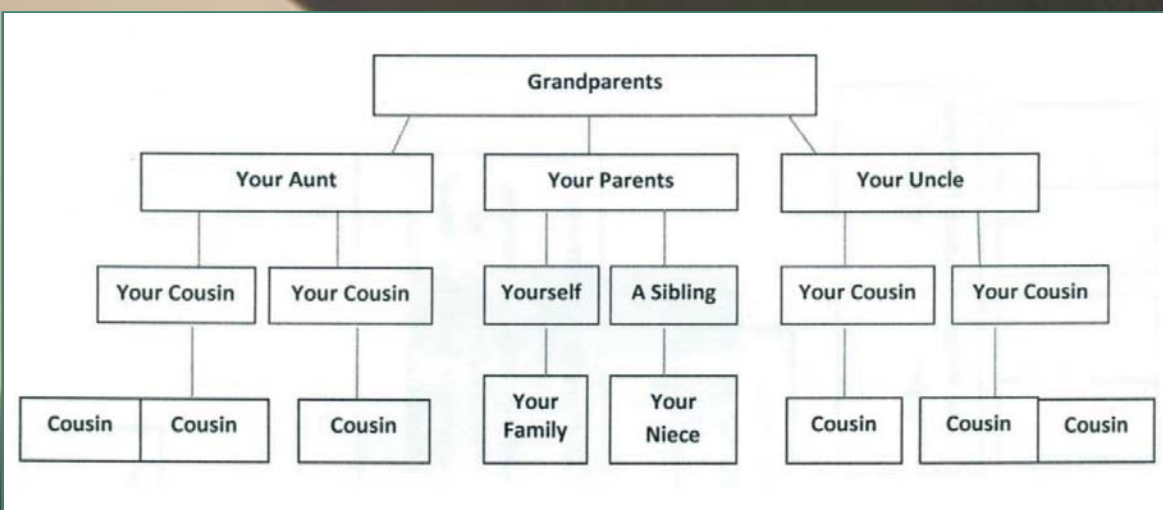
Supplementary pages with a brief biography for each name will make the project even more interesting. Copies of original documents, such as birth, marriage and death certificates add validity and interest. Pictures, letters and related family stories will add personal interest and value for the present and future generations. While you may think that such information is hardly worth recording because it is common knowledge now, it will be of considerable interest to and appreciated by your children and grandchildren in years to come. What is common knowledge today will be history tomorrow.

You may wish to begin your chart with the great grandparents of the same family name, rather than the Grandparents. It could be a challenge to find all the names and dates and the number of relatives will double, but it would be a very worthwhile and satisfying undertaking. Much information can be found by visiting heritage centres, historical societies and museums. Relatives may have old family documents, which you could copy and use in your project. A digital camera is most useful in this respect. And having discussions with older members of the family can be both productive and enjoyable for all concerned.

When the number of generations being recorded is four or five, a box chart is not feasible, but the idea is the same. There are easy to use computer programs available which sort the names and dates in an easy to follow format once the information is entered.

Give it a try and Good Luck!

- Bob Chisholm, Don Mills, Ontario



Register now!
cegepgim.ca/english-section

