

Caribou population on the Gaspé Peninsula remains stable

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - The caribou herd of the Gaspé Peninsula remained stable in 2021, according to data from the Ministry of the Environment, the Fight against Climate Change, Wildlife and Parks published on January 16. The 2022 numbers obtained via the Access to Information Act by Environnement Vert Plus once again confirm this stability.

According to the ministry, 33 caribou were observed in the fall of 2021 and according to data obtained by Environnement Vert Plus, 30 caribou were seen in the fall of 2022.

Two inventories were carried out in the fall of 2021: an overflight on October 4, 2021, but also a ground camera inventory in the Mount Logan sector, which is difficult to count when observing from the air.

During the flights over Mounts Albert, McGerrigle and Logan, 33 caribou were counted: 26 in the McGerrigle sector - 10 males, 12 females and four calves; and seven in the Albert sector, three males, three females and a single calf. In the McGerrigle area, the number of adult caribou has increased while the number of calves has decreased.

The number of caribou in the Mount Albert sector has continued to decline since 2010 and in 2021 fell below the threshold of 10. Recovery is a concern in this sector where only one calf has been observed.

No caribou were seen in the Logan sector during the overflight.

The ground camera inventory carried out from June 15 to October 6, 2021, made it possible to observe at least five distinct females during 77 photographic events.

The method of analysis made it possible to estimate the population at 13 individuals, but the great imprecision associated with this method does not allow conclusions to be drawn.

Based on these observations, the Ministry of Wildlife estimates the population at between 37 and 40 individuals, whereas it was between 32 and 36 during the overflight in the fall of 2020.

Fall recruitment is estimated at 33 calves per 100 females, while the proportion of calves in the population is estimated at 15%. Recruitment in 2021 is, therefore, below that of 2020 and represents a decrease of 3% compared to the previous year, says the ministry.



Photo: Ministry of Environment, the Fight against Climate Change, Wildlife and Parks website.

A caribou in a pen in Val-d'Or.

Quebec estimates that the mountain caribou population of the Gaspé Peninsula remains in a situation of great precariousness given the small size of the three herds, the low recruitment rate and the few exchanges between the groups.

For 2022, based on data obtained by Environnement Vert Plus, the population is estimated at between 32 and 36 caribou, the same figures

as 2020.

According to the environmental group, conservation measures taken in recent years have helped to slow the decline, which leaves room for more intense conservation measures.

“We are facing a population that is declining in the long term, but there has not been a drastic drop in the population in recent years, which means that the conservation

measures put in place are starting to bear fruit. But, unfortunately, the population is stabilized at too low a level. We must act to restore it,” says spokesperson Pascal Bergeron.

The improvement of the population depends on the political will and the recovery plan that will be implemented, according to the ecologist.

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One of the two enclosures will be ready for the spring capture of pregnant caribou

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - One of the two enclosures for pregnant caribou females will be ready for the capture operation scheduled for the very beginning of spring.

The Ministry of the Environment, the Fight against Climate Change, Wildlife and Parks specifies by email that the construction of one of the two structures has been completed.

There remains only the connection to the solar panels which will be done in the coming weeks.

For the other enclosure, work will have to be completed in the spring.

However, the ministry is not able to provide the overall costs for the entire work since, like everywhere else, inflation has had an impact on the construction and the fact that the site is not yet finished.

Initially, the planned budget

was \$1.1 million per enclosure, plus related costs.

First scheduled for spring 2022, the capture and enclosure of pregnant females is now planned for March and April 2023.

Before proceeding with the operation, four overflights of the territory will be carried out by March to locate the pregnant females.

During the capture, the females will be spotted by helicopter and captured with a net

gun.

They will be anesthetized and then airlifted to the enclosures where their vitals will be taken before they are awakened and released into the enclosures.

All of these steps will be carried out by a team of professionals made up of veterinarians, technicians and biologists.

The enclosures are cleared of snow in preparation to greet the first females over early spring.

The construction of maternity enclosures at Mount McGerrigle and Mount Albert began in the fall of 2021.

The objective of these facilities is to provide a safe environment for caribou, while reducing the environmental footprint.

The ministry had hoped to capture 10 females last year and distribute them to the two enclosures, but the enclosures were not ready on time to start in 2022.

Restoration of Cap-des-Rosiers beach to its natural state is a success

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - The restoration of the natural dynamics and the enhancement of the coastal ecosystem of Cap-des-Rosiers are considered a success by Forillon Park.

This is the conclusion in a final report presented by the park recently.

The 2010 Forillon Park master plan reported on the erosion situation and the need for action.

As early as 2006, a report noted that the main cause of the problem was the establishment of infrastructures in a high risk zone and the encroachment on a very dynamic natural zone.

“Our main objectives, both in terms of restoring the coastal system and improving the visitor experience, have been achieved or even exceeded in several cases,” says Forillon Park ecologist, Daniel Sigouin.

The work took place between 2015 and 2021.

One of the major elements was the removal of 1600 metres of riprap and road which was near the sea.

“We were looking to re-



Photo: Courtesy of Parks Canada

The capelin have found a large place to spawn on the beach at Cap-des-Rosiers.

duce these interactions significantly,” says the ecologist.

The park also wanted to ensure the recovery and the dynamics of the marsh which is very close to the old road.

“Until further notice, the marsh maintains the area as known in the past,” he says.

The spawning area for capelin, an important fish in the food chain of the Gulf of St. Lawrence species, has been doubled.

Initially, the goal was to achieve an area for fish

spawning of 11,765 square metres which was lost over the years due to the lowering of the beach profile. It now reaches 23,198 square metres.

“The area of the beach as such has grown to find an equivalent range of protection systems. With these infrastructures, the profile of the beach had changed. At high tide at this time, the water was hitting the rock. Now, we have found a beach like in the 1920s, before the construction of the road and the pro-

ductive structures,” explains Mr. Sigouin.

The vegetation has also taken over the whole of this sector.

“When you have a beach with a natural profile, the impact of waves during storms and high tides is much less marked than when you have infrastructure.”

A multiuse trail and two parking lots have been set up for visitors. Restrooms have been added near the Cap-des-Rosiers lighthouse.

“The removal of the riprap also facilitated access to the beach,” said Mr. Sigouin.

Thanks to cameras installed in collaboration with the University of Quebec in Rimouski before the start of the project in 2011 and, at the end of 2018, park managers could see that the local population and visitors have enjoyed using the beach.

“We have seen an increase in the number of beach users of around 27%,” says the ecologist.

Another major element was the relocation of the Monument aux Irlandais, which commemorates the sinking of the Carricks, a ship carrying 180 passengers that ran aground off Cap-des-Rosiers on April 18, 1847.

This monument was erected in 1900 in memory of the shipwreck.

Human bones were discovered on the beach in 2011, the day after a storm. These were the bones of three individuals between the ages of seven and 12.

According to historical accounts, the bodies of the castaways had been buried on the beach, possibly in a mass grave.

An archaeological dig was launched in 2016 before the work and 18 other individuals were found.

The remains are buried near the Irish monument which has been moved to its current site.

All the developments put in place since 2015 have reduced the impacts of coastal erosion by restoring the site to a natural state.

“Natural environments take some time to regain their dynamics. What is important is that, in our case, we have put in long term follow-ups to evaluate the progressive recovery to see in the long term the success of our interventions,” says the ecologist.

Mr. Sigouin mentions that, following the work being done, the park has managed to keep the area accessible for people to enjoy.

“People now have different options. They can walk directly on the beach or use the trails,” says the ecologist.

Due to the geographical location of the park, other sectors are subject to coastal erosion and extreme events.

The Penouille sector has already been the subject of interventions, including the replacement of a small asphalt road with a wooden footbridge. Service buildings have also been relocated.

“There are also the sectors of Cap-Bon-Ami and Petit-Gaspé where we have infrastructures that have the potential to be significantly affected by coastal erosion. We are facing many challenges,” says Mr. Sigouin.

The Grande-Grave sector is also being monitored.

“It is part of our ecological monitoring program where we use erosion markers. It allows us to evaluate changes in coastal erosion. Even for these areas, it allows us to monitor and see the evolution and allow us to turn on a yellow light or a red light,” he explains.

Diane Lebouthillier approves mandates given to McKinsey and Company

GILLES GAGNÉ

CARLETON – Asked to comment on the reports mentioning that the consulting firm McKinsey and Company was awarded tens of millions of dollars in contracts by the Liberal Party government since 2015, Canada Revenue Agency and Gaspésie-Magden Islands Member of Parliament, Diane Lebouthillier, states that the role of such a firm is useful.

“What I can answer is that going to consult experts is not a problem. It (not asking for that kind of counsel) would be to think that we have infused science. Consultation is not a problem. We can make decisions with all the information. It does not affect our capacity to make decisions,” she says when asked to com-

ment on the controversy raised by a Radio-Canada report.

During the Conservative Party nine-year tenure between 2006 and 2015, Stephen Harper’s government gave \$2.2 million worth of contracts to McKinsey and Company. Since the election of Justin Trudeau in 2015, the contracts awarded to the same firm amount to \$84 million, according to the public broadcaster. Another report mentions \$66 million. Some contracts awarded in the later part of 2022 are not included in the count.

Diane Lebouthillier believes in the usefulness of firms like McKinsey. “I look at what happened. They (the consultants) have had a significant impact on the population, on the future of Canada

in major issues at the Canadian and international level.”

Her department has not done business with McKinsey though. “At the level of my ministry, I have various round tables regarding tax evasion, tax credits for people with disabilities. Experts have generously given their time to advise me,” she says.

Public Services and Procurement Minister Helena Jaczek’s office is pledging to work with a parliamentary committee if a motion tabled by the Conservative Party seeking a probe into reports of contracts given to McKinsey is adopted.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on January 11 that Minister Jaczek and Treasury Board president Mona Fortier will look into the contracts.

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Police report

The preliminary hearing of Brandon Metallic, a 30-year-old Listuguj man charged with two murders, will take place between June 12 to 16 at the New Carlisle courthouse. The dates were set by Quebec Court Judge Celestina Almeida on January 13, at the last court appearance of the accused. Brandon Metallic was charged on May 16, 2021, with the non-premeditated murders of a young man and a child. The slayings had taken place in a Restigouche Drive house the previous day.

Brandon Metallic defended himself but it was decided by the Quebec Court that Legal Aid Attorney, Hugo Caissy, would assist him with the paperwork required during such a procedure and that another lawyer, Ariane Cayer, would assist him during the trial, by asking questions to witnesses and as a friend of the court. Brandon Metallic did not object to the two appointments.

Steve Soucy, 50, from Saint-Elzéar, allegedly responsible for a September 2 incident, will return to the New Carlisle courthouse on February 7 for his bail hearing. He has been incarcerated since the September 2 events during which he allegedly uttered death threats or caused injury to police officers. He also faces charges of possession of a weapon without a permit, possession of a weapon for a purpose dangerous to the public peace and possession of a firearm when he was prohibited to do so. Steve Soucy last appeared in court on January 9 in front of Quebec Court Judge Celestina Almeida. He was initially sent for a 30-day psychiatric evaluation following his September 6 court appearance. It was carried out at the Louis-Philippe-Pinel Institute in Montreal. The psychiatric evaluation of Steve Soucy was made to determine his responsibility at the time of the alleged crimes.

Steve Soucy already had a criminal record when he was arrested by Sûreté du Québec officers in September. In 2018, he was sentenced to serve 30 months in prison for various offenses related to break and enters. The September 2 police intervention made headlines all over Quebec at 4 p.m. and during the evening because of the accidental general alert triggered by the Quebec government's operational centre. It took hours to inform the Saint-Elzéar population about that alert because of the poor cellular phone coverage in the village.

Sûreté du Québec police officers and investigators from the Rocher-Percé MRC detachment carried out a drug bust on January 12 in an apartment located on René-Lévesque Boulevard East in Chandler. During the bust, police seized 1,065 methamphetamine tablets, a certain amount of cash, as well as three pellet weapons, two of which were pistols that are similar in appearance to real handguns. The tenant of the premises, 44-year-old Pascal Boucher, was arrested by the police and then appeared the same day by videoconference at the Percé courthouse. He was subsequently detained pending his January 18 return to court. The suspect was initially charged with possession of a weapon contrary to a court order. On January 18, possession of narcotics, drug trafficking and resisting arrest charges were added. His bail hearing was postponed until January 22. Information from the public led to the police operation.

The Sûreté du Québec reports a rising number of fatal collisions during 2022 in the territory it serves. The data also reveals that the 2022 statistics are characterized by a number of fatal collisions above the average of the last five years. However, the Gaspé Peninsula, Magdalen Islands and the Lower Saint Lawrence regions present a slight improvement in 2022 compared to 2021 with 25 deaths on the road, instead of 26.

In Quebec, the number of fatal road collisions climbed from 245 in 2021 to 266 last year. The five-year average stands at 232. Those collisions claimed the lives of 291 people in 2022, compared to 265 a year earlier and 253 as the five-year average.

The Quebec-wide number of fatal collisions involving a motorcycle decreased between 2021 and 2022, from 53 to 43. The five-year average for fatal motorcycle accidents is 44.

The number of collisions involving at least one tractor-trailer increased from 41 to 47, which was above the five-year average of 35.6.

The number of pedestrian deaths also increased from 30 to 36, again a number much higher than the five-year average of 25.8.

The number of cyclists who died remained stable at seven, two more than the average since 2018.

The report shows that the main causes of fatal collisions were again reckless driving and speeding, in 32% of the cases; driving impaired by alcohol, drugs or fatigue, with 15%; and distraction, in 9% of the cases. Nearly 30% of victims who died in road collisions had not fastened their seat belts. This situation is a concern for Security and its Partners, an organization involved in the road safety strategy. The main causes of fatal collisions are linked to human behaviour.

"The failure to fasten seatbelts is hard to understand after all these years of awareness efforts. It should have become a reflex," remarks Sgt. Claude Doiron, spokesperson for the Sûreté du Québec. The continuation of the police work along the roads and the adoption of safe behaviour by the motorists are essential to reducing the number of road collisions, he adds.



Photo: N. Sergerie

On several occasions, there was a shortage of ambulances in the Gaspé Peninsula.

Several ambulances left in their bays due to Paramedic shortage

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - Service disruptions in the ambulance service in the Gaspé Peninsula have been numerous since last April with a peak of 18% last July. This situation could be corrected in the coming weeks, according to the Federation of Pre-Hospital Employees of Quebec.

According to data obtained from the Gaspé Peninsula Integrated Health and Social Services Centre, between April and August, this rate varied between 6% and 9%.

July reached 18%. It was a difficult month when nearly one out of five ambulances could not get on the road due to lack of manpower.

Since the fall, the CISSS has been working more closely with the area's ambulance companies to minimize breakdowns, which resulted in a rate ranging from 1% to 3.5% between September and December 2022.

Concrete actions have been taken by Paraxion, which operates several ambulance services in the region, according to the Federation of Prehospital Employees of Quebec.

"Our paramedics have really contributed to this reduction (of the disruption of services) and the employer has also favoured this provision of work. For example, a worker who left Sainte-Anne-des-Monts to work in Gaspé did not receive any

benefits such as travel expenses. He had to use money out of his own pocket. The employer has set up a program to allow paramedics from the Gaspé Peninsula to lend a hand in other sectors, which helps to promote service delivery in the territory," says the vice-president of labour relations at the federation, Jérémie Landry.

The implementation of hourly schedules, announced last June by Quebec for the Gaspé, Rivière-au-Renard, Sainte-Anne-des-Monts and Pointe-à-la-Croix sectors, should promote the recruitment of paramedics and thus reduce or even eliminate service failures.

"The paramedics voted in favour of several letters of agreement to convert the schedules as quickly as possible," says Mr. Landry.

"The transformation of schedules will promote recruitment. We will be able to get workers from outside. With the shift schedules, it was a big negative for recruitment, but if the employer, with the signed letters of agreement, put them in quickly, we will be able to eliminate the breaks in service," says Mr. Landry.

The transformations could take place in March or April, according to Mr. Landry.

The Quebec government announced \$3.5 million in June for the conversion of schedules by March 31, a claim by the Gaspé Peninsula CISSS since 2018.



Gilles Gagné

Commentary

Pierre Poilievre has a long way to go before becoming a hit in Quebec

Conservative Party leader, Pierre Poilievre, spent three days in Quebec between January 17 and 19 inclusively to do what he had refused since his September rise to leadership - talk to the province's media and answer some of their questions.

He also did some recruiting, or at least attempted to. Toronto Star political analyst, Chantal Hébert, recently wrote that Pierre Poilievre is trying to recruit some Coalition avenir Québec cabinet members, including Deputy Premier Geneviève Guilbault and Finance Minister Éric Girard, who ran unsuccessfully for the Conservative Party in the Lac Saint-Louis riding in 2015. Ms. Hébert said that influential members of the party based outside Quebec have repeatedly heard that Éric Girard will run at the federal level in the next election.

Pierre Poilievre denied having tried to recruit them, saying that the party members choose candidates, not him. Such a naive way of recruiting is hard to believe.

Political parties need a certain number of influential candidates. Those people rarely make it on the list of candidates until they have been contacted by the party leader. Both sides, the leader and the candidate, need to know the thorough political goals of one another.

Pierre Poilievre initiated his tour of Quebec in January by saying things that were aligned with some of Quebec Premier François Legault's favourite topics: the eventual construction of additional power dams and the development of lithium mines to fabricate electric car batteries. This is a strong sign that he is trying to develop some support in Quebec.

Mr. Poilievre has a long way to go before getting that support and convincing prime CAQ cabinet members to run for the Conservative Party during the next electoral campaign. The number of hurdles is considerable and trying to lure François Legault's pillars is certainly not well received by the premier.

Moreover, the CAQ was just re-elected. Geneviève Guilbault and Éric Girard still hold prominent roles in that government. Vice Premier Guilbault is seen as a potential leader when François Legault calls it quits.

Secondly, Pierre Poilievre doesn't have much to offer right now. The date of the next federal election is highly uncertain. It could be later this year, but it could also be in 2024 or in 2025. The New Democratic Party holds the balance of power right now but even if leader Jagmeet Singh occasionally reconsiders the deal he has made with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to support the Liberal Party government, the NDP is far from being in a position to go into an election.

Thirdly, Pierre Poilievre, despite his attempts to support some positions of the popular CAQ government, fails to reach the average Quebecer with his statements. Two-thirds of Quebecers don't like him or don't trust him. In fact, despite his landslide victory at the Conservative Party convention in September, he experienced a worse start in Quebec than his predecessors Andrew Scheer and Erin O'Toole.

There is potential trouble there, just like the fact that François Legault, who asked Quebecers to vote for the Conservative Party in the federal election in

October 2021, has not met him personally yet. He had met Erin O'Toole one month after the latter was elected at the head of the party.

This context largely explains why, after four months as party leader, he recently changed his strategy. Outside and inside Quebec, Pierre Poilievre has started giving interviews. Some of his caucus members, in sufficient numbers to avoid being blacklisted, told him that his reliance on social media was not working well enough to expand the party's political base, which will be needed to win the next election.

Over the last four elections, the Conservative Party's worst results occurred in Quebec in 2011 and 2019, and next to worst in 2015 and 2021, behind Newfoundland. In 2011, Stephen Harper proved that he could win a majority without the support of Quebec. However, Pierre Poilievre is not Stephen Harper.

Canadians prefer moderate statements

Pierre Poilievre's extreme positions on certain issues provide him with mistrust from a relatively large cross section of the electorate. His less than subtle support for the truckers movement a year ago, his statement to the effect that the bitcoin was more reliable as a staple currency than the policy of the Bank of Canada and his recent declaration to the effect that the CBC headquarters in Toronto was a palace that would be turned into condominiums under a Conservative Party government are blunders that hardly connect with a significant number of voters.

Stephen Harper was far from a great democrat and he undertook severe cuts in CBC's budget but he was not the loose cannon Pierre Lelièvre often is.

Mr. Poilievre won the leadership race by playing the ruthless pit bull, regularly launching personal attacks against his opponents, à la Donald Trump at times. It worked there, but it won't work countrywide, hence his recent strategic switch. Extreme statements are stubborn, as are first impressions, especially when they are backed by seconds and thirds. Mr. Poilievre has been living by the "sword" since becoming a Member of Parliament at the tender age of 25.

It is too early to say that he will also perish by the "sword" but to prevent this, he will have to master some compromise techniques.

For example, during the leadership race, supporters of Mr. Poilievre's main opponent, Jean Charest, who remained in the party, paid a certain price for not having supported him.

Gérard Deltell supported Jean Charest during the race, despite being a fierce opponent when he was an Action démocratique du Québec and Coalition avenir Québec Member of National Assembly, during Mr. Charest's days as Liberal Party Premier. In order to support his former foe, Mr. Deltell sure disliked Pierre Poilievre and believed very little in his chances to win major support in Quebec.

When he chose his shadow cabinet, Pierre Poilievre "rewarded" Gérard Deltell, who is very popular in many parts of Quebec City and surrounding areas, by appointing him the Conservative critic for the environment. This is far from a reward, considering that many supporters do not believe in climate change. Mr. Deltell is consequently forced to walk on eggshells. Mr. Poilievre has, therefore, chosen a strange way to enhance his supporting cast in *la belle province*.

His worst move, though, was the campaign he led against Alain Rayes, the Conservative Party former lieutenant in Quebec, because he had also supported Jean Charest. Mr. Poilievre tried to convince the electors of Richmond-Arthabaska that their member of parliament had to resign and leave his seat.

Alain Rayes had previously said that his values were incompatible with that of the new leadership and that he will continue to sit as an independent. The Conservative Party eventually admitted having tried to pressure Mr. Rayes into leaving his seat. The party presented a less than convincing apology, mostly di-

rected at the party members instead of the member of parliament.

These methods, coupled with a very limited scope of political orientations, expressed by Pierre Poilievre so far, spell trouble for the Conservative Party in the short term. He has plenty of time to recover, considering that the next election will probably not be called soon.

For now, few Quebecers, be they political stars or not, want to be the locomotive of the party. They will wait for the engine to start before deciding if they'll board the train.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

La Société de conservation ZICO de la Baie-de-Gaspé (SCZBG) has been working for many years to end toxic herbicide and creosote use on the railway. There was a victory from 1992 to 2004, when the CN agreed to stop using herbicides. However, the new owners started spraying again. The SCZBG kept on working, including with the MRCs and towns having by-laws preventing herbicides in the transport corridors.

From 2011 to 2013, the MRC du Rocher-Percé enforced its by-law, making the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG) pay fines. Then an alternatives committee was formed, headed by the SCFG and including the MRCs and towns, plus the SCZBG. After a bad choice of alternative was made by the SCFG alone, it ended the committee.

The SCZBG continued to inform the SCFG and to ask it to stop spraying, but we got no reply. In 2019, the SCZBG attended the Rail Summit held by Transports Québec (MTQ), having been invited after sending in a paper. We explained our requests for an end to herbicides and for the alternatives we have been proposing to be used, including for the rehabilitation of the Port-Daniel-Gascons-Gaspé portion.

In 2022, the SCZBG sent the MTQ our research detailing the toxicity of the five herbicides used by the SCFG and of creosote. We proposed alternatives, again. Afterwards, we and our supporters won a victory, as the MTQ formed an advisory committee, and assured us that the SCZBG will be invited, and that our participation will be very much appreciated.

We are certain this will result in the end of herbicides and creosote, and that the alternatives will be used for rehabilitation and maintenance. Gaspésians will then be in full possession of our right to health, a healthy environment and the protection of our children.

Margret Grenier
President, SCZBG Gaspé QC

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Emma Buckley

Guest Commentary

PERCÉ - During my last visit to Australia, my mum thrust a heavy plastic tub into my arms. "I thought you might like to go through this," she suggested. (I detected a faint subtext of "I'm getting tired of minding your stuff.") The box contained a pile of school exercise books and black notebooks: my journals. I started keeping journals, or diaries, at age 15, and have done so, on and off, ever since. I selected one at random, penned by my 19-year-old self and started reading. It was a bit like being a spectator at a nail-biting sporting event. I felt myself zinging between delight, compassion and horror as the action unfolded.

The first thing that struck me reading the journal was that I sounded like...me. (Was I really expecting someone else?) The second thing was the passionate enthusiasm my 19-year-old self felt for so many things. Some of these things still feature in my days. Others – writing letters to dear friends, reading poetry, had slipped away. Remembering the deep satisfaction of putting pen to paper or the delight of discovering a glorious mesh of words, I decided to honour my younger self and revisit these former joys.

Often our enduring passions take root and flourish at a young age. It was my primary school teacher, Mr. Battle, who introduced me to poetry. Mr. Battle (aka Mr. B or the Battle-Axe) had red hair and a fiery temper to match. He believed firmly in discipline and his old-school teaching methods (lots of yelling and a habit of grasping the collars of naughty schoolboys) were contentious, even in the 1980s. Mr. B had a soft side, though. He loved poetry, particularly the Australian bush poets of the early 20th century such as A. B. Paterson or Henry Lawson, and would read them out loud in his rich, booming voice. These poems were ballads that romped along with a rollicking metre, pleasing our 12-year-old ears to no end. We would finish the school week drawing pictures of our favourite couplets from *The Man from Snowy River* or *Clancy of the Overflow*, poems that celebrated the violent beauty of the Australian bush and the earthy, honest toughness of its settlers.

If Mr. B introduced me to poetry, my senior high school English teacher, Mr. Keen, broadened the poetry palette. Mr. Keen was a refreshing change from my previous teacher Miss Maguire, whose absolute lack of class control was legendary and recorded for posterity by my classmate Sara's scathing end-of-year haiku: *English is a joke/We do whatever we want/Then we leave the room*. Mr. Keen treated us like adults and enjoyed hearing our perspectives. He introduced us to the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, which was unlike anything I'd ever heard. The first

time Mr. Keen read us Hopkins' poem *The Windhover*, our class sat mute, wondering exactly which language Mr. Keen was speaking. The sounds rippled and churned like a stream. Learning what the words meant gradually brought Hopkins' dazzling imagery into focus, and revealed his awe of nature.

In my 20s and 30s, I made the odd new discovery, but the poetry books gradually gathered dust. That is, until the journal revelations of last winter.

Some of our youthful passions rightfully burn out or mellow appropriately with the years (obsessions with dodgy rock musicians, anyone?) but others are sitting quietly inside us just waiting to be rekindled. Whether it's skipping stones, collecting beach treasures, ice-skating, reading, walking at night, or dancing around the living room, those things we loved to do in our younger days can still bring so much to our lives, from the enjoyment of being in the "flow" of concentration to feelings of exhilaration, peacefulness and comfort. For me, the world is larger and brighter with poetry.

Now, thanks to my poetry revival, I often drive home in the early evening thinking of Hopkins' words; the same words my younger self wrote in my journal many years ago; words that reassure me now as they did then: "And though the last light off the black west went/Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs/Because the Holy Ghost over the bent/World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings."

FIRE SERVICES: A shortfall of \$40,000 for Grande-Rivière

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GRANDE-RIVIÈRE - Grande-Rivière estimates that Percé's decision to become independent in terms of its fire protection service will result in a shortfall of \$40,000.

Percé informed the Grande-Rivière municipal council of its decision at the end of 2022 and January 10 formalized the hiring of an exclusive director for its service.

The municipalities had shared the services of a director of Grande-Rivière since 2018.

"The decision taken by the Percé municipal council will have impacts, and adjustments will have to be made," said the mayor of Grande-Rivière, Gino Cyr.

The mayor mentions that in 2018, a report was produced on the optimization of fire services in the territory of Rocher-Percé and, from that time, as Percé had no director, an agreement was reached between Grande-Rivière and Percé, which also included Sainte-Thérèse-de-Gaspé.

"With their territory, Percé assumed roughly 47% of the salary and benefits of the director of the fire department. You have to consider what is billed to the Town of Percé,



Photo: N. Sergerie

The financial impact of Percé's departure from the fire brigade has a significant impact on Grande-Rivière

which includes compensation, but also the services rendered," adds Mr. Cyr.

It is estimated that the additional bill for the Town of Percé would be \$15,000.

Grande-Rivière forecasted fire services of \$40,000 in its budget. In addition to a director, the Grande-Rivière fire department has training officers and 24 firefighters.

"It is certain that following this decision, there will be a loss of income. We are going to review our intervention and pricing policy for the next activities, but we will respect the risk coverage plan," says the elected official.

According to him, Grande-Rivière will no longer be on

the front line during a fire in the territory of Percé.

"It is certain that the agreement ensured that the director of the Grande-Rivière service (during a fire alarm) had 24 firefighters initially available, but with this new orientation, it will be necessary to review everything," says the mayor.

On January 10, the mayor of Percé, Cathy Poirier, indicated that the perimeter of the town was vast and had three firehouses. There were recruiting difficulties to justify hiring a manager for the department.

Requested by the town council, elected officials believe that this new resource will promote the hiring of new firefighters.

Two storms in quick succession on the Gaspé Peninsula

Nelson Sergerie

Snow, sleet, freezing rain and heavy rain on January 13 and 16 gave way to difficult conditions for many Gaspésians.

First, on January 13, the Bay of Chaleur area was hit by the worst storm of the season with 30 centimetres of snow measured in New Carlisle. During the afternoon, zero visibility on a long stretch of Route 132 forced the closure of several businesses earlier than usual. Meanwhile, Gaspé fared little better with 23 centimetres according to Environment Canada. In the evening, the impacts moved towards Haute-Gaspésie as the winds caused Transports Québec to close Highway 132 between Sainte-Anne-des-Monts and Les Méchins. Many schools suspended classes and the Régie intermunicipale de transport Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine (RÉGIM) cancelled several departures during the afternoon.



Traffic was practically non-existent on January 13 during the snow-storm, in the Gaspé Peninsula

Photo: N. Sergerie

Second storm

On January 16, Mother Nature did it again, this time with a cocktail of precipitation. Environment Canada estimated the amount of freezing rain between 10 and 20 millimetres as it fell between 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. on Gaspé before changing to rain.

According to the federal agency, for January 16, 17 and 18, 41 millimetres of rain fell at Michel-Pouliot Airport. Despite the poor weather, the Sûreté du Québec reported no serious accidents during this entire period. Surprisingly, Orléans Express maintained all of its departures despite the poor conditions during those days. In addition, temperatures have not fallen below -20 degrees Celsius since the start of winter. The coldest night occurred on December 28. It was -19.6 degrees Celsius at the Gaspé airport.

"It's extraordinary to have -20 so late. Two years ago, in 2021, we had such a late -20 too, on January 22. This is exceptional. This is not a record," says meteorologist Simon Legault.

2022 SNOW CRAB WRAP UP: Higher quotas offset lower than expected prices

GILLES GAGNÉ

PASPEBIAC – Even if the year 2022 was not marked by records in terms of landings and income associated with snow crab, Quebec snow crab fishermen still experienced one of the best seasons in history, by virtue of catches totalling 13,300 metric tonnes and, above all, overall revenues of \$196.6 million.

Among the three maritime regions of Quebec, the Gaspé Peninsula maintained the lead, with landings worth \$109.5 million, for 55.7% of the total. The data is still preliminary.

The 2022 overall data surpass the results obtained by crab fishermen in 2021, resulting from catches of 11,200 metric tonnes and total revenues of \$184.8 million. Last season's results represent an increase of 18.75% in the volume of catches and 6.4% in revenue.

The 2022 landings were the best since the 14,500 metric tonnes of 2019, while it is necessary to go back to 2016 to see better earnings, at \$210 million. This amount was the highest total of annual revenues in the history of the snow crab fishery.

From one region of maritime Quebec to another, the trends have differed quite a bit last year, says researcher analyst Simon Desrochers, from the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

Region by region results

"In the Gaspé Peninsula, total income has increased between 2015 and 2022," he says, comparing the \$37.9 million in landed value seven years ago to \$109.5 million in 2022. This amount of \$109.5 million followed a good year in 2021, when Gaspesian crab fishermen had brought in catches worth \$97.3 million. The regional annual record was reached in 2017, with \$113.4 million.

In 2017, fishermen delivering their catch in the Gaspé Peninsula had landed a total volume of 10,457 metric tonnes, compared to 7,464 tonnes this year. Catches in 2017 were by far the highest in the past seven years. Crab quotas are subject to fairly large variations from one year to the next, which can cause significant differences in in-



Photo: G. Gagné

Fishermen and crab processing plant operators were expecting a higher price in 2022 but it still reached a high level.

come for fishermen, regardless of price.

On the north side of the Gulf of Saint Lawrence, the results obtained in 2022 confirmed a tendency observed over several years.

"On the North Shore, snow crab catches have decreased by 47% in seven years," Simon Desrochers says about annual catches that fell from 6,875 to 3,633 metric tonnes between 2015 and 2022, which represents a 3,242 tonnes difference.

However, the value of snow crab remains essential for the proper functioning of North Shore fisheries; in 2022, income from the catch of this species represented 71% of the total income of fishermen in this region.

During the period, incomes generally followed a more capricious but overall beneficial curve for North Shore crab fishermen. Despite the abundant catches in 2015, the total income of fishermen then stood at \$38.8 million, compared to \$52.6 million in 2022, for a much lower total volume. In 2021, North Shore crab fishermen delivered catches worth \$61.2 million. Last season's results were, therefore, down 14%.

The North Coast record was set in 2018 at \$75.4 million. It was the excellent price of \$5.33 per pound, double the \$2.65 in 2015, which, combined with a good quota,

supported this record.

The years 2015, 2016 and 2018 had allowed the North Shore to outstrip the Gaspé Peninsula in terms of total revenues related to snow crab. However, the last four years have not led to a repetition of this scenario, by far, notes Simon Desrochers.

A high price overall despite a sudden drop after season start

Speaking of prices, Simon Desrochers points out that the

2022 price was advantageous for Quebec crabbers, including those from Gaspésie.

"The 2022 price reached \$6.72 per pound; it's more than the average from 2017 to 2022," he says, noting the record price of \$7.49 in 2021. This 2021 price had the entire snow crab industry expecting another record in 2022. These expectations were based on non-existent inventories in February and March.

Magdalen Islands crab fishermen also had a good season in 2022, thanks to record revenues of \$34.5 million from catches totalling 2,188 metric tonnes, compared to \$26.2 million in 2021 resulting in catches of 1668 tonnes. These data represent significant increases of 31.7% for revenues and 31.2% for volumes.

The previous Magdalen Islands record for revenue dated back to 2019, with \$29.8 million. In 2022, the 2,188 metric tonnes of snow crab landings were close to the average for the past six years.

The effects of inflation

"The processing plants paid a very good price at the start of the season, but as inflation set in, people found it easy to target things to cut expenses. Paradoxically, inflation has put downward pressure on crab prices. Lobster has suffered the same pressure," says Ali Magassouba, economist at the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

In addition to the "slightly too high" expectations of the snow crab industry, whether they came from processors or fishermen, the entry into the North American market of massive quantities of Russian crab until the end of June was also a factor pushing down snow crab prices. This element was clearly identified by processors by June.

The boycott of Russian products did not affect snow crab purchases since these agreements predated the February 24 invasion of Ukraine. Industry expectations propelled the starting price to \$8.25 and \$8.75 per pound in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence at the start of the season on April 14, with the highest price paid to crabbers who own boats equipped with a water hold. Nine days later, the price was down by a dollar a pound, the first dip in a series eventually bringing the average price down to \$6.72.

"These price decreases contrasted sharply with the heavy trend of the last decades in snow crab, when the price at the beginning of the season constituted a prudent floor threshold, which could only be increased at the end of the season, once all the sales were done," adds Mr. Magassouba.

However, the importance of this upward adjustment has decreased significantly in recent years.

Another break in obstetrics services, this time in Gaspé

Nelson Sergerie, LJI

GASPÉ - A partial rupture of the obstetrics services occurred on the nights of January 18, 19 and 20 at the Gaspé hospital.

The lack of manpower explains this break between midnight and 8 a.m. Only one nurse provided the service during this period.

Pregnant women over 36 weeks have been notified by the Gaspé Peninsula Integrated Health and Social Services Centre.

A service corridor had been set up with the Chandler hospital centre, however, in an emergency, women about to give birth could receive care in Gaspé.

In addition, suspended since January 6, the surgery department of the Sainte-Anne-des-Monts hospital centre was still inactive (as SPEC was reaching its deadline) despite efforts to find staff.

The CISSS has attempted to obtain agency nurses, without success so far.

The regional health network hopes to find the temporary staff to offer the service again as soon as possible while waiting for a viable longer-term solution.

The suspension of operating room activities has an impact on the obstetrics department, which cannot function without surgery for safety reasons.

A service corridor is in place with the Matane hospital.



Photo: N. Sergerie

Resumption of sawing at the Saint-Elzéar Association Coopérative Forestière sawmill

GILLES GAGNÉ

SAINT-ELZÉAR – Sawing activities resumed on January 20 at the sawmill of the Saint-Elzéar Association coopérative forestière, exactly two weeks after a fire in the electrical system that forced 60 of the company's 100 workers into unemployment, on January 6.

It took 10 days of constant work by specialized workers dispatched to the facility on January 10 to restart production, specifies the director general of the Association coopérative forestière (ACF), Christian Bourdages.

“We are restarting operations tomorrow morning (January 20). The testing phase is done. The electrical wiring was completely changed but the equipment was not damaged. The repair teams worked 24 hours a day, seven days a week,” says Mr. Bourdages, who feared the day after the fire that the elec-



Photo: Saint-Elzéar Forestry Cooperative Association

The technical teams, including several electricians, took 10 days to repair the damage caused by the fire on January 6 at the Saint-Elzéar sawmill.

trical damage had caused a serious malfunction of the equipment. “It didn't,” he adds.

The exact value of the

damage remains to be assessed, but the director general specifies that “there is the equipment but also the production losses for two

weeks. We can talk about a few hundred thousand dollars. The final evaluation will come with the invoices and after discussions with the in-

surers.”

The sawmill building suffered very little damage despite the fact that the fire broke out in the middle of the night, when only one person was in the plant. The prompt intervention of the firefighters and the sprinkler system limited the damage.

Forty ACF employees were assigned to planing, drying and forestry work operations between January 6 and January 19 inclusively. The Saint-Elzéar sawmill is the second largest sawmill in the Gaspé Peninsula with an annual supply of approximately 250,000 cubic metres of wood.

Over recent years, the cooperative has often been the most important buyer of logs from the Gaspé Peninsula Wood Producers Syndicate.

It has recently completed a \$21.4 million modernization of its planer and kiln, which was undertaken over the fall of 2021.

Significant water infiltration at Carrefour Gaspé

NELSON SERGERIE

GASPÉ – Several merchants at the Carrefour Gaspé shopping centre had an unpleasant surprise on January 18 and 19, when a major water infiltration caused damage to their businesses.

During a visit by SPEC on the morning of January 19, the damage was quite

apparent.

In one business, a lot of water entered and the infiltration continued while SPEC was present. A section of the store was closed off and you could clearly hear water dripping from the ceiling. There was an inch of water on the surface of the floor.

In the halls of the mall, you could see gypsum

swollen by water infiltration.

In another business, the management installed huge tarps to direct water to containers installed on the floor.

A store had to close for the day on January 19, in order to pump out the water from the saturated carpet. Half of the store had to be moved to pro-

tect the merchandise. A strong smell of humidity was noticeable.

At least two other businesses were affected by the water infiltration. Buckets were placed everywhere on the floors.

Mall management declined to comment.

During the visit by SPEC,

the director, Daniel Brousseau, accompanied by two employees shouted at the SPEC journalist. He opposed the production of this article threatening to call the Sûreté du Québec and take legal action. An employee even filmed the scene before escorting the journalist to the exit.



An inch of water was on the floor of this store when SPEC visited the location on January 19.



Photos: N. Sergerie

Several plastic tarps were used in this other store to direct the infiltration of water towards containers to protect the products.

Mining unfavourably impacts the caribou herd in the Gaspé Peninsula

GILLES GAGNÉ

CARLETON – The rising presence of mining companies registering claims around the Parc de la Gaspésie represents a source of worry for Pascal Bergeron, spokesperson of Environnement Vert-plus.

He is still looking for accurate statistics but his observations over the last few years suggest that there is a growing concentration of mining claims next to the Parc de la Gaspésie.

“Mine drilling implies clearing areas of trees and building roads to drill holes. The mining companies’ roads cause disturbances and their drilling operations make noise. We should protect an area of 10 kilometres all around the Parc de la Gaspésie and forbid drilling in that

buffer zone. The protected area would extend to the area between the park and the sea, to the north,” affirms Mr. Bergeron.

“The area around the Parc de la Gaspésie is not where you see a whole lot of caribou but the caribou stays away from industrial activity such as drilling and wood cutting,” he adds.

The current surface of the Parc de la Gaspésie reaches 802 square kilometres.

“The number of caribou ranges between 30 and 35 since 2019. This number is perhaps what the habitat can support in the current context. The herd was reaching 250 to 300 caribou decades ago but since 2007, it has been declining,” points out Pascal Bergeron.

In 2007, 165 caribou were observed during the yearly

count, for an estimated herds of 189, given that not all the specimens are seen during the counting operation. Part of the Parc de la Gaspésie surface was subtracted from its original limits in 1981 when it became a conservation territory and resource exploitation was forbidden in that perimeter. The park was created in 1937.

“Logging was not as aggressive before 2000. We are just coming off 20 years of abusive cuts. On the sides and on the summit of Mount Blanche-Lamontagne, the wind is strong. It will take more than 20 years before we see trees taller than a man or a caribou. We knew it before cutting and we cut anyway! That’s why the whole caribou protected habitat must be expanded outside the limits of the Parc de la Gaspésie,” suggests Pascal Bergeron.



Photo: G. Gagné

Pascal Bergeron thinks a buffer zone should be added around the Parc de la Gaspésie since the current limits have not provided enough protection to maintain the former size of the caribou herd.

Use of herbicides on railway tracks is being opposed

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - The use of herbicides to manage vegetation along the railway in the Gaspé Peninsula is once again in the news as the group Ensemble pour l'avenir durable du Grand Gaspé calls for the use of processes other than glyphosate.

The environmental group supports the position of the Liberal Member of Parliament for Fredericton, Janica Atwin, for the use of glyphosate to be abandoned.

Ms. Atwin is asking her government, which has authorized this product until 2031, to backtrack and, in this sense, supported by her colleagues, she has tabled a bill and a petition in the House of Commons.

The president and spokesperson of Ensemble pour l'avenir durable du Grand Gaspé, Lise Chartrand, is asking the Liberal Member of Parliament for the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Is-

lands, Diane Lebouthillier, to support the bill and also asks the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie to abandon this practice.

“We find that the moment is perfect to relaunch the file. There is spreading, whether there is a train or not. Before summer returns, we ask the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie to present us with other options for eliminating weeds harmful to the rails and we propose that this be planned in the budgets for next summer,” mentions Ms. Chartrand, who makes suggestions.

“There is nothing more efficient than manual labor. There would be a platform that can do mechanical work. What we no longer want is the spreading of herbicide and glyphosate. It’s over to use herbicides when you know the consequences on health and the environment,” adds Ms. Chartrand.

The president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, Éric Dubé, reminds



Photo: N. Sergerie

The debate resumes on the weed control methods of the railway in the Gaspé Peninsula.

us that this is a question of safety.

“We always tend to reduce our quantities. But why do we have to weed the railway line? It’s a matter of security. We follow environmental rules. We receive our environmental authorizations to do so,” said Mr. Dubé.

claim any piece of territory without further rights afterwards,” he says.

Mining companies have taken “possession” of the land around the Parc de la Gaspésie, which is hampering the park’s expansion.

According to Mr. Bergeron, the protected area must be expanded to ensure the survival of the species. “In

“This is a reality for railroads in North America. We have always said that we are on the lookout to find economically viable alternatives that will meet expectations,” adds the president.

Last year, Together for the Sustainable Future of Greater Gaspé obtained the mandate to

represent the environmental component in the case of the return of the train, as requested by the Citizen Committee for the Development of Gaspé.

The group says that drinking water wells are found all along the railway line and many waterways end their course in Gaspé Bay.

the range, there is a lot of work to do to restore the ecosystem to keep predators away and make more room for caribou, and that goes for the expansion of the protected area,” says Mr. Bergeron who mentions that there was a project to expand the park in the mid-2010s.

The environmental group still calls for faster and more

adequate disclosure of annual inventories, adding that it is unacceptable to disclose 2021 inventories 15 months later, when previously it only took about 3.5 months. That delay has led Environnement Vert Plus to make the decision to reveal the figures for 2022 at the same time as those of the ministry for 2021.

CARIBOU:

▶ Cont'd from cover

“We can restore a decent population level in the Gaspé Peninsula. There are projects on the table. There are ways to get there. But we will have to get down to it for real,” says Mr. Bergeron.

The Quebec plan for the

recovery of the caribou must be tabled in June 2023 and Environnement Vert Plus expects a lot from the document.

“Conservation must have a say in the whole territory and not just the forestry industry which win when they want to collect a cubic metre of wood or the mining companies with their rights to

Red sky at night...

*Red sky at night,
Sailor's delight;
Red sky at morning,
Sailor's warning.*

Diane Skinner

Why does the sky turn red at sunrise or sunset? The skies on Sunday evening, January 15, 2023, (photo) were a gorgeous spectacle to behold. A red sky appears when dust and small particles become trapped in the atmosphere by high pressure. This causes the blue light to “scatter” which creates a red sky. What about that old rhyme, “Red sky at night, sailor’s delight?” Is it true all the time as a predictor of the next day’s weather? In this case, the intensely colourful red and pink skies on January 15 were not a predictor of good weather at all. January 16 was a day on the Gaspé of snow, freezing rain and more rain. Not a “sailors’ delight” at all!

Photo: D. Skinner

Quebec will oversee the decontamination of the former MTQ garage in Gaspé

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - While the Town of Gaspé was supposed to take charge of the decontamination of the grounds of the former Quebec Ministry of Transport garage in downtown Gaspé, now the ministry will take care of doing the work.

An agreement has been reached with Transports Québec to transfer this responsibility to the department. “We have the same financial deal, except that with the quantity we have to deliver, we do not have the technical capacity to do the work. The MTQ is doing it and the work can be done in 2023. If all goes well, the land should be available for us in 2024,” says the mayor, Daniel Côté.

Citizens will be consulted, especially those in the town centre, to determine the use of the land that will be made available.

“Are we providing housing? Green spaces? A commercial centre? What do we do with these two grounds downtown? The decision will be with the citizens,” mentions the mayor who will ask the popu-

lation their ideas for the future vocation of arena grounds which should also become available if Quebec agrees to finance the construction of a new amphitheater near C.-E. Pouliot. Quebec has already expressed a desire to densify urban city centres.

“The MTQ land and the arena land with a view to densifying the city centre, as for me, there is part of this land that could be used for housing purposes. This is my vision, but I do not want to impose it on citizens. We will look at the best suggestions,” indicates the mayor who underlines that these sites have very good land values.

“If we want to give ourselves the means for the future, we must think about making income with these lands. Housing, it brings income, commercial sectors, it pays. Green spaces are pleasant, but it does not bring in income, only expenses, but it is pleasant all the same. Can we combine all of this?” asks the mayor.

Lodging

Two years ago, the Town

adopted a housing construction assistance program.

Gaspé is on track to reach and even exceed the objective of 150 housing units over five years.

“We are very close to 150 rental units in the last two years. If I include the construction of single-family houses, there are over 200. In rental only, we have reached a hundred in the last two years. The 150 over five years will be greatly exceeded,” says Mr. Côté.

Only with the projects in motion at the beginning of 2023, the 150 will be reached. The target was revised to between 200 and 300 along the way.

“With the project of 144 units near the IGA, it will also be achieved,” adds the elected official, who mentions that the objective had subsequently been increased to 400.

“The economic boom is far from running out of steam. I'm betting that in four or five years, 400 units will be exceeded. There are still promoters knocking on our doors,” says the mayor.

According to him, there are

Conservatives have the wind in their sails, according to Jean-Pierre Pigeon

Nelson Sergerie, LJI

QUEBEC CITY — Longtime Conservative activist Jean-Pierre Pigeon believes his party is once again becoming a force on the political scene, admitting that since the days of Brian Mulroney between 1984 and 1993, the Conservative Party has fallen on hard times in Quebec.

President of the Conservative Association of Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands, candidate for the last three federal elections and new organizer in eastern Quebec, Mr. Pigeon displays more overflowing enthusiasm than in the past when he talks about the next few months for his party.

An activist since the days of Joe Clark, Mr. Pigeon participated on January 17 in Quebec City in a rally with his leader, Pierre Poilievre, where, according to him, more than 300 people attended the meeting.

Having supported Jean Charest in the leadership race last fall, Mr. Pigeon had a brief discussion with his new leader where he could not talk about the issues in the region.

“First, he thanked me for accepting the position (of organizer in the East). Surely he knew my background. I appreciated his openness. Once the race was over, I rallied. There are different factions in the parties but the ultimate goal is to regain power,” explains Mr. Pigeon who believes that the different groups are now united.

“I believe that the bond is golden,” he says without hesitation. Mr. Poilievre is a man who goes to people, smiling. He is not the kind of man who is completely closed in on himself. A very smart man. Sometimes you think he's a pit bull, but deep inside him, I think he's a Canadian like everyone else,” adds the activist.

As regional organizer, his first role will be to solidify associations, find funding and then find candidates for the next election in collaboration with national authorities.

“I really appreciate Mr. Poilievre for his openness to people who had not supported him in the race. He is a unifying man. The fact that I have been appointed organizer is evidence of how Mr. Poilievre intends to lead the party. In Quebec, we are delighted with the small turn towards the centre. This is what he needs,” comments Mr. Pigeon who is more optimistic than ever.

“Mr. Mulroney, that was the golden age. In Gaspé, we had 3,000 members. With Mr. Harper, it had been a little more difficult. With Mr. Poilievre, what I feel, in Eastern Quebec, we have tripled, even quadrupled the membership. I feel a new wind,” says the new regional organizer.



Photo: N. Sergerie

Jean-Pierre Pigeon with Conservative leader, Pierre Poilievre, on January 17, in Quebec.

some big players who would be interested in the Gaspé market. “As long as we are going to provide housing to attract people and families, the growth potential is far from being reached,” says the mayor, mentioning that the expansion of the LM Wind Power Plant will permit the company to accommodate

more than 650 new employees.

“The signal we have from LM is as long as we are able to build housing, we will hire,” the mayor was told, also mentioning that several other companies are also growing.

Each promoter can receive up to \$500,000 in tax credits over five years with the program in place.

Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie experiences traffic decline in 2022

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW RICHMOND – The Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie experienced a significant decrease in traffic in 2022 compared to its record year of 2021. The freight transporter's total number of carloads went from 4,636 in 2021 to 3,190 last year, a 31.3% drop.

Three main reasons explain the decline, and two of them are tied to customers. Gaspé's LM Wind Power ceased to send their windmill blades to the southern part of the United States by rail in May instead of November. This represented a 70% drop in carloads while traffic out of the Port Daniel Saint Mary's Cement Plant went down by 22%.

Only seven windmill blade trains left the New Richmond station between the beginning of January and May 5, the departure date of the last such train. In 2021, there were 23 unit trains that hauled windmill blades between New Richmond and Matapédia. Close to 20 such trains were initially planned in 2022. LM Wind Power decided to use ships to reach the destination of the blades, Texas in most cases.

The blades were trucked between the Gaspé plant and the New Richmond transshipment facility because the line, mainly its bridges, is under repair east of Caplan.

"We can say that 2022 was a transition year. We knew that the windmill blade hauling operation would come to an end last year but it occurred eight months earlier than expected. It was a major element in our budget. We still have to realize that the duration of the hauling contract was almost twice as long as we thought initially. It was also a transition year for the cement plant, following its (April 2020) acquisition by Votorantim. Some logistics elements of the transportation patterns changed with the new ownership," explains the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG) director general, Luc Lévesque.

He indicates that the 2022 traffic total is twice that of the 2010-2016 stretch.

The third reason that prevented cement traffic from increasing or being stable is the fact that the railway still was not in service between New Richmond and Port Daniel in 2022, as promised by the



Photo: G. Gagné

The end of windmill blade traffic during the first half of 2022 contributed heavily to last year's decrease in carloads

owner of the railroad, Transports Québec. The costly transshipment expense from a truck to a railcar between the plant and the SCFG cement silo in New Richmond hurt and still hurts the railway, says Luc Lévesque.

"It is a large component of the traffic decline. We realized it when we received confirmation that it would take two more years before we could load cement cars in Port Daniel. We could see it coming but in our five-year business plan, we had expected to reach Port Daniel in 2022. The rising cost of diesel affects the trucking of cement between Port Daniel and New Richmond. The cost of other types of fuel went down but diesel remained high. It affected us a bit with our trains, because our locomotives burn diesel fuel but it is only a fraction of the trucking cost on a tonne per mile travelled,"

Woodchip traffic generated by Nouvelle's Groupe Lebel sawmill remained stable in 2022, compared to 2021, with an increase of 2% in the number of carloads. Lumber traffic increased by 56% between the two years. It had also increased between 2020 and 2021, after a few years of decline.

"Woodchip traffic would have been a bit better without a slump at the end of the year. White Birch Papers undertook a series of shutdowns at its Rivière-du-Loup mill and it slowed down wood chip deliveries from Nouvelle. As for lumber, the market experienced crazy growth over the spring and the summer, before

ment volumes and get a handle on input traffic. The inputs not coming by the sea all reach the cement plant by truck.

"The windmill blade cars that appear on our 2022 numbers will not be there in 2023. Can we make up for that loss? Lumber and cement could compensate but it will depend on the magnitude of the recession anticipated by a number of experts. We are also working on other traffic files, like the possibility of hauling wood chips and lumber produced by the Saint-Elzéar sawmill. It has been discussed for years but it will come. We will surely regain what we lost when we load cement cars in Port Daniel. We might even add to our annual traffic, counting the input," points out Luc Lévesque.

That return to Port Daniel could take place in 2023 but the SCFG director general is cautious and, therefore, functioning as if it will only happen at the beginning of 2024.

"The main bridges will be ready this year but the call for tenders regarding the two culverts (Caplan and Port Daniel) and the small Saint-Siméon bridge are not out yet. Some observation of fish habitats will be required in Saint-Siméon, which could delay

construction start until the fall. We will see," says Mr. Lévesque.

Cement plant yard to be ready over the summer

Groupe Gilbert, the contractor chosen to move the main line north of the cliff, just east of Saint Mary's Cement Plant, will also build a small yard to service the facility. It should be ready over the summer.

"I was consulted before planning drawings of the small yard. The first stage will consist of two tracks, one for the loading of cement cars and the second one for loaded cars and input cars," says Mr. Lévesque.

The total capacity of the two tracks will amount to about 30 cars. The SCFG will use its New Richmond trackage to carry out the main shunting activities linked to the Port Daniel plant and the New Carlisle yard for longer car storage purposes.

Whether traffic picks up or not in 2023, the SCFG will, nevertheless, have a very busy year considering that the transporter will be allowed a \$19 million budget to participate in some track and retaining wall upgrading initiatives. The envelope is earmarked for two years.

being hit by a slump during the last months of the year," explains Luc Lévesque.

He prefers not divulging the specific number of carloads of the SCFG customers as their request.

What about traffic in 2023?

Mr. Lévesque fears another traffic decrease in 2023 because as long as the railroad is not reopened to Port Daniel, it will be difficult to increase ce-

Méganne Perry Mélançon returns to the public scene

Nelson Sergerie, LJI

GASPÉ - The former Member of the National Assembly for Gaspé, Méganne Perry Mélançon, has resurfaced in the public domain, three months after suffering defeat in the election last October.

Ms. Perry Mélançon will hold an administrative position at the Centre de création et de diffusion de Gaspé (CCDG), which produces various cultural activities in the C.-E. Pouliot auditorium.

"We can say that it is a return to the public sphere in a certain sense, because I have always wanted to get involved in the socio-economic development of my region. I asked myself 'where can I be useful?' several times after the election campaign," explains Ms. Perry Mélançon.

She finds that the CCDG has been very dynamic with the projects over the last two years and those to come.

"It will be enriching for me and I think that having someone from the political world will not hurt because the cultural community has been very affected by the pandemic. The Ministry of Culture is a complex machine. Navigating through this can be quite complex. I hope this is the start of a great adventure," says Ms. Perry Mélançon, who has a background in cinema and in tourism that will help her with this new challenge. "It's an environment that I find fascinating," she adds.

As for her professional future, Ms. Perry Mélançon remains relatively discreet, taking the transition one day at a time.

"There is a reflection on which sector of activity I want to invest in for the next few years. We will have news soon enough," says the ex-politician who adds that she will have news in the coming weeks. When asked to clarify she concluded by saying "there are different proposals on the table and to do the pros and cons. How can I be useful with the experience acquired and how can I promote it for the region because the development of Gaspésie is important to me. I want to take all that into consideration and it should be over pretty quickly."



Méganne Perry Mélançon.

Photo: N. Sergerie

Cold, dark days of winter: Improve your mental wellness

DIANE SKINNER

Christmas and New Year's are behind us and now we have started the journey of co-existing with winter, at least three months of it. When the weather outside is frightful, and that is bound to happen, try a few strategies suggested by clinical psychologists to lift our moods. The third Monday of the month in January is marked as Blue Monday and is considered by some to be the saddest day of the year.

We have been experiencing the effects of a world with COVID for almost three years and we have spent many days of anxiety about the pandemic. Families and friends have had disagreements about how to deal with COVID and this has added to the negative headspace many have felt. Psychologists suggest that we make a choice to face the world with a more positive outlook. Shun negative conversations which can greatly affect our mental wellness. Think positive. Spend time with positive people and stay away from the "Negative Nellys." (Apologies to all the Nellys.)

Brighten your home

Light therapy boxes can offer an effective treatment for seasonal affective disorder caused by lack of sunlight. They are available in a wide range of prices.

Look for the positive

Take stock of all in your life that is positive and for which you are grateful. In looking for all that is good in your life, you can reset your brain towards a more positive perspective. Some people keep a daily gratitude journal which helps to focus on positivity. At the end of each day simply jot down whatever brought you joy that day, big things or small.

Make self-care a priority

With the hullabaloo of Christmas done, January feels downright calm and less demanding. For some, the slide down into feeling blue –



Meditation, or mindfulness, calms the mind and body.

seasonal affective disorder (SAD) – can lead to poor mental wellness in the next few months. The suggestion is to be good to yourself by practicing self-care. Get lots of quality sleep by limiting screen time for a few hours before bed, (try it and you may be pleasantly surprised) and set a sleep schedule for bedtimes. Good, uninterrupted sleeps can help combat SAD.

Get active

Walk, ski or snowshoe because activity helps to reset our mindsets, and leads to better and deeper sleeps.

Eat well

Try to cut down on carbohydrates and processed foods. Eat fruit and vegetables. This will also help to combat winter weight gain. Take a vitamin D supplement to make up for less sunlight. Nothing beats getting outside on sunny days to take in natural sunlight.

Meditate

Many psychologists recommend trying meditation. This helps to calm the mind and body. If sitting or doing nothing at all is a challenge, and it is for many people just be more mindful while reading, walking or eating by slowing down and being fully

"in the moment." Just slowing down and feeling fully in the moment is a form of meditation. Cut down on worrying and overthinking.

Listen to music

"Music hath charms to soothe..." Listen to music that lifts your spirit.

Appreciate yourself

One path to mental wellness is to love yourself the way you are. You are wonderful just the way you are. Appreciate yourself. Try deep breathing. A quick strategy to lessen anxiety is three Magic Breaths. Take in a deep breath through the nose and exhale slowly. Do this three times. It is amazing what a simple exercise as this can do for your way too busy mind. Never give up on yourself. If you are really struggling with severe anxiety and depression look for help and support. This can be from family, friends or a therapist. Asking for help is not a weakness but a step in the right direction.

"The experience I have had is that once you start talking about (experiencing a mental health struggle), you realize that actually you're part of quite a big club." — Prince Harry

Reflections

by

Diane Skinner Flowers



Reflection not meditation

"We don't learn from experiences.

We learn from reflecting on the experiences."

We hear a lot about the benefits of meditation yet many of us feel that must be a big waste of time. Sitting, doing nothing? Those who are anxious and stressed find the prospect of sitting still a daunting task. If we reframe the word "meditation" it might be a more helpful strategy for those whose minds are "overfull" and who do need to slow down from time to time. Give your brain a break!

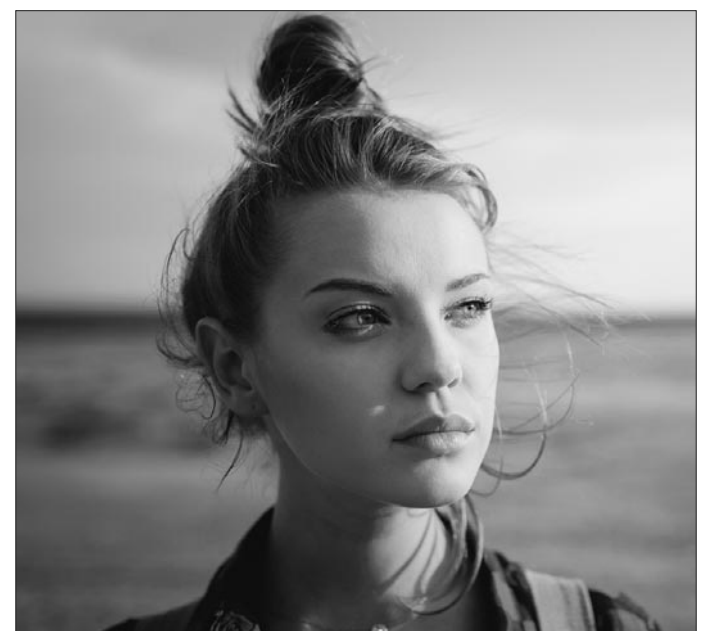
Perhaps instead of meditation we could approach it as a time for reflection. At least for high energy people, reflection seems to say we are doing something and that is good for the anxious mind. What is reflection? It comes from the Latin word reflexia which means to bend back. Reflection leads to a better understanding of yourself and may even give a change in mindset. Reflection can help you to find that change. An active verb – whereas meditation implies well, doing nothing.

Reflection is not just thinking back about events and thoughts we have had. It is a process where we can learn more about ourselves through thinking about our emotions and our thoughts. There is an element of self-reflection and self-evaluation where we judge ourselves to understand and improve. What did we do well? What did we do that went not so well? Self-reflection helps to improve and set goals to become a better human. Nobody wants to stay the same person if things are not working well. Reflection (or self-reflection) is an opportunity.

Meditation is like reflection but is narrower. Reflection can involve meditation but other "tools" can be used. These include sitting in nature, journaling, having a reflection buddy to include discussion and creating an environment that is comfortable and cosy. With the addition of items that bring you comfort, and even joy, your reflection journey should be a positive, enjoyable experience. Soft blankets, a warm cup of tea, a candle, soft music, these can help to relax you and help with your self-reflection.

If people around you might judge your self-reflection moments, simply keep it to yourself. You will not benefit from the critics. The only critic you need for reflection is you. Forget about them. It's about you.

Complete wellness may not be achievable, but anyone can improve, and reflection gives you that opportunity. Well-being is a complex and multi-faceted road and can involve social, intellectual, spiritual, financial, physical and emotional needs. Give yourself the gift of reflection. Think about it. Plan. Move ahead.



Learn about yourself through reflection.

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The wonder of winter: Embrace the season

DIANE SKINNER

Whether you love or loathe the snow there are a number of ways to make the most of the season. Dress for the weather and this will maximize your enjoyment of the great outdoors.

Sledding: What an opportunity to get out as a family to get some fresh air and exercise. Walking up the hill while pulling the sled or toboggan behind you is a great workout. The payoff is sailing down the hill while laughing and yelling!

Snowshoeing: This is the perfect time to get out and snowshoe. After-Christmas sales are on so check out your local sports store. You can tramp across deep snow and what an opportunity to have a cardiovascular workout. You can experience the beauty of the woods and fields. A fantastic opportunity to take



Tobogganing (or sledding) is not a pricey choice for a winter activity but can be a fun-filled afternoon for the whole family.

lovely photos!

Snowmobiling: If you like a high-speed and intense winter experience then snowmobiling is for you. Zip through the forest or across frozen lakes. (Check for thickness and safety first).

You will need to buy a snowmobile pass or membership to access trails.

Downhill skiing: You may be a beginner and prefer to use the bunny hills, but the level of skill needed can vary greatly. You will need ski

gear and skis, snow blades or a snow board.

Cross-country skiing: It is a perfect outing for those who prefer a slower pace to downhill skiing, while still getting fresh air and exercise. It is a fullbody workout.

Skating: Skating is pure fun. The requirements are skates and a helmet for extra safety. Many municipalities have rinks or arenas. You can skate as long as you are enjoying yourself and hurry home to enjoy hot cocoa!

Hiking: Having boots that are warm, waterproof and non-slip are important to be safe. The plus of snow hiking is that you can go for as long as you wish. A great activity for taking photos. Winter scenery is exquisite, especially on days when the trees are laden with snow and sparkling in the sunshine.

Nordic walking: This is a great activity to keep fit. You need good boots and two Nordic walking poles. The poles have wrist straps, handles and tips. It is a good workout for the upper body, strengthens muscles, improves balance plus you are outside in nature.

Nora Gould's candles: Locally made, a Mala quality product

DIANE SKINNER

GESGAPEGIAG: Nora Gould's local business, Nora's Mala Made Candles, (mala means home in Mi'gmaq) has been offering a quality product since 2019. She comments that every year her business is continuing to grow, and she is proud to state that she loves to add new products and scents for her clients.

Nora Gould began making a variety of homemade items during her maternity leave with her youngest daughter, but the one she enjoyed creating most of all were her candles. At first, she gave them away as gifts and those people would come back and ask for "refills," so she made the decision to do "something bigger" with this candle hobby.

She carries over 90 scents and works with different kinds of wax than paraffin, such as palm, coconut and soy. Nora states, "I mainly work with soy wax as there are many sorts of soy wax for different projects, such as for my glass jar candles, wax melts, (for electric wax melters) pillars, votives, tealights and even novelty candles that look like real strawberry parfaits, hot chocolate, bleeding skulls, even real roses. I also make



Local artisan and creator, Nora Gould, has been making premium quality candles since 2019.

the four medicine candles that have the scent of sweetgrass, sage, tobacco and cedar. I also make fresheners for closet or car, lip balm and I do many custom orders as well for events."

All products are designed and created by Nora and artist Jessica Jerome designed the logo for the business. Nora is always planning new products. Her spring and summer favourites are scents of flowers and fruit. Winter products are warmer and cozier and her best-selling can-

dle in the winter is Christmas Tree scented. Her biggest seller throughout the year is the Four Medicine collection. Her signature scent is Magnificent and this can be purchased with beaded earrings, also made locally by artisans from Gesgapegiag. The earrings are placed in the middle of the candle and

are revealed as your candle burns down!

Specialty candles are available for Valentines, Mother's Day, Father's Day and birthdays.

You can order a custom candle and Nora can place a photo of your choice on the candle jar. She also offers a

variety of gift baskets that include candles, lip balm, soap and some chocolates.

In the future, Nora plans to have her own shop in Gesgapegiag to showcase all the products she offers. Currently you can buy her candles at the Micmac Handicraft store and Martin's Depanneur, both located in Gesgapegiag. She has plans to offer products online in the next few months. Check her Facebook page for more information: Nora's MALA Made Candles.

Nora, from the Gesgapegiag Mi'gmaq First Nation, has always enjoyed creating things. She also likes making baskets, beading and experimenting with new products and ideas. Her candle making started out as a hobby and grew into a business with the support of her family, friends and her community. She expresses her gratitude, "I would like to thank everyone who has supported me through my journey. Your support all around means a lot." She adds, "So when you have a dream, keep dreaming forward cause your hard work will show."

The business is aptly named Nora's Mala Made candles because all products are homemade (Mala) and represents her home community of Gesgapegiag.

SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS

Announcements



Obituaries



ASTLES: James Ralph "Bud"

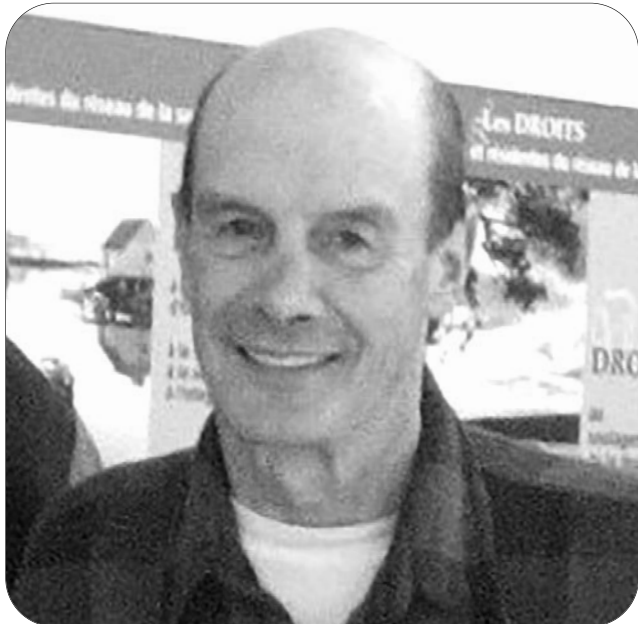
James Ralph "Bud" Astles passed peacefully on January 10, 2023, at age 92 in Brockville, Ontario, after a brief illness. Bud was raised in New Carlisle.

Bud was the son of the late James Percy and Mary Emma (nee Skene) of New Carlisle.

Bud served in the Canadian Army from 1951 to 1953. A long-time resident of Montreal, Bud lived in Guelph, Ontario, from 1983 to 1991 before retiring to Brockville.

Bud is survived by his wife of over 63 years, Betty (nee Elizabeth Anne McDaid, originally of St. John, New Brunswick), as well as son David, daughter Diane, siblings Ella (Paul) and Ray of New Carlisle and Don of London, Ontario. Bud has four adult grandchildren – Nicole, Stephanie, Paul and Emma.

Bud and brother Don last visited "down home" in May of 2022.



BUJOLD: Gene

It is with profound sorrow that we announce the sudden passing of Eugene "Gene" Maurice Bujold at the Maria Hospital, Maria, Quebec on December 20, 2022, at 75 years of age.

Born in Fleurant Point, Quebec, on August 19, 1947, he was the youngest son of the late Maurice Bujold and the late Iola Court Bujold.

Gene was a graduate of Dalhousie High School, and of the Bathurst Trade School where he ranked first in his class of Stationary Engineering. He was employed by various businesses including Soldiers' Memorial Hospital in Campbellton, New Brunswick. Gene was very grateful and proud to tell everyone that he achieved more than 24 years of total sobriety.

He is survived by his brothers: Sterling (Buzz) and Dot of Fleurant, Quebec; and Edward (Ed) and

Ivy of Fredericton, New Brunswick, as well as several nieces and nephews. Also surviving are his aunts Maida Hunter, Jackie Rimell and Berthe Boucher. Gene was predeceased by his parents, and by his sister, Alice (the late Guy Tassé).

We wish to thank Kathy Levesque, Thérèse and Gilles Gravel, Normand Doucette and all of the many staff members who cared for Gene over the past 18 years in your special Residences in Pointe-à-la-Croix, Carleton-sur-Mer, and St.-Omer, respectively. A very special "thank-you" to Mado Rioux for the extra special attention and devotion to Gene's needs during the past five years. Mado, vous êtes un vrai ange spécial; et nous n'oublierons jamais votre gentillesse et votre professionnalisme. Mille merci!!

Cremation has taken place. A Graveside Service will be held and announced at a later date. For those who wish, memorial donations may be made to a charity of the donor's choice.

Funeral arrangements are entrusted to the care of Maher's Funeral Home, Campbellton, NB. (506) 789-1699 or toll free (855) 404-1699. Email: maher.fh@nb.aibn.com.



ST. ONGE: Dale Duthie

On Friday, December 23, 2022, Dale Duthie St. Onge died peacefully at Maria hospital. She was 75 years old.

Predeceased by her parents: Audrey (Sinclair) and Robert (Bobby) Duthie; sister: Kay; and brothers: Hawley and Gordon.

Dale is survived by her husband of 55 years, Pat St. Onge, her children: Tanya (Kurt) and Junior (Diane) and her grandchildren: Delaney and Abby.

She also leaves to mourn her sisters: Joan (Carl), Helen and little brother: Larry (Darlene), brothers and sisters-in-law, many nieces and nephews, as well as countless friends that she considered family.

Dale also held a very special place in her heart for all who knew her as Nana Dale.

The funeral was held on Friday, December 30, at St. Andrew's United Church, in New Richmond.

The family would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their expressions of sympathy. They will be fondly remembered and were very much appreciated.

Thank you to Rev. Momberg, Alice Dell and the choir for arranging the beautiful service.

The family want to acknowledge the wonderful care Dale received from so many medical personnel at Maria Hospital, staff at Manoir du Havre, and other institutions, over the years. For those of you who treated Dale with dignity and compassion, it did not go unnoticed.

A very special thank-you to Dr. Audet who provided Dale with such wonderful, supportive care over the years.

She will forever be remembered in our hearts.

VIKANDER: Nils Olaf (1941-2022)

*"His life was gentle and the elements so mixed in him that nature might stand up and say to all the world
"This was a man!" (Hamlet)*

Nils was born in Stockholm, Sweden, on December 7, 1941. His mother often told Nils that his birth was delayed by a doctor who was occupied that ominous day by the radio detailing the horror from Pearl Harbour. Nils was the second of four boys. He leaves to mourn his elder brother Erik of Montreal and his younger brothers Thomas of British Columbia and Savant of Copenhagen.

Nils and his family moved to Montreal when Nils was about nine years of age. He graduated from Town of Mount Royal High School where he won many awards as an outstanding athlete in swimming, cross country skiing and long distance running. Then on to Concordia University where he graduated with a B.A.

Nils enrolled in the M.A program at the University of New Brunswick. He participated in the New Brunswick cross country ski team and went to the Canadian Winter Games. In his final year, he lectured in the Department of Sociology. After graduation, he joined the faculty of St. Thomas University where he lectured in social science for three years.

But College de la Gaspésie et des Îles came calling. The Cegep was looking for a professor in social science, one who would inspire critical thinking in students. About a week after Nils began, two students appeared in the Dean's office. They complained that the new professor was clearly an oddball believing as he did that the earth was flat.

The Dean assured the two that the professor was challenging them to consider their belief that the world was circular. Nils used the technique of posing the incredulous to form thinking students. He dared to propose support for the Viet Cong versus the omnipotent Americans and his students responded!

A man of spartan habits, he would often take students on long ski trips, camp overnight in the most unpleasant winter weather, cook meals on propane, and sleep in tents. He decidedly introduced cross country skiing, and winter camping to the English language students of the Gaspé Cegep.

In January, on a very cold Saturday morning, I drove down McDonald Avenue to the old wood road that led up to Nils' house at the top of the hill. The wind was blowing and I ploughed through the deep snow to finally arrive at the house that had been my grandfather's birthplace. No smoke from the chimney and no sign of life. I knocked on the door. No answer. I turned to return to my skis. Then, I heard a noise. "Gary, I'm over here." I saw Nils emerging from a snowbank dragging a sleeping bag after him. "Come on in the house." I commented that it was a very cold morning. "Only about -22°C."

The house was freezing. I split a pile of wood and some kindling. A very old eight plate range stood in the old kitchen. I wore two heavy sweaters and a fur lined parka. Nils sat there with a shirt and a fallish windbreaker. I trembled. Regarding my discomfort Nils decided to turn on a hot plate and make me a coffee. "You know Gary, I seldom put on a fire. I leave here at six thirty each morning, ski down to my truck and shower at the Cegep and eat all my meals in Gaspé. I arrive home at 10 o'clock. "I welcomed the coffee. As my blood began a slight warming, Nils went on to say, "You know Gary, I rarely sleep in the house. All I need is a very good sleeping bag. I have two of them and I can cope with -45°C." I then knew why Nils made an annual trip to Maine to shop at LL Bean. Stamina and endurance were Nils Vikander.

Continued on page 15.

Announcements

Continued from page 14...

lived. I recall a very hot July morning, the first summer Nils came to Gaspé. The temperature was a very warm 35 degrees. On route from Murdochville to Gaspé with a load of copper anodes, a driver who knew every twist and turn of the Murdochville - Gaspé road suddenly came upon a man wearing skis, poling his way along the highway. The driver was awe stricken; he could not believe he was seeing a person skiing in July!

After returning to Sandy Beach, the driver mentioned the experience to an attendant who was conscious of news of demented mass murderers and cognizant that Gaspé maintained a facility for some mentally disturbed patients. He phoned the SSQ. Soon thereafter a squad car sped up the Murdochville highway. About halfway beyond Gaspé the Surété came upon this strange creature. They examined the skis and discovered they had small wheels beneath. The poles were not for skiing. They did not have the larger bottom ring. For the

first time, the officers gazed upon cross country training skis. They asked for his identity, Nils told them his name, that he was employed by the Cegep of Gaspé. He could not, however, give them his credentials as these were in his truck some twenty kilometres beyond. The two policemen located me and learned that the "suspected madman" was indeed Professor Nils Vikander.

After leaving the Gaspé, Nils founded the Tobique Skiing Academy at Nictau, New Brunswick where he trained American and Canadian cross country skiers. Five years later, he worked in the lower Canadian Arctic for the Government of Canada training native Canadians in the art of cross-country. Then, on to Norway, where he taught at a junior college and married Marguerita, his Russian born wife, who nursed Nils during his final days. He left us on October 30, 2022.

We will not see his like again - Rest in peace, dear friend!

Gary Briand



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PORT DANIEL:

Three Star Golden Age Club

Tuesdays: Pétanque from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. every Tuesday evening to have fun and learn a new game. Cost is \$3.

January 28: Military Whist beginning at 8 p.m. \$5 per person. Everyone welcome.

PORT DANIEL:

Tea and Bake Sale

February 25: The St. James Port-Daniel And St-Paul's Shigawake, Anglican Churches are having a Tea and Bake Sale at Three Star Golden Age Club at Port-Daniel, 177 Route 132 from noon to 3

p.m. (Weather permitting). Cost: \$10 Please come and enjoy a few hours out and support our churches. Contact information: Landis 418-752-4236 or Audrey 418-752-6171. Hope to see you there!

PASPEBIAC:

Knitters Needed

La maille de l'amitié, a group of knitters who are eager to help men, women and children who are receiving chemotherapy at Maria hospital by providing knitted hats, is looking for knitters. If needed, patterns and samples are available at the library in Paspebiac, which is also where you should drop-off your knitted items. You can also include a short note of encouragement, identified by your name only. For more information contact Claudette Whitom (418) 752-3633 or Doris Chedore (418) 752-5190.

HOPE:

Hope Baptist Church

Sundays: Sunday School starting at 10 a.m. Worship service beginning at 11 a.m.

NEW CARLISLE:

Royal Canadian Legion Branch #64

Please be advised that Legion memberships are available for \$45. Returning and new members welcome.

Wednesdays: Cribbage beginning at 7 p.m. Bring a partner.

Thursdays: Open from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Fridays: Darts beginning at 6:30 p.m.

Saturdays: Open at 2 p.m. Everyone welcome!

February 7: General meeting at 7 p.m. at 1 Mount Sorrel, New Carlisle.

NEW CARLISLE:

Bible Chapel Meetings

Sundays: 9:30 a.m. Breaking of Bread for believers. 2 p.m. Gospel

meeting and Sunday School.

Thursdays: 7 p.m. Prayer Meeting and Bible Study. Everyone welcome! For more information: 418-752-3372 or 418-752-6011.

NEW CARLISLE:

LLB Membership

Please note that membership renewals for the Linda LeMore-Brown Foundation are now available for the 2023 year. You can renew your membership by sending \$20 cash, e-transfer or cheque by mail to: C.P. 219, 168 Gérard D. Levesque, QC G0C 1Z0 or in-person on Tuesdays or Fridays between 9 and 11 a.m. For more information, please call 418-752-7223.

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES:

Book Room

The book room is now open. Anyone who needs assistance can contact Kathleen at 418-392-4896.

UNITED CHURCH

NEW RICHMOND

Sunday, January 29

10 a.m. Service

UNITED CHURCH

HOPE TOWN

Sunday, January 29

10 a.m. Service

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

Sunday, January 29

NEW CARLISLE

11 a.m. Holy Eucharist

PORT DANIEL

9 a.m. Holy Eucharist

PARISH OF GASPÉ

Sunday, January 29

No Service

ANNOUNCE ALL YOUR UPCOMING EVENTS!

Does your organization have a Coast Round-Up plan? If so, don't forget to send SPEC information about your upcoming activities.

Be sure to include:

- location
- date
- time
- cost

DEADLINE IS
WEDNESDAYS AT 4
P.M. TO APPEAR IN
FOLLOWING
WEEK'S PAPER



HELP KEEP YOUR
COMMUNITY STAY
INFORMED



SEND YOUR
ANNOUNCEMENTS TO:
holly.smith@globetrotter.net



INBOX US ON FACEBOOK AT:
The Gaspé Spec



CALL:
418-752-5400



TEXT:
418-752-8245



Keeping seniors connected

CASA offers enjoyable activities

DIANE SKINNER
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

MATAPEDIA: The Committee for Anglophone Social Action (CASA) is continuing to offer seniors' activities in numerous locations on the Coast, including Matapedia, Escuminac, Cascapedia-St-Jules, New Carlisle, Hope Town, Port Daniel and Chandler, as well as at the Gilker Residence in New Carlisle and Richmond Manor in New Richmond.

The Seniors' Wellness coordinators, Madelyn Hayes and Kathy Gallon, offer in-person and online events and get-togethers for the senior community. Sally Walker continues in the role of the Seniors' Outreach Worker.

During the fall and spring, the coordinators offer 80 in-person activity sessions in several communities. From January to March inclusive, the groups stay connected through online "Facebook Live" talk shows and one weekly Zoom Bingo. Coordinator Madelyn Hayes informs



Photo: Courtesy of CASA

This group of seniors meeting in Escuminac looking forward to a fun and stimulating morning filled with fun, laughter and connecting with others.

us, "Since we have started our online activities due to the pandemic, in all, we reach 250 plus seniors."

A typical in-person gathering begins with an opportunity to chat and socialize. Announcements and discussions on local and world events are shared and then information about CASA programs and services. Each meeting in-

cludes physical exercise, with a focus on balance and coordination, cognitive challenges, presentations on various health topics, legal information, various guest speakers and many other topics of interest to seniors. Live music is offered from time to time and there is a 50/50 draw and a door prize. Refreshments are served.

Madelyn states that when the seniors arrive, you can feel the excitement in the room while the participants wait to see what the day will bring. Coordinators and animators must continually come up with new and fun activities for the groups.

This program is vitally important because it breaks isolation and loneliness, which

has been felt particularly by seniors since the pandemic. It offers an enjoyable way of maintaining physical and mental health and keeping connected with their community.

The coordinators have heard such comments as "Can't wait for the next session. I feel part of something special and I have made new friends."

The goal of the program is to keep seniors in the Gaspesian communities active, healthy, happy and living in their own homes as long as possible.

The CASA Seniors' Wellness team is currently planning activities for 2023 and 2024. They always welcome new participants. If you want to try out the program, which is free to participants, or you know a senior who may enjoy this, simply contact CASA at 418-752-5995. Enter either Madelyn's extension (104), or Kathy's (105).

If any seniors require home visits or assistance with any resources, please contact Sally, also at 418-752-5995, ext. 118.

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