

Agate picking in January proves possible due to lack of ice floe

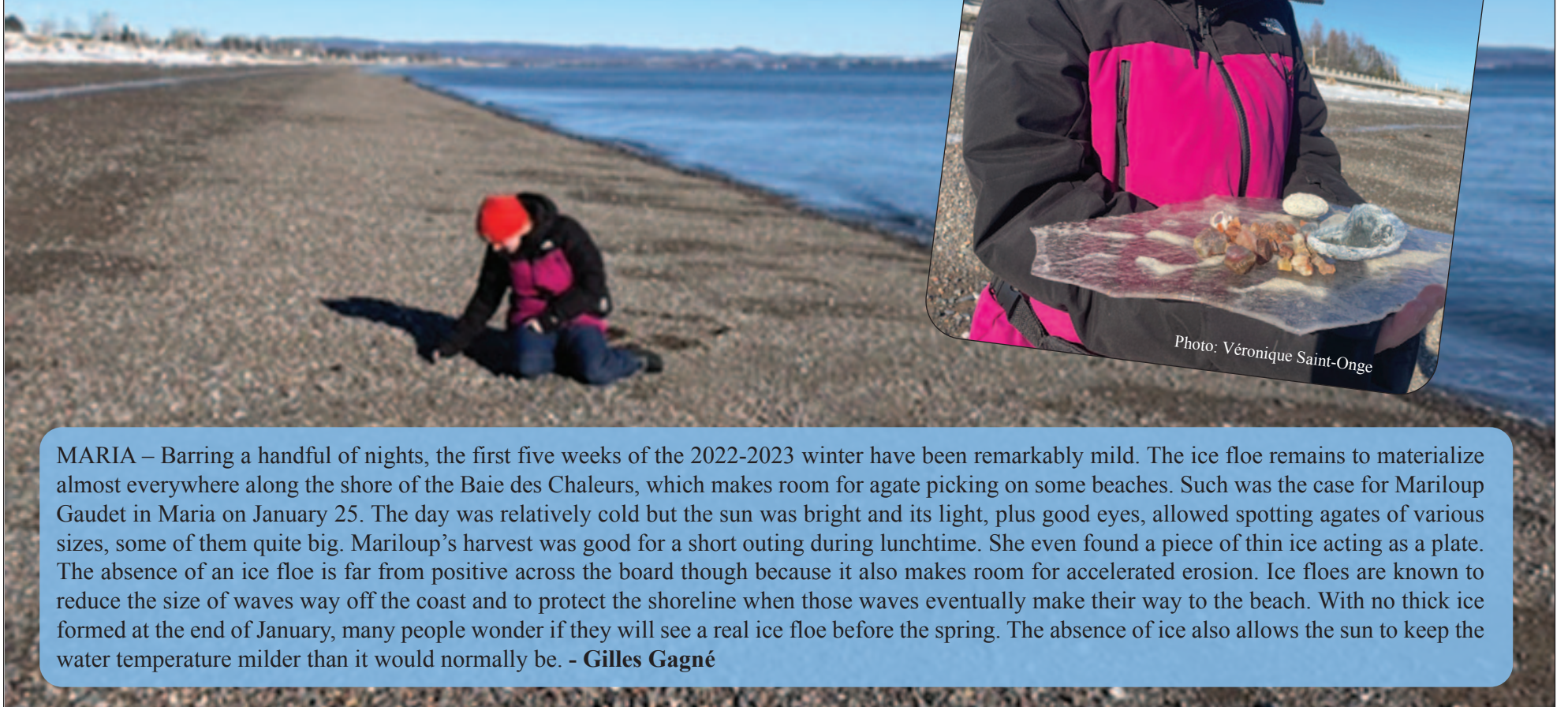


Photo: Véronique Saint-Onge

MARIA – Barring a handful of nights, the first five weeks of the 2022-2023 winter have been remarkably mild. The ice floe remains to materialize almost everywhere along the shore of the Baie des Chaleurs, which makes room for agate picking on some beaches. Such was the case for Mariloup Gaudet in Maria on January 25. The day was relatively cold but the sun was bright and its light, plus good eyes, allowed spotting agates of various sizes, some of them quite big. Mariloup's harvest was good for a short outing during lunchtime. She even found a piece of thin ice acting as a plate. The absence of an ice floe is far from positive across the board though because it also makes room for accelerated erosion. Ice floes are known to reduce the size of waves way off the coast and to protect the shoreline when those waves eventually make their way to the beach. With no thick ice formed at the end of January, many people wonder if they will see a real ice floe before the spring. The absence of ice also allows the sun to keep the water temperature milder than it would normally be. - Gilles Gagné

Snow crab outlook for 2023: It could be a tough year, according to Bill Sheehan

GILLES GAGNÉ

CARLETON – The 2023 snow crab season will likely not be as good as that of 2022 because market prices are still 50% down from what they were 10 months ago. Even if last year's prices were a bit disappointing, they still allowed Quebec snow crab fishermen to get the second highest global revenues in history, at \$196.6 million, a figure they would gladly welcome this year.

Bill Sheehan, vice-president of the E. Gagnon et Fils processing plant in Sainte-Thérèse-de-Gaspé, explains that a number of factors convince him to be careful about 2023, two months before the fishing season starts. The massive exports of Russian crab to Japan represent one factor that calls for cautiousness.

"Processing plants in Canada still have unsold inven-

tories left from last year. It is always hard to predict how a season will go. Last year, the sellers were saying at the Boston Seafood Show at the beginning of March that they had no inventories. So it was supposed to be a great season, with record prices. Finally, there were inventories left. This factor, added to Russian exports, caused the 2022 season to start to be less promising than anticipated," says Mr. Sheehan.

"Joe Biden's decision to ban snow crab imports from Russia in order to help Ukraine left room for promises. Up to 30 million pounds of crab supply were to be removed from our main market. That's 30% of the supply. The market was supposed to be hungry for our snow crab, however, the ban sort of backfired. The market price was high. The ban was not applied immediately in

March. It was delayed until June 30 because some American buyers had paid for these imports in advance. So, it had to be delivered. From there, Russian crab was sold at a lower price than ours," he adds.

From mid-April and on, a downward spiral followed, as the Russian crab was initially offered for one dollar less per pound.

"The Canadian crab sellers who didn't want to lose their market also cut their price by one dollar less than the Russians, who in return cut the price again. It didn't take long before the price was less than 50% of that set at the beginning of the processing season," stresses Bill Sheehan.

Prices dropped by more than 50%

At one point during the summer of 2022, sections of



Two months before the season starts, the snow crab industry stakeholders are worried

Photo: Robert Nicolas

crab were sold at \$6 per pound in American dollars, while it had been \$16 at the dawn of the season. In the meantime, Russian crab processors switched to another market, a well-known one.

"They are flooding the Japanese market with very af-

fordable crab prices. The Japanese get a good discount on that crab. If we take into account the possibility of a 13.5% quota increase in zone 12 (the southern Gulf of Saint Lawrence, where most Gaspesian crab fishermen

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Erosion: Transport Ministry prepares for the next 25 years

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - Shoreline erosion will be the biggest transportation issue during the next 25 years on the Gaspé Peninsula. This is affirmed by the former Transports Québec territorial director for Lower Saint Lawrence, Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands, Yves Berger, who now works in the deputy premier's office in Quebec City for special mandates across the province.

"There will be major erosion of the banks. You will have to work hard. It will require large investments in the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands. For me, this is the number one issue," says Mr. Berger without hesitation in an interview reviewing his last seven years at the head of the regional branch of the Transports Québec ministry.

"It is a file that I have led head-on and that my successor will lead head-on as well. We have 273 sites that we follow very closely, that we know there will be an imminence one day or another. We have projects in preparation, especially on the north side of the Gaspé Peninsula, but there are also some on the south side. These are very important mandates," says Mr. Berger, who points out that over the past few years, \$20 million has been invested in the fight against climate change.



Photo: N. Sergerie

Highway 132 in Haute-Gaspésie is the subject of several interventions to protect it from the onslaught of the sea. This was the case again last November between La Martre and Marsoui.

The former regional director believes from experience that the Gaspé Peninsula is particularly affected by the weather and the phenomenon does not only affect the erosion of the banks.

"We also mention the thaw in the spring with the Parc de la Gaspésie. In fact, there are several challenges in the Gaspé Peninsula," adds Mr. Berger, referring to the floods.

With each violent storm, eyes systematically turn to Haute-Gaspésie where Route 132 is particularly vulnerable between Cap-au-Renard and Gros-Morne.

"We are working hard on that. We have a lot of projects. There, we work a lot on proj-

ects like Mont-Louis, Anse-Pleureuse which has a particular sector, and Cloridorme has a particular sector (banc de Saint-Yvon). There are others that come to mind. In addition to fighting coastal erosion, we also fight snow avalanches in winter, rock slides and ice avalanches in spring. It is a particularly affected region," explains the former regional director who mentions that there is surveillance 24 hours a day.

A coastal erosion team is being created in Rimouski which will serve all of Quebec.

"The unit is taking shape. We have about fifteen people working: geomorphologists.

We want engineers in hydraulics, in project preparation, in project implementation, biologists. We will have a specialized team at the department based in the Lower Saint Lawrence. The core will be in Rimouski, but we will work with people in Gaspé, on the territory, who are close to the scene," explains Mr. Berger.

The idea proposed for several years now, to bring Highway 132 over the mountains, on former segments of Route 6, in Haute-Gaspésie, is unrealistic due to its cost, along with technical and maintenance challenges.

"We are better off improving what we have. You know the Parc de la Gaspésie. It would be a huge project. On the north side of the Gaspé, we are on rock. There are techniques that are coming up with our unit team. We are working with geotubes (a synthetic textile tube used to sediment sludge), we are going to work with groynes. We are looking at technologies that exist elsewhere in the world. It will be interesting in the coming years what we are going to develop," says Mr. Berger.

Hearings held by the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE), should begin in 2023 to explain what is being prepared and provide information to the population.

"There will be follow-ups to let people know what we are going to do to provide flexibility to work. Since, for each project, we need to have a BAPE, which does not make much sense. We have grouped the three regions (Lower Saint Lawrence, Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands) and we are going to make a bigger BAPE, but one that will be beneficial. In the short term, it may seem cumbersome, but in the long term, we will save time and operate more quickly when there are unforeseen events," says Mr. Berger.

The studies currently in progress will terminate in 2024-2025.



Yves Berger during a press briefing in 2017 to announce the work on the Cascapedia River bridge, in Cascapedia-Saint-Jules.

Four other elements highlighted by Yves Berger

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - In addition to coastal erosion, four other issues caught the attention of Yves Berger during his tenure as regional director of the Transports Ministry for the Lower Saint Lawrence, Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands.

A source of pride for him is the establishment of a co-ordination centre in Rimouski serving the Lower Saint Lawrence, Gaspé Peninsula, Magdalen Islands, North Shore, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean and the new region of Chibougamau-Baie-James.

In the Gaspé Peninsula, 16 cameras are connected to the centre and 21 others are planned. The centre has 44 cameras for the entire Lower Saint Lawrence, Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands region.



Photo: Archives, Ministry of Transport

The work carried out at the Pic de l'Aurore in Percé was enormous.

"Since we implemented this in 2017, we have had over 1.4 million clicks to view our cameras. We are very proud. We have a 24-hour team from October 15 to April 15. If there are events during the summer, we re-open the centre," says Mr.

Berger about this project which serves in winter for civil security.

Another element is the historic flooding of the Cascapedia River on May 8, 2017, which almost washed away the Highway 132 bridge over the Cascapedia River.

"We were very, very afraid of losing it completely. We were less than a day away and we thought we were going to lose spans," recalls Mr. Berger.

Two spans had been affected by the underwater erosion of three piles of the long structure.

"It still cost \$8 million for the repairs, but it was done in record time. We had to redo the design and get the plans back in motion. We put the bridge back into operation almost a year to the day. We are very proud of the team that worked on this bridge. It wasn't bank erosion. It was truly spring snowmelt. There had been a lot of snow during the winter and a very, very rapid melting in the spring. It had caused scouring at the base of certain piles which created a vortex and emptied the sand under the piles. We were re-

ally lucky not to have any mishaps with this event," said Mr. Berger with relief.

Inspections are carried out periodically on all the infrastructures of the regional district with a schedule designed according to the date of commissioning.

With climate change, every redone infrastructure is optimized for this new reality. "We are growing, we are improving compared to the 50-year and 100-year recurrences. All our structures have been redone as a result," said Mr. Berger as the process began with the first major floods in 2007 in the Gaspé region.

The fourth element is the reconfiguration of Highway 132 in the Pabos Mills and Newport neighbourhoods of

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Photo Courtesy of Port of Havre-Saint-Pierre

The port of Havre-Saint-Pierre.

A decisive year for the Côte-Nord-Anticosti-Gaspé Peninsula crossing

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

HAVRE-SAINT-PIERRE - The management of the Port of Havre-Saint-Pierre estimates that 2023 will be the year of the crossing between the North Shore, Anticosti Island and Rivière-au-Renard.

“This is the year of the realization of the project,” says the director of the port, Odessa Thériault.

“We probably won't have a ferry in 2023 but, at least, we'll know that we're working on solid foundations. We really think it's this year. With the steps in place and the successive meetings with our intermediaries, we are quite confident that 2023 is the year when the project must materialize,” adds the director.

Since November, the project has been presented to the office of the Minister of Tourism, to that of the Minister responsible for the Lower Saint Lawrence, Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands regions, Maïté Blanchette-Vézina, as well as to the minister responsible for the North Shore, Kateri Champagne-Jourdain.

“We recently had a meeting with the minister (Champagne-Jourdain). We were able to discuss and bring things to light. For us, it is very important that we talk about the issue. It was important to push for this with our minister responsible. We are waiting to see if there will be a clear position on her part,”

says Ms. Thériault, who claims to have listened very well to the stakeholders.

“We did not have a closed door. We really had a good conversation. We had good questions which, we think, show the interest of these people,” she believes.

In the coming weeks, a first meeting will be held with the Ministry of Transport, the key player in unblocking the file.

“We are ready. We do not see why, all of a sudden, it would turn around,” says Ms. Thériault.

The file was also submitted as part of the pre-budget consultations organized by the Finance Ministry with a view to preparing the 2023-2024 budget of the Government of Quebec.

“We think this is really a great opportunity to defend this project. We can expect something positive. We do not know to what extent. We do not know at what level for now. Something has to be unlocked because 2023 is a key year for something to happen,” says the director.

Daily service between Havre-Saint-Pierre, Anticosti Island and Rivière-au-Renard would be deployed over a minimum operating period of 160 days per year, from June to November.

The roll-on-roll-off ship will be able to accommodate up to 350 passengers, 55 to 65 cars and 10 to 15 trucks for the transport of goods.

A study estimated the deficit of the crossing be-

tween \$5 million and \$7 million per year.

Two operating models are suggested: either that Quebec finance the ship, absorb part of the deficit and finance the operation, or else be entirely borne by the Société des traversiers du Québec.

The ferry schedule would depart from Havre-Saint-Pierre and take 7.5 hours to get to Anticosti, make a 4-hour stopover and take 5 hours to dock at Rivière-au-Renard. The return would be the next day.

This idea dates back 30 years after the failure of the crossing between Rivière-au-Renard and the Côte-Nord between 1994 and 1996.

The project experienced a new chapter in 2014.

The Liberal government of Philippe Couillard commissioned a study published in April 2019 which concluded that such a crossing with a used ship would have generated an operating deficit of \$7.5 million for the years 2025-2030, a bill which would have risen to \$12.9 million with a new ship.

The infrastructure cost with the use of a new vessel was estimated at \$136 million and the cost estimated at \$44 million with a used vessel.

Infrastructure improvements were \$5 million in Rivière-au-Renard, \$4.3 million in Havre-Saint-Pierre and \$6 million in Port-Menier.

The potential customers had been estimated at nearly 33,000 on an annual basis for the period of 2025-2030.

Police report

Police officers from the major crimes squad of the Sûreté du Québec, in collaboration with police officers from the Rocher-Percé MRC detachment in Chandler, arrested four individuals on January 23, in addition to conducting a seizure of a large quantity of narcotics in Grande-Rivière. Three of the four suspects were arrested after trying to flee from the police in a vehicle traveling on Saint-Hilaire Range. A car chase over a few kilometres, followed by a chase on foot, finally resulted in the arrest of the three fugitives.

A search aboard the suspects' vehicle led to the seizure of a large quantity of narcotics, including 37,000 methamphetamine pills, approximately 1,920 grams of cocaine, 100 THC vapes and a large sum of cash. The vehicle in which the narcotics were discovered was also seized. The two men in the vehicle were arrested. Jocelyn Nicolas, a 45-year-old Grande-Rivière man, is facing several charges related to possession and trafficking of narcotics as well as three breaches of probation. Philippe Demeule, aged 43, from the Anse-au-Griffon sector of Gaspé, faces charges of drug trafficking.

“As the police investigation is ongoing, other charges could be added to those already known. The other people arrested on January 23 could soon face charges. A quantity of 37,000 methamphetamine pills is huge. It is that many drugs that won't reach our schoolyards. Methamphetamine is often used by minors, as it doesn't smell, which is not the case for cannabis. It is affordable and it is easy to hide because the pills are small,” says Sûreté du Québec spokesperson, Sgt. Claude Doiron.

A 41-year-old woman from Grande-Rivière was also in the vehicle. She was released after being questioned, pending further proceedings. Immediately following these three arrests, a search took place in a residence on a Petit-Pabos Road, also in Grande-Rivière. There, the police officers seized 30 methamphetamine pills, four THC vapes and a firearm improperly stored. The resident of the premises, a 52-year-old man, was arrested by the police and then released. He and the 41-year-old woman will be summoned to appear in court at a later date. The police operation took place following information received from the public last fall.

Jocelyn Nicolas will also face a charge of fleeing from the police and dangerous driving. He will come back to the Percé Courthouse on March 13. He was kept in custody. For his part, Philippe Demeule was supposed to return to court on January 26 for his bail hearing but the procedure was postponed due to a snowstorm. The date remained to be set as the SPEC was reaching its deadline.

The Sûreté du Québec reminds the public that any information relating to the trafficking or production of narcotics may be communicated at any time, in a confidential manner, to the criminal information centre of the Sûreté du Québec at 1-800-659-4264.

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A 60-year-old man from Sainte-Anne-des-Monts, Daniel Lévesque, died of his injuries following a January 24 car accident that took place in the Tourelle part of that town at about 10:30 a.m. Mr. Lévesque stopped at the intersection of a secondary street in order to get on Highway 132. For a reason that is still under investigation, he turned as another vehicle was passing on the highway. “It was a lateral collision. The driver was seriously injured but he was still conscious upon the intervention of police officers. He talked to them. The lady sitting in the passenger seat was also seriously injured but her life is not threatened. Both were hospitalized in Sainte-Anne-des-Monts. Unfortunately, the driver died of his injuries a few hours after being admitted to the hospital,” explains Sgt. Claude Doiron. The driver and the two children in the other vehicle sustained very light injuries but were also sent to the hospital as a precaution. “Highway 132 was closed for a certain period of time to allow a technician to reconstitute the circumstances of the accident. At first glance, no foul play is suspected here,” adds Sgt. Doiron.

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Gilles Gagné

Commentary

The Bank of Canada should have delayed its last policy rate hike

The Bank of Canada, which manages our currency, increased its policy interest rate, by 0.25% on January 25, which brought it to 4.50%. It is the eighth consecutive increase. Commercial banks use the policy rate to determine the interest rate people borrowing money have to pay.

The policy rate decisions over the last year represent the factor that has sparked fast-rising mortgage rates since January 2022. Considering the high value of properties in most parts of the country, a lot of citizens have experienced a sudden adjustment in mortgage payments, ranging between a few hundred dollars per month to thousands of dollars.

The Bank of Canada is doing this because in its monetary policy management, fighting inflation stands as a priority, if not the priority. It is relatively normal although some economists are quick to mention that skyrocketing mortgage payments also contribute to inflation. It represents vanishing money affecting people’s capacity to make ends meet. Rising mortgages also affect rent, because apartment building owners are adjusting what they charge to tenants according to the overall housing market.

The January 25 policy rate hike called by the Bank of Canada is questionable for many reasons, including its effects on mortgages and rent, but there is more.

There is currently a lot of uncertainty regarding the direction the Canadian and the worldwide economy are headed. The goal sought by the Bank of Canada’s rising policy rate is to slow down the economy to fight inflation. The policy rate break would come in March once that bank’s decision makers are sure that the world’s growth is under control.

There is already an economic slowdown per-

ceived in the country though. The Bank of Canada used the 7 to 7.2% inflation rate of last year to justify the January 25 hike of 0.25% but most indicators published over the last three to six months reveal that the inflation rate is currently 3% or so, very close to the 2% rate considered normal.

The inflation rate of the first part of 2022 was largely attributable to logistics adjustment problems in the worldwide supply chain of manufacturers. Most experts affirm that supply chain problems accounted for 50% of the inflation rate. Those problems played a much smaller role lately and it is permitted to think that they are essentially solved.

Another inflationary factor, the cost of fuel, has fallen over recent months. In the context of the war triggered by Russia in Ukraine, fuel costs remain subjected to various currents but they are not a major contributor to inflation right now.

The Bank of Canada put emphasis on labour market data to justify its decision to increase the policy rate, pointing out that the scarcity of workers is too high, and that the unemployment rate is reaching record low levels.

The Bank of Canada management seems to have forgotten that the labour market adjustment is always lagging behind other indicators, a phenomenon that couldn’t be more true in a context of labour shortage. A lot of employers will keep their workers as long as possible before laying them off because they are afraid of losing them to other businesses less affected by a potential economic slump. So basing the policy rate increase on current labour market statistics was a rather bad idea.

Secondly, holders of mortgages characterized by a flexible interest rate will likely pay more sooner than later. This affects between 30 and 35% of mortgage holders. They would likely have appreciated a break on that front, considering the cumulative financial effects of the last year.

Too optimistic?

The eighth consecutive policy rate increase seems to rest on an optimistic hypothesis that the economy is still flying high. However, the Bank of Canada decision followed recent announcements of hundreds of thousands of layoffs in the United States.

Most Canadian commercial banks, the National Bank among others, are not as optimistic though.

Their economists think that the worldwide slowdown has already started. Some stock market experts feel the same. It is always difficult to trust commercial banks and stock market analysts because people wonder if some schemes are feeding their comments but this time around, their cautiousness looks justified.

Moreover, January and February are generally quiet months, consumption-wise, following the much heated holiday season. A quiet period contributes to a slowdown.

The Bank of Canada governor ,Tiff Macklem, and his board of directors committed to a break regarding the policy rate, which could technically be revised on March 8. They said that barring unexpected shocks in the Canadian or world’s economy, that break will occur.

Truth be told, the Bank of Canada aligned its 2022 and early 2023 position along with that of most leading central banks evolving in industrialized countries. Stéphane Marion, chief economist at the National Bank, even says that such cohesion was never seen among central banks. It makes predictions for the coming months quite difficult to do, he adds.

We are far from experiencing the policy rates of the 1980-1981-1982 era. At one point, the Bank of Canada policy rate almost reached 18% back then. However, the cost of housing was way less 40 years ago, and so was its impact on owners. However, such high interest rates, considering that commercial banks charge a few per cent more, made a lot of people surrender and give up on their mortgage, as they couldn’t even pay interest fees.

Housing is not supposed to cost more than 30% of a well-balanced family budget. Tell this to the people living in Toronto or Vancouver and they will cry, although they are already aware that their situation is out of control.

Interest rates will likely fall between now and mid-2024, according to most commercial banks’ analysts. Holders of a flexible or fixed interest rate mortgage can, therefore, expect a reduction, once their renewal time will come in the latter case.

The current situation highlights our governments’ negligence, both Canadian and Quebec, over the last years regarding the necessity to stimulate the construction of affordable housing. It is a totally different issue than the Bank of Canada policy rate decisions but the impact wouldn’t have been the same with a housing strategy adapted to people’s needs.



Cynthia Dow

Guest Commentary

We need an Estates-General on healthcare!

Given the shocking news stories lately about our healthcare system, Canadians are rightly worried about what lies ahead: nurses on strike, patients lying on stretchers in hallways, surgery wait times growing, doctors overextended — something's got to give. This past month, the death of two women due to slow access to care at Nova Scotia emergency wards has people in that province up in arms.

Here, in the Baie des Chaleurs area, we are very fortunate to be served by Maria Hospital. Almost everyone who has to go to the hospital is pleased with the caring attitude of the staff, and the wait times for tests and treatments are generally acceptable. But

there, too, the halls around the emergency ward are sometimes filled with people on stretchers, and staff are burning out at an alarming rate.

Canadians used to be rightly proud of our universal healthcare, which is supposedly “free for everyone” and leaves nobody behind. Sadly, that dream has become a very tattered nightmare. The pandemic has shown us that disparities still exist and are costing people their lives. Our healthcare system is reeling from years of inattention, top-heavy management approaches, low wages, crippling bureaucracy — and lobbying pressures from those who want to privatize it to line their own pockets.

There is a lot of information out there about how our healthcare system could, and should, be saved. Recently Ontario and Alberta have opted for increased use of private and for-profit clinics to ease the strain on the medicare system. I could not disagree more with this approach.

One of the first things we learned during the pandemic was that the rate of death was shockingly high in privately owned seniors’ residences compared to public residences. When the bottom line is your main concern, client care is obviously not the top priority. Do we really want our entire system to be run that way? We have only to look south of the border to see that private healthcare is costly to individuals, dis-

criminate against the poor and racialized, and does not produce the best results. The US ranks below Canada in healthcare outcomes on almost every measure.

I am no expert on how to manage a healthcare system, but I have worked on committees with managers

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CONTRIBUTORS:
Cynthia Dow,
Jeanie LeLacheur

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

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in the system and with frontline personnel. I know that, at least here in Quebec, frontline workers are frustrated with the amount of paperwork - filling out forms takes up so much of their day they have little time for their patients.

As an outsider looking in, I believe that we also have far more managers than strictly necessary, and this leads not only to a skewed salary scale, but more administrative barriers for frontline staff to jump over, around, or under in order to do their real jobs: helping patients.

Our system is also too doctor- and hospital-centric. Years ago when I lived in Ottawa I was amazed when a nurse practitioner dealt with my strep throat infection immediately, rather than having to make an appointment to see my family doctor, which would probably have taken a week or more. The two professionals worked together in a small clinic: the nurse practitioner took on minor issues like my sore throat, and was licensed to prescribe the antibiotics I needed. This left the doctor free to deal with much more serious cases.

Last September, an Angus Reid study reported that 6 million Canadians do not have access to a family doctor. Surely we could put nurse practitioners and other professionals to better use throughout the system, and create multi-purpose clinics to help relieve the pressure on emergency rooms.

In fact, on January 24, the CBC news program The Current interviewed former Health Minister Dr. Jane Philpott about a recent study released by the Public Policy Forum which advocates for health teams to deliver care to Canadians. Quebec’s CLSCs and UMFs are a good example of what can be done, but they need more human resources to function effectively. The report recommends that the federal government tie some funding to the development of such teams across the country.

I am also adamant that decisions about public health precautions should be left firmly in the hands of knowledgeable health authorities and not politicians. While the Legault government started out well in handling the COVID pandemic, in the face of a small minority it has backed away from masking and other measures that could have saved hundreds of lives. Here in the Gaspésie as of January 2022, there had

been a total of 4,500 COVID cases and 46 deaths. In the past year there have been an additional 8,000 cases — a twofold increase (and likely wildly underestimated) — and another 43 deaths. By no stretch of the imagination is this pandemic over as the government would have us believe.

To really revolutionize our healthcare system, we need to hear from workers at every level: we need an estates-general. I would like to see at least one full week of meetings with representatives of frontline workers: from custodians to ambulance technicians to nurses, assistants, technicians, social workers and managers at every level working together to reshape our system. And the event should include representatives of patients as well.

Meanwhile, can the average citizen do anything about this situation? Yes! First of all, we need to take good care of our own health. Secondly, we need to be kind and patient with the healthcare professionals we interact with: they are exhausted and merit our deep respect and our compassion. Thirdly, we need to tell governments what we expect from our system: free, good quality services for everyone. Don’t let our universal health care die!



Emma Buckley

Commentary

A flower that’s worth the wait

The email from my mum was headed, simply, *Agave*. Below the header was a photo of a large grey-green plant with long, spiky leaves unfurling from its centre, like the waving arms of some strange sea creature. I recognized it instantly as the plant that grew in the rockery below mum’s clothesline, a fixture in my childhood memories. We kids didn’t know what type of plant it was (an aloe? a cactus?), we just knew as youngsters playing 44-Home (hide and seek, Aussie style), or as teenagers reluctantly hanging out the washing that it was best to steer clear of its spiny leaves.

Mum’s excitement virtually bounced off the screen. “Sometimes you have to wait a long time to experience something as remarkable as this!” she enthused. Having quietly spent the last 50 years in the rockery behind the family home in Australia, the plant - *Agave Americana* (a native of Mexico but quite happy in dry climates worldwide) – had undergone a dramatic transformation. For the first time, it was preparing to flower.

Agave Americana’s entire life is spent preparing for this single goal. Slowly, patiently, it builds up enough nutrients to push a single stalk out of its crown of leaves and up into the sky. The stalk – shaped like a spear of asparagus - is massive, reaching up to 30

feet in height. In mum’s photos, my teenage niece is as tall as the plant, and the flower stalk is quadruple this height (almost as high as the traveller’s palm beside it, which was never a favourite of our neighbour’s due to its regular shedding of fronds on his side of the fence). Branching off the agave stalk at different places are clusters of pale green buds shaped like slim fingers, hinting at the flowers to come. Once it flows, the plant will start to die, its energy exhausted.

Despite being dubbed the ‘century plant’, in reality most agaves flower before thirty years of age. There are plenty of examples of late bloomers like my mum’s agave, however. An *Agave Americana* planted in the Botanical Gardens at the University of Michigan in 1934 finally sent up its flowering stalk in 2014, at the ripe old age of 80. It may be that it took one of Australia’s wettest years on record – 2022 - to nudge mum’s agave towards its life’s goal.

If we value things by their scarcity, we can consider the agave flower as a valuable entity indeed. What other things happen only once in a lifetime, or take so long to come to fruition? A worthy love? An Olympic medal? The getting of wisdom? The agave flower teaches patience in an era of impatience. It is also a profound reminder of the countless miracles that occur in nature, many of which we’ll never know. The more conscious we are of these miracles, the more likely we are to feel awe, and to value and cherish our fellow living creatures – be they plants, animals, birds or insects.

“Did you know that it would take so long to flower?” I asked my mum, after she’d sent the email. “I did,” she said. “I wondered if I’d live long enough to see it.”

Mum sent us some new photos yesterday of the agave. In these latest snaps the green buds have burst open, revealing slender yellow flowers. The grey-green leaves at the base of the plant are already start-

ing to wilt; an ominous sign of what lies ahead. Happily, this end is linked to new beginnings. As it matures, *Agave Americana* produces many small “pups” or baby plants around its base, one of which mum replanted next to the mother plant. The photos reveal the younger plant nestled happily in the sun-warmed rockery, patiently awaiting its own moment of glory.



SNOWCRAB:

Cont'd from cover

fish), and expected quota increases in Newfoundland, we wonder what the market will be, with such a high supply. Will we see another downward spiral,” wonders Mr. Sheehan.

The situation can change quickly sometimes, last year being a testimony of that.

“The markets picked up a bit recently. We are certainly wishing for a betterment of

the situation, that the current inventories will go away, and that the price will increase. We (snow crab processors) went a bit far last year and we got caught because there are other sources of proteins that came as substitution products in that inflation context. Russian exports were not the only problem in 2022,” he says.

Currently, in Newfoundland and Labrador, snow crab processors are putting pressure on the Government of

Canada in order to convince the Japanese to restrain Russian crab imports. The Atlantic province industry reports unsold inventories reaching 30% of the snow crab volume processed last year.

Bill Sheehan points out that E. Gagnon et Fils also possesses unsold snow crab inventories. “The 30% proportion might not be far from our situation. At the current market price, I would sell it all today but we are holding

some in an attempt to see a price increase.”

Meanwhile, between now and the beginning of the 2023 season, the Gaspé Peninsula snow crab fishermen and processors are putting emphasis on a totally different issue, as they are again trying to convince the Federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans to start fishing as early as they can, by the end of March if possible, to avoid interactions with right whales.

“The winter is mild so far

and there is no ice. The season starts at the end of March in Rimouski in zone 17, and in zone 12A which is in the Rivière-au-Renard area. The only factor breaking us usually is the situation at the New Brunswick wharves, due to the presence of ice. We could likely avoid that this year. Right whales might arrive early as well. The best way to avoid entanglements is to start fishing when they (the whales) are not around,” concludes Mr. Sheehan.

Year 2022 was a good year for the port of Gaspé

Tonnage more than doubled compared to 2021

GILLES GAGNÉ

GASPÉ – The Port of Gaspé experienced a good year in 2022, as the tonnage handled by its various customers more than doubled compared to that of 2021. It went from 92,955 metric tonnes in 2021 to 210,804 metric tonnes last year, a jump largely attributable to the traffic generated by LM Wind Power.

It was the third consecutive increase in tonnage handled by the port of Gaspé, following 80,502 tonnes in 2019 and 85,984 tonnes in 2020. The revenues received by the Société portuaire du Bas-Saint-Laurent et de la Gaspésie and linked to the port of Gaspé activities went from \$155,799 in 2021 to \$312,853 last year.

The number of ships that stopped at the Sandy Beach facility decreased slightly between 2021 and 2022, from 109 to 102.

The two types of traffic related to LM Wind Power increased in 2022, windmill blades, for 102,162 metric tonnes, compared to 11,458 in 2021, and equipment for the expansion of the Augustines’ industrial park plant. In the latter case, it increased from 264 to 2,933 metric tonnes.

In the windmill blade case, the tonnage is an equivalent measure for revenue purposes. The calculation is in fact an adjustment from a volume in cubic metres, since the blades loaded in Gaspé were light, around 10 tonnes per unit.

“We are expecting an increase in wind energy related traffic in 2023 with the production of the giant blades by LM Wind Power, in volume



Photo: Société portuaire du Bas-Saint-Laurent et de la Gaspésie

The port of Gaspé’s windmill blade traffic has intensified since April 2022 and will only increase over the next few years.

and weight,” points out Anne Dupéré, president and chief executive officer of the Société portuaire du Bas-Saint-Laurent et de la Gaspésie, the corporation founded by the Quebec government to manage the ports of Gaspé, Matane, Rimouski and Gros-Cacouna.

At one point this year, LM Wind Power will export giant windmill blades to the northeast coast of the United States, where they will be installed on offshore wind farms. These blades measure 107 metres in length, and they are the biggest ever made in the Americas.

De-icing salt traffic also increased in 2022 in Gaspé, as 26,874 metric tonnes were unloaded in 2022 compared to 18,991 in 2021.

“The Port of Gaspé is now serving almost the entire peninsula in salt. It is unloaded there and then distributed by trucks,” says Ms. Dupéré.

The total of 102 vessels

includes some ships that stopped at Sandy Beach for other purposes than loading or unloading freight.

“Revenues linked to tonnage are important but some other revenues come from ships that are making stops because there is a storm and they need a shelter, or repairs. In Gaspé, 12 of the cruise ships that came in the bay berthed at the wharf. This generates revenues but it is not the case when they stay at anchor,” explains Anne Dupéré.

Gasoline unloaded at the Sandy Beach wharf amounted to 32,541 metric tonnes in 2022, a slight drop from the 33,173 tonnes of 2021. Other petroleum products increased a bit, from 29,068 tonnes in 2021 to 29,613 last year.

Considering the four ports of the Société portuaire network, Gaspé surpassed Rimouski for tonnage in 2022, as 157,712 metric tonnes were loaded or unloaded in the main town of the Lower

Saint Lawrence region. In fact, Gaspé almost passed Gros-Cacouna, coming only 2,240 tonnes short of the port serving the Rivière-du-Loup area.

Significant upgrades worth \$6.3 million were carried out at the Port of Gaspé over the last year in order to make room for the storage of windmill blades and facilitate their loading on the wharf. With road work, the amount totals \$7.8 million and this is not counting the special road currently under construction between the LM Wind Power plant and the port, a \$20 million venture.

The Quebec government bought the two buildings that were demolished to increase the storage space at the port of Gaspé. One of the buildings was an old refrigerated warehouse used for fishery products.

The ports of Rimouski and Matane will eventually benefit from vital upgrading work, as their wharves have not been deeply refurbished in more than 50 years. Although a warehouse was built in Matane in the 1990s, and expanded afterwards, the wharf’s structure was considered worn out a few years ago

and only emergency work allowed the west side of the port, where pulp and paper products are loaded between 30 and 40 times a year, to be maintained. Other types of freight transits in Matane.

“Matane has the smallest berthing space but it is the most active port of our network, tonnage-wise, and the challenge over the next years will be to maintain commercial activities and upgrade it. A new berth will be added,” explains Anne Dupéré, who doesn’t expect work to kick off before 2026 in that case.

The four wharves were transferred from the federal government, which had neglected three of them for decades, to the Quebec government in March 2020. An envelope of \$150 million accompanied the agreement. About \$80 million of the Quebec money is earmarked for Matane, \$40 million for Rimouski and the rest shared by Gros-Cacouna and Gaspé. The Port of Gaspé was completely rebuilt in 1985 and remains in fair shape.

This envelope will not fill all the needs of the four ports but about 60%. The Quebec government is expected to extend the additional part of 40%.

The Port of Matane will likely need in excess of \$100 million for the reconstruction of the existing commercial wharf and the addition of a berth. The east side of the port, consisting essentially of two ramps, one for the car ferry and one for the rail ferry, have either been replaced or rebuilt recently.

During the last years of activity of the Murdochville smelter, up to 400,000 tonnes of freight was transiting at the port of Gaspé annually. Between 1999 and 2002, the smelter was depending exclusively on imported ore, following the closure of the underground mine. Ore imports were frequent even when the mine was active.

Traffic over the last three years

(in metric tonnes)

PORT	2020	2021	2022
Gaspé	85 984	92 955	210 804
Gros-Cacouna	143 185	151 510	213 044
Rimouski	150 507	142 752	157 712
Matane	304 847	344 409	319 410
TOTAL	684 523	731 626	900 970

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The Conservative Party of Quebec is growing in the Gaspé Peninsula

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - The leader of the Conservative Party ended a whirlwind visit to Eastern Quebec by stopping in Gaspé on January 24 to meet about twenty supporters in a restaurant in Gaspé.

Éric Duhaime came to the region for the first time in June 2021 and notes that the number of members is growing in the two Gaspé ridings.

"I am here in Gaspé because we want to professionalize the party. We have reached another stage in the growth of our party. It was excusable a year ago: everything was going fast and business was a bit off. We have four years ahead of us. We have resources. We want to make sure in the next election that the political offering will be more professional, more credible. This is the work to which I invite activists," explains Mr. Duhaime in an interview on the sidelines of the meeting with about twenty party members.

From a handful of supporters in 2021, the party now has 215 members in Gaspé and 240 in Bonaventure.

Disappointed at not having a representative in the National Assembly, the Conservative leader turns this situation to his advantage by saying that he has more time to tour the province. He has visited 45 constituencies since the start of his tour.

In the Gaspé Peninsula he



Photo: N. Sergerie

Éric Duhaime had dinner with supporters during his visit to Gaspé on January 24.

met the mayors of Gaspé and Sainte-Anne-des-Monts and the prefect of Haute-Gaspésie, in addition to business people. "It allows us to have the pulse (of the citizens) and to develop according to local needs and realities. Each region has its own dynamics. I confess. It is one of the regions that I have visited the least. During the campaign, we went where we had the highest concentration of votes/chances of winning," admits Mr. Duhaime.

In an account of the visit, the conservative leader mentions labour shortages, exploitation of resources, housing, decentralization and tax reform at the municipal level.

Decentralization will be a

key element of its platform which is under construction. "It's one of my top priorities. By definition, Conservatives want to bring power closer to citizens. It is a discourse compatible with people in the regions. We want your elected officials and services to be closer to you. It is not up to environmentalists from Montreal or civil servants from Ottawa or Quebec City to decide what is good for the Gaspésians," says Mr. Duhaime.

The debate between caribou protection and logging also caught his attention, after meeting with individuals from the logging industry.

"It's easy to say in Montreal we're for the caribou and we don't care about jobs in the

Gaspé but, here, it's another reality. I feel that people (Gaspésians) are more sensitive to finding a balance. It is an industry that has always been present. We think there is a way to reconcile the two and not lose hundreds of jobs in the region. This is the kind of sensitivity that we do not hear from civil servants in Montreal or from Montreal ecologists," explains the Conservative leader.

Éric Duhaime does not want to promise anything and gives himself four years to do "serious and meticulous work".

This is why he toured the province before proposing a decentralization plan. "To make sure how we can propose an ambitious and detailed plan and how we want to see a Quebec of the regions. We are still squabbling against Ottawa to decentralize to Quebec, but it seems that when it happens in Quebec, the same discourse of decentralization to the regions is no longer good. There is something incoherent on a theoretical level," explains Mr. Duhaime who wants to make sure that the money will follow. The transport component was also addressed with the difficulties, particularly in air transport and \$500 tickets.

"It's also another problem and with a population boom (that the Gaspé Peninsula is experiencing), it will become more and more pressing because these people will want to see their friends, their employ-

ers because they will be working remotely. We are not suited to meet the demand. The CAQ will have to propose constructive solutions in the coming months," says Mr. Duhaime.

Regarding the conspiracy label sometimes attached to the party during the health crisis, Éric Duhaime mentions that, if the pandemic had not happened, he would not be in politics.

"I returned to politics because I felt my civil rights were violated and I saw four parties repeating the same thing. Why did the Conservatives stand up and say: this does not make sense? It carries over to other areas. When Pierre Fitzbiggon, the Quebec Minister of the Economy, says that you have to lower the thermostat to 18 degrees or start the dishwasher at 3 a.m., it's none of his business," says Mr. Duhaime.

According to Éric Duhaime, the health crisis has become a pretext to interfere in the lives of citizens.

"What has scared me for two or three years in Quebec is not just the question of the health crisis. It's the fact that the government has found a new way to interfere in our lives and a lot of people aren't protesting. The government can abuse and violate our rights and freedoms. This is what worries me as a citizen who is concerned about civil rights and individual freedoms," concludes the Conservative leader.

Action plan to improve CISSS management is 50% complete

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - Nearly nine months after the tabling of the damning report of the Auditor General of Quebec on its administrative performance, the Gaspé Peninsula Integrated Health and Social Services Centre claims to have achieved 50% of its action plan to improve administrative performance.

On May 11, 2022, Guylaine Leclerc submitted a report on the management and governance of the CISSS which reported a lack of rigor in hiring and the inadequate management of service contracts, work climate issues, poorly protected personnel information and lack of respect for the rules of governance.

The process already appeared to be progressing smoothly when last October, the president and CEO, Mar-

tin Pelletier, pointed out that approximately 38% of the actions out of the 65 detailed in the plan had been carried out. "We are satisfied to see that after half a year, the action plan that had emerged following the tabling of the report, we have reached 50% progress. At the same time, we were in action before the report was tabled and we knew that most of the actions were going to be put in place quickly. So it's not a surprise," says the organization's director of financial resources, Jean-Pierre Collette.

The major elements highlighted in the Auditor General's report have already been addressed. "We have carried out a revision of the regulations which define the processes for identifying potential conflicts of interest and especially the mitigation measures to be put in place so as not to leave room for the

appearance of a conflict of interest," explains the administrator.

The issuing of contracts and the hiring process were particularly targeted by this revision of the regulations.

"Another was to redefine the job posting process for executives and managers to ensure that each of the steps is well documented because it was an element of the report that was brought. The process was there, but it lacked documentation. It has been restructured and it allows us to support the decisions of the selection committees," adds the manager.

The hiring of a senior internal audit consultant will ensure that the actions of the plan are applied.

"We are giving ourselves the means to monitor progress and ensure that these changes bring concrete results to the shortcomings detected by the

Auditor General of Quebec," assures Mr. Collette.

The entire contracting process is under review and is beginning to take shape, but it is too early to assess the results.

"This will be the role of the senior internal audit advisor," says the director of financial resources.

The action plan is for a three-year period and a next progress meeting will be held next May with the Auditor General.

"At that time, the Auditor General will not position himself on his degree of satisfaction with the progress. It will only be done halfway through, in November 2023, where the Auditor General will make a proper progress report," says Mr. Collette.

The implementation of the action plan is part of an ongoing process of improvements in the administrative manage-

ment of the CISSS.

"It changes certain ways of doing things, but it's not an additional weight that is put on existing processes. It's just a different way of approaching them," he explains.

"If I give you the example of the process of posting an executive position: all the steps were already done. These are the same stages: there are pre-selection and selection committees. Now there are defined and uniform grids. We make sure to collect all the comments of the members of the selection committees. It's a better structure, a more efficient process and that's the goal of the action plan: to improve," he adds.

The Ministry of Health is not involved in the process. It received the initial action plan and will receive the progress report which will be submitted to the Auditor General next May.



Jean-François Kacou has been the Director General of Percé since July 2019.

Photo: N. Sergerie

PERCÉ: Director General leaves his position

NELSON SERGERIE
PERCÉ - In office since July 2019, the director general of the Town of Percé will leave his position on February 10.

Jean-François Kacou intends to pursue new projects and professional challenges, but he remains discreet about what happens next.

“Percé will always remain in my heart,” Mr. Kacou spontaneously says in an interview.

“These are personal projects. There is a new dimension in my personal life and possibly new professional challenges. I thought about it and decided to move on to another chapter of my life,” he adds.

Career highlights as director general

One project that comes to mind is the creation of the school of permaculture and agriculture in Val-d'Espoir, an initiative that was spearheaded by the community.

“The world believes in it when you come up with concrete ideas,” the director general mentions.

The future commercial street towards the Geopark in Percé is also among his feats, in particular the idea of creating asphalt with flexible plastics that are difficult to recycle otherwise.

“We know that we can make plastic disappear permanently through using it in our roads, without polluting and without making microplastics. This is a real innovation for Quebec and municipal infrastructure,” Mr. Kacou proudly explains.

The creation of the Rivière aux Émeraude Park and the Cultural and Congress Centre project also reflect his work. The element that will remain in people’s minds is the creation of the tourist fee. “It’s a revolution in Quebec. It overtook Percé. It affects the Magdalen Islands. Montreal looked at creating a consultation table on this. We have had calls to find out how to implement the fee. We had to speak to the UMQ (Union des municipalités du Québec) at their last convention in 2022. It’s great what Percé has done in less than four years in the municipal revolution,” explains the director.

He would, however, like to have the judgment on the legality of the tourist fee before leaving his position.

Opponents challenged its application in court on January 17 and 18. The decision is expected in the coming months.

“What comforts me is that after the trial, I am really confident by the argument of our lawyer but I was already before the Magdalen Islands adopted the regulation even though we were in a legal challenge. It is because they know that it is a municipal right granted by Quebec law,” says Mr. Kacou.

“I would have liked to send the press release to say that we won but we already won when the revolution was launched,” he adds.

Mr. Kacou mentions that he had a short-term personal game plan, and possibly a professional one, “but I don’t want to talk about it right now.”



Photo: Courtesy

The 14-inch pipe is at a depth of eight feet.

Highway 132 under analysis in downtown Chandler

NELSON SERGERIE
CHANDLER - The Quebec’s department of Transport is carrying out analyzes on Highway 132 in Chandler before allowing the reopening of the section affected by a break in a 14-inch main water pipe on January 15.

Pavement experts are carrying out various tests to determine whether traffic can resume across the entire width, on a reduced carriageway or alternately on this section built in the 1980s.

The mayor, Gilles Daraïche, explained that the instability of the ground could be the cause of the breakage since a fill of seven metres of forest debris from the Gaspésie Mill is under the road, which would cause its deformation in a recurring way.

Given the composition of the foundation, Transports Québec wants to ensure that there is no problem.

The process was initiated on January 23 with the Ministry of Transport to find a solution to repair the road between Jacques-Cartier and Hôtel de Ville streets.

During the break, part of the road was flooded near the post office.

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Journalist federation denounces the obstruction of work experienced by a SPEC journalist in Gaspé

GILLES GAGNÉ

GASPÉ - The Eastern Quebec section of the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec, the FPJQ, denounces the obstruction of journalist Nelson Sergerie's work and the attempts to intimidate him, while he was covering a situation of public interest in Gaspé on January 19.

After receiving photos from a source seeking to alert him to a major water infiltration at the Carrefour Gaspé shopping centre, Nelson Sergerie went to the scene to verify the situation for himself. Once on site, he saw that entire sections of certain businesses were closed and that merchandise had been moved or covered with tarps. Buckets were scattered in certain businesses and in the aisles of the shopping centre to collect the water leaking from the ceiling. The reporter then took photos of the scene.

The management of the

shopping centre refused to answer his questions. He was covering the news for SPEC and Paspebiac's CHNC radio station. On the other hand, Nelson Sergerie was able to interview business owners who all requested anonymity.

While the journalist was doing his job, the manager of the Carrefour Gaspé, Daniel Brousseau, who is also president of the Chamber of Commerce of the Côte-de-Gaspé, went to Mr. Sergerie, accompanied by two mall maintenance employees.

Mr. Brousseau then told him of his strong opposition to the production of the report, even threatening to call the Sûreté du Québec and sue him. One of the two employees also filmed the intervention before escorting the journalist to the exit.

"Threats, largely unsubstantiated, to scare an individual, show that the manager unfortunately seems more con-



Photo: N. Sergerie

cerned about his image than the well-being of merchants and customers," deplores the president of the FPJQ, Michael Nguyen. "This behavior is unacceptable and unfortunately still too common. The journalist here is doing his job, which is to inform the population and those who are directly affected by the problem. Rather than attacking the messenger, this manager should have taken the oppor-

tunity to give his version of the facts," add Mr. Nguyen.

The FPJQ specifies that, like anyone else, journalists are authorized to present themselves in public spaces with their cameras. This authorization also applies to private properties open to the general public, such as shopping centres.

"Journalists are there to observe and report the facts," says Johanne Fournier, presi-

dent of the FPJQ, Eastern Quebec section. Under no circumstances should they be hindered in their work, not by receiving threats or attempts at intimidation, especially since this is a place frequented by the general public. This kind of behavior undermines the freedom of the press and the public's right to information."

Nelson Sergerie's report was published in the January 25 issue of SPEC.

Ministry of the Environment receives report on the condition of McInnis Cement equipment

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

PORT-DANIEL-GASCONS - Ciment McInnis sent an initial expert report concerning all the equipment that did not require a complete shutdown of the plant on January 16 to the Ministry of the Environment, according to the order issued against the company on September 15.

The document covers all air emissions purification equipment that did not require the complete shutdown of the plant, a total of 49, according to the order.

These expert checks on this equipment were carried out in the fall of 2022.

The Environment department will analyze the report to ensure that it meets the expectations expressed in the ministry's order.

The next step will come no later than 30 days following the report, so no later than February 15, when the company must submit a control plan for dust and other atmospheric contaminants setting out the measures to implement the expert's recommen-

dations and containing a work schedule.

The plan must be approved by the ministry.

Moreover, following the last episode of dust in October, the ministry specified that the verifications are still in progress and if it concludes that there are breaches, the necessary follow-up will be taken to enforce the law in accordance with its directive on the treatment of breaches.

Since the issuance of the ministry's order between September and January 16, the company has complied with the requirements of the document, according to the ministry, which has not noted any exceedances of the atmospheric emission standards ap-

plicable to the cement plant since September.

However, it is specified that a penal investigation is underway in relation to exceedances of atmospheric emission standards that occurred before the issuance of the order.

Since penal proceedings could result from this investigation, no comment on this subject is made by the Ministry of the Environment.

It should be recalled that the order issued against the Port-Daniel-Gascons company came following highly publicized dust emissions in the summer of 2020 which recurred sporadically.

The document asked Cement McInnis to cease, upon

notification of the order, the discharge of dust and other atmospheric contaminants beyond the standards established in the operating authorization.

In addition, it was requested to grant a mandate to an independent expert recognized by the ministry to carry out an assessment of the proper functioning of all the air purification equipment and to propose measures and operating methods to permanently stop the emission of dust and other atmospheric contaminants beyond the standards established in the operating authorization and transmit, according to a set

schedule, the findings, conclusions and recommendations regarding the corrective measures to be implemented.

Quebec had also granted McInnis Cement that the inspection of the five process dust collectors connected to the three chimneys and other equipment requiring a total shutdown of the facilities be carried out during the annual maintenance period scheduled for next February and March.

The ministry recalled in the order that since 2019 several inspections had revealed various shortcomings relating to dust emissions into the atmosphere from the plant's facilities.

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Protect yourself from winter falls!

● DIANE SKINNER

Seniors know that a fall can have serious consequences. In winter, the snow and ice raise the concern about potential falls.

In Canada, a senior falls every 12 seconds, but can we reduce the risk of falling?

There are a few things that can be done to lessen the risk, besides just staying home! It is also helpful to have a plan if you fall when you are home alone.

Wear boots that offer good traction. Just like tires when the tread is low, worn-out boots need to be replaced. If you want an extra layer of protection, you can buy Snowtrax or any other brand of ice cleats, grippers or spikes that can be placed over boots and removed when indoors. Some boots even have retractable cleats built-in.

It is tempting to stay inside, and if you do, use that time to exercise and build up your strength and balance. Leg lifts are easy to do. Try balancing on one foot while standing behind a chair and extending the time that you can hold the pose. If you have the room, walk indoors. Any exercise will strengthen your fitness.

Slow down. Be aware of



Most falls happen close to home. Make certain that ice and snow are cleared from your entranceway.

the ground conditions. Underneath a fluffy snow covering may be ice. Step carefully and do not rush. If you have someone with you, take their arm for extra stability.

Most accidents happen close to home, likely because we are thinking about other things like where we are going or where we have been. Make sure that ice and snow are cleared from your entranceway.

Maintain good bone health. Cold temperatures are

especially hard on people who have arthritis. Maintain strong bones by eating a diet high in calcium, including dark green vegetables and dairy products. Ask your doctor about supplements.

Do you have a “safety net?” If you go outside alone, how would you get help if you have a fall? Having an emergency plan is important. A cell phone might be helpful. Buying an alert device can also be helpful if you fall in your home.

It’s cold outside, make soup!

● DIANE SKINNER

There is a storm howling and the snow and ice are piling up. The winds are whipping, and you are not going to make a trek to the grocery store today. Why not make soup in the slow cooker? The smells will be wafting all day and come supper time you will be grateful for a hearty, yet easy to make, soup. You likely have most of these ingredients in the house and substitutions are perfectly fine. You may not have frozen meatballs in the

freezer, but they are worth picking up for future storm days. And there will be more storms!

This recipe is called Pantry Minestrone because you may have all the ingredients on hand.

- Pantry Minestrone Soup**
- 1 tetra pack of chicken or beef broth
 - 1 can of diced tomatoes
 - 1 cup water
 - About a dozen frozen meatballs
 - ½ cup of macaroni shells



The winds are howling, and the snow is piling up. Use ingredients you have on hand to make Pantry Minestrone soup!

- 1 diced onion
 - 3 cups of frozen mixed vegetables
 - 1 or 2 cans of kidney beans
 - 1 tbsp. oregano
 - 1 tbsp. basil
- Put all ingredients into a slow cooker (crock pot). Place on low heat for about 8 hours.

Substitutions:

Don’t have meatballs? Add sausages cut into bite-sized pieces or browned lean ground beef. Instead of meatballs, add a package of diced firm tofu. The tofu, which is flavourless, will pick up all the other flavours. Have leftover chicken? Add that instead of meatballs. Add a handful of spinach in the last few minutes before serving. If you like it hot, add hot sauce when serving soup. Serve the soup with whatever bread you have on hand for dipping. If you have a baguette, serve it with cold butter.

How easy was that?

Reflections

by

Diane Skinner Flowers



America is a gun

England is a cup of tea.	Holland is a wooden shoe.
France, a wheel of ripened brie.	Hungary, a goulash stem.
Greece, a short, squat olive tree.	Australia, a kangaroo.
America is a gun.	America is a gun.

Brazil is football on the sand.	Japan is a thermal spring.
Argentina, Maradona's hand.	Scotland is a highland fling.
Germany, an oompah band.	Oh, better to be anything
America is a gun.	than America as a gun.

This poem, *America is a Gun*, is written by Brian Bilston, a British poet and it has been widely shared online. The news from the United States this week is horrific with three mass shootings within days in California. That adage, “guns don’t kill people. People kill people rings hollow.” Seems to me that without guns, especially assault type rifles, the body count would be significantly lower. The United States has had more mass shootings than any other country. Shooters either die by suicide afterwards, are captured or killed by law enforcement officers.

Mass shooters are predominantly male, in fact close to 98% are men. The average age of the shooters is 34 and 50% are white, 20% black, 8% Latino, 6% Asian, 4% Middle Eastern and 2% Native American. These statistics, just like any mass shooting, are shocking, but the fact that these crimes are almost exclusively committed by men is quite alarming.

Access to guns has been cited as a reason for the high rate of mass shootings in the U.S. The United States has the highest per capita gun ownership in the world. For every 100 Americans there are 120 guns. The next closest country for gun ownership is Yemen where there are 50 guns for every 100 people. States that have more permissive gun laws have a higher rate of mass shootings. Guns kill people. Can anything be done about the startlingly high rate of gun ownership in the U.S.? Democrats support laws requiring permits, banning assault weapons with the capacity to kill high numbers of people quickly and universal background checks. The number of illegal guns in the United States is shockingly high. America is a gun culture.

Another factor to consider is mental health. At least a third of all mass shootings in the United States are committed by people with serious mental illness. Gun violence is linked to the mental health crisis in that country. One theory is that mass shootings are a form of “angry suicide.” These acts are premeditated, and suicidal thoughts are intertwined with these acts.

The mass shooters are almost exclusively male, and is it because men tend more to violent acts? That theory is too simple. Some psychologists feel that it is that men, more than women, externalize their problems. They may look for others to blame and this fuels anger and potentially violence. When women resort to violence, their weapon of choice is not typically a gun and that may be attributable to socialization. Some mass shootings are “copycat” crimes. A man may see himself and his problems in another mass shooter. Some even study the details of a mass shooting to pattern and duplicate what happened before.

America is a gun, but what can be done to stop mass shootings? What is the root problem? Guns, “angry suicide,” mental health struggles, or how males are socialized? The answer is complex and the solution a long way off.

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Photo: Courtesy of the Gaspésie Cegep

The Cegep teachers tried to make their stands as interesting as possible for the Gesgapegiag students.

More than 60 Gesgapegiag students take part in first Career Day with local Cegep

GILLES GAGNÉ

GESGAPEGIAG – Members of the Gaspé Cegep teaching staff participated in their first Career Day organized by the Gesgapegiag Education Services on January 18. More than 60 students from the Gesgapegiag community; young people who attend New Richmond High School or a French school were present for the activity.

Several programs were represented at the event including: Legal Techniques (Carleton campus), Intervention Techniques in Criminology (Carleton campus), Forest Technology (Gaspé campus), Human Sciences (Gaspé campus), Natural Sciences (Gaspé campus) and Adventure Tourism Techniques (Gaspé campus) and Aquaculture Techniques (Grande-Rivière Fisheries School).

Carleton-based Bay of Chaleur Cegep communication officer, Marie Nowak, points out that “the teachers appreciated sparking young people’s interest in their training.” The teachers also felt blessed to participate in an event filled with symbols and rituals with, in particular, a dance performance by the young Theland Kicknosway, traditional dancer and Aboriginal activist, member of

the Potawatomi nation.

“We responded to the Gesgapegiag Education Services invitation. It was a premiere for us, presenting our programs to Gesgapegiag’s secondary school students. We presented our English programs. We basically went for that, but we also offered programs in French, as we know that some Gesgapegiag youth speak French. We wanted to see the interest, with the two facets,” adds Marie Nowak.

“What is interesting is that some of the programs, like forestry, are given in immersion, in students’ second language. It is a partial immersion at the Gaspé campus. It was important to show the students what we have to offer. Certain programs, like Legal Techniques, are offered in person or remotely. Programs offered remotely were represented. Some students will visit the Gaspé campus though. We were happy to be there.. where we were able to meet the high school students,” she says.

“Also, this is an opportunity to present the scholarships available to students. Our anglophone programs, for students applying for admission, can provide scholarships ranging from \$15,000 to \$22,500 from the program. It amounts to \$7,500 per

year,” she explains.

Will the experience be repeated next year? “We evaluate our presence in such outings every year, but it is a clientele that is part of our targets. We have programs at the Gaspésie and Magdalen Islands Cegep that can suit the needs of the Gesgapegiag students,” stresses Marie Nowak.

TRANSPORT:

Cont'd from page 2

Chandler, a project over 40 years overdue.

Over \$50 million will be invested in the entire road section to take Highway 132 out of the urban perimeter once phase 2 is completed.

“Next summer, phase 2 will be running. There were a lot of curves. The Anse-au-Canard bridge was were a lot of trucks would overturn. This bridge has been replaced. We also avoid the residential sector. It has been a project since the 1970s. Very happy that we were able to free up these amounts,” says Mr. Berger.

This is the last major project to take Highway 132 out of the urbanized areas in the Gaspé Peninsula.

The other major challenge of recent years has been to solidify Highway 132 at the height of Pic de l’aurore in Percé when the road could have fallen into the nearby glen, a \$7.2 million project to secure the road.

“We worked on the sea side. One day we will have to work on the cliff side. But for the moment, we wanted to secure the road. This is a file to follow,” says the director.

Specialized work could be called upon to lower rock from the side of the cliff, as happened last summer on Route 198 near Lac de l’Anse-Pleureuse.

“It expresses all the particularity of the Gaspé Peninsula. It’s beautiful, but there are some big challenges

when you look at where the road goes in certain places,” says Mr. Berger.

The new Gaspé Department of Transport service centre put into service last fall and awaited for nearly 50 years, is also the pride of the former territorial director.

Beyond the Gaspé Peninsula, Yves Berger mentions that we will see a Highway 20 completed between Trois-Pis-toles and Bic in the medium term.

“What remains to be completed could be \$1 billion. Between Rimouski and Mont-Joli, we are reaching the maximum level of service. The important thing is to complete the last stretch. A team of major projects is being set up. It has a mission of safety but also of economic development,” says Mr. Berger, who recalls that the construction of Highway 85 in Témiscouata has brought new dynamism all along the highway.

As part of his duties in Quebec, Mr. Berger, will use his 35 years of experience to mentor at the Ministry of Transport. In a short period of time, six other executives like him will leave their positions in the regional directorates.

Yves Berger has spent practically his entire career in regional management in Rimouski, except for two years spent in Quebec. He had been regional director since 2017.



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Announcements



Obituary



MANN: Sheila - 1943 – 2023

It is with profound sadness that we announce the passing of Sheila Frances Mann (nee Sullivan) of Oakville, Ontario, on January 19, 2023, at the age of 79. Sheila is survived by her loving and devoted husband of 56 years, Ken Mann, who cared for her with immense kindness, gentleness and dignity during her last years.

Sheila was born on the Gaspé Peninsula in the lovely town of Shigawake. She was the second eldest of four children to parents George and Mildred Sullivan. She moved to Montreal in the early 1960s where she met her husband-to-be, Ken, while working at Scotiabank. They eventually moved to Kirkland and Beaconsfield, Quebec, and then Oakville, Ontario, in the early 1990s. Every year they returned to the Gaspé for extended stays in their house by the Bay to be with family and their many beloved life-long friends.

Sheila had a generous heart and was renowned for being a fabulous baker. In fact, her banana bread was deemed the best by anyone that sampled it. Each loaf was baked with a delicious crunchy sunken top that was wrapped to perfection. The “silver brick” was eagerly received when gifted.

Sheila was the proudest of mums and leaves behind to mour, her daughters Tanya (Chris) and Lori (Blake), grandchildren Mackenzie and Kaitlin, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, nieces, nephews and cousins. She will be dearly missed by her best friend

and sister Sarah (Ken) whom she spoke to every day. She is predeceased by sister Veryl (Tom) and recently deceased brother Bill (Marcelle).

A funeral service will be held at St. Paul’s Anglican Church in Shigawake this summer for family and close friends to pay their respects. As expressions of sympathy, donations can be made to the Canadian Cancer Association or St. Paul’s Anglican Cemetery Fund at 31 Route 132, Shigawake, Quebec G0C 3E0. Online condolences available at www.marlattfhdundas.com.



In Memory



ANNETT: Sybil

April 12, 1933 – January 31, 2013

In loving memory of our dear mom and nanny. It is so hard to believe that it has been 10 years since you left us.

*We think of you every day,
Missing your smile, gentle voice and hugs!!!
It is still hard after all these years,
That you are not with us
We miss you so much
But take comfort that you are watching over us,
Witnessing the growth
Of your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.
You are my sunshine
You make me happy
When skies are grey
You’ll never know, dear
How much we love you
Please do not take my sunshine away.*

Your children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

SIMON: Elson (Sonny)

In loving memory of a dear husband, father, father-in-law and grandfather who passed away January 16, 1983.

*You left us beautiful memories,
Your love is still our guide,
Although we cannot see you,
You’re always at our side.*

Loved and sadly missed by Merle and family.

**The New Carlisle
Funeral Association**
extends sympathy to the family of
May Coulombe



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The Gaspé Spec - Obituary Guide

(Please note that paragraphs can be added or removed as needed.)

Paragraph 1: In this paragraph you will list the full name, date and place of your loved one’s birth and death, cause of death (optional), as well as the name of parents.

Paragraph 2: In this paragraph you can give a brief biography of the deceased, including if desired the schools that they attended.

Paragraph 3: In this paragraph you can list employment history, any special awards received and notable accomplishments.

Paragraph 4: In this paragraph you can list information about church or religious affiliations, any organizations or clubs, as well as any hobbies or interests that the deceased was a part of or enjoyed.

Paragraph 5: This paragraph can be used to give any information about your loved ones personality, their quirks or funny stories.

Paragraph 6: Paragraph 6 is where you will list surviving family, friends and other relatives as well as any predeceased family. It is important to note that regardless of family situations or relationships with other family members, the obituary should include accurate information for historical purposes, as once it is published it can be used as a reference for future generations. It should not exclude anyone for personal reasons.

Paragraph 7: The last paragraph is usually reserved to let friends and family know about funeral arrangements such as visitation date, time and location it is also where you can indicate where family and friends can make donations in memory of your deceased loved one. Example: In lieu of flowers, a donation in their memory can be made to

Please note that there are many ways to write an obituary, there are no set rules that must be followed. It is recommended to view samples of obituaries online or in your local paper. Find a style that would fit your loved one and make them proud.

COAST ROUND-UP

GASPÉ:
Royal Canadian Legion
Please be advised that Legion memberships are available for \$50. Returning and new members welcome.

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.

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!

HOPE TOWN:
Sports Club
February 3: Super gift bingo at the Optimist Club in Saint Godefroi beginning at 7 p.m.
February 4: Snowshoe

Rally beginning at 11 a.m. registration will take place between 10 a.m. and 10:45 a.m. Teams must consist of three or four people with at least one adult. Games on ice will begin at 1:30 p.m. Deal or no deal will take place at 7 p.m. (ages 18 and older). Cost: \$5 tickets must be purchased in advance.
February 5: Old timers vs Young timers hockey beginning at 1:30 p.m. Gift bingo for children 13 and under beginning at 1:30 p.m. Canteen service will be available Saturday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 1:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. Items include hotdogs, fries, mini pizzas, soup and chilli.
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 Whit-

tom (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:
LLB Membership
Please note that membership renewals for the Linda LeMore-Brown Foundation are 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.
NEW CARLISLE:
Royal Canadian Legion Branch #64
Please be advised that Legion memberships are available for \$45. Returning and new members welcome.
Wednesdays: Line dancing every Wednesday in February and March at 7:30 p.m. \$7 per person.
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 4: Music with

Gery Harrison beginning at 8:30 p.m. \$5 per person.
February 11: Music with Nash Stanley beginning at 8:30 p.m. \$10 per person.
February 7: General meeting at 7 p.m. at 1 Mount Sorrel, New Carlisle.
February 24: Music with Tammy Adams beginning at 8:30 p.m. \$10 per person.
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.

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES:
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The book room is now open. Anyone who needs assistance can contact

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NEW RICHMOND
Sunday, February 5
10 a.m. Service


UNITED CHURCH
HOPE TOWN
Sunday, February 5
2 p.m. Service

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

Sunday, February 5
NEW CARLISLE
9 a.m. Holy Eucharist
SHIGAWAKE
11 a.m. Holy Eucharist

PARISH OF GASPÉ
Sunday, February 5
St. Andrews - York
9 a.m. Holy Eucharist

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ARIES – Mar 21/Apr 20
Aries, it's important to focus on progress and not necessarily on money that can be made. See what you can learn along the path you choose.
TAURUS – Apr 21/May 21
You have high hopes that your efforts will be well received this week, Taurus. Before you move full speed ahead, run your ideas by a trusted group of confidantes.
GEMINI – May 22/Jun 21
You don't learn by getting things right all of the time, Gemini. A few mistakes along the way provide an opportunity to grow and fig-

ure out new ways to do the job.
CANCER – Jun 22/Jul 22
Cancer, distractions seemingly abound this week and your head isn't in the game. While you can get away with a few oversights here and there, too many can be problematic.
LEO – Jul 23/Aug 23
Leo, someone in your life is looking for a pep talk and you are just the person to provide one. Listen to the problem at hand and offer this person some solid solutions.
VIRGO – Aug 24/Sept 22
Virgo, you could be at a crossroads in your life. You are pondering many different scenarios, and now is the

time to solidify plans for the next few weeks.
LIBRA – Sept 23/Oct 23
If you made a career change recently, you may be discovering that the payoff isn't quite what you expected. Fulfillment is essential, so give some thought to new pursuits.
SCORPIO – Oct 24/Nov 22
Scorpio, it is not like you to feel adrift, but that could be the situation right now. Latch on to one activity or person that brings you joy. Focus on the positives in life.
SAGITTARIUS – Nov 23/Dec 21
Sagittarius, family members want to spend more time with you, so plan for the extra company. Have a few extra

snacks on hand and make sure the house is orderly.
CAPRICORN – Dec 22/Jan 20
Your tendency to want to tackle things all on your own could have you pushing others away, Capricorn. Accept others' willingness to pitch in.
AQUARIUS – Jan 21/Feb 18
Aquarius, there has been a lot on your plate and many thoughts swimming through your mind. A quick getaway could be what is needed this month.
PISCES – Feb 19/Mar 20
Pisces, you have a few offers on the table, but could be having trouble narrowing down your preference.

Bring in a third party to help.

FAMOUS BIRTHDAYS
JANUARY 29
José Abreu, Athlete (36)
JANUARY 30
Christian Bale, Actor (49)
JANUARY 31
Justin Timberlake, Singer (42)
FEBRUARY 1
Harry Styles, Singer (29)
FEBRUARY 2
Gerard Piqué, Athlete (36)
FEBRUARY 3
Warwick Davis, Actor (53)
FEBRUARY 4
Natalie Imbruglia, Singer (48)

Lettrage Hilltop Creations

Support local businesses

DIANE SKINNER

“I believe that local businesses are the heart of our community and we play an important role in the economic development.” Trevor Buttle

NEW CARLISLE: Lettrage Hilltop Creations, a locally owned and operated business, offers signs, banners, canvas art, vehicle decals, vehicle wraps, custom clothing printing and other custom orders as requested by customers. Trevor Buttle, owner, designer and fabricator, informs SPEC that he is a creative person who loves designing original and personalized items. He purchased equipment needed to make stickers and, at first, he used this new equipment to make something for his own car. At the time, Trevor was not planning to build a business around these custom-made orders, but soon word spread, and he was being contacted to

fill orders for people in the community. Since then, the business has continued to grow. He states, “I realized that there was a demand for that kind of products and, from there, I was able to take off.”

Seeing his work as he drives around the community and beyond makes him proud. When customers receive their completed order and are pleased with the outcome, that is a positive feeling for Trevor. Mostly self-taught using the trial-and-error method, he completed training in Montreal on specialized techniques for custom finishing and lettering on vehicles. He has completed projects on cars, trucks, boats and more. Having the support of the community, both local and beyond, and his family and girlfriend, is very important to him and will help him to continue to grow and succeed. He adds, “There is so much talent in the area, that it is important to encourage

each other.” Trevor’s favourite part of his business is the opportunity to be creative every day!

Other than his passion for his work, he is a musician (drummer) and is currently offering life skill workshops through CASA.

Why is it important to support local small businesses? There are some pretty important reasons to do so. This includes keeping money within the community, helping the environment (no need to use fossil fuels to transport goods), building a stronger community, drawing newcomers to the area, creating unique businesses that meet the specific needs of the area, and providing jobs. Think globally, but act locally, for maximum positive impact.

Photo: Local entrepreneur Trevor Buttle offers custom lettering, signs, vehicle wraps and more. He is a strong advocate for supporting local businesses which can be the heart of a community. Credit Trevor Buttle



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