

Lobster fishing season underway in the Gaspé Peninsula

Price paid to the fishermen is still unknown

GILLES GAGNÉ

SAINT-GODEFROI — The 2023 lobster fishing season began in most parts of the Gaspé Peninsula on April 29. The fishermen based between Bonaventure East and Brilliant Cove in Gaspé set their traps on April 29 and landed their first catches the following day.

As the SPEC was reaching its deadline, the price remained unknown. For the last six years, the price has not been determined prior to the season start, as it is based on an equation involving the amount paid by buyers during the previous week, a model borrowed from the Magdalen Islands.

Resource-wise, the picture is bright, points out biologist Jean Côté of the Southern Gaspé Professional Fishermen Group.

“Things are going very well. We received indicators from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans peers this winter and they are quite sound. All indicators are high, egg-bearing females and small lobsters. I classify them (small lobsters) in two categories,

pre-recruits 1, which are one year before entry into the fishery, and pre-recruits 2, which will enter the fishery in two years. There is recruitment. They are always very present,” explains Mr. Côté.

The Gaspé Peninsula lobster fishermen have carried out vigorous measures in order to improve the situation of their shellfish stock over the last 25 years, including buying out 50 permits over the last 20 years, as a buyback program was implemented in 2003.

Some permits were also eliminated through a buyout measure coming from Fisheries and Oceans Canada, or bought by fishermen already holding a licence.

“This year, 158 licence holders will start the season, 146 non-Natives and 12 Native fishermen. Some of the non-Natives have a double permit,” points out Jean Côté.

Each licence holder is permitted to set 235 traps. Until a few years ago, the holders of a double permit could set 435 traps instead of 470 after a licence acquisition. Over the last few years, the rule has



St. Godefroi wharf was a bustling spot as Nicolas Renouf and the crew of the *Vieux Python*, set their lobster traps in preparation for the first day of the season.

changed and a fisherman buying another permit cannot add more than 100 traps to the initial capacity. Consequently, permit acquisitions are made by two, three or four fishermen, who divide between themselves 200 traps instead

of 235, for resource conservation purposes.

What will the lobster price be?

In 2022, the Gaspé Peninsula fishermen received an average price of \$7.95 per pound, the second-best price in history after the \$8.52 of 2021. What will it be in 2023? The fishermen will not know before May 8 or 9, once the sales of the first week's catches indicate the price paid by various buyers.

Some observers think that the first signs of recession and the falling landing price of crab, which went from an average of \$6.75 per pound last year to a season start of about \$2.25 in 2023, will influence the price of lobster downward.

“We agree that the lobster sector is not experiencing the same crisis as the crab industry this year. We expect a good year without it being the

best in history. We hear a lot of things but we don't know how it will settle. A year ago, processing plant owners were saying that it (lobster inventories) had not come out of refrigerated warehouses as fast as usual. This past winter, the warehouses were emptied,” stresses Jean Côté.

Low inventories usually lead to a better price when the fishing season starts.

“Lobster has always been more affordable than snow crab. Often, snow crab is publicly perceived as a high-end product while lobster is often considered more available to the middle class. Although there is some correlation between the prices of the two products, they are not directly connected. The retail price of lobster has not moved much for years. Supermarkets are using it as a loss leader, often around \$8.99 per pound. They attract consumers with affordable lobster and are, therefore, able to sell them a wide range of items alongside,” adds Mr. Côté.

In the Gaspé Peninsula, lobster catches have increased almost every year since 2013, but 2022 was an exception due to very difficult weather conditions during the first two weeks of the season, as it snowed on occasion, mixed with very strong winds. The catches, therefore, reached 4,263 metric tonnes, compared to 4,719 metric tonnes in 2021, a decrease of 456 metric tonnes, or 9.66%.

This 9.66% decline mostly explains the fall in overall revenues, which went from \$88.8 million in 2021 to \$74.4 million in 2022, a 16.2% drop. The 6.7% drop in the price paid to lobster fishermen also contributed to the 2022 income fall for Gaspésians. The 2022 fishing season nevertheless generated the second-best lobster results in history.



Shigawake fisherman, George Skene of the *Captain Morgan* lobster boat, set his traps in calm waters on the morning of April 29.

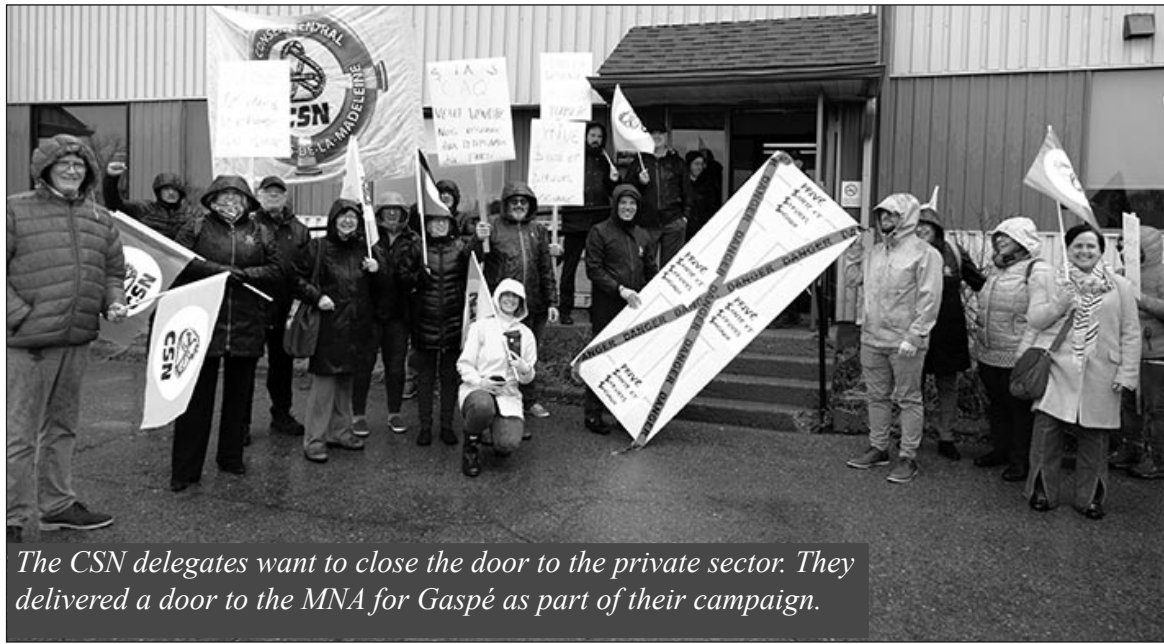
Photos: P. MacWhirter

A truly public network, says the CSN once again

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - The Central Council of the CSN (Central Labour Union) for the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands continues its fight by demanding a truly public health network in the wake of the reorganization proposed by Quebec.

On April 18, delegates who were gathered at a general meeting in Gaspé, illustrated the need to keep the network truly public by delivering a door to the office of the Member of the National Assembly for Gaspé, Stéphane Sainte-Croix. "It (the door) should be wide open to the expansion of the public network and it should be closed to the private



The CSN delegates want to close the door to the private sector. They delivered a door to the MNA for Gaspé as part of their campaign.

Photo: Courtesy CSN

sector," declared the delegates.

The president of the Central council for the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen

Islands, Serge Saint-Pierre, affirms that there is proof that the private sector does not respond to the needs.

"The government persists

in wanting to move in that direction, especially with Bill 15, which will move the decision-making centres of the regions even further to the city,"

he states.

Centralization does not work, referring to the Barrette health reform. "It's not all bad in Santé Québec, but when you want to be close to the population, that's not how you do it. We must have centres where decisions are made" adds Mr. Saint-Pierre.

The CSN, however, points out that Minister Dubé's health plan opens wide the door to the private sector by stating that services will be provided by establishments which, "can be either public or private."

The CSN's Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands Central Council represents approximately 4,000 workers from all sectors of activity. It has more than 75 affiliated unions.

Most paramedics in the Gaspé Peninsula are still on strike

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - The Gaspé Peninsula is significantly impacted by a new ambulance service strike that started on April 25.

Paramedics affiliated with the Federation of Prehospital Employees of Quebec want to improve their working conditions. Their collective agreement expired on March 31, 2022.

"Last July, we went on strike. We were supposed to have a negotiation meeting with the management party on March 27, but it was cancelled. This increased the pressure on the members who were insulted by the situation," mentions the president of the federation, Daniel Chouinard.

Faced with this fact, the workers lifted the existing strike on April 12 to file new notices the next day to go before the Administrative Labour Court to submit a list of essential services, which was done on April 21. The list was approved, allowing the new strike.

"Essentially, these are administrative measures. We agree that this does not affect service to the population. This is only to put pressure on our employers. We are asking more managers in different companies to perform tasks normally performed by paramedics," says Mr. Chouinard.

The only impact for users is the restricted period for returning home, which only takes place from noon to 5 p.m., rather than in the morning, evening or at the start of the night.



Services to citizens are hardly affected during this new strike

Photo: N. Sergerie

Negotiations had made it possible to get things moving before March 27.

A common front has been concluded with the Beauce ambulance technicians.

"The main thing is a salary catch-up because there is a lot of difference between the nurses and the police. We ask to be recognized at a fair value as an emergency service. We are talking about a catch-up of 14% and increases to at least have the cost of living," explains Mr. Chouinard.

Severance penalties for pension plans, bonuses, vacations, and the attraction and retention of the workforce are also items on the agenda.

On-call schedules, which are increasingly rare, but which are found in certain places in the Gaspé Peninsula, are also an issue.

"We have submitted the list of places still having on-call schedules. We know that there have been a lot of conversions in the last three years, but there are still a few to modify.

What we also see is that the department is going to modify one shift per hour, but only for 12 hours instead of 24 hours. That brings gaps in some areas and it's a neighbouring area that comes in to cover for the other 12 hours, at night most of the time," says Chouinard.

This type of conversion is in the plans for the second vehicle in Gaspé, but the transition has not yet been made. The Gaspé Peninsula Integrated Health and Social Services Centre (CISSS) is reflecting on the impacts of such a decision.

A paramedic initially earns \$23 per hour and the tier maximum is \$35.59.

With the federation's request, the level would vary between \$27 and \$40 per hour.

"We don't think these are exaggerated rates," says the president.

In the region, the paramedics working in the 13 Paraxion ambulance bays covering the MRCs of Haute-Gaspésie, Côte-de-Gaspé,

Rocher-Percé, Bonaventure and the Avignon west sector are members of the federation, just like their colleagues from Service ambulancier de La Baie inc. in Caplan.

The Health and Social Services Minister is not ready for new conversions.

Before carrying out new conversions to the ambulance service schedules, the Minister of Health wants to review the prioritization of calls.

The Parti Québécois Member of the National Assembly for the Magdalen Islands, Joel Arseneau, asked for the conversion of the last on-call shifts to hourly schedules to avoid making them second-class citizens.

Minister Christian Dubé points out that he has invested \$25 million for conversions in recent years and that two-thirds of crews are now on hourly schedules.

"The big issue, and this is what we've been asking for in emergency rooms and call centres, is to make sure that we qualify what an urgent call is. The problem is that a person will say, 'Look, this is not an urgent call.' This is where we will make quick gains," says the Minister to the Member of the National Assembly for the Islands.

On-call schedules are still in place in Gaspé, Murdochville, Saint-Alexis, Pointe-à-la-Croix, Mont-Louis, Grande-Vallée and Sainte-Anne-des-Monts.





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Photo: FMBM

Performances for all musical tastes at this year's FMBM

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - A wide range of performances will take place from August 10 to 13, at the 19th edition of the Festival musique du bout du monde in Gaspé.

On April 20, the festival presented the palette of artists through a "breathtaking mixture of Gaspé landscapes with artistic and cultural discoveries."

Two shows per evening will be presented under the marquee and according to the festival co-director, Steve Pontbriand, one should attract more attention.

"We have already presented several experiences not to be missed, such as the sunrise and Mont Bechervaise (performances), but the highlight of our announcement is the six shows that will take place in the tent on August 10, 11 and 12. With the Bottine souriante getting ready to launch an album this fall, we might have a nice surprise with a group we have known for a long time. We will be one of the first festivals to have this new version of the Bottine. With 10 musicians on stage, it's a guaranteed family party," says Mr. Pontbriand, who always has a hard time picking out a show not to be missed from the array of musical performances that are offered during the four days of festivities.

The other artists on the big stage for Thursday will be the Bohemian Betyars group, based in Budapest, who will launch the festivities with their speed-folk freak-punk band that plays with all the codes of Balkan music by mixing punk rock, bouncy ska, psychedelic music, all spiced up with Hungarian and gypsy traditional music.

They will be followed by the New Brunswick group, Hôtesses d'Hilaire, who offer psychedelic progressive rock, strongly influenced by the music of the 70s.

On the second night, Amoye will begin the evening with her unique reggae sound, where old school rocksteady, dancehall and dubstep meet with touches of gospel, soul and R&B. Her performance will be followed by the Bottine souriante.

This series will end with a performance by Bon Enfant, a group comprised of music scene superheroes who perform groovy pop-rock music.

These concerts under the big top will end with a very special evening with the band Moonshine, made up of Pierre Kwenders, San Farafina and AKAntu.

The stage on rue de la Reine will welcome country music artist, Pamela Rooney, from Douglastown, who won two awards at the Texas Sounds International Country Music Awards last October.

In addition, Klô Pelgag's sunrise show at Cap-Bon-Ami in Forillon National Park is sold out. Barely a few days after the opening of the box office, all 700 tickets put on sale for this signature concert were sold.

"They found takers in just a few days. It is really an impressive craze of festival-goers. This is the first time that we have put all 700 tickets on sale all at once. It has never been so fast," says the co-director.

Shows will also be presented throughout the greater Gaspé area.

For this edition, festival-goers will be able to attend conferences that will allow them to learn about the approach of several artists featured in the program, in particular, Darlene Gijuminag, from Gesgapegiag, Lara Klaus and Pamela Rooney. They will also be able to perfect their dancing skills thanks to an initiation to swing workshop with Studio 88 Swing.

Tickets and passports are on sale now.

Police report

A drug-related police operation conducted around 6:30 p.m. on April 25 led to the interception and arrest of the three occupants of a vehicle which was travelling on Highway 132 in New Richmond West. One of the occupants, Ashley-John Travers, 39, a former resident of Gaspé, was wanted for illegally being at large. His parole had been revoked by the Canadian correctional services and, consequently, an arrest warrant was issued for his arrest.

A 28-year-old man and a 32-year-old woman were also arrested, but later released after agreeing to appear in court at a later date. Following the arrests, a search of the vehicle resulted in discovering a small quantity of cocaine.

At the time of this arrest, another search also took place at a residence on Gérard D. Levesque Boulevard in Paspebiac. Items seized included a handgun, ammunition, a certain amount of cannabis, various objects that could be used for drug trafficking as well as several thousand dollars in cash.

"We never reveal the exact amount of money seized but we can say that it was an important sum of cash. The case remains under investigation and will be brought to the criminal prosecutor for assessment and the determination of charges," points out Sgt. Claude Doiron, spokesperson for the Sûreté du Québec.

The three suspects could face certain charges for possession or trafficking of narcotics as well as possession of a prohibited weapon. This operation was carried out by the Chandler major crime investigation squad with the participation of police officers from the MRC police stations in Avignon and Bonaventure.

David Guy, 39, from Maria charged with assault causing bodily harm to a prison inmate, entered a plea of guilty on April 26 at the New Carlisle Courthouse. He was initially supposed to go through the orientation and declaration procedure step pertaining to his case. "Between his last court appearance (on March 13) and now, we were able to reach an agreement. We also reached an agreement on the sentence. Nine months will be added to the prison term he was already serving," explains Maxime Rocheville-Paradis, criminal prosecutor at the New Carlisle Courthouse.

David Guy was imprisoned since March 2021 after being charged with assault causing bodily harm on his former wife. While in custody in 2022, at the New Carlisle prison, he attacked an inmate, breaking his nose and two teeth.

At the time of the attack, he was serving a four-year sentence after pleading guilty on August 12, 2022, of assault with a weapon, assault causing bodily harm, uttering death threats and breach of conditions. In that case, the victim was his former wife, who was abused over a period of 17 years. On August 17, five days after Mr. Guy pleaded guilty, she died of natural causes, in her sleep in Rivière-du-Loup.

The trial of Jean-Guy Lavoie, 91, a former priest, who previously lived in New Richmond and was charged with sodomy and gross indecency on a minor, will not take place because the accused died in mid-March. The priest of the Community of Oblates of Mary Immaculate was suspected for events that allegedly occurred between 1983 and 1986 in New Richmond. "The court is awaiting the death certificate to close the case on June 27," says criminal prosecutor Maxime Rocheville-Paradis, of the New Carlisle Courthouse. Last year, because he was suffering from cognitive problems, Jean-Guy Lavoie had already been considered unfit to appear in court following a psychiatric evaluation report that was requested by his lawyer. The report had been submitted to the Review Commission to assess the situation. The priest had been living outside the region for years when he was charged.

Marco Albert, 52, a teacher living in Newport who is charged with sexually assaulting a minor, returned to the Percé Courthouse on April 24. Mr. Albert will have to return to court again on June 27. The defence attorney requested this postponement to allow time to become familiar with the file. In addition to the sexual assault charge, the suspect is suspected of sexual exploitation and taking advantage of a minor in a position of authority. He allegedly incited a minor to touch him and a third party. Mr. Albert, who was arrested in March, was released subject to severe conditions, including not being in a position of authority with minors. A teacher at Polyvalente Mgr Sévigny, Marco Albert was suspended by the Centre de services scolaire René-Lévesque. The alleged events did not occur at the school.

The Amiral tourist train was vandalized again at the end of April. It was the sixth time that the train, which has been sitting idle since the fall of 2014 at the Gaspé intermodal station, was broken into. "Several items were damaged. Our police officers will give the train more attention during their patrol," points out Sgt. Claude Doiron. The director general of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, Luc Lévesque, says that the damage was not significant but he is annoyed by the repetitive nature of the break and enters in the train over the years. "People have entered the train many times, sometimes without causing damage inside. It is the third time that damage has been caused. There are surveillance cameras but they are located at the other end of the train. I am seriously thinking of bringing the train to New Richmond. I have asked for tenders in order to move it by truck. Depending on the cost, we might make the move. We also have to consider selling it if the train is to stay idle a few more years, which is the case," explains Mr. Lévesque.



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Gilles Gagné

Commentary

Third link: a bit of common sense emerges at last

People will hear about the Quebec City-Lévis third link project for many years to come, whether the new initiative calling for a tunnel strictly reserved for commuter services is built or not.

The Coalition avenir Québec government decision to axe the project as presented during the last electoral campaign, with a section reserved for individual cars, is a major blow to a significant portion of the population of Quebec City and the nearby south shore area.

On April 20, Transport Minister Geneviève Guilbault announced, two days after a leak in the media, that the tunnel, slated to link the downtown areas of Quebec City and Lévis, would only be used by commuter transport, whether it is a metro or a tramway.

In the October 3, 2022, election the Coalition avenir Québec (CAQ) won 16 of the 18 constituencies of the capital and the south shore area. A lot of ridings voted for the CAQ based on the party's position on the project. The CAQ also received a lot of support based on the initial third link initiative when it accessed power in 2018.

However, every urban transport expert consulted over the last decade or so has systematically rejected such a project. In fact, one of them, Catherine Morency, who teaches at Université de Montréal, sums up the issue by stating that the third link as it stood prior to April 19 was a project of the 1970s trying to be accepted in 2023. Even the latest version of the initiative is outdated, she adds.

In 2014 the original third link project was supposed to be a tunnel starting on the south shore somewhere in the east part of Lévis, a few kilometres east of the Lauzon shipyard, to a point located in the lower Charlesbourg suburb. The tunnel was supposed to pass under Île d'Orléans, nothing less. Its length was over 10 kilometres. The latest stage of the initiative included three lanes in each direction, with one ded-

icated to commuter services.

Without thorough studies, the cost of the project was valued at \$10 billion, before the beginning of the pandemic.

In January 2020, the CAQ government modified the project for a downtown-to-downtown, 8.3-kilometre concept, with only two lanes, with none dedicated to commuter transport except during rush hours. The new cost was brought down to \$6.5 billion, again this amount was given without reference to in-depth studies, which remain to be carried out to this day.

That \$6.5 billion tab remains the last known cost mentioned in relation to the initiative presented on April 20 by Minister Guilbault, who admitted that the traffic numbers, in part, stemming from new telework habits, no longer justify a tunnel for individual cars.

Her announcement raised the ire of close to everyone living on the Lévis side, including Beauce and Bellechasse, to the south and east respectively. People are under the impression that they were used politically during the last electoral campaign, since the CAQ made a promise for a tunnel for all vehicles.

They are probably right, as it is hard to believe that the reality of downward traffic intensity between the two shores of the Saint Lawrence River in the capital area was new to Premier François Legault and his entourage in October. Most congestion of late was caused by significant repairs to the Pierre-Laporte Bridge.

Intelligence was set aside

Understandably citizens living in Lévis and the surrounding area, as well as people in Quebec City, were disappointed to witness the April 20 announcement made by Geneviève Guilbault, and the further explanation by Premier Legault a week later.

However, it seems that wishful thinking and willful blindness played a major role in people's disappointment, considering the following elements.

Roughly 800,000 people live in the extended Quebec City area, including Lévis. It remains a rather medium-sized city, even by Canadian standards.

Every major infrastructure project is characterized by a sizable cost overrun, often propelling the total tab way over the amount projected at first. The cost often doubles and sometimes triples, especially considering that thorough studies remain to be carried out. A cost exceeding way over \$6.5 billion was

therefore not excluded from the project abandoned on April 20. Can Quebec consequently afford a \$10 billion plus useless expenditure over the next decade? Of course, it cannot.

Why would the Quebec government spearhead a tunnel project, even the one reserved exclusively for commuter services, when several other options have not been assessed? The Pierre-Laporte Bridge doesn't include yet a lane reserved for buses, an anachronism in 2023. Moreover, it is used almost exclusively by people sitting alone in their vehicles. To worsen things, the size of vehicles, like SUVs, is constantly growing in Quebec, including in the capital. Are we collectively maximizing the use of the space in doing so? Not at all, especially since all those vehicles carry a lot of air instead of occupants as of now.

How about trying to use the old Quebec bridge soundly? The bridge should have been expropriated decades ago by the Quebec government, considering that it is not maintained soundly by its current owner, CN Rail. Originally, it was exclusively a railway bridge, before only one track was kept in 1929. Instead of pursuing feasibility studies on a tunnel, wouldn't it be more relevant to check if removing the road lanes and replacing them with either a second track or tramways would increase its efficiency?

Up to 1,000 people can board a commuter train consisting of double-decker cars. Regular tramways from the south shore connecting with the future tramway network of Quebec City would greatly increase the commuting capacity of the old Quebec bridge.

Better bus services between the Lévis side and Quebec City must be implemented before anybody complains about transit time between the two shores. People from that area are quite conservative in their habits and political orientation but they are surely able to understand over the coming months or years that climate change consciousness, wiser use of money and a better understanding of demographics as well the use of space is required in tomorrow's society.

The CAQ government will likely drop the tunnel project solely reserved for commuting as well. It would be a waste of money, given cheaper and brighter solutions.

It is very interesting to note that outside the capital and Lévis area, relief is the norm since following the April 20 announcement, given that common sense is finally emerging.



Emma Buckley

Guest Commentary

I say a little prayer for you, Burt Bacharach

One of the most notable American musicians of the 20th century recently passed away. Burt Bacharach was a rarity; a famous musician who didn't sing. In a career spanning more than 60 years, he wrote and arranged a tremendous amount of music for others to sing. Though I suspect many a Millennial or Gen Z-er would not recognize his name, Burt Bacharach's impact persists as a musical influence, and through films and contemporary musicians who continue to put a fresh spin on his songs.

Given that he penned over 100 Top 40 US and UK hits, it's highly likely that there's a Bacharach song out there that you know, even if you don't know that he wrote it. Karen Carpenter lent her beautiful voice to *They Long To Be (Close To You)*, but the song is Bacharach's. Remember *That's What Friends Are For*, with its star chorus of Stevie Wonder, Dionne Warwick and Elton John? That was Bacharach (with help from his wife, Carole Bayer Sager). So too is *I Say a Little Prayer*, sung by Aretha Franklin among others,

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and popping up as a star in its own right 30 years later in the Julia Roberts' film *My Best Friend's Wedding*.

An American composer writing jazzy pop hits 60 years ago may be an odd choice of subject for a 40-something Australian-Gaspesian, but Bacharach's tunes were known in our household, thanks to my dad. As a jazz musician and passionate devotee of 1960s pop and rock, Dad seemed respectably hip when it came to music. But my siblings and I knew – as all kids know when it comes to parent hip-ness - that this was largely a façade. We knew that alongside the Doors and Rolling Stones records in his prized LP collection were records by Nana Mouskouri and Engelbert Humperdink. (My partner might use that colourful Québécois adjective “kétaine” to describe some of Dad's tastes, but he was a fan of 80's punk and is quick to claim the avant-gardist high ground. I prefer to describe some of Dad's tastes as easy listening, or swerving right into the middle of the road). Dad loves a good melody, a brass section and some classy, unusual chords. He was always going to be a Bacharach fan and, sure enough, we first encountered Burt in Dad's LP collection, smiling out from an album cover with his signature turtle-neck and silvery mane.

Correction

Please note in the article published April 26, Hiking the Mont Albert Loop, Jeannette Maltan Martin is the proper spelling.

What is it about Bacharach's music that is so enduring (and endearing)? He wrote music for the big screen and, much like film does, his music evokes emotion and transports the listener to another place, one that is full of possibilities. *Raindrops Keep Falling On My Head* is classic Bacharach, jaunty, yet wistful. There is sheer joy in *I Say a Little Prayer*, deep longing in *What the World Needs Now*, and tender vulnerability in *This Guy's In Love With You*. Try to listen to

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Quebec provides \$14 million for coastal erosion in Sainte-Anne-des-Monts

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

SAINTE-ANNE-DES-MONTS - The Quebec government is contributing \$14 million to help protect the Sainte-Anne-des-Monts shore from coastal erosion.

The targeted area of intervention is between Cartier Beach and the end of 1st Avenue West, known to have experienced coastal overflow in recent years.

Studies will take place to determine what types of interventions are required. "As of today, this gives us the chance to hire specialists and project managers. There will be other studies that will be added to those of the UQAR (Université du Québec à Rimouski). We are talking about a hybrid formula. There could be beach replenishment, low walls, and riprap. We can't tell you. This is the start of the project. This is where we will learn more," states the mayor of Sainte-Anne-des-Monts, Simon Deschênes.

"It was not the Town of Sainte-Anne-des-Monts that targeted the area. It was specialists from UQAR - road studies for several years - who determined that this sector

was one of the priorities within the Ministry of Public Security for intervention as soon as possible. I want to make sure that people don't raise their hands to say why not at my home," the mayor clarifies.

The work should be done in 2026 or 2027 and aims to protect assets valued at \$70 million.

The Town of Sainte-Anne-des-Monts will contribute \$1.2 million, an amount frozen even if the project were to cost more than the \$14 million advanced by Quebec.

"The premier announced six projects at the beginning of March and Sainte-Anne-des-Monts is part of these projects to counter the effects of erosion linked to climate change," explains the Member of the National Assembly for Gaspé, Stéphane Sainte-Croix, who made the announcement on behalf of the Minister of Public Security, François Bonnardel.

It is not only the riding of Gaspé that is vulnerable to erosion.

"We understand that in the coming years, the issue of shoreline protection and the impacts of climate change on



Photo: Town of Sainte-Anne-des-Monts

Concrete blocks protect this hotel from the ravages of heavy storms.

coastal regions will be something important. We will have budgetary appropriations to devote to these protection elements. We are well engaged in this dynamic," adds Mr. Sainte-Croix.

Other sectors are also being prioritized by Quebec.

"We'll see how things unfold. What is important is that we are in action throughout the territory to map the areas at risk and prioritize future in-

terventions," concludes the MNA.

Meanwhile, in Maria, studies to determine the best way to intervene to protect the coastline have been completed and the authorities are now analyzing the risks.

Beach replenishment remains the preferred option, in particular, to protect the Coop grocery store and the nearby seniors' residence. The intervention for this section is between the post office and the Rivière Verte, a distance of approximately 1.2 kilometres, which should protect assets estimated at \$22 million.

Quebec announced last June a sum of \$9.3 million for this sector and the municipality was to contribute \$684,000 to reach \$10 million in a closed envelope.

The work originally planned for this year was postponed to 2024, however, work has now been postponed until 2025.

Faced with delays and inflation affecting the construction sector, the provincial authorities could show flexibility and contribute more to the project, despite the initial statement to the effect that the budgetary envelope was closed.

CÔTE-DE-GASPÉ: An employment study geared at the most vulnerable

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - Keeping vulnerable people employed is one of the main conclusions of a study conducted in the Côte-de-Gaspé MRC.

The director general of the Côte-de-Gaspé Carrefour jeunesse emploi (CJE, Youth Employment Centre), Steve Fournier, became aware of the impending labour shortage in 2019.

"We felt it was important to see the mobilization of people far from the labour and training markets and to put these people into action," says the director as the primary objective of the study presented to 40 people on April 19 in Gaspé.

"We wanted a more realistic picture and to be given recommendations to maximize services and make this transformation in relation to the

labour market," Mr. Fournier adds.

The stigmatization of these people, concerning their age, gender, ethnicity, lack of access to services such as transportation and the lack of flexibility of some employers was noted in the survey.

Out of all the recommendations, there is one that stands out according to Fournier. "Putting in place support for employees who are experiencing life skills or personal difficulties. This is why we are setting up an integration and job retention service. This recommendation will optimize communications between the employer and the employee," he says.

The labour market can no longer set aside the most vulnerable people when there is such a shortage.

"In the current state of the labour market, a person who loses his job finds another one



About 40 people attended the presentation of the study.

Photo: Carrefour jeunesse emploi Côte-de-Gaspé

quickly. His issues will follow him. Before firing an employee, it is more cost-effective to make a referral to better intervene with him or her and facilitate his or her re-

tention at work. In this way, a company will save on recruitment and training of new workers," says the CJE director.

The project, which was

conducted by the Centre for initiation to research and support for sustainable development (CIRADD), produced a twenty-page report on these issues.

First Nations of the Gaspé Peninsula acquire majority ownership of New Brunswick IT firm

GILLES GAGNÉ

GESGAPEGIAG – Owned by the communities of Listuguj, Gesgapegiag and Gespeg, the Mi'gmawei Mawiomi Business Corporation announces the acquisition of a 51% ownership share of a New Brunswick firm specialized in information technology, PLC Info.

Founded in 2005 by Pascal Labrecque and Marc Dubé, who decided at the time to create their office in Eel River Crossing, PLC Info quickly started offering information technology services to the Indigenous communities of the Gaspé Peninsula and New Brunswick.

Those services notably include analysis of the needs, design and installation of complete networks, whether they are wired or wireless, cybersecurity, programming and databases, hardware and software devices, point-of-sale solutions, structured cabling, telecommunication solutions and so on.

Gesgapegiag Chief John Martin points out that the business relationship developed between PLC Info and the Gaspé Peninsula First Nations communities was already quite sound before the transaction.

"They did such a good job that we decided to marry them," he summed up on April 25, upon the announcement that the Gespe'gewa'gi three communities bought 51% of the PLC Info shares.

The amount of the transaction hovers around \$2.5 million, confirms Fred Vicaire, Director General of the Mi'gmawei Mawiomi Business Corporation.

"It is a mix of loan, cash



MMBC Director General Fred Vicaire says that PLC Info is opening an office in Gesgapegiag.

down and a grant from (the department of) Aboriginal Affairs," he says, adding that the decision to invest in PLC Info made sense in many ways.

"We were seeing a major need for such services in the aboriginal communities. We were also seeing a big need to train our people in information technology," says Mr. Vicaire.

"The goal of the MMBC is also to maximize job creation for our community members. We have a lot of youth in our communities and there is great potential to spark their interest in information technology," he points out.

The partnership between the Mi'gmaq and PLC Info will allow the new company to expand its market, particularly their Indigenous markets.

"It is also a new source of revenue that will contribute to the economic independence of the Mi'gmaq," insists Mr. Vicaire.

Physically, PLC Info will soon open an office in Gesgapegiag, in the same building as the one housing the MMBC. "There is no sign yet but it will come. The transaction was con-

cluded at the end of March," says Fred Vicaire.

Listuguj Chief Scott Martin explains that a few years ago company officials made a first offer so that Listuguj could become a partner. "We declined the opportunity to do it alone but with the two other communities, we decided to join the partnership," he says.

Scott Martin also sees job opportunities for the citizens of Listuguj, in particular, the youth.

"Our people have a chance to train and work for PLC," he says, considering that PLC Info will eventually provide training at the Listuguj Mi'gmaq Development Centre, where courses are provided in various fields. "We are working together to move forward," he mentions regarding the partnership with Gesgapegiag and Gespeg.

Economic diversification underway

Like his colleagues, Scott Martin is glad to see the Mi'gmawei Mawiomi Business Corporation (MMBC) and the three communities of Listuguj, Gesgapegiag and Gespeg are now getting involved in another economic sector.

"It is a new venture for the MMBC. We have been involved in forestry, fisheries and wind energy. It is something new," he says, adding that two people from Listuguj already work for PLC Info.

To explain the move to invest in PLC Info, Donald Jennotte-Anglehart, the president of MMBC, emphasizes the need for diversification.

"We have here a possibility to make a breakthrough in another sector that doesn't harm the environment. Information technology will not disappear.



Listuguj chief Scott Martin stresses that the new partnership will diversify the economy of the three communities.

There is some road ahead in that field for us in employment, training and business opportunities," specifies Mr. Jeannotte-Anglehart.

PLC info founder Pascal Labrecque will remain president and chief executive officer of the company. He is not affected at all by the fact that he and three business partners are no longer the sole owners of the firm that has experienced a significant growth over the last four years. Fifteen people now work for PLC Info, a number that will likely double over the next five years.

"I am still an owner-operator of the company. The partnership will allow us to get a higher number of employees. We are working with the local aboriginal schools," he points out.

Clientele-wise, the company already covers all of New Brunswick and the Gaspé Peninsula, as well as parts of Nova Scotia.

"In phase 1, we want to complete our coverage of the Atlantic region. In phase 2, we will cover Quebec and Ontario and in phase 3, the rest of

Canada," he projects.

In fact, Pascal Labrecque sees an opportunity tied to the new reality of the company, which now bears the corporate status of a limited partnership, with an administrative board, while it was previously managed solely by its four shareholders.

"As we saw in the last federal budget, a certain part of federal contracts is given to Indigenous companies. We will now be entitled to bid on those contracts because the majority of our control is detained by First Nations' communities," he says.

Over the years, he has noticed a keen interest on the part of Aboriginal youth in technology.

"This reality will enable us to develop solutions made by Natives, for Natives," concludes Pascal Labrecque.

PLC Info was just employing its two founders during its first four months of operation in 2005 but gradually hired 12 more people, including two business partners. The pandemic gave a boost to the company.

- Continued from page 4

I'll Never Fall In Love Again without swaying. It's difficult.

Though I rolled my eyes at some of Dad's tunes when younger, as an adult I feel nostalgic when I hear them. As is the case with childhood foods, this nostalgia is often for what the music represents: the warmth and security of family snug in the living room, and the excitement of gatherings punctuated by laughter and

singing.

I have softened my tough childhood stance on Dad's music, and admit to sometimes veering toward the middle of the road myself (though let's be clear: I draw the line at Engelbert Humperdink). Of one thing I'm certain: Burt Bacharach, with his smooth, unique sound and magical musical legacy, was not kitsch at all.



Photos: G. Gagné

PLC Info founder Pascal Labrecque expects the staff of the company to double over the next five years.

The Gaspé Peninsula wants to charm Maritimers

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

MONT-JOLI - Tourisme Gaspésie is investing \$700,000 to attract visitors to the region. They are primarily targeting Maritime customers.

The campaign is a follow-up to the L'Extraordinaire campaign, which was launched last year. "We started our work in the Maritimes last year. We had interesting results last summer and winter. This market is showing a lot of interest. We are stepping up our promotional actions directly related to New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. We are also targeting French and English-speaking customers in Quebec and the Maritimes," explains Marketing Director, Stéphanie Thibaud.

In addition, Tourisme Gaspésie continues to work at stretching the tourist season into spring. "We work differently. We have specific offensives dedicated to spring and autumn. We are going to offer

more short stays – three to four days – to encourage people to discover the destination during these seasons," says the marketing director.

The MRCs of the Gaspé Peninsula are investing \$40,000 in total to obtain a leverage effect, which will be doubled by Tourisme Gaspésie.

"This allows them to have a little more visibility for each of their territories," she says.

Inquiries are slightly lower at this point in the season compared to last year.

Internal surveys of accommodation establishments show that 50% of establishments are experiencing booking similar to last year.

"We still have 20% who say that we are slightly behind. We still expect it because we have had a few good years behind us. There is a different consumer trend and people are interested in international markets. We have to be ready. There is nothing acquired. We will remain confident," says Ms. Thibaud.



Tourisme Gaspésie's 2023 summer campaign is aimed primarily towards Maritimers.

Photo: Tourisme Gaspésie – Mathieu Dupuis

Last year, more than 570,000 people visited the region between May and October, leaving \$340 million in economic spinoffs.

"It was a very good season. We had very good seasons for the last four years. I don't have a crystal ball, but every effort is being made to encourage

people to discover or rediscover the destination. Eighty percent of tourists come to the Gaspé Peninsula between April and October. This is why so much effort is put into those seasons," she explains.

People in the industry are adapting as seasonal businesses open earlier and close

around Thanksgiving.

"We have very good seasons, especially in the fall. We noticed last year that it was beautiful and warm longer (extending the season). There are people interested in discovering the destination. There is an offer that adapts to this new trend," notes Ms Thibaud.

Growth of winter tourism in the Gaspé Peninsula

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

MONT-JOLI - A preliminary report by Tourisme Gaspésie shows winter tourism has increased in popularity in the Gaspé Peninsula, with a growth of 5.2% compared to last year.

In total, for the period between December 2022 and February 2023, the occupancy rate reached 37%. This rate was 31.7% in January, a gain of 7.4%, and 52.6% in February, an increase of 5.6%.

The director general of Tourisme Gaspésie, Joëlle Ross, says it was an excellent winter. "We are aware that at 37%, we can greet more (tourists) in winter. We will continue to work hard and we will have even more people next winter," promises Ms. Ross.

Winter 2023 compares to the pre-pandemic numbers of 2019.

"We didn't have the impression that there were that many people but, finally, with the statistics of overnight stays, we realize that people were here," even though the snow came late this year.

The statistics for March have not yet been completed, but the numbers are encouraging.

"We saw a lot of snowmobilers in March, especially from Ontario and the United States. When we have March (statistics), it will adjust the winter season even more," says Ms. Ross.

Tourisme Gaspésie invested \$300,000 to promote the region this winter with both French-speaking and English-speaking customers in Quebec and the Maritimes.

In total, more than 20 million advertisements were delivered in selected media platforms, enabling the destination to be positioned advantageously among high-potential customers with an interest in winter and the activities offered in the Gaspé Peninsula, such as snowmobiling, off-trail skiing, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing and other outdoor activities, as well as getaways combining distinctive accommodations and gourmet offerings.

"We will continue to work on this. Of course, every year there are new products that can be sold. Word of mouth



The occupancy rate increased this winter in the Gaspé Peninsula.

Photo: Tourisme Gaspésie

remains good. We are working on all of this to ensure that our winters are inviting," says the director.

In addition, Québec Maritime has invested nearly \$115,000 to promote the destination to snowmobilers in Ontario and neighbouring American states.

Tourisme Gaspésie is now working on promoting the 2023 summer tourist season following an excellent 2022 tourist season.

"There are always factors that we have no control over such as the price of gas and temperature. We are going to work our markets even more so that our customers are fond of coming back to the Gaspé," says Ms. Ross, who mentions that visitors no longer look at the region in the same way.

The efforts put into the beginning of summer and the end of the season are working.

"You have to extend it, but also spread it over the territory. Sometimes, not sleeping or eating in key places that are always more full, can bring us interesting customers who stay a little further away, but who benefit from it because they are able to go back and forth. Everyone will be better served," says Ms. Ross, who believes that people are not offended by travelling 10 or 15 kilometres.

James Martin receives recognition for contribution to the New Richmond Agricultural Society

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW RICHMOND – The hard work of James Martin for the New Richmond Agricultural Society was recognized during an April 22 morning gala underlining volunteer involvement, an event organized by the Municipality of New Richmond.

François Blais, another longtime volunteer and colleague of James Martin, was also praised for his decades of contributions to the New Richmond Agricultural Society. Sadly, Mr. Blais was unable to attend the event.

Awards were given to people from seven categories of volunteer involvement. Mr. Martin and Mr. Blais won in the “recognition award” category, an award “given this year to two volunteers who have devoted a very large part of their time to the New Richmond Agricultural Society.”

Master of ceremony, Sébastien Gallant, mentioned that “both men served as presidents of the agricultural society for several years. Both have done many hours of manual work to maintain the ancestral site of the New Richmond Agricultural Society

which has existed since 1845! Together, they visited the site regularly and made sure to do the work necessary for the proper functioning of the place. Despite the pandemic, these two volunteers remained optimistic. We could count on the presence of these two valiant volunteers every Sunday morning. Their dedication and time invested in the agricultural society is commendable! Mr. Martin and Mr. Blais, the members of the community, the agricultural society as well as the Town of New Richmond would like today to highlight your important work. Thank you for your generosity and dedication.”

The New Richmond volunteer recognition event, which took place under the theme “Volunteers in unison” highlighted the involvement of more than 100 people and organizations.

Other winners

The recruits of the year were Anthony Gauthier, Éloi Duchesneau and Béatrice Bujold from the New Richmond Cadet Corps while the emerging volunteer award went to Jérémie Cormier for his involvement in the Maison des jeunes (youth house) of New Richmond.

The coach of the year was Benoît Durand for his many years as a basketball and hockey coach.

The event of the year award went to the 50th anniversary of the New Richmond 50+ Club, represented by Solange Hébert.

The selection committee chose Danny Hudon as the 55 and under volunteer of the year. Mr. Hudson devotes his time to the Rallye Baie-des-Chaleurs. The volunteer of the year for 56 years and over

went to Marie-France Hébert for her dedication to the Choeur Clef de sol, the local choir.

The celebration event by the Town of New Richmond was a way to encourage people to continue their unprecedented commitment and also to humbly say ‘thanks’ for what volunteers bring to the community, says Mayor Dubé.



Photo: Anne Audet

James Martin received his certificate from Mayor Éric Dubé. The Town of New Richmond also recognized the efforts of François Blais who could not attend the event.



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

LOCATION: Chandler Golf Club
(200 Commercial Street West, Chandler)

DATE: Friday, June 9, 2023

TIME: 8:00 a.m.: Welcome
8:30 a.m.: Annual General Meeting
10:30 a.m.: End of the meeting

Invitation to the population of the MRC du Rocher-Percé. In anticipation of this annual general meeting, at which directors of the corporation will be elected, a nomination period will be open from April 28, 2023 to be closed on May 28, 2023 at 8:30 a.m., in accordance with the by-law 5.03 of the general regulations.

The positions to be filled are in the following sectors:

- **Tertiary:** Four (4) administrators representing all the socio-economic activities corresponding to the service of the distribution or sale of goods, products and services, in particular: Educational institutions, professional services, services to business, health and social services.
- **Youth:** One (1) director representing young people aged 18 to under 40.

Any interested person must complete the appropriate form, within the time limits mentioned above and send it to the head office of the corporation at: 129, boulevard René-Lévesque Ouest, bureau S-101, Chandler (Québec) G0C 1K0.

The nomination form and the general regulations are available at the SADC office as well as on the website in the “ANNUAL REPORTS AND PUBLICATIONS” section.

For the Board of Directors,

Marthe Larocque
Administrative Officer
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Geometry car inspects Matapedia to New Richmond line

GILLES GAGNÉ

NOUVELLE – CN Rail’s geometry car rarely goes unnoticed by rail fans and other onlookers not used to seeing such a rare unit on railroads. Unit CN 1501 spent April 24 inspecting the line between Matapedia and New Richmond for the use of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG), which operates freight trains between the two points and Transports Québec, the ministry that owns the line.

The purpose of such a test car consists of analyzing the curves, the inclination of the slight slopes characterizing some railway curves, the span between the rails and it also suggests the speed that should be adopted on some stretches or the places that need upgrading in order to increase speeds.

“It gives us a very accurate indication of the parts of the line where work is required. It can be very minor work but it is useful, as we can, through correcting a situation quickly, avoid bigger work later,” explains Luc Lévesque, director general of the SCFG.

This Gaspé Peninsula transporter usually requires

the services of the test car twice a year, when it passes near the area to do the same routine on the CN lines in the Matapedia Valley or northern New Brunswick.

“In the spring, it gives us indications about the consequences the winter has had on the line and over the fall, it provides us with details about what the maintenance program of the coming year should look like,” says Mr. Lévesque.

“Experienced track people can also pinpoint the areas that pose a problem. There are old school maintenance documents showing how to check the inclination of a curve with a rope, however, detecting an inclination variation over 61 feet from a pickup truck is not evident, for example,” adds Mr. Lévesque.

Technology now allows the report produced by the test car to be available the same day as data is collected.

More repair contracts awarded

Meanwhile, Transports Québec has recently given the go-ahead to two construction firms for the upgrading



The CN geometry car passed in Nouvelle on the afternoon of April 24, behind three of the SCFG locomotives. The locomotives were headed to Matapedia for the following day’s freight train and the test car was experiencing an intermittent engine problem, which explains why the locomotives accompanied it.

Photo: G. Gagné

or repairs of small structures located between Hope Town and Port Daniel.

Hamel Construction has been awarded the Port Daniel culvert replacement contract over Castilloux Brook. The culvert is located between Bellevue and Clemville Roads. The contract is valued at \$4,950,000, as communicated on April 25 by Transports Québec. Work is supposed to start in mid-May and has to be completed by mid-September.

The two small contracts for the Hope Town railroad

bridges have been awarded to Construction BSL Inc. for \$5,155,333.

The contracts to repair three small bridges, located over the Saint-Siméon River, Cullen’s Brook and Day Brook in the east part of Bonaventure, will soon be awarded considering that the call for tenders deadline is scheduled for May 8.

In addition to the various contracts underway in Caplan, Bonaventure, Shigawake and Port Daniel, the latter contracts complete the main aspects of the work re-

quired to reopen the line between Caplan and the Port Daniel cement plant.

Transports Québec’s planning suggests that the line will be reopened in 2024 to Port Daniel, but whether it will be at the beginning of the year or later is not yet official.

Cement from Port Daniel is currently being hauled by transport trucks to rail cars in New Richmond.

Traffic on the railway to serve St. Mary’s Cement is expected to increase significantly once the line is functional.

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Spring garbage quite conspicuous in Hope Town, Shigawake and Port Daniel

GILLES GAGNÉ

SHIGAWAKE – Several citizens from the municipalities of Port Daniel, Hope Town and Shigawake have noticed this spring an unusual quantity of garbage along secondary roads. It is a problem everywhere when the snow melts because litter dropped, thrown or blown away by the wind during the winter seems to gather up within a short period of time during the spring.

However, people find it hard to understand why an item like a mattress can be dumped along a road. The Petit 2 in Hope Town, Sullivan Lane in Shigawake and Route Marciel in Port Daniel, to name a few, have left the residents of those areas wondering what is happening this year.

The fact that garbage pickup is now done every three weeks, instead of every two weeks, in the Rocher-Percé MRC, is a point raised by the people trying to understand the situation.

The mayor of Port Daniel-Gascons, Henri Grenier, doesn't consider the 2023 situation worse than previous years.

"Based on my experience, springtime is always the same. At the beginning of



This mattress on the side of the road in Shigawake angered many citizens.

Photo: Holly Smith

May, our employees will make a round and pick up the garbage. We have to wait. There is still snow in the ditches and a high level of water in the brooks," he explains.

Garbage pickup every three weeks until the end of May is not a reason to throw litter everywhere, he adds. The municipality of Port Daniel-Gascons intends to remind people that throwing garbage outside is forbidden,

and that people caught doing it can be fined.

"We will put signs along the roads. It is hard to think that surveillance can have an effect. We can't watch the situation around the clock," mentions Mr. Grenier.

Many Port Daniel residents are also upset about the cancellation of the annual spring large garbage pickup, with many residents questioning what they are supposed to do with materials such as mat-



Shigawake Municipal Employee, Debbie Benwell, stated that the garbage situation is the worst she has ever seen.

Photo: Facebook

tresses, large appliances and furniture.

Shigawake municipal employee, Debbie Benwell, mentioned in a Facebook post that in the five years she has worked for the municipality, it's the worst she has ever seen for the garbage situation on Sullivan Lane. "I did not think we should pay taxes for recycling bins and garbage cans, to throw it out on the lane," she wrote.

People, she added, must

bring recycling and garbage home instead of throwing it out of their vehicles. She describes this spring's situation as pathetic. "The lane is not a dump for you guy(s) to use whenever you like." She points out that it is a matter of "respect for our community and yourself." She finished her message by reminding the person who threw a mattress on the side of the road that "we do have a big garbage pickup at the end of June."

Large items will not be collected in Rocher-Percé MRC

NELSON SERGERIE

GRANDE-RIVIÈRE: The collection of large waste or bulky items will not take place this spring in the MRC du Rocher-Percé following bids that greatly exceeded the board's ability to pay and certain administrative rules.

The difficult decision made by the administrators of the Gaspé Peninsula Intermunicipal Residual Materials Processing Board is causing much discontent on social networks.

"Following the call for tenders, we were surprised at the prices received. There was a 60% increase and since it was beyond the technical thresholds of the call for tenders process, the MRC could not award the contract and it did not respect the budget. It was decided not to carry out the collection of bulky items this spring," explains the director general of the board,



Photo: Gaspésie Intermunicipal Residual Materials Treatment Board

Large debris will not be collected this spring in the MRC of Rocher-Percé.

Nathalie Drapeau.

A working committee is in place to check whether it would not be possible to organize a collection this fall.

"Until then, there are still three ecocentres on the territory. Citizens are invited to bring their material directly to the ecocentres. They are enti-

tled to 10 free trips. It is quite flexible as a service. For those who cannot come, they can wait to see if there will be a collection this fall. They can call us to see the options," says Ms. Drapeau.

"There is a limit to blowing the budget," says the manager.

On social networks, citizens criticized the management's decision, mentioning that taxes increased this year, but the services are decreasing.

The citizens of the Town of Gaspé, who are attached to the board for residual materials, are not affected by this decision.

Beyond the situation of bulky waste collection, the overall situation of residual materials management is becoming more and more of a concern.

Already, to avoid a price shock to citizens, the waste collection went from two to three weeks in January as part

of a pilot project in colder months, which had also caused an outcry.

But the situation has since calmed down.

"It's going great. We have a significant increase in brown bin users. The arrivals at the composting site are beautiful. There are not too many contaminants. There are people who came to buy a brown bin because they had gotten rid of theirs. The few complaints at the start were perhaps people who were worried, but there are many who have found solutions," says Ms. Drapeau.

This pilot project saved more than \$100,000 and limited the increase in the 2023 budget.

"It was one of the possible solutions to precisely reduce the increase in the significant costs of residual materials management," adds Ms. Drapeau, who insists that the bi-weekly collection will return during the summer.



Photo: N. Sergerie

In August 2019, dozens of people demonstrated in Gaspé to speed up rail rehabilitation.

Citizens committee from Gaspé is once again calling for a quick return of the train to Gaspé

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - The slowness in drawing up plans and repairing the rail on section 3 between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé is being criticized by the Citizens' Committee for the Development of Gaspé.

The call for action comes following the Regional Road, Airport and Rail Investment Program for the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands

which was announced by the Minister of Transport, Geneviève Guilbault on April 17 in New Richmond

"I understand that there is approximately \$285 million allocated and only \$142 million spent since 2017. It's not going fast," says the president of the Citizens' Committee for the Development of Gaspé, Mauril Minville.

"The minister says she is waiting for the studies. Imagine! In August 2019, we had a

gathering of people waiting for the rehabilitation of the train. At the end of August 2019, the premier received the mayors and prefects, and the minutes of the meeting say that the premier had hinted at 2025. We were very happy in 2019," he adds. By February 2022, the schedule no longer existed, the Coalition Avenir Québec government did not dare to announce any date for

Cont'd on page 13 ▶

Matapedia avoids flood with stable spring weather and work of hovercraft

Gilles Gagné

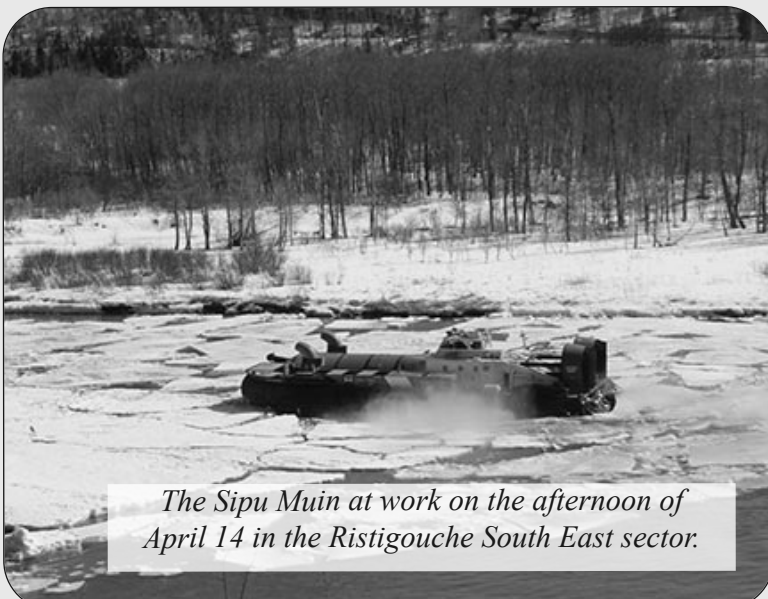
MATAPEDIA – The two visits of the Canadian Coast Guard hovercraft *Sipu Muin* between March 28 and April 15 erased the concern of Matapedia citizens regarding a possible ice jam-induced flood this spring.

The *Sipu Muin* worked on the Restigouche River from March 28 to April 4, before leaving to de-ice the fishing port of Shippagan, New Brunswick, to help the snow crab fishermen open their season. The hovercraft needs water under the ice to break it with the wave generated by its air cushion. On April 4, when the hovercraft first visited the region, the river's water levels were not high enough for it to do its job effectively upstream of the Sillarsville area.

The very gradual melting of snow this spring also helped considerably to avoid a sudden breakup.

The *Sipu Muin* returned to the Pointe-à-la-Croix-Matapedia area on April 13 and de-iced areas of the Restigouche River that could pose a problem. The breakup occurred late on the evening of Saturday, April 15, and the broken ice descended unhindered toward the mouth of the river. The heavy rain that took place on April 18 kept some other Gaspésians on alert mode but, finally, the rivers absorbed the quantity of precipitation and melted snow without causing any harm.

In Matapedia, ice jam floods occurred several times over the last 50 years; the worst ones taking place in 1974 and 1994. The floods of 2008, 2014 and 2019 also caused damage but to a much smaller degree. Serge Normandeau, a Matapedia businessman and an observer of the spring situation for decades, points out that the last damage caused by factors other than ice jams, such as precipitation and melted snow, occurred at the end of the 1970s.



The Sipu Muin at work on the afternoon of April 14 in the Ristigouche South East sector.

Photo: G. Gagné

Reflections

by

Diane Skinner Flowers



Screen-free Week May 1 – 7, 2023

"There's no WiFi in the forest, but you'll find a better connection."

Gasp! No screens for a whole week! Screen-free Week is an annual invitation to get off your screens for a whole week. If you cannot manage to be screen-free for a week, start with one day. It is still progress towards realizing how much time we, and our children, spend in front of a screen. This week does not ask those who do their work or even schoolwork on a computer to stop. Students still must complete their homework. It is more about how we spend our "off hours" and how much time many of us spend in front of a small, medium or large screen such as a cell phone, tablet, or television.

Being on a screen for too much time affects children in negative ways. The average child, from the age of six, spends eight hours per day on a screen and less than one hour outside! This affects sleep, stress levels and their attention span.

Play outside instead of going on YouTube. Read a book, a real physical book, instead of a book on a screen. It is a different experience. Forget social media, which can be so negative, even harmful; and socialize with a friend or family member face to face. Play a game with your family or friends this week. Absolutely no screens at the supper table!

Children need play to develop, and they need to learn about the physical world around them. Screen-free week was originally "TV Turnoff Week" when the TV was turned off and kids went out to play and enjoy interacting with others. Kids only learn to get along with peers by socializing, talking, playing and using their imaginations.

Another big advantage is that children and adults are not being bombarded by targeted ads. These ads tell children what they should want.

Instead of screen time children can...

Read a book, play a game, play outside, cook or bake a treat, go for a walk, write a story, listen to music, draw, paint or make a craft, exercise, try yoga, ride a bike, clean the yard, or clean their room. Encourage them to make a list of their hopes and dreams for this summer. They could build a fort and even have a friend over.

Instead of screen-time adults can ...

Do pretty much the activities that children can but, most of all, do not take your cell phone to bed with you. It is suggested that you stay off your phone for 45 minutes before bed every night, not just on Screen-free Week. This will help you sleep better.



By the age of six, children spend an average of eight hours a day in front of a screen and less than an hour outside.

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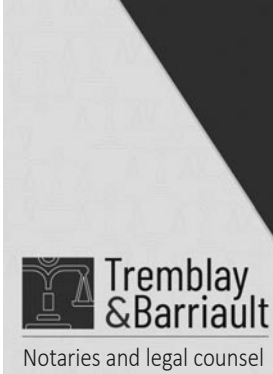
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Chandler: Negotiations to renew the workers' collective agreement have broken down

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

CHANDLER - Negotiations between the 41 unionized employees affiliated with the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) and the Town of Chandler were not progressing when the discussions were broken off.

After a short bargaining session on April 25, the town "threw in the towel," following the union's rejection.

"We had a short and brief meeting and we are disappointed by the turn of events. We offered 16.5% over five years with an average of 3.3% per year. We think the town acted in good faith and we have come a long way. It is in a real impasse," says Bruno-Pierre Godbout who is a municipal councillor for the Town of Chandler and spokesperson for the employer.

It appears there isn't any possibility of reaching an agreement.

"The union has been notified that the offer on the table has been withdrawn. We're going to call a mediator. Otherwise, we will go to arbitra-

tion," adds Mr. Godbout, who has closed the door to any new attempt at negotiations.

The CSN maintains its policy of not negotiating in the public arena. The regional coordinator of the CSN, Éric Babin, has taken note of the town's desire to go to mediation. According to him, everything is being done to reach an agreement and he is hopeful of winning.

On April 11, the president of the local union, Lisa Cyr, indicated that the standard had been settled and that the issue was about compensation.

The request was for 16.5% over five years and a revision of the salary scale. The town was ready to grant the increase, without reviewing the levels.

Union members voted on a five-day strike mandate on April 11, which will be used when deemed appropriate.

Ms. Cyr did not return our calls on April 25, when asked to comment.

The collective agreement expired on December 31, 2021.

RAIL PROTEST:

Cont'd from page 11

the return of the train to Gaspé.

"We are told in April 2023 that they are not able to give a deadline for the completion of this work because they are awaiting studies? Listen! Seven years to do \$100 million of work and no studies for the rest! There is someone sleeping on the job," says Mr. Minville.

According to him, the committee's patience has reached its limits.

"The CAQ government adopted, under a gag order in December 2020, a law for the acceleration of major works, that is to say all those exceeding \$50 million. They identified 150, including the construction of the Gaspésie train... And we are told 'we cannot give a deadline because the studies are not advanced enough,'" says the president.

Mr. Minville believes that the Minister of Transport has a great opportunity to make the decision to

modify the third link project between Quebec City and Lévis and to prioritize rail in the Gaspé.

"One (the government) must admit that there is no desire to finish this project," explains Mr. Minville following last week's announcements in the Gaspé Peninsula.

"There is a neglected sector and we will not give up," he says, maintaining that after years of waiting on the part of industry stakeholders and the strong consensus emerging in the Gaspé Peninsula rail file, the disappointment is great.

For the committee, the very vulnerable situation in which Gaspésians have found themselves in for many years, when it comes to passenger transportation, should nevertheless meet the criteria of logic, prioritization and consideration retained by the Government of Quebec.

The committee adds that Gaspésians travelling alone over very long distances by car for medical reasons, school, family and business, justify the prioritization of the file.

Earth Day Clean-up: Children learn an important lesson

DIANE SKINNER

"Earth Day should encourage us to reflect on what we are doing to make our planet a more liveable and sustainable place."

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES: It was a cool, yet pleasant day, on April 22, when volunteers took part in a municipal cleanup activity to make their community a more beautiful place to live.

Miranda Willett, the Recreation Coordinator for the town of Cascapedia-St-Jules, organized an Earth Day cleanup activity.

Participants were provided gloves, as well as garbage and recycling bags, for the cleanup. The 15 volunteers, eight adults and seven children worked hard throughout the morning to "clean up the town."

Items picked up included lots of cans, car mats, winter hats, as well as lots of paper and cardboard. Ms. Willett tells SPEC that participants felt a bit dismayed at the amount of litter they found.

The children who participated had an enjoyable time and they expressed how important it is for people to not litter. Samuel Willett, one of the child volunteers, had such a great time and understood the importance of Earth Day, that when he got home, he grabbed a garbage bag and started to clean up the area near his home! If we can show our children the importance of a clean environment, they will take that mission into adulthood.

Miranda Willett states, "Celebrating Earth Day is significant because it reminds us of the importance of taking care of our planet. It reminds us that together we can make a difference in keeping our home a healthy and safe place to live." An important takeaway for all.

The plan for Earth Day 2024 is to make the cleanup an annual event and to hopefully encourage more people to take part. Also planned for next Earth Day is providing small trees for par-

ticipants to take home and plant.

At the end of the Earth Day 2023 activity, the group of volunteers celebrated a job

well done by having a pizza party, while sharing their thoughts about a successful Earth Day in Cascapedia-St-Jules.



Photos: Miranda Willett

Jayce Willett-Bernard enjoyed his very first Earth Day activities!



Participants from Cascapedia-St-Jules enjoying a pizza lunch after completing their first Annual Earth Day Clean-up!



Happy and involved children from Cascapedia-St-Jules helping to clean up litter and learning an important lesson about the earth.



Announcements



In Memory



ANNETT: Emily (née Tuzo)

ANNETT: Francis

In loving memory of a dear mother, mother-in-law and grandmother, who passed away 25 years ago on May 2, 1998 and a dear father, father-in-law and grandfather, who passed away 25 years ago on May 14, 1998.

*Their nature was loving and giving,
Their hearts were made of gold,
And to us who truly loved them,
Their memory will never grow old.
We speak their names with love and pride.
We smile with tears we cannot hide.
We thank them for the years we shared.
The love they gave,
The way they cared.
May the winds of love blow softly
And whisper so they'll hear.
We will always love and miss you
And wish that you were here.*

Sadly missed and forever loved by daughter Bonnie, son-in-law Daniel, granddaughter Janna and grandson John (Evelyne).

LANGLOIS: Leonard

In loving memory of a dear husband, father and grandfather who passed away on March 10, 1998.
*Time slips by but memories stay,
Quietly remembered every day.
We know you are always near,
To help us along the way.
Love you forever. Iona and all your family.*

ROBERTS: Earl - April 6, 2000

ROBERTS: Beatrice - February 16, 2003

In loving memory of Mum and Dad. Dear parents, grandparents and great-grandparents.
*Those we love can never be,
More than a thought away,
For as long as there are memories,
They live on in our hearts to stay.
Love you both forever. Iona and family.*



Memorial Service



MILLER: Bill

A memorial service for Bill Miller will be held at the Wakeham Anglican Church on May 20, beginning at 1 p.m.

Prière infaillible à la Vierge Marie

Fleur toute belle du Mont-Carmel, vigne fructueuse, splendeur du ciel, mère bénie du fils de Dieu assistez-moi et montrez-moi, ici même, que vous êtes ma mère de Dieu, reine du ciel et de la terre, je vous supplie du fond du cœur de m'appuyer dans cette demande. Personne ne peut résister à votre puissance.

Ô Marie conçue sans péché priez pour nous qui avons recours à vous (trois fois). Saint Marie, je remets cette cause entre vos mains (trois fois). Faites cette prière trois jours de suite et vous devez publier. La faveur demandée vous sera accordée.

D. J.

The New Carlisle Funeral Association extends sympathy to the family of Victorine Imhoff

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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.

May 13: Mother's Day tea from noon to 2 p.m. \$10 per person.

HOPE:

Hope Baptist Church

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

May 6: Bake sale fundraiser

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beginning at 9 a.m. at the New Carlisle Town Hall.

HOPE TOWN:

Sports and Recreation Club

May 20: Gift bingo beginning at 7 p.m. at the Saint Godefroi Optimist Club. Bring your dabbers. Organized by the Hope Town Sports and Recreation Club and the Saint Godefroi Optimist Club.

NEW CARLISLE:

Royal Canadian Legion Branch #64

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

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!

June 6: General meeting at

7 p.m. at 1 Mount Sorrel, New Carlisle.

NEW CARLISLE:

Linda LeMore-Brown Foundation

May 17: The Linda LeMore-Brown Foundation will be having its Annual General Meeting beginning at 4 p.m. at the CASA office. Please contact Ashley Renouf at 418-752-5995 extension 107 or email: ashley@casa-gaspe.com to confirm your presence.

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: Funeral Association

June 18: The New Carlisle Funeral Association will be having a Father's Day Brunch at the New Carlisle Chalet from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Adults \$15, children ten and under \$10. Hope to see you all there.

NEW RICHMOND: United Church Luncheon

May 21: Luncheon in house or takeout from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Church Hall. Cold cuts, salads and dessert. \$12 per person. All proceeds will go to the humanitarian fund.

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, May 7
10 a.m. Service

UNITED CHURCH

HOPE TOWN
Sunday, May 7
2 p.m. Service

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA

Sunday, May 7
NEW CARLISLE
11 a.m. Holy Eucharist
PORT DANIEL
9 a.m. Holy Eucharist

PARISH OF GASPÉ

Sunday, May 7
St. Paul's - Gaspé
Holy Eucharist / Vestry
with Douglas Johnson and
Bishop Bruce Myers

Animals at the Bioparc await your visit beginning on June 4!

DIANE SKINNER

BONAVENTURE: The animals (and staff) at the Bioparc, Bonaventure, will be ready for your visit on June 4, the opening day. It is even more special because it is one of the “Free Sundays” (offered to Quebec residents) and the beginning of the celebration of the Bioparc’s 25th anniversary. It is also the 25th birthday of Trompette the seal! On opening day, the animals will receive special treats.

Stéphanie Bentz, a biologist in charge of educational programs, has worked at the Bioparc since 2013. Her job involves a wide variety of tasks including hiring, training and coaching the education team. She also writes articles for magazines and journals. She also speaks on radio and television to promote the Bioparc. In addition, she manages the insectar-

ium, amphibians and reptile collections. Stéphanie states that her favourite collection is the insectarium. She mentions the spiny leaf insects that were born a few weeks ago that she says are “so cute.”

When you go, wear comfortable walking shoes because the average visit takes about three to four hours. During the summer, activities will be offered in the outdoor kiosks. In addition, your timing might be just right to see one of the two daily feedings of the harbour seals. Activities in the insectarium and in the reptile and amphibian pavilion where an opportunity to touch and hold an animal may be offered to you!

Taking photos is not only permitted but encouraged. This summer Stéphanie Bentz projects that the Bioparc will welcome 35,000 visitors. Last summer 32,000 enjoyed a visit there. All the information panels

are available in French and English. Most guides and reception attendants also speak English.

When asked why zoos are important, Stéphanie points out that visitors can see the animals up close and learn about them and their habitat. This can lead to a bond between people and animals that encourages the visitors to want to protect the animals. Some of the animals are difficult to see “in the wild.” So, zoos make nature more accessible.

Importantly, the Bioparc is a safe refuge for wounded or orphaned animals. Sometimes these animals stay for a while and are introduced back into their natural habitat. Others stay for their “retirement” at the Bioparc because they could not survive on their own.

A reminder: “Free Sundays” occur on the first Sunday of the month.



Stéphanie Bentz manages the insectarium, amphibian and reptile collections. Here she is with one of the residents of the reptile collection.

Photo: Stéphanie Bentz



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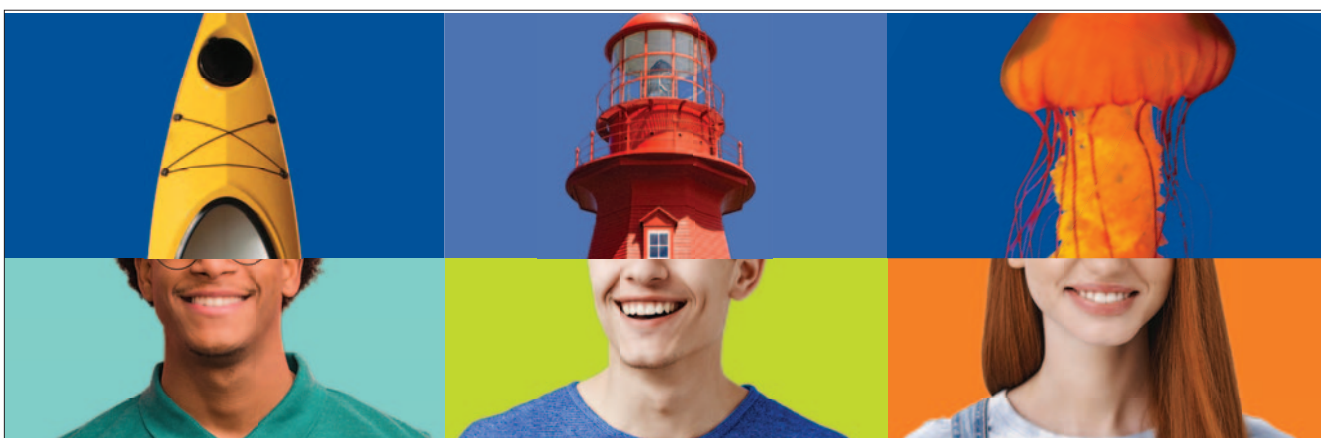
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