

Gaspé receives 117cm of snow in one week

NELSON SERGERIE

GASPÉ - The Gaspé Peninsula was hit hard with back-to-back storms.

In the Gaspé area, 117 centimetres of snow fell on February 13, 16 and 17.

During the February 13 storm, Gaspé received 40 centimetres of snow, Pointe-à-la-Garde 35 to 40 centimetres, New Richmond 30 centimetres and Matapédia 24 centimetres.

High winds and blowing snow caused road closures in several areas of the region. Even when roads remained open, travel was complicated by poor visibility.

Schools suspended classes, and the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine Inter-municipal Transport Board's public transportation services were also affected by bad weather in some areas.

As if that were not enough, a blizzard hit the region on February 16 and 17, this time leaving 77 centimetres of snow in Gaspé and 50 centimetres in the Bay of Chaleur area.

The storm was so intense that Highway 132 was closed all the way to Rivière-du-Loup, making it impossible to leave the region.

In Bonaventure, the town suspended snow removal operations on the evening of February 17, as crews could no longer operate safely due



Photos: N. Sergerie

Rue de la Reine in Gaspé on the evening of February 18.

to the heavy blowing snow.

Mayor Pierre Gagnon mentioned that in some areas of the eastern part of the municipality, snowbanks had reached heights of seven to eight feet. "We're getting the upper hand, but it can change from hour to hour with the intensity of the winds," said Mr. Gagnon while the storm was still underway.

During the blizzard an ambulance was delayed by the significant snow accumulation. However, the Town of Bonaventure says that the municipality wasn't contacted by any emergency services personnel during the blizzard.

The town had informed the Ministry of Transportation, the fire department, the 911 emergency call centre and the mayor of the suspension of snow removal services.

Crews were on standby, ready to assist in an emergency, but according to di-

rector general André Pineault, no call was made to the town.

"When the paramedics told CAUREQ (on 911), they can't get out, they called the Ministry of Transport. The truck passed by and we made a detour of a few metres. The ambulance drivers asked the

ministry to continue clearing the snow all the way to the citizen's home in the centre of the town. At that point, CAUREQ called the town and we escorted the ambulance," says the director general. Fortunately, the citizen did not have to be taken to the hospital.

On February 17 alone, 67.5 centimetres of snow fell, which is a record, according to Environment Canada data in Gaspé. This single storm surpassed the February monthly average of 63 centimetres.

So far, 119 centimetres have been received since the beginning of the month, almost twice the normal in Gaspé.

With the 117 centimetres received in one week at Michel-Pouliot Airport, the total for the 2024-2025 winter season reached 232 centimetres as of February 18.

The precipitation norm of 258 centimetres between the start of the winter season and February 28 is expected to be reached.



Downtown streets at the end of the storm on February 18.

54th Annual Wakeham-York Winter Carnival



On Saturday, February 8, sixteen people participated in a rousing game of boot hockey.

Photo: Arianne Fournier

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International nurses arrive against a backdrop of racism

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - Over the weekend of February 15-16, twenty new international nurses arrived in the Gaspé Peninsula to lend a hand at the Gaspé Peninsula Integrated Health and Social Services Centre (CISSS), which is facing issues of a significant shortage of healthcare workers.

Before practicing their trade, the nurses must complete a one-year refresher program at the Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles.

This third cohort of international nurses is assigned to healthcare facilities in Gaspé and Maria. "With manpower

needs everywhere, but more so in these two sectors. The accessibility of our modular accommodations facilitated the arrival and integration of these people are the factors that were taken into account," says Jean-François Cassivi, Assistant to the Director of Human Resources at CISSS.

The nurses come from Morocco, the Congo and Haiti. "It's very diverse," notes Mr. Cassivi.

This cohort was recruited before the moratorium that no longer allows nurses to be recruited from certain African countries.

About forty nurses were recruited in the first two cohorts. "The vast majority of people

stayed with the CISSS de la Gaspésie. We're very happy," says Mr. Cassivi.

These 60 or so caregivers have had a major impact on healthcare services offered in the Gaspé Peninsula.

"These are resources that complement our work team. Since the student pool is not sufficient, we lack human resources at this level. It has become essential to seek this help," explains the administrator.

For the moment, there are no plans for a fourth cohort. "The work is being done with the Ministry of Immigration and Francisation. We are waiting for instructions for the next steps," he says.

On February 14, the daily newspaper Le Devoir reported cases of racism at the hospital involving some of these international nurses.

"Without going into details, we have raised awareness. We are taking the situation seriously. We will have to intervene, have discussions with the people involved. For us, as an institution, racism in any form has a zero tolerance," says Mr. Cassivi.

He clarified that, while concerns have been raised, no concrete wrongdoing was found. "We did not have any clear evidence that would have led to reprimands. We do not want to remain on percep-

tions. We want to intervene so that there are no racist behaviours or actions," says Mr. Cassivi.

At the Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles, officials emphasize that such alleged incidents are rare

The coordinating teacher at the CISSS has denounced the situation. "There were interventions that were made. The students also changed shifts. The situation has improved," emphasized Éric Couillard, the coordinator of continuing education at the CEGEP, in an interview with CHNC. "The students have been very well received in the other internships in recent years. The staff is attentive," he adds.

Budget reductions: No positions cut at the CISSS

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - According to the three main unions representing healthcare workers in the Gaspé Peninsula, contrary to what is happening in other Integrated Health and Social Services Centres (CISSS) and Integrated University Health and Social Services Centres (CIUSSS) across the province, the Gaspé Peninsula CISSS has not cut any jobs as of yet.

"Currently, the CISSS is not there yet. We are keeping our eyes open, but we are having discussions to see how we can be effective in managing the workforce, in compliance with the applicable collective agreements," says Pier-Luc Bujold, President of the Eastern Quebec Nurses, Auxiliary Nurses and Respiratory Therapists Union.

While no jobs have been cut, staffing shortages remain a significant issue, particularly in obstetrics. "This is not due to budgetary restrictions or directives from Santé Québec. This existed before Santé Québec," notes the union representative.

The challenge is to have

enough staff to maintain activities in the emergency rooms and the use of external workers is necessary to keep all user services operational.

"We are talking with the CISSS to see how to gradually reduce while respecting the teams in place. Our goal has always been to eradicate the independent workforce while avoiding service reductions," emphasizes Mr. Bujold.

A few nurses have left the agencies to join the CISSS workforce. The Gaspé network must free itself from the independent workforce by October 2026 at the latest.

The Alliance du personnel professionnel et technique de la santé et des services sociaux (APTS), which represents laboratory technicians, radiology technicians, public health workers and the Youth Protection Department, has also reported no job losses within its members

"There has been no announcement of job cuts by the CISSS management. We have requested a meeting with the CEO and the director of human resources to inform us," says the union's regional spokesperson, Jenny Tardif.

However, many departments represented by the APTS are also experiencing staff shortages. "We are already overdrawn. When we talk about youth centres, psychologists, nuclear medicine that is on life support, it is extremely difficult to cut people when we are already in a restricted position to offer service to the population," notes Ms. Tardif.

The APTS is monitoring what is happening in Lower Saint Lawrence while there is

talk of closing the emergency rooms in Mont-Joli and Trois-Pistoles during the evenings and weekends. Discussions have already been held for the emergency services of the CLSCs of Paspébiac, Grande-Vallée and Murdochville.

"We will monitor what is happening. It is essential that the population has access to these services. The population must be aware and monitor new developments because they are the ones who will suffer service cuts if necessary,"

warns the union spokesperson.

On the CSN side, which mainly represents support and administrative staff, union representatives, no job cuts have been reported either.

For the current fiscal year, the use of independent labour to maintain services alone represents 400,000 hours of work and costs between \$25 million and \$30 million.

So far, the CISSS has successfully hired 28 agency workers into permanent positions.





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Environmentalist Pascal Bergeron faces sexual assault charge

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW CARLISLE –Environmentalist Pascal Bergeron has been charged with sexual assault against an adult female. The 43-year-old man was arrested by the Sûreté du Québec on February 18 and is scheduled to appear at the New Carlisle courthouse on March 31.

“He had been charged since February 5 by warrant. He did not appear in court this week. The identity of the victim and anything that could allow us to know that identity are subject to a publication ban,” says Sam Bernard, the criminal and penal prosecutor in this case.

Frédéric Deshaies, spokesperson for the Sûreté du Québec in the Gaspé Peninsula, points out that Pas-

cal Bergeron “was arrested, questioned and released pending his appearance” in court. The location of the arrest was not mentioned by the police. Pascal Bergeron has recently been living in Bonaventure.

A spokesperson for the Environnement Vert-plus group, Mr. Bergeron has been active in environmental causes for over a decade. In particular, he campaigned against oil drilling in the Gaspé Peninsula, for better monitoring by environmental authorities of the Port Daniel cement plant and for the protection of mountain caribou.

More recently, he has opposed the establishment of a pozzolan mine in Dalhousie, New Brunswick, citing potential impact of this project on the Quebec side of the Bay of Chaleur.



Photo: G. Gagné

Pascal Bergeron, during the public meeting held on October 29 in Carleton about the pozzolan mine project in Dalhousie.

Most Listuguj court cases will be heard in Carleton

GILLES GAGNÉ

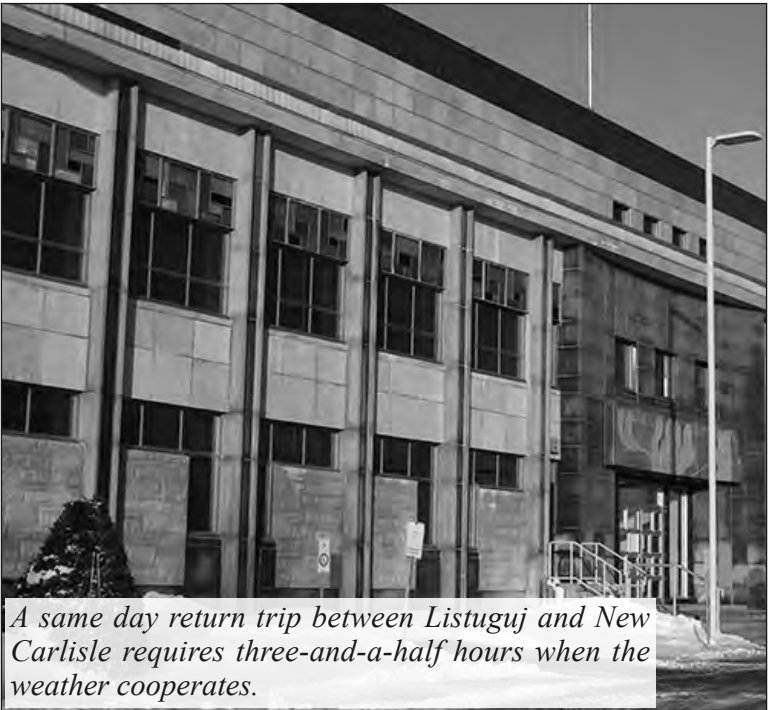
CARLETON – Following a year of discussions and ensuing reorganization, half-a-dozen justice stakeholders have agreed to hold a majority of hearings involving Listuguj citizens at the Carleton Courthouse, which will notably reduce the time spent on the road for numerous people.

The new formula will be effective on Thursday, February 27. A ceremony will then be held with various stakeholders being represented, including a Listuguj elder.

Gaspé Peninsula, Magdalen Islands and Lower Saint Lawrence president of the Bar Alexis Deschênes points out that the first mention of the possibility of using the Carleton Courthouse was made over the fall of 2023, during the official work resumption in courthouses.

“Someone submitted the idea back then. In February 2024, we had our first meeting in order to make it a reality. The goal is to bring justice closer to the citizens,” sums up Alexis Deschênes, a Legal Aid lawyer based in New Richmond.

For decades, some Listuguj citizens have been requesting the establishment of the courthouse in their community. What is happening now is not exactly the same thing but it does facilitate access to justice,



A same day return trip between Listuguj and New Carlisle requires three-and-a-half hours when the weather cooperates.

Photo: G. Gagné

points out Mr. Deschênes.

Team work

“We set up a roundtable including a judge, people from the Penal and Criminal Prosecution Directorate, defence attorneys, correctional services, the Public Security Department and CAVACS (the organization providing services to the victims of criminal acts). Everybody was in a practical mode in order to go quickly, maybe improve the way it works now, and find how to do that and what needs to be done to achieve it, starting with the first step and keep going. It is quite complex,” stresses Mr. Deschênes. The population deal-

ing with the justice system is often vulnerable, he adds.

“Listuguj has its own police service, which means that the officers can target all the files that emerge from the community and send them to us. We see that 20% of all criminal files dealt by the New Carlisle Courthouse come from Listuguj,” mentions Alexis Deschênes.

The use of the Carleton Courthouse, which is essentially reserved for small claims and youth cases once a month, will, for now, be limited to the Listuguj population.

“We understand that New Carlisle is also far from the

Cont'd on page 14

Police report



A February 19 avalanche, likely caused by mountain climbers, struck a pickup truck circulating on Highway 132 in Mont-Saint-Pierre, on the north side of the Gaspé Peninsula. “The emergency services were called at 12:45 p.m. to respond to a roadblock on Highway 132 in the Mont-Saint-Pierre area. A vehicle was immobilized after being pushed sideways by the avalanche, but the vehicle was not buried in snow. The two occupants sustained minor injuries. Highway 132 was closed in that sector for two hours, as it was reopened at 2:40 p.m. Emergency services were dispatched, including Sûreté du Québec, paramedics, firefighters, Civil Security and Transports Québec,” explains Audrey-Anne Bilodeau, spokesperson for the Sûreté du Québec.

Three mountain climbers were on the cliffside when the avalanche occurred. According to Transports Québec’s spokesperson Sophie Gaudreault, they likely triggered the mass of snow that descended onto the road. “That’s the information we gathered following the avalanche and that is backed by our Québec 511 cameras feeding us with road conditions. The climbers were moving along the side of the mountain. We could see them on the camera. They were able to get out of the avalanche’s way. They were the only ones on the side of that mountain. None of them were injured. The vehicle occupants were also able to get out of their pickup truck and walk away after the impact,” points out Ms. Gaudreault.

She adds that the avalanche could have been triggered randomly and naturally later, without human intervention, due to the weight of the snow that had fallen over previous days. A milk distributor driver was the only witness of the accident and the first person to assist the pickup truck’s occupants. Lisa Bond, a Gaspé resident who was in the pickup truck, later posted images of the avalanche on Facebook. The accident occurred at the eastern end of Mont-Saint-Pierre, where the cliff is very close to the road.

Daniel Albert, 67, from the Pabos Mills area of Chandler, recently pleaded guilty to eight of eleven poaching charges at the Percé Courthouse. At the start of the investigation, he was suspected of various infractions, including, hunting without a license, failing to register deer harvested and exceeding the legal big game hunting limit between November 2021 and November 2022. He was fined amounts ranging between \$250 and \$2,500 for each of the eight offences. In addition, he must pay court costs totaling nearly \$7,000. As part of his sentence, Daniel Albert will be banned from hunting for the next two years.

Two people escaped unharmed on February 20 after their snowmobile sank into the middle of the York River near a set of fishing shacks in front of the Gaspé hospital. A 13-year-old boy and a man in his forties were riding around 7 p.m. when the ice gave way under the weight of the vehicle. Several emergency vehicles were dispatched to the scene, but only the man fell into the water. He managed to pull himself out on his own. The interim director of the Gaspé Fire Protection Service, Éric Fugère, urges people to be cautious with the mild weather of the last few days. The snow is hiding the ice, which could be thin in places. Both individuals suffered from hypothermia and were taken to hospital for treatment.

A farm building in the Rivière-au-Renard sector of Gaspé was ravaged by flames at dawn on February 21. The alert was received at 4:44 a.m., and about thirty Gaspé firefighters from all stations responded. Upon arrival, the building was already engulfed in flames. It contained farm machinery, but no animals were inside. Due to the presence of fuel, firefighting efforts were longer and more complex. The building is a total loss, and an estimate of the damage has not yet been determined. An investigation will be necessary to determine the origin of the fire since no apparent clues were found. The cause of the fire is still unknown. Meanwhile, Percé firefighters provided coverage for the southern sector of the Town of Gaspé in case of another emergency.



Gilles Gagné

Commentary

Harder times for Pierre Poilievre

Over the first two years of his term as Canada’s Conservative Party leader, Pierre Poilievre put emphasis on axing the carbon tax, reducing the fiscal burden on Canadians, advocating for law and order and criticizing nearly every move made by current prime minister Justin Trudeau.

Instead of putting together potent replacement solutions, he opted for simplistic policies that have very slim chances of succeeding if he is elected, as they need to be polished, and thoroughly thought through.

He imposed a style that reminds people of Donald Trump, adopting a libertarian approach, waving basic parliamentary rules, such as politeness for his opponents, and chose bully manners. His decision to call Justin Trudeau a “wacko” on April 30, 2024, during House of Commons debates last year, which led to his expulsion from parliament, made good headlines. His Conservative Party caucus followed him out of the room.

However, it also showed Canadians, who are by and large moderate people who favour the respect of institutions, that Pierre Poilievre could probably go further, that the limit had not been reached, which might not augur well in a crisis situation.

The context has changed dramatically over the last four months. Donald Trump was elected for a second term as President of the United States, and the crisis situation has been the norm since November 5.

The ballot question has shifted

Donald Trump wants Canada to become the 51th state of the United States. He has repeatedly said that he wants to bring Canada to submission by imposing trade tariffs. He expresses a total disregard for facts, existing institutions, government people’s jobs and other countries.

His “America First” slogan is bound to fail if he doesn’t show a touch of flexibility, as the United States is a trading country, and its commercial partners will refrain from trading with Americans if there is no fairness in exchanges. Those partners will find other countries to do business with, as the world is vast in that regard.

Since his convention victory in September 2022, Pierre Poilievre has adopted an aggressive style that mirrors that of Donald Trump, with political manners, or lack thereof, that often seem to show connection between the two men. Since No-

vember 5, the Conservative Party leader’s positions and style have represented a significant handicap.

His 25% lead over Justin Trudeau’s Liberal Party in surveys conducted prior to the American election has melted away like snow in the sun.

Pierre Poilievre’s ballot question, “Axe the tax”, is now a tiny, vanishing point on the political map.

The real ballot question for Canadians is now: Who do they want as prime minister to face off against Donald Trump during trade talk?

Pierre Poilievre, who has not filled any position of significance before being elected at the House of Common at age 25, or Mark Carney, the man who was chosen by former Conservative Party Prime Minister Stephen Harper to run the Bank of Canada during the 2008-2009 financial crisis?

The same Mark Carney was later hired by another Conservative Party leader to run the Bank of England during the Brexit talks and the first year of the pandemic.

In both cases, his work and competence were praised by conservative forces.

Mark Carney remains a potential candidate for the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada. Chrystia Freeland is trailing far behind him in recent surveys, somewhat handicapped by her nine years and three months of association with Justin Trudeau, even if she contributed to his January 6 announcement that he will quit following the March 9 end of the leadership race.

There is a chance that, come an electoral campaign at the end of March, or in April or May, Canadians might decide to opt for Mark Carney to conduct the country’s talks with the United States.

Who’s on the Conservative Party’s team?

There is another snag in Pierre Poilievre’s troubled patch of navigable water towards power. He has so far been a one-man gang while the Liberal Party government, despite the crisis triggered by Justin Trudeau’s endless reflection about the relevance of quitting politics, has shown that there is still someone running the country.

Justin Trudeau himself has demonstrated an ability to evolve in crisis, somewhat like his leadership ability during the first year of the Covid pandemic. Secondly, David McGuinty, Dominic LeBlanc, Mélanie Joly and other cabinet members have conducted Canada’s affairs with aplomb since the beginning of January, defending the country

against Donald Trump’s repeated assaults.

Who would do the same for the Conservative Party if Pierre Poilievre were to win the upcoming election?

There is certainly some talent in his team, but who are they? Pierre Poilievre has failed to show them around since September 2022 and Canadians will likely opt for people they know during the storm triggered by Trump instead of taking a chance with nobodies.

This doesn’t mean that Pierre Poilievre cannot win the next poll. But time is running out for him to round up the conditions that would give him a win in April, May or June, since a fall election seems out of the question at this point.

In its latest survey conducted over the third weekend of February, Pallas Data revealed that the Liberal Party would currently receive 31% of Canadians’ support with Justin Trudeau leading the country. That rate of support would climb to 37% would Mark Carney be prime minister right now. Pierre Poilievre’s support stands at 40%.

It is a 3% lead over Mark Carney, which matches the margin of error. So. Mr. Poilievre could be 6% ahead, or toe-to-toe with Mark Carney. Pierre Poilievre’s problem is that before November, his lead was 25%. Such an erosion of popularity has not been seen in decades of federal politics, if ever.

To further complicate things for Pierre Poilievre, nothing indicates that the popularity shift of the latest months is over. Besides that, there is presently an electoral race in Ontario, a poll that will end on February 27 with the likely win of Progressive Conservative leader and current Premier Doug Ford.

Presently, the Ontario election probably boosts to a certain degree the rate of support of Pierre Poilievre, as it happens sometimes. Some people seem to confuse federal and provincial polls.

However, after February 27, Doug Ford will again avoid being seen on the same stage as Pierre Poilievre, which has been the norm over the last couple of years. The Ontario premier doesn’t get along with Mr. Poilievre, which is not a good sign, given that it is the province that will likely determine who is going to lead Canada from this spring and on.

Pierre Poilievre can still win the next federal election, but he must show in a matter of weeks that he has a team, negotiation competence and a strong program. Those remain to be proven in all three areas.

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Québec

Maria unsuccessful on two attempts at the MRC level

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

MARIA - The municipality of Maria suffered two setbacks at the MRC of Avignon Council of Mayors on February 12, regarding the election of a prefect by universal vote and the regionalization of the Carleton-sur-Mer arena.

The mayor of Maria, Jean-Claude Landry, considered it relevant to get a new start on a prefect elected by the population, considering the responsibilities devolved to the MRCs at the end of the years have become important. Prefect Mathieu Lapointe, recalls that discussions have taken place five or six times since 2021.

The issue was settled in June 2024. "After much thought, everyone was unanimously in favour of the cur-

rent elective method, i.e. the prefect elected by his peers. What we did was simply adopt it by resolution, so that the position would be clear. We went back over the arguments that had been discussed. In the end, the elected officials wanted to maintain the current method," says Mr. Lapointe.

According to the prefect, everyone is playing their part well. "Things are going well. We are developing. We are on a good run. Avignon is doing better than ever. We wanted to maintain the current ways of doing things. What will it be like in a year, two years, five years? We will see," he says.

The other debate ended with Avignon elected officials refusing to regionalize the Carleton-sur-Mer arena.

On February 10, Carleton adopted a resolution imposing

a \$1,200 fee on minor hockey and figure skating users residing outside of Carleton-sur-Mer to help cover the arena's operating deficit.

Maria wanted to see the infrastructure taken over by the MRC. "The MRC council quickly closed the door. The MRC does not want to interfere in the management of sports and leisure infrastructure and does not want to interfere in issues between municipalities. The debate does not concern the municipalities of the West," said the prefect.

"It's disappointing. I admit it. However, it is a decision made by the MRC representatives," said Maria Mayor Jean-Claude Landry. "There will be discussions at the Municipality of Maria on the follow-up to the responses



The mayor of Maria, Jean-Claude Landry.

Photo: N. Sergerie

received by the MRC," the elected official mentioned following the meeting with his colleagues.

Further discussions on all municipal infrastructure may

take place.

"The response was negative. Is there a need to come back to the charge? We will discuss it again at the municipality," continued Mr. Landry.

Gaspeians sensitize the federal government to threats of American tariffs

NELSON SERGERIE

GRANDE-RIVIÈRE - Entrepreneurs and politicians from the Gaspé Peninsula had the opportunity to discuss potential American tariffs with federal Minister of Industry, Science and Innovation François-Philippe Champagne, during a virtual meeting on February 18.

The meeting was organized by the Member of Parliament for the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands, Diane Lebouthillier. It was originally planned to be held in Matane, but was moved online due to the blizzard that hit the region on February 18.

"It's a message in which people want to be part of the solution. They clearly explained the economic situation of the region and everyone brought their concerns. Minister Champagne and Minister Lebouthillier were listening. We had tools that were there to help with marketing and exporting to allow businesses to move towards added value," says GÎMEXPORT Director Gino Cyr, who participated in the meeting.

Programs exist to provide direct support to businesses.



Photo: N. Sergerie

GÎMEXPORT General Manager Gino Cyr.

"There are closed programs. We need to make sure they are reopened. We should also have a toolbox adapted to the sector to support ecosystems. What is important to remember is that SMEs (Small Medium Enterprises) support Canada's GDP (Gross Domestic Product). We need to make sure we get closer to the resource regions to implement an action plan developed directly with the stakeholders," suggests Mr. Cyr.

GÎMEXPORT recently re-

ceived \$510,000 in funding from the Quebec government, allocated at a rate of \$170,000 per year for the years 2024 to 2027. Given the situation with the United States, the organization's role is increasing. "We support our companies to ensure that they have all their information in order to plan their market diversification," notes Mr. Cyr.

Three weeks ago, the federal government also granted \$280,000 per year to GIMXport in funding until 2027.



The worst flu season in 10 years

NELSON SERGERIE

GASPÉ - The 2025 flu season is shaping up to be the worst in the last 10 years in the Gaspé Peninsula, a situation similar to the rest of the province.

For the most recent full week of data (February 3), the positive rate of influenza in sentinel laboratories in the Gaspé Peninsula reached 25%, while it was approximately 21.6% last year. Provincially, the rate was 32%.

Despite this, the Regional Public Health Department considers the regional rate quite high, given that the 10 year average is 15.6%.

Public Health reports that

flu cases continue to rise but cannot predict when the season will peak. Based on province-wide data, experts believe the peak has not yet been reached.

The good news is that cases of COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) are decreasing.

The Public Health department reminds the population that vaccinations are still available free of charge for the entire population aged six months or older. It is especially recommended for those at higher risk of complications, including the elderly, individuals with chronic illnesses and pregnant women. The COVID-19 vaccine is also still available.

Four major components of the Gaspé Strategic Development Plan

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ - Four major components were retained in the report aimed at providing Gaspé with a Strategic Development Plan for the next 10 years.

The territory, the social component, the economic component and the internal component of the municipal organization are the elements that emerged following the consultations conducted online and in person during the months of October and November.

The consultations engaged nearly 1,000 people online, including 250 young people, as well as more than a hundred participants in the various workshops organized throughout the Gaspé area.

Several workshops were also held with elected officials, the municipality's administrative staff and other socio-economic partners in the community. "The population contributed enormously to the activity, much more than I could have expected," says Mayor Daniel Côté.

An ongoing online consultation invites residents to provide feedback on the proposed priorities.

"There aren't any big surprises: people are generally satisfied with the work accomplished and the way we are developing this town.



Citizens at one of the public consultation evenings.

Photo: N. Sergerie

Where there are pitfalls is the issue of housing, intra-urban and inter-urban transportation, the commercial offer where the municipality can't do much. These are the elements where people have put big reservations. We will have to emphasize these elements," explains the mayor, who notes that the population's satisfaction rate is close to 80%.

The online survey, which takes approximately 10 minutes to complete, will help prioritize what is presented to the population. The town hopes to adopt the final strategic plan by mid-March.

"There will also be time objectives. Among other things, in the next steps, we will modernize urban planning," emphasizes the mayor. Internally,

efforts will also be made to improve communication between the town and its citizens. To address this, a communications officer position has been created.

The 10-year planning horizon was also intended to coincide with the 500th anniversary of Jacques Cartier's arrival in Gaspé.

"All sorts of ideas emerged. People wanted more civic activities, but given Gaspé's place on the national stage, there will be elements of national history that will have to stand out. It is still the first meeting place between Indigenous communities and European communities. The beginning of the Francophonie in America was in Gaspé," maintains the mayor.

plete its strategic planning before launching consultations on the future of the land of the former Ministry of Transport service centre downtown and that of the arena.

"We were supposed to launch the consultations at the beginning of the year, but we chose to do them one after the other to avoid people being inundated with surveys," the mayor explains.

The demolition of the former Minister of Transport (MTQ) buildings was completed in January, with decontamination still to be carried out.

The town is expected to take possession of them at the end of the year or early next year. "The arena property will be fine when there is a financial assistance program that will accept us to build a new arena. We still have a few years before the land is available," he notes.

The consultation will address both properties. "We don't want to duplicate. If people choose to build a citizen space on land x, there won't be two citizen spaces," explains the elected official.

The survey on the strategic plan is available online until February 28 on the town's website.

Residents also expressed interest in infrastructure legacies and maintaining strong relations with First Nations.

A 500th anniversary celebration committee will soon be formed. "We don't want to do it at the last minute. We want to train it as far in advance as possible so that we can already start looking for funding, work with the First Nations, with Saint-Malo, which is our twin city in France because of our ties to Jacques Cartier, who left Saint-Malo in 1534. We have several long-term projects," he adds.

Gaspé has chosen to com-

Petition for a nephrologist is still under review

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ - The petition filed by Jean Lapointe calling for a nephrologist in the Gaspé Peninsula is making its way through government channels.

Mr. Lapointe, who has been fighting for a decade for the development of a hemodialysis service in the Gaspé Peninsula, collected a little over 10,000 signatures in November. The petition urges the Gaspé Peninsula Integrated Health and Social Services Centre to hire a nephrologist, as local patients must currently travel to Rimouski.

In response to this civic engagement, the Member of the National Assembly (MNA) for Gaspé, Stéphane Sainte-Croix, committed to submit it to the National Assembly. According to the MNA's office, the document has, so far, not been rejected by the Ministry of Health.



Jean Lapointe submitted his petition to the MNA for Gaspé, Stéphane Sainte-Croix, last November.

Photo: N. Sergerie

Snowmobilers are happy to see a big snowfall

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

CARLETON-SUR-MER - The significant snowfall from February 13, 16 and 17 in the Gaspé Peninsula is making snowmobilers happy, as they can now do the legendary Tour of the Gaspésie.

"With what we had, it's an ideal temperature for practicing all sports, especially snowmobiling. Winter is back to normal," says the president of the Mont-Carleton Snowmobile Club in Carleton-sur-Mer, Denis Henry.

According to Mr. Henry, the Avignon sector received a total of about 60 centimetres

of snow in mid-February.

"We didn't have any snow at all. We were on the grass. We lost a big month of snowmobiling in the Bay of Chaleur. We're going to hope that the two recent storms won't be the only ones this winter." The sun is getting stronger and the snow cover could disappear quickly," notes Mr. Henry.

When he talks with the neighbouring clubs, they are pleased as well. "There is a lot of excitement in the snowmobile clubs. The presidents are happy, the people are happy. Life is getting back to normal for snowmobilers," says the president.

The Tour of the Gaspésie remains very popular with snowmobilers, according to Mr. Henry, who participated in two winter trade shows this year.

"I was at a booth and for people from the big cities, the Tour of the Gaspésie is the pinnacle. I saw people last year who told me it was the seventh time they had done the tour," relates Mr. Henry.

To maintain current conditions, two or three 30-centimetre storms would be needed by mid-March to have a good season.

Between February 13 and 18, the Gaspé region received 117 centimetres of snow.



Study shows a decline in snow crab stock.

Photo: G. Gagné

Snow crab stock in Southern Gulf of Saint Lawrence drops 24%

GILLES GAGNÉ

CARLETON – A survey conducted in late summer 2024 shows a 24% decline in the snow crab stock in the Southern Gulf of Saint Lawrence compared to a similar survey made in 2023.

The biomass dropped from 68,000 metric tons of 2023 to 51,000 metric tons last year, according to Fisheries and Oceans Canada biologist Tobie

Surette, who monitored the survey. Mr. Surette explains that the snow crab stock has been in the declining phase of its ten-year cycle since 2022.

Between 2018 and 2022, that Southern Gulf biomass hovered between 78,000 and 85,000 metric tons. Tobie Surette mentions that over the last 20 years, the worst biomass levels were recorded in 2009 and 2010, with 31,000 and 35,000 metric tons, respec-

tively.

The commercial fishing quotas will likely only be determined at the end of March or the beginning of April for that zone. Gaspé Peninsula fishermen get around 30% of that quota.

SPEC will present a thorough report on the Southern Gulf snow crab stock in its next issue, as the 2024 survey data was released when the newspaper was reaching its deadline.

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Local news makes a difference *for English-speaking communities*

The importance of local media is a topic that has been the subject of many discussions in the last decade as news outlets across North America struggle to stay alive. But nowhere is the topic more important than within the English-speaking community of Quebec. As the provincial government has moved to systematically reduce the amount of information in English available, the need for English media becomes more vital. “We are the only ones explaining basic services and issues,” said Nikki Mantel, publisher of *The Low Down to Hull and Back News*, which covers the Gatineau hills region in western Quebec. As elements of Bill 96 approved in 2023, which has reinforced the Charter of the French Language, are implemented and enforced, the amount of information in Eng-

lish in all sectors of Quebec is diminishing. Quebec-based companies must now ensure that all information on their websites are in French only. The provincial government itself has reduced information available in English. And at the municipal level, only towns with bilingual status retain the right to provide some services and information in both French and English. Although, this includes offering English on their websites, many reports and some documentation are often available in French only. For English-speaking residents who live in municipalities that do not have bilingual

status, the information available to anglophones in English is disappearing. “Now more than ever we need a place where the community comes together,” Mantel said. “It’s like a Joni Mitchell song,” Mantel continued. “You really don’t know what you’ve lost until it’s gone.” In this climate, ensuring that English-language media survives in these communities, she said, is that much more important now. But it is not just information in English that is important, said Brenda O’Farrell, president of the Quebec Community Newspaper Association. It is also having journal-

ists on the ground, doing the research, asking the questions and providing the context of what is happening at the municipal level that is crucial. “Journalism puts issues in context,” said O’Farrell, who is also the editor at three community newspapers. “We can’t lose sight of what is happening with public administration,” she added. “If local media is not doing it, it simply doesn’t get done, and the majority of residents will never learn about what is going on at town halls, where public money is being managed.” “It takes work,” said Mantel, referring to covering town councils. Owners and publishers of local independent newspapers don’t take anything for granted. But neither should readers, said Ilka de Laat, manager of the QCNA. Especially, she explained, when we see so much of the media disappearing.

Canada only G7 country where media is banned on Facebook

The cat videos are still there. The questions from new homeowners looking for recommendations for a reliable contractor pop up every so often. And posts that highlight a new chicken-and-orzo recipe continue to appear, complete with a list of ingredients in the comments. But the link to the story about the hike in your municipal tax bill is not. Neither is the link to the article about the impact on the economy of the little town of Les Cèdres, west of Montreal, in the days after Amazon announced it planned to shutter its Quebec operations. It has been a year and a half since Meta, the owner of Facebook and Instagram, has banned news from its social media platforms, making Canada the only G7 country where news from legitimate me-

dia sources cannot be seen. The ban is a result of federal legislation, Bill C-18, the Online News Act, which came into force in June 2023. The aim of the legislation was to force large tech giants like Meta and Google to pay media outlets for news content shared on their platforms. But Meta opted to deny news outlets access to its social media sites, making it exempt from the new law. The move created another hurdle for community newspapers to get over. Meanwhile, a deal struck with Google to provide \$100 million in funding to Canadian media, will see most of the money go to large media companies. The result is the struggle for the smallest media outlets has become more difficult, as it no longer has the ability to engage

with their readers on the biggest social media platforms. “As a society that cares about the truth and cares about having a population that’s informed to ensure better democratic outcomes and to hold politicians to account, this is extremely bad news,” said Aengus Bridgman, director of Media Ecosystem Observatory, which published a study last June, marking the one-year anniversary of the Meta news ban. “Less news is being consumed by Canadians,” the report stated, which highlighted the increasing risk of Canadians being informed on politics and current affairs through a “more biased and factual lens than before.”

“Journalism puts issues in context.”
– Brenda O’Farrell, QCNA president



“News no longer flows down from the big media outlets.”

Shifting the direction flow of news

COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS AT EPICENTRE OF A REVOLUTION

In the first 11 months of 2024, 36 local news outlets closed in Canada. Twenty-nine were community newspapers, while seven were privately owned radio stations, according to the Local News Research Project at Toronto Metropolitan University’s School of Journalism.

That is in addition to the more than 500 news outlets that have ceased operations in Canada since 2008.

For those that remain, surviving does not mean striving – not by any means. Just about every other news operation in the country that remains – from Bell Media to the CBC, Postmedia to the Torstar group of papers – have slashed jobs and pulled back on coverage.

Canadians across the country are losing their news media, bit by bit, reporter by reporter, newspaper by newspaper – except for you, at least for now.

What makes you so different from a growing number of Canadians?

The mere fact that you are reading this, means you are served by a community newspaper that is still in operation. In fact, in a few very rare instances, you are reading a newspaper that just started publishing in the last few years.

If these areas were to be located on a map, they would be identified as “the starting point.” It’s where news begins.

And this is where the one bright light in the story of the Canadian media shines. It is where a little revolution

has started to rumble. It’s the epicentre that is shifting the directional flow of news in Canada.

“News no longer flows down from the big media outlets,” said Brenda O’Farrell, the president of the Quebec Community Newspaper Association. “It flows up, from the small, independent community news operations that still have reporters in communities outside the big city areas.”

O’Farrell calls it the “Trickle Up Theory of News.”

“No longer are major news outlets covering all areas. They are only focusing on major metropolitan centres,” she explained. “But so many people live outside of those regions.”

The stories that reflect these communities – stories that are important to these Canadians – are being covered by community newspapers.

“And these stories are trickling up to the major news operations – the CBC, the nearby daily, the Bell Media or Global News television stations. They pick up on our stories,” O’Farrell explained.

If it wasn’t for community news outlets, Canada’s major media outlets would only cover the big cities and nothing else. They no longer have the resources to do it.

That is why community newspapers are so important and need support, says Ilka de Laat, manager of the QCNA.

They also deserve your support, De Laat said, adding, “Your local newspaper reflects your issues, because the journalists live in the same community. They are your

neighbours. This is how accountability and trust works. A big-city reporter being sent to your small community from a corporate media outlet, they won’t appreciate your situation.”

Which brings us to context. Local reporters understand the local context – what is important to residents and why.

But for this “trickle up” to succeed, readers in all these communities that still have a community newspaper have to buy in. They cannot take their newspaper for granted. The stories from their towns are important. Readers have to become stakeholders in the process. And the way to do that is to subscribe.

“Look at what is happening in the U.S.,” O’Farrell said. “We can’t rely on social media platforms that are ready to drop fact-checking, ban news like Meta has done in Canada, and change the name of the Gulf of Mexico as they pander to a president who will allow them to avoid regulations that could affect their bottom lines.”

And on this side of the border, in Quebec, where municipalities that do not have bilingual status will soon have to eliminate information in English from their websites as aspects of Bill 96 are enforced, access to information in English is going to become more crucial.

Having reporters cover municipal councils will be crucial for the English-speaking community. And only your local community newspaper does that.



Alexis Deschênes files his candidacy for the Bloc Québécois in Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine-Listuguj

GILLES GAGNÉ

CARLETON – Alexis Deschênes, a former journalist and now a Gaspé lawyer with Legal Aid, has filed his candidacy as a Bloc Québécois candidate in the new riding of Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine-Listuguj, in anticipation of the coming federal elections.

Mr. Deschênes, who previously ran twice under the banner of the Parti Québécois, without success, is taking over from Bloc Québécois Member of Parliament Kristina Michaud, from the riding of Avignon-La Mitis-Matane-Matapédia. Ms. Michaud withdrew from the 2025 electoral campaign on January 27, as she will give birth to her first child in a few weeks.

In 2024, she chose to run in Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine-Listuguj because her riding is expected to disappear. A legal challenge to keep this riding has been under review by a federal judge since February 3. Alexis Deschênes was also at the origin of this challenge.

Surprised by Ms. Michaud’s withdrawal, Alexis Deschênes said he felt the urgency to intervene in the destabilizing context created by American President Donald Trump and his threats to impose tariffs on Canadian products when they arrive in the United States. He announced his intention to run for the Bloc on February 6 in Carleton.

“Make no mistake, times have changed,” he said. “The economy in my region is hit by uncertainty and worry,” he said, referring in particular to exports of wind turbine blades, lumber and lobster from the Gaspé Peninsula to the United States, products threatened by possible 25% tariffs as early as March.

“We are certain that Yves-François Blanchet and the Bloc Québécois will be able to defend Quebec’s interests,” Mr. Deschênes was quick to add, assuring that he “certainly cannot stand by and do nothing” in the current context.

His possible candidacy in the new riding of Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine-Listuguj does not discredit or contradict his approach to ensuring that the two ridings are maintained in the election scheduled for later in 2025, assures Mr. Deschênes.

“Nothing is changing. I continue to fight for my region (...) I however am not a fan of the empty chair (...) The new riding covers 30,000 square kilometres. It is as big as a country. If it is half the size, the Member (of Parliament) can be twice as present,” he emphasizes.

Bloc Québécois leader Yves-François Blanchet came to support Alexis Deschênes stating, “In hockey, we call that a franchise player.” Referring to Kristina Michaud, Mr. Blanchet said, “We don’t always choose the circumstances” to have a child, the Bloc leader was delighted that a “candidate of the calibre (...) who knows the issues of the region so well” could replace her.

“It didn’t take long before Alexis’ phone rang,” summarized Yves-François Blanchet. In a context where recent polls show a decline in the Bloc Québécois voting intentions, 22% compared to 38% if Mark Carney becomes leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, Mr. Blanchet still hoped for a vote “as soon as possible.”

He specified that the Bloc will rise in popular favour when Quebec issues occupy a greater place in the news, as elections and the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement approach, hence the need for federal elections as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, the Bloc associations in both ridings support Mr. Deschênes’ candidacy. The investiture date has not been chosen, but it should be a formality for Alexis Deschênes.



Photo: Gilles Gagné

Dredging is needed again at the Percé wharf

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

PERCÉ - A new dredging session is planned this year at the Percé wharf. The Quebec Ministry of Transport says the work should take place towards the end of April to avoid delaying the start of the fishing season and the arrival of tourism activities.

Since the plans and specifications are still being finalized, the exact quantities to be dredged remain to be confirmed. Unlike in previous years, the Bas-Saint-Laurent and Gaspésie Port Corporation will coordinate this operation in 2025.

Regarding long-term solutions to prevent the fishing harbour from silting up, the ministry indicates that the hydro-sedimentary surveys, including raw bathymetry and topography data, will be analyzed by the engineering firm responsible for studies to design a sustainable solution for the Percé wharf.

The ministry continues to



Photo: N. Sergerie

actively seek a sustainable resolution to the erosion and silting problems.

“The first step will consist of conducting specialized studies, such as a coastal marine hydraulic study, a coastal sediment transport study, an agitation and navigability study, as well as a comparison of scenarios based on a multi-criteria analysis,” the ministry wrote in an email.

These studies are scheduled to begin in the winter of 2025.

For the moment, there is no precise timetable for their duration due to the need for government authorizations.

Dredging work at the Percé wharf costs between \$350,000 and \$450,000 annually. They have been necessary since 2021, following the completion of the wharf reconstruction in 2020, which

was transferred by the federal government to the Government of Quebec.

Furthermore, on the protective wall inside the fishing harbour that protects a SÉPAQ building and, to a certain extent, nearby rue du Mont-Joli, the ministry notes that the facilities do not belong to it. However, the ministry conducted emergency work in 2024 to protect the wall’s integrity. Rock was thus added behind the wall, in sections particularly exposed to the impact of waves and at risk for its stability. The ministry also plans to consolidate the front of the wall to prevent any subsidence.

Since this work will take place in a coastal zone and a historic area, environmental authorizations, as well as from the Ministry of Culture and Communications will be required.

According to the ministry, taking into account the time needed to obtain these authorizations and to finalize

the plans and specifications, the stabilization work should be completed in 2026.

“It is important to note that despite this work, one of the SÉPAQ buildings remains at risk during storms. Also, the loss of boardwalk equipment caused by waves during storms is a phenomenon that is likely to recur. However, it is not within the MTSM’s (Ministry of Transport and Sustainable Mobility) mandate to ensure the maintenance of the boardwalk,” states the ministry’s note.

The emergency work carried out behind the retaining wall cost approximately \$240,000. Mayor Daniel Leboeuf expressed concern on the sidelines of the January town council meeting about the integrity of the structure.

“The end of this promenade has been affected. Even the emergency work is starting to fail. We are losing large sections of it,” says the mayor. “We will have to see if we will not have to find another solution,” he suggested.

Petition urges Quebec to address the needs of Maria Hospital

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

MARIA - A petition launched on February 12 on the National Assembly website is once again demanding the reconstruction of the emergency and intensive care units at the Maria hospital.

Elected officials are adopting resolutions to urge the Quebec government to move forward once and for all on this issue.

The wording of the petition states that in 2012, a clinical and real estate master plan had noted the major functional deficiencies in the facilities, particularly those of the emergency and intensive care units, and that the Gaspésie Integrated Health and Social Services Centre had prioritized the construction of the emergency and intensive care units at the Maria hospital; that the dilapidated state of the premises does not allow for the confidentiality of user files to be respected and that infection prevention is difficult and that the prefects of Avignon and Bonaventure recognize

the importance and urgency of carrying out this construction project.

The conclusion of the electronic document asks the Government of Quebec to register, on the Quebec Infrastructure Plan 2025-2035, the construction of the emergency and intensive care unit at the Maria hospital.

The municipality of Maria adopted a resolution on February 10 in support of the petition.

"We are hopeful that this is the right one. The premier confirmed to us in November 2023 that it would be registered and it was not done. We are hopeful that this time, it will be done," says Maria mayor, Jean-Claude Landry.

On February 12, the MRCs of Avignon and Bonaventure added their support by each adopting a resolution in favour of the project.

"The MRC adopted a resolution in support to invite the population to sign the petition. It is a major infrastructure. It is a priority for the CISSS, a priority for the MRC d'Avignon," mentions Prefect

Mathieu Lapointe.

"This is a file that we have been following for several years. The Premier, the Minister of Health, everyone is aware. We expected it to be included in the PQI last year. We were very disappointed as a region. We know that the government is in the budget process. It was obvious that we give our support and invite the population to sign to remind them of the importance for the Baie-des-Chaleurs to upgrade the infrastructure," mentions his colleague from Bonaventure, Éric Dubé.

The prefect is aware that Maria is in competition with other establishments "while things are cracking everywhere," illustrates Mr. Dubé.

According to him, it could cost between \$150 million and \$200 million to rebuild the emergency and intensive care units, a structure that could be recovered in the future if a new hospital were to be built.

The current emergency department was inaugurated in 1972.

This debate has been ongoing



Photo: G. Gagné

ing for quite some time, not only for this component, but to rebuild the entire hospital which has been in operation since 1952.

The latest evaluations suggested that a renovation of the current hospital would cost \$330 million and the work would be spread over 15 years. On the other hand, a new hospital centre would take half as long to build, but it is estimated at \$390 million.

In 2021, it was mentioned that the new hospital would have more beds in order to eventually repatriate patients from Avignon-Ouest who are treated in Campbellton, New Brunswick. Premier François Legault was informed of the situation during a visit to Carleton-sur-Mer in July 2021.

In June 2018, the Gaspé Peninsula CISSS Board of Directors adopted a resolution for a new centre, an idea that dates back to before the entity was even created, at the time of the CSSS de la Baie-des-Chaleurs.

No Thanks Pozzolan Dalhousie requests a federal environmental impact assessment for mine project

GILLES GAGNÉ

NOUVELLE – The citizens' group No Thanks Pozzolan Dalhousie recently sent a letter to Steven Guilbeault, Minister of Environment and Climate Change, expressing concerns about the environmental, social and economic impacts of EcoRock's open-pit pozzolan mining project and requesting that a federal impact assessment be conducted.

The letter was also addressed to Susan Holt, Premier of New Brunswick, Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, François Legault, Premier of Quebec, Manon Jeannotte, Lieutenant Governor of Quebec, Louise Imbeault, Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick, Mary Simon, Governor General of Canada, and all relevant federal and provincial ministers. According to the company's timeline, an environmental impact assessment will be conducted for New Brunswick, but not in Quebec. However, based on No

Thanks Pozzolan Dalhousie, the potential open pit mine would be located less than three kilometres from the closest point of the Gaspé Peninsula shores. For the citizens' group, the repercussions on the Bay of Chaleur area would be inevitable.

The project is spearheaded by a Montreal-based company called EcoRock Dalhousie. After holding meetings in Dalhousie in order to present the main aspects of the project, the main administrators of the company, including Director General Francis Forlini, also held a meeting in Carleton on October 29.

According to the document released on February 10 by No Thanks Pozzolan Dalhousie, the report issued by EcoRock following the Carleton meeting mentions that the company "Recognized the impact that the project could have on Bay of Chaleur in terms of the port terminal, dredging and sediments that will have to be removed, but did not make an unequivocal

statement on the other possible impacts on the Gaspé."

In this same report, one can read that the company insists, however, that "the Quebec government has no jurisdiction over the project, which is governed by New Brunswick regulations."

Several of the potential consequences of the project with regards to its negative effects falling under federal jurisdiction, as set out in the proposed amendments to the Impact Assessment Act to bring it into line with the most recent case law. Thus, such an impact assessment would help to highlight the real risks of the project for all territories affected by it.

Before being sent to the various ministers and representatives of the Canadian, New Brunswick and Quebec governments, the letter was sent to many stakeholders in the Bay of Chaleur, and has collected 139 signatures as of February 10, which confirms the shared concern among the population regarding this project.



Photo: G. Gagné

Pozzolan is a volcanic rock that can be integrated in the production of cement. Its presence in the Dalhousie area stems from the volcanic eruption of Mount Sugarloaf 400 million years ago.

The management of EcoRock Dalhousie argues that because of its volcanic nature, pozzolan, when added to cement powder, reduces the latter's environmental impact in greenhouse effect gases.

The opponents counter that argument by underlining pozzolan's content in fine particles, once it is reduced to fine powder, which EcoRock Dalhousie's managers intend to do locally.

The noise, the proximity of houses to the open mine location in Dalhousie, the industrial plant that would have to be built along the Bay of

Cont'd on page 14

Return of the Accroche-Cœur Gaspésie-Sud office project

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

CHANDLER - The Accroche-Cœur Gaspésie-Sud Community Social Pediatrics Centre is relaunching its project to develop the basement of its head office in Chandler.

The goal is to expand the services offered by the organization, which serves the area between Barachois and the Plateaux de la Matapédia.

The idea first emerged last summer, but a change in administration put the project on hold.

"It's a need. We have our house in Chandler with our of-

fices and premises upstairs, but we have a large basement that is available. There are facilities required to properly accommodate people and workshops. We're even thinking about a music garage. We could have lots of possible projects with work in the basement," explains the general director, Liane Roy-Castonguay.

The organization is currently in the process of hiring a project manager.

"To identify needs and develop workshops throughout the territory. We need space and the needs are there," mentions the director.

The Town of Chandler has

already funded the plans and specifications for the basement renovations.

"We will still have to put together the financial package and ask our partners and locals to help us do this work," says Ms. Roy-Castonguay.

The estimated cost of the redevelopment is \$148,000, with an additional \$52,000 required for accessibility improvements in the basement. "It will be in the coming weeks to submit funding requests," she adds.

The centre currently has 223 active files.

In addition to its offices, the centre operates a mobile clinic,



The organization's head office in Chandler.

Photo: Facebook

called Mobilicoeur, which travels throughout the region, especially during the summer. There are two other social

pediatrics centres in the Gaspé Peninsula, one in Cap-Chat and another in Rivière-au-Renard.

Sainte-Anne-des-Monts: A third “Vague humaine” to fight cancer

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

SAINTE-ANNE-DES-MONTS - The “Vague humaine” will make a remarkable return to Sainte-Anne-des-Monts on August 16 for its third edition, aiming to raise funds for the Eastern Quebec Cancer Association.

This year's edition will mark the 15th anniversary of the first “Vague humaine”, in which 7,000 people formed a huge line along 1st Avenue West, stretching over seven kilometres between the church and the western end of the municipality.

The event came very close to being entered into the Guinness Book of Records. Two years later, in 2012, thousands of people made the same gesture of raising their arms to the sky to bring support and courage to people battling cancer.

These first two editions raised nearly \$70,000, all of

which was donated to the cause.

“A fifteenth anniversary deserves to be celebrated. It's an opportunity to come together and support people who have the disease. In 2010, I looked at images and saw people who were on the line who are no longer there today. But I also see people who were on the line and who won,” said coordinator Serge Chrétien, referring to people's battle against cancer.

This year, the goal is to raise at least \$30,000, to bring the total raised over the three editions to \$100,000.

“It will be very festive. We will have a lot of entertainment from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. We invite people to bring an umbrella and we will create a fantastic image of the sky with drones that will film the images over a kilometre long,” says Mr. Chrétien.

The umbrella has become a powerful symbol for the event.



“It's very representative. We open an umbrella to protect ourselves from the rain, from the sun. With the Human Wave, we will open it to protect ourselves from the disease. It's symbolic, but it's a powerful message. The umbrella will become an emblematic object in the fight against cancer,” says Mr. Chrétien.

The funds raised will be donated to the Eastern Quebec Cancer Association to support research, patient

services and awareness initiatives.

Photo: The 2010 wave. Credit - Frédéric Deroy

Marked increase in unemployment in January

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ - The unemployment rate jumped 2.7% in January to reach 13.9% in the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands. This increase is attributed to a higher number of people actively seeking work. According to Statistics Canada, the labour force grew by 700 between December and January – a fairly rare occurrence directly impacting the data.

In January, 35,300 people were employed, reflecting a decrease of 400 jobs compared to December.

The loss of 900 full-time jobs was partially offset by the addition of 400 part-time positions.

There was a steep increase in the number of unemployed individuals going from 4,500 in December to 5,700 in January, an increase of 1,200.

Despite this, the overall employment situation has improved compared to last year.

In January 2024, 31,900 people were employed. This represents an annual gain of 3,400 jobs, primarily in full-time positions, which increased by 3,900.

Additionally, the number of unemployed individuals has decreased by 500 over the past year.

CNESST has yet to rule on Bréboeuf aerodrome accident

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ - The unemployment rate jumped 2.7% in January to reach 13.9% in the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands. This increase is attributed to a higher number of people actively seeking work. According to Statistics Canada, the labour force grew by 700 between December and January – a fairly rare occurrence directly impacting the data.

In January, 35,300 people were employed, reflecting a decrease of 400 jobs compared to December.

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Announcements



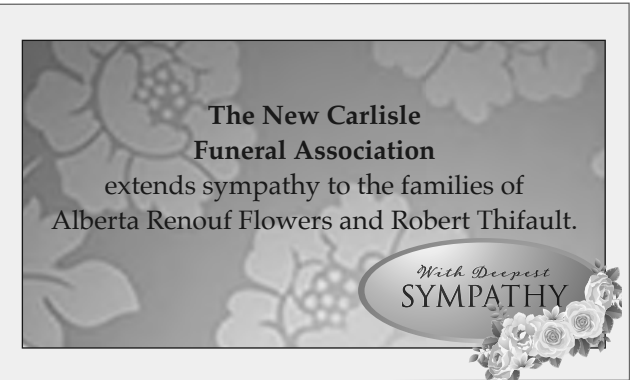
In Memory



BOURGAIZE: Elaine Mary née Holland
April 8, 1940 - February 26, 2023
Elaine, My Dear
I don't need a special day
To bring you to my mind.
The days I don't think of you
Are very hard to find.
Each morning when I wake,
I know that you are gone.
And no one knows the heartache
As I try to carry on.

My heart still aches with sadness,
And the secret tears still flow.
What it meant to lose you,
No one will ever know.
I love you - Elwood
The Bourgaize family remembers our dear wife, mother, grandmother, sister, aunt and cat rescue mom on the second anniversary of her passing. We miss you every day, and love you eternally.

CLARK: Gail
Loved and missed always.
"She Is Gone"
You can shed tears that she is gone,
Or you can smile because she has lived.
You can close your eyes,
And pray that she will come back.
Or you can open your eyes,
And see all that she has left.
Your heart can be empty because you can't see her,
Or you can be full of the love that you shared.
- David Harkins



Obituary - 150 words - \$50
150-250 words - \$55
250+ words - quote will be provided
In memory: 150 words - \$35
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Card of Thanks, Engagement,
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COAST ROUND-UP

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HOPE:
Hope Baptist Church
Sundays: Sunday School starting at 10 a.m. Worship service beginning at 11 a.m.

NEW CARLISLE:
St. Andrew's Anglican Church
March 4: St. Andrew's Church will have a pancake supper (Shrove Tuesday) from 4:30 - 6 p.m. in the basement of St. Andrew's Anglican Church. Cost \$10 per adult and \$5 per child. Please note there will be regular and gluten free pancakes. Take-out is available

but not delivery. All proceeds will help support the completion of the outside lighting of the church.

NEW CARLISLE:
Bible Chapel Meetings
Sundays: Breaking of Bread for believers - 9:30 a.m., Gospel meeting and Sunday School - 2 p.m.
Thursdays: Prayer Meeting and Bible Study - 7 p.m.

**UNITED CHURCH
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March 2
10 a.m. Service

Everyone welcome! For more information: 418-752-3372 or 418-752-6011.

NEW CARLISLE:
New Carlisle Legion
Wednesdays: Shuffle board beginning at 4 p.m. Line Dancing beginning at 7:30 p.m. for \$7.
Thursdays: Darts beginning at 7 p.m. for \$10.
Saturdays: Pool beginning at 8 p.m. \$1 per game.

**UNITED CHURCH
HOPE TOWN**
March 2
2 p.m. Service

March 4: General meeting at 6 p.m. at 1 Mount Sorrel, New Carlisle.

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES:
Book Room
Please be advised that the book room is open. Anyone who needs assistance can

PARISH OF GASPÉ
Sunday, March 2
St. Andrew's - Gaspé
10 a.m. Holy Eucharist
Wednesday, March 5
St. Andrew's - Gaspé
7 p.m. Holy Eucharist

contact Kathleen at 418-392-4896.

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES:
50+ Club
Tuesdays: Weekly bingo every Tuesday at 6:30 p.m. \$10 for three cards. Extra cards are \$1 each.

**ANGLICAN CHURCH
OF CANADA**
Sunday, March 2
New Carlisle
11 a.m. Holy Eucharist
Shigawake
9 a.m. Holy Eucharist

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COURTHOUSE:

▶ Cont'd from page 3

Matapedia and Plateaux area, or Pointe-à-la-Croix but the cases taking place there are more difficult to target. There is also the idea of reconciliation with the First Nations that becomes juxtaposed to the practical side of hearing cases in Carleton. We will move 20% of the court days from New Carlisle to Carleton,” says Mr. Deschênes.

“It means reducing the driving time to the court-

house from three-and-a-half hours, the time taken to cover a Listuguj-New Carlisle return trip, to one-and-a-half hours. It is good for the accused, for the victims, and all witnesses. Court files are often spread months before being settled, considering that they often require several appearances. What is required so far is a bit exorbitant,” states the Legal Aid attorney.

Alexis Deschênes is satisfied with last year’s results. “We needed everyone’s collaboration and everyone

came up with solutions. I find it moving; it came following a collective effort by all legal stakeholders. The February 27 inauguration ceremony will be presented at 9:30 a.m. Then, the criminal court will sit for the first time in that new context. It will be two days out of ten court days for Carleton. The schedule is settled until August. We will hold another meeting (of the stakeholders in May, after two sessions at the Carleton courthouse.”

POZZOLAN:

▶ Cont'd from page 11

Chaleur and the impact of dredging for marine life on the Gaspé Peninsula side of the bay are all factors convincing No Thanks Pozzolan Dalhousie to request a federal environmental impact assessment.

The Gaspé Peninsula opponents to the project are working closely with a similar group based in Heron Bay, the relatively new municipality now including the former limits of the Town

of Dalhousie.

The project relies on the local port for pozzolan exports to Europe. It has been inactive for a decade and necessitates dredging to accommodate ships with a capacity of 70,000 tons.

The development of the mine could require an investment of between \$200 million and \$300 million. The eventual location of the mine is situated on an already exploited quarry that has been exploited for construction aggregates.

ARIES – Mar 21/Apr 20

People are not mind readers, Aries. If you want others to know how you are feeling, you are going to have to give them some sort of indication this week.

TAURUS – Apr 21/May 21

You may discover that you enjoy a great deal of support from other people right now, Taurus. This includes those who you didn’t realize are on your side.

GEMINI – May 22/Jun 21

Even though it can be challenging at certain times, try to see the positives in every situation, Gemini. This may make it easier to overlook some of their faults.

CANCER – Jun 22/Jul 22

Try to stretch beyond your comfort zone and limits this week, Cancer. This likely will involve meeting new people and asking a lot of questions along the way. You will develop and grow.

LEO – Jul 23/Aug 23

Leo, this is a great time to communicate with friends and socialize. Put aside any worries and engage in light-hearted activities that will enable you to laugh and smile.

VIRGO – Aug 24/Sept 22

The more peaceful and understanding you are this week, Virgo, the more you



will get along with the other people in your life. Be the diplomat instead of a warrior this time around.

LIBRA – Sept 23/Oct 23

Libra, this is a good week for cleaning up your space and devising a better organizational system at work. You might be so good at cleaning up that you forget where you put things.

SCORPIO – Oct 24/Nov 22

Scorpio, do not feel like you have to change your personality to fit certain situations this week. Just be yourself.

Those who want to be around you will naturally gravitate to you.

SAGITTARIUS – Nov 23/Dec 21

A great deal of information is available if you simply request it, Sagittarius. Word your request in a way that guarantees cooperation from others.

CAPRICORN – Dec 22/Jan 20

Capricorn, you are so focused on a personal project

that you may completely forget about the needs of others. Make a change this week to be more receptive to others’ needs.

AQUARIUS – Jan 21/Feb 18

Aquarius, take a look at the bigger picture to identify what you will need for the next few months. Then discuss your ideas with others to see if what you have planned is plausible.

PISCES – Feb 19/Mar 20

Your good mood will be elevated for much of the week, Pisces. Don’t fret about a little hiccup along the way. You will bounce back quickly with a smile on your face.

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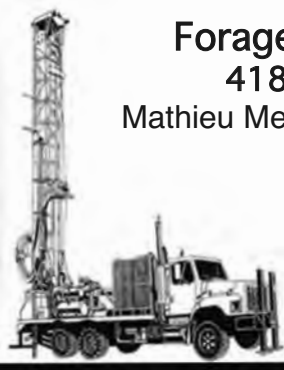
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54th Annual Wakeham-York Winter Carnival

ANDREW PATTERSON

WAKEHAM-YORK - Each year the Wakeham-York Carnival provides a reprieve from the long, dark days of winter. This year, it took place from February 7 to 13, and as usual the festivities were well attended. The carnival opened on Friday night with a bonfire and fireworks and closed with the annual snowmobile poker run and dance. In between, there were activities for all ages.

The opening night was attended by over 100 people, who enjoyed the warmth of the bonfire while watching a wonderful fireworks display. Afterwards, most people moved inside the community hall to enjoy music by the country duo Coco and Dodo. Dancing and partying continued well beyond midnight.

Saturday was Family Day, with something for everyone. Due to the lack of snow this winter, only a dozen or so participants went on the snowshoe hike, without snowshoes. A free lunch was served to all those in attendance, and the afternoon began with the masquerade, with a dozen or so kids and

adults in costume. Ice bowling is always a highlight, but the frigid temperature reduced our usual gang to about 30 bowlers, who picked off the prizes one by one. Then came the nail-driving contest, followed by a rousing game of boot hockey. In the evening, over a dozen people showed up for Texas Hold'em and battled it out for the chance to take home first prize.

The BINGO on Sunday afternoon was another chance for young and old alike to get involved. Eighteen games were played, with a multitude of excellent prizes donated by various local businesses. Around 80 people were in attendance. In the evening, a small crowd gathered for the Super Bowl Party.

Tuesday evening was Tuk night with 7 tables. Unfortunately, Gaspé's first major snowstorm of the winter forced the cancellation of the Line Dancing on Thursday.

Finally, the big day arrived. Saturday morning began with a well-attended breakfast. At ten o'clock, over fifty snowmobiles revved their engines and headed into the Gaspé wilderness for a day of playing in the snow.



Four participants competed in the tea boiling competition.



Over 100 people attended the opening night, which featured a bonfire and a fireworks display.

Photos: Arianne Fournier

Despite the bitter cold, approximately 40 sleds showed up, and over 50 people braved the weather. As could be expected, three snowmobiles didn't make it back under their own power! But that didn't slow the momentum, leading into the Saturday night party, which closed the 54th

annual carnival.

The profits from the annual carnival go exclusively towards maintaining the outdoor skating rink, which is well used by children and adults alike from the wider Gaspé area. Local businesses donated prizes, gift certificates, and cash to make the

carnival a fantastic success. Pal Airlines provided a donation of two airline tickets.

Committee members dedicated many hours to planning, preparing, and coordinating the annual events. The dates are already set for 2026: February 6 to 14.



About 50 people braved the weather for this year's poker rally.



Around 80 people participated in the bingo on Sunday afternoon.

Photo: Arianne Fournier

Special thanks to the generous local businesses whose donations made the Wakeham-York Carnival a success.

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