



Federal pension: waiting three months to finally receive the first cheque

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ – Sylvie Derasp had to fight the federal government bureaucracy to receive her federal pension, a three-month delay she finds unacceptable. She is speaking out about her experience to raise awareness among others who may be facing similar difficulties.

After working approximately 35 years in the banking sector, the Gaspé resident began the process in May 2025 to ensure that her file was up to date so that she could receive her pension the month after her 65th birthday in October.

"In May, I hadn't received the form we were supposed to get. I called the federal office, and a man answered, and we filled out the form online on May 9. My birthday is in October and the pension was supposed to start in November, but I haven't received anything," explains Ms. Derasp.

When she followed up, an agent initially told her that cut-backs had caused delays in



Photo: Courtesy of Sylvie Derasp

Sylvie Derasp had to call on the Member of Parliament for Gaspésie-Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine to receive her federal pension after waiting three months.

payments.

"He told me it could take a few days, a few months, several months; he couldn't give me a date. I could tell he was sorry," she says.

In December, nothing had been deposited into her bank account.

"I called back and was told that if no one called me back, I should call on January 12. I got the same answer: we're be-

hind, we have several files to deal with," she says.

Meanwhile, she heard in the media that the government was experiencing computer problems.

"On January 12, I could no longer see my information in the Revenue Canada system. It was starting to get worrisome. I called back to ask what was going on. Nothing was working anymore. The person who

answered said there was a computer problem and not to worry," adds Ms. Derasp.

On January 19, she still had no payment, and the person on the phone said there was no timeline for resolving her file after nearly three months of delay.

"On January 23, the person on the other end of the line said they were having major computer problems. We don't know how to resolve your file. I couldn't see my file anymore, and that's when I started to get anxious," she says.

Fortunately, she did not rely on the pension to meet her immediate needs.

She filed a complaint with the agent handling her call.

"He took my complaint, and within 24 hours, someone was supposed to call me back. I never heard anything."

A friend suggested she contact her federal Member of Parliament (MP) Alexis Deschênes.

An assistant to MP Alexis Deschênes told her she was not the only person experiencing difficulties.

The day after she contacted the MP's office, the issue was raised in the House of Commons.

"Marie-Josée Lemieux (the MP's assistant) managed to speak to someone in the pensions department and told me that my case would be resolved on February 6. Finally, after three months, they deposited three months' worth of interest, without a letter of apology. I never received a call back from the federal government," she laments.

Having worked in customer service for 35 years, she worries about people who may be less able to navigate the system.

"I lost between 12 and 15 hours just waiting on the phone. People who are struggling, call frequently or go through your MP's office," she suggests.

"It's ridiculous to wait for a pension that is owed to us. It's ours. When we owe them money, for example, we have to pay, and they harass us. We have to fight," says Ms. Derasp.

School move expected before end of March

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW CARLISLE – Denise Simoneau, Director General of the Eastern Shores School Board, recently sent a letter to the parents and guardians of New Carlisle High School's students informing them that the move from that building and the Baie-des-Chaleurs Regional School is imminent. The specific dates are not mentioned in the letter, but it will likely happen before the end of March.

"We are now working on the final details to ensure a smooth and positive move for all students. To make this transition as calm and pleasant as possible, we will be scheduling a few PED (pedagogical) days; some may be full days, and others may be half days. These



Photo: Gilles Gagné

Move imminent between New Carlisle High School and Baie-des-Chaleurs Regional School.

days will allow our team to move materials safely, organize classrooms, and prepare the new spaces for your children", specifies Ms. Simoneau.

"We are also planning a special moment for families: you will be invited to accompany your child when it is their turn to move into their beautiful new classroom. We

believe this shared experience will help create a comforting and memorable start in the new building," she adds.

"After March break,

please keep an eye on your Mozaik Portal, where more detailed information will be shared. We are in the process of obtaining the contractor's final authorization, after which we will be able to confirm the official transition dates," she writes.

On January 22, Ms. Simoneau was expecting the contractor's approval before the end of that month. However, a month later, that approval had not been granted. The school board cannot take charge of the building before receiving the contractor's approval.

The move will begin from the younger students and proceed upward, as students will gradually bring their belongings. The whole process could take four weeks, noted Ms. Simoneau in January.

Gasoline: Stéphane Sainte-Croix admits his powerlessness

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ – The Member of the National Assembly for Gaspé, Stéphane Sainte-Croix, admits that under the current regulatory framework governing gasoline pricing, the measures introduced by the government over the past three years have had little to no impact in the Gaspé Peninsula.

The debate resurfaced over Valentine's Day weekend, when gas prices reached \$1.49 per litre in Gaspé and Chandler. Just 300 kilometres west, in Matane, stations were selling gasoline for \$1.32 per litre — a difference of 17 cents per litre.

The recently published Annual Report on the Retail Gasoline Market by the Quebec Energy Board once again highlighted the higher profit margins observed in the Gaspé Peninsula.

In 2025, the average price in the region was \$1.58 per litre, according to the report, compared to the Quebec average of \$1.53.

Part of the explanation lies in the retailers' profit margin. Motorists in Gaspé do not ap-



Photo: Nelson Sergerie

Citizens of Gaspé and Chandler still pay higher prices at the pump than elsewhere in Quebec.

pear to be benefiting from the abolition of the price floor.

The average profit margin in the region stood at 13 cents in 2025 — down two cents from 2024 — but still well above the provincial average of 9 cents.

A closer look at the board's data shows the highest margin remains in Gaspé at 13.6 cents last year. It was 12.3 cents in Rocher-Percé and 11.4 cents in the Baie-des-Chaleurs area.

By comparison, the average margin was 11 cents in Bas-Saint-Laurent and Mon-

tréal, 10 cents in Quebec City and 9 cents on the North Shore.

"This can be explained by a lack of competition and independent players. Corporate players share the market. This inevitably has an upward effect on prices," comments Stéphane Sainte-Croix, who points out that the issues are already well known.

He points out that the Energy Board has conducted investigations and issued reports, and that the Quebec government abolished the

price floor in an attempt to benefit consumers.

"We can see that there are limits to what we can do in the context of a lack of competition in the region. We will continue to reflect on how we can address the issue with sustainable solutions," says the Member of the National Assembly (MNA).

Can more be done, or is the region stuck with higher prices? "We need to take stock and analyze the last few months. We need to look for comparable data elsewhere. But we are not going to find the same results as in other regions, mainly because of the lack of competition," says the elected official.

"It's a shame, honestly, because it's the consumer who pays the price. It's disturbing because it's not something we appreciate when we represent a region and see disparities from one sector or region to another. It's questionable," concludes Mr. Sainte-Croix.

One potential development that could increase pressure on retailers is a new data collection method to be implemented by the Energy Board.

Starting April 1, any price change at a gas station will be posted online immediately, allowing the board to monitor regional fluctuations more closely.

Meanwhile, the mayor of Gaspé is not backing down.

He has been denouncing high prices since 2019 and remains convinced that the Competition Bureau needs to take action.

"I remain convinced that

intervention by the Competition Bureau can change things. The Régie de l'énergie's reports mentioned weak competition. In Matanie, gasoline is \$1.32, while it's almost 20 cents more in Gaspé. We're in roughly similar markets. Don't try to tell me that transportation costs explain the difference," says Daniel Côté.

The mayor also notes that the Gaspé Peninsula benefits from tax credits that do not apply in the Lower St. Lawrence region.

"As local elected officials, we can only express our discomfort. I have long suspected that gasoline prices are being controlled. The Régie de l'énergie du Québec suspects that there is a lack of competition. All of this leads me to believe that a thorough investigation by the Competition Bureau of Canada could reveal things that we don't currently suspect, but that are causing us to pay far too much," he says, pointing out that even within the region, there are sometimes "huge" differences in prices.

"I understand that at the New Brunswick border, the market has to adapt to reality. But when you're in Chandler, where it's 8 cents cheaper, or 12 cents cheaper in Sainte-Anne-des-Monts, why is that?" he asks.

"I would be inclined to believe that someone is controlling the price of gas, but I can't document it. I have no investigative powers. I only have the power to denounce it," he says emphatically.

2034 Quebec Games: No special treatment for Gaspé

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ – Although the mayor of Gaspé has raised the possibility of requesting an exception to host the Quebec Games on the occasion of Jacques Cartier's 500th arrival anniversary in 2034, Sports Québec has no intention of granting the town any favours. "Not at this time. The Quebec Games are a big deal. They require a significant investment in terms of human resources and hosting capacity. There is a process that cities must go through, and it is at the end of that process that we will know who will host the games," explains Isabelle Ducharme, executive director of Sports Québec.

The organization is currently working on awarding the 2029 games. In 2034, if Gaspé decides to submit a bid, it would be for the Winter Games, based on the alternating schedule in which Winter Games are held in even-numbered years and Summer Games in odd-numbered years.

A city or town that wishes to host the games must first produce an inventory of its infrastructure.

"Today, I would have the games, here's what I need to host the Winter Games. Do I have the capacity here? The games have evolved a lot and cost a lot more. We just saw that with the Olympic Games. We're trying to reduce costs, but it's huge. The first thing to do is ask ourselves, do we have the institutional organizations to come on board with us? Do we have the infrastructure? If so, does it meet the standards? Because there are standards that must be met for competitions," suggests Ms. Ducharme.

The Winter Games present particular challenges because they are held during spring break. There are fewer outdoor sports, but they require numerous gymnasiums and an arena.

The 2034 Games are eight years away. "What we've seen in recent years is that there is a political movement six years before. Four years before, a committee is formed, and three and a half years before, the Games are awarded. We'll be working on 2033-2035 within a year. So people need to start thinking about it now," Ms. Ducharme adds.

Sports Québec wants to avoid major competition between cities or towns in the coming years.

"Sorel-Tracy and Terrebonne have been practically in the running for a year and a half. They have a 150-page book to defend their community. What we want to know is the community's capacity to host the games in order to help them obtain the games," she says, describing a process aimed at streamlining applications.

In the past, there were sometimes four competing bids, while in other years only one application was submitted.

Gaspé previously hosted the Quebec Games in the summer of 1993.

The games were created in 1970, and Rivière-du-Loup was the first host town in 1971. Approximately 3,000 athletes participated in those Summer Games.

Montreal hosted the first Winter Games in 1972.

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Foreign workers: the mayor of Gaspé appeals to Quebec government

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

GASPÉ – In a heartfelt plea to keep well-established foreign workers in his town, the mayor of Gaspé, Daniel Côté, hopes that the government of Quebec will take regional characteristics into account in its decision.

The minister responsible for immigration, Jean-François Roberge, has rejected a grandfather clause for those who are already working and are well established in Quebec through the Quebec Experience Program.

The town has passed a resolution calling for them to be allowed to remain in the community.

“The Quebec government talks to us about regionalization of immigration, but its definition of regionalization is anything outside the Montreal



Photo: Nelson Sergerie

The mayor of Gaspé hopes that Quebec government will analyze the situation of foreign workers in his town.

Metropolitan Community. I have nothing against Quebec City, Sherbrooke, or Gatineau, but is that what regionalization is? Where does Gaspé fit into this?” asks the mayor.

According to him, integration in Gaspé is going well, with a welcoming population

and a housing problem that is in the process of being resolved.

“What pains me the most are the people who are already settled, who have housing, a job, who contribute to our public services, whether it's at the hospital, the CHSLD, serving

coffee in restaurants, or repairing cars at our dealerships. All these people who contribute to our public services and who are housed, integrated, who may have had children, all these people we want to kick out, it's not acceptable,” the elected official says indignantly.

The mayor deplores the Quebec government's firm stance.

“I heard Minister Roberge say that, as a matter of principle, there would be no grandfather clause. Come on! These people are settled here. How are they harmful? They are helpful. I understand that there are problems elsewhere in Quebec, but we don't have those problems here. There are no integration or francization issues. Things are going well. That's what we're saying in the resolution,” explains the mayor, reiterating that Gaspé

remains welcoming.

“The population of the Gaspé Peninsula is the oldest in Quebec. This is a fact that must be taken into account. We don't have the same economic drivers as the Quebec average,” he says, citing the fishing industry and wind mill component manufacturing as examples.

“We don't want these people to leave once they've put down roots here. I don't want them to leave. I'd like them to stay here,” says Mr. Côté.

Recently, the Confédération des syndicats nationaux (CSN) expressed concern about the fate of roughly 140 Filipino workers at LM Wind Power in Gaspé. The union said these experienced workers were facing deportation in 2026 and 2027 due to new, stricter federal rules that are becoming increasingly restrictive.

Foreign workers: MRCs united against Quebec government

NELSON SERGERIE

CHANDLER – MRCs in the Gaspé Peninsula are asking the Quebec government to reinstate the Quebec Experience Program (PEQ) and review the restrictions imposed on the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (PTET).

On February 11, the MRCs of Avignon, Rocher-Percé, and Côte-de-Gaspé adopted resolutions to this effect in support of the Union des municipalités du Québec, which is leading a campaign on the issue of foreign workers.

For many elected officials, it is a matter of maintaining several sectors of economic activity in the Gaspé Peninsula that depend on the Quebec government's decision.

“These are people who come here to live in our region and meet our labour



Photo: Nelson Sergerie

Samuel Parisé, Prefect for the Rocher-Percé MRC, joins the call to keep foreign workers in his territory.

needs. They work in areas that are critical to our economy: health, fishing, tourism, which are strong sectors of our economy,” notes Rocher-Percé Prefect, Samuel Parisé.

The elected official men-

tions that some have left war zones to study and live in the Gaspé Peninsula.

“In my view, when we welcome someone to our territory, we must do so properly. If we have made promises to them, we must keep them,” says Mr. Parisé.

In Avignon, this stance is above all a matter of fairness, consistency, and humanity. Quebec is built by those who work, live, and contribute to it every day, and immigration policies should reflect that reality.

“We can see that there is a problem. It has concrete impacts throughout the region, (as immigrants) will have to leave the country if this policy is maintained,” says Avignon Prefect Mathieu Lapointe.

The MRC is calling for the implementation of a grandfather clause for PEQ orphans, the removal of re-

strictions imposed on the PTET (Temporary Foreign Worker Program), and the introduction of a grandfather clause for affected workers.

In the race for the leadership of the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) between Christine Fréchette and Bernard Drainville, each candidate is proposing to bring back the PEQ in a version specific to each of them.

“There is good news in the leadership race. Now what we need is a quick legislative amendment before the end of the race,” says Mr. Lapointe.

The two prefects say it is difficult to clearly and concretely establish the direct impact that the departure of these workers would have on their territories.

Côte-de-Gaspé too

Côte-de-Gaspé is also

adopting a resolution to express its concern about the future of foreign workers.

The council of mayors is asking the Quebec government to allow workers and families already settled in the Côte-de-Gaspé to benefit from their Quebec selection certificate and to allow them to continue contributing to the region's economy, which is facing a labour shortage.

The council is asking for a review of the criteria and points awarded in order to truly take into account the needs of each region and to reserve a larger share for regions whose aging population poses greater challenges in terms of replacing the workforce in essential sectors of their economy and which have the capacity to welcome an immigrant population.

The Bonaventure MRC plans to adopt a similar resolution at its March meeting.

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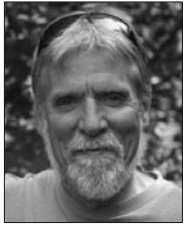
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Commentary

A statistical spark or a growing trend?

If we look at the recent political surveys carried out by Pallas Data, the support conferred to the Parti Québécois (PQ) is dwindling. So is the sovereignty option. The declining popularity of the PQ could be linked to the nomination of Charles Milliard at the helm of the Liberal Party of Quebec.

The recent survey results could also hide a more complex context. The Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) is also reaping better support overall, probably a result of its leadership race. New leadership usually translates into increased media coverage and popularity, as in the case of Charles Milliard.

Pallas Data's survey was carried out for L'Actualité magazine, the French equivalent to MacLean's and the Québec125 site. Pallas reached 1,075 Quebecers on February 21-22. The error margin stands at 3%, 19 times out of 20.

If we compare it to the previous Pallas survey, carried out just before François Legault's January 14 announcement that he will resign at the beginning of April, there are tendencies that can hardly be ignored, despite the margin of error.

The Parti Québécois went from a 34% rate of support in early January to 30% on February 21-22. The Liberal Party went up 3% to reach 27%. So, the PQ's 10% lead of January has melted to 3%.

The Conservative Party of Quebec remained at 16%. The Coalition avenir Québec increased its support from 11% to 14%, and Québec Solidaire lost a point, from 11% to 10%.

Francophone and Montreal realities

Among the francophone majority, the PQ still leads heavily, but its support has also declined by four points, from 41% to 37%, a variation outside the margin of error for this sub-sample, according to Québec125 analyst Philippe J. Fournier.

The Liberal Party now receives a mere 18% rate of support from francophones, 19% behind the PQ. It is still better than a previous low of 10%.

This means that the PQ would have won in a wide range of ridings had elections been held around February 21-22.

The Coalition Avenir Québec only gets 16% of support among francophones, just ahead of the Conservative Party's 15%. Québec solidaire closes

the standings with 12%.

The Montreal context is favourable to the Liberal Party of Quebec (PLQ), according to Pallas Data. The PLQ went up 5% between January 10 and February 22 to reach 36%. The support of the anglophones clearly feeds that rate and confers many ridings to Charles Milliard's party.

Truth be told, there was a lot of movement in Montreal in 43 days, as the Parti Québécois went down 10%, from 35% to 25%, which could cost a few ridings, come October 5, election day. The PQ mainly lost support in the 450 crown, the suburbs of the metropolis, according to Philippe J. Fournier. The survey results are reliable, he says, because more than 500 people were consulted in Montreal.

Quebec's Conservative Party gained 3% to 16%, and the CAQ went up a mere 1% despite the leadership race. Québec solidaire moved up two points to reach 11%.

Quebec City and the regions

Quebec City displays another reality. Quebec's Conservative Party is leading, with 30%, a 4% rise. The capital remains leader Éric Duhaime's stronghold, province-wide. The Parti Québécois lost two points between January and February to get down to 28%.

Liberal Party leader Charles Milliard is originally from Lévis, on the south shore facing Quebec City, and it is permitted to think that it influenced the relatively good showing of his party, which climbed 6% to reach 20%, according to Pallas.

The biggest loser in the capital area is the CAQ, which went down 7% to stand at 10%, in last place. Québec solidaire lost one point, to stand at 11%.

No doubt, the Coalition Avenir Québec has lost a huge share of credibility over the last term around Quebec City, especially considering its unstable position regarding the Third link tunnel project, highly popular in the capital area, but immensely unpopular elsewhere in the province.

In the other Quebec regions, the PQ went up 6% to reach a 41% rate of support. The favourable results obtained on February 23 in the Chicoutimi riding indicate that the Pallas survey is reliable, despite its small sampling outside Montreal.

The CAQ has apparently received a 7% boost in regions since January 10, to reach 18%, the same as Quebec's Conservative Party, which was hit by a 6% loss.

Quebec's Liberal Party's popularity outside major cities remains very weak, at 13%, down 1% compared to January. Unless Charles Milliard suc-

ceeds in convincing people from rural regions that his party will treat them way better than Philippe Couillard did between 2014 and 2018, the Liberals will keep stagnating there.

For reasons that could partly be attributable to statistical deviations stemming from a low sampling, Québec solidaire lost 8% in regions between January and February, to settle at 8%. It looks like a huge loss over a 43-day span.

The sovereignty in all this

The Pallas Data survey indicates that the sovereignty option is at its lowest point since at least 2023. Up to 60% of Quebecers are opposed to it, a 6% increase since the January survey.

Accordingly, people favouring Quebec's separation from Canada now stand at 32% of the electorate, a drop of 3% compared to January 10. It remains within the margin of error. However, it looks like the results obtained by another survey firm, Léger, days before February 22.

Another sign of those surveys' potent reliability rests in Parti Québécois leader Paul Saint-Pierre-Plamondon's speech following his party's victory in Chicoutimi.

He has said repeatedly over the last years that his party will hold a referendum during its first term back in power. He maintained that general stand on February 23, but pointed out that such a referendum could take place at the end of the term instead of early on, considering the economic uncertainty prevailing in North America, courtesy of United States president Donald Trump.

The Parti Québécois commissions surveys too, like its opponents. They are conducted as professionally as the ones carried out for the media. By and large, they yield results. Political leaders almost always say that they don't comment on surveys. However, they take them into account in their speeches!

Charles Milliard certainly commented on the recent favourable surveys on February 25, the day Pallas' results were released. They were mostly good news for the Liberal Party.

His reaction to the sovereignty part of the survey was rather odd, though. He said that he would lead to No side, should a referendum be held over the next term.

It is like saying that he gives very little chance to his party in the next electoral race, as if he concedes the victory to the Parti Québécois. After all, a referendum won't be necessary if the Liberals win in October.

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Obstetrics: Feminist roundtable and Gaspé MP concerned

NELSON SERGERIE

GASPÉ – Following an incident on January 2 in which a woman from Rivière-à-Claude gave birth without her medical records in Matane after obstetric services were unavailable in Sainte-Anne-des-Monts, the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine Feminist Roundtable and the Member of the National Assembly (MNA) for Gaspé express concern about recurring problems in the region.

There are multiple obstetric shortages in Sainte-Anne-des-Monts and occasionally in Maria and Gaspé.

"This is a highly concerning situation. We've been saying this for years. We're simply seeing a situation that is becoming the norm. This particular situation reflects what we've been describing for some time," says the table's coordinator, Nastassia Williams.

While acknowledging that the CISSS and obstetrics teams are trying to find a solution, this is not an ideal situation.

Not knowing which teams are on duty at any given time



Photo: N. Sergerie

Nastassia Williams, coordinator of the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine Feminist Roundtable.

could lead to incidents.

"Transferring a woman in advanced labour could lead to her giving birth in transit between Sainte-Anne-des-Monts and Gaspé or Sainte-Anne-des-Monts and Matane. For us, all transfers during labour are discouraged because they disrupt the normal process and create risks. What families are asking for is to have permanent teams," explains the coordina-

tor, for whom this is a major risk.

"This leads us to question whether the citizens of the Gaspé Peninsula are not really being treated as second-class citizens. Quebec and Canada have signed international agreements that consider citizens to be entitled to health rights, and these rights imply access to local services," she explains.

In some cases, the distance to the nearest dedicated hospital can stretch 200 or 300 kilometres. "If there is one service that must be offered within a reasonable radius, it is obstetrics," says Ms. Williams.

Being forced to give birth outside the planned facility creates difficulties for family support, arranging childcare for existing children, travel in winter conditions, and other anxiety-inducing concerns.

"We have long-term concerns. Will the government take action to ensure that women receive the high-quality services they are entitled to? Will measures be put in place to ensure that there are trained nurses

available to allow women to give birth at home?" asks Ms. Williams.

The committee will hold discussions with the CISSS in order to participate in local and regional committees to consider solutions. "But we are aware that part of the responsibility lies with the government and Santé Québec, which must deploy the necessary resources to maintain teams," adds the coordinator, who points out that there is a lot of burnout in the network. Working conditions must value this practice and allow teams to remain stable.

The concerned Member of the National Assembly

Stéphane Sainte-Croix, Member of the National Assembly (MNA) for Gaspé, learned of the case early in the year. "We have an issue with obstetrics in the region. It's a complex situation in terms of resources. It requires specialized resources. We are working

to increase the number of nursing students. A structure is studying the service offering and maintaining service corridors," says Mr. Sainte-Croix.

He notes that shortages are recurring, particularly in Sainte-Anne-des-Monts.

"But in the short term, it's difficult," he admits. The end of the use of independent labour, which keeps the service going, particularly in Sainte-Anne-des-Monts, will add to the problem. "An exception rule could be looked at closely, considering the situation," he adds.

The goal is to keep the obstetrics unit operational. "I dare to hope that we will find elements of a solution," says the MNA.

Incentives to attract nurse midwives are being explored, as is the consolidation of midwifery services, which could help. "I think we need to give ourselves the freedom to think differently and come up with ideas that are outside the box," suggests Mr. Sainte-Croix.

Abortion: Women's table welcomes Quebec's backtracking

NELSON SERGERIE

GASPÉ – Justice Minister Simon Jolin Barrette's withdrawal of an article on abortion rights from his draft Quebec constitution is welcomed by the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine Feminist Roundtable.

The Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government backed down in the face of what the group describes as almost unanimous opposition across Quebec society.

"From our point of view and that of several lawyers, it was a very bad idea to make a law. At this time, abortion is decriminalized and there are several case law precedents. This right is considered to be a health care issue like any other and does not need a specific article in the current legal context," says Feminist Roundtable coordinator Nastassia Williams.

According to Ms. Williams, including a constitutional article on abortion could have opened the door to challenges to the right.

"Once there was a legal framework, anti-choice movements could come in and negotiate, for example, how many



Photo: Facebook

Justice Minister Simon Jolin Barrette.

weeks, does it require the authorization of two doctors or a medical condition? By not having an article and considering abortion as health care, we maintain a free framework and do not open the door to a reduction of the right," she says.

The right to abortion remains a recurring topic in public debate, particularly among groups with more conservative views.

"The CAQ government really wanted to use the issue of gender equality to gain political capital in the context of the immigration debate. The issue

of abortion is a powerful symbol. But it's absurd because in recent months, we've had to fight to defend a right against a minister who said he was doing it for gender equality. It was very disturbing," she adds.

The roundtable suggests the government could focus on other areas if it truly wants to advance gender equality.

"For example, on issues of domestic violence, the men's movement is making a lot of progress, and there is a lot of work that could be done. We felt like we were being used in this context," she says, recalling that the abortion debate had already taken place in 2023.

At that time, Quebec Minister Martine Biron, Member of the National Assembly (MNA), proposed legislation to make women's right to choose abortion "sacred" in Quebec law.

"We will continue to send suggestions to the government so that it understands that we agree with promoting equality between men and women, but we have strategies that may be more effective," Ms. Williams concludes.

The organization has still not received confirmation of its funding beyond March 31.

Organizations call for better government support

Nelson Sergerie

PERCÉ – Taking advantage of the Groundhog Day gathering in Val-d'Espoir on February 2, a dozen people representing collective rights organizations and members of the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine Feminist Roundtable, made their demands known for better support from the Quebec government to carry out their mission.

Those present – all women – wanted to send a symbolic message by announcing not "a return of winter, but the arrival of an early, warm and decidedly eventful spring."

Citizens' rights groups denounce their chronic underfunding, several provisions of Bill 7 aimed at reducing bureaucracy, and what they described as the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) government's broader policy approach.

"The majority of collective rights advocacy groups have funding of barely \$100,000 per year. Covering salaries, rent and activities with such a small budget is very difficult, and our funding is not indexed. Year after year, our budget is reduced," says Nastassia Williams, coordinator of the Table de concertation féministe (Feminist Roundtable).

Collective rights advocacy organizations in the Gaspésie and Îles-de-la-Madeleine are calling for a significant increase in funding, specifically, an additional \$155 million annually to support the core mission of all currently funded groups.

They are also demanding the introduction of a permanent indexation mechanism based on the Community Operating Cost Index. For 2026, this would represent an increase of 3.6%.

In addition, the groups are calling for the creation of a transparent process to support organizations that are currently awaiting funding. "If we want to keep our teams, we have to be able to pay decent salaries," adds Ms. Williams.

"The CAQ government is not a big fan of collective rights. Several laws attack our field of action. The lack of funding is a sign of contempt, like Groundhog Day coming back year after year," she continues.

So far, no positive signal has been sent by the government, despite provincial elections scheduled for October 5. Collective advocacy organizations play a key role by giving a voice to those with the least access to power and justice.

"We live in an increasingly unequal society. For me, it's about excluding people from discussions, and even from public programs," she says.

The word “region” sounds funny to the CAQ

NELSON SERGERIE

GASPÉ – Regional development consultant and former Minister of Regions Gaétan Lelièvre believes that candidates in the race for the leadership of the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) will have to make a big splash if they want to be taken seriously on their regionalist rhetoric.

The very word “region” should be redefined.

“Some steps have already been taken. We could talk about metropolitan areas around major centres. We could define a 100-kilometre radius around Montreal, Quebec City, or Sherbrooke. And then there are the intermediate regions. When we say that Trois-Rivières is a region, with its critical mass, an hour and a half from Montreal and Quebec City, it is not the same type of region as Gaspé or Baie-Comeau,” says Gaétan Lelièvre.

While the CAQ presents itself as a party of the regions, Mr. Lelièvre says the results tell a different story. “The Coalition Avenir Québec government, the Legault government, with all due respect, is not a government of the regions, and I am ready to prove it anytime, anywhere,” says



Photo: N. Sergerie

Regional development consultant Gaétan Lelièvre.

Mr. Lelièvre without hesitation.

He cites several examples: halting the rehabilitation of the railway, the extension of Highway 20, and the “massacre” of the Fonds d’aide aux initiatives régionales (FAIR) program exclusive to the Gaspé Peninsula.

“We changed that to centralize it. The abolition of the three regional directorates of the Ministry of Economy and Innovation, which was merged into a single directorate in Rimouski, means there is a lot of

work to be done before we can say that the CAQ government is concerned about the regions,” explains the former regional minister.

In 2020, Gaspésie–Îles-de-la-Madeleine, Bas-Saint-Laurent, and Chaudière–Appalaches were grouped into a single regional office of the ministry. The office now covers a vast territory stretching from the Îles-de-la-Madeleine to Thetford Mines, including Gaspé, Rimouski, Lévis, and Beauce.

During her January 25 campaign launch, Christine Fréchette mentioned the wind power announcements in Gaspésie and Bas-Saint-Laurent. Bernard Drainville also referenced the word “region” in his own launch.

Mr. Lelièvre says the next CAQ leader will have to make a clean break. “It will take a certain break with the current functioning of the CAQ. The future leader of the CAQ will automatically become premier. This is a race that will have an impact. I am convinced that the premier can influence the government’s political program and actions. But we can always dream and hope that one of the two might have a different vision,” he says.

CAQ leadership race: Stéphane Sainte-Croix supports Bernard Drainville

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ — After initially supporting Justice Minister Simon Jolin Barrette, who chose not to run, the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) Member of the National Assembly (MNA) for Gaspé has now chosen Bernard Drainville in the race for the leadership of the CAQ.

“Over the past three years, Bernard has proven beyond a doubt his generous support for regional issues and the realities of the region, and his position on the challenges we face influenced my decision,” says Stéphane Sainte-Croix, explaining his choice.

The MNA also made no secret of the fact that Drainville’s parliamentary experience, notably as a minister under Pauline Marois during the Parti Québécois’s short term in power between 2012 and 2014, and his knowledge of government and governance also tipped the scales.

“Bernard has a very good understanding of the different dynamics at play in Quebec, specifically in the Gaspé Peninsula. All the wind power potential, the issue of regional specificities: the aging population, how to better adapt health, education, and entrepreneurial support services? Bernard has a real desire to be part of a regional development dynamic, to support and accompany entrepreneurs in their ideas. These are themes that speak to me a lot,” says the MNA for Gaspé.

The elected official intends to collaborate with the candidate, who has shown a strong interest in the Gaspé Peninsula, and will actively participate in contributing ideas for the campaign.

The campaign team of the other candidate Christine Fréchette also approached the Gaspé MNA.

“We are one big family and have been working together for nearly four years. We have had discussions with both the Drainville team and the Fréchette team. The discussions have also been interesting, frank, honest, and constructive. In both cases, we have people of great quality and competence. If Ms. Fréchette wins, I will rally behind her without any problem,” says the man who was elected in the 2022 general election.

However, the MNA mentioned that a choice had to be made in this leadership race and that the debate needed to move forward.

His CAQ colleague from Bonaventure, Catherine Blouin, sided with Christine Fréchette.

QS launches nomination process in Gaspé–Bonaventure

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ – While legislation or a decision by the Supreme Court of Canada could reinstate the 2022 electoral map for the next provincial election, Québec solidaire (QS) in the region is proceeding based on the proposed map and is organizing a nomination contest for the new Gaspé–Bonaventure riding.

A special general meeting of members from the Gaspé and Bonaventure riding associations officially launched the nomination campaign on February 17. The process will run until March 19. Nicole Grenier will serve as chair of the nomination committee.

According to the party’s nomination guide, “any person who is eligible to vote in Quebec and is a member of Québec solidaire may run for nomination in a riding, whether or not they live there. Anyone wishing to become a candidate must submit their nomination papers to the nomination committee before the end of the nomination period.”

To be eligible, applicants must submit a nomination form signed by at least 15 members from the riding, along with a signed code of ethics, a confidentiality agreement, authorization for a criminal background check, a letter explaining their interest in running, a 250-word presentation, a photograph and a candidate verification form including links to digital platforms and social media accounts.

The proposed Gaspé–Bonaventure riding currently includes more than 200 party members.

If Gaspé and Bonaventure remain separate ridings through legislation or a Supreme Court decision, the party says it is prepared to move quickly to launch nomination contests in both ridings.

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Wilbert Coffin, 70 Years after the prospector's hanging, another book revives history

GILLES GAGNÉ

MARIA – Maria author Sylvain Rivière has just published “Wilbert Coffin, l’histoire qui ne veut pas mourir”, 70 years after the Gaspé prospector’s execution on February 10, 1956. He had been found guilty on August 5, 1954 in Percé of the June 1953 deaths of three American hunters.

Sylvain Rivière was only four months old when Wilbert Coffin was hanged at the Bordeaux prison in Montreal. However, as a child, he quickly became familiar with the case, which had caused a great stir not only in Quebec, but throughout Canada and in a significant portion of the United States.

“We listened to adults talking about this case, and it sounded like it was a family affair, the Coffin family was like ours. We heard about the injustice of the case, about someone who couldn’t defend himself properly because he didn’t have the means,” the author explains.

“It’s a story that has haunted me all my life, more than I’ve pursued it, especially at the beginning. I’ve been working on it for about thirty years now, and even more so during the pandemic. I put it aside for a short time to finish another book, about Suzanne Guité, and then I came back to finish it before the 70th anniversary of the execution,” notes Sylvain Rivière.

The author uses images to explore complex episodes of the Coffin case, including the Thompson and Cabot affairs, two men who confessed nearly 40 years apart to killing the American hunters. Francis Gilbert Thompson, from Akwesasne, confessed to the murders in 1958 after being arrested in Florida.

Philippe Cabot, a Gaspé native who died in 1998, bragged about it to family members in the 1990s. He was living in the Gaspé Peninsula in 1953 when the hunters died. Several of Philippe Cabot’s children are convinced that their father killed the three Americans.

In November 2006, the Montreal Gazette ran a complete file about Cabot’s possible involvement in the case. It was signed by Marian Scott and it arguably remains to this day the most thorough journalist report on the Coffin case.

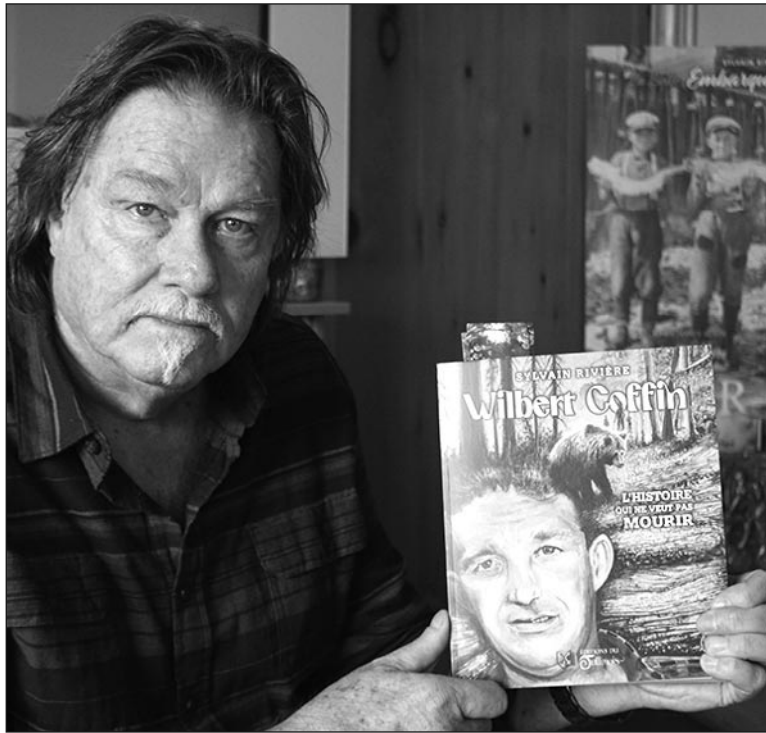


Photo: G. Gagné

Author Sylvain Rivière still hopes the Gaspé prospector will be exonerated due to a lack of evidence of his involvement in the deaths of three American hunters in June 1953.

An Eastern Townships man, Alton Price, worked very hard to reveal the possible involvement of Philippe Cabot in the deaths of Eugene Lindsey, his son Richard Lindsey, 17, and a friend of the latter, Frederick Claar, 19. Mr. Price released a book about it, *To build a noose*, in 1996.

"A 620-page anthology"

"It's a 620-page anthology, a hefty tome, and it's also a graphic narrative. When you read what's been written about the Coffin affair, like the books by Hébert (Jacques, a journalist, publisher, and senator who has since passed away), it's dense, and you can get lost because it just goes on and on. I structured it like a film script. I included 300 photos, newspaper clippings. You have the dates for the images. We're talking about the Thompson case and the Cabot case, the latter being the most recent to make headlines for a scenario that didn't involve Wilbert Coffin," says Sylvain Rivière.

His graphic narrative includes photos of numerous pieces of evidence from the 1954 summer trial in Percé. The book also includes some previously unpublished documents, including telegrams discovered by chance in the Matapedia train station in the summer of 2023.

"The Matapedia train station is also an artists' centre. Nearly three years ago, an artist went up to the attic and found thousands of telegrams

in wooden crates. She found telegrams reporting on the first press articles about the case," explains Mr. Rivière.

His book also features many photos of Wilbert Coffin in a family setting, well before the events of 1953. Born in 1915, the prospector was mobilized into the army during the Second World War, serving in the Black Watch regiment. He held various jobs before and after the war.

"He was in Murdochville in the early 1950s, during the construction of the town and the development of the mine. He was already interested in prospecting, but it was this stint that convinced him to pursue it," notes Sylvain Rivière.

The Hunters' Trail

The book also retraces the journey of Eugene Lindsey, Richard Lindsey and Frederick Claar.

Leaving Pennsylvania on June 5, they arrived in Gaspé three days later. They were in contact, a fact documented and consistently acknowledged by Wilbert Coffin, during the following two days, essentially in the woods. The prospector notably helped them try to repair Eugene Lindsey's damaged pickup truck. They were not seen again after June 10, at least not by anyone in Gaspé.

The bear hunters' bodies were found the following month, in an advanced state of decomposition. Eugene Lindsey was found on July 15, while his son Richard and

Frederick Claar were located on July 23. Bullet holes in the hunters' clothing immediately triggered an investigation to find the murderer(s). The head of Eugene Lindsey was never found, probably taken by bears.

"Coffin was caught up in the turmoil of the 1950s, dominated by the rule of premier Maurice Duplessis, who was also Quebec's Attorney General, or Minister of Justice. Coffin was an Anglican in a Catholic Quebec, and he lived in a common-law relationship with the mother of his son, which Duplessis denounced. A scapegoat was needed quickly to appease the American hunting lobby. Coffin took a hit, like so many others at the time. He had been found in possession of items belonging to the hunters. But stealing isn't killing," insists Sylvain Rivière.

"The investigation was marred by violence against Coffin, by irregularities, as was the trial, during which the jurors were allowed to go to the cinema," he recalls.

Among the previously unpublished photos featured in the book, published by Éditions du Tullinois, is the revolver carved from a bar of soap that Wilbert Coffin used to escape from the Quebec City jail in the fall of 1955, just days before his scheduled

execution, which was postponed shortly afterwards. Sylvain Rivière obtained permission to view this replica weapon, which belongs to a lawyer from the Gaspé region whose name he is withholding.

"Coffin voluntarily returned to prison on the advice of his former lawyer. He still hoped to prove his innocence. Would a guilty man return to prison just days before his execution? It seems obvious to me that the answer is no!" the author states definitively.

Recent documents have covered the Coffin affair. In 2023, Daniel Proulx, specialized in criminal history, released a book, *J'accuse les défenseurs de Coffin – la fabrication d'un mythe* (I accuse Coffin's defenders – the fabrication of a myth), concluding that the August 1954 trial verdict was correct.

The same year though, Kathryn Campbell, a professor of criminology at the University of Ottawa, released a six-hour podcast entitled "The Coffin Affair: a miscarriage of justice revisited." Ms. Campbell has worked for years on that case, and notably read the transcripts of the trial. She concludes that errors of law were carried out during the whole process, and that the work of Raymond Maher, the prospector's lawyer, was detrimental to his client.

Sylvain Rivière's wish

Gilles Gagné

MARIA - Sylvain Rivière still hopes to see Wilbert Coffin's name cleared by the Canadian justice system. He wants it first and foremost for the members of the Coffin family.

"History goes around in circles, and at some point, it bites its own tail. Wilbert Coffin was sentenced to death without direct evidence, based solely on circumstantial evidence. There are no living witnesses. The murder weapon was never found. This is a huge case. That's why it refuses to die. My conclusion is that when he came back down from the forest after meeting the Americans (on June 10, 1953), he must have been convinced that the hunters weren't dead. Otherwise, he wouldn't have stolen the items. I naively hope that something will happen with this unresolved case. It's remarkable, incredible, that we're still talking about it, 70 years after the execution. It just needs a push," hopes Sylvain Rivière.

The launch of his book took place on February 7 in Percé. The evening's hosts, booksellers Nathalie Clément and Patrice Dansereau, served the guests the last meals offered to the prospector on February 9, 1956.

"He ate chicken for lunch, and in the evening, ham with eggs. Nathalie (Clément) added a bit of flair to these dishes, but it was essentially true to life," concludes Sylvain Rivière.

Although photos, press clippings and maps make a sizeable part of the book, the author added a few interviews he conducted with various people. One of them was carried out with Matapedia resident Faye MacNaughton, who remembers witnessing the train carrying Coffin's casket a few days after the execution.

The book is only available in French. However, numerous English press clippings are reproduced in it.

Three of the four hospitals in the Gaspé Peninsula receive a C rating

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

MARIA – The latest report from Santé Québec on the condition of healthcare facilities gives three of the four hospitals in the Gaspé Peninsula a C rating.

Only Chandler Hospital received an A rating.

The problems at Maria Hospital are well known and well documented.

A study commissioned by the CISSS last November showed that two-thirds of the site has reached the end of its useful life. The first sections of the hospital were built in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

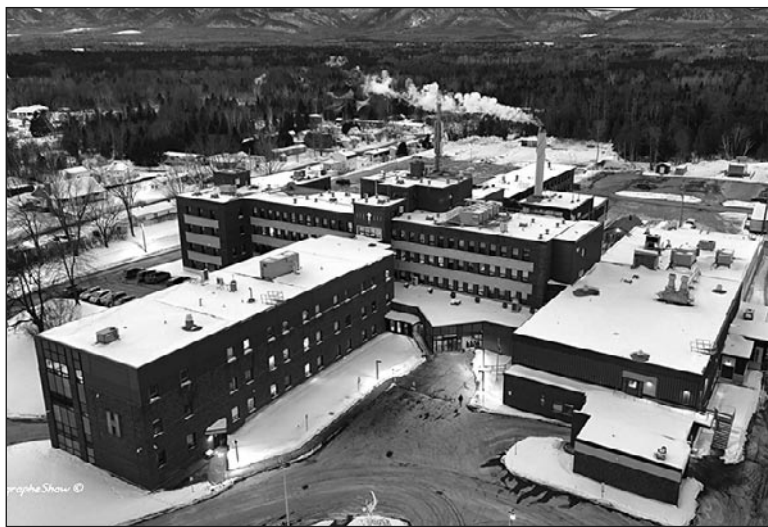


Photo: Allen Doug Shaw

Maria Hospital.

"We already knew that. There have been many complaints about the emergency room. We know that the surgery department is an aging environment. In the hospital wards, the rooms are often very small for patients. Ac-

cess to bathrooms for people with reduced mobility is very difficult," notes Pier-Luc Bujold, president of the Eastern Quebec Union of Nurses, Nursing Assistants and Respiratory Therapists.

A new hospital for Maria was already requested by the CISSS de la Gaspésie in 2018. However, because the process was lengthy, a project for a new emergency room and intensive care unit was granted "clinical relevance" status in the fall of 2022, meaning that the Ministry of Health recognized the need.

"This brings back the importance of revisiting the idea that it's not just a new emergency room that's needed, but a new hospital," says the union president.

The Clinical and Real Estate Master Plan already showed in the spring of 2022 that the hospital, built from 1952 and on, was no longer suited to modern practices, particularly the emergency room, where the last renovations date back to 1972.

The Parti Québécois has proposed taking hospital renovations out of the hands of politicians and instead plan-

ning the work based on the age and condition of buildings.

This position has been welcomed by the union.

"Absolutely. The hospitals in Sainte-Anne-des-Monts and Gaspé are rated C, similar to Maria. A visit to the three hospitals shows that Maria is a priority. The hospitals in Gaspé and Sainte-Anne-des-Monts date back to 1970. They must be given priority. Aging criteria must be taken into account and the most urgent cases addressed first," notes the union representative.

In the wake of the problems at Maisonneuve-Rosemont Hospital, a government statement indicated that Maria was not a priority.

"Politically, a mega-hospital has much more resonance, but that shouldn't overshadow essential elements in the regions," says Mr. Bujold.

However, politicians regularly mention the Maria hospital. "Being considered does not put food on the table. We need clear commitments and official announcements," says the union spokesperson.

30 years for the Parenfant Family Centre in Gaspé

NELSON SERGERIE

GASPÉ – Thirty years ago, three mothers working in the social and health services network came together to create the Maison de la famille Parenfant de Gaspé. The organization will mark the milestone with a series of anniversary activities.

"As citizens, these women decided to create a family centre and provide a meeting place for families, a place where there would be activities that met their needs. Thirty years later, we are able to offer a wide variety of activities and services to families," summarizes the centre's coordinator, Marie-Andrée Nadeau.

Over the years, the mission has remained the same: to welcome families and respond to their needs.

"Over the past 10 years, we have added perinatal and prenatal services, but the family centre has always been there for children and youth aged 0 to 18," notes Ms. Nadeau.

The centre is one of 280 family centres across Quebec, most of which were established in the late 1980s and 1990s.

"Each family centre is independent. They are autonomous community organizations. They are free to develop according to the needs of families," explains Ms. Nadeau.

In 30 years, Quebec society has changed, but the fun-



Photo: N. Sergerie

Marie-Andrée Nadeau, coordinator of the Parenfant Family Centre in Gaspé.

damental needs remain the same: to discuss parenting.

Birthing room project

An important phase in the development of the Maison de la famille Parenfant is the planned creation of a birthing room in an extension to the current downtown building.

The project was delayed last year due to government budget cuts.

"I am hopeful that the project will go ahead this year. We are still waiting for confirmation of the final funding from the CISSS (Health and Social Service Integrated Centre) towards the end of March. As soon as

we have confirmation, we can get started," explains Ms. Nadeau.

The final cost of the project will be known when the calls for tenders are issued.

"Most of the funding has been raised," estimates the coordinator. "We can't wait to offer it to the Gaspé community!"

Last fall, Martin Pelletier, president and chief executive officer (CEO) of the CISSS de la Gaspésie, indicated that he was working to include the project in his next fiscal year, which begins on April 1.

A \$300,000 community fundraising campaign has already reached its goal for this project, which was initially estimated at \$1.2 million.

A year of celebration

The 30th anniversary will be marked by several activities throughout the year.

On March 7, the centre will offer 30 family ski passes at Mont Béchervaise. Families can register through the organization's website.

A family activity day is planned for November at the gymnasium of the Cégep de la Gaspésie et des Îles, on the Gaspé campus.

On May 16, the annual family celebration will be held at the rest stop, a well-established tradition during the long Patriots' Day weekend.

Operating rooms are not at full capacity in the region

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ – A shortage of doctors and nurses means that operating rooms are not running at full capacity in the four hospitals across the Gaspé Peninsula.

However, patients who require surgery generally have relatively quick access to care.

"We use the operating rooms according to the needs of our patients and our human resources. We don't have operating rooms that are closed in the traditional sense, but they are used on a variable basis," explains Dr. Nathalie Guilbeault, Medical and Professional Services Director at the CISSS de la Gaspésie.

The rooms are not operating at 100% capacity. "We use them as best as we can with the medical and nursing staff we have. If we had more people for the various specialties or nursing resources, we could increase operating room time," says the doctor.

"Often, this can be explained either by the unavailability of patients or by certain specialties that we don't always have in Gaspésie. But we're still doing relatively well in terms of surgery wait times throughout the Gaspé Peninsula," she adds, while noting that exceptional situations do arise from time to time.

In orthopaedics, a few cases exceed one year, but this remains very rare, according to Dr. Guilbeault.

Efforts are being made to bring in reinforcements from other regions.

In oncology, the CISSS de la Gaspésie is meeting the prescribed deadlines.

"In general, we provide excellent service to people. We are fortunate to have a good medical staff that is so caring and helpful to our population. For me, I think it's wonderful for the Gaspésie region," insists Dr. Guilbeault.

Recently, a Canadian Press article reported that 134 of Quebec's 560 operating rooms were closed.

End of the saga between Louisette Langlois and the Town of Chandler

NELSON SERGERIE
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

CHANDLER – In a dramatic turn of events in Chandler, the Town and Louisette Langlois have settled their dispute, which dates back to the former mayor's suspension by the Municipal Commission in 2020.

A confidential settlement has been reached between the parties and a motion to dismiss has been filed by the Town.

"My initial reaction was one of surprise because the Town was so committed to pursuing me to the end. For eight years, I was in troubled waters, and this puts an end to that hellish life," says Ms. Langlois.

According to a conservative estimate, the legal fees in this case exceed \$410,000, not counting the latest developments.

The former elected official is turning the page and has no intention of pursuing the matter further in the face of the



Photo: N. Sergerie

Former mayor Louisette Langlois says she is relieved that the proceedings are over.

Town's relentless pursuit.

"The law is clear. An article of the law states that an elected official must be protected from legal costs. I have no intention of pursuing this. We're going to leave it at that. I've had enough upheaval in my politi-

cal life. We're going to stop there. Their own conscience will speak to them," she says.

"Yes, there is an out-of-court settlement with a withdrawal. However, there are other very important details that remain confidential," comments Mayor Gilles Daraïche.

The debate is finally over. "This is a debate that has gone on far too long and should have been closed long before now. Unfortunately, with what we know about the justice system, it drags on. It's always taxpayer money, and taxpayers are paying dearly. We have to stop spending their money," the mayor continues.

The hearing of the case was scheduled to begin on April 20 at the Percé courthouse.

In January 2021, the council passed a resolution leading to the filing of the claim by the Town, emphasizing in particular that the allegations against Louisette Langlois resulted from gross or intentional mis-

conduct, with her personal interest prevailing, and that she had acted intentionally and premeditatedly to achieve her ends.

The argument was repeated in the motion to initiate proceedings for reimbursement of defence costs filed in January 2022.

The bill claimed at that time was \$230,411.

Chandler's attorneys noted in particular that "the decision rendered (...) on December 21, 2020, is damning to the defendant and establishes that the defendant's acts or omissions constitute gross negligence and/or intentional misconduct and/or are separable from the performance of her duties."

They added that the former elected official "initiated multiple proceedings, some of which were unnecessary, unfounded, and truncated in light of the evidence presented before the CMQ (Commission municipale du Québec)."

In December 2019,

Louisette Langlois was cited for 21 violations of the Chandler Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct for Elected Officials.

After hearings in July 2020, the commission concluded that the former elected official was guilty of 20 violations, including conflicts of interest, in December 2020. Prior to the sanction hearing, Ms. Langlois attempted to have the proceedings stayed, challenged the sanction notice issued against her, and even requested that the investigation be reopened, but these requests were rejected by Administrative Judge Sandra Bilodeau.

The former mayor appealed to the Superior Court, where her case was dismissed in July 2021, and suffered the same fate in October 2021 before the Court of Appeal.

In addition, the motion criticized her for having multiplied the proceedings thereafter.

UPAC tours the Gaspé Peninsula

NELSON SERGERIE

GASPÉ – The anti-corruption commissioner spent two days in the Gaspé Peninsula on February 24 and 25, not to conduct investigations or make arrests, but to explain the work of the Permanent Anti-Corruption Unit (UPAC) to elected officials and municipal leaders.

"There are three mandates within the UPAC. There is the enforcement mandate, which most people are familiar with. We have a specialized police force called the Anti-Corruption Commissioner. We work closely with Revenu Québec. We have an audit aspect in collaboration with the Commission de la construction du Québec and the Sûreté du Québec. We are responsible for auditing government-authorized companies. And then there is the whole aspect of prevention and risk management, which is why we are here," explains UPAC Commissioner Vincent Rochette.

His goal is to prevent people from finding themselves in awkward situations in their daily work.

The commissioner, who stopped in Gaspé and Bonaventure to meet with elected officials, wanted to present the offences UPAC is working on, how to recognize them and how to report them.



Photo: N. Sergerie

*UPAC Commissioner
Vincent Rochette.*

Prevention measures are also provided to help avoid embarrassing situations. Sometimes people commit reprehensible acts in good faith.

"In smaller municipalities, people know each other. Sometimes, there is no malicious or criminal intent. They tell themselves they are going to save money and administrative work by awarding the contract to a particular person. People can get themselves into trouble. Sometimes, there is wilful blindness, but sometimes there are criminal intentions, and that is where we come in," says the commissioner.

There is an online and tele-

phone reporting centre to receive reports, and the process is anonymous.

An initial analysis is carried out and a recommendation is made. Sometimes the file is handed over to a partner organization.

"When it's an investigation file, the investigation is launched. When there is suspicion, the validation team will dig deeper to see if there is a crime. They will meet with people to determine whether there are grounds for an investigation. If there are no grounds for an investigation, the case will be referred to public integrity colleagues. If there are grounds, an investigation will be conducted. Corruption investigations are lengthy and extremely complex, and we are assisted by Crown prosecutors. The Crown prosecutor will make the decision to lay charges," explains the commissioner.

The UPAC's success rate is 80%.

Some stakeholders have said in the past that there are very long delays between the reporting process and action on the ground.

"We have to respect the judicial process. But when someone reports a situation, within five days, we will tell them what we are going to do. But when we start an investigation,

it is true that it takes a long time. Sometimes legal proceedings have to be taken, particularly regarding client-solicitor privilege. Sometimes it takes a long time. There are cases where we seize hundreds of thousands of documents. Our investigators have to go through them, find the right information and gather evidence. It takes time," says the commissioner.

The organization has succeeded in obtaining charges against former municipal councillor Bruno-Pierre Godbout and former director of urban planning for the Town of Percé, Ghislain Pitre. The cases are still before the courts.

"The reports are anonymous. This is for people's protection. I can't give you that information. I made a commitment to transparency when I arrived, but I can't say everything, all the time. People's rep-

utations are at stake," replies the commissioner when asked how these cases ended up on the UPAC's desk.

In addition to the reports received, complaints may come from the Commission municipale du Québec, the Ombudsman or even the Sûreté du Québec in order to identify elements to investigate.

"We have a specific mandate for corruption. There is no such thing as petty fraud or petty corruption. Fraud involving \$1,000 by an elected official is serious because it has an impact on the integrity of the state. Sometimes there is something else behind it. Sometimes the Sûreté du Québec transfers cases to us. We are also proactive. We monitor the media and our partners," says the commissioner.

The commissioner receives a press review to identify potential cases to investigate.



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Slight tax increase in Percé

NELSON SERGERIE

PERCÉ – Taxpayers in Percé are relatively spared, as citizens with municipal services will see a 2.1% increase in their tax bills, while those without services will see a 2.7% increase.

The 2026 budget, tabled on January 27, totals \$8.7 million, up \$600,000 from 2025.

Based on the average home value of \$147,069, the increase will be \$30 for citizens with services and \$41 for those without.

The difference is due to variations in the costs of various services, which this year benefit those with services, who will see a decrease in their water tax because a borrowing by-law has been completed. The bill for waste collection alone is increasing by \$15. The base tax rate is rising from \$0.90 to \$0.918.

"We've been lucky. Gas tax transfers and equalization have given us a little cushion. We benefited from new construction, which brought in \$200,000 out of the blue. That's fine because the council had to absorb the MRC's share of \$100,000. If we hadn't had that, it would have been tough," calculates Mayor Daniel Leboeuf.

The municipality wants to create contingency funds for infrastructure in order to avoid borrowing to carry out future work.

The new collective agreement with the municipal employees, which expired in 2024 and was settled in 2025, has an impact on the budget.

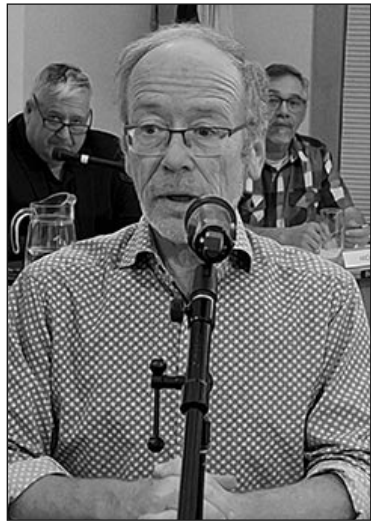


Photo: Nelson Sergerie

Percé Mayor Daniel Leboeuf.

The municipality did not have to touch its accumulated surplus. "This shows that it is well managed. Seriously, in 2024 and 2025, many positions were vacant. These are salaries we didn't have to pay. But fewer employees means fewer services for citizens. Now we just have to find a new director general," says the mayor.

The Town is using a power under the municipal taxation law, in place since 2024 to tax vacant lots served by municipal services more heavily.

"We're not doing this retroactively. It's to encourage owners of land served by water and sewer systems to participate in the maintenance of these systems, otherwise, sell them to encourage the settlement of new families. Perhaps the asking price is too high," believes the elected official.

The tax increases from \$1.80 to \$3.67 per \$100 of assessed value.

The budget for the tourist office is renewed for 2026.

"The tourist receptionists

will be there. We will have a small budget for tourism promotion, which we want to focus on the off-season. During the summer, there is no need for big announcements. The budget has been reduced slightly due to the elimination of the position of tourism promotion director in 2024. We have not reinstated it," explains the mayor. The tourist office recorded a 4% increase in visitors, welcoming approximately 30,000 people in 2025.

Investments

The three-year capital plan contains \$16.5 million.

The most significant project is the \$10 million repair of Val-d'Espoir Road. "It's been more than 40 years. These are old roads. The culverts need to be rebuilt. We've presented this every year. It's a program that maintains rural roads. It was overdue. The Local Road Assistance Program provides grants," says the mayor. The repair project will be carried out in two phases at a cost of \$5 million.

The other major project is the renovation of the town hall.

"This is a preliminary estimate, without technical advice. We have commissioned someone to draw up a quote. Will it cost \$1.2 million? I hope not. It's a heritage building. The parts that need to be replaced are quite expensive," adds the elected official.

The Oasis and Val-d'Espoir community centres will also see a total investment of \$250,000, as their roofs need urgent replacement.

Strong start for camping reservations at Forillon

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ – The 2026 season is off to a strong start at Forillon Park, with the reservation centre recording 2,650 bookings on its first day of operation on February 4.

This represents a 32% increase over the 2,011 reservations made on the first day of 2025.

These figures include reservations for campsites and accommodations.

The park declined interviews at this stage of the season but notes that a 25% discount on camping and lodging fees will be available from June 19 to September 7 as part of the Stronger Canada program, which offers free admission to national historic sites, national parks, and national marine conservation areas administered by Parks Canada during the same period.

The early figures are promising following a more than 15% increase last year, with a total of 31,242 overnight stays, resulting in an occupancy rate of 86% compared to 77% in 2024.

Forillon Park recorded its best performance in 2025 with 188,400 visitors, surpassing the 181,000 visitors in 2021, an increase of 13.6 per cent compared with 2024.

Strong start for the Carleton-sur-Mer campground

Nelson Sergerie

CARLETON-SUR-MER – The first day for the Carleton-sur-Mer campground reservation centre set a record, boding well for a strong season in the summer of 2026.

No fewer than 2,096 reservations were made on January 21, up 11% from the 1,882 made on the first day of operations in 2025, which had been the previous record. "That represents about 13,000 overnight stays for reservations made on the first day," says Mayor Mathieu Lapointe.

There is still room available during the high season. "From Quebec's National Holiday to Labour Day, this is a very popular campground. We are very happy about that. You have to book early. There are still spaces available throughout the summer, but fewer and fewer," adds the mayor.

Between 28,000 and 29,000 overnight stays are normally recorded during the summer. "We already have 13,000 reservations. That's about half of a big season. We know that people often make reservations during the high season. September, October, May, and June are often less booked in advance," says the mayor.

"This is a first positive sign. We could be looking at a record season," he continues.

The record is 29,906 overnight stays, recorded in 2021. In 2025, the campsite saw a decrease of 200 overnight stays, for a total of 28,500.

Rates have increased by an average of 3.1% this season.

Percé wharf: dredging and more studies

NELSON SERGERIE

PERCÉ – Every early spring brings a new ritual: dredging in the Percé wharf harbour, and 2026 will be no exception, as the Bas-Saint-Laurent-Gaspésie Port Authority has issued a call for tenders to remove an estimated 1,600 cubic metres of sediment that has accumulated over the past year.

The work will be scheduled for late April to early May. The call for tenders specifies that the work must be completed before May 1.

Last year, dredging cost \$249,000.

Dredging has been necessary since 2021, following the reconstruction of the wharf, which was completed in 2020 and transferred from the fed-



Photo: Nelson Sergerie

The retaining wall east of the Percé wharf will be reinforced.

eral government to the Quebec government.

Still studying

The Department of Transportation is still investigating

the origin of this silting, which was not present before the wharf was reconfigured.

When asked about the progress of the file, the department writes in an email that "specialized studies to de-

termine the origin of the recurring silting in the wharf basin have not yet been completed. The approach taken is based on conducting in-depth hydro-sedimentary studies, which are an essential prerequisite for identifying a sustainable solution adapted to the site." The ministry added that a specialized firm has been mandated to carry out the studies. Some work has already begun, while other studies will be initiated over the next year.

Protective wall

Analysis of the consolidation work on the protective wall inside the fishing harbour, which safeguards a SÉPAQ building and, to a certain extent, the nearby Rue du

Mont-Joli, is also ongoing.

In its email, the ministry indicates that it is continuing "its work on protecting the retaining wall located east of the Percé wharf to ensure the safety of the infrastructure and limit the impact of coastal storms on the site."

Plans and specifications are currently being prepared, and considering that the work will be carried out in both a coastal and heritage environment, applications for environmental and heritage authorizations are underway.

Emergency work had to be carried out in 2024 to protect the wharf's integrity by adding rock behind the wall in sections that were particularly exposed to wave impact and at risk of instability. This work cost approximately \$240,000.

Rail: Transport Minister sows doubt

NELSON SERGERIE

GASPÉ – Quebec’s Transport Minister is raising doubts about the current provincial government’s willingness to continue rehabilitating Section 3 of the rail line between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé.

The response came during question period at the National Assembly on February 25, following a question from Liberal Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Enrico Ciccone, spokesperson for Gaspé Peninsula issues.

"In 2020, the Coalition Avenir Quebec (CAQ) promised that the train would reach Gaspé in 2025. Subsequently, the project was postponed to 2026 and then to 2027. In 2025, the project disappeared from the Quebec Infrastructure Plan. The CAQ made promises and, as usual, failed to deliver. I wonder what the Member for Gaspé thinks about this," asks the Marquette MNA.

"I went with my colleague to meet with various stakeholders in the Gaspé Peninsula specifically about the



Photo: National Assembly screenshot

Transport Minister Jonatan Julien during question period on February 25 at the National Assembly.

train. The last section had a business plan closely linked to LM Wind Power with wind turbines. Once this structure goes through maritime transport, we are rethinking the third section. But the others are moving forward," replies Minister Jonatan Julien.

This comments surprised the president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG).

"We must remember that when the government was considering this, it was in the 2025 budget. We are now back in the fall of 2024. LM was producing 107-metre blades for offshore projects that could only be shipped by ship. LM had some issues, but they returned to producing smaller blades that can be transported by rail. That's what we're working on to justify the relevance of renovat-

ing the third section," replies Éric Dubé.

During the meeting with the minister in December in Maria, Mr. Dubé said the issue had already been discussed.

"Yes, there is a large volume with LM. But we also have other companies that we will be able to serve. We often think about what we can export, take out of the region, but it also allows us to bring in inputs for our companies," the SCFG president points out.

The railway company has been working for several years to complete the rehabilitation of the line to Gaspé.

"Politically, this will remain an issue. There is a budgetary challenge for the government, which we understand. But we have all the tools to demonstrate the relevance and necessity of rehabilitation. There will be a budget soon, and the premier will change by April. There will be an electoral campaign in the fall. These are all opportunities that we will seize," says Mr. Dubé.

Work is still underway on

Section 3, particularly on the Grande-Rivière and Douglas-town bridges.

The Quebec government has invested approximately \$150 million in the final section to date.

The railway received authorization from the Quebec government on December 22 to resume service on Section 2 between Caplan and Port-Daniel-Gascons following an investment of nearly \$300 million.

Cement trains have been running between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Matapédia since January.

The Quebec government put the rehabilitation of the stretch between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé on hold in March 2025 due to soaring costs.

The Ministry of Transport had budgeted \$517 million in June 2023 for the final section, but since then, bids came in at between \$150 million and \$200 million higher, according to Bonaventure Member of National Assembly (MNA) Catherine Blouin. The project was sent back to the planning stage.

Drivers urged to remain patient at grade crossings

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW CARLISLE – Drivers passing on railroad grade crossings located east of the New Richmond station will have to be patient for several more weeks, and in some cases, a few months, before seeing freight trains pass at normal speed instead of 10 miles per hour.

Since traffic resumed on January 7 between New Richmond and the Port Daniel cement plant, trains hauling cement between those two points have been operating at reduced speed for safety reasons, explains Éric Dubé, president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG).

"People are no longer used to seeing trains at grade crossings. Along most roads, it is not so bad because there are light signals but it is not the case everywhere, notable at farm crossings," he explains.

Some light signals have not been put back into operation, particularly in the Paspébiac area. In several cases they must be replaced, and updated safety standards will



Photo: Anthony Bernard Prince

sometimes require reconfiguration of certain grade crossings.

"We even have to make trains stop at some grade crossings because the light signals don't work," adds Éric Dubé.

SCFG management has also received complaints from Paspébiac residents concerned about malfunctioning crossing signals.

"They complain because they fear colliding with the train. But our trains stop in those cases. We even have employees protecting some

grade crossings through their presence along the train. We respect the safety norms," he points out.

Trains are also travelling slowly because several sections of track between New Richmond and Port-Daniel-Gascons were completely rebuilt, including bridges.

"The ballast has to be compacted before we go back to normal track speed," concludes Éric Dubé.

Normal freight train speeds in the Gaspé Peninsula generally range between 30 and 35 miles per hour.

A brand new garage needs to be fixed

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ – Three corrections must be made to the new Quebec Ministry of Transport (MTQ) service centre built in 2022 in the Augustines industrial park, following an engineering study.

The WSP firm has made these recommendations, which the Société québécoise des infrastructures (SQI) considers minor, in order to facilitate maintenance and improve the efficiency of the facilities.

The proposed corrections include targeted modifications to the slab to improve water drainage in the wash tank area, raising the bases of the jacks for light vehicles, and modifying the automatic reel systems to increase the system's range of action.

The SQI is currently estimating the costs for this work. WSP had a \$28,300 contract to prepare plans and specifications and supervise the improvement work in accordance with the department's quality standards.

Last fall, the Société québécoise des infrastructures indicated that "the work will improve existing equipment used for heavy machinery, after conducting field operations and with a view to ensuring its efficiency."

The centre has three garage doors on the side of the Rolling Stock Management Centre and three doors on the side of the Department of Transportation. It also contains an unheated warehouse for the ministry.

In the centre of the building, a three-story office section will be shared between the centre and the ministry. There is also an area for storing abrasives and other items.

The new service centre cost \$19.9 million.



Inside the MTQ service centre in Gaspé.

Photo: N. Sergerie

1996, another year of battles and transitions

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW CARLISLE – It has been said before and it deserves to be repeated: Gaspésians are tough. When there is something they really want to hold on to, they don't give up. They can also fight many battles at the same time. The year 1996 proved it.

**Vol 22, No 1
January 7, 1996**

- Issue 1, dated January 7 headlines with “New federal policy may force ports to close” and “Home for the holidays!”, which invites readers to look at a letter to the editor on page 4. New Carlisle’s “Polar Dip raises \$900” for the Girl Guides, a picture-caption combo, “Taxes up 4% in Gaspé”, “Fire destroys Barachois house” and Fisheries minister Brian “Tobin’s fisheries plan cuts turbot levels”, complete the front page.

**Vol 22, No 2
January 14, 1996**

- “Population decline leads to loss of county” at the federal level headlines issue 2, dated January 14. The new riding of Matapedia-Matane goes as far east as the Cascapedia River, and includes Haute-Gaspésie as well. The other riding encompasses the MRCs of Côte-de-Gaspé, Pabok (now Rocher-Percé), Bonaventure and the Magdalen Islands. “Taxes back to 1993 level” in Percé, “English movie showings to be reduced at Cinéma Royal” due to a \$10,000 loss in 1995, “Reactions to electoral changes”, “Cablo G will soon offer more services” and “Minister asks St. Omer to keep Saint-Louis road open for ... horses” also make page 1.

**Vol 22, No 3
January 21, 1996**

- “Bernier on the electoral map: ‘if the government wanted to, they could do something’” and “Municipal budgets”, a perspective of 1996, headline issue 3, dated January 21. “A Much-Needed Meal” covers the new breakfast program at New Carlisle High School through a picture and



The New Carlisle Optimist Club handed out its annual bursaries to deserving students from New Carlisle. The bursaries are given in memory of Philip Jiona Sr., who founded the New Carlisle Optimist Club. The winners are Amanda Smith, Frederick Minville (at right) and Simon Grenier (at left). They are pictured here with Secretary-Treasurer of the New Carlisle Optimist Club, Mr. Wilfred Hocquard.

caption.

**Vol 22, No 4
January 28, 1996**

- “Troy Adams decorated by Justice Minister”, as the young man from Matapedia saved a drowning friend, and Carleton “Dairy gets nod from government agency”, namely SO-QUIA, which will invest \$200,000 in the \$2.3 million project, headline issue 4, dated January 28. “Police hope for a breakthrough in (Hope Town) break-ins”, Patrick “Gagnon announces grant for CASA”, New Carlisle’s “Taxes up 5 cents per \$100” and “Chandler: status quo on taxes” also make page 1.

**Vol 22, No 5
February 4, 1996**

- Issue 5, dated February 4 shows Mathias “Rioux promoted, (Marcel) Landry ousted, (Guy) Lelièvre made regional secretary” as headline. A picture-caption combo, “Wind storm leaves trail of damage” reports on an end of January gale. “Chief Douglas Martin – ‘We just can’t lose our country twice’”, “Quebec Grand master attends Gaspé Burns supper”, that of the Masons, and “Federal cabinet shuffle: Gaspésians hope for flexibility on Unemployment reforms”, also make page 1.

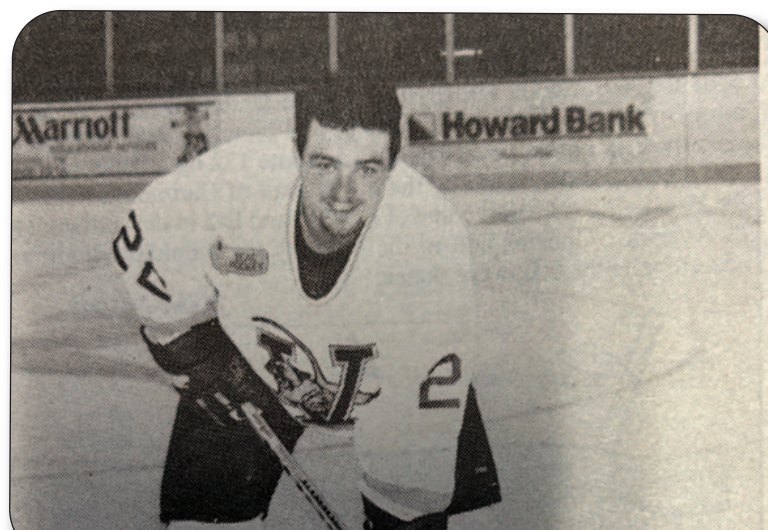
**Vol 22, No 6
February 11, 1996**

- “Demonstrators block 132 in Grand River” to denounce the Unemployment insurance

reform, and “Wilbert Coffin: forty years after hanging, book may prove innocence” headline issue 6, dated February 11. The book was written by Alton Price, an Eastern Townships retired teacher, whose father knew Mr. Coffin. His book will be titled “To build a noose”. “Military museum project submitted to CRCDD” (Conseil régional de concertation et de développement), “Villa St. Paul’s: probably not to start before 1998” and “Surfin Gaspé: the Internet brings the world to the Gaspé and vice versa”, also appear on page 1.

**Vol 22, No 7
February 18, 1996**

- “Growing demonstrations, growing frustrations” makes the only headline of issue 7, dated February 18. Unemployment insurance’s new rules, imposing more hours worked and lower benefits, mobilized as much as 3,000 seasonal workers on one day, all along the Gaspé Coast. Daniel “Johnson



Local boy on his way to U.S. NCAA Hockey Tournament. Dale Patterson, son of Debbie and Andy Patterson of Sunny Bank.

visits counties on provincial tour”, “UI reforms: what’s all the fuss about”, “Fire department can’t deal with all fire” in Gaspé and “Bishop of Gaspé: on-going barricades ‘breaking solidarity’” make smaller titles.

**Vol 22, No 8
February 25, 1996**

- “Port Daniel cement plant: Environment gives plant the nod – including burning tires for energy”, headlines issue 8, dated February 25. The decision comes from the Quebec department of the Environment. “Women of the Gaspé: the poorest in the province with the lowest job rate”, “Chandler: English students to be moved” and “Partition concept has few proponents among local Anglos” also make page 1.

**Vol 22, No 9
March 3, 1996**

- “UI reforms: demonstrators aiming for major events” and “Listuguj: former band council chief charged with fraud”, namely Ronald Jacques, headline issue 9, dated March 3. “Wakeham-York Centre: Carnival raises three times average amount”, “MRC prefects off to Ottawa, will argue against loss of county”, “Chandler: Gaspesia mill shut down for a week” and “Amusement Bechervaise expands” also make front-page titles.

**Vol 22, No 10
March 10, 1996**

- “CASA president encouraged by Ottawa lobby”, as president Lynden Bechervaise met prime minister Jean Chré-

tien, and New Carlisle’s “Bar La Grange destroyed by fire” headline issue 10, dated March 10. “Amalgamation: plans for Hôtel-Dieu, Mgr. Ross to be known March 14”, “National health forum draws few, CASA paper outlines anglo needs”, “Grand Cascapedia: (Brenda) Milligan wins with 52% of the votes” in ward 5 and “New courses available in English at Gaspé Cegep”, also make page 1.

**Vol 22, No 11
March 17, 1996**

- Quebec premier Lucien “Bouchard speech: ‘effects on francos equally important’”, according to CASA president Lynden Bechervaise, “UI reforms: the anger grows” and “Bonaventure MP gets promoted: Gagnon to co-chair Joint Official Languages Committee” fill the front-page of issue 11, dated March 17. The Bouchard speech was delivered at the Centaur Theatre in Montreal presenting his position regarding the rights of anglophones.

**Vol 22, No 12
March 24, 1996**

- “Estates-general on Education: good turnout despite poor weather” makes the main headline of issue 12, dated March 24. Budget cuts represent one of the main worries of the regional stakeholders. “Environment ministry: Gaspé loses head office jobs to Ste Anne des Monts” and “The wearin’ o’ the green”, about St. Pat’s Day, complete front-page titles. Inside, readers learn that SPEC’s debt is now down to \$30,000, from \$63,729 in 1995 and Gaspé hockey player Dale Patterson is on his way to the U.S. NCAA tournament.

**Vol 22, No 13
March 31, 1996**

- Issue 13, dated March 31, puts “Economy grows, Desjardins optimistic” and “New Richmond: Stanley House sold to J. Edgar Leblanc – Heritage

From Page 13

group disappointed” as headlines. Mouvement Desjardins is relatively optimistic, and a university researcher found that the rate of new enterprises on the Gaspé is twice as high as in the rest of Quebec. “Three of a kind” reports on one of New Richmond farmer Billy Budd’s cows, which gave birth to three calves.

Vol 22, No 14
April 7, 1996

- “Gaspé: fishermen invade fisheries forum” headlines issue 14, dated April 7. Those 70 fishermen, including Leroy Leggo, indicate that the Alliance des pêcheurs professionnels does not represent them. So, they take a seat at the table, despite not being invited. “Healthy changes? Exploring the impact of transforming our health care systems”, “Meeting with Bouchard: ‘an extremely good leader’ says CASA president” Bechervaise and “SPEC update – the debt is gone! Generous grant through CASA clears the books” make smaller page 1 titles.

Vol 22, No 15
April 14, 1996

- “Hope Town: fusion seen as threat to language rights”, that fusion being projected with Saint Godefroi, headlines issue 15, dated April 14. In Barachois, “Central School to be closed for good in June” also makes a big title. “Book about German spy tells of RCMP bungling”, about the 1942 story of Herbert von Janowski, “Electoral map: ‘maybe in the year 2002’, says (MP Patrick) Gagnon” and “Language policy: Quebec decides to investigate job bias” also make page 1.

Vol 22, No 16
April 21, 1996

- “Windmills to be built at Val-d’Espoir, but negotiations with Hydro lagging” and “Pesticide use: Hydro and environmental groups scramble (as opponents) for municipal support” headline issue 16, dated April 21. “Barachois: parents opt for Belle Anse School”, “Gaspé: rental owners don’t



The 1996 BPS graduates.

want to pay new water and sewage tax” and “Pin Rouge Ski Hill in financial bind” also make the front-page.

Vol 22, No 17
April 28, 1996

- “Budget is ‘really, truly bad news’, No return to feeder schools – yet” headlines issue 17, dated April 28. The return from Bonaventure and Gaspé Polyvalents to feeder schools would save money, argue some stakeholders. “Get out your bib! Lobster season opens” makes another headline. “Crab fisheries: lower quota, fishermen must share”, “Bonaventure: fire-fighting shortcomings admitted” and “Hope Town: mayor resigns over amalgamation debate” also make page 1.

Vol 22, No 18
May 5, 1996

- “Gascons: two lobster fishermen drown” on opening day headlines issue 18, dated May 5. The Stéphane P. owned by Stéphane Parisé, capsized because the crew had placed too many traps on the deck. “FTQ announces regional fund - \$6 million for tertiary industries” and “Prince (Charles) petitioned in NB by UI demonstrators” also make the front-page.

Vol 22, No 19
May 12, 1996

- Issue 19, dated May 12, headlines with “Nouvelle: sawmill burns, 40 jobs on the line”, a sawmill called Bois Saint-Omer, and “Education: exam results due to poor texts, translations” according to Gaspesia and the Islands

School Board. New Carlisle “Day Care faring well” also appears on page 1.

Vol 22, No 20
May 19, 1996

- “Crab industry paralyzed” by a strike undertaken by boat crew members and fish plant workers, who disagree with the snow crab fishing plan, which shares the quota with non-traditional fishermen headlines issue 20 dated May 19. “Shriner’s Club raises almost \$1,000”, “Get hooked on the Gaspé – Salmon fishing special”, “Health changes: Gaspé area administrators welcome changes”, “FORE! The Great Gaspé golf tournament” and “Sharon McCully wins QCNA top honor” also appear on page 1.

Vol 22, No 21
May 26, 1996

- “End of an era: Levesque garage closes its doors” in Paspébiac, 18 months after the death of former owner and minister Gérard D. Levesque, headlines issue 21, released on May 26. “Estates-general on education: focus on basic, says D-G of Gaspesia” Wade Gifford, who states that the primary role of the school is education, not students’ socialization.

Vol 22, No 22
June 2, 1996

- Issue 22, dated June 2 shows “Bonaventure Polyvalent: students place 5th in national competition”, among 950 teams, Canada-wide, in a stock market competition. Their teacher is John Williams. “Alliance Québec: partition al-

most splits city, regions”, “Orléans Express: special service for mobility impaired”, “Gaspé: Customs office closes after 229 years”, “Crab war: captains agree to fish” and “Brendon (Budd) celebrates 2nd anniversary” following his bone marrow transplant, also make page 1.

Vol 22, No 23
June 9, 1996

- “ATR finds itself with huge debt - board considering legal proceedings” against ex-manager Jocelyne Michaud, because of a \$131,000 debt, headlines issue 23, dated June 9. In “New Carlisle: accusations fly between mayor and councillor”, as Barry Tennier and Harold Walker disagree on the sports and recreation club, also make the front-page.

Vol 22, No 24
June 16, 1996

- “National Bank president apologizes for ‘closing regions’ comment” headlines issue 24, released on June 16. “Catch of the day!” shows brothers Calvin and Stevie Jerome of Gesgapegiag with a 20-pound salmon. “Crab war: majority of special permits to go to cod fishermen” completes the front-page articles.

Vol 22, No 25
June 23, 1996

- “Situation ‘tense’ as natives and DFO debate fishing boundary” in Listuguj salmon fishing, and “School board: budget to be discussed at special meeting, July 3” headline issue 25, dated June 23. Fifteen years after the 1981 salmon war, Listuguj authori-

ties find very little flexibility from the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans. “100 and still on the go” invites readers to discover Leora Smollett Steele.

Vol 22, No 26
June 30, 1996

- “Anglophone youth: only allophones have higher unemployment rate”, “Listuguj: situation calm, but no resolution” regarding salmon fishing, and “Bonaventure Polyvalent: ‘I hope the world is ready for you’”, about the 1996 graduation, headline issue 26, dated June 30. “Maria accident: more and more accidents caused by trucks”, “Gas wars reach the Gaspé” and “CBC radio reduces coverage” through moving Ron Lavallée to Quebec City, make smaller page 1 titles.

Vol 22, No 27
July 7, 1996

- “Port Daniel: father kills sons, self in blaze”, a tragedy receiving national coverage, headlines issue 27, dated July 7. “School board: budget delayed as Gaspesia asks for help – shortfall of \$350,000 for teachers’ wages” and “We ran out of cake everywhere!”, Canada Day’s coverage, also make page 1.

Vol 22, No 28
July 14, 1996

- “Port Daniel tragedy: (Jules) Langlois tried to convince wife to come home – All three victims died as a result of fire” and “Bioparc construction begins, aiming to open next summer” occupy the whole front-page of issue 28, dated July 14.

Vol 22, No 29
July 21, 1996

- “Coffin book sells like hot cakes at (Wakeham-York) festival” and “Crab fishery: some fishermen threatening legal action” because they were excluded from crab allocations, fill the front-page of issue 29, released on July 21. The Coffin book, “To build a noose”, written by Alton Price, who affirms that Wilbert Coffin was

Page 15

innocent of the murders of three Americans in 1953. He suggests another murderer.

**Vol 22, No 30
July 28, 1996**

- “Who is teacher’s pet today?” and “North Shore flood: Carleton ferry off to Sept Îles, taking food, bringing back tourists” headline issue 30, dated July 28. The John Hamilton Gray ship was used to de-isolate part of the North Shore, after rainfall damage made highway 138 collapse. “Listuguj: new school for grades K to 8”, “TAGS program to end in 1998” (The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy), “Gaspé Promenade in hot water” and “Wakeham-York festival ends” complete page 1.

**Vol 22, No 31
August 4, 1996**

- “Tragedy at Maria: murderer still at large, no suspect” makes a sad headline in issue 31, dated August 4. Sonia Raymond was killed at the age of 32, on the beach in Maria along highway 132. “Fannie (Bélanger) just blew them away!”, about the Country and Western talent show at Fleurantide Park in Escuminac, “Belle Anse School anniversary”, “Foster homes; places for anglophone kids lacking” and “High cancer rate: researcher wants to study area” also make page 1.

**Vol 22, No 32
August 11, 1996**

- “Gaspé Polyvalent: Fire damages C.E. Pouliot – fast action by fire department accredited to saving school” and “Shigawake: over 300 attend Hayes reunion” headline issue 32, dated August 11. “CN negotiates to sell the Matapedia to Chandler line”, “Fire brings back old debate” in Gaspé, regarding acquiring a fire truck with a ladder, and “Jeux de l’Est comes to Fox River” also make page 1.

**Vol 22, No 33
August 18, 1996**

- “July ’96: Tourism down 25%” because of rain and economics, and “Rural Dignity: fight to save railway toughest yet”, notably because a buyer

is not forced to offer passenger service, headline issue 33, dated August 18. “Gaspé Cathedral: hundreds witness ordination of new priest” Chester Cotton, “Gaspé Polyvalent: school may be ready for students in September” and “Carleton: Blues (festival) leaves town feeling up, not down”, are other page 1 titles.

**Vol 22, No 34
August 25, 1996**

- Issue 34, dated August 25 headlines with “School board budget: ‘bottom line is, we will survive – this year’”, “Judge André Dubé receives Order of Canada” for his work at the Kidney Foundation of Canada, and Audrey “Acteson cleared of charges, company pleads guilty” of Unemployment insurance fraud. Produits Marins Saint-Godefroi is fined \$18,900. The fraud was initially thought to reach \$1,345,000. Up to 100 fishermen and fishermen helpers are expected to pay some fines. “Gaspé Cegep: Anglo numbers up in English section”, “Crown drops charges against Ronald Jacques” and Gaspé “Anglo seniors still out in the cold” also make page 1.

**Vol 22, No 35
September 1, 1996**

- “New Richmond: Stone employees vote to strike”, Gesgapegiag’s “Pow-wow increasingly popular” and “Warning: population advised not to eat fish livers” headline issue 35, dated September 1. “Federal minister’s special fund may help save train”, “New Richmond Legion celebrates 50th anniversary” and “Equality Party: ‘genuine interest in staying Canadian’” also make the front page.

**Vol 22, No 36
September 8, 1996**

- “Listuguj intervention could delay sale of line”, as the community questions the ownership of the railway within its limits, “Small towns will be paying more for SQ services” and “Three stalwarts at the Shigawake Fair” headline issue 36, dated September 8. “\$30 million more for small towns – New Richmond pleads with minister for reduction”, Lucien “Bouchard



Jennifer MacNair, Jody Bujold and Lori Budd have taken on quite a job for the summer! They’re become entrepreneurs, running their own tea room at the Willett House on the site of the Gaspesian British Heritage Centre in New Richmond.

to visit region October 14” and “Stone Container: employees accept company offer” also make page 1 titles.

**Vol 22, No 37
September 15, 1996**

- “Native fishery sparks controversy” in Miguasha, as some Mi’gmaq people fish lobster in September, headlines issue 37, dated September 15. “Village wraps up stressful season” at British Heritage Centre, and “CASA AGM provokes debate about leaving” Quebec in case of separation, also make headlines. “Listuguj: Sagamaw wins third mandate”, “Delay in change of CBC reporter” and “School board budget: principals concerned about future cuts” also make page 1.

**Vol 22, No 38
September 22, 1996**

- Lucien “Bouchard urges moderation on language; ‘I will not use the notwithstanding clause’” and “Group set to fight Gaspé line abandonment” fill most of the front-page of issue 38, dated September 22. “Gaspé: (Howard) Miller launches his own strategy”, asking the federal government to offer financial aid to “refugees” leaving Quebec in case of separation, “Gaspesians urged to register now” in a new drug plan and “Listuguj natives selling lobster” also make page 1.

**Vol 22, No 39
September 29, 1996**

- Issue 39, dated September 29, headlines with “Commer-

cial fishermen vent frustrations” after broken traps are left in various places in protest of Native lobster catches, and “Gaspesian named to Concordia management”, Larry English. “Gaspé hospitals finally agree on amalgamation”, “New Carlisle: (Wayne) Astles wins over (Paul-Raymond) Chapados by a squeaker” in ward 4, and “Group asks government for real UI portrait” also appear on page 1.

**Vol 22, No 40
October 6, 1996**

- “Lobster dispute: fishermen off to see Fisheries minister” and former Quebec premier Robert “Bourassa dies of cancer at 63” make two heavy headlines for issue 40, released on October 6. Patrick “Gagnon’s future: ousting (of Official Languages Committee) means feds think he’ll lose”, “Maria murder: two months and still no suspect” and “Pin rouge: plan calls for extensive marketing” also make page 1 titles.

**Vol 22, No 41
October 13, 1996**

- “CN Rail line sold to Quebec Railway Corp.” and “Lobster dispute: Gesgapegiag chief asks for apology – says actions, remarks ‘racist’” headline issue 41, dated October 13. “Roxanne and Vanessa top collectors” and “Runs bring in thousands” cover the Terry Fox runs, with more inside. Leroy “Leggo named to international tuna body” and “CBC cuts ‘devastating’ admits head of English Radio”

complete page 1 titles.

**Vol 22, No 42
October 20, 1996**

- Issue 42, dated October 20 headlines with “Quebec sovereignty: Micmac ask to intervene in legal case” initiated by the federal government, and “CN Rail: railway wants \$3 million for Chandler to Gaspé line”. “School board: audit confirms deficit of \$53,000”, “Port Daniel: wharf gets environmental approval”, for that part of the cement plant, and “Municipal mergers: you can dilute us, or strengthen us”, says CASA president Lynden Bechervaise, complete front-page titles.

**Vol 22, No 43
October 27, 1996**

- “‘Cause of poverty has a name’ say groups”, that name being the concentration of wealth, headlines issue 43, dated October 27. “CN Rail: Chandler to Gaspé maintained until March 4 – local group preparing offer to purchase” is another headline. Carleton “Ferry company wants right to expand”, “Newspapers like decision on Canada Post”, to not increase rates, and “Federal Court says DFO playing judge” regarding fishing penalties, also make the front-page.

**Vol 22, No 44
November 3, 1996**

- “Escuminac: parents fear disaster on speedy new highway” and “Health minister

From Page 15

wants region to cut another \$2.2 million” headline issue 44, dated November 3. A picture-caption combo on Halloween, “Gaspé: Régie wants hospitals to amalgamate”, “Referendum fraud: Alliance Quebec & Gazette win battle to preserve documents” and “New Richmond: cattle auction barn renovated” also make page 1.

Vol 22, No 45
November 10, 1996

- “Corporation will try to revitalize rail line”, namely the municipal entity, Corporation du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, which envisions buying the line with grants, headlines issue 45, dated November 10. “Enid Legros wins Mérite Culturel” and “Gaspesia (mill): \$40 million to be invested by Rexfor and (Fonds de) Solidarité” are also on the frontpage. “Escuminac school: bus route altered to avoid tragedy”, “Hydro may cut 30 jobs in Gaspé office”, “Lobster dispute: DFO ready to offer buy-back program” and “Mont Bechervaise organizers confident about this winter” also make page 1.

Vol 22, No 46
November 17, 1996

- “Cegep: students vote to strike” over Quebec in order to avoid university tuition increase, “Mgr. Ross: Health council wants observer” and “Fewer veterans every year” (Remembrance Day coverage), fill the headlines of issue 46, dated November 17. “Escuminac: accidents up sharply”, “CN Rail: lobbyists warn Gaspésians not to give up” and “Kevin Parent wins four ADISQ awards” make smaller page 1 titles.



Tiny tots at New Carlisle's Munchkin Mansion day care centre are thrilled that Christmas is on the way!

Vol 22, No 47
November 24, 1996

- “CN Rail: still has no agreement for right of way” headlines issue 47, dated November 24. The right of way must be given to VIA Rail, days from an ownership change between Matapedia and Chandler. “Gaspé: research investment could mean 300 jobs” or more, along with “And the winner is...”, a drug and alcohol prevention draw conducted in the region’s schools, also make headlines. “Cegep students satisfied with strike”, “Natives: Listuguj’s constitutional position denounced by other chiefs” and “St. Jules and Grand Cascapedia ask to be put on map” also make page 1.

Vol 22, No 48
December 1, 1996

- “Port Daniel: politicians criticize summit outcome – Cement promoter questions support for development”, “Community rallying to help Sean” Dee’s cancer battle and “CN ensures right of passage” within the agreement with the Quebec Railway So-

ciety headline issue 48, dated December 1. “PQ convention: Gaspé delegates turned off by ‘hatred’”, “Fish plants: Brilliant Cove closes while American firm may re-open Newport” and “Our region our future” starts up in Gaspé complete page 1 titles.

Vol 22, No 49
December 8, 1996

- Leader Jean Charest is “Rebuilding the Conserva-

tives ‘from the ground up’” and VIA Rail’s “Chaleur will roll another 6 months” according to interim agreement, headline issue 49, dated December 8. Also on page 1, “End of the line” mentions that New Carlisle’s Ford Fraser gets his retirement package at 48 due to CN selling the Matapedia-Gaspé line. “Gaspé: feasibility studies set for R&D project”, Réal “Savoie pleads guilty to sexual assault” and “Candi-

dates: (Delton) Sams will not run against (Patrick) Gagnon” also make front-page titles.

Vol 22, No 50
December 15, 1996

- “Gaspesia Teachers Association: 65% of teachers support strike”, “Gaspé: increase in municipal taxes to average 8% - budget of \$11.8 million adopted” and “Excitement reigns” in day care as Christmas looms, headline issue 50, dated December 15. “CASA disappointed with outcome” of health elections, “Ship runs aground off Peninsula” and “Another delay for the dairy” complete page 1 titles.

Vol 22, No 51
December 22, 1996

- “Gaspé Polyvalent: Parents against return to elementary schools”, “No more fighting for train”, according to Patrick Gagnon, who says VIA’s train is saved for five years, and “My two front teeth...”, a Christmas concert photo-caption, fill the front-page of issue 51, the year’s last paper, dated December 22.

Ties between 1996 and 2026 apply to train service and Wilbert Coffin

● GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW CARLISLE – Since its 1975 foundation, the SPEC has widely covered the railway file roller-coaster, the intricacies of VIA Rail’s questionable decision-making as a public corporation, the federal government’s orientations regarding Canadian National Rail (CN) and, once the latter privatized in 1995, the same government’s lack of vision continuity in rail transport.

That coverage reached records in 1996, as CN confirmed a previous decision: selling its Gaspé Peninsula line. It infolded in two almost simultaneous steps. First, the Matapedia to Chandler portion was sold to the Quebec Railway Society, which created Chemin de fer Baie-des-Chaleurs. Later, the Corporation du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, the ancestor of the current Société du chemin de fer, bought the section from Chandler to Gaspé, which had been deprived of its regular freight service in the 1980s, thanks to CN’s demarketing strategy, even though it was still a public corporation at the time.

In 2026, Gaspésians are still fighting for rail services. The region is still pushing VIA in order to force that government-owned entity to meet its passenger-train obligations in the region. Those same Gaspésians are also pressing the Quebec government to maintain its plan to repair the Port Daniel to Gaspé line, which would notably facilitate VIA’s return.

Meanwhile, in 1996, Alton Price published a book about the injustice marking the Wilbert Coffin case. Mr. Coffin was hanged in 1956 for the murders of three American hunters. Mr. Price all but named the murderer, Philippe Cabot, according to Mr. Cobot’s own children. That affair does not want to die. In February of this year, 30 years after Alton Price’s book and 70 years after Mr. Coffin’s execution, Maria author Sylvain Rivière, published another book, “Wilbert Coffin, l’histoire qui ne veut pas mourir,” the story that doesn’t want to die. (see page 8 in this week’s edition.)

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Regional minister on economic/tourism mission

NELSON SERGERIE

CARLETON-SUR-MER – On January 22, the minister responsible for the Gaspé Peninsula and Minister of Tourism concluded a four-day tour of the Gaspé Peninsula, where she met mainly with stakeholders from the economic and tourism sectors.

Amélie Dionne did not schedule any meetings with mayors and prefects, which surprised them. To justify this “absence” from her agenda, the Member of the National Assembly (MNA) for Rivière-du-Loup-Témiscouata stated that she had met with them just before the holidays. During her visit in December, organizations had asked to meet with her, which she did during her second visit to the region since her appointment.

“These are strategic meetings that enable us to push forward with ongoing issues,” says the minister.

On January 19 and 20, meetings were held in the riding of Gaspé. Ms. Dionne stopped at the LM Wind Power plant in Gaspé, which is facing a major challenge: the possible loss of 140 Filipino workers.

The federal government has tightened the rules to keep foreign workers who are essential in many cases to the continued operation of businesses, whether in manufacturing, processing, or services.

“The federal criteria are restrictive. The government has gone from 20% to 10% temporary foreign workers. Across

the board. What we have asked for and are reiterating is the grandfather clause. We want to keep our workers in the region, who are in strategic positions,” replies Ms. Dionne.

This issue came up again during the meeting with the Baie-des-Chaleurs Chamber of Commerce and Industry on January 21 in Carleton-sur-Mer. She notes that the tourism sector is experiencing growth and that developers are investing in their establishments and tourist attractions. Developing a four-season tourism industry is one of her objectives. The Minister of Tourism is focusing in particular on business tourism and winter cruises.

“We will have a new budget in March. We have made our strategic plan for the coming months. Among the actions we will be taking, four-season tourism is one of our priorities. We are also talking about business tourism and creating strategic hubs outside Montreal and Quebec City. The Gaspé Peninsula has the potential to host corporate events. Business tourism spends four times more than leisure tourism. It has great potential,” she says.

But there must be means of transportation to get to the region. On this issue, the ball is in the court of MNA Stéphane Sainte-Croix, who is focusing on intermodal transportation: cars, trains with the ongoing rail repairs, and planes with programs to reduce ticket costs.

“It's really about designing strategies that will make use of

all the infrastructure and facilitate the reception and structured infrastructure for tourists arriving in winter in particular. There is a need to provide security and reassurance,” comments Stéphane Sainte-Croix.

There are six months left before the National Assembly is dissolved ahead of the October elections.

“There is a budget that will be tabled in March. We have submitted the files we want to complete before June. I have a busy but achievable roadmap. There is an opportunity to be seized with the Trump phenomenon. We have identified what we can do to bring viable projects to fruition. I will be meeting with the Minister of Finance shortly, and we will be able to detail the next steps. I want regions like the Gaspé Peninsula to position themselves as business destinations,” Ms. Dionne states as her goal.

Electoral map

While a consensus seems to be developing to add two MNAs to the new ridings in Centre-du-Québec and the Laurentians and maintain the two ridings in Gaspésie, the regional minister does not want to go down that path.

“We are disappointed with the turn of events. We are not ruling out any possibilities. There is a consensus to maintain two ridings in the Gaspé Peninsula. We are currently evaluating possible solutions to maintain two ridings in the



Photo: Amélie Martineau

Minister Amélie Dionne took advantage of her visit to tour the Baker Hotel in Gaspé, which has received government support, accompanied by Gaspé MNA Stéphane Sainte-Croix and owner Pascal Denis.

Gaspé Peninsula,” Ms. Dionne said.

Coalition for the return of passenger trains

On January 21, the minister met with the Coalition for the Return of Passenger Train Service in Gaspésie, which is fighting for VIA Rail to resume service between Matapédia and Port Daniel-Gascons now that the rail line has been rehabilitated to that point.

“It's a federal matter, but the Quebec government has sent a strong message with all the investments we've made in the railway. I met with Canadian ministers in November in Winnipeg, and we had the opportunity to meet with the federal Minister of Transport, whose vision is intermodality. He wants to connect the regions with the major centres,” she

says.

“The message sent by our government in recent years is very clear. I am continuing my discussions with my federal counterparts to get this back on track,” added the Minister of Tourism.

Her colleague from Bonaventure, MNA Catherine Blouin, recalled the visit of the Quebec Minister of Transport in December, who discussed the issue with the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie.

The minister left with a strong impression of the region's desire to pursue tourism development and was told that the programs are tailored to the project's implementation.

“It motivates me for the future,” concludes the minister, who ended her visit on the morning of January 22, by visiting businesses in Carleton-sur-Mer.

Plans to renovate the René Lévesque House proceed

NELSON SERGERIE

NEW CARLISLE – The restoration of the childhood home of former Quebec premier René Lévesque has taken another step forward with the launch of a call for tenders to prepare plans and specifications.

The Quebec Ministry of Culture and Communications says the functional and technical program (FTP) was completed in the fall of 2025 to determine the scope of the work.

In addition to preparing plans and specifications, the call for tenders also includes supervision of the work during construction, which explains the 29-month contract period.



Photo: Taken from Facebook, Éric Perron

A call for tenders has been issued for plans and specifications for the restoration of the René Lévesque House in New Carlisle.

Once the plans are completed, a separate call for tenders will be issued for the

construction work, allowing the project to move ahead.

The ministry anticipates

that work could begin in January 2027, with the building expected to be commissioned in early summer 2028.

The objective remains to restore the heritage property to its appearance between 1925 and 1939, when the Lévesque family lived there.

Since discussions about restoring the René Lévesque House began, the Quebec government has invested \$151,000 in temporary protection measures while studies and analyses were carried out in preparation for the restoration.

In the fall of 2024, stabilization work was completed to maintain the building in sound condition, including measures to prevent water in-

filtration and reinforce certain structural elements.

The south wall had to be rebuilt after several structural components were damaged by rot.

The work also included removing the east gallery, which was too deteriorated, and installing temporary white vinyl siding on the south and west façades.

Since that work was completed, the ministry has not needed to intervene further to protect the building's integrity.

A condition report prepared after the Quebec government acquired the property in 2021 estimated the restoration cost at approximately \$800,000.

The house was built in 1905.

Paspébiac allocates \$300,000 for its first participatory budget projects

NELSON SERGERIE

PASPÉBIAC – The Town of Paspébiac is allocating \$300,000 to sports and recreation projects as part of its first participatory budget — possibly the largest amount dedicated to such an initiative so far in the Gaspé Peninsula.

A kick-off meeting will be held March 12 to explain how residents can submit project proposals. The proposals will be unveiled publicly in April, followed by a citizen vote in May and a final announcement afterward.

The municipality is also hoping to reduce its share of the cost through provincial funding.

"We are trying to seize an



Photo: Taken from Facebook

Mayor Jérémy Laplante.

opportunity through the PAFIRSPA program (Financial Assistance Program for Recreational, Sports, and Outdoor

Infrastructure). We could get up to 66% financial assistance. Considering a base budget of \$250,000 plus \$50,000 for contingencies, out of the \$300,000, we could get \$200,000. This could be an interesting way to finance the project at a lower cost," says Mayor Jérémy Laplante.

On February 23, the Quebec government launched a new call for tenders for this program, which has a budget of \$300 million divided into two components.

The program allows municipalities, non-profit organizations, solidarity cooperatives, school and higher education institutions, and First Nations and Inuit authorities to submit projects for the construction,

development, renovation, and improvement of sports, recreational, and outdoor infrastructure.

Selected projects could receive financial assistance of up to 66% of eligible costs, up to a maximum of \$20 million for sports and recreational infrastructure (component 1) and \$500,000 for outdoor infrastructure (component 2).

Applications must be submitted by June 22, 2026, for component 1 and by May 21, 2026, for component 2.

"If it is not possible to obtain assistance through the PAFIRSPA, we could turn to the Rural Regions Fund or perhaps Desjardins to seek \$100,000. If we are not selected, it will be an additional

amount to be paid by the citizens," the mayor adds.

Projects eligible under the participatory budget must relate to sports or recreation and be located on municipal property or under municipal management.

"The Town is generous with the budget it has allocated. There are some great projects that can be submitted for citizens and young people in particular. This is an opportunity to be seized, and we can't wait to see what citizens will offer us," says the mayor.

Elsewhere in the region, participatory budgets have been smaller, with Carleton-sur-Mer allocating \$125,000 in 2025 and Gaspé setting aside \$100,000.

Paspébiac wants Ottawa to repair the wharf

NELSON SERGERIE

PASPÉBIAC – Paspébiac is asking the federal government to repair the Transport Canada wharf, which has been deteriorating for several years and was barricaded last year due to safety concerns.

"The structure is at risk of collapse. It is no longer accessible. We are asking the federal government to intervene to restore the infrastructure so that it is safe and the site can be used again. Ideally, it should be accessible to ships, or at least to cars and pedestrians," says Mayor Jérémy Laplante.

The wharf was until recently used to unload ships carrying deicing salt and served as a gathering place for citizens. "The fact that the large dock is closed has an impact on activities because many people go to the small dock and interfere with the activities of the Unipêche MDM plant next door, which during the summer must access the



Photo: Taken from Alexis Deschênes' Facebook page

The Transport Canada wharf in Paspébiac is inaccessible.

boats with machinery," notes the mayor.

Alexis Deschênes, the Bloc Québécois Member of Parliament (MP) for Gaspésie-Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine-Lis-tuguj, has been made aware of the issue, and the mayor says that the federal representative will take action.

"Could economic projects be added to justify the use of

the infrastructure? That would be interesting, but for now, there is nothing concrete to my knowledge," says Mr. Laplante.

The federal government has never approached the municipality to transfer the wharf. "We haven't had those discussions. For us, it will be studied, but it would be preferable for the infrastructure to

remain in federal hands and for maintenance to be carried out by the government. It would be difficult for us to maintain such a large infrastructure with property taxes alone," the mayor calculates.

Significant investments would be required, and the mayor does not know the full costs or extent of the disrepair.

"Certainly, there would be millions of dollars to invest, but it would be worth it for the vitality of the community. It also gives a bad image with the historic Banc-de-Pêche site right next door and the fact that you arrive at a fenced-off wharf. Symbolically, it is very important that this investment be made," he says, noting he will use the site's historical significance to convince the federal government to act.

Some 60 kilometres to the east, the federal government and the Town of Chandler are discussing the transfer of the Transport Canada wharf there. The town plans to turn it into a

recreational and tourist wharf with a dedicated fishing area and marina, among other amenities. No cost has yet been submitted, as the project must first undergo engineering studies.

Transport Canada had three scenarios: demolish all or part of the infrastructure, or undertake a revitalization project.

A 2016 assessment estimated refurbishment at \$19 million, rising to nearly \$40 million in 2019. Recent figures have suggested costs could reach \$60 million.

The Chandler wharf was closed in September 2016 for safety reasons due to its dilapidated condition. It was inaugurated in 1970 to meet the needs of the former Gaspésia paper mill, which closed in 1999. It was used afterwards for different purposes, including the unloading of de-icing salt, the loading of the paper mill equipment, sold in Asia, and the cruise ship CTMA Vacancier.

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Gaspé MNAs make electoral map and regional projects top priority

NELSON SERGERIE

GASPÉ – Members of the National Assembly (MNAs) Catherine Blouin and Stéphane Sainte-Croix of the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) are focusing on preserving their ridings at the start of the parliamentary session that began February 2 in Quebec City, ahead of the provincial election on October 5.

On January 14, the decree confirming the loss of a riding in the Gaspé Peninsula was published in the Quebec Gazette. On December 2, the Electoral Representation Commission had tabled a map that maintained the abolition of a riding in the region, merging Bonaventure and Gaspé, and sending Haute-Gaspésie to Matane-Matapédia.

In its report, the commission indicated that it had analyzed the electoral districts of the Bas-Saint-Laurent and Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine regions by grouping them within the same regional entity.

On April 30, 2023, the Bonaventure electoral district had a negative deviation of 29.2% and Gaspé 40.6%, which exceeded the legal limit of $\pm 25\%$ compared to the provincial average. By November 30, 2024, Gaspé's negative deviation reached 41.5%, making it the least populous riding in Quebec after Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

Since the 2017 electoral map was established, the ridings of Bonaventure, Gaspé and Matane-Matapédia have seen declines of -0.3, -1.5 and -1.3 per cent in the number of electors. Between 2014 and 2023, the region's electoral weight fell from 4.55 to 4.37 constituencies, a trend expected to continue.

A consensus appears to be forming on adding two MNAs to the National Assembly—bringing the total to 127—to allow new constituencies in Centre-du-Québec and the Laurentians while maintaining the two Gaspé Peninsula ridings. The Quebec government is seeking permission to appeal to the Supreme Court to reinstate a May 2024 law preserving Bonaventure and Gaspé, though a response may come



Photo: N. Sergerie

Members of the National Assembly Catherine Blouin and Stéphane Sainte-Croix are making the electoral map a top priority in the last parliamentary session before the election.

too late.

“This is a major issue for our region, but also for rural areas throughout Quebec. We will see if we will be heard quickly. Otherwise, we still have cards to play for a possible bill. We will see at the beginning of the session,” says Gaspé MNA Stéphane Sainte-Croix.

“This is a priority issue,” adds Catherine Blouin, MNA for Bonaventure. “We are awaiting the Supreme Court's decision, but all options are on the table. The will remains on the part of all Members of the National Assembly. Discussions are underway with the opposition. We hope that there will be positive developments in the coming weeks,” she adds.

The Chief Electoral Officer needs six months to organize elections, setting a potential deadline of April 5. MNAs are cautious about simply adding two members to the Assembly to quickly resolve the issue, preferring a lasting reform of the Election Act.

“What I want is for us to keep two ridings in the Gaspé Peninsula. Adding ridings does not protect the two existing ones. We must inevitably protect Gaspé and Bonaventure. The criteria must be revised so that we don't end up in the same situation every time there

is a review,” says Ms. Blouin.

“This is the proposal that has gained consensus among all Members of the National Assembly. It is one of the items on the table that is progressing favourably, as far as I know, and is likely to be the subject of an agreement in the near future, if all goes well,” says Mr. Sainte-Croix.

“This is the top priority when sessions resume and will be on my agenda,” continues the Member for Gaspé.

“I look forward to confirming the measures that will be taken by Members of the National Assembly,” says Ms. Blouin.

With the proposed new map, Gaspé-Bonaventure would have a positive deviation of 11.6%, while the other ridings in eastern Quebec would have a deviation within the provincial average, with the exception of the islands, which maintain their exceptional status by law with a negative deviation of 78.0%.

The commission specifies in its report that relative voting equality is not the only criterion, but that compliance with it remains an essential foundation for ensuring fair representation of the entire Quebec electorate.

Among the comments heard during the consultations was the reduction in the political

weight of the Gaspé Peninsula in relation to its specific issues.

Rail and Infrastructure

In March 2025, Quebec paused rehabilitation of Section 3 between Port-Daniel-Gaspcons and Gaspé after tenders exceeded the planned \$517-million budget by more than \$150 million. Both MNAs hope for progress when the budget and Quebec Infrastructure Plan are tabled.

“We made progress on section 3 in the last year, but not at the speed we would have liked. We are working on it, and I discussed it with Mr. Girard (Éric, Minister of Finance) in a pre-budget meeting. We need to make one last push,” explains Stéphane Sainte-Croix, who reiterates that the file remains a priority.

“I don't want to set expectations too high. It's a priority, and our government has demonstrated its commitment by investing over \$500 million in delivering sections 1 and 2. We also had \$119 million allocated to section 3,” recalls Ms. Blouin, who notes that the Minister of Transport was made aware of the issue during his visit to Maria last December, as was Regional Minister Amélie Dionne in January.

“We need to find the right way to carry out the work at a reasonable cost. Will it be in this budget? I can't guarantee it. But I assure you that the political will is still there,” Ms. Blouin adds. The issue is even being discussed in the leadership race between the Minister of the Economy, Christine Fréchette, and the Minister of the Environment, Bernard Drainville.

“Rail is at the top of our list of priorities. Both Ms. Fréchette and Mr. Drainville are well-versed in the matter,” the MNA for Gaspé states. Another major issue affecting the Baie-des-Chaleurs region is the construction of the new emergency and intensive care unit at the Maria Hospital.

“We've always said that the project would be reviewed before the next budget. We're waiting for that news. The CISSS (Integrated Health and

Social Services Centre) finished its work just before the holidays. We're working with Quebec Health, and the next step is to send the file to the Cabinet for review. I'm eager to hear back. It's another project I'm following closely,” says Ms. Blouin.

In November, a report revealed that the electromechanical, structural, and civil components of the Maria Hospital are not capable of supporting new loads, and more than \$50 million will need to be invested to build a new power plant.

Other issues on the agenda

For the MNA for Bonaventure, the renovation work at Bourg School in Carleton-sur-Mer has recently been added to the agenda following the fire on January 26, alongside housing construction and childcare spaces.

For Stéphane Sainte-Croix, the gaps and disruptions in obstetrics services in Sainte-Anne-des-Monts remain a major concern, acknowledging that these issues are still worrying.

“We are not sitting idly by, despite the lack of a solution. We have established a reliable service corridor and we thank the professionals. We have formed a working committee and are discussing ways to find lasting solutions. I discussed this with the Minister of Health during the caucus in Trois-Rivières,” states the MNA for Gaspé. Promoting the profession and attracting the existing workforce to acquire the skills needed to work in obstetrics have not yet yielded results.

“Stakeholders are aware of and concerned, and the same is true on the ministerial side regarding this specific issue.”

The MNA for Gaspé also has plans to address the situation of the 140 foreign workers at LM Wind Power, the future of regional museums and the Villa Frederick James in Percé, the refinancing of the DÉPART program which supports the development of economically depopulated regions, and budget cuts at the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine Intermunicipal Transportation Authority.

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The green bin bill will be steep for frequent users

NELSON SERGERIE

GRANDE-RIVIÈRE – Those who are in the habit of putting their green bin out on the curb for every collection may see their waste collection bill increase on their 2026 tax bill.

The Régie intermunicipale de traitement des matières résiduelles de la Gaspésie (Gaspésie Intermunicipal Residual Materials Treatment Board) is applying a new fee for those who do not make an effort to compost and recycle, and will charge an additional \$175 in the Rocher-Percé MRC for increased collection.

On the other hand, those who put out their waste 12 times or less will receive a tax credit of \$17 to \$20.

The implementation of incentive pricing has been dis-



Photo: Nelson Sergerie

cussed since 2024.

The majority of citizens, 80%, will see no change.

The current tax is \$350 in the Rocher-Percé MRC and \$280 in the Town of Gaspé.

"This is a new development for the MRC. Everyone used to pay the same amount. From

now on, they will pay half a unit more if they put out a garbage bin more than 20 times," says the director of the agency, Nathalie Drapeau.

In Gaspé, residents were already paying for additional bins.

"The recognition rate,

which is very symbolic, applies to addresses where there are fewer than 12 garbage pickups per year," adds the director.

A chip is embedded in the green bin, and an electronic reader calculates the number of collections.

The blue and brown bins are also equipped with this technology, and the results are compiled in a database by the authority.

"The 4% of citizens identified as the largest generators will receive a note with their tax bill. Once they see this, they will call us and explain their situation. We will assess whether there are any special circumstances and it will be possible to review the file," she says.

The authority has several tools at its disposal to reduce

the use of green bins for waste disposal.

"The turning point came when we built the two new cells at the Gaspé landfill site. Construction costs increased by 68%. We have to take note of this and take additional action," explains Ms. Drapeau.

If nothing is done, the bill could continue to skyrocket as it has in recent years.

The investments needed to continue the treatment and collection of residual materials by the Gaspé Peninsula Intermunicipal Residual Materials Treatment Board have caused the budget to rise by 10% in 2026, reaching \$12 million.

This practice has already been in place since 2010 in the Rocher-Percé MRC and since 2018 in the Town of Gaspé's commercial sector.

Liberals in the region welcome Charles Milliard

NELSON SERGERIE

NEW RICHMOND – The president of the Bonaventure Liberal Association welcomes the arrival of the new leader, Charles Milliard, following difficult months that marked Pablo Rodriguez's short tenure at the helm of the political party.

Christian Cyr, who is also president of the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine Liberal Association, believes that it is now time to turn the page on past events and that the party is well positioned for the October 5 election.

"Yes, the party is ready to move forward with the arrival of Charles Milliard and new people in the party leadership," says Mr. Cyr.

"Mr. Milliard has a clear plan and experience in Quebec as the former executive director of the Quebec Chamber of Commerce. He is familiar with the regions, the business community, and small and medium-sized businesses. People are confident that things will move forward with Mr. Milliard and that the results will be good," says the president, who was in Trois-Rivières on February 15 for the leader's induction as head of the Liberals.

He says the Liberals' traditional economic message will once again take centre stage.

"Absolutely. It's the return of an economic development discourse and strategy. This is very clear in Mr. Milliard's



Photo: Christian Cyr's website

mind. For him, economic development in each region is important. Small and mid-sized enterprises (SME) are the foundation of the economy. He intends to give SMEs a helping hand by reducing their tax burden," says Mr. Cyr.

As former chief executive officer (CEO) of the Quebec Federation of Chambers of Commerce, Mr. Milliard's experience in this area will serve him well.

"He knows where he's going. He knows the issues. He's not fumbling around. He has a good understanding and is moving forward with confidence," he believes.

Despite polls that remain unfavourable, the regional president of the Liberals believes momentum will shift.

The party experienced growth during Pablo Rodriguez's brief leadership.

"Support from Francophones and the regions had risen significantly in recent months.

We are confident that with the arrival of Charles Milliard, this will continue. His message is in line with the reality of the regions," continues Mr. Cyr.

He also believes that the controversies surrounding Pablo Rodriguez and the legal debates initiated by Marwah Rizky will not affect the party's future.

"It could have an impact if we dwelled on it. The various investigations and audits do not concern Charles Milliard. As he said, we are looking ahead. We are proposing a game plan to Quebecers to move forward with economic development, to affirm Quebec culture and the French language. We are confident that these issues will not delay the party's progress and Charles Milliard's advancement," says Mr. Cyr.

On the question of the electoral map, the Liberal Party's position is to maintain the configuration used in the 2022 election, even if that means granting special status to the Gaspé Peninsula.

The regional president says preparations are underway for a campaign that would maintain two ridings in Gaspésie.

"The Liberal Party team is preparing for the next campaign and is in discussions with various people. People have been raising their hands for six months. With a new leader and clear direction at the head of the party, we are confident that others will raise their hands," says the activist.

A major boost for the Fondation Étincelle Jeunesse

Nelson Sergerie

MARIA – Launched in March 2025, the Fondation Étincelle Jeunesse is getting a major boost from the Avignon, Bonaventure, and Rocher-Percé MRCs, which are injecting \$300,000 over three years into the endowment fund to support to the most vulnerable students at the René-Lévesque School Service Centre.

The first payment of \$105,000 is part of a broader regional commitment to the fundraising campaign. "Since the René-Lévesque School Service Centre covers the territory of our three MRCs, it was only natural to act together and respond to this request," explains Samuel Parisé, prefect of the Rocher-Percé MRC.

Too many children face daily challenges, whether it's coming to school on an empty stomach or not having the right clothes for our winters. Our contribution of \$35,000 for 2026, in collaboration with the other two MRCs, is an essential gesture of solidarity to improve equal opportunities for every student in our territory."

"For our MRC, this amounts to \$35,000 for 2026. Our intention is to continue this support for three years. We see the Fondation Étincelle Jeunesse as a crucial investment in the future of all our young people," says Éric Dubé, prefect of the Bonaventure MRC.

"We have committed, based on our future budgets, to a total contribution of \$100,000 over three years because, for us, the issues addressed by the foundation are very important," says Mathieu Lapointe, prefect of the Avignon MRC.

The foundation's goal is to raise \$1.5 million to create an endowment fund that will provide approximately \$75,000 annually to students in the region who need it most.

Urgent need for action

Approximately 5,500 students attend schools and training centres in the school service centre. Of these, 56% attend schools with a high deprivation index, which is nearly double the Quebec average of 30%.

According to the centre, hundreds of young people lack nutritional resources such as healthy snacks, meals, and essential equipment such as warm winter clothing and eyeglasses, or have little access to sports and cultural activities that promote development and self-esteem.

Within its territory, 18 of the 28 schools have a high deprivation index.

The fundraising campaign is spread over three years and includes an internal campaign targeting staff, an external campaign targeting local businesses and a public fundraiser.

Those who wish to contribute can do so via the foundation's website.

The Gaspesian Floyd Show draws 500 spectators in Gaspé

GILLES GAGNÉ

GASPÉ — The Gaspesian Floyd Show performed before more than 500 people on February 21 in Gaspé at the Centre de Création Diffusion.

The audience—already enthusiastic—was transported into the rich, atmospheric soundscape of the legendary band Pink Floyd.

Spectators were carried away by meticulously executed melodies, faithful arrangements, and beautifully interpreted guitar lines, fully recreating the essence of the iconic Floydian repertoire.

For more than two hours, the band offered an immersive show where musical precision and visual ambiance blended in harmony.

Composed of ten musicians from across the Gaspé Peninsula, The Gaspesian Floyd Show stands as far more than a simple tribute act: it is a complete stage experience, shaped by shared



Photo: Courtesy of Daniel Lebreux

The Gaspesian Floyd Show during its Gaspé show.

passion and a clear desire to celebrate music that has left its mark on multiple generations.

Building on this success, the group announced that more dates will soon be revealed, all within the Gaspé region. However, given the growing enthusiasm, one question is already emerging: will it soon be necessary to broaden their horizons to

meet demand?

The Gaspesian Floyd Show offers a faithful and immersive reinterpretation of Pink Floyd's greatest classics. Combining musical precision, enveloping atmospheres, and deep respect for the original repertoire, the band delivers a unique experience that appeals to devoted music lovers and newcomers alike. *(From a press release.)*

More performances in the region

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW RICHMOND — The Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine region is seeing an increase in the number of artistic performances, based on data from 2024, as well as in their economic impact.

This is according to a report presented on February 11, by the Institut de la statistique du Québec, which analyzed performance data across all regions of the province and provided a provincial overview.

In the region, 419 shows were presented to a total of 64,061 spectators, representing an occupancy rate of 60.4%.

Complimentary tickets accounted for 13.7% of total attendance.

The Institut de la statistique du Québec estimates ticket sales reached \$1.3 million. The average ticket price was \$23.18, with average



Photo: Courtesy of Daniel Lebreux

The economic impact of performances is on the rise in the region.

box-office revenue of \$3,060 and an average audience of 153 spectators per performance.

The data was compiled from 28 venues across the region.

This represents an increase over 2023, when 327 shows were presented to 50,429 spectators and generated just over \$1 million in revenue.

By comparison, Quebec as a whole recorded an occupancy rate of 73.9 per cent in 2024, with 7.9 per cent of tickets distributed free of charge.

Province wide, the average ticket price was \$49.26, with average box-office revenue of \$19,935 and an average attendance of 440 spectators per performance.

Reflections

by Diane Skinner Flowers

Canada at the Olympics: Classy, Polite and (Mostly) Cooler Than Some Other Countries

When the Olympic Games roll around, it's not just the medals that matter. It's how you represent your country. How you show who you are. And if there's one thing the world can agree on about Canada at the Olympics, it's that we bring something to the Games that we can be proud of. We show a perfect mix of skill, sportsmanship, kindness and polite interaction. Consider the U.S. Men's gold medal winning hockey team, who had the opportunity to speak up for the also gold medal winning U.S. Women's Hockey team but said nothing. They should be ashamed.

At the 2026 Winter Olympics, Canadian athletes performed admirably and brought home 21 medals. Steven Dubois, from Laval, Quebec skated to gold in the men's 500m short track, reminding the world that when Canada races around the ice, it's usually because we skate really fast. After all, we are from a northern climate. Snow and ice are an integral part of our lives.

Admittedly, not every moment was the perfect example of Canadian classiness. Take the accusations of cheating in curling, where we later took gold. When curler Marc Kennedy was accused of double-touching the curling rock, his language was not very cool at all, including some words that you would not say in front of your grandmother. He apologized, something Canadians often do and do well.

Our men's hockey team suffered heartbreak in a dramatic 2-1 overtime loss to the United States. This was celebrated with great enthusiasm that reportedly included the head of the FBI, Kash Patel, who flew to Milan on a private jet to party wildly in the dressing room with the U.S. Men's hockey team. Not a good look.

Canadian singer Michael Bublé showed his Canadian coolness when he congratulated both men's hockey teams with manners and good humour, adding that "next time it's ours." It was the perfect blend of pride and that cool-as-a-glacier charm only Canadians can carry off without sounding smug.

Meanwhile, while the Americans partied wildly, Canada responded with calm reflection after the heartbreaking hockey losses, with a few polite "sorrlys" for losing and a general sense that yes, we did give it our all. My view, shared by many, is that the dreaded 3-on-3 is no way to decide an Olympic gold medal.

That was how both our men's and women's teams lost. By a sliver, by a hair.

It's not just about losing with grace it's about winning with dignity. Across Olympic history, Canadian athletes have exemplified the Olympic values of respect and friendship. A beautiful example is when Canadian sailor Lawrence Lemieux sacrificed his own race to rescue fellow competitors in danger at the 1988 Seoul Olympics. This was an Olympic moment that shows class far beyond the podium. (Read about this amazing Canadian. It's a whole other story to be proud of.)

And let's not forget beautiful moments like these: when Canadian athletes console their competitors, or when they graciously applaud others' successes. We do that far more often than is shown on TV. That's the Canadian brand of kindness and cool.

Sometimes Canadian athletes lose their cool in the heat of competition. Who wouldn't? Because competing in the Olympics is a dream built on years of hard work and sacrifice. But even in defeat, Canadians tend to show humour where others show anger. While some national celebrations look like an opening-night Broadway production, ours are more like a friendly neighbourhood barbecue, where everyone's invited but you still politely insist that someone else take the last burger.

Canadian athletes often have thoughtful reflections, give heartfelt congratulations and carry an attitude that somehow says, "We may not have won gold today, but we're still good people." That, dear readers, is Canadian class.

So, now that the Olympic flame has dimmed and the medals are counted, one thing remains that we can be proud of. Canada may not always win the gold, but we sure make the world feel good about watching us try. And we can still feel good about ourselves. That, in its classy, polite, maple-scented and cooler Canadian way, is the true gold.

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Announcements



Obituary



CAMPBELL: Irvin Kenneth
January 1, 1937 – January 8, 2026.

It is with deep regret that the siblings of Irvin Kenneth Campbell, announce his passing on Thursday, January 8, 2026, at the age of 89, at the Residence St. Joseph (Centre d'Hebergement) in Maria. Irvin was the son of the late Elias "Sonny" and Catherine "Katie" Campbell of Caplan, Quebec.

Irvin leaves behind his siblings: Bertha Hayes; Cranston (Kathleen Casey); Osburn; Grace Brown; Ruby Beckett (Ronald); Mitchell; Marilyn; and Ralph (Denise Dugas); as well as his sisters-in-law, Pauline Warren Campbell and Elizabeth "Betty" Acker Campbell. Irvin also leaves behind his wife's siblings: Elizabeth "Betty" Bujold; Teresa (Michael); Frank (Lena); and Ethel (Conrad). He also leaves many nieces and nephews on both his

side and his wife, Patsy's side.

Irvin was the husband of the late Patricia Cleary Campbell, who predeceased him on July 5, 2025. He was also predeceased by his parents; his siblings, Viola Kosman, Bernard, Mary Whittington, Keith and Everett; and his bothers-in-law, Nick Kosman, Leonard Hayes, Ivan Whittington, William "Bill" Brown and Roger Bujold on his wife's side.

Irvin grew up helping his father on the farm, in the woods and doing mechanics. He left home at an early age for Montreal, then on to Toronto. Irvin returned to Montreal, where he worked in a garage and took a night course to become a licensed mechanic.

Irvin returned home to the beautiful Gaspé in the fall of 1959 and worked in the woods with his father and brothers. In 1960, Irvin started his own garage business in New Richmond West. He rented the garage from Mrs. Otis "Mae" Sinclair Campbell and served his customers there for over 25 years. Irvin later moved to two other locations before building his own garage in Maria West. He worked as a mechanic, he did body work, and painted cars. He restored older models of vehicles. Irvin was a wheeler and dealer in his day. He was one of the best mechanics until he retired a few years ago. Gradually, Irvin sold his garage. It was a difficult decision, but in the end, he was glad.

Irvin married Patricia "Patsy" Cleary on October 28, 1972, and they settled in Cascapedia-St-Jules (St-Jules area,) on or near the Cleary family homestead. They had no children of their own.

Irvin was a great brother. He will be truly missed for his sense of humour, his grin and smile by his family and those who knew him. Irvin would joke around, calling himself "The Good-Looking Guy."

According to his wishes, there will be no visitation or funeral service. There will be a graveside burial service in the late spring or early summer.

At this time, we, the Campbell and Cleary families would like to take the opportunity to thank the

doctors, nurses and orderlies or nurses' aides for the fantastic care that was given to our brother, Irvin, while he was a resident at St. Joseph's. Many thanks to the HG Division Funeral Home in New Richmond for their support. A big thank you for the phone calls and messages of sympathy.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Residence St. Joseph or to a charity of your choice.

Thank you

We would like to offer a special thank you to all individuals who were involved in and/or supported our St. Andrew's Church, Pancake Supper on Shrove Tuesday, February 17. It was a great success, and our net profit was \$2,133,00.

Your encouragement and support were greatly appreciated.

Norma Chedore, Chris (Fraser) Ward, and Carol Smollett (Organizing Committee)



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

HOPE TOWN:
Hope Town Sports Club
May 2: A bingo will be held at the Hope Town Community Centre starting at 7 p.m.

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

NEW RICHMOND:
St. Andrews United Church
March 29: We will be holding our annual chili luncheon from 11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Chili with all the trim-

UNITED CHURCH NEW RICHMOND
Sunday, March 15
10 a.m. Service
Sunday, March 22
10 a.m. Service

dings, rolls and a dessert. Cost: adults \$10 and children under 12 \$6. Take-outs are available by calling Kathleen at 418-392-4896, no later than March 27.

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES 50+ club
March 14: Afternoon music with John Gedeon Jr. from 2 - 4 p.m., \$10 entry fee at the door and bar service will be available.

UNITED CHURCH HOPE TOWN
Sunday, March 15
2 p.m. Service
Sunday, March 22
2 p.m. Service

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES Book Room
Wednesdays: The book room will be open from 1 -

4 p.m. For questions or more information please contact Kathleen at 418-392-4896.

ANGLICAN CHURCH OF CANADA
Sunday, March 15
New Carlisle
9 a.m. Morning Prayer and Vestry meeting
Shigawake
10 a.m. Morning Prayer

Sunday, March 22
New Carlisle
9 a.m. Holy Eucharist
Port Daniel
11 a.m. Holy Eucharist

PARISH OF GASPÉ

Sunday, March 15
St. Pauls, Gaspé
10 a.m. Holy Eucharist

Tuesday, March 17
St. Pauls, Gaspé
7 p.m. Healing Service

Sunday, March 22
St. Andrews, York
10 a.m. Holy Eucharist

Tuesday, March 24
Rectory
7 p.m. Evening Prayer

Announcement Deadlines:

March 18 for the March 25 issue
April 1 for the April 8 issue
April 15 for the April 22 issue
April 29 for the May 6 issue

On the Lighter Side...

POEMS CREATIVE WRITING PUZZLES WHAT'S THIS CHALLENGE SPEC GETS AROUND RECIPES



ST. PATRICK'S DAY WORD SEARCH

T A K C T O L I V J L K L J A G G L O N
 O D A R E B K K S I U E A N J I G E D U
 E A B J B D E D M F O R T U N E U P K E
 E U E P V J V A D M I D O O P H R R C O
 I O K A B G R G D F P R A H R F C E O F
 B J H T F B E G G A E L I C M I I C R E
 I J P R I J V V T G C C A E D U G H M I
 D N F I P E O H V V A E D C A V A A H
 S S V C V R L T N F C L C G D G M U H C
 M R T K P I C G K E U T A L G N F N S S
 O H B K O N H D L E I I U T J F A V R I
 M S S M V N L E T P M C P M B R J L J M
 H K E C C R A B N S T H P P U E M N B S S
 J C K K C R I J D J N O I T I D A R T I
 J U R E A A G G N O M P A R A D E S M M
 R L M T S G F O A T S V H B I U K R L S
 A E I F M P L L L B N A B E N F U H V J
 A O H C R A M D E V R O V B K N E V T L
 N R D H S I R I R P J F J H O J P T G J
 A S P R G F U H I C D N E G E L U L E R

WORDS

CELEBRATION
 CELTIC
 CLOVER
 EMERALD
 ERIN
 FORTUNE
 GAELIC
 GOLD
 HARP
 IRELAND
 IRISH
 ISLAND
 JIG
 LEGEND
 LEPRECHAUN
 LUCK
 MAGIC
 MARCH
 MISCHIEF
 PARADES
 PATRICK
 SAINT
 SHAMROCK
 TRADITION

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

Math Blocks

Fill in the missing blocks with numbers between 0-20.
 The numbers in each row add up to the totals on the right.
 The numbers in each column add up to the totals on the bottom.

	3		9
19		20	57
	15	14	45
37	36	38	



HOROSCOPES - March 9 to March 15

ARIES - Mar 21/Apr 20

A collaboration brings out your best side, Aries. Someone else's strengths may complement your drive right now. You'll get a lot of things done this week.

TAURUS - Apr 21/May 21

Your patience pays off in a relationship, Taurus. A long-term goal you share with a partner starts to move into the planning stages this week. Enjoy the excitement ahead.

GEMINI - May 22/June 21

Gemini, joyful news arrives via a friend in the next few days. Celebrate the successes of others, as your own turn for good news is right around the corner.

CANCER - June 22/July 22

This week you may have the opportunity to find beauty in small things, Cancer. A simple walk or a quiet meal with a loved one can bring about peace

and insight.

LEO - Jul 23/Aug 23

You are the life of the party right now, Leo. Your warmth draws people to you, making this a great time for networking. A job offer may come from your efforts.

VIRGO - Aug 24/Sept 22

An act of kindness you performed recently may come back to you in surprising ways, Virgo. The universe will reward your generous spirit. You may continue to pay it forward.

LIBRA - Sept 23/Oct 23

Figure out the perfect middle ground between work responsibilities and fun this week, Libra. If you delegate some of your tasks, you may free up time for personal enjoyment.

SCORPIO - Oct 24/Nov 22

Scorpio, optimism is your guiding light this week. Your "can-do" attitude may inspire others who cross

your path in the days to come. Lots will get done in little time.

SAGITTARIUS - Nov 23/Dec 21

Deep conversations may lead to a breakthrough, Sagittarius. You might start to understand someone else or a situation on a whole new level.

CAPRICORN - Dec 22/Jan 20

Capricorn, financial stability is something you should carefully consider this week. A smart decision you made in the past may not be the best way to continue forward.

AQUARIUS - Jan 21/Feb 18

Aquarius, you may feel a strong draw toward community or giving back this week. Helping out a neighbour will bring you satisfaction, or you can volunteer.

PISCES - Feb 19/Mar 20

It's important to trust your intuition, Pisces. This is leading you toward a very happy coincidence by the end of the week. Someone special becomes involved.

HOROSCOPES - March 16 to March 22

ARIES - Mar 21/Apr 20

Sometime this week you may discover a hidden talent you didn't know you have, Aries. Embrace this new aspect of your identity and put it to good use.

TAURUS - Apr 21/May 21

This is a time when you might feel grounded and secure, Taurus. Your inner strength will allow you to take a calculated risk that will pay off, either with your finances or relationships.

GEMINI - May 22/June 21

You might find that this week a mental fog will lift, leaving you with a crystal-clear vision for the future, Gemini. Start moving toward your goals as soon as possible.

CANCER - June 22/July 22

Your emotional intelligence is your greatest asset right now, Cancer. You help a friend navigate a tricky situation with ease midweek, and by the weekend you're

still going strong.

LEO - Jul 23/Aug 23

Right now your confidence is unshakable, Leo. Use all of your energy to advocate for something you fully believe in. Chances are you will evoke some change as a result.

VIRGO - Aug 24/Sept 22

Virgo, order brings you joy, which means you may want to tackle transforming your work space into a more detailed operation. This will boost your mood and your performance.

LIBRA - Sept 23/Oct 23

Romance is a priority right now, Libra. Whether you are single or in a relationship, expect a moment this week when the spark is ignited once more.

SCORPIO - Oct 24/Nov 22

A small change in your routine may lead to a big increase in energy. Try rearranging your schedule to see what works best for you, and then make it a habit.

SAGITTARIUS - Nov 23/Dec 21

Sagittarius, a dream you had is more attainable than you might think. Take the first step and quickly the path will open up for you. Enlist friends to push you even further along.

CAPRICORN - Dec 22/Jan 20

Leadership comes naturally to you now, Capricorn. People will be looking to you for guidance this week. Try to deliver it with kindness and no sense of ego.

AQUARIUS - Jan 21/Feb 18

Your "Eureka!" moment might come sooner than you would imagine, Aquarius. Pay attention to the details this week and tune your way of thinking toward innovation.

PISCES - Feb 19/Mar 20

Nature walks or creative hobbies may nourish your soul this week, Pisces. You might find yourself deeply attuned to the world around you and the beauty you discover.

For the Birds: Winter feeding helps backyard birds

MARY ROBERTSON

CASCAPEDIA-ST. JULES - February was National Bird Feeding Month in Canada, a time dedicated to raising awareness about the importance of helping wild birds to endure one of the coldest and most challenging months of the year. The initiative focuses on education, observation and encourages Canadians to feed birds with high-energy food sources such as seeds and suet to help them survive when nature's food supplies are scarce. Across the country, the month is widely recognized as an opportunity to better understand and support the many different bird species in our areas.

Winter on the Gaspé Coast can be long and challenging, not only for the people, but also for the birds that remain when the snow begins to fall. For many, feeding winter birds is about more than just providing them with nourishment. It is an opportunity to observe and learn about nature and the birds that visit feeders on cold winter days.

Verna Harriman O'Neil, from Cascapedia-St-Jules has been an avid bird observer all her life. Her earliest memories include watching birds feed on the chaff during haymaking time on her grandfather Meredith's farm and observing



Photo: Facebook

A Red Cardinal in Thelma Day's backyard.

swallows nesting in the eaves of his barn. Those moments, along with time spent watching ducks and mallards on a nearby pond, sparked a lifelong appreciation for birds that continues to this day.

After she got married in 1977, she and her husband, Barry O'Neil, moved into his parents' home in St-Jules. She remembers hanging up bird feeders outside the kitchen window so that her in-laws could sit and watch the birds. She said it was the best gift she had ever given them.

As a young woman in the 1980s, Verna worked at the Camp Brule fishing camp in New Richmond, owned by Helen and Art Campbell. Art was a well-known bird watcher, and his nature column in the SPEC inspired

many Gaspésians. While working at the camp, Art taught Verna about the many different birds that lived on the Coast which added to her enjoyment of birdwatching. She passed on her love of birds to her daughter, Crystal, and she now gets to share her passion with her granddaughter, Catherine.

This winter, Verna's yard is visited by all kinds of birds, including four types of woodpeckers: the Downy, Hairy, Pileated and Sapsucker woodpeckers. Her favourite birds are the Blue jays and chickadees, and she looks forward to seeing the Rose-breasted Grosbeak in late spring. She says that life would be dull if she could not sit in the window with her cup of tea and watch the birds every day.

Thelma Day from Bonaventure is another well-known bird watcher in the area. Those who have had the opportunity to visit the flower gardens that she and her sister Annie built on their property know that it is the perfect place for birds to live year-round. During the summer, birds enjoy the many types of annual and perennial flowers that grow throughout their large garden. In the fall, they get to eat the dried seed pods and fruit. And during the winter, the birds are treated with the seeds and suet that they put in feeders in their yard.

This winter, they have chickadees, juncos, grackles, blue jays, starlings, mourning doves, woodpeckers, sparrows, different types of grosbeaks and crows. But the most impressive and colourful bird in their garden is a red cardinal, which showed up in November.

Red cardinals are rare on the Gaspé Coast because this region lies outside of their residential range in the warmer parts of Ontario and southern Quebec. As non-migratory birds, they rely on consistent food sources, often in bird feeders, to survive, because the cold environment of the Gaspé limits their ability to find enough food to survive the winter.

Thelma and Annie feel that they have a special connection to this rare bird because, according to some spiritual beliefs, cardinals are said to be messengers from loved ones who have passed. And the daily visits from this beautiful bird remind them of the two sisters they have lost.

Annie's favourite bird is the cardinal, and it is interesting to learn that she is an artist who has painted all the birds that visit their garden. Thelma's favourite bird is the mourning dove, for it is quiet and timid. She says that birds are a part of our lives, a part of our being, and she can sit for hours in her rocking chair with a cup of tea, watching them.

Like most bird watchers, Verna, Thelma and Annie have a collection of books about birds on their bookshelves, because to know more about the feathered visitors who stop by their feeders adds to their fascination and understanding. They also know that having a front-row seat for helping birds survive during the harsh, food-scarce winter months is both a rewarding and relaxing pastime.

For those wanting to know more about bird watching, they can check out the Birds Canada website and follow the Club des ornithologues de la Gaspésie on Facebook.

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Suddenly Irish, no proof required

HOLLY SMITH

PORT DANIEL — Every year on March 17, something magical happens. People who normally argue about the weather suddenly agree on one thing: it's a perfectly reasonable day to wear bright green, eat too much, and claim, at least spiritually, that they might have an Irish great-grandmother somewhere in the family tree.

St. Patrick's Day, of course, began long before green cupcakes and parade selfies. The holiday honours Saint Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, who lived in the fifth century. Contrary to popular myth, he wasn't actually Irish by birth. He was born in Britain, kidnapped by Irish raiders as a teenager, and brought to Ireland as a slave. After escaping, he later returned as a mission-

ary, helping to spread Christianity across the island.

Originally, St. Patrick's Day was a solemn religious feast in Ireland. Ironically, it was Irish immigrants, particularly in North America, who transformed it into the lively cultural celebration we know today.

The first large parades were held not in Dublin, but in cities such as Boston, New York, and Montreal, where Irish communities proudly celebrated their heritage.

And that's where our own local connections come in.

Across our region, Irish roots run deeper than many people realize. Generations ago, Irish immigrants arrived

seeking work in fishing, forestry, railways, and mills, bringing with them their music, storytelling traditions, and a healthy appreciation for strong tea and even stronger

opinions. Many familiar family names in our area trace back to those early arrivals, and local churches and cemeteries quietly record that shared history.

Even today, traces of Irish influence pop up in everyday life. You can hear it in the fiddle tunes at community gatherings, in recipes handed down for soda bread or hearty stews, and occasionally in the friendly stubbornness that insists winter isn't over until at least April.



Not for scientific reasons, of course, just to confirm whether he's handing out gold or only chocolate coins again.



For many residents, St. Patrick's Day isn't just about Ireland, it's about community. It's a reason to gather, share a laugh, and celebrate the mix of cultures that shaped our towns and villages. Whether your ancestors came from County Cork or you just enjoy wearing green socks once a year, the day offers a cheerful reminder that traditions travel well, and often improve with local participation.

And if you happen to spot a leprechaun around town, please report it immediately.



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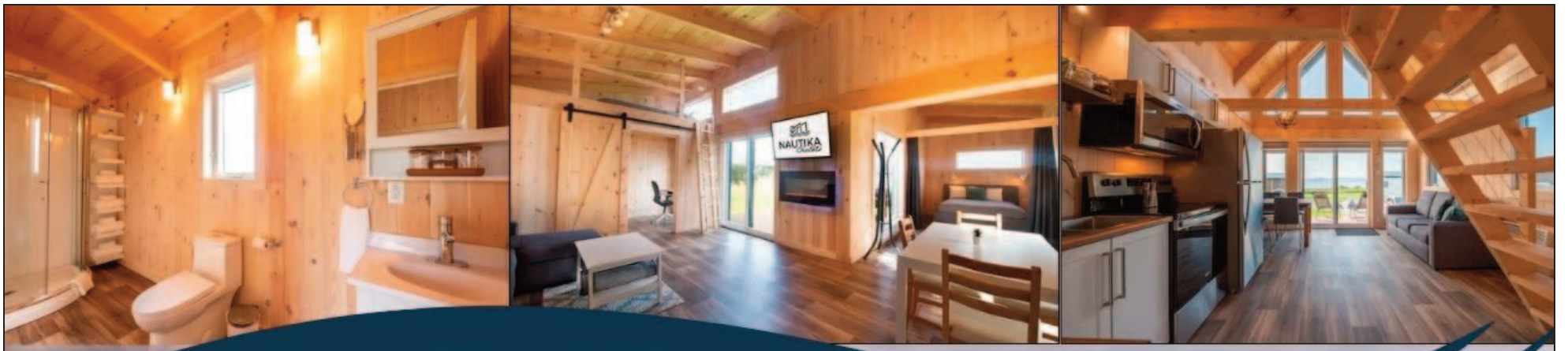
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