

STREETS

SERVING WINNIPEG'S WEST END

JULY 2025

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM OUR COMMUNITY | VOL 3 NO 9 | FREE TO WEST END RESIDENTS

WOLSELEYEAR.CA

Prime program celebrates ten years

By Terese Taylor



Candace Blundell works with staff at PRIME to help maintain independent living for seniors.

"This is exactly what health care should be, where someone knows your care, and you get the right care," said Candace Blundell, a social worker at the Misericordia Health Centre's PRIME program for seniors.

The five-day-a-week drop-in program celebrated its 10 year anniversary in June. PRIME provides services for

seniors with complex medical and health needs, supporting them in ways that allow them to continue living independently in the community. They provide transportation to and from the program for clients, where they can socialize with others, get involved in fitness activities, and meet with staff

continues pg 2...



Residents began holding meetings to discuss the impending closure of the RBC branch in the west end. Photos by Ralph Bryant

The West End Fights to Save Last Bank on Sargent Community members organize to prevent closure of RBC branch serving area with one of the city's highest senior populations

By Ralph Bryant

The Royal Bank of Canada branch at the corner of Sargent Avenue and Sherbrook Street will close its doors on July 11th, leaving the West End of Winnipeg without a single bank in a neighborhood that houses one of the city's highest concentration of seniors and newcomers to Canada.

At a community meeting at XCues restaurant this week, dozens of residents, business owners, and representatives from local politicians gathered to voice their opposition to the closure and strategize ways to keep banking services in their neighborhood. The meeting highlighted the profound impact this closure will have on a community where many residents rely on walking to conduct their banking business.

"This is a very strong ethnic community. There's a lot of seniors and there's a lot of

people that just don't drive cars," said Michael Paille, owner of Cobra Collectibles and president of the Sargent Business Community. "You're taking that convenience away from them and telling them this is for the better of the community. How is it better when people have to take a bus across the city?"

The closure represents more than just the loss of a single business. According to community organizers, the West End has lost 36 businesses over the past few years, with many replaced by cannabis dispensaries. The departure of RBC means residents will face significant barriers to accessing basic financial services.

Ella, a longtime bank customer who relies on the branch to pay bills and withdraw cash, doesn't own a

smartphone or computer, making online banking impossible. "I have social anxiety and health reasons," she explained during a meeting with bank management. "And online banking, I don't have any source of a computer."

Her situation reflects that of many neighbors. As Lynne noted, "A lot of people don't

continues pg 4...



Glen Griffith and his mom Elsie, 90 years old, celebrated with PRIME. Top photo: Candace Blundell works with staff at PRIME to help maintain independent living for seniors.



COMMUNITY

Prime, continued...

regarding health needs.

Elsie Griffith celebrated the anniversary with her two sons and daughter-in-law. "We're always happy to know that she's here because she's in good hands and always looks forward to the times that she knows she's coming here," explained her son Glen. "I think it's a really, really badly needed program, and I think we're very fortunate to have it in this community and that my mom can be part of it because other than this, she would never really be stepping outside of her apartment."

One of the activities in

the PRIME program is gardening, something that a recently retired volunteer, Karen, has assisted with. She has enjoyed witnessing the "amazing transformation" over the last three weeks since planting began. Clients planted tomatoes and flowers on the roof-top garden which has a beautiful view of the trees around the centre.

Participants also opted to create a mini-magical garden with glass beads and mini gnomes. "It was really good for dexterity, and stretching," said Karen.

"People really come alive when they come up here," she

says. "You know, there's one client who said she raised a family of nine on her garden."

Blundell, who has a background in social work, says staff try to stay flexible when assisting clients, and sometimes it's the small things that can really make a difference. As a case manager, she sometimes has helped clients to read their water meter, helped with getting groceries, or helped with online communication. Although it's portrayed as more efficient to make appointments or communicate online, for many seniors it isn't, Blundell explained. "It sounds really accessible, but often seniors can't hear (miss the cues) to push the automated buttons. Once they get through the system they can advocate for themselves, but sometimes they can't get through the system."

One of the greatest benefits of the program, said Blundell, is that seniors who may have fallen through the cracks, and were using emergency services much more often, are regularly connected to staff and doctors who can give more consistent care and attention.

Some of their clients were referred through EPIC (Emergency Paramedics in the Community) - a program run by Fire and Paramedic Service, that identifies frequent users of 911.

Blundell said the emphasis in PRIME isn't to make people better, because often participants

join at a time where that's not likely to happen. Some are dealing with cognitive decline, increasing mobility issues, sometimes grieving changes in their life, and may have limited family supports. "We really believe in a holistic model. Everyone is very unique and we try to look at the recreational, social part of things, to the medical part, to mental health, and

to cover it all," she says. "We're giving them better quality of life, whatever that looks like," says Blundell.

Misericordia Health Centre is one of two sites in the city that runs the program, along with Deer Lodge Health Centre, and the Misericordia program serves 70 clients from age 65 up to 100 years old.



Karen assists seniors on the rooftop garden and gets to take in the beautiful view. Photos Terese Taylor.



Working for Wolseley

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Great reads by local authors that should be on your bedside table this summer

Zilla Jones' widely awaited novel **World So Wide** takes readers on a long-standing story that has existed on a fine line in North America's history. It's a story both powerful and devastating, exploring the depths of the dreams and convictions of a country finding its own voice.

Jones grew up hearing adults and family members telling the stories of the political movements in the Caribbean country of Grenada, and of the political protests in the 70s that united students and youth across the world against inequality, including an active community in Winnipeg.

"It's this tiny country, and yet it spawned this great revolution that was inspiring America and all these other countries that were having socialist movements. This tiny island of less than 100,000 people somehow was able to do that," said Jones at her book launch at McNally Robinson Booksellers. It's a story that "just calls out to be told," she said.

Jones is an award-winning author and lawyer who also sings opera, and her main character in **World So Wide** is a biracial (Canadian and Grenadian) opera star who has travelled the world and wants to see a former love interest who is a leader in the country. Jones intersperses real events with a character who knows both the inner and outer workings of the many communities that were connected to its fate.

People don't know a lot about the history of this region, says

Jones, but it was a region that had created massive wealth on the back of slavery and indentured labour as one of the biggest producers of sugar in the world. Another lesser-known story, says Jones, are some of the first democratic systems formed by pirate associations who held that women and all racial groups were equal.

When people told stories about the Grenadian revolution, it was often as a cautionary tale, says Jones. "It was always like well, they got too cocky or they didn't really see the reality of what was at stake and just wanted too much. But in some ways," she says, "there was this aspect of if (Grenada) didn't do this who would?"

"The United States was scared of them. Of this tiny country, and it took them days to take it over... And I know the US didn't bargain for the fight that they got."

"It's really important for people, and my kids to know that we had such strong movements and throughout the Caribbean there are so many great stories."

The World So Wide is published by Cormorant Books.



Author Zilla Jones (photo provided)

Let Us Be True

Like what seems to be a particularly pronounced skill in this neighbourhood - women writing about women's lives - Erna Buffie's novel **Let Us Be True** is beautifully written, and her characters seem like they live up the street. And remember that older woman who could slice a mean emotional piece off of her kids? She's there too.

Buffie grew up on Dominion Street near Notre Dame, and many of the classic ele-

ments of Winnipeg Culture run through the pages of the story. And although it a fictional landscape, explains Buffie, the book feels right at home. Buffie grew up overhearing, as children do, the beginnings of secrets and halting conversations that women of her mother's generation tried to hide from the world.

"Women are more open with one another and more open about what they've been through (in this generation),"

says Buffie, "but at the same time we still have our own secrets. And we need to pay attention to them because they can come back and bite us."

Matriarch Pearl seems like she is someone you have likely met, but one of her daughter's (an academic working at the university) partner Athena is a massage therapist who, used to following the quieter and less guarded communication of the body, can sense something doesn't add up.

It's looking at intergenerational trauma. It's it's looking at how, you know, whether it's a Holocaust survivor or it's someone who survived the depression in the war, that we pass on the damage is done to us, and often, despite our best intentions.

"I would hope coming

away from this book that people would be more sympathetic towards women like Pearl and not just assume anything - that that they would give them room, just knowing that there might be something in their lives, something in their background, something in their families that have made them the women they are, and that we would be more forgiving of that."

Let Us Be True is published by Coteau Books.



Author Erna Buffie (photo provided)



Author and journalist Josiah Neufeld (photo provided)

The Temple at the End of the Universe, A Search for Spirituality in the Anthropocene

"The old story was no longer working," Josiah Neufeld quotes in **The Temple at the End of the Universe, A Search for Spirituality in the Anthropocene**, and Neufeld came to feel a slow reckoning in his heart and his body. The community that he had grown up in and had loved had become part of a movement that would run roughshod over another truth that he deeply felt; the earth and its living organisms, its evolution, needed to be incorporated into a spiritual understanding.

In his beautifully written exploration, Neufeld takes us with him on his journey to reconnect to a meaning behind the science and environmental movements trying to bring the urgency of environmental degradation to an evangelical and political

stage.

His journey and curiosity takes him on numerous adventures, including an outdoor workshop where he is instructed to throw everything off, stripping naked in a

lone campsite in the Arizona desert, and trusting that he will come out OK.

Winnipeg author Joan Thomas said it made the hairs on the back of her neck stand up. Neufeld's beautiful prose deeply touches in a subject matter usually scientific or technical. **Temple at the End of the Universe is published by House of Anansi Press.**

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COMMUNITY

Bank closure, continued...



have phones. People with disabilities don't necessarily cotton on to how to do all of this stuff on the phone."

In a meeting with community representatives, RBC branch manager Patricia Halstad explained that the closure stems from changing customer needs and a desire to provide expanded hours at the consolidated Ellice Avenue location. The bank claims customers are demanding more digital services and extended operating hours.

However, community members challenged this narrative. During an hour-long observation period in front of the bank, organizers noted the diverse clientele - predominantly Indigenous people, seniors, and newcomers - who conduct banking "the way my grandmother banked," going to tellers for personal service rather than using digital alternatives.

"The needs of our clients have changed," Ms. Halstad, the bank manager stated, but couldn't provide data supporting this claim when pressed by community members.

The branch closure consultation process also raised serious concerns. Letters notifying customers were only sent to those who originally opened accounts at the Sargent

location, meaning many regular customers who bank there but opened accounts elsewhere never received notification. An April consultation meeting was similarly limited in scope.

What makes this closure particularly devastating is the unique character of the RBC branch. Staff members speak Tagalog, English, Arabic, Spanish, Tigrinya, Hindi, Gujarati, and Punjabi - reflecting the neighborhood's incredible diversity.

"One of the things that they talk about how proud they are is all those languages that they speak in that branch," said one community member that asked to be unnamed. "Having a branch that knows the neighborhood is diverse and has representation of people that can speak to people in our neighborhood is important."

Local residents described how newcomers to Canada would be brought to this branch to set up their first accounts, creating a network where people from the same countries would naturally bank together. This personal, culturally responsive service cannot be easily replicated at distant locations.

The closure forces residents to travel to Ellice Avenue - a 20-minute bus ride that

costs \$7 round trip. For seniors and people with disabilities, this creates significant hardship.

"What about the ones that can't walk, like the elders or the people with disabilities that can't walk far?" asked Sal, owner of X-Cues. Another resident using a walker explained he could manage the distance to the current branch but would be unable to reach Ellice Avenue.

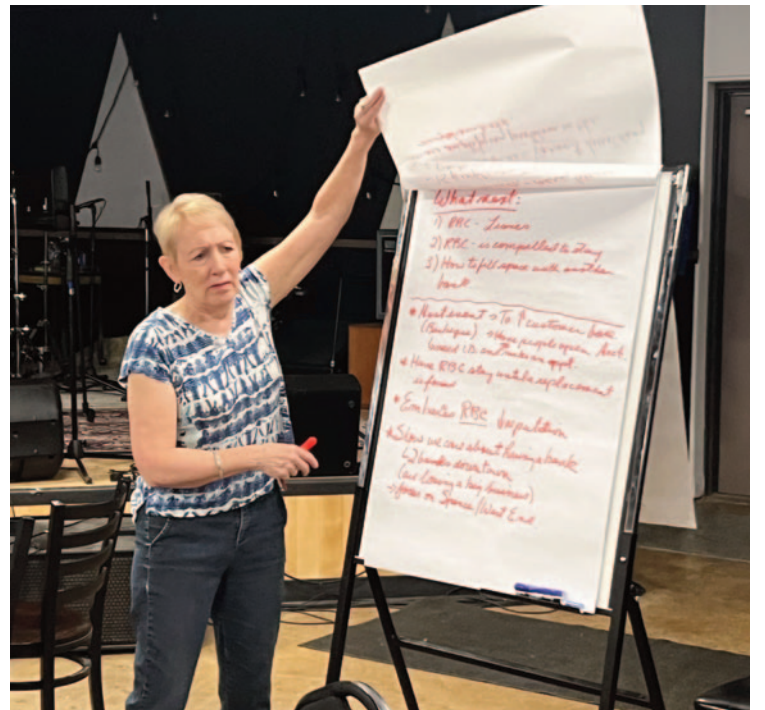
For businesses in the area, the impact extends beyond convenience. Local business owners typically visit the bank twice weekly, with travel time potentially increasing from 10 minutes to 45 minutes each trip. Many ethnic business owners in the area don't use smartphones or laptops and rely entirely on in-person banking services.

The closure has drawn attention from multiple levels of government. Federal MP Leah Gazan has written to both the Minister of Finance and Minister of Industry, urging intervention to prevent a "banking desert" in the community. Provincial MLA Uzoma Asagwara and City Councillor Cindy Gilroy have also expressed support for keeping the branch open.

"The letter urges the Minister to direct the Director of the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada to intervene in the closure," explained a representative from Gazan's office. The letter emphasizes impacts on newcomers, seniors, and low-income residents for whom a three-kilometer journey to the next bank "is not a small thing, it's a big deal in our community."

Faced with a July 11th deadline, community organizers are planning multiple strategies. A petition is circulating, and on July 3, a demonstration to draw media attention to the closure will happen in front of the bank.

"We have two weeks before this bank is scheduled to close," noted Cheryl Martins, who is one of the leaders of the organizing. "From an organizing standpoint, what are the levers we're going to need to pull to try to inspire them to keep the



Cheryl Martins and community members strategize how to keep the bank open. Photos Ralph Bryant

bank open?"

Some community members are already looking beyond RBC, reaching out to credit unions and other financial institutions that might fill the void left by the closure.

The RBC closure reflects a troubling trend in Canadian banking. As Cheryl, a 30-year neighborhood resident, observed: "I was at Royal Bank since I was five years old. They shut the Royal Bank in my neighborhood and told us we could go to the branch downtown for our convenience and to serve us better. On what planet does this serve us better?"

The closure also represents what some see as corporate abandonment of lower-income communities. "Banks make huge amounts of money," said a community member at the or-

ganizing meeting. "One of the things that you're supposed to do as a bank is be responsible to the neighborhood."

As the July 11th closure date approaches, the West End community continues fighting for a basic service that many Canadians take for granted. Their battle highlights fundamental questions about corporate responsibility, community access to financial services, and whether Canada's banking system truly serves all citizens equally.

For a neighborhood that has already lost so much, losing their last bank feels like another step toward being forgotten entirely. As Michael Paille said: "We see things lost in a neighborhood like this, and they don't come back. And people are just left out."

STREETS
SERVING WINNIPEG'S WEST END

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Zilla Jones and Tasha Spillet explore unexpected connections at WAG-Qaumajuq

By Ralph Bryant

Sometimes the threads that bind us together reveal themselves in the most surprising ways. At a packed storytelling workshop on June 8 at the Winnipeg Art Gallery-Qaumajuq, Wolseley resident and writer Zilla Jones discovered she shares ancestral connections with fellow author Dr. Tasha Spillet through a family name that carries centuries of complex history.

The event, part of the fourth annual Trinnipeg Live Mixtape and inspired by the Threads of Kin and Belonging exhibition, brought together two of Manitoba's most compelling voices for an intimate conversation about identity, belonging, and the stories that shape us.

"Which one of your grandmothers are you prepared to deny?" Jones shared, recounting advice from a Black elder that helped shape her understanding of her mixed Afro-Caribbean, Chinese, and European heritage. It's a ques-

tion that resonates in a city like Winnipeg, where so many residents carry multiple cultural threads in their DNA.

Spillet, who is Michif and Anishinaabe from Minegoziibe Anishinabe First Nation and of Trinidadian descent, read from her picture book *Beautiful You, Beautiful Me* – a story about a mixed-race child learning to embrace the beauty in not matching her mother's appearance.

"I'm part of you and you're part of me. I'm beautiful like me and you're beautiful like you," she read, her voice carrying the tenderness of bedtime stories shared with her own daughter.

But it was the revelation about their shared Cumberbatch ancestry that demonstrated how deeply intertwined our stories can be. Jones's research into her family history revealed that her ancestors were enslaved by the Cumberbatch family in Barbados – the same colonial family

that connects to Spillet's paternal lineage through Trinidad. Jones even described family silverware, engraved with a 'C', that her ancestors took from the plantation house when slavery ended.

"I was like, wait a second," Spillet recalled, remembering Jones's sister posting about the family silverware on Facebook.

"In a very Winnipeg way, we might share an ancestry and figured it out through this Facebook post."

The conversation, moderated by Elliott Walsh aka Ness Wynrush, co-curator of the exhibition and founder of Trinnipeg Live Mixtape, wove



Zilla Jones (from left), Elliott Walsh, and Tasha Spillet at *Threads of Kin and Belonging* at the WAG. Photo Ralph Bryant

between the personal and political. Jones spoke about her recent trip to Ghana, where she experienced both the profound sense of "coming home" to the African continent and the complex reality that 200 years of diaspora had created its own distinct culture.

"We always kind of saw Africa as one place," Jones explained, describing how diaspora peoples often lose the specific knowledge of their origins.

"When you're landing and you see the red earth... it was just like this sense of coming home. But it doesn't feel like home because I've been gone too long."

Spillet reflected on her own journey of reclaiming her Black identity, particularly after becoming a mother to a daughter whose dark skin surprised her expectations.

"The only way she's going to learn how to be a proud woman is if I first healed the parts of me that are sad and broken," she said.

The audience – a mix of longtime Winnipeggers, newcomers, students, and families – asked thoughtful questions about courage, identity, and raising children with complex cultural backgrounds. One father spoke about his mixed-race sons navigating questions about their identity in a city that, despite its rich multicultural history, remains "incredibly segregated."

"Don't let anyone say that you're less than," Jones shared, recounting her mother's advice when facing racism at a prestigious English school where she was the first person of color to attend.

The event exemplified the goals of both the Threads of Kin and Belonging exhibition and the Trinnipeg Live Mixtape project – creating spaces where Indigenous and Black communities can see themselves reflected, share their stories, and discover unexpected connections.

"We are living archives," Walsh noted during the discussion, pointing out how community members often recognize each other's family connections across generations. "Our job is to honour what has been before and add what is part of us into it to make sure it never dies."

As visitors left the gallery that afternoon, many stopped at the interactive desk where they could add their own reflections to the exhibition's on-going record. The stories continue to grow, one conversation at a time, proving that sometimes the most profound connections happen when we dare to share our truths in community.

The *Threads of Kin and Belonging* exhibition continues at WAG-Qaumajuq until National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30.



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Affordable housing needs beauty too: Rotary clubs step up

Story and photos
by Mike Maunder

Rotary members from several Winnipeg clubs spent June 14th helping to create and beautify a tenant green-space for Westminster Housing Society on Spence Street in West Broadway.

The clubs are entering a partnership with Westminster Housing which provides affordable housing for over 100 units in West Broadway. When a group of Rotary clubs decided to form the partnership to help Westminster, the idea of doing exterior work rose to the top of Westminster's needs.

"The cost of renovations and the low rents we charge leave little left over to beautify our properties," explained Brian Pincott, chair of Westminster's board. "The green-space at 189 Spence is a good example. It's a large garden that tenants at 189 Spence and 182 Spence have maintained

over the years with Westminster's support. But as tenants have changed and aged, their ability to maintain the garden has declined."

The front room at 189 Spence is a Tenant Hub where tenant-based activities and meetings are held during the year. But the once-beautiful garden needed work.

Rotary members arrived June 14 and worked a whole morning. Weeds were a major issue and the first few hours were spent pulling them. They were loaded into a trailer provided by Rotary and hauled to a composting site.

Then Rotary members planted a variety of perennials to fill in the green-space: most particularly a basswood tree in the centre. The tree replaces seven trees that once shaded the green-space, but have been lost to various causes, includ-

ing the red dot of death on four elms.

The green-space at 189 Spence is built around a patio area which Rotary will continue to improve for Westminster tenant's use. In the week following the clean-up and planting day, two community groups held community meetings in the green-space.

Amanda Emms, is the Tenant Support Worker for Westminster Housing's tenants, employed in a partnership with West Broadway Community Organization. She'll be hosting a variety of activities for tenants in the

green-space during the summer.

The biggest smile of the day came from Sheila Head who lives in a Westminster property across the street. An avid gardener, Rotary purchased for her a crabapple tree and five blueberry bushes, which she promises to tend

and make into blueberry pie for a celebration with Rotary in the Fall.

Rotary plans to continue the partnership in the Fall and beyond, by doing fence work and other needed improvements to Westminster properties.



BEFORE

Frank Cosway, president Downtown Rotary, and Terry Dick, Winnipeg West Rotary, were two of about a dozen Rotarians who beautified the tenant green-space. This photo shows one part of the green-space before they began work, infested with weeds.





Leah Gazan

Member of Parliament
Winnipeg Centre




Community at the centre



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AFTER

The same part of the green-space: weeds removed; brick path improved; new basswood tree planted.

(Far left) Amanda Emms, Westminster Tenant Support Worker and Bob Foster, president, Winnipeg West Rotary, pose with three Westminster tenants: (l to r) tenant Brianne Anderson, Amanda and Bob, tenant Sheila Head, and tenant and journalist Mike Maunder.

(Bottom) The Rotary group in the centre of the new Tenant Green-space.



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SPORT

Congratulations to West End businessman Yonatan Gebreegziabher!

Yonatan placed first in his age category- 50 to 54 years, in the half marathon, finishing the race in 1 hour 27 minutes in the 2025 Manitoba Marathon



Yonatan Gebreegziabher, owner of Mikkey's Barbershop at 639 Portage Avenue is an avid runner who trains year round to prepare for the Manitoba Marathon Photo provided

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Winnipeg Folk Festival Glass Banjo Award Recipients

WINNIPEG, MB, Canada – The Winnipeg Folk Festival is honoured to present Glass Banjo Awards to Ava Kobrinsky, founder, and Gerry Couture, past board chair. The award presentation will take place on Saturday, July 12 at 7:00 PM on Main Stage.

“We are able to celebrate our 50th festival because of the foundation that people like Ava and Gerry laid,” said Vale-

rie Shantz, Executive Director. “We needed our visionaries and founders to get us started—and we’ve needed dedicated people who stepped up along the way to keep us going. What both Ava and Gerry have done must be shared with our community, to highlight these amazing people who worked behind the scenes and are the reason why the festival is thriving today.”

Ava Kobrinsky is one of the visionary founders of the Winnipeg Folk Festival,

which began in 1974. Her contributions to the Canadian folk music scene have been im-

measurable. In 2021, she was inducted into the Order of Manitoba in recognition of her life-long dedication to the arts.



Winnipeg Folk festival has been bringing great music to Winnipeg, and and inspiring the launch of music festivals across the world for 50 years. Photo Terese Taylor

Famous Feathers

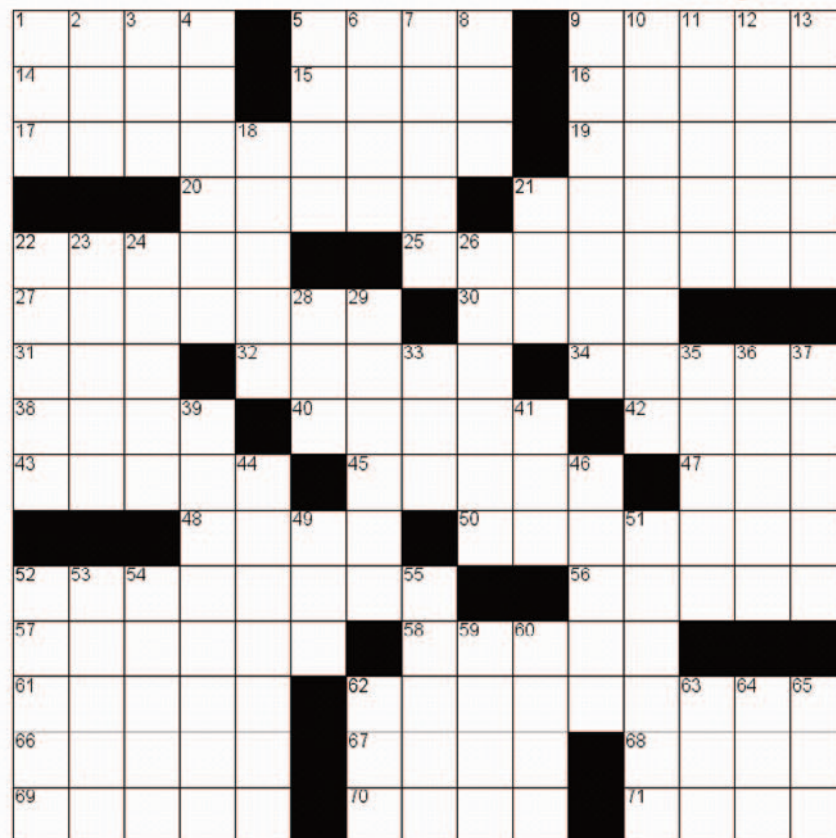
ACROSS

1. Ininew
5. "No ____ Traffic"
9. Contemptuous
14. Sunburn soother
15. Ogles
16. Felt for
17. Black-capped or Anna Cardwell
19. Rapidly
20. Sniggled
21. Subatomic particle
22. Blue Cross Park quartet
25. Nanas, often
27. Soft things at the end of pencils
30. Fencing sword
31. Capote nickname
32. Ages
34. American or Williams
38. TV host Kotb
40. Water slide, e.g.
42. Stage name for Christa Päffgen
43. Chimney or Taylor
45. Revise
47. Antidiscrimination inits. rolled back by #47
48. Red River Ex, e.g.
50. Joints
52. Can easily go up in flames
56. Step after lather
57. Makes into law
58. Hawaii on a US map, often
61. Fritter
62. Red-winged or McCartney song
66. Key in
67. Roster
68. Image on a desktop
69. Peruses
70. Part of a molecule
71. Comedian Fey

DOWN

1. Our national broadcaster's inits.
2. Pep rally yell

Debby Lake



3. Saskatchewan born poet Mandel
4. Hosts
5. Color similar to aqua
6. Jekyll's alter ego
7. Oboes, e.g.
8. Employ
9. More frightening
10. Mille-feuille pastry
11. Seething
12. Interior design
13. Utopias
18. He wrote "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest"
21. ____ goes the weasel
22. Sisters of Amys, Jos and Megs
23. Image on a street sign
24. ____ Arabia
26. Nag
28. Button on a VCR
29. Largest desert in Africa
33. Mojito liquor
35. Joe or Jill
36. Cake finishers
37. Din
39. Pretentious
41. Opposite of WSW
44. Ragged clothes
46. Canadian comedian Seguin
49. US addressee in April
51. It counts your steps
52. Better word than less, for many things
53. Ridiculous
54. Follower of Haile Selassie
55. Aviator
59. Sweden joined it in 2024
60. Swindle
62. Bikini top
63. On parle francais ____
64. Co-host with Don of "Hockey Night in Canada"
65. Paternity test material

Ava, originally from Winnipeg, met Mitch Podolak while in Toronto. After they married, the couple returned to Winnipeg, where Ava became a co-founder of the Winnipeg Folk Festival and played a major role in the creation of the West End Cultural Centre and Home Routes. Her early work on the festival's board and as an administrator was vital to its success. While working a full-time government job, Ava dedicated her evenings and weekends to the festival—selling program ads, writing grants, contributing artistic input, managing a stage, and handling administrative tasks.

Gerry Couture served as board chair during pivotal moments in the festival's history. Gerry served two terms where he was called upon to help navigate operational challenges. Throughout his leadership, Gerry was a steady and guiding presence, playing a key role in the festival's growth and evolution.

Since its creation in 1994, the Glass Banjo Award has been the festival's way of publicly recognizing extraordinary individuals and organizations that have made a lasting impact on the Winnipeg Folk Festival. After the 2025 festival, the award will have been given out more than 60 times—a testament to the incredible people working behind the scenes. Over the past 30 years, the festival has honoured volunteers, staff, artists, donors, suppliers, and funders whose support has been essential to its continued success.

Seen that, done that

Federal plan will make climate worse, say activists

By Terese Taylor

Winnipeg climate activists gathered to screen print posters drawing attention to climate issues, saying that moves the federal government and the provincial government are making in response to much more frequent “climate catastrophes” and trade pressures from the US government “aren’t connecting the dots,” and have the potential to make increasing climate disasters worse.

Manitoba evacuated almost 20,000 northern residents from their homes in June due to the threat of massive forest fires, the largest evacuation in its history.

“Obviously we need to be responding to the fires and putting resources into emergency preparedness and protecting evacuees, but (the government) should be dealing with the real causes at the same time,” says Hannah Muharajine.

Activists suggested that terms to describe what is happening make it sound like its simply a natural phenomenon, instead of disasters being caused by human activities.

Calling it “wildfire season” is something that Manitoba Energy Justice Coalition took issue with. A better name might be “manfires,” suggested a participant.

The government’s response has been “reaction based rather than solutions based,” said Ken Harasym.

Muhajarine, an activist since her youth, said “this summer and the last few summers have been really

shocking. I think I first learned about climate change 20 years ago in school. It’s been very eye-opening to now see it happening before our eyes and to be living it and knowing that it’s really gonna get worse from here. It’s frustrating to see the government not connect the dots publicly... the government has a responsibility to be leading some of the messaging on this. The provincial government doesn’t even have a climate plan yet.”

Activists referred to the new federal government’s ‘elbows up’ plan, and Bill C-5, which is supposed to enable large cross-Canada projects to get underway because of the volatility of the US administration, and US tariffs. “We are all in favour of building a Canada that we want,” said Harasym,” but if we are talking pipelines then we’re not on the same page.”

“It’s disheartening when you hear about a northern access pipeline or a northern energy corridor and refer to it as “building infrastructure”, that’s going be obsolete in 10 years. We have to move away from fossil fuels... instead of building more pipelines to put more carbon into the air,” said Harasym.

Shawn Kettner, a long time activist also said nuclear energy has come up in discus-

sion for Canada’s future energy needs, but its a bad choice that has already been debunked. Canada doesn’t have the components needed to build it - that would have to come from either the US or Russia, she says, and “we still haven’t figured out how to get rid nuclear waste.”

“Countries can survive and

thrive on green technology,” she says. “If they cared about us or the world, and not about the bottom line, then they would do something different. But here we are. “We can’t breathe, we can’t go outside because its too hot. We need to figure out how to engage to make it better.”



Climate activists screen printed posters in an event at the Handsome daughter




Manitoba’s First Nations react to Building Canada Act

The passing of Bill C-5, the Building Canada Act (including the Free Trade and Labour Mobility in Canada Act), has been highly criticized by Indigenous organizations across the country and in Manitoba including the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Manitoba Keewatinowik Okimakanak Inc. (MKO), and the Southern Chiefs Organization. “Our Nations are not stakeholders. We are rights-holders. We must be involved from the outset and not as an afterthought when decisions are already made,”said SCO Grand Chief Jerry Daniels.

“Any approval of ‘national interest’ projects must include enforceable conditions that reflect our rights and our role as decision-makers on our lands

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B	A	S	E	S				S	P	O	I	L	E	R
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T	R	U			Y	E	A	R	S		R	O	B	I
H	O	D	A			C	H	U	T	E		N	I	C
S	W	I	F	T			A	M	E	N	D		D	E
			F	A	I	R			R	E	E	F	E	R
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W	A	S	T	E			B	L	A	C	K	B	I	R
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Colleen Rajotte shares love of Indigenous gardening

By Terese Taylor

In a lesson shared with elementary school students at Laura Secord School, Colleen Rajotte passed around a medicinal plant with a beautiful smell. Black Diamond willow fungus has a mild scent of lico-rish or cedar and can be used as a tea or a smudge for a variety of health concerns.

Pieces of the fungus were found in an archeological dig in Manitoba that dated back to the 1400s; but for several years were mistaken for decoration, said Rajotte.

Discovering the history and teachings of Indigenous gardening and plant medicines has become a profound quest for Rajotte. So much so that she started a television show - Vitality Gardening, that has been running on APTN and the US channel PBS. It's a show that has taken her across turtle is-

land, from the mountains of California to northern Ontario, travelling by foot, or boat, sometimes spending days locating medicines like the black diamond willow fungus, that are hard to find.

But it all started, for Rajotte, when she attended a sweat ceremony.

Rajotte shared with the class that she was born at the Old Grace Hospital in the neighbourhood, and then grew up in a loving adoptive home with a white family. But when, as an adult she joined Indigenous elders at a ceremony, she was given a spiritual name that surprised her. It was a name that meant she would learn about the value of sacred and healing plants.

"Sure enough, I am a very passionate gardener," she laughs, and began by sharing



(Clockwise from far left) Colleen Rajotte gets ready to add sage to a smudge : The fire catches with help from many hands. Rajotte explains how to plant baby tobacco plants in a hot and sunny area of the garden at the school.

one of the sacred plants that she now grows in her Wolseley yard. Dried sage is used in smudges and imparts a calming and memorable scent, like other sacred plants. The class crowded around an abalone shell to protect it from the warm breeze that blew out the first few matches. The class then passed the shell with the scented smoke that people sometimes whisp around their bodies, leaving it's subtle scent

on their skin.

Rajotte brought baby tobacco plants to plant with the class, who gently packed them into a full sun area of the school garden. Although tobacco plants can grow quite large, the seeds are tiny and can be thrown on top of the soil to germinate. Once they are grown, they produce beautiful white flowers, which attract pollinators in the evening, but also keep plant pests, like

aphids away.

But as Rajotte tells the class, her own journey of learning about gardening and cultural teachings is something anyone can grow to love. Before she received her name, and began to teach, she began with the basics. As she realized during her first show, she didn't have a watering can. It's one of the things, along with heart and respect for Mother Earth that can begin your journey, she says.

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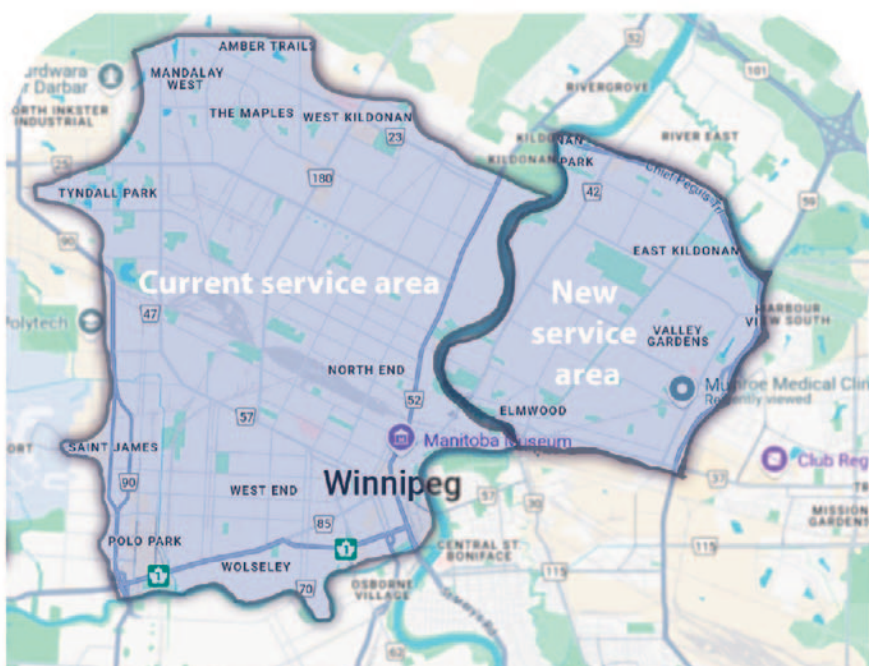


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