

The Madawaska Valley Current

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2020

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Underlying issues of strike in rural Ontario schools

ELSER LEE ARCHER
MADAWASKA VALLEY

We all understand the importance of downsizing and cutting back on expenses when managing our own personal debt. Did you tighten your belt over the last few months to balance your budget after excess spending last Christmas? With that in mind it is easy to understand why the province of Ontario needs to manage well over \$300 billion dollars in debt -- essentially money they have borrowed from tax payers and various investment vehicles like bonds.

This is the reality expressed by some taxpayers in the Valley who get angry as they watch our educators strike. Let's take a look at the other side of the coin... The sentiment expressed by our teachers and parents, not to mention the real cost of educational cutbacks to our rural students and our more vulnerable special education programs.

The one-day strike on February 21, 2020 by the four largest teachers' unions emphasized the underlying issues of support staff, the adverse impact of larger classrooms on our rural teachers and our general student population. All of this culminating in problematic outcomes for our special needs students. Reality is, "... about a third of its 60,000 members (Ontario Teachers Federation of Ontario) work at a wide variety of other jobs. They include office administrators, custodians, social workers, IT staff, library technicians and educational assistants who work with special-needs children." (Source: *The Globe and Mail*)

Educational Assistants earn less than half of what teachers earn and most boards require 16 students from a single grade to qualify for an Educational Assistant. In rural communities where we experience classrooms combining multiple grades we often do not qualify



Staff from Madawaska Valley circle of schools demonstrating.

for an Educational Assistant. Research reveals other rural communities identify children with behavioural issues who are kept home half days as a risk management measure to ensure the safety of other students as there is no Educational Assistant to support children with significant challenges. Also, autistic children who are not considered flight risks are having trouble integrating into the standard classroom as they, too, are without educational support when rural schools don't meet the urban eligibility requirements of the Ministry of Education, who don't understand rural communities.

"All students require support from teachers, classmates, family and friends to thrive and benefit from their school experience. Some students have special needs that require additional supports beyond those in a classroom setting..... Special education programs and services in the Renfrew County District School Board (RCDSB) support classroom teachers in meeting the needs of our diverse group of learners with special education needs." Special Education www.rcdsb.on.ca

Whether in elementary school or high school there are many kinds of learners. Some students are visual learners, some auditory learners and some are tactile learners. Our teachers, support staff and educational assistants facilitate different learning strategies to enable our children to succeed. Presently, some rural schools require teachers to teach elementary students spanning junior kindergarten to grade 3 in one classroom. Beyond that we expect professionalism in preparing classroom content, additional hours spent after school marking and provision of extracurricular activities that promote student health and wellbeing. As a society we want to be inclusive on so many levels but there is a cost.

"The Renfrew Country District School Board, for instance, was forced to cut about 30 courses and blend grades and academic levels into the same classroom at some of its schools this year. Grade 11 and 12 drama, music and guitar courses were eliminated at one school, while another didn't offer any physics courses in Grade 11 or 12 and a third —Continued on page 2

Continued from page 2—
school cut French courses in Grades 11 and 12, offering e-learning instead.”
Source: Ottawa Citizen

As a social worker I am aware of the varying developmental needs of different age groups. The residual impact of larger classrooms and online curriculum exacerbate the challenge of applying different learning strategies to benefit our rural student population.



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“...Staff (Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation) interviewed on the picket lines [say] they are concerned about the same issues cited by teachers: They want more support for kids with high needs and action on violence in the classroom. They oppose larger classes and mandatory online courses for high schoolers. They want full-day kindergarten preserved.” Miller, Jacquie; Feb 19, 2020; Ottawa Citizen

There was a time when one-room classrooms combined multiple grades, but 21st Century education requires so much more, when our children aspire to compete globally for a post-secondary education spots and need to learn in an inclusive classroom.

About the author: Elser Lee (Faith) Archer's governmental experience both at the provincial and municipal level — the latter as a councillor — coupled with her

professional expertise as a social worker and mediator, provides our readers with valuable commentary and insight. As a community volunteer, Archer has played a leading role in the Communities in Bloom success in recent years and has stepped up to ensure the Barry's Bay Triathlon continued. She wears many hats including as a Rehabilitation Consultant and is an advocate for youth and people of all abilities.



Elser Lee (Faith) Archer.

Bay Blades sledge team in finals



Bay Blades sledge hockey team and coaches. PHOTO CHARLIE STOPPA.

ANITA JESSUP
BARRY'S BAY

After an amazing first season as a competitive team in the Ontario Sledge Hockey Association (OSHA) Open Division Pool B, the Bay Blades are off to the finals in Oakville in March.

The Barry's Bay and Area Sledge Hockey Club started in the fall of 2013 with the support of Sledge Hockey of Eastern Ontario (SHEO). After six years running a Recreation program playing weekly for fun, there was enough interest to enter a competitive team in the OSHA.

The bulk of our Barry's Bay Blades team has been together for more than five years. You can see it on the ice: they know each other well and they play together out there.

A grant we received in partnership with the Community Resource Centre Killaloe helped to subsidize both the competitive and recreation programs and allowed us to get more players on the ice. The competitive team practices each Sunday for one-and-a-half hours and the Recreation program runs on Friday nights for one hour.

More speakers at Legion contest



Front: Certificate winners from left Tristan Biffert, James Shaw, Rivko Reimer, Luetta Reimer, Elena Shaw, Winter Biffert, Benedict Biffert, Kate Biffert (absent from photo Liam Malley) Back: Legion Youth Education Officer William Cunliffe, Legion President Heather Poliquin.

DANIELLE PAUL BARRY'S BAY

Twenty-two young people entered the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 406 Public Speaking competition on Saturday February 22.

Legion Youth Education Officer William Cunliffe welcomed the crowd of about 50 family members, friends and volunteers who listened as the children spoke on a wide range of topics. Legion President Heather Poliquin said the annual contest is open to all students from Grade 1 to Grade 12, whether in school or home schooled.

Although there are four levels, Primary: Grades 1 to 3; Junior: Grades 4 to 6; Intermediate: Grades 7 to 9; and Senior: Grades 10 to 12, like last year young people competed at only the first three levels. Unlike last year when only ten children attended, this time there were more than double the number of speakers. Poliquin said she greatly appreciated the support received both from parents and from teachers.

A blend of history, curiosity, personal experience and humour was evident during the morning as the audience enjoyed a wide range of subjects delivered by the young people. First to speak was Gregory Shaw at the Primary level on the topic of Sherwood Forest and its inhabitants. There were eight Primary contestants who spoke on topics including hunting, skiing, my favourite teacher and video games. Kate

Biffert was awarded first place for her talk about *My Little Sister* (cute, smart and mischievous); second place winner James Shaw told us about dinosaurs (especially his favourite, Triceratops). Liam Malley won third place for his speech about hunting (and the countdown until he can take Hunter's Ed).

The biggest group of eleven speakers, the Juniors, came next. Topics included cartoon characters, endangered species, history (pirates, Charlemagne, soda pop, Vikings, archaeology), sports stars, and the advantages of large families. Certificates were awarded to Benedict Biffert whose first place talk was about Charlemagne and why we need more leaders like him. Elena Shaw disproved *The Curse of the Mummy's Tomb* to win second place; and Rivko Reimer spoke about ships and piracy, both historical and contemporary, to take third place.

As in 2019, the Intermediate field had just three contestants. In first place was Winter Biffert who described the benefits of going barefoot. Luetta Reimer's speech about three inspirational young people who are making a difference in the world gained her a second place certificate. In third place was Tristan Biffert who discussed the pros and cons of Artificial Intelligence and why he thinks we can do without it.

The first place winner in each category was invited to compete at the Legion Zone finals in Eganville on Saturday March 7.

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Canada Jay talk fascinates MV Gardening Club

DANIELLE PAUL
MADAWASKA VALLEY

Dan Strickland, retired Chief Park Naturalist of Algonquin Park, presented a talk on the “Triumph and Downfall of the Canada Jay” at the February 20 meeting of Madawaska Valley Gardening Club in Barry’s Bay.

He began with a history of the Canada Jay, also known as the Gray Jay, from earliest observations of French ornithologists several hundred years ago to the U.S. Ornithological Society’s restoration of the name to “Canada Jay” in 2017. Another name for the bird is the “whiskeyjack,” and an Ontario Parks blog post says this name for the bird comes from the Cree and Algonquin languages (*Wisakedjak* in Algonquin, *Wihsakecahkwi* in Cree).

Strickland’s lengthy career in Quebec and Algonquin Park boreal forests involved research of the Canada Jay. In retirement, he now studies a different Jay on Vancouver Island but Strickland’s talk to MV Gardeners concentrated on his research into Algonquin Park’s Canada Jay.

Research in Algonquin Park involved careful observation of nests and banding young birds with unique identifiers. This yielded interesting facts about the Canada Jay:

- non-migratory
- high survival rate
- high territorial fidelity; i.e. pairs stay in their own territory
- average life span of 10 to 14 years.
- The oldest Canada Jay observed in Algonquin Park was 16 years old.
- deaths tend to occur in summer
- overwintering adults weigh 65 to 75 gsm

As the Canada Jay is a non-migratory bird of the boreal forest, Strickland’s research examined how it survives through winter. He found that the bird does not eat seeds or cones. Instead its diet consists of perishable food such as: mushrooms, berries, insects/spiders, bits of meat from small mammals or carcasses. The Canada Jay divides its food into tiny bits and uses very sticky saliva to store thousands of little parcels of food in gaps under tree bark or under lichen.

Continued on page 5—



Canada Jay nesting. PHOTO DAN STRICKLAND.

CASTAWAY CULTURE: Bishop Michael Bird on a tropical island



MICHAEL BIRD
MADAWASKA VALLEY

If you were to be cast away on a deserted island, what books or music would you want to have with you? Bishop Michael Bird reveals his castaway picks in this article.

The past couple of days have seen the temperatures plummet to well below -20 degrees and so my first thought about responding to these questions is that it is my sincere hope that I have been stranded on a tropical island!

Of course, I would take a copy of the Bible with me and perhaps one of the many books in my bookcase written by the former Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, who has been called the most important Protestant theologian in the world today. His book, *Tokens of Trust*, has been sitting on the shelf for some time waiting to be read so perhaps it would be that one. Anything written by Archbishop Desmond Tutu could be another fine choice.

A Christmas gift that I received this year was the historical thriller written by Andrew Taylor entitled, *The Ashes of London*, set during the time of the Great Fire of London in 1666. I couldn’t put it down! The next book in the series is entitled *The Fire Court* and I would

have to take it along with me.

One of my Christmas gifts to my wife was Linden MacIntyre’s new book, *The Wake: The Deadly Legacy Of A Newfoundland Tsunami*. In 1929 a tidal wave hit the Burin Peninsula on the southeast coast of Newfoundland and the devastation of that event is documented in what is purported to be a masterful work of writing. I served my first parish in Burin, Newfoundland from 1984 to 1987 and the incredible and tragic stories of the day the tidal wave hit this community were still very much alive in those days as part of the local narrative. If I could sneak the book away from Susan, I would take it with me as well.

I have a wide range of musical interests. I love jazz, so I would have to have an album by Oscar Peterson, Sonny Clark, Vince Guaraldi or something like that. I am also a great fan of Spanish and Classical guitar music so perhaps something by Lina Boyd, Armik or Jesse Cook.

I have just returned from a Caribbean Cruise so I would prefer not think about food or beverages for a least another two months!

About the author: The Right Rev. Michael Bird is the Assisting Bishop of Ottawa, Anglican Church of Canada, and serves as the Archdeacon of Pembroke and Incumbent of the Parish of the Valley including Barry’s Bay, Madawaska and Whitney. He is the former Bishop of Niagara centered in Hamilton, Ontario.

Continued from page 4—

SOCIAL LIFE OF THE CANADA JAY

Canada Jay pairs mate for life and stay in their own territory. They nest very early, mid-February, and lay three to four eggs by Easter. At three weeks, the chicks are fledglings; by six weeks, they are fully grown, able to fly and begin storing their own food. The adult pair allows only the dominant juvenile to stay with them, so the other young birds must find their own territory. The dominant juvenile remains with the parents when they nest again the following year, but is not allowed to help feed the new chicks. Once they are fledged, the older juvenile can socialize with the young ones.

FIVE BIG QUESTIONS:

1. Why does the Canada Jay nest so early? Strickland suggests this is to avoid predation by what he terms the “Killer Beast of the North” i.e. red squirrel. It also gives the juveniles more chance of establishing their territory and allows more time to store food before next winter.
2. Why do the adults prevent older juveniles from helping? Strickland thinks this is to minimize traffic to and from the nest, to avoid predators.
3. Why are the siblings ejected? Strickland’s research found that 40 percent of the dominant juveniles survive to end of summer while only 15 to 20 percent of the ejected juveniles survive that long.
4. How does the Canada Jay recover its stored food? As there is little direct proof that they recover the food, Strickland says the bird probably has a very good memory!
5. How does the perishable food stored by the bird last until next fall? He conducted experiments to determine the nutritional value of perishable food stored in different tree species in Algonquin Park and found the highest food value by far was that of food stored in black spruce bark. The range of the black spruce in North America is equivalent to the Canada Jay’s range.

DOWNFALL

A declining population of Canada Jays in Algonquin Park has been identified, probably due to climate change. The MV Gardeners appreciated learning more about this boreal bird, and enjoyed the excellent photographs and detailed data presented by Strickland.

42 kids treated as arena closed due to carbon monoxide leak

THE CURRENT

On February 1, forty-two children were taken to several regional hospitals and health centres feeling extremely ill with what was subsequently confirmed to be Carbon Monoxide (CO) poisoning. Madawaska Valley Township closed the Paul J. Yakabuski Community Centre while the cause was investigated.

Fortunately there were no serious injuries and everyone was released from hospital following emergency treatment. CAO/Clerk Suzanne Klatt reported to Council on February 4 that after an investigation by the Technical Safety Standards Authority (TSSA), municipal staff and relevant technicians, the arena’s ice resurfacer machine “was

deemed to be the main cause of the high levels of carbon monoxide.” This has been repaired and the arena reopened February 5.

The municipality reported the incident to the Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC) which monitored the situation. Klatt said battery-operated CO detectors were installed at the facility on Saturday night and that the municipality planned to also install hard-wired alarms. Fire Chief Corwin Quade explained to Council that because the arena does not include sleeping quarters, CO alarms were not mandated. Municipal staff have implemented annual service procedures each fall for this machine as well as the back-up equipment in Combermere.

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BLR Council unhappy with Integrity Commissioner's explanation for her fees

JAMES DI FIORE
PALMER RAPIDS

At the January meeting of Brudenell Lyndoch & Raglan (BLR) Council, members discussed the response received from Integrity Commissioner Peggy Young-Lovelace of Expertise for Municipalities (E4M) for an explanation of the size of her account following an investigation she carried out last year.

As reported by *The Current* at the time, Young-Lovelace carried out what she described as a "preliminary review" which resulted in an eleven-page report. In that report, she said she did not have jurisdiction to deal with the complaints because they were made against Township employees and not members of Council.

The discrimination complaints investigated by E4M are also, as noted by Young-Lovelace in her report, the subject of ongoing court proceedings. Her review cost BLR taxpayers \$4,460 for E4M's services.

The Township asked for an explanation

for the size of the account which resulted in an email from Young-Lovelace to Clerk Michelle Mantifel on January 20. The contents of that email were not well received by members of Council. In it, Young-Lovelace said, "It has not been our practice to provide specific time detail of activities carried out." Referring to "our consultants" she went on to say, "To redact the information is time-consuming and creates additional cost."

In response Councillor Trevor Lidkie remarked, "I'm a poor reader and don't interpret things properly but when somebody tells you that to explain their bill is going to cost you more money? So if you do a job for somebody it's just \$5,000 for an inspection, don't ask her to give you a detailed report on it or it'll cost you more money." This caused Councillor John Rutledge to comment, "The whole thing's a crock." To which Lidkie answered, "Exactly. And as far as I'm concerned, don't have her back – for anything. That's baloney."

Councillor Andrea Budarick referred

to the fact that the complaint was against employees, and not members of Council, saying, "Because in this particular case where she said in her report that, you know, investigating employees is not part of her jurisdiction but then to go on for several pages about the complaint against employees." Later in the discussion, Councillor Budarick pointed out that, "I mean we're not talking that we're splitting apart 30 minutes. We're splitting apart 36 hours – that's a full week's work for most people. And it's unique that she brings up the issue of transparency and we can't seem to get our bill questions answered."

Council considered whether under the terms of the contract with E4M someone else could be hired as an Integrity Commissioner in their place. The Clerk was asked to produce the contract with E4M at the next meeting and was also asked to find out in the meantime what E4M would charge to provide a more detailed breakdown of its bill.



VALLEY HERITAGE

Mystery Bride

BOB CORRIGAN
BARRY'S BAY

This picture of a young bride and presumably her mother was discovered at the Bark Lake Mall. It was brought to the Barry's Bay Heritage Society Genealogy meeting in the hope that someone could identify the subjects. To date no one has any clues. Any suggestions would be appreciated.

Note: If you are interested in having a picture and story featured in The Madawaska Valley Current, please submit the information to Bob Corrigan c/o The Current, PO Box 1097, Barry's Bay K0J 1B0 (originals will be returned) or email to madvalleycurrent@gmail.com

Madawaska Valley Council considers proposed new Strategic Plan

THE CURRENT MADAWASKA VALLEY

On February 14th Paul Blais of MDB Insight presented a draft Strategic Plan to Madawaska Valley Council. The proposed plan resulted from consultation with Council, Township staff and approximately 50 members of the public on November 21st and incorporated the results of an online and hard copy survey that was available to the public for completion between November 21st and December 11th. Blais told Council that 209 surveys were returned. Based on a total population of 4,123 this represents 5 percent of residents.

The proposal is based on the previous Strategic Plan the same consultant prepared for Madawaska Valley in 2015, *The Path Forward*. Blais had said at the public meeting on November 21st that the update would not be a complex, lengthy document. Rather, he said, “The outcome of all this isn’t going to be a big document like the 2015 report strategy-wise. It’s really actually going to be a two-pager. And this is a very intentional request from the municipality because they want something that the public can visualize quickly and see what the priorities are.”

However, while shorter than *The Path Forward*, the draft plan presented on February 14 was no “two-pager.” It was 17 pages in total, with five pages devoted to Strategic Priorities and Action Plan. The list of Action Items had increased from 30 to 41. Blais reviewed many Action Items and members of Council suggested amendments as he went along. CAO Suzanne Klatt asked for some action items to be expanded, reminding Blais that, “The main goal when we set out the Strategic Plan was to have a comprehensive document that we can review yearly at budget time [and] to hold Council and staff accountable to continually review it to ensure that we are staying on the strategic priority path that we are setting today.”

He reviewed the four main themes



Paul Blais MDB Insight presents draft plan to Council

and said feedback from the public was incorporated in three ways (indicated in quotes below):

- Open government: “communication” is now included
- Progressive and growing economy
- Healthy lifestyles: “sustainability” regarding the long term health of the community at large, both environmental and concerns for “healthcare”
- Efficient and effective Township services

MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS

A new initiative this time is a staff Work Plan showing how MV Township intends to implement the Action Items from the Strategic Plan, to be used as an annual “scorecard.” CAO Klatt shared a proposed Work Plan spreadsheet to use at budget time or whenever suitable funding opportunities arose for projects to implement some of the Action Items.

The effectiveness of the 2015 plan was not discussed because no public report has ever been disclosed showing what Action Items had been achieved, either wholly or in part. At the February 14th meeting Blais said that Council and staff had provided him with such a

progress report when he met them on November 21st but at the public meeting later that day, CAO Klatt and Mayor Love said they did not share the progress report with residents, giving the excuse that they did not wish to influence community members’ feedback.

COMMUNITY INPUT

At the end of the session, Councillor David Shulist asked Blais about the survey data: “There’s general survey results, I find them quite interesting and good input from the public.... I think it would be kind of helpful for us to make any kind of decisions on action, right? We have got to hear from the public. Just my opinion. Are you going to cover this?”

Blais responded, “Well certainly we incorporated the input into the strategic priorities and we modified the priorities from 2015 based on that input. We created many of the action items around the input that was through the survey and the public session. So definitely from a strategic plan point of view I feel good that we’ve heard it and we’ve incorporated it.”

A revised plan is expected to be presented at the Council meeting on March 17.

Picnics, ball games and priests

DANIELLE PAUL
BARRY'S BAY

The audience in a crowded Barry's Bay Railway Station listened to Sean Conway interviewing Joshua Blank about the annual picnics held by St. Hedwig's Parish from 1912 to the mid-1960s.

Many of those present chimed in with recollections and stories about the picnics, the baseball games, and the priests who presided over the social life of the community decades ago. Conway and Blank, both born in the Valley, have in their own ways been instrumental in keeping alive the stories of a bygone era. Blank's article "Pitching, Pies and Piety: Early Twentieth Century St. Hedwig's Parish Picnics" (pub. Canadian Catholic Historical Association) chronicled the launch of the picnic by a young Father Peter B. Biernacki in 1912 to help build his St. Hedwig's Roman Catholic Church in 1914.

Listeners heard how the picnic became famous to the extent that on one occasion, nine railway cars were filled with picnickers coming to Barry's Bay for a day out to enjoy the baseball and the picnic.

The formidable Monsignor Biernacki, a great ball player and organizer of parish events, inspired vivid memories among members of the audience. From recollections of his sports prowess



Joshua Blank (l) interviewed by Sean Conway.

to examples of his leadership qualities to tales of how he inspired terror in his confessional box, the stories came tumbling out.

Conway and Blank ensured that the memories were interspersed with explanations of social, political and legislative matters of the time. As always when talking about the Valley, the problems relating to alcohol, temperance and liquor licensing laws entered the picture. Father Biernacki's strategies for reducing alcohol consumption at the picnic were debated. A few admissions about

gambling were also revealed, as was an "incendiary" story from Don Kosnaski!

All told, this episode of The Local lived up to its billing and is a fine addition to the series about the Valley's heritage buildings and the people associated with them. If you missed it or want to relive the experience Click [HERE](#) to listen to The Local: St. Hedwig's Picnics (1912–1960s)

Author's Note: I'm still looking for the recipe my grandfather, Thomas Bonnah, used for his sand-baked beans at that first St. Hedwig's Picnic in 1912.

College presents The Song of Bernadette drama

The Don Bosco Drama Club from Our Lady Seat of Wisdom College presented its annual stage production at Madawaska Valley District High School in Barry's Bay. Audiences at three performances enjoyed The Song of Bernadette, a play telling the story of St. Bernadette Soubirous and Our Lady of Lourdes.

Leah Myers (l) as Bernadette's sister Marie, Gabi Jezierska as Bernadette Soubirous, Olivia Bagshaw as school friend Jeanne Abadie



Fabric of Life by Patricia Thurston at Pembroke gallery



Patricia Thurston (left) with Cameron Montgomery pose in front of Thurston's work.

During February, Fabric of Life, an exhibition of work by Killaloe artist Patricia Thurston, delighted art lovers at Studio Dreamshare in Pembroke.

The exhibition was hatched when the textile artist met Dreamshare owner Cameron Montgomery last summer. Montgomery is not only a gallerist but also a video artist, filmmaker, teacher and musician. The two women were among the local artists featured in Pop Up Art Renfrew County, the Extraordinary exhibit that travelled to six different venues in the region.

Thurston said her work is inspired by living in the Valley. As she said at the opening, it "is the perfect place for me to work on my Nature themed subject matter for wild places still exist here in abundance.... The people too are stoic and strong, and carry in their hearts a deep love of this amazing land. I feel privileged to be able to reflect back to them my own uniquely personal view of this wonderful place."

At the opening, the artist talked about her practice and explained that after attending art college in Toronto she embarked on an intensive study of traditional European tapestry technique. Once she had relocated to the Valley, Thurston said she then transitioned to another traditional technique, patchwork. She said, "I combined the basics of patchwork with my own version of appliqué and hand sewing to create one-of-a-kind works.... The use of patchwork and applique is an exciting and evolving field for creative work these days."

While Thurston follows and adapts tradition in terms of her technique, artistic tradition is also woven into her family life. Her mother was the late Helene Thurston, a well-known artist in Barry's Bay. And Patricia Thurston has passed on her needlework skills to the next generation. Her daughter, Eden, has provided some quilts that help tell the story of Fabric of Life on the walls at Studio Dreamshare.

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Truly experience Cuba on your next holiday

ISH THEILHEIMER
CUBA

More than a million Canadians go to Cuba every year, mostly for “playa y sol,” beach and sun, which they soak up at all-inclusive resorts. These places are fun, economical, and convenient, but they offer barely a glimpse of the richness of the real Cuba, real Cubans, and real Cuban life.

It's not hard, though, to have a more authentic Cuban experience and also get the satisfaction of helping a lot of people by staying in *casa particulares* (also known as *hostales*). These are bed-and-breakfast-type places run by families. They are strictly regulated to conform with the hospitality standards and expectations of the savvy tourist. Each room has a private bath and air conditioning, and the hosts will serve breakfast for about 5 CUCs, and, in many cases, supper if you ask for it, for 10-15 CUCs. (CUCs are worth one US dollar.)

Casa particulares are a real bargain, costing 25-30 CUC nightly. You can find them online. There's a useful app called Cuba Junky that lists and rates many of them. Most do booking by email. Some *casa* owners speak English fluently. Many don't. It's good to learn some basic Spanish from a phrasebook if you plan to stay in *casas*.

There are lots of *casas* in the cities we visit in central Cuba. We fly from Ottawa to Santa Clara and then visit Cienfuegos, Trinidad, Sancti Spiritus, Remedios and other places. The quality of the *casas* varies. After four years of visiting *casas*, we've culled the ones that disappointed and cultivated outstanding, delightful places to stay and developed warm relationships with their owners.

My wife and I are cycle tourists, as are several of our friends. The *casas* have been welcoming and provide safe places for our bikes. Cycling in Cuba is a great adventure. Many roads are unforgotten for touring. You don't often get to see an oxcart or a real cowboy when you're out for a ride in Canada.

DONATING MEDICAL SUPPLIES WITH NOT JUST TOURISTS

A highlight on our trips was discover-



Sharing surplus medical supplies with a director at the Ernesto Che Guevara CardioCentro in Santa Clara, Cuba

ing the satisfaction of bringing surplus medical supplies to donate to local hospitals and health care providers.

A voluntary group called Not Just Tourists has chapters across Canada. They'll set you up with suitcases of surplus medical supplies. We have taken suitcases to several hospitals, met their directors, taken tours, and been thanked with the deepest gratitude. Cuba has good doctors. But due to their low incomes and the U.S. economic embargo imposed on the country, Cubans are often unable to get treatment for health problems that Canadians consider routine.

Your local doctors and hospitals also can find surplus medicines and medical devices you can take to Cuba. If you do this once, we expect you'll do it again.

The airlines are helpful when you plan a Cuban trip. On our recent trip, Air Transat waived baggage fees on all the donated medical supplies and oth-

er donations we brought, including a bicycle. Contact the airline in advance to arrange this.

There is so much to enjoy once you're seeing the real Cuba from the street level. Most towns have a *Casa de la Trova*, which features traditional music, or a *Casa de Cultura*, featuring art, music, literature and other cultural activities. Art and music and stimulating experiences are everywhere if you avoid the all-inclusive resorts and big hotels. But bring everything you expect to need. It's hard to find common tourist accessories such as sun screen, headache remedies, toothpaste, bug spray, batteries etc.

And think of bringing small quantities of travel products that you can give to the Cubans you meet and the servers you want to tip. Those gifts and a few Spanish phrases will win you a really warm *bienvenido* from the Cubans you meet. *Abridged for print edition.*

Rainbow Valley Community Health Centre now open five days a week



RVCHC team members (above) include: (back row) Shirley Hill RN, Pat Biernaskie Admin/clerical, Keri MacFarlane MSW, Julie Howard Admin/clerical (front row) Heidi Krebsz NP, Jessica Valentine NP and Erica Atfield RN. Missing from photo are Dr. Denise Coulas, Derek Frew NP and Noemie Gatien Admin/clerical. PHOTO: SUBMITTED

SUBMITTED KILLALOE

Rainbow Valley Community Health Centre (RVCHC) in Killaloe is now able to provide primary health care services five days a week, thanks to a \$250,000 injection of provincial funding.

With this new funding from the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, RVCHC will increase its operations from three to five days a week and begin to take on additional patients and clients in need of primary care. RVCHC works under the umbrella of

Valley Manor to introduce better access to health records

DANIELLE PAUL
MADAWASKA VALLEY

Valley Manor Long Term Care facility in Barry's Bay has begun to work with a new electronic clinical system which will provide improved access for staff and residents to their healthcare records. Clinical Viewer staff will train eight "Superusers" who will in turn train the rest of the team. Valley Manor CEO Trisha Sammon expects to go live with the system in the fall.

St. Francis Memorial Hospital (SFMH) in Barry's Bay, providing a wide range of local health services in partnership with other community organizations. Its catchment area includes the townships of Killaloe, Hagarty & Richards, North Algona / Wilberforce, Madawaska Valley, and Brudenell, Lyndoch & Raglan, in the western region of South Renfrew County.

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March Break PROGRAMS



Madawaska Valley
PUBLIC LIBRARY

LEGO CLUB

Tuesday March 17
2 pm to 4 pm

FORTS AND FAIRIES

Tuesday March 17
6 pm to 7 pm

For children 3 to 8 years. Have fun reading stories in our forts, lit with fairy lights. Wear your jammies and bring your favourite stuffed animal.

HARRY POTTER TRIVIA NIGHT

Thursday March 19
2 pm to 4 pm
at PJYCC Arena Lounge

Ages 8+. Put together a family team. Maximum of 6 per team. To register your team, contact the library.

POP UP LIBRARY

Friday March 20
11 am to 12:30 pm
at PJYCC Arena Lounge
Story books and crafts for children, from senior K to grade 2.

LIBRARY BOOK CLUB

March 4 • 10 am
Book: *Irma Voth* by Miriam Toews. Copies available at the library.

19474 Opeongo Line, Barry's Bay • mvpl.programs@gmail.com • 613-756-2000

February brings family fun to the Valley

The weekend got off to a brisk start thanks to Family Fun Activities offered by Madawaska Valley Recreation Department. Organizer Stephanie Plebon told *The Current* they tried to revive outdoor events that used to happen at the annual Timberfest, such as a bonfire for the kids, tug-of-war, snowball fights.

Ann Maika-Chartrand, with co-hosts Kristen Graves Kuiack and Clinton

Roche, revived the popular Girls' Night Out event at the Paul J. Yakabuski Community Centre on February 15. After a few years' "rest" while she changed careers and had a baby, Maika-Chartrand said many people had requested it. She told *The Current*, "It's an opportunity for local entrepreneurs and small businesses to showcase their crafts. Vendor events are huge for small businesses in

the marketplace. It's something that the public can get involved in as well." Proceeds of the event benefited St. Francis Valley Healthcare Foundation.

Madawaska Valley Public Library's new LEGO Club attracted ten children on February 15. The group meets once a month and welcomes LEGO lovers at any experience level. Their creations are on display in the Library.



Clockwise from above: The Baklinski family toast marshmallows while Dad (MV firefighter) Matthew Baklinski (l) looks on with Fire Chief Corwin Quade and firefighter D'Arcy Sheehan. Ann Maika-Chartrand (l) and Kristen Graves Kuiack at Girls' Night Out. LEGO boatbuilder Finn Walsh.

Most number of skiers yet at Opeongo Hills Classic Loppet

This year's Opeongo Hills Classic Loppet saw the biggest field of competitors yet in its five year history with 82 skiers racing on February 2.

Two fun new prizes attracted attention: Biggest Team (won by 14 people from Deep River) and Best Costume (won by the Outdoor Leadership Group from Boundless School dress as Super Mario Carts).

Winning in various classes were skiers from Port Perry, Perth, Deep River, Quebec, Eganville, North Bay, Ottawa and Barry's Bay. Full results at opeongonordic.com.



Best Costume from left: Trevor Mills, Chance Bartlett, Aleksander Hejnowicz, Allyson Saunders, Amelia McNiven, Enock Buliman, Josiah Kennedy, Amelia Marchand.