

## Québec ami des Aînés program: A \$15 Million investment for senior community initiatives



The QADA program is significantly enhancing the well-being and social participation of seniors in the Outaouais region through various projects, including revitalizing senior citizen groups, fostering intergenerational connections, and reducing isolation. (TF)

PHOTO COURTESY OF QUÉBEC AMI DES AÎNÉS



Tashi **Farmilo**

The Québec ami des Aînés (QADA) program is making a significant impact on the lives of seniors by addressing a wide range of needs through national, local, and regional projects. With a total funding of \$5.4 million, the 16 national projects are tackling crucial issues such as social isolation, access to information, and encouraging the involvement of seniors in society. These efforts are particularly important in the face of challenges like the social isolation intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the program is supporting 73 local and regional projects with a total of \$9.7 million. These initiatives aim to strengthen the community support for seniors, enabling them to participate in social and recreational activities. This not only improves their mental health and well-being but also fosters intergenerational connections, creating more inclusive and resilient communities.

In the Outaouais region, the QADA program is making a notable difference. Projects such as the revitalization of senior citizen groups in Les Collines by the Services for Elders of the Hills, and the "Intergenerational sparks!" project by the Outaouais Seniors and Retirees Consultation Table, are just a few examples of how the program is enhancing the social participation and well-being of seniors in this area. Other initiatives like the "Coffee chat"

by the Papineau Regional Committee for the Third Age and the collective kitchen by the Hare Food Bank are also contributing to the reduction of senior isolation and the promotion of active aging in the Outaouais region.

This ongoing initiative is part of Quebec's broader efforts to address the challenges of an aging population, as outlined in the 2018-2023 action plan "A Quebec for all ages" and the government policy "Aging and living together, at home, in your community, in Quebec." The aim is to improve the quality of life for seniors and encourage their active participation in society.

The \$15.1 million investment in the QADA program for 2023-2024 reflects the Quebec government's commitment to the well-being and inclusion of seniors. This initiative not only meets the immediate needs of the elderly but also lays the groundwork for a more equitable society for future generations.

Minister Sonia Bélanger expressed her enthusiasm for the program, saying, "It is with great pleasure that I announce, as part of the Québec ami des Aînés program, more than \$15 million dedicated to various projects promoting the social inclusion of seniors and active aging. I thank all the organizations that have submitted innovative and impactful projects for their community."

## 800 Quebec politicians stepped down in the last two years, France Belisle becomes 801st as she steps down from mayor's seat of Gatineau



Tashi **Farmilo**

In a move that has sent ripples through the political landscape of Gatineau, Mayor France Bélisle announced her immediate resignation during a press conference held at 11 a.m. on February 22, 2024. Citing a need for personal reflection and concerns about the current political climate, Bélisle declared that she would not seek a second term, nor would she form a political party or team.

"I am fully aware that this news is a shock and will create a period of turbulence," Bélisle said, addressing the gathered media and public. "I assure you that our municipal teams are well in place, and citizens need not worry about this departure. The city's activities will continue as usual."

Bélisle's resignation brings to an end her tenure as the mayor of Gatineau, with Versant Coun. Daniel Champagne stepping in as the acting mayor, or "maire suppléant." The city has announced on its X (formerly Twitter) account that it is working toward organizing a byelection to fill the mayoral vacancy and will provide more details in the coming weeks.

Reflecting on her decision, Bélisle shared her concerns about the challenges faced by elected officials, including disillusionment, intimidation, and the intense pressure of the role. "I am resigning, among other reasons, to preserve my health for the future because political life takes its toll," she explained.

Bélisle also highlighted the need for a more respectful and professional political environment. "I have witnessed comments and behaviors that concern me," she said.

*Continued on page 3*



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**See page 3**



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## New members appointed to the Quebec Council on the Status of Women



Louise Cordeau, a seasoned lawyer and manager, has been leading the Council on the Status of Women since February 2017. (TF) PHOTO COURTESY



Tashi **Farmilo**

On February 14, the Council of Ministers announced the appointment of four new members to the Council on the Status of Women for a four-year term. The newly appointed members are Eva Falk Pedersen, Valérie Mvogo Balla, Mélanie Kéroack, and Françoise Ramel. Additionally, the mandates of existing members Andréan Gagné and Jessica Olivier-Nault have been renewed for another four years.

The Council on the Status of Women is a key advisory body in Quebec, consisting of ten members recommended by various sectors of society. Alongside the president, these members discuss the council's orientations, approve its opinions, and endorse recommendations transmitted to the government.

The council's current composition includes president Louise Cordeau, vice-president Rakia Laroui, and members Hélène Bourdages, Lise Courteau, and Geneviève Paquette, who remain in office. Each member brings a wealth of experience and expertise from different sectors, contributing to the council's mission of advancing the status of women in Quebec.

President Louise Cordeau, an expe-

rienced lawyer and manager, has been at the helm of the council since February 2017. With a distinguished career in law, media, and public service, Cordeau has been recognized for her professional achievements and social commitment, including being named a knight of the National Order of Quebec in 2019.

The council's voting members represent various sectors, including women's associations, union organizations, academia, and the socio-economic environment. Their diverse backgrounds ensure a comprehensive approach to addressing issues related to the status of women in Quebec.

In addition to the ten voting members, ex officio members representing different government departments and agencies participate in council meetings, although they do not have voting rights. These members include Marie-Claude Brunet from the Ministry of Health and Social Services, Pascale Bureau from the Ministry of Culture and Communications, Catherine Ferembach from the Secretariat for the Status of Women, Sophie Joncas from the Ministry of Justice, Karine Lemay from the Treasury Board, Audrey Normand-Laniel from the Ministry of Education, and Janika Tardif from the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Solidarity.

## Chelsea residents invited to shape future of recreation in upcoming focus group



Tashi **Farmilo**

The Municipality of Chelsea is calling on residents to participate in a crucial focus group aimed at shaping the future of recreation, sports, culture, and community life in the area. This initiative is part of the Recreation Department's mandate to review and understand the needs and preferences of Chelsea's residents.

The focus group is scheduled for Thursday, March 7, at 6:30 p.m., and will be held at Fire Hall 1, located at 7 Chemin de l'Hôtel de Ville. The Municipality seeks to include 10 to 12 participants from each district, with the invitation extended to everyone aged 13 and over.

This diverse age range is intended to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the community's aspirations and requirements.

Residents with ideas and opinions about recreational activities, cultural events, sports, outdoor pursuits, and community life are encouraged to come forward and share their insights. The feedback gathered from this focus group will play a pivotal role in guiding the future development of recreational facilities and programs in Chelsea.

Given the limited number of places available, interested participants are urged to register soon to secure their spot in this important discussion. Registration can be completed online at <https://forms.office.com/r/8JaQNKi6kS>.

## 800 Quebec politicians stepped down in the last two years, France Belisle becomes 801st as she steps down from mayor's seat of Gatineau

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"Personal attacks that go beyond criticism, elected officials not playing their role properly, death threats from some members of the public, and decisions taken for partisan purposes that no longer serve the interests of Gatineau's citizens."

As Bélisle bids farewell to her role as mayor, she expressed gratitude to her municipal teams and the citizens of Gatineau for their support. "I have always done my best," she stated. "Rest assured that I will always be a proud ambassador for our city and region, and an eternal advocate for what Gatineau deserves."

The next round of municipal elections in Quebec is scheduled for No-



**In a decision that has created shockwaves in Gatineau's political scene, Mayor France Bélisle has announced her immediate resignation. (TF)**

PHOTO: TASHI FARMILO

vember 2025, leaving Gatineau with the task of navigating this transitional period until a new mayor is elected.

## Pontiac Council - Removing dangerous buildings



MO **Laidlaw**

The monthly council meeting was held on February 13 at the Luskville community centre at 7:30 pm. Eight residents were present. Councillors Amyotte and Allen were absent.

Jane Gardner asked about work on ch Braun, supported by two other residents. Mayor Larose explained that work to finish the road foundation will be done in the spring at the municipality's expense. Then the cost to pave (in 2025) will be determined and residents polled. If at least 50% +1 residents request paving they will be charged for half the cost over 25 years, on their tax bills. If a majority refuse, that is their right and it will not be paved.

### ADMINISTRATION

Bylaw 02-24 on agreements on sharing costs between a resident and the municipality for infrastructure work was adopted (see municipal website for text of bylaw).

The computer server needs to be replaced

to improve performance. Microgram's offer was accepted for \$26,500 plus tax.

The offer from Société d'Évaluation Immobilière de l'Outaouais was renewed for up to a further \$3,500 of expenses.

An offer from MC Perrault for legal advice was accepted for a bank of 40 hours.

The existing municipal electoral divisions will be maintained for a further four years.

Draft bylaw 08-24 to update the fee schedule for supplying goods and services was tabled.

### PUBLIC WORKS

A used snowscraper will be bought from Excavation CMS for \$3,800 plus tax for snow removal in Quyon village.

### PLANNING

Bylaw 03-24 on maintenance of buildings was adopted to control dilapidated buildings that cause prejudice to neighbouring properties (see municipal website for text of bylaw).

Draft bylaws 05-24, 06-24 and 07-24 on minor variances, public nuisances and the planning committee (CCU) were tabled.

DWB Consultants will carry out an audit of buildings at 2311 ch Westbrook and 55 ch Frazer that need to be demolished according to bylaws, due to dangerous conditions, for \$2,860 plus tax per building. If the owners don't collaborate, DHC Avocats are mandated to start legal proceedings. The MRC des Collines fire safety officer is man-

dated to assess their safety. A chartered appraiser will be mandated to appraise the residual value of the buildings for \$875 per building.

Drone Logik's offer to obtain Lidar data from the sand pit and high definition photos of the ecocentre area and the village of Quyon was accepted, for two surveys per year for two years.

### AVIS DE CESSATION DES ACTIVITÉS PROFESSIONNELLES DE M. ALPHA DUGUAY

Prenez avis qu'à compter du 7 février 2024, l'Ordre des travailleurs sociaux et des thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec a repris les dossiers des clients de M. Alpha Duguay en raison de la cessation de ses activités professionnelles.

En vertu du *Règlement sur la cessation d'exercice d'un membre de l'Ordre professionnel des travailleurs sociaux et des thérapeutes conjugaux et familiaux du Québec*, les clients ont jusqu'au 7 février 2029 pour reprendre les éléments de leur dossier ou en demander le transfert à un autre travailleur social. Après cette date, les dossiers seront détruits.

Tout client concerné peut formuler une demande à l'adresse suivante :

OTSTCFQ

Direction des affaires juridiques et du secrétariat

255, boul. Crémazie Est, bureau 800

Montréal (Québec) H2M 1L5

Le directeur des Affaires juridiques et secrétaire de l'Ordre

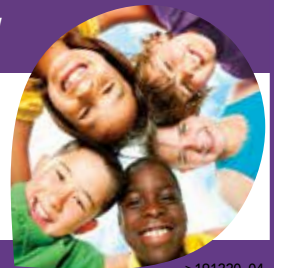


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## Oil-stupid?



FRED Ryan

We hear many climate-change arguments for “getting off oil”. We also see as many arguments the other way: “oil is reliable ... steady ... has a distribution network in place”.

Or even that an oil-cousin, LNG, gas is somehow non-polluting and the solution to, what, to the profit statements of petro-investors like our banks? Pro-oil’s big claim is that it supports jobs in Canada; but anti-oil’s unbeatable argument is that oil is destroying our climate, and hence, destroying us. We won’t live through the destruction we clearly see heading our way, given our present life-styles. And so far “technology” -- carbon capture, hydrogen conversion, etc -- has not given us solutions, they remain ideas, absolutely unproven within current budgets.

And today’s news presents one more reason to back off oil, a very big reason. In late January, the Baltic states,

along Russia’s northwest border, unveiled a massive Russian military build-up. About one-third of Russia’s national budget is now going to modernize and expand their already-massive military.

This is not just bad news for the Ukraine -- that war’ll be over by the time we actually see Russia flex its expanded muscle. But Russia has other targets: Canada. “Our” big piece of the Arctic. Russia already claims substantial areas there, especially its sea-floor, rich with oil and minerals, standing nose-to-nose with Canada.

Yes, we have NORAD, our northern military alliance with the USA. That’ll provide some breathing room, but when we consider how easily the US has dropped its supposed allies -- think of the Kurds who sacrificed thousands to repel Saddam Hussein. When they became uncomfortable for the Yanks, when their alliance was no longer facing a tin-pot dictator, but oil-rich Iran, backed by Russia and China, the Kurds were dropped at the curb.

At our top-of-the-world front door (for the Russians) our few troops on their brand-new skidoos aren’t going

to cut it. We’re still mulling over new fighter jets -- the Yanks have a sale on a model which doesn’t operate well in Arctic conditions. The (Unprogressive) Conservatives think they’re fine.

So let me put it to you, you with your hand on the self-serve gas pump, you still committed to oil in your automobile and heating, especially, but also you who still flies across the continent, or cruises up the Alaskan coast, you, madam/sir, this oil you are buying enriches -- Russia. Russia’s military buildup begins at our gas pumps.

Much of our oil does enrich the corporations operating in Alberta, but in terms of the world market in oil, it is Russia which is counting our dollars. And Iran, Saudi Arabia, the ‘stans -- dictatorships everywhere. That is what oil does, where its profits flow.

Climate change is a massive challenge. But Russia’s military (now on our northern border), plus the world’s most corrupt regimes everywhere, are massive, too. You and I have got to stop being so stupid. Oil-stupid.

## LETTERS

to the **Editor** *Opinions expressed are not necessarily shared by the paper*

### AI’s theft of content is unregulated

Are AI-powered chatbots covered under fair use laws, or are they stealing copyrighted content at the expense of the newsrooms that paid to produce it? We need much more and better legislation that would help news organizations grapple with quick-moving changes in the tech world.

**Annon. publisher**  
**Ottawa**

### Really, more big highways?

Steven Guilbeault, the federal climate change minister, said recently the federal government is moving away from funding huge new road developments -- which aroused a thunderstorm of media accusations. Remind me who owns big media in Canada, please?

From a climate point of view, this shift in planing is needed and crucial. More roads will further snarl traffic and increase carbon dioxide emissions from gas-burning cars -- hello! What is needed is a shift to more mass public (electric) transit

and organizing cities so people can walk or cycle to where they need to be for their work or shopping or whatever. No question public transit is the best way to move citizens around, reduce emissions and improve public health -- not building more Doug Ford super-highways and parking lots!

What will it take for us to wake up -- forest fires all year long? Drought everywhere? Climate refugees banging at our doors?

**Nigel Acevedo**  
**Aylmer**

### Make our voices heard!

It’s no secret that many of you, like myself, and many of our fellow Quebecers who have yet to make their voices heard, are increasingly unhappy with the way François Legault is running this province.

Many of his government’s policies -- some with a measure or even full support of the opposition -- are detrimental to Quebec: to the economy; to the social cohesion we’ve forged through various trials and tribulations over generations; to our already fragile health care system; to immigration and more.

It’s time to come up out of the trenches, to do more than gripe about it, to rise above pithy comments on social media. We need to show up in numbers, show our faces and be heard. We need to demonstrate that we are unhappy and, more importantly, we have ideas.

This government’s, and years of successive governments’, legislative agendas and core ambitions have had immediate consequences on our economy, our children’s future and our international standing.

Look at the CAQ’s recent tuition hike stubbornly imposed on out-of-province students which led to

an immediate enrollment drop, some 30 percent, at McGill and Concordia universities. And this, despite the government’s own advisory committee’s opposition, and the earnest pleas and good-faith cautions from most of civil society. True to form, the Legault administration, comfortable with its majority, went full steam ahead.

But here’s the kicker: the government, in its drive to leverage out-of-province tuition cash for its underfunded French network, could have easily achieved the same results with a more modest \$1,000 increase, instead of the \$3,000 “compromise,” which has now had the concrete effect of denying many Canadian youth the opportunity to pursue their studies and perhaps their futures here in Quebec.

Whether an underhanded attempt to limit the growth of the anglophone population in our metropolis, or an earnest but desperate over-reach for funding, this was a complete and utter failure by an elected government, showing little evidence of acting in good faith.

**Marc Perez,**  
**Coalition of independent thinkers**  
**info@parlonsdu.quebec, Montréal**

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Initiative de journalisme local

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## The Customer is always right?



On October 28, 2021, a spanking new grocery store held its inaugural near where I live. It was such an important event that the mayor of our fine city was there to cut the ribbon. Significantly, every customer who entered the premises of that hallowed building that day was accorded VIP status. Always searching for bargains, I was among the first to enter.

I write this, a few years later, as I speculate that you too have had a similar experience. In this day of escalating food prices, we consumers have to stand together. Some of you, more computer savvy than I, may have one of those smartphone apps where you can take advantage of the best prices by scanning online flyers. Every Thursday, I peruse these flyers that appear at the door in the daily paper. Appropriately, I prepare a list of the sale prices while planning shopping expeditions should I be driving by a particular store. Here is what occurred on one of those excursions.

On February 3, I arrived at that spanking new store where I was once welcomed as a VIP. I entered to select a floral arrangement to bring to family members celebrating their wedding anniversary. It's a lovely florist corner that this day had colourful displays, including balloons for Valentine's Day. A sign indicated that the person in charge was unavailable at the moment, but that any cashier would be happy to assist.

There were other items on my list which I decided to add to the cart, before returning to the floral section that was still unoccupied. Noting that all the cashiers were busy, I looked about for anyone who could assist me. There was no one. After some time exploring the beautiful arrangements, I selected one in a lovely sculpted vase, placed it on the counter, selected and signed a small card to go with it and waited, waited and waited. When I was about to leave, three ladies approached, one of whom asked if she could help. Indeed, that employee wrapped the gift, complete with curly ribbon, as I signed the accompanying card.

At that same store the following week, Harvest Spinach was listed for \$2.99. That's a real bargain. However, there was none on display. I searched for assistance only to be told that the order would be arriving within the next couple of hours. Fair enough, I'd be passing by in the next few days.

Two days later, the sale price, as well as the

Harvest Spinach, was nowhere in sight. This I mentioned at Customer Service. The lady made a phone call, answered two other calls, then the one that answered my request.

"Just go to the door at the back of the produce department and someone will be there to help you," she said.

After waiting several minutes, I noticed a fellow approaching. He mentioned that the spinach was now on display. There were six packages only. What these stores won't do to avoid making available a loss leader. Heck, if they can coax you into the premises to purchase other items, why not make it a little inconvenient by delaying the display of the loss leader?

Just another consumer with no VIP status, I had to relieve my frustration, so I sat down and wrote this verse:

In reading the tea leaves this morning  
I saw an island and three ships at sea  
Weekly flyers, I laid on the table  
Boiled water for one more cup of tea.

To peruse flyers I am accustomed  
To seek best deals, I'm always inclined  
Those ships must have been those of pirates  
For there weren't many bargains to find.

Three probiotic yogurt for ten dollars  
Translates to one at three thirty-three  
If months ago it was two for five dollars  
Then the third one offered should be free.

Pennies were retired to heaven  
Many a full moon ago  
Yet those flyers still count the pennies  
Eight and nine round upwards we know.

For a half-century the metric system  
Was adopted as our measurement scale  
Yet kilograms dwarfed pounds and ounces  
Guess a minnow must look like a whale.

Carbon taxes do raise grocery prices  
As does that war in Ukraine  
Yet big box stores roll in high prices  
While inflation our bank accounts drain.

Here's wishing you a pleasant shopping experience. Should you become agitated, just grin and bear it...you're on camera after all.

## Our Captives in China



Reuel S Amdur

**TOUJOURS AMDUR**

*A view from  
West Quebec*

There are matters left over from the exchange of Meng Wanzhou in 2021 for Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor. That is beside the claim by Spavor that he was entrapped by Kovrig, a matter with which we will not be dealing here.

Our concern here is what that settlement left out and what is left to do. Besides the two Michaels, there are at least five other Canadians whose fates are in the balance. As we shall see, there may be measures that could have been and still may be taken to resolve their situations.

Robert Schellenberg was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 2018 for attempting to smuggle illicit drugs to Australia. Following Meng's arrest in Canada in 2018 on an American extradition request, he was retried and sentenced to death. Was 15 years lenient? Let me cite the case of one of my clients. I was a social worker whose client was caught peddling fentanyl. The judge asked the amica curiae for her advice as to a sentence. After reviewing precedents, she recommended six to ten. The judge gave him 12 years. 15 years was not light.

Then two other Canadians, Xu Weihong and Fan Wei, were convicted of drug offences and also sentenced to death. Another Canadian, Sun Qian, was convicted in 2020 for her activities in Falun Gong and given an eight year sentence.

Finally, we come to the case of Huseyin Celil, a Chinese-born Canadian Uyghur human rights defender. He and his family were visiting his in-laws in Uzbekistan when China requested and received his extradition. He has been in Chinese captivity for 17 years.

The first question is about the trade of Meng for the two Michaels. Was that the best deal Canada could have made? Meng is the chief financial officer of Huawei, a major Chinese international technology corporation. She and her father are close to the country's political elite. The exchange of Meng for the two Michaels did not even result in a return to the status quo ante. That is

to say, the least one might expect in exchange for Meng would include no death penalty and, arguably, release of Sun. Be that as it may, after this poor deal we are left with the problem of how to resolve the situation of the five remaining Canadians.

China is going to release Canadians or lift the death sentences only if there is a quid pro quo. Canada is not facing that reality. The failure to do so antedates this prime minister. When Stephen Harper was in charge, Lai Changxing was extradited to China, which wanted him for his role in a major smuggling ring. And Zeng Hanin was returned to China because of business fraud. There was no quid pro quo. The lacking quo? Celil.

Bringing matters up to more recent times, let us consider other possibilities, either missed or still open. Consider the case of Qing Quentin Huang. He was arrested on a charge of offering to share engineering secrets with China. After eight years, the case was tossed in 2021. The evidence was obtained by a wiretap on the Chinese embassy, and the case fell apart because his lawyer demanded disclosure around the wiretap, information that the government would not reveal. During those eight years, could the government not have tried to do a deal for an exchange?

Currently, there are multiple charges against Yueshang Wang, accused of economic espionage while he was working at Hydro-Québec. Is this not a possible trade?

Finally, there is the case of Cameron Ortiz. A civilian high up in the RCMP, he was recently convicted of being a mole for organized crime. While the actual charges in court did not include acting for China, it has been alleged that that was also the case. Would China be interested in him? Might he prefer China to a federal penitentiary? It is said that he speaks Mandarin. Might a deal be made?

Is the government doing all that it should to help these five Canadians?



# Local newspapers produce game-changing coverage

“We have boots on the ground, and often our stories get picked up by larger media.”

Nikki Mantell, publisher,  
Low Down to Hull  
and Back News

**COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS** do a lot with a little. The result is game-changing coverage that not only informs the immediate regions they serve, but reflects the issues that contribute to the public conversations on a provincial and national scale.

While large media outlets were debating the possible ramifications of Bill 21, Quebec's so-called secularism law that prohibits civil servants and other public-sector workers from wearing religious clothing or jewelry, the editor of *The Low Down to Hull and Back News* was interviewing Grade 3 teacher, Fatemeh Anvari, in the little town of Chelsea, Que., in the Outaouais region. She had just been fired for wearing a hijab.

“That’s one of the stories that wouldn’t get picked up if we wouldn’t do them,” said *The Low Down*’s publisher Nikki Mantell.

The story, broken by a newsroom with a staff of three, was picked up by the *Ottawa Citizen*, *The Globe and Mail*, the *National Post* and international outlets, including *Newsweek* and *The Guardian*.

It put a human face on Quebec’s often-virulent secularism debate. And, as Mantell put it, “changed the discourse.”

Mantell continued: “Before *The Low Down* published Ms. Fatemeh’s story, support for Bill 21 was hovering around 64 per cent. Following the story, which every major news outlet in Canada picked up, support for the bill dropped to 55 per cent.”

In another corner of the province, in the Vaudreuil-Soulanges region west of Montreal, when Bill 96 threatened to strip small bilingual towns of their dual-language status, the mayor of one of those tiny communities appeared set to let the deadline for the municipal council to affirm its will to keep the status expire. The local English-language paper in the region, *The 1019 Report*, questioned the mayor. On repeated occasions that spanned months, the mayor refused to commit whether council would vote on the needed resolution.

In response to the coverage, residents in the tiny town of 120 grew concerned. Two reporters with *The 1019 Report* started working the phones and going door to door. By the time they were done, the paper reported on the results of an exhaustive survey: a clear majority of residents of the island community of Île Cadieux wanted the town to keep its official bilingual status.

“Most of the residents credit the paper” when the resolution was finally renewed, said *The 1019 Report*’s editor Brenda O’Farrell, adding that large media outlets would never have bothered to do the legwork.

“We spread ourselves thin. We work really hard. And we’re good at stretching a buck,” said Mantell. “We put our hearts and souls into this.”

This is the type of journalism the Local Journalism Initiative helps produce. The federal funding program provides resources to hire journalists who produce civic content – coverage of health, education, rights, public policy and other essential issues.

It also ensures that members of Quebec’s English-speaking community continue to be informed. As Lily Ryan, publisher of *The Aylmer Bulletin* and the *West Quebec Post*, points out, as the province’s language of business and politics is French, English-language papers offer the minority community the opportunity to stay in touch with what is going on in their communities and government decisions.



BY THE  
**NUMBERS**

**10,815**

Number of LJI articles on civic issues produced at QCNA publications between April 2019 and February 2024. SOURCE: QCNA

**4**

Number of community newspapers launched in Quebec serving the English-speaking community since 2020. SOURCE: QCNA

**518**

Number of local news operations that closed between 2008 and Feb. 1, 2024. SOURCE: LOCAL NEWS RESEARCH PROJECT

**547**

The number of job cuts announced by Quebec television network TVA in November 2023. SOURCE: TVA

**800**

The number of job cuts announced by CBC in December 2023. SOURCE: CBC

**1269**

Number of media jobs eliminated in Canada during first year of the COVID pandemic. SOURCE: LOCAL NEWS RESEARCH PROJECT

**4800**

The number of job cuts announced by Bell Media in February 2024. SOURCE: BELL MEDIA





# Community newspapers emerging as last journalistic soldiers standing

**LAST MONTH**, Bell Media announced its largest workforce restructuring in 30 years, laying off 4,800 workers.

In December, CBC/Radio-Canada announced plans to cut 800 jobs.

One month earlier, Quebec television network TVA cut 547 jobs.

Earlier in 2023, Postmedia, one of the largest media companies in Canada with a daily newspaper in almost every major city in the country, announced it was cutting 10 per cent of its staff, just the latest in a long string of downsizing moves that has spanned more than a decade. The cuts planned for Quebec went much deeper.

Almost every month, evidence of the continuing shift in the media landscape can be seen. And the result is fewer and fewer journalists reporting the stories that keep Canadians informed.

But in many communities a singular journalistic soldier remains standing: The community newspaper. These small, often privately-owned outlets are the last providers of reliable, professional local news.

“Community newspapers aren’t just fill-

ing the gap, they’re the whole fabric,” said veteran journalist and president of the Quebec Community Newspaper Association Brenda O’Farrell.

That is why support for community newspapers is so important, O’Farrell says. As the media landscape continues to shift, the role these news outlets play is not only crucial, but gaining importance.

And they need to be supported by initiatives like the federal government’s Local Journalism Initiative, O’Farrell explains, referring to the funding program that helps qualified outlets hire reporters in communities across the country. But readers in these communities, have to do their part, too, she added, by subscribing to papers that offer that option, especially in Quebec where the minority-language community needs to maintain access to information in English.

Without programs like LJI and reader support, many community papers would struggle to survive.

Since 2012, journalist Marie-Ève Martel has tracked community news outlet closures across Quebec.

“For the moment, I’ve counted more than 80,” she reported late last year, after the abrupt shuttering of the Montreal daily *Metro* and its offshoots in several Montreal suburbs and Quebec City.

Each closure represents not only jobs lost, but “a hole in our social cement,” as Martel describes it.

Local media “makes us more informed, more aware and more likely to vote,” she said.

“CBC and the *Ottawa Citizen* aren’t going to cover a byelection in Chelsea,” said Nikki Mantell, the publisher of *The Low Down to Hull and Back News*, which covers the small towns in the Gatineau hills. “We have boots on the ground, and often our stories get picked up by larger media.”

“Local papers are where you hear about the most important things — health care, schools, getting your roads paved, the environment,” said Sharon McCully, publisher of *The Record* in Sherbrooke and the *Brome County News*, two papers that cover about 30 municipalities for the English-speaking community in the Eastern Townships. “These are stories that impact people directly.”

*“Community newspapers aren’t just filling the gap, they’re the whole fabric.”*

Brenda O’Farrell, journalist and QCNA president



# Quebec takes first step in support families grieving the loss of a child



Taylor **Clark**

Quebec has joined the likes of Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Ontario, British Columbia, and Northwest Territories in formally recognizing perinatal bereavement annually on October 15.

Close to 23,000 families in Quebec experience the loss of a child during pregnancy, childhood, and the early post-natal period every year but society has remained largely unaware of perinatal bereavement.

Bill 595 was introduced by Liberal MP for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Désirée McGraw, who has experienced this type of mourning on more than one occasion, to bring light to this reality among Quebecers. "With Bill 595, we have launched a national discussion on perinatal bereavement. In the last 24 hours I've been overwhelmed by the personal stories of loss from colleagues, constituents, and people across Quebec," McGraw wrote Facebook following the unanimous passing of the bill on February 1.

Along with being a proud mother of



Lieutenant Governor for Quebec Manon Jeannotte join Liberal MP for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce Désirée McGraw and psychotherapist Rosa Caporicci in celebrating the passing of Bill 595 to recognize October 15 as Québec Perinatal Bereavement Awareness Day.

PHOTO: DÉSIRÉE MCGRAW FACEBOOK

three boys, McGraw was a mother of a daughter named Catherine, who would have been eight this year. To McGraw and her family, the bill was Catherine's law. "This is a key first step, and I feel hopeful that this new law will allow us to implement concrete measures to support families who have lost a baby," wrote McGraw.

While the bill aimed to bring awareness to perinatal bereavement, it was not accompanied by any specific legislative provision to support the thousands of bereaved families in Quebec.

According to a brief by the Centre for Studies and Research on Family Intervention and the Canada Research Chair, Quebec has lagged on the issue. Quebec's

2008-2018 perinatal policy made several recommendations to improve perinatal bereavement awareness and support families, but medium and long-term support has remained poor. "A next step is to grant bereavement leave to both parents. Generally speaking, fathers experience the same psychological and physical effects of bereavement as mothers ... It is therefore important to look at the needs of fathers who are often more reluctant to seek help," said Centre for Studies and Research on Family Intervention director Francine de Montigny in a press release.

For over 20 years, studies have shown perinatal death has real consequences for both parents, resulting in experiences of heavy loss and intense grief. The loss can have significant deleterious effects on both men's and women's mental health up to five years later. "Losing a child is not something from which one recovers, ever, but there are things we can do to cope better," McGraw told her National Assembly of Quebec colleagues on January 31. "This bill is a call to action for our government to provide parents and families in Quebec with crucial support, both psychosocial and financial."

## Celebrating the resounding success of the 21st Edition of the Défi Ski Santé



Tashi **Farmilo**

The Fondation Santé Gatineau is proud to announce that the 21st annual Défi Ski Santé has surpassed all expectations, thanks to the exceptional generosity and commitment of the regional community.

On February 21, nearly 40 local businesses and numerous donors gathered on the beautiful slopes of Mont Cascades to participate in a friendly ski competition, while supporting the renovation project of the ENT-oncology clinics at the CISSS de l'Outaouais. This initiative was made possible thanks to the exemplary leadership of Mr. Sébastien Lavoie, honorary president and presenting partner of the event, as well as the generous support of Mr. Yan Labelle, partner at Atelier Architectes.

The result was remarkable: the initial fundraising goal of \$100,000 was far exceeded, with a total amount announced of \$134,160.63. This success demonstrates the positive and lasting impact that the collaboration of the business community

can have on the transformation of healthcare in the Outaouais region and their willingness to participate in it!

Since the beginning of their involvement in the Défi Ski Santé, more than \$2 million has been raised to support the modernization of healthcare and social services in the region. These funds directly contribute to improving access to quality healthcare for residents of the Outaouais.

The festive closing evening, held at Château Cartier, provided participants with an opportunity to celebrate this remarkable success in an atmosphere of joy and camaraderie. The Fondation Santé Gatineau expresses its deep gratitude to all participants, donors, and partners who contributed to making this 21st edition a true triumph.

Thanks to the generous contributions collected this year, the Fondation Santé Gatineau will be able to continue the realization of the ENT-oncology clinic renovation project, ensuring rapid access and appropriate multidisciplinary follow-up for the region's population.

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# Assortment of drugs and over \$3,000 seized in illicit cannabis trafficking investigation



Taylor Clark

Following an investigation executed in recent months, the Service de police de la Ville de Gatineau arrested and seized a long list of items related to illicit cannabis trafficking after several searches in the Buckingham sector on February 15.

With assistance from the Service de police de la Ville de Gatineau Intervention Group, investigators executed various search warrants shortly before 9 am. The warrants targeted 124 Impasse des Pruches as well as a business and warehouse garage at 400 Avenue de Buckingham.

An additional two warrants targeted a Ford F150 where more than \$900 in cash, a cell phone, and a THC vape were seized along with a Honda Civic with more than \$100 in cash and an air gun.

Among the long list of items seized were \$3,100 in Canadian currency, more than 6,700 grams of dried illicit cannabis, beyond 470 grams of hash-



The Service de police de la Ville de Gatineau has arrested two Gatineau men in connection to an investigation of illicit cannabis trafficking on February 15 in the Buckingham sector. PHOTO: SERVICE DE POLICE DE LA VILLE DE GATINEAU FACEBOOK

ish, 28 THC vapes, 1,500 milligrams of THC gummies, around 120 grams of cocaine, an excess of 15 grams of crack, more than 200 grams of methamphetamine, more than 20 grams of ecstasy and 106 prescription drug capsules.

Two men from Gatineau were arrested and will face charges under the Cannabis Act as well as the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act.

The investigation was carried out as part of the ACCES Cannabis program which was implemented in 2018 by the Government of Quebec to intensify the fight against the supply of illicit cannabis throughout Quebec. Since 2019, the Service de police de la Ville de Gatineau possesses a team of three investigators working to detect and dismantle illegal networks in Gatineau.

The Service de police de la Ville de Gatineau called upon anyone with information regarding the illegal possession of firearms, the possession or sale of cannabis, or narcotics in the area to contact its information line at (819) 243-4636, option five. The information would be treated as confidential.

## History and future of CLSCs discussed at Action-Santé Outaouais event



Greg Newing

Outaouais residents discussed the past, present and future of Local Community Service Centres (CLSCs) at a virtual panel discussion hosted by health rights advocacy organization Action-Santé Outaouais (ASO) on February 20. The event, which attracted over 70 participants, featured speakers Dr. Anne Plourde, researcher at the Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomiques (IRIS), Dr. Isabelle Leblanc, Assistant Professor at McGill's Department of Family Medicine, and Yves Destroismaisons, a Human Relations Officer with 20 years prior experience as a CLSC social worker in Petite-Nation.

In his introductory comments, ASO Director Mathieu Charbonneau said the idea for the event emerged from discussion workshops about access to healthcare in rural areas held across the Outaouais November 2023, "One of the main points that came up during these workshops con-

cerned the role of CLSCs. Participants and representatives from local organizations noted a major decline in the function of rural CLSCs and a net decrease in service accessibility," said Charbonneau.

The panel focused on the history and origins of CLSCs, the impact of increasing centralization and privatization of healthcare on CLSCs and the prospects of the CLSC model for promoting greater access to healthcare in Quebec.

Dr. Plourde spoke about how the model for CLSCs first emerged from grassroots social movements during the 1950s and 60s prior to becoming a government service in the 1970s. She explained that, at the time, health services were private and concentrated in wealthy urban neighbourhoods leaving those living in poor neighbourhoods and rural areas without adequate healthcare, "In the 60s, local movements decided to take healthcare into their own hands and created community clinics in disadvantaged neighborhoods to respond to needs that weren't being met by the private services," said Plourde, "The CLSC model was largely

based on these grassroots community clinics."

Panelists noted that, although CLSCs were initially supposed to have a full multidisciplinary health team and offer a wide range of front-line health and social services as well as be administered by local democratically elected boards, the vision of province-wide healthcare anchored in local communities was never fully realized.

"One of the big issues is that CLSCs never lived up to what they were supposed to be. A great model was created but it was never given the support it needed. There was chronic underfunding and CLSCs were never given the means to complete their mission," said Dr. Leblanc. Leblanc said resistance to the CLSC model over successive governments coupled with a push towards privatization among many doctors in the province eventually led to CLSCs becoming a parallel service to private clinics.

Destroismaisons spoke from his experience working in CLSCs for over 20 years, "Initially there was a broad range of services offered and they had latitude because they were managed by a local board with a direc-

tor on site. However, bit by bit services have been distanced from rural CLSCs. There was a human contact that has gradually been lost over time, and I find that extremely unfortunate," said Destroismaisons.

"We need to start developing an alternative plan now. I'm not optimistic about the most recent healthcare reforms, but we are capable in Quebec of creating innovative models that can respond to the needs of the population," said Dr. Plourde when asked about the future of CLSCs.

"I think that we can still be confident the majority of actors on the ground in the healthcare system are still motivated by a desire that people get better. I think there is still a glimmer of hope there. It becomes really difficult for healthcare workers see how people are being treated and perhaps this is a common point to bring people together and make improvements," added Dr. Leblanc.

For more information and to learn about upcoming events and initiatives organized by ASO visit <https://actionsanteoutaouais.org/> or email [actionsanteoutaouais@gmail.com](mailto:actionsanteoutaouais@gmail.com).



# Gatineau Loppet 2024: A fusion of international talent and community spirit



Tashi **Farmilo**

From February 16 to 18, Gatineau Park transformed into a cross-country skiing paradise for the 46th edition of the Gatineau Loppet. With the most favourable weather conditions of the season, over 2,300 athletes from around the world graced the trails, participating in a series of races that showcased both the

sport's competitive spirit and its community ethos.

The event's international prestige was underscored by the presence of a Worldloppet delegation, including its President, Juha Viljamaa, and key communicator Gunnar Zlöbl. They joined thousands of skiers across eight races of varying distances and styles, from the swift 2 km sprints to the grueling 50 km marathons, available in both classic and freestyle techniques.

Notably, the French team delivered spectacular per-



Over 2,300 athletes from around the globe glide through the picturesque trails of Gatineau Park during the 46th Gatineau Loppet, a celebration of cross-country skiing under the season's best weather conditions. (TF)

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GATINEAU LOPPET

formances, with Gérard Agnellet defending his title in the 50 km freestyle and Coralie Bentz clinching the win in the women's division of the same distance. The classic races delivered their share of excitement, with nail-biting finishes as athletes like Ricardo Izquierdo-Bernier and Samuel Picard fought for every second until the finish line.

The 27 km M30 Women's category celebrated Emily Drake's victory, who completed the course in a swift 1:31:36, followed by Noémie Chenail and Élise Huet. The younger competitors also made their mark, with Samuel Picard and Ruby Serrouya taking top honours in the Junior categories, signaling a bright future for the sport.

The Gatineau Loppet's success hinges on its vast network of dedicated volunteers. Philippe Lebel, president of the board of directors, paid tribute to their tireless efforts: "We would like to thank, from the bottom of our hearts, our some 300 volunteers, without whom none of this would be possible. Year after year, this team deploys boundless energy to offer the most beautiful and safest events to cross-country skiing enthusiasts from around the world."

Distinguished guests, including Isabelle N. Miron, Mathieu Lévesque, Pierre Guénard, and Margus Rava, were acknowledged for their presence at the Worldloppet Cocktail, further emphasizing the event's stature.

The Gatineau Loppet, a significant tourist attraction, continues to generate a substantial economic impact and promote cross-country skiing in Canada and globally. Enthusiasts are encouraged to follow the event on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and its website to stay updated on future events and celebrate the enduring allure of cross-country skiing.

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**THE BRITISH HOTEL PRESENTS KARAOKE NIGHT.** Upcoming dates: March 8 and 22 at 8 p.m. Free admission. 71, Rue Principale, Gatineau (Aylmer) QC.

**SYMMES INN MUSEUM** - The museum presents a new temporary exhibition entitled "Porcelain Dolls". These dolls, each more beautiful than the others, were handcrafted by Hélène Chartrand (Leduc), an Aylmer resident who passed away in 2023. The museum is open on Saturdays and Sundays, from noon to 5 p.m. Free admission.

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