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# West Quebec Post

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Peace on earth,  
goodwill to all

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Gwynne  
DyerSomaliland:  
Mixed Motives

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Hotel in Gatineau Park?

## Future of O'Brien House nears turning point

Tashi Farmilo  
LJ Reporter

The future of the O'Brien House, a heritage landmark over Meech Lake in Gatineau Park, appears to be shifting as lease negotiations progress with a company aiming to turn the site into a boutique hotel and restaurant. The National Capital Commission, which owns the property, confirmed that discussions are active but has not released details, citing the ongoing nature of the talks. The Commission expects to finalize the agreement soon.

The house was built in 1930 for businessman and sports entrepreneur Ambrose O'Brien. Once known as Kincora Lodge, it is notable for its rustic design of cedar

shingles, faux log siding, and granite stonework. O'Brien, a founding figure in the creation of the National Hockey Association, precursor to the NHL, used the house as a private summer residence. In 1964, the NCC acquired the property for heritage conservation.

After decades of vacancy, the house underwent a \$4-million restoration in 2018 and briefly opened to the public as a hotel before closing again in 2019. It has remained largely empty since, aside from limited use for internal meetings.

If negotiations succeed, the upcoming lease could mark the beginning of a new chapter for this historic building, restoring its place as an active and welcoming part of Gatineau Park.



O'Brien House, known as the Kincora Lodge, overlooks Meech Lake in Gatineau Park. NCC leadership aim to have the site reopened to the public as part of a broader effort to expand access to most NCC properties. (LR)

PHOTO: PARKS CANADA COLLECTION

## Helping youth cope with climate fear

Tashi Farmilo  
LJ Reporter

Eco-anxiety, the growing emotional response to climate change, is becoming a defining mental health challenge for today's youth. Increasingly, young people report feeling overwhelmed, frustrated, and helpless in the face of environmental degradation and political inaction. In response to this rising concern, the Gatineau-based non-profit Enviro-Éduc-Action has launched a targeted workshop aimed at helping parents and educators better understand the phenomenon and support youth in transforming anxiety into constructive engagement.

The initiative, titled "Eco-Anxiety in Our Youth: Understanding It to Better

Support Them," draws on years of direct engagement with youth through regional programs such as C-Vert, GénérAction Climat, and Écoles Écocitoyennes. These efforts have consistently surfaced climate distress as a common and deepening experience among adolescents and young adults in the Outaouais.

This educational push culminates in a public conference on February 12 from 6:30 - 8:00 pm at the Donalda-Charron Library in Aylmer. Free and open to the public, the 90-minute session is designed to equip adults with tools to respond empathetically to the mental health impacts of climate-related stress, and to encourage age-appropriate environmental action.

*Continued on page 3*

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**See page 3**

# Joël Blain appointed acting assistant director of public safety for Collines-de-l'Outaouais



**Sophie Demers**  
LJI Reporter

Des Collines-de-l'Outaouais' Council of Mayors has appointed Joël Blain as acting assistant director of public safety. He has worked with the MRC des Collines Public Safety Department for 28 years.

Blain is a graduate of the École nationale de police du Québec (ÉNPQ) and has held a variety of positions since starting with the public security department in 1997, such as inspector in charge of Gendarmerie, inspector in charge of criminal investigations, and inspector in charge of police operations.

Previously, Blain was appointed acting Director of Public Safety and is therefore familiar with the responsibilities of his new position. According to the MRC, Blain's experience gives him an in-depth knowledge of the mission and operations required for this role.

"Mr. Blain has remarkable experience and a keen understanding of the operational and organizational issues facing our MRC's Public Safety department, said Paul Charbonneau, Director of Public Safety for the MRC des Collines-de-l'Outaouais. "His commitment, leadership skills, and ability to mobilize teams make him the ideal person to take on the role of acting assistant Director of Public Safety."

The MRC highlights Blain's 14-year experience with collision investigation, over a decade of experience as a training instructor, and 13 years as a member of the Tactical Response Unit, for five years of which he was a team leader. The MRC says his leadership is a major asset to public security.



Joël Blain, new acting assistant director of public safety for Collines-de-l'Outaouais (SD)

PHOTO: COURTESY

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## Love the *Bulletin* fundraiser

# Know someone in Aylmer? Help them receive the local newspaper

West Quebec Post readers are sprinkled throughout Outaouais. Many Post readers have relatives or friends who live in Aylmer. This is why Post readers should know that something good is afoot in Aylmer!

The local newspaper, the *Aylmer Bulletin*, is now delivered free to everyone in Aylmer by Canada Post. To pay for this expensive endeavor, a fundraiser is underway.

### A BIT OF HISTORY

For decades, the *Aylmer Bulletin* was delivered free by the defunct delivery network called PubliSac. The far more expensive delivery option, Canada Post, was an out-of-reach dream for the team at the *Aylmer Bulletin*. However, the foundational *raison d'être* of this newspaper is to provide news to everyone regardless of household income. We were not fulfilling our mission. It just wouldn't do!

After saving up enough funds to get started on the Canada Post delivery and increased print costs, the new delivery system started just before Christmas 2025.

What a success! Letters to the editor sky rocked, news tips flooded in, even new advertisers called for

bookings. Readers stopped by the office day in and day out thanking us for the home delivery. Still, the cost of printing 32 850 copies, and delivering them, was not being covered by general revenue.

Savings won't last, so the community suggested a fundraiser.

### LOVE THE BULLETIN FUNDRAISER

The Love the *Bulletin* fundraiser kickstarted at the beginning of 2026. The idea is for a regular \$5 a week donation to cover the costs of several homes, knowing not everyone can afford the donation.

Dear West Quebec Post reader, would you consider signing up for such a donation? The benefit is for folks in Aylmer – perhaps a friend or family member – who are now receiving their local newspaper via Canada Post.

Consider this? And in the meantime, please send in your letters to the editor, news tips, ad bookings – and talk about the paper to everyone you encounter.

Long live local news,

**Lily Ryan**  
Publisher

## LETTERS

## to the Editor

*Opinions expressed are not necessarily shared by the paper*

### When a Municipality Criminalizes Insults

In Chelsea, a matter that may seem trivial exposes a disturbing corrosion of local democracy through the policing of speech. That corrosion now has a concrete expression: on January 20 at 9 a.m., I'm summoned before the MRC des Collines court to face fines for allegedly insulting the former mayor and ex-director general.

Not for threats. Not for criminal harassment. Not for defamation in the legal sense. But for words judged to be offensive.

At first glance, the bylaw in question belongs to the broad category of measures aimed at “peace, order and public safety.” One provision, however, stands out clearly: the prohibition against “insulting” a municipal elected official or employee, including on social media.

This clause doesn’t target a specific, measurable, or objectively verifiable behaviour. It targets a tone—a subjective assessment of language, leaving enforcement to individual sensibilities rather than objective standards.

Citizens may condemn insulting officials on moral grounds. They may pine for a more respectful public debate. But the issue here isn’t moral; it’s constitutional. Freedom of expression protects not only polite and consensual speech. It also protects words that rattle, shock, or annoy

office holders—especially when it’s directed at their administration.

Chelsea’s bylaw creates a fundamental problem for precisely that reason. It violates the freedom of expression guaranteed by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (section 2(b)) and fails to meet any of the criteria of the Oakes test as defined by the Supreme Court, particularly the requirements of minimal impairment and proportionality.

That test requires that a restriction on a fundamental right be clearly defined, necessary, proportionate, and minimally impairing of the right at issue. The Chelsea insults bylaw is neither narrowly tailored, nor minimally impairing, nor proportionate to the objective raised, and therefore can’t be justified under section 1 of the Charter.

By criminalizing “insults” without clear limits, the municipality goes well beyond policing civility—it enforces conformity. It subjects political speech to sanction, recasting the frictions of democratic life as punishable offences. The message is plain: dissent is tolerated only so long as it doesn’t bother those in power.

The vagueness of the key term compounds the problem. What’s an “insult”? A swear word? Biting irony? Exaggeration? Awkward satire? A cartoon?

Enforcement inevitably becomes arbitrary in the absence of objective criteria. What’s tolerated today may be punished tomorrow, depending on the sensitivity of an elected official or employee. In a small town, the effect is immediate: self-censorship sets in and public debate is stifled.

The arguments advanced by the Crown further illustrate the pitfall to be avoided in a constitutional debate: substituting a moral platitude—“insults are bad”—for the rigorous legal analysis required of any restriction on freedom of expression. To present this bylaw as “narrowly tailored” is to ignore the elephant in the room: the notion of an “insult” is inherently vague, subjective, and dependent on the feelings of the person claiming to be offended.

Characterizing the bylaw as a measure to protect officials’ “dignity,” without evidence of genuine societal harm and without regard to existing legal safeguards, invites the court to sacrifice a fundamental freedom to the subjective sensitivities of timid souls—contrary to the prosecutor’s obligation to justify the limit in a free and democratic society.

This case goes far beyond my own situation. It concerns all citizens who criticize their elected officials forcefully—sometimes clumsily, sometimes angrily. The question is simple: do we want to live in municipalities governed by the policing of language, or in communities capable of absorbing criticism without turning it into a matter for the courts?

The issue is no longer theoretical. On my behalf, lawyer Mark Bourrie has filed a constitutional challenge to the bylaw, placing its compatibility with the Charter squarely before the court.

By choosing to criminalize insults, the Municipality of Chelsea has already answered. It now remains to be seen whether the court will accept that political impoliteness is a crime, and that institutional fragility can replace democratic debate and legitimate criticism.

*One final contextual element deserves mention, not as determinative of the constitutional issue, but as illustrative of broader governance tensions within the municipality. Chelsea’s former director general is the subject of an operational report forwarded by the MRC des Collines police to the Director of Criminal and Penal Prosecutions concerning allegations of false sworn testimony before the Commission d'accès à l'information. No determination has been made, and the matter remains under prosecutorial review.*

*At the same time, at its January 13 council meeting, the municipality formally thanked her for her services and wished her well in her new role as clerk of the City of Gatineau’s Municipal Court. This juxtaposition raises legitimate questions about institutional prudence, ethical restraint, and the signals sent to the public at a moment when transparency and accountability are said to be paramount.*

**Jean-Paul Murray, M.A., trad. a. / C. Tr. Chelsea**

# West Quebec Post

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# Peace on earth, goodwill to all

Country tracks  
Victor Laurin



This paper has a long history within the West Quebec region, dating back to 1895. It was once the Buckingham Post and the Buckingham Post and Papineau County Echo. From its foundation, hundreds of devoted scribes have continued its relevance. Every one of those who published, edited or wrote for the Post would be appalled to learn that unscrupulous individuals would one day generate Quebec community papers under a guise of authenticity using Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The last issue's editorial by Lily Ryan exposed that diabolical practice. This paper has no room for AI-generated nonsense. I am body, mind and soul; AI is not. I can laugh, cry, feel pain, anguish; AI cannot.

Last month, as Christmas was approaching, I chose a very personal message, with concrete examples that AI could not hope to achieve. Yes, a few words or sentences might have generated several columns by AI as swiftly as I write one sentence, but how real is that? Please be patient as you read this. When you have finished, you will know its ultimate purpose.

Since soccer is prominent in the present world dialogue, let's begin with the year 2006. My teaching career over, I chose to volunteer at St. Anthony's School in what is known as Ottawa's Little Italy. Italy won the world championship in soccer that year. I was supervising the children during the lunch hour when a car honking, flag-waving parade went by the schoolyard. All of us gathered at the fence to watch the celebrants go by. Many of the children asked me, "What is this all about?" Was I surprised that here, in the heart of Little Italy, those children would not know? Not at all.

Many of those children, born in Canada, were the offspring of the 'Boat People' who had escaped the communist incursion of their homeland in the 1980's and 90's. They would have known of the horrors of war from their parents. Soccer would have been alien to them. Today, as adults with their own children, they might be driving their sons and daughters to soccer practice.

Fast forward to more recent happenings. At a Superstore, I was browsing the Asian food aisle while getting a few groceries. Christmas music was supposed to be enticing me to be happy. It was not. At the checkout counter, a gentleman behind me expressed similar sentiments. I asked the cashier what she was celebrating at this time of year. "Eid," she replied. "Have a wonderful Eid," I wished her, as with a

wide smile, she bagged my groceries.

At a Walmart Pharmacy, which dispenses my prescriptions, I was searching for an item. One of the salespersons retrieved the item for me swiftly and directed me toward a desk at the end of the aisle. There, a lady with a hand-held device was able to package the item with the groceries.

"What are you celebrating at this time of year?" I asked.

Her face lit up with a smile. Raising her hands to her shoulders, she replied enthusiastically, "In my home country we celebrate Christmas. All the stores close that day."

"What country is that?" I asked.

"Bangladesh. But we also celebrate Eid about 15 days before."

My barber, Chaulet, is from Haiti. I have learned much about his country of origin from our conversations. One day, Chaulet was not there. I was told by one of the other barbers, Mohammed, that Chaulet had gone back to his home country to visit. Mohammed would be my barber that day. Mohammed's home country was Saudi Arabia. We had a wonderful conversation where Mohammed showed me photos on his smartphone of his homeland. It wasn't a busy day for him. He invited me to join him for a coffee at Tim Horton's across the street where he showed me many other photos of his homeland. Later, on the news, I saw some of those same places as I watched Prime Minister Carney in Saudi Arabia seeking trade partnerships.

At the Walmart store, a young fellow named Nissan directed me to the proper aisle. Nissan, from India, is in Canada on a foreign student visa. A year's tuition for him is around \$50,000. He is from the same city as India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His family and the Modis are friends. Nissan is Hindu. He told me about one of the largest Hindu temples in North America, located in New Jersey.

Our Jewish friends light Menorah candles in preparation for Hanukkah.

For most of my life, I have gone to the annual pilgrimage at Our Lady of Knock Shrine in Mayo, Quebec. It is patterned after the shrine of the same name in County Mayo, Ireland. In past years, a busload of pilgrims from Montreal's Irish Society always went to the pilgrimage. More recently, a busload of devout Filipinos from Ottawa are bused to the August pilgrimage.

At the Galeries d'Aylmer is a store, Acci Coin d'Afrique. There, on display, are some of the most colourful, attractive styles that you would ever want to see or purchase. It is worth the trip to the Galeries just to see that store.

Finalement, il n'est pas nécessaire de traduire mes voeux pour tout le monde. Bonne et Heureuse Année.

## Somaliland: Mixed Motives

by Gwynne DYER

AUTHOR, HISTORIAN & INDEPENDENT JOURNALIST

In late December, Israel was the first country in the world to establish diplomatic relations with Somaliland. Not Somalia, a wreck of a country on the East African coast that has been mired in civil war for the past thirty-five years, but Somaliland, a different country just north of there that has been peaceful, relatively prosperous and even democratic for all those years.

This is causing a diplomatic outcry because many countries suspect that the deal has a secret clause. They think Somaliland's president, Abdirahman Mohamed Abdullahi, may have promised to let Israel offload Gaza's two million Palestinians onto his country in return for recognising Somaliland as an independent state.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's motivation is clear. He still wants to expel the Palestinians from the Gaza Strip if possible, although his own cabinet will not let him defy President Trump's order to accept a ceasefire. But he knows how volatile Trump is: just one big Hamas strike could turn him around and let Netanyahu restart the war.

Netanyahu is slow-walking the talks on moving to the second phase of the ceasefire (ten weeks and counting), while the Israeli forces keep trying to provoke Hamas into doing something stupid (401 Palestinians killed and 1,108 injured since the ceasefire). But even if Israel got a green light from Trump to expel the Palestinians, where would it send them?

Every Arab state has said it will not be an accomplice in the ethnic cleansing of the Gaza Strip, but Somaliland would do as a destination. It's Muslim, it has room (6 million people in an area bigger than Bangladesh), it's not too far from home (just across the Red Sea from Yemen), and above all it's willing. But why would it let in up to two million Palestinians?

They would be excellent immigrants in smaller numbers (one of the best-educated populations in the Arab world), but normally no country would voluntarily bring in foreign immigrants who speak an entirely different language and are up to one-third of the entire existing population. However, Somaliland does not live in normal circumstances.

It's a classic case of 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure.' The British colony of Somaliland and the Italian colony of Somalia both got their independence in 1960, and the people of the smaller bit (Somaliland) voted to join the bigger bit in a unified 'Somalia.'

They forgot that all politics in Somalia is clan politics, and that the Isaaq, the main clan family in the northern, formerly British-ruled area, had no allies or influence in the formerly Italian-ruled south. The Isaaq came last in government and civil service jobs, in education and healthcare, in their share of the national budget.

Within a year the northerners had realised their mistake and voted heavily against the new constitution. It made no difference – and when they protested, they were met with repression.

By the '80s the whole north was occupied territory and the repression had tipped over into genocide. It only ended when the dictator Mohammed Siad Barre was overthrown in 1991 and the former British colony reclaimed its independence and its name: Somaliland.

The rest of the once-united country then dissolved into almost perpetual civil war (which still continues), but Somaliland kicked free of the wreckage and has seen no further violence. It's a perfectly normal country in many ways – an army, a currency, a school system and healthcare, regular elections – but no other country recognises its government.

It is a victim of the basic rule of post-1945 international law: borders may not be changed by force. That's unfair to many parts of the world that are trapped in unhappy unions, or have managed to secede but don't get international recognition. However, if the rule puts an end to wars of conquest then it's a price most of the world thinks is worth paying.

The problem is that the rule is no longer being observed. Russia's attempted conquest of Ukraine is the most flagrant example, but the impending US attack on Venezuela would be an equally unjustifiable breach of the law. If those things are okay, then surely Somaliland can legally secede from Somalia without getting the latter's permission.

Ethiopia and the United Arab Emirates will probably recognise Somaliland fairly promptly, because they have some interests in common with it. However, I suspect that Somaliland's president is stringing Netanyahu along: he already has the recognition, and in the end he probably won't help Israel ship the Palestinians out.

# Legault steps down after Dubé exits weeks earlier



**Tashi Farmilo**  
LJI Reporter

François Legault announced that he will step down as premier of Quebec, triggering a leadership transition in the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) less than a year before the next provincial election. The statement was delivered during a live press conference on January 14 in Quebec City and broadcast on CPAC.

Legault said he had come to the conclusion that many Quebecers are seeking change, including that of a new premier. He stated his decision was made for the good of the province and his party. He will remain in office for a few months while the CAQ selects a successor.

The resignation comes shortly after Christian Dubé stepped down as health minister on December 18, 2025. Dubé, who served in the role since June 2020, cited the need for new leadership to carry forward the revision of Bill 2, legislation aimed at reforming physician compensation and modernizing governance in the health-care system. He now sits as an independent member of the National Assembly for La Prairie.

In a public letter posted on social media, Dubé acknowledged that while the government reached a tentative agreement with the Fédération des médecins omnipraticiens du Québec to enroll 500,000 new patients by 2026, significant elements of the original legislation had been watered down. He said the government's approach to negotiations, combined with misinformation and resistance from medical federations, contributed to a weakened climate of trust.



François Legault announced his decision to step down as Quebec premier during a live press conference in Quebec City broadcast on CPAC marking a major leadership transition for the Coalition Avenir Québec weeks after the resignation of former health minister Christian Dubé. (TF)

PHOTO: SCREENSHOT OF JANUARY 14 PRESS CONFERENCE ON CPAC

Legault, in his announcement and in a follow-up message on social media, outlined his government's accomplishments over two terms. He cited Quebec's economic performance, noting that growth in wages and disposable income outpaced other provinces in recent years. He credited a strategy of corporate investment and public infra-

structure projects, particularly in energy, with strengthening regional economies and preparing Quebec for long-term challenges.

He pointed to increased public spending, with health, education and culture budgets rising by more than 50 percent over seven years. In health care, his government initiated the construction of new seniors' homes and revised compensation models for family doctors. In education, it expanded support staffing and introduced a new generation of school infrastructure. He also highlighted the upcoming opening of Quebec's first National History Museum.

On language and identity, Legault defended legislation adopted by his government, including Bill 21, which restricts religious symbols for public employees in positions of authority, and Bill 96, which reinforces the Charter of the French Language. He raised concerns over the rise in temporary immigration and its impact on the decline of French, especially in urban centres like Montreal and Laval.

Legault also referenced a proposed energy deal with Newfoundland involving Churchill Falls and Gull Island, which was rejected by the newly elected Newfoundland government. He expressed hope that a new agreement would be reached.

In closing, Legault thanked voters, his party colleagues, and his family. He described the founding of the CAQ and its rise to form two majority governments as one of his greatest achievements. He called serving as premier the greatest honour of his life. The CAQ has not yet announced a timeline or process for selecting its next leader.

## Two Women with Inspiring Journeys



**Mélissa Gélinas**  
LJI Reporter

Thanks to their determination, resilience, and courage, Sunobar Asifi, originally from Afghanistan, and Zhour AlNaser, originally from Syria, had the privilege of receiving BRAVO Scholarship Funds in the Outaouais region. Both war refugees, they wanted to share their stories with students in a French immersion class by visiting the Cégep de l'Outaouais at the Louis-Reboul Campus on December 12, 2025.

### A DIFFICULT JOURNEY

Their success was the result of a long process of learning and integration. "Their immigration story, [...] filled with challenges overcome and personal victories, leaves no one indifferent," said retired diplomat Jacques Laberge, a founder of and spokesperson for the BRAVO Scholarship Funds in the Outaouais region. "Their message of hope and encouragement resonates with learners who appreciate contact with strong, motivated, and inspiring role models."

### ZHOUR ALNASER

Mother of five, Zhour arrived in Gatineau in 2016 with limited formal education. She faced daily challenges balancing her studies and family responsibilities. Despite the difficulties, she managed to learn French and complete high school. She then earned a vocational studies certificate in Clinical Administrative Support, as well as a vocational diploma in Dental Assisting. Since 2019, she has



(From left to right): Zhour AlNaser and Sunobar Asifi during their presentation at Cégep de l'Outaouais, Louis-Reboul campus, in the French immersion class (December 12, 2025) (MG)

PHOTO: COURTESY OF JACQUES LABERGE

been the proud owner of a bungalow in the Hull sector.

### SUNOBAR ASIFI

In 2013, at just 13 years old, Sunobar moved to Gatineau with her family for the very first time. Born blind, she

nonetheless completed her final year of high school with excellent results, which allowed her to be admitted to the University of Ottawa's psychology program. To help her in her daily life, she gets around with a guide dog from the Mira Foundation and uses various digital software programs. In the future, she would like to obtain a doctorate and help women who are victims of violence.

### ABOUT THE BRAVO SCHOLARSHIP FUND IN THE OUTAOUAIS REGION

Founded in 2021 by a group of mostly retired volunteers and led by Jacques Laberge, the initiative has awarded 45 scholarships to date, ranging from \$740 to \$2,000 to newcomers aged 16 to 45 from 15 different countries who have been residents of the Outaouais region in 2012 or later.

This achievement was made possible thanks to \$50,000 in donations raised by the community and several partners, including the Université du Québec en Outaouais (UQO), the Centre de services scolaires des Draveurs, the Archdiocese of Gatineau, the Islamic Centre of the Outaouais, a car dealership, and a major grocery store.

This is also the only scholarship program in Quebec whose mission is to promote French language learning, academic perseverance, and educational success.

Scholarship recipients must successfully learn French, complete a training program, and obtain a first diploma recognized by the Quebec government. They must then commit to becoming education ambassadors by presenting and sharing their experiences with students from immigrant communities in various schools in the region.

# Outaouais Agri-Food meetings set to cultivate innovation in 2026



**Tashi Farmilo**  
LJI Reporter

The 2026 Outaouais Agri-Food meetings are set to begin, bringing together farmers, researchers, entrepreneurs, and advisors for a regional series focused on innovation, sustainability, and agricultural transition. Organized by the Outaouais Agri-Food Table (TAO) in partnership with the regional office of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPAQ), the twelve events will run from January 21 to March 11 across various locations in the Outaouais, offering participants a hands-on look at the evolving realities of agriculture in the region.

The program opens with Maple Syrup Day on January 21 at Domaine de L'Ange-Gardien. The day will explore new developments in maple syrup production, including the use of geomatics to monitor and map forest health, research on the chemistry of sap and the structure of maple trees, and presentations on next-generation evaporators. Consultants will also lead sessions on business fundamentals such as launching a farm, ownership transfers, and acquisitions, which are key concerns as many producers plan for succession or expansion.

Each event is designed to respond directly to regional needs, with an emphasis on climate adaptation, farm viability, and peer-to-peer learning. A marketing-fo-

cused session on January 28 at the L'Ange-Gardien municipal hall will tackle how producers can use current global conditions to position local products more effectively. The session will include insights on collective marketing and partnerships, with case studies from outside the region.

February's calendar is filled with practical sessions, beginning with two evenings dedicated to beef production during forage shortages. Scheduled in Shawville and La Pêche, these meetings will feature drought management strategies and risk mitigation through Quebec's stabilization insurance program (ASRA), drawing lessons from the 2023 drought in Abitibi-Témiscamingue. Mid-month, young and aspiring farmers can attend a full day in Wakefield focused on agricultural start-up steps, legal considerations, and available support services, including a testimonial from a recent local start-up.

February 12 marks the launch of the first Outaouais Agri-Food Innovation Fair, a major event in Cantley that will bring together business leaders, government advisors, and financial partners to help producers implement innovation across animal and plant production. The same venue will host a horticulture-focused day the following week, offering tools and strategies for addressing compaction, climate change, data use, and safety.

In the final weeks of February, the spotlight turns to biodiversity and pest man-



The 2026 Outaouais Agri-Food Meetings will bring together producers, researchers, and advisors for twelve events focused on innovation and sustainability. (TF)

PHOTO: COURTESY OF OUTAOUAISS AGRI-FOOD RENDEZVOUS

agement. Two "Biodiversity Days" in Shawville and Chelsea will introduce producers to silvopasture and Adaptive Multi-Paddock grazing, techniques that enhance soil carbon and habitat quality, alongside support from ALUS Outaouais and the Nature Conservancy of Canada. Pest management will be addressed in Gatineau and Shawville through sessions focused on curbing herbicide resistance and managing invasive corn pests, supported by presentations from MAPAQ and CEROM researchers, as well as a drone technology partner.

The series concludes on March 11 with the Transformation Showroom in L'Ange-Gardien, which will bring together major food processing support organizations like

Cintech Agroalimentaire and the CTAQ. Attendees will be able to explore services related to financing, innovation, and food production scale-up, and hear from a standout local company known for its creative approach to growth.

With affordable admission prices, many including meals, and discounts for students, the meetings aim to be as accessible as they are informative. By blending scientific expertise with real-world farming experience, the 2026 Outaouais Agri-Food Meetings promise to be a vital platform for building a stronger, more resilient agricultural sector in the region.

Full programming and registration: [www.agro-outaouais.com/rvao2026](http://www.agro-outaouais.com/rvao2026)

## Quebec launches \$20M initiative to boost agricultural productivity in Outaouais



**Tashi Farmilo**  
LJI Reporter

The Quebec government has announced a \$20 million initiative aimed at boosting the productivity and competitiveness of agricultural businesses specializing in plant production and beekeeping. This funding, available to businesses across the province, includes significant support for those located in peripheral regions such as Outaouais. The initiative will help agricultural producers modernize their equipment, reduce labour hours, and improve efficiency in their operations.

For businesses in Outaouais, the program provides a unique opportunity to benefit from an additional 15% financial assistance, as the region falls under the "peripheral" classification. This extra funding could be pivotal for local farmers



The Quebec government's \$20 million initiative aims to boost agricultural productivity in peripheral regions like Outaouais by providing financial support for businesses specializing in plant production and beekeeping to modernize equipment and improve efficiency. (TF)

PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE GOVERNMENT OF QUEBEC

and beekeepers looking to invest in state-of-the-art equipment and technologies to keep up with growing demands and the challenges posed by climate change.

*Continued on page 8*



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# UPA conference puts spotlight on local resilience

 **Tashi Farmilo**  
LJI Reporter

Quebec's agriculture sector entered a defining conversation last month as over 1,000 producers, policymakers, and stakeholders gathered at the Union des producteurs agricoles (UPA) General Congress in Quebec City. Framed by economic pressure, climate instability, and shifting trade realities, the three-day event underscored both the fragility and strategic importance of local food systems. For Sophie Chatel, Member of Parliament for Pontiac Kitigan Zibi and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, the Congress reflected the urgency to act on what farmers already know from experience.

The UPA Congress, held December 2 to 4 under the theme "United for the Future," was marked by calls for renewed commitment to domestic food procurement, streamlined regulations, and consistent government policy. Chatel, who addressed delegates and introduced the federal Minister of Agriculture, used her presence to emphasize the economic and strategic weight of the agri-food sector. "It's the largest manufacturing sector in Canada," she said. "We often talk about automobile, for example. Agri-food is so much bigger. It represents 7.2 per cent of our GDP and one in every nine jobs."

Chatel and Federal Agriculture Minister Heath MacDonald also met with Quebec's Minister of Agriculture, Donald Martel, during the conference. They discussed provincial priorities and how federal and provincial co-operation could help realize them. "Ensuring a stable, equitable, predictable and efficient commercial space is essential to the prosperity of our farmers and our food sovereignty,"



At the UPA General Congress, MP Sophie Chatel, alongside Federal Agriculture Minister Heath MacDonald and Quebec's Minister of Agriculture Donald Martel, met to discuss Quebec's agricultural priorities, with a shared focus on creating a stable, equitable, and efficient commercial environment to support farmers and strengthen food sovereignty. (TF)

PHOTO: COURTESY

Chatel said, echoing MacDonald's remarks.

Beyond policy, Chatel focused on climate adaptation as a top priority. She highlighted the \$38 million Agricultural Climate Solutions program, administered through the UPA, as an essential tool to support practical resilience strategies on farms. Techniques supported by the program include improved soil management and cover cropping to retain water in drought conditions. "That is the kind of practical, farm-level innovation we need to see across the country," she said.

She also raised concerns about the hidden impacts of international trade policy on Canadian agriculture, especially as they relate to packaging and food production costs. While agricultural products themselves may not always

be subject to tariffs, the materials needed to process and sell them such as aluminium and steel for cans or wood for packaging often are. "Although tariffs do not impact food directly, they hit packaging. That drives up grocery prices. It's all connected," she said.

As a response to this growing pressure, Chatel pointed to Ideal Can, a Quebec-based can manufacturing company that is investing in expanded operations in Ontario. Historically, much of Quebec's canned vegetable production has relied on a circular supply chain in which crops such as tomatoes grown in Ontario are sent to the United States for canning before being imported back into Canada for sale. This cross-border dependency, while once cost-effective, has become increasingly expensive due to American tariffs on imported Canadian aluminium and steel. U.S. manufacturers facing these tariffs pass the added cost onto Canadian food companies, which in

turn contributes to higher retail food prices.

By investing in domestic canning infrastructure, Ideal Can aims to shorten and localize the supply chain, insulating producers from foreign tariff regimes and keeping more of the value-added production process within Canada. "They now have a competitive product because the U.S. cans are tariffed," Chatel explained. "And if we're supplying the aluminium, we might as well supply it to ourselves."

The case of Ideal Can illustrates a broader trend toward rethinking food sovereignty, not just in terms of growing food locally, but also processing, packaging, and distributing it without relying on vulnerable global supply chains. For rural economies like the Pontiac's, the ripple effects of these upstream shifts are real. More local canning capacity means more stable demand for regional produce, more predictable pricing, and potentially lower costs for consumers.

Chatel emphasized that policy must work in tandem with industry leadership to strengthen domestic resilience. "We need to make sure that when Ottawa talks about food security or innovation, it means something real on a farm in Mansfield or Otter Lake," she said.

The UPA Congress also brought renewed attention to regulatory and institutional reforms. UPA President Martin Caron urged the government to set clearer targets for food procurement, invest in farmland protection, and lower the cost of agricultural credit. With federal and provincial agreements on agriculture programming up for renegotiation this year, 2026 is set to be a critical moment for shaping the province's farming future.

For rural regions like the Pontiac and the broader Outaouais, these decisions matter not only for local economies but for long-term food security and cultural continuity. "Farmers are on the front lines of everything. Climate, markets, food prices," Chatel said. "We can't afford to leave them behind. And they're telling us, clearly, that they need us to show up."

## Quebec launches \$20M initiative to boost agricultural productivity in Outaouais

*Continued from page 7*

The program is divided into two distinct areas of focus. The first supports plant production businesses by helping them purchase equipment that will streamline their operations, reducing the amount of time spent on labour-intensive tasks such as planting, harvesting, and packaging. The second area addresses the beekeeping sector, where producers can receive funding to purchase equipment aimed at increasing bee population survival rates and enhancing workforce productivity.

For businesses to be eligible, they must meet certain requirements, such as being registered with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food (MAPAQ) and, in the case of beekeepers, being part of

the province's beekeeping registry. The funding is available on a first-come, first-served basis, and businesses can apply between December 10, 2024 and February 7, 2025.

The financial aid comes in the form of non-repayable contributions, covering up to 45% of eligible expenses for plant production projects and 50% for beekeeping initiatives. In addition, a 15% bonus is available for projects involving organic products, agricultural cooperatives, or those located in peripheral regions.

For more information, visit: <https://www.quebec.ca/agriculture-environnement-et-ressources-naturelles/agriculture/aide-financiere/initiative-ministerielle-productivite-vegetale>



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# Momentum builds for a Gatineau Arts Council amid growing cultural needs



**Tashi Farmilo**  
LJI Reporter

The longstanding proposal to create a Gatineau Arts Council is gaining renewed momentum, as cultural leaders and municipal officials alike confront the challenge of how to support and retain professional artists in the region. Advocates say a dedicated council could provide the structure and stability that have long been missing from Gatineau's cultural framework, and the City itself has launched a formal analysis into the idea's feasibility.

Clara Lagacé, co-president of Culture Outaouais, said the proposal has been on the table for years. "This isn't a new idea," she said. "We've been calling for it to better structure support for professional artists. Right now, there's no meaningful municipal-level funding for professional artists, and that's a major gap for a city of this size."

Recent years have seen important steps forward. Gatineau has already modernized its Programme de soutien aux organismes culturels (PSOC), integrating internationally recognized arts council practices such as peer and expert jury evaluations, mission-based funding, and multi-year agreements aimed at offering greater stability to organizations. In 2026, the PSOC budget will rise from \$1.2 million to \$1.5 million, with a gradual increase to \$1.85 million projected by 2028. Culture



Culture Outaouais is renewing its call for the creation of a Gatineau Arts Council to provide more structured support for professional artists, a proposal that aligns with recent cultural milestones such as the awards ceremony at the Culturiades last November in Gatineau. (TF)

PHOTO: MARIE-ANDRÉE BLAIS

Outaouais welcomed the increase but noted in a December press release that the program still only covers about 32 percent of the sector's funding requests.

Lagacé described the current level of direct municipal support for individual artists as minimal. "There's only one artist residency per year. That's it," she said. "It's not enough to build or retain a vibrant cultural community. We need a structure, a clear, independent body that can distribute funds and support in a fair and transparent way."

The City is now conducting a full-scale analysis of the council proposal. A first phase

of consultation was held with cultural organizations in summer 2025, and a second phase focused on individual artists is planned for 2026. Officials say the consultations aim to build a deep understanding of the needs, roles, and realities of the city's cultural actors, and to develop a governance model that aligns with Gatineau's unique context.

In parallel, Culture Outaouais has been mandated to produce a comprehensive portrait of private arts funding and philanthropy in Gatineau. The findings will help determine how public and private financing can work in tandem, ensuring complementarity rather

than duplication. Lagacé acknowledged the importance of private support but stressed that it cannot replace the need for strong public infrastructure. "Philanthropy is complementary," she said. "But the foundation needs to be public. And that foundation doesn't exist yet in Gatineau."

While the City's timeline points toward the possibility of integrating a council into the 2028 to 2030 cultural policy action plan, Lagacé expressed concern about the delay. "We understand that these things take time," she said, "but artists are making decisions now about whether they can stay in Gatineau or have to leave. We can't afford to wait too long."

She clarified that Culture Outaouais is not seeking to assume the role of a future council. "We're not advocating for more power or money for ourselves," she said. "We're advocating for a structure that works, one that exists in other cities and provinces and is proven to serve artists well." The goal, she said, is to create a one-stop body, arms-length from municipal politics, with a mandate to support creation, development, and retention in the arts sector.

At its core, she said, the issue comes down to leadership. "If Gatineau wants to be a place where artists can stay, create, and thrive, then it needs to show it," said Lagacé. "And a council would be the clearest sign of that commitment."

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# Foundations fuel over \$269K in care upgrades across Pontiac



**Tashi Farmilo**  
LJI Reporter

A major infusion of community-raised funding is reshaping the experience of health care in the Pontiac. In December, the Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux (CISSS) de l'Outaouais confirmed that more than \$269,000 had been invested across four health care sites in the region over the course of 2025, thanks to the contributions of three local foundations.

The Pontiac Community Hospital Foundation led the effort, contributing \$180,200 to improvements at the hospital and its

long-term care wing. Funds were used to modernize essential clinical equipment in the laboratory and sterilization unit, purchase oncology chairs and patient lifts, and enhance the atmosphere in care spaces with murals and sleeper chairs for family members. Part of the donation also supported nursing students through the MacLachlan Family bursary program, reinforcing the region's efforts to address workforce needs with local talent.

The CLSC Pontiac Foundation followed with \$52,500, funding several quality-of-life upgrades, particularly at the CHSLD Manoir Sacré-Cœur in Mansfield. Invest-

ments included bariatric beds, therapeutic mattresses, a digital scale, and a stylishly renovated hair salon — a rare but welcome feature in institutional care settings.

A further \$37,056 from the Centre d'accueil du Pontiac Foundation supported fall prevention measures and comfort-based initiatives, such as therapeutic dolls and communal breakfasts. The foundation also contributed to the site's transformation into a Maison des Aînés — a provincial model of elder care that emphasizes warmth, autonomy, and dignity in residential living.

That transformation, now complete,

resulted in the creation of 12 themed areas designed to evoke familiar, homelike environments. According to the CISSS, these renovations mark a shift away from traditional institutional design, favouring spaces that reflect the needs and identities of residents.

"Behind every dollar invested is a face: a patient receiving more comfortable care, a resident living in a more human space, a user who feels welcomed and respected," said Nicole Boucher-Larivière, Director of the Pontiac RLS. "The Pontiac foundations are truly changing lives here at home. We owe them a great deal."



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**ANNUAL ICE FISHING TOURNAMENT ORGANIZED BY CENTRE DE PÊCHE BLANCHE GATINEAU** January 31, 2026. Start: 6:30 a.m. – End: 3:30 p.m. Prizes given on the ice starting at 4:00 p.m. All fish must be registered alive, and release back into the water is mandatory at registration. Catches must come exclusively from the bay Clément. Please bring a bucket to safely transport your catches to the registration area for release. Adult ticket: \$40. Pre-sale until January 23: \$35. Child ticket: \$20. Pre-sale until January 23: \$15. Prizes to Win: \$2,000 – Largest Pike \$1,000 – 2nd Largest Pike \$500 – 3rd Largest Pike \$750 – Largest Yellow Perch \$500 – Smallest Yellow Perch \$750 – Largest Crappie \$250 – Other species (random draw) For children: 3 random draws of \$250. Many door prizes and participation prizes! Cabin rentals available once installation is completed. Cabins reservations are starting on Monday, January 5, 2026. A cabin is not required to participate in the tournament. On-site: cabin rentals, hole drilling, tip-up rentals, bait sales, and fishing gear available. Ticket purchase is valid for one person only and provides tournament participation only (cabin and access not included). Tickets on sale now at the office, Pêche Blanche Gatineau 540 chemin de Montréal Ouest, Gatineau. Information: 819-281-9733.

**ATLANTIC VOICES THE NEW-FOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR CHOIR OF OTTAWA PRESENTS:** We Rise Again, soulful songs from down east. January 25 at 3 pm. Doors open at 2:15 pm for the Fumblin' Fingers band. Centretown United Church 507, Bank Street, Ottawa. Tickets are \$30 until January 24, or \$35 at the door. Free for children 12 and under. Tickets are available from choir members or can be purchased through EventBrite; visit atlanticvoices.ca/category/upcoming for more information. www.atlanticvoices.ca

**AYLMER LEGION BRANCH 33** -January 17 at 7 pm: Dance and live music with Arc of Fire. -January 21 at 6:30 p.m.: Bingo Night, a fundraiser in support of the Aylmer Legion. The Bingo will be held at the Aydelu Centre. Tickets are available in advance only; contact Lynda at 819-684-9971. -January 24 at 1 pm: Euchre Tournament. Registrations from 12:30 to 12:45 pm. Cost: \$5/person. -January 25 at 2 pm: Annual General Meeting followed by elections for Branch 33 members. Proof of membership in good standing is required upon arrival. -January 31 at 1 pm: Cribbage Tournament. Registrations from 12:30 to 12:45 pm. Cost: \$5/person. -February 8 at 2 pm: Super Bowl LX Party; Chili at 5 pm. -February 18 at 6:30 pm: New! Trivia Night, registrations in advance with Jared at 613-240-0559. -February 28 at 6 pm: Chicken Dinner Fundraiser and live music at 7 pm with "Swamp City Stompers". Tickets available in limited quantity in advance only, call Denise at 613-614-7847. The Aylmer Legion Branch #33 is located at 59 Bancroft street, Aylmer, QC. Infos: Aylmerlegion33@gmail.com.

**ENJOY YOUR SKATING RINK WITH DISNEY MUSIC.** Saturday, January 24, 2026, from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Parc des Cèdres, 1 Rue Principale, Aylmer sector. Free!

Come skate in the magical world of Disney! Glide to the beat of everyone's favorite songs in a magical atmosphere that will delight young and old alike. On site: entertainment, a bonfire to warm you up, and a food truck to satisfy your appetite. Don't miss the themed face painting, perfect for getting even more into the spirit! Need equipment? Skate and helmet rentals are available with the Accès Gatineau+ card.

**HERE IT IS! LAST CALL WILL BE LIVE AT CHEZ PUTTERS** in Aylmer, Quebec, Saturday, January 31, 2026, at 9 pm. \$10 Cover charge at the door. Galeries Aylmer entrée Nord, 181 rue Principale, Gatineau.

**SKATING WITH SUPERHEROES** Sunday, February 1, 2026, from 10 a.m. to noon at the refrigerated skating rink – Marina d'Aylmer 1 Principale Street, Gatineau. Free event! Dress up to meet your favorite superheroes on the ice. A perfect opportunity for original and memorable photos. Free face painting on site.

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16, 2026, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Become a volunteer: Join the hundreds of volunteers who enjoy unforgettable moments every year during Winterlude. Your talents will be put to good use, and you will have an enriching and stimulating experience. Here: <https://www.canada.ca/.../devenez-benevole/bal-neige.html>

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**WINTERLUDE AFTER-SLIDING PARTIES FOR TEENS.** Winter parties you won't want to miss. The Snow Dance is switching to teen party mode. February 6 and 7, 2026, 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. at Domaine des flocons – Jacques-Cartier Park, Laurier Street, Gatineau. Live DJ, music, nighttime tubing, illuminated Ferris wheel, 360° camera... in short, everything you need to have fun and laugh with your friends! Come play outside, even in winter (yes, really). Hot chocolate and coffee. Soup. Prizes to be won + surprises. Contest for the best retro winter outfit (bring your coolest coat). Bonus: the park stays open until 10 p.m. just for these evenings. Admission and all activities are 100% free (even the hot chocolate). Even the soup. Even the coffee and even the Ferris wheel). Shuttle available from the Robert Guertin Center. STO buses 31 and 67. No parking on site (take the bus or find a ride). Après-glisse is simple: winter, but fun. Details: <https://calendrier.gatineau.cloud/calen.../evenement.aspx>

# Aider les jeunes à faire face à la peur du changement climatique



Tashi Farmilo

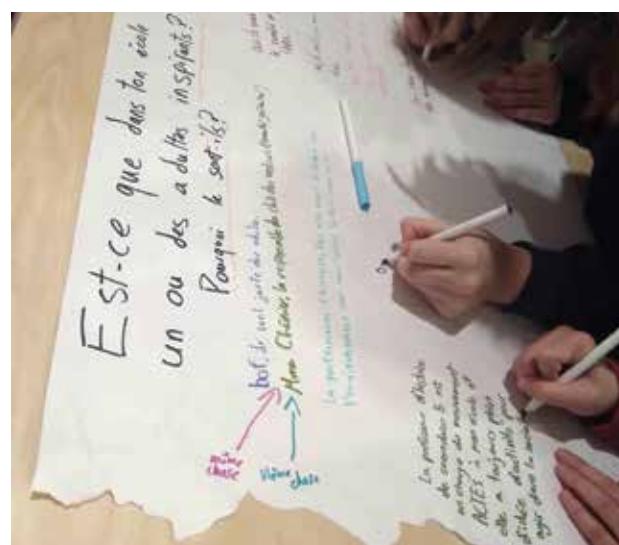
L'éco-anxiété, cette réaction émotionnelle croissante face au changement climatique, devient un défi majeur en matière de santé mentale pour les jeunes d'aujourd'hui. De plus en plus, les jeunes se disent dépassés, frustrés et impuissants face à la dégradation de l'environnement et à l'inaction politique. En réponse à cette préoccupation croissante, l'organisme local à but non lucratif Enviro-Éduc-Action a lancé un atelier ciblé visant à aider les parents et les éducateurs à mieux comprendre le phénomène et à aider les jeunes à transformer leur anxiété en engagement constructif.

L'initiative, intitulée « L'éco-anxiété chez nos jeunes : la comprendre pour mieux les soutenir », s'appuie sur des années d'engagement direct auprès des jeunes dans le cadre de programmes régionaux tels que C-Vert, Génér'Action Climat et Écoles Écocitoyennes. Ces efforts ont régulièrement mis en évidence la détresse climatique comme une expérience courante et de plus en plus profonde chez les adolescents et les jeunes adultes de l'Outaouais.

Cette initiative éducative culminera avec une conférence publique le 12 février, de 18 h 30 à 20 h, à la bibliothèque Donalda-Charron à Aylmer. Gratuite et ouverte au public, cette séance de 90 minutes vise à fournir aux adultes des outils pour répondre avec empathie aux répercussions du stress lié au climat sur la santé mentale et à encourager des actions environnementales adaptées à l'âge.

Des données récentes soulignent l'urgence de la situation. Un sondage Léger réalisé en 2021 a révélé que près des trois quarts des Québécois âgés de 18 à 34 ans souffrent d'éco-anxiété. À l'échelle mondiale, une étude publiée dans *The Lancet* la même année a révélé que 59 % des jeunes âgés de 16 à 25 ans étaient très ou extrêmement préoccupés par le changement climatique, 45 % d'entre eux déclarant que leur anxiété perturbait leur vie quotidienne. Les symptômes comprennent des troubles du sommeil, des difficultés de concentration et un retrait social, souvent associés à une vision pessimiste de l'avenir.

Plutôt que de pathologiser ces sentiments, Enviro-Éduc-Action présente l'éco-anxiété comme une réponse rationnelle aux conditions du monde réel, qui peut être canalisée vers une participation environnementale significative. Leur atelier fournit aux adultes des ressources pratiques : des outils d'alphabétisation émotionnelle, des stratégies d'écoute active, des exercices de pensée critique liés aux médias et des exemples d'actions climatiques positives menées par des jeunes. Le message central est que la



Enviro-Éduc-Action propose des ateliers publics et scolaires dans toute la région afin d'aider les adultes à soutenir les jeunes souffrant d'éco-anxiété, en mettant l'accent sur des outils pratiques, une compréhension éclairée et des réponses constructives et optimistes à la crise climatique. (TF)

PHOTO : COURTOISIE

compréhension et la validation de ces émotions constituent la première étape vers la résilience et l'autonomie.

La session aborde également le rôle de la désinformation et de l'alarmisme, qui peuvent amplifier les sentiments de peur et d'impuissance. Les participants apprendront comment aider les jeunes à identifier des sources fiables, à replacer les informations dans leur contexte et à éviter les discours sensationnalistes qui entravent l'engagement.

Bien que la session du 12 février soit un événement phare, elle s'inscrit dans le cadre d'un déploiement régional plus large. D'autres sessions destinées aux parents sont prévues au printemps, et les écoles ou les organismes communautaires peuvent demander une formation sur mesure jusqu'en mai.

Les inscriptions pour la session de février sont ouvertes sur le portail en ligne de la Ville de Gatineau : [cultureloisirs.gatineau.ca](https://cultureloisirs.gatineau.ca)



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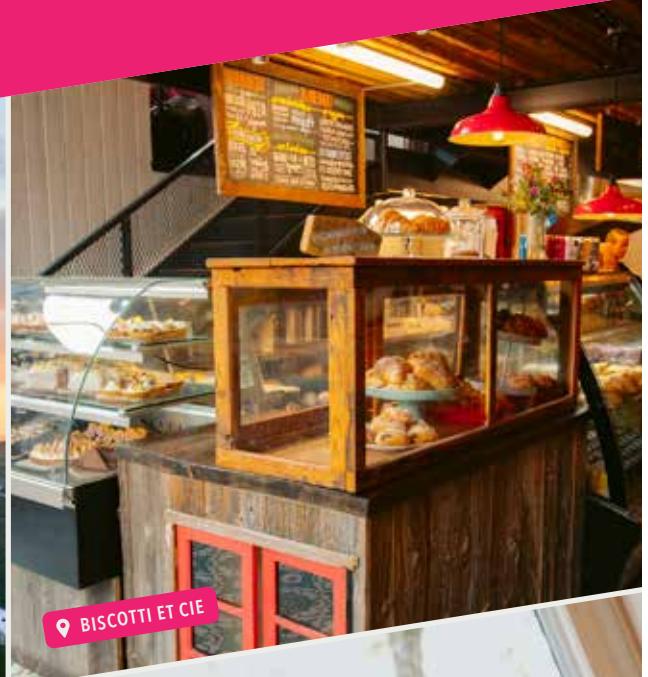
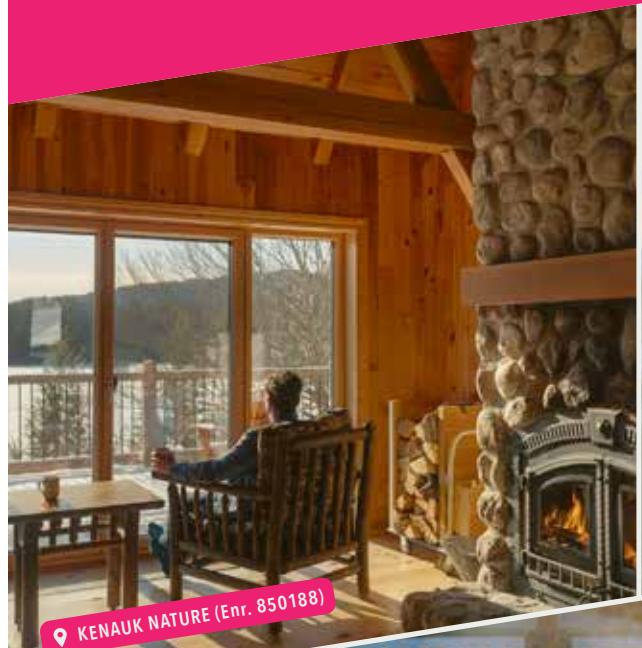
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