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The Press

COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER

Locally Owned & Operated

Vol. 13 - Issue 51 | Wednesday, December 18, 2024

Celebrating 45 years in business



Two significant milestones were recently achieved at a local business, with several long-time staff members about to reach their own milestones. For them, it's all about the family. Pictured is Joanne alongside regulars and the famous fireplace.

By Serena Lapointe

Over four decades ago, a popular restaurant established in Edson expanded to Whitecourt as a sister franchise, the only two of their kind. That restaurant was Mountain Pizza & Steakhouse. This year marks a significant milestone for the community

mainstay as it celebrates 45 years of business in Whitecourt.

But that is not the only milestone recently reached under the peaks. Somebody on the inside is celebrating a milestone of their own. On December 2, Manager Joanne Bates Belke reached her 20th anniversary working at the restaurant. "When I moved to Whitecourt in 1989, I used to bring my son here. He was four. Now, he comes with my grandchildren, ten and seven," smiled Belke.

Her career in the

food service industry started at age 14, and Belke credits working for great employers as the reason for sticking with it. "Where Smitty's is now, there used to be a place called the Renford Inn. When I moved to Whitecourt, I started working there. Then, I started working at Ernie O's," she explained.

Belke said that was where her connection to Mountain first started. The managing partner/half-owner of the Whitecourt fran-

continued on page 4



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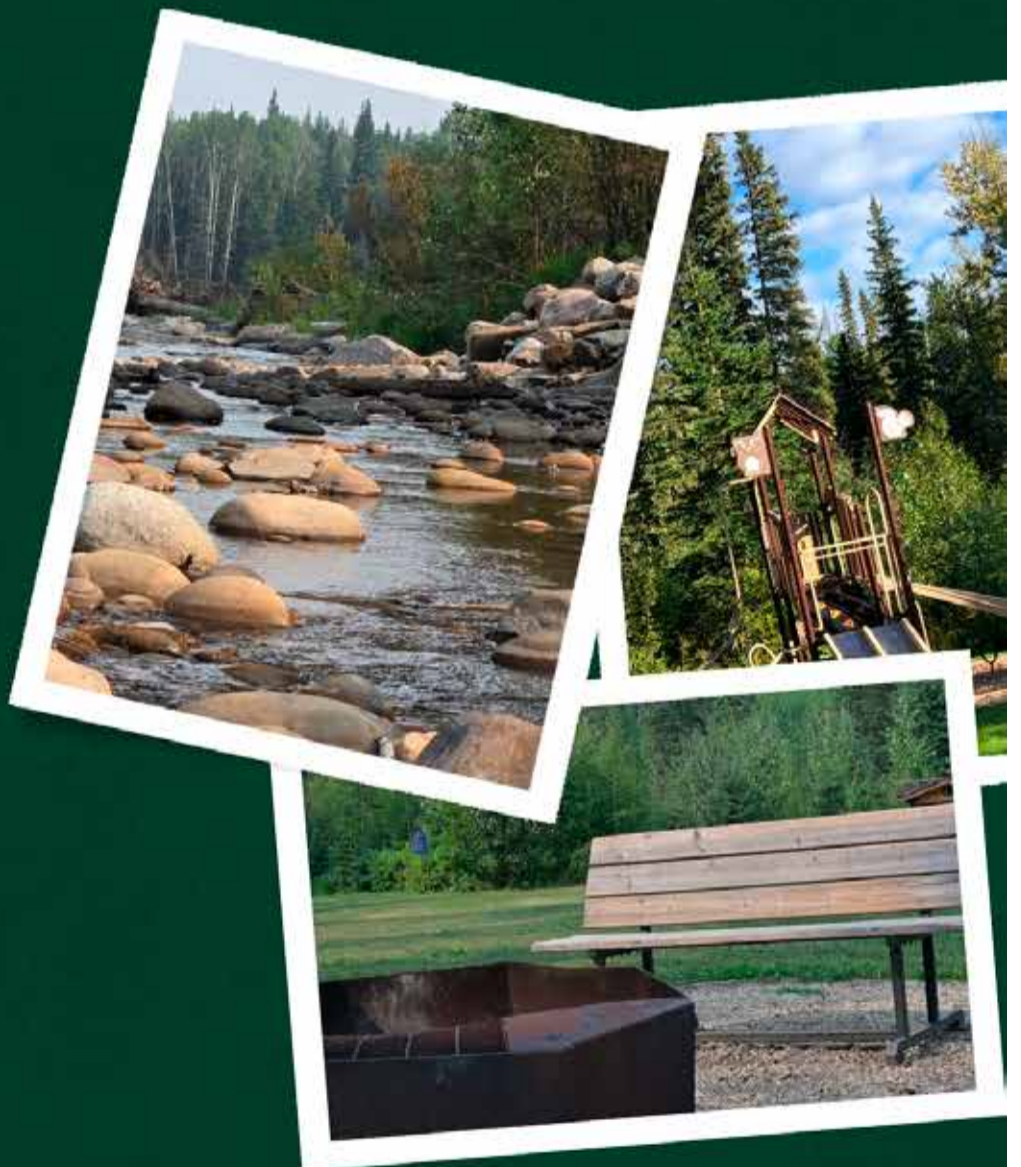
2025 Groat Creek Group Camping

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Info & Registration

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The Press

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continued from page 1

chise was married to the owner of Ernie O's. When they needed help at Mountain, it was easy enough to bump over. "In my twenty years here at Mountain, I've seen families grow, including five generations of my family here in Whitecourt."

One fond memory happened soon after she started. "A couple came in, and I got to meet them. She ended up getting pregnant, and they had twin girls. Those twins graduated a couple of years ago and are now in university. I got to see them grow up," said Belke. "So many of our customers have been coming since day one."

From first dates to anniversaries and engagements and the families from those unions, her experiences and memories are part of the restaurant's history. "A couple there the other night came in and said they got engaged in front of our fireplace in the dining room. It's those stories that stick with me," said Belke. She said there are also sad parts of life that she feels blessed to be part of. "There's those who have lost loved ones, and they still come here, and we mourn with them."

As word spread about the two December milestones, customers began sharing their stories and memories with Belke. "Last night in the lounge, many people shared their memories with me. One couple in town, who got married just before Mountain first opened here and attended a supper before it officially opened, come in every year for their anniversary."

She said while good food is a big part of the success of Mountain Pizza & Steakhouse, the staff and owners play a significant role. Restaurant owner Emmanouil Kazoleas, who started the restaurant in Edson in 1975, was a big proponent of community and encouraged Belke to support the community as often as she could.

"You look after your community. You make sure everybody is ok. You look after your people. I remember thinking, that's my kind of person I need to be involved with because that's how I feel too. He ensured we looked after the soup kitchen or donated to the Food Bank," explained Belke. When Emmanouil passed in late 2016, his son, James, who had been his dad's business partner for years, kept up the family legacy with the same community-focused mindset. "It's what I believe in. I've always believed in it. My mom believed in it too. My parents worked hard, but my mom always made sure to help, even if it was just through kindness. She believed in it strongly, and I thank God I got that from her and my dad."

There are several long-time employees at Mountain, including two of the three chefs, who've been there for 16 and 17 years. Belke said even after all these years, she still sometimes watches the kitchen crew in awe. "It's a well-oiled machine, and it's fun to watch them because they don't even have to speak. They know what they are doing." Belke called it a dance.

"The staff are some

of my favourite memories here. I still have my bookkeeper. He has been here 19 years. Junita (waitress) has been here twenty years in January. She started right after me. That's why I've been here so long. It's hard work, but the staff and great food and the family I work for, you can't get any better than that," said Belke.

Belke said the relationships she has built through the community are irreplaceable and considers the staff a second family. "It's my heart and soul. It's my job until I'm done with my career. Yes, we are a business, but we are successful for a reason. It's not just about delicious food. Tradition matters. Community matters."

Belke said having her restaurant family has helped her get through hard times. "Losing my mom. Losing my husband's parents. Mountain was my safe place through hard times in life." She said the experience of dealing with COVID was another hard time. "I had never had to lay off staff prior, and it almost killed me." Thankfully, all but two staff who had moved eventually returned.

Belke said retirement will come knocking one day, but not yet. "This has been an incredible journey with incredible people. I'll retire eventually. I just love it so much. Whitecourt is an incredible community. There's so much goodness here. Yes, there are bad things and hard times, but the community always steps up. I can't explain how wonderful the people are."

When asked what



Steaks on.



Joanne and her grandchildren.

her favourite thing on the menu was, Belke laughed and said she had to give it to their steak. "To celebrate 45 years of a milestone business here and 20 years myself, again, there are no words because I feel it every day in some shape or form. Thank you to the community. It's been an amazing ride, and I'm still going strong!"



Joanne Bates Belke, celebrating 20 years at Mountain.

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***Monthly meetings have been postponed due to COVID-19*



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Support group on Tuesdays 6:30pm - 8:30 pm, starting September 17, 2024 at Crossroads Community Church, 4419 44 Ave, Mayerthorpe.

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Hamper elves busy at work

By Serena Lapointe

At 9 am, on Friday, December 13, over 40 volunteers with the Whitecourt Christmas Hamper took over the main room at the Family Worship Center to create hampers for area families. The room was overflowing with love and generosity, showing how much Whitecourt takes care of its own. "It really is overwhelming, truly," said Whitecourt Christmas Hamper Chair Kim Tschigerl, as she looked towards the mountains of presents before her. "We live in a great community that gives from the heart. They really do." So much so, that this year, the Hamper received more stuffies than expected, thanks in great part to the Wolverine's recent Teddy Bear Toss. "We have an overabundance, and what's really great about that is that our teenagers get more of a variety and will get a stuffed animal that is more suited to their age, like the Squishmallows, which we received lots of (through REMAX's business nomination game)." Tschigerl said that some of the remaining stuffies will be shared with local community organizations in need who work with children. "At the end of the day, you just go home and say, thank you, God," said Tschigerl, wiping away a tear. "It truly is amazing." Great work to all who donated, shared the message, collected donations, wrapped gifts or supported the process in any way. The joy you've given to area families, with selfless and generous actions, lives up to the true meaning of Christmas.



The Family Worship Center's main room was filled with busyness.



Someone's getting a Nerf toy wrapped by this jolly elf.



Some of the over 40 elves helping wrap and put together hampers.



Each of the 113 hampers start out on a chair.



These two elves were having a ball.



A pair of elves handpicking toys for hampers.



Mounds of stuffies to choose from.



A mountain of locally donated toys for the Christmas Hamper.

Online nominations a huge success for Whitecourt Christmas Hamper donations

By Haylee Winger

The Whitecourt Christmas Hamper, a non-profit with a 52-year legacy, is brightening the holidays for 113 families this year, up from 99 last year. A total of 244 children will benefit, thanks to the support of volunteers, local businesses, and the community.

As one of five Ambassador Locations, RE/MAX leverages social media to boost donations, going above and beyond with their annual Local Business Challenge on Facebook.

The challenge kicks off with a Facebook post from RE/MAX where they announce their nominees and encourage them to join in on the fun. Participants are invited to donate new, un-

wrapped toys and then challenge at least two other local businesses to do the same, creating a chain reaction of generosity throughout the community.

RE/MAX celebrates every donation on their Facebook page with a post showcasing the donor, their contribution, and the businesses they've invited to participate. This approach not only fosters goodwill but also shines a spotlight on local businesses reminding residents of the companies that step up to support their neighbours.

Brian Ames, owner of RE/MAX Whitecourt, shared the story behind this amazing challenge. "We started an Excel spreadsheet the first year we started the

Small Business Challenge [2022]. That first year we had 159 businesses step up. Nothing small about that! We wanted to drop the word 'small,' and now it's called the Local Business Challenge," Ames said. "It's all about supporting local, those in need, and those who have businesses in our community. Maybe next time you buy tires or get your accounting done you'll think of that business that brought in toys." This year, 134 businesses participated in the Local Business Challenge filling the RE/MAX lobby with toys and lining the hallways with even more. Whitecourt's businesses are proving that the holiday spirit is both alive and thriving.



RE/MAX photo

Santa poses at the RE/MAX office with generous donations from local businesses all in support of the Whitecourt Christmas Hamper.



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SCHOOL NEWS



Students from Pat Hardy School's Grade 5 Uttley class recently enjoyed a meaningful visit to Spruce View Lodge, where they spent time connecting with the elders.



Students in Pat Hardy School's Grade 2 Turcotte class have been busy crafting special Christmas gifts for their parents, showcasing their creativity and holiday spirit. The class also enjoyed spending time with leadership students from Hilltop High School, fostering mentorship and community connections during this festive season.

PUBLIC NOTICE

www.whitecourt.ca | facebook.com/TownofWhitecourt | 780-778-2273



NOTICE OF DECISION

The following decisions were made by the Municipal Planning Commission:

Application 24-116: Unit 2, 4164 Kepler Street – Discretionary Use – Application for Retail General – Approved with Conditions.

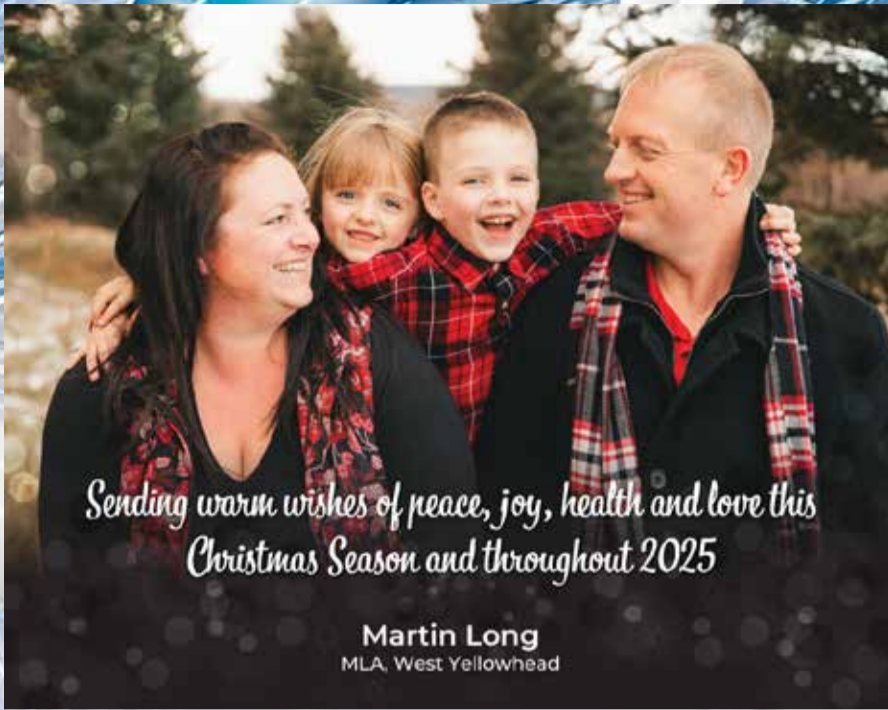
Date of Decision(s): November 28, 2024 **Appeal Closes at 4:00pm:** December 19, 2024

The following decisions were made by the Development Officer:

Application 24-113: Lot 12, Block 8, Plan 752 1663, 3717 37 Street – Over-width Driveway – Approved with Conditions.

Date of Decision(s): December 4, 2024 **Appeal Closes at 4:00pm:** December 30, 2024

An Appeal of the above decision(s) may be made by submitting a written appeal and appeal fee (\$300) to the Office of the Secretary of the Subdivision and Development Appeal Board, Town of Whitecourt Administration Building, Box 509, Whitecourt, Alberta, T7S 1N6 prior to 4:00pm on the above noted date. Any person(s) affected by the said proposal(s), has the right to appeal prior to the above date.



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The Press welcomes readers to write letters to the Editor. A maximum of 300 words is preferred but not necessary. Letters must carry a first name or two initials with surname and include an address and daytime telephone number. All letters are subject to editing. Please email letters to wctpress@gmail.com.



The Press

A locally owned and family operated newspaper serving Whitecourt

PUBLISHED EVERY WEDNESDAY

Contact

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Charlie Brown and friends on Lyons.



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with: Duncan Craig LLP Attention: Kayla Thompson
Name of Personal Representative or Lawyer

at: 2800, 10060 Jasper Avenue Edmonton AB T5J 3V9
Address of Personal Representative or Lawyer City or Town Province Postal Code

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Putting a face on suicide



Austin Gage Schoonover

Age - 14

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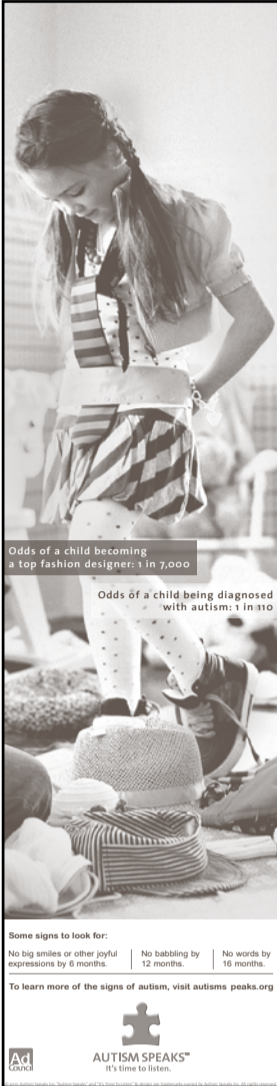
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A look at the local weather		Wed., Dec. 18	Thu., Dec. 19	Fri., Dec. 20	Sat., Dec. 21	Sun., Dec. 22
P.O.P.		Snow	Mainly sunny	Mainly sunny	Cloudy with sunny breaks	Cloudy
High		70%	20%	30%	30%	60%
Low		-9°C	-10°C	-9°C	-3°C	0°C
Wind		-11°C	-12°C	-9°C	-3°C	-2°C
24-Hr Rain / Snow		E 10 km/h ~5cm	W 6 km/h	E 15 km/h	W 7 km/h	SW 7 km/h

Whitecourt and area residents share some of their favourite Christmas memories

By Serena Lapointe

Christmas means different things to different people. From family traditions to special memories and people, places to see, things to do and everything in between. For some, the holidays might mean travelling or staying close to home. Most families bake or cook up certain dishes year after year, and lots attend mass to celebrate their faith and the birth of Jesus.

For Cheryle Trofimuk, one of her favourite memories of Christmas is one from her childhood. A very special lady in her life, her grandmother, was known for making a delectable cherry cheesecake every Christmas Eve, which she could not wait to dig into. "I was most excited about her cherry cheese, even though it was so simple. Somehow, she'd make it taste so delicious," explained Trofimuk.

"She passed away a few years ago, and I've taken on the tradition of making cherry cheesecake every Christmas. It's not the same (without her). I feel it makes me honour my grandmother when I think of her and her cherry cheesecake every year,"

she said. Trofimuk, who wears her grandmother's gold ring that she inherited, said those memories of her grandmother are a significant part of her life.

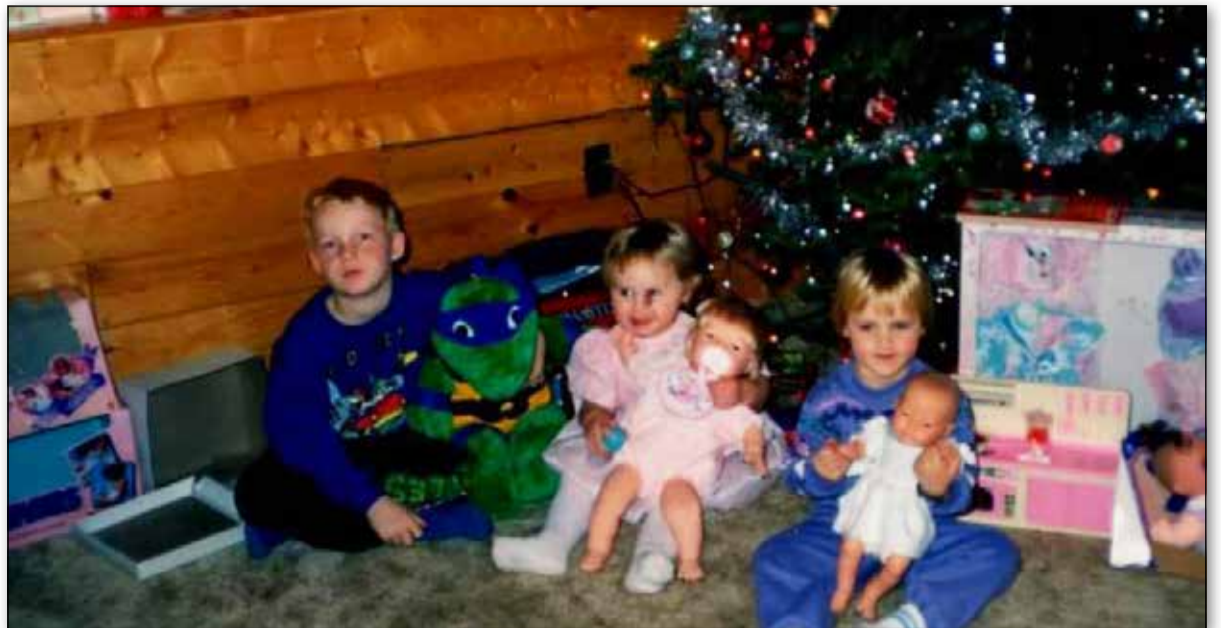
For local mom Lorelei Sergeew, her fondest memories also stemmed from her childhood. "My grandparents, Stan and Margaret Case, would host a large Christmas brunch every year. Family and friends would gather, and Grandpa would cook all morning. He passed when I was nine.

Our family continued the tradition, but it wasn't the same without Grandpa at the stove."

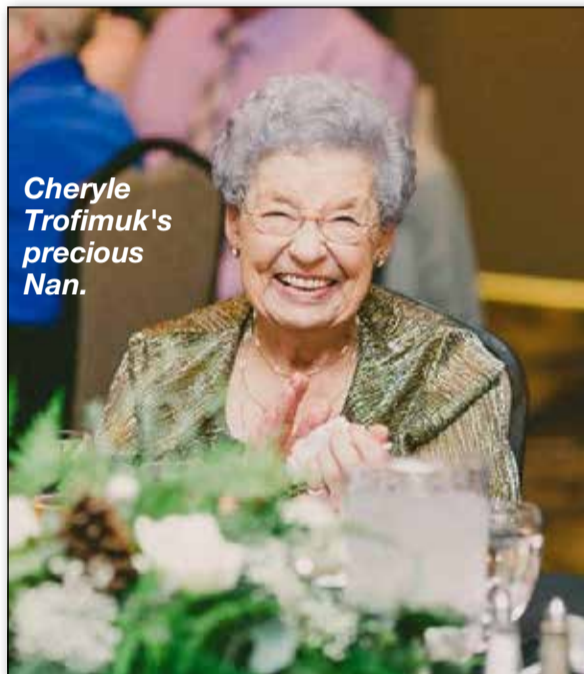
Sergeew said though she was too young to remember what dishes he made, she remembers the feelings of that time, and the emotions remain in her heart years later. "I was too young to remember the food, but I remember a house full of people, love and laughter." Sergeew does remember one thing, though. "He was a professional bacon maker," she chuckled, proudly.

Tara Bartsch is another person who holds

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Amanda Mckenzie with her cousins opening presents.



Cheryle Trofimuk's precious Nan.



Tabitha with her parents and siblings in Meadow Lake.

Everyone has their own Christmas traditions and holiday memories. Here are a few stories from area residents for you to enjoy. From hunting for a Christmas tree to festive skits and favourite recipes, we hope the spirit of the season comes through their experiences.

HOLIDAY SCHEDULE TRANSFER STATIONS & WASTE COLLECTION

TRANSFER STATIONS: Anselmo, Doris Creek, Goose Lake

Open	Saturday, December 28, 2024 Sunday, December 29, 2024 Tuesday, December 31, 2024
Closed	Tuesday, December 24, 2024 Wednesday, December 25, 2024 Wednesday, January 1, 2025

WASTE COLLECTION Fort Assiniboine Holiday Pickup

No Change to schedule for pick ups

Monday, December 16, 2024 • Monday, December 23, 2024 • Monday, December 30, 2024

Blue Ridge Holiday Pickup

Friday, December 20, 2024 • Tuesday, December 31, 2024 • Friday, January 3, 2025

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Registrations forms are also available on Woodlands County Website www.woodlands.ab.ca.

A copy of valid insurance must be attached, with Woodlands County added to your insurance, as additionally insured.

If you wish to obtain further information, please contact admin@woodlands.ab.ca

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onto special memories. Her younger brother, Cole, who tragically passed while serving in the military, was a fanatic for Christmas. "It was his favourite holiday! He would get up super early, grab his stocking, and try and wake everyone up," said Bartsch.

"One year, he tried to wake me up super early," laughing as she recalled the morning in question. "We had just moved to the acreage where my parents live now. My door had been the outside door, and when it became my bedroom door, I had a lock on the inside. So that Christmas Eve, I decided I was sleeping in and locked it. Cole was there early, trying to get in, knocking on the door and trying to bribe me with my stocking. Ha-ha! But nope. I slept in that year," said Bartsch.

Food is also something that sticks with her, no matter how many years pass. Traditions have a way of bringing lost loved ones closer. "My second favourite memory is that Cole would make everyone crepes Christmas morning. We stopped for a bit after he passed, but my mom has picked it back up," she said.

For Amanda McKenzie, Christmas dinner was her favourite memory, especially when she still lived in Newfoundland and her

Nan would watch her. "She would watch me while my parents went out and made me turn off the lights so that no mummers would come knocking at the door," she laughed.

Mummers and mummering are traditions found on the East Coast. "It's when people dress up in disguise, with anything from around the house, to change their appearance, even talk or walk differently," she explained. "Then they go to the homes of friends and family, and the host has to guess who's who. Then the mask is usually removed, and they go from strangers to friends.

After, there's lots of song, dance and drink!" McKenzie said though the tradition isn't as popular as it once was, the memories remain strong for her. "It's not around much anymore, but St Johns has a Mummer Parade each year." When asked what part of Christmas dinner she remembers most, McKenzie said her Nan takes the cake, or rather, cobbler. "My favourite thing my Nan made would be either her homemade buns or her Blueberry Grunt, like a blueberry cobbler. My Nan spent all her time in the kitchen, and all the family would get together. I sure miss it a lot!"

From food to trees, many residents enjoy the experience of finding their own Christmas tree, chopping it down,



The Trigg Family out to get their yearly tree.

bringing it home, and dressing it up in shimmering festive glory. Laurie Catherine Trigg and her crew do just that, but they add a musical touch, which has become a family tradition. "When my mama homeschooled us, we would go out and get a Christmas tree from our field or ditch while playing the song, "Going to get a Christmas Tree" by Tom Paxton," she explained. "And now, myself and my sweet, homeschooled babies do the same thing. We sing it the entire way, regardless of whether we are on foot

or in a vehicle! It's the sweetest!"

Local mom Jennifer Moffat and her family also enjoy the tradition of getting their own tree. The crew recently completed the yearly trek into the fluffy white snow to pick out the perfect specimen for their living room, now surely decorated in all its glory.

For Tabitha Desrosiers, travelling to Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan for Christmas with her mom, dad, and siblings is one of her fondest memories. "My parents would load all the gifts into



Jennifer Moffat and her family getting their 2024 Christmas tree.



Picking out the best one.

the van, and Nicole, Shayne and I would buckle in, ready to spend Christmas with my mom's side of the family," she explained.

"It seemed like forever when I was a child, but as I got older, the trip wasn't as long as I thought, ha-ha! Upon arrival, my Grandpa Alex and Grandma Eva would wave in the window while we came down the driveway. Each spruce tree that lined the drive would sparkle with the vintage Christmas bulbs! When I saw those trees, I felt the magic of Christmas!"

Desrosiers said they also did Christmas Eve skits, which the cousins would get on board with.

While performing, one person would be absent from the crowd for good reason. "My Grandpa would go dress as Santa, and then after, he would be outside. We never caught on that Grandpa wouldn't be watching, and that Santa would always appear right after we finished." Talk about going the extra mile to create magic for the kids. Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.

Rate cut turns 50...again

By Mark Parsons, ATB ECONOMICS

The question heading into last week's rate decision was not whether the Bank of Canada would cut, but by how much: 0.25 or 0.5 percentage points. Our call, solidified after last week's soft jobs report, was that the Bank would go jumbo (0.5 points) for the second straight meeting. And that's exactly what they delivered today, bringing the policy rate from 3.75% to 3.25%—the lowest since October 2022.

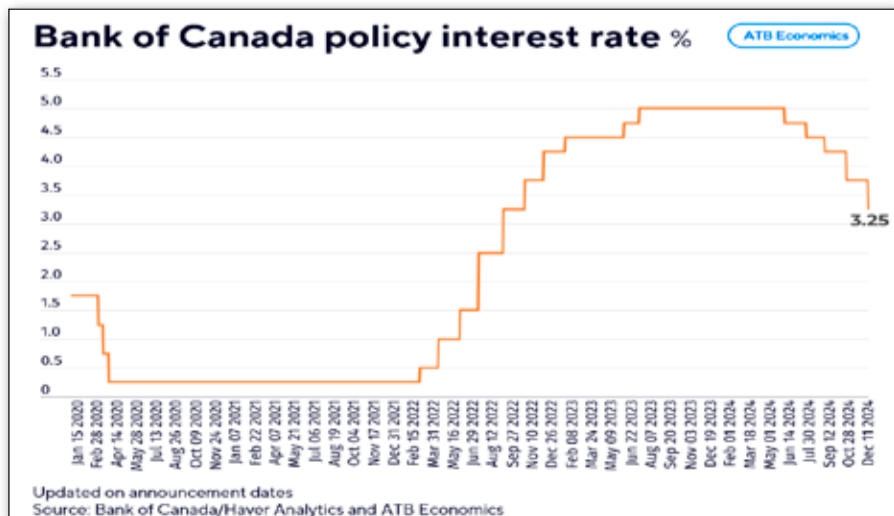
This was just a rate announcement—no new forecasts (we get a new Monetary Policy Report from the Bank at the end of January).

So we're left dissecting the statement and press conference remarks.

Our quick take: Clearly the Bank of Canada doesn't want to be behind the curve. Inflation is at target and there is plenty of slack

in the economy—why not move lower faster? With this second jumbo move, the Bank hopes this will help prevent the economy from cooling too much, at least more than needed to keep inflation at 2%.

Even with this latest cut, policy will remain restrictive with households and businesses still adjusting to past hikes. If inflation flares up again, the Bank can simply hold longer at the current rate.



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