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Vol. 15 - Issue 1 | Wednesday, January 7, 2026

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Year-end wrap-up from the seat of the Minister of Infrastructure, Martin Long



West Yellowhead MLA Martin Long has been Minister of Infrastructure since February 2025. With ten months under his belt and a new year on the horizon, he recently chatted with *The Press* about some significant moments he was part of and some of the plans currently underway in his busy ministry. Pictured is Minister Long playing with a youngster at the Stollery Hospital land announcement. See story page 3.



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If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, you need to know that you're not alone. You can also call if you are not in crisis, seeking additional information. The new Canada Suicide Prevention Service (CSPS), by Crisis Services Canada, enables callers anywhere in

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KidsHelpPhone Ages 20 Years and Under

in Canada **1-800-668-6868** (Online or on the Phone). First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness 24/7 Help Line **1-855-242-3310**
Canadian Indian Residential Schools Crisis Line **1-866-925-4419**
Trans LifeLine – All Ages **1-877-330-6366**

Putting a face on suicide



Kelli Lynn Hull Sheeley
Age 25

Every 40 seconds somewhere around the world someone dies by suicide, that's 99 people every 66 minutes. Every day, that's almost 100 people in the United States alone, and over 2160 worldwide. Putting a Face on Suicide (PAFOS) is a suicide awareness project that creates posters and videos to pay tribute to those we have lost to suicide with dignity and respect. PAFOS humanizes the daunting statistics; lovingly replacing numbers with faces.

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Three things to know for your eye health

(NC) Maintaining good eye health is important at all ages, but particularly as we get older. It's important to consider ways we can protect our sight and help others who are facing vision loss. Here are three things to keep in mind:

1. Get your eyes examined regularly. Adults over 40, those with diabetes or anyone with a family history of eye disease should be

extra diligent. Many serious eye conditions, including glaucoma, cataracts and diabetic retinopathy, show no early signs. This is why getting a comprehensive, dilated eye exam is important: it lets your eye doctor see inside the back of your eye and detect damage early.

2. Your lifestyle impacts your eyesight, and more. Regular physical

activity helps prevent conditions like diabetes and high blood pressure, which are linked to vision-threatening diseases. You can also support eye health with foods high in nutrients, such as leafy greens, colourful fruits and vegetables and foods rich in omega-3s. Other lifestyle changes, like quitting smoking, can significantly re-

duce your risk of developing serious eye problems.

3. Practice daily eye protection. Always wear sunglasses that fully block UVA and UVB radiation, even on cloudy days and in the winter. When using tools or doing home improvement projects, wear safety glasses to prevent eye injuries. For those who wear contact lenses, proper handling and

cleaning are essential to prevent infections.

Eye diseases, injuries and infections can cause the cornea—the clear, dome-shaped “lens” surface of the eye—to become cloudy or scarred, resulting in serious vision loss or blindness. For many, a corneal transplant is the only way to restore sight. These procedures have a high success rate and can dramatically improve quality of life.

In addition to taking good care of your own eyes, consider going one step further and registering as an organ, eye and tissue donor. Eye donation involves recovering the cornea, not the entire eye. One donor can restore sight for up to two people, and people of all ages and backgrounds can register as donors.

Learn more about giving the gift of sight at donateyourtissues.ca.

Want to be self-employed? What you should consider

(NC) Many Canadians dream of starting their own businesses, and entrepreneurship can be hugely rewarding. Being your own boss, setting your own hours and personal fulfilment are all benefits of self-employment. But there's also a lot to consider beyond the day-to-day of the business itself. If you're thinking about starting your own business, here are some important

considerations:

Ask yourself if entrepreneurship is for you. The reality of self-employment is that it can be more than a 40-hour work week. Starting your own business takes drive, dedication and an idea that you're passionate about enough to see to fruition. It can be a rewarding path to take, but one that requires commitment. Don't take the step lightly—it can be a

major shift in lifestyle, so take some time to consider if it feels right to you.

Build up your financial literacy. Being your own boss means handling a lot more financially than being an employee, including business expenses, payroll and taxes. Everyone has different levels of knowledge and comfort when it comes to managing money, and there's al-

ways something we can learn. Consider taking a financial literacy course for self-employment. Some organizations, like ABC Life Literacy Canada, offer free programs and resources. They can help you brush up on your financial skills as well as learn new ones that can help when managing your new business.

Be prepared to network. No entrepreneur is an island. Your business will be a part of your community, as well as the community of businesses in your area. You have to be

prepared to represent your business during interactions and events in your community. It can help you build valuable contacts and relationships, while helping others better understand your business.

Striking out on your own can be daunting, but with the right preparation, you can be well-positioned to enjoy the rewards that come with independence and the pride that comes with building something yourself. You can learn more about building your

skills and knowledge related to self-employment at abcmoneymatters.ca.



Year-end wrap-up from the seat of the Minister of Infrastructure, Martin Long

By Serena Lapointe

Minister of Infrastructure Martin Long, MLA for West Yellowhead, sat down with the Whitecourt Press in the final weeks of 2025 to reflect on the work done since he took the Minister post in February. The ministry is a significant ingredient in the provincial pot, and the Woodlands County resident said he is excited to be part of it. "I really do enjoy the fact that it's such a busy time. There's always something on the go. But, truthfully, I am one cog in a wheel. I have an incredible team in my office and an incredible team in my ministry, and I'm so fortunate to be in this position for such a time as this."

One of the most significant moments of 2025 that Minister Long pointed to as a standout for him was the announcement that the land for the new standalone Stollery Children's Hospital had been selected. "It's been a long time coming. I've worked extensively with the Stollery Foundation and the folks at the Stollery, getting their feedback, and our department worked hard with the U of A to get an agreement," he said.

Knowing how important the hospital will be for Albertans, including families in his riding and community, Minister Long said it was an emotional moment. "I was really overwhelmed that day to get to that point and make that announcement. It gives me such a sense of pride, yes, but also humility. When I went around in the early days and said that I would represent the everyday people, the families that make our communities home, and then, as a dad with young children myself, the last thing that we want is for our children to be in a hospital. For me to be in a position

today where I can be a partner in helping lead this future project and create a space where children will thrive when they are in the unfortunate circumstance of needing care, is so humbling."

As for a timeline, Minister Long said his team will be coordinating with the Stollery, University of Alberta, Health Ministry and partners in other jurisdictions to work towards the functional program planning for what the facility will need. "We are hoping to complete that process in 2026, and then at that point, once we know what the facility will need, we will get into the design phase followed by construction."

Other projects that took place last year include the opening of the Calgary Recovery Community, a mental health and addiction facility, and the launch of 45 school-related projects. "There's also another project that many families will be familiar with, and that's the old Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton. We are in the early negotiations for the potential redevelopment of it. We will see what comes of that."

He said he let it be known his first week as Minister of Infrastructure that he wanted to take another look at the building, ultimately halting the plans to demolish it and seeking requests for expressions of interest to see who would consider redeveloping the space, giving it a new life. The deadline for submissions was in November. Though there isn't a timeline yet for next steps, Minister Long said conversations about those submissions will start in 2026.

When it comes to sitting down with construction stakeholders, Minister Long said regular meetings and a partnership mindset

are significant focuses for him. "If we have a 'no' answer to give, we are giving that no with a reason now and making sure we continue to move forward because we need all of our industry partners on board with us. We have many schools to build, health projects in various stages, and a number of other projects on provincial infrastructure that we need to complete. So, we need all hands on deck at this point," he said, adding that meetings have been very positive.

For class sizes, Minister Long said provincial growth is obviously putting strain on public infrastructure components and that the government is responding. "We've announced an 8.6-billion-dollar investment to build 200,000 student spaces over a seven-year period, and that's on top of another 3 billion dollars that were already in the queue being done. We recognize there are pressures in the system, and we will do our best to speed up timelines and get spaces built so all students can enjoy a positive learning experience," he explained.

As previously reported in The Press, the 2025-26 Electoral Boundaries Commission recently recommended removing Jasper from the West Yellowhead constituency and adding Swan Hills, through a multi-constituency redistributing plan, enabling the commission to eliminate two provincial seats from rural Alberta. The commission's reasoning was to place the two seats in Calgary, where population growth has been exponentially higher.

Minister Long said he disagrees with the commission's recommendation for his constituency and has voiced that through their feedback survey, along with other affected Albertans. "I be-

lieve that Jasper is best suited to remain in the West Yellowhead constituency. I travel that corridor frequently, and I do know that it's the general corridor, east/west, for folks living in the region. I can appreciate the intention that the commission might've had, but disagree with removing Jasper from the West Yellowhead constituency and putting it in a riding with Canmore and Banff," he said.

Minister Long explained that his ability to access both Hinton and Jasper through his current constituency allows him to meet with residents regularly. He said that changing the boundary would likely keep residents from meeting one-on-one with their representative. "Travelling the highway 93 corridor in the wintertime, if it's open, is treacherous, and there are many times when it isn't open, which would effectively make it impossible for constituents to meet with their MLA and for the MLA to go to the communities."

He said that while he understands the commission's focus on population growth, rural Albertans have different accessibility concerns than urban Albertans, as well as different needs. He said focusing on reasonable boundaries and effective representation is important and cannot become lost in the conversation. A virtual meeting will take place on January 15, where residents can share feedback. Register for it at the commission's website www.abebc.ca.

As he looks forward to 2026, Minister Long said his focus will be on building and modernizing schools, creating more spaces and capacity for acute care and hospitals, and continuing important engagement with partners

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in the construction sector and external stakeholders. He encourages everyone, his fellow Albertans, constituents of West Yellowhead and community members, to continue being what Alberta is all about. "It's a land of opportunity where every community feels like you're surrounded by family, whether you grew up there or came from afar. I encourage all of us to continue moving forward and embodying the land that everyone wants to be part of with us. Happy New Year!"

| A look at the local weather | |  Wed., Jan. 7 |  Thu., Jan. 8 |  Fri., Jan. 9 |  Sat., Jan. 10 |  Sun., Jan. 11 |
|-----------------------------|--|---|---|---|--|--|
| P.O.P. | | Mainly sunny | Mainly sunny | Mainly sunny | Mainly sunny | Mainly sunny |
| High | | 20% | 30% | 30% | 30% | 20% |
| Low | | -3°C | -5°C | -9°C | -1°C | 0°C |
| Wind | | -11°C | -14°C | -10°C | -10°C | -4°C |
| 24-Hr Rain / Snow | | SW 8 km/h | W 9 km/h | SW 10 km/h | SW 9 km/h | W 20 km/h |

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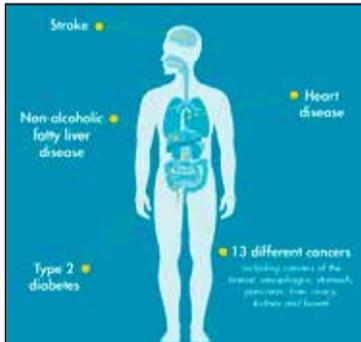


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Elsie Berryman 780 778 0241 elsiesvitalityrebuild@gmail.com



A beautiful red heart.

An anonymous resident is back at it again, creating beautiful red ice hearts and placing them around the community. The Wellspring Family Resource and Crisis Centre is one spot where hearts can be seen, as is Tennille's Hope. Staff and volunteers of both places might not know who the artist is, but they do know one thing: they're loved.



Woodlands County has some exciting job opportunities!

Community Ambassadors: The Woodlands County ambassador is a unique full-time seasonal role that requires an outgoing, media savvy, engaging individual that is willing to represent the County and connect with our communities' residents. Duties Include: Gathering survey data, meeting with community stakeholders and small businesses, attend events and create a catalog of photos and videos to share on social media platforms.

Seasonal Labourers: Woodlands County is hiring seasonal labourers to support Recreation, Infrastructure, and Agriculture Services through hands-on outdoor work such as grounds maintenance, facility upkeep, weed control, traffic support, and general labour duties. These full-time temporary positions run May through summer and offer valuable experience for students interested in practical fieldwork across parks, roads, and agricultural services.

Human Resources Coordinator: This role works closely with all County departments, helping managers with hiring and onboarding, supporting employees, and contributing to the development of HR initiatives and policies, and plays a key role in supporting an engaged, healthy, and collaborative workplace.

For more information and to apply: woodlands.ab.ca/p/career

BULK WATER STATIONS - PREPAID ONLINE ACCOUNTS

Beginning January 2026, all Bulk Water Stations will transition to a prepaid online account system.

To complete the required system upgrades, the stations in Anselmo, Blue Ridge, and Fort Assiniboine will be temporarily closed for a short period in January.

Closure dates will be posted on the County website Notice Board and shared through social media. Detailed information will also be included with the December invoices.

For inquiries or details, please contact the Municipal Office in Whitecourt at 780-778-8400.



Eastlink Park photo

Eastlink Park is open for winter fun! Magic carpet and T-bar lifts are running, and tubing is now open. Enjoy a day on the snow and warm up by the fire pits with friends.



DAVE KUSCH

Reeve, Division 1 - Anselmo
dave.kusch@woodlands.ab.ca
780-778-9337



PATRICIA MACNEIL

Councillor, Division 2 - Whitecourt West
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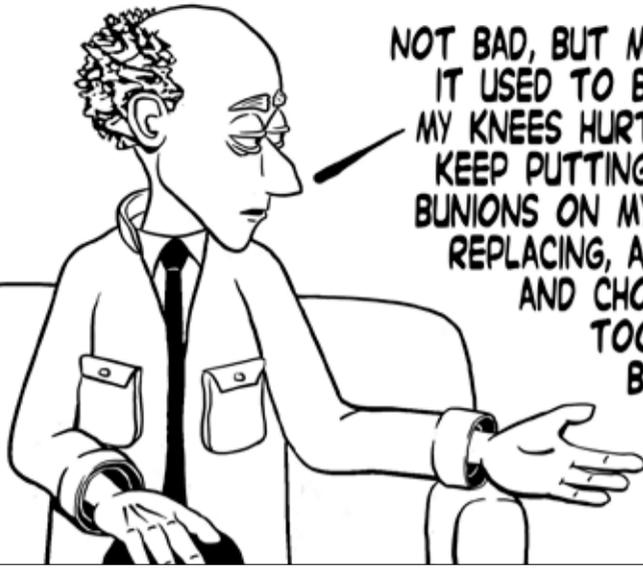
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Meetings are three times each week

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- Friday 8:00 pm - 9:00 pm

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Support group on Tuesdays 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm, September 16 – December 2, Crossroads Community Church, 4719 44 Avenue Mayerthorpe, Pre-registration is required

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- Mental Health Helpline 1-877-303-2642
- Addiction Helpline 1-866-332-2322
- Health Link 811

Whitecourt 2026 interim budget adopted

**| Town of Whitecourt
Press release**

Whitecourt Town Council has approved the 2026 Interim Budget. The budget, totaling \$69,078,492, consists of a \$50,957,865 operating budget and a capital budget of \$18,120,627. The budget maintains service levels and funds important capital investments with a 4.45% tax rate increase.

“This budget not only meets our needs today, but prepares our municipality for the future. Long-term financial

health and stability are priorities for this new Council, and this budget includes a number of multi-year investments in local infrastructure, while balancing ongoing financial pressures from rising inflation and operating costs,” stated Whitecourt Mayor Ray Hilts. “I’ll be posting a series of budget highlights on social media in the new year to discuss what is planned for 2026, and how this budget will impact our community.”

The 2026 Interim Budget Report can be

viewed on the Whitecourt website at www.whitecourt.ca/your-town. Whitecourt Town Council will be hosting its annual public open house on the proposed budget in the new year, which will provide an opportunity for further public engagement.

2026 Capital Budget Highlights:

- The Culture & Events Centre will open in the fall of 2026.
- The 2026 Street Improvement Program includes street, lighting, and sidewalk repairs at locations

throughout the community.

- Highway 43 Vitalization plantings will be completed along both sides of Highway 43 in west Whitecourt.
- Enhancements will be made at the intersections of 52 Avenue and 47 Street, and 51 Street and 49 Avenue, and improvements will be made to pathway and bus stop connectivity, and accessibility on portions of the transit route.
- Construction of the multipurpose courts at Festival Park will be completed to provide space for pickleball, basketball, badminton, tennis and ball hockey.

An outdoor classroom will be developed at the Forest Interpretive Centre to provide space for a variety of community programming.

2026 Operating Budget Highlights:

- A Community Safety

Plan will be developed that will connect local agencies and organizations with shared safety priorities for the community that will focus on crime prevention and crime reduction.

- A Community Emergency Preparedness Day will be organized to provide community members a chance to meet local first responders, and to learn how to prepare for emergencies.
- Continuation of youth-focused programming, including the Doors Open Program and Teen Week.
- Continuation of the social prescribing services for seniors in the region, with support from the United Way and Health Aging Alberta. This program helps connect seniors with non-medical programs and services in the community to

enhance their quality of life.

- A Volunteer Coordinator position will be added to support Whitecourt non-profit groups in areas such as grant identification and writing, budget development, recruiting and retention of volunteers, and other organizational supports.
- A Utilities Master Plan will be created to assess the Town’s existing water, sanitary and storm systems, and provide recommendations for future services and development.

The 2026 Budget will be finalized in the spring of 2026 once the Provincial budget is adopted, and final assessment figures are established. Specific tax rate impacts will vary by property type depending on the assessed value of a home or business, and will be determined once the final budget is adopted.

What online dangers are teens facing?

(NC) A lot of our lives are spent online. While there are many benefits to being connected, it also carries serious risks, especially for teens. Parents, guardians and trusted adults all have a role to play in knowing how to recognize the signs, and how to intervene safely when teens and youth might be in dangerous or violent situations.

Can violence happen online?

Unfortunately, yes. Violence isn’t always physical. It can also be emotional, sexual or financial, and violence that begins online can also spill out into the real world. Another important factor to consider is the prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV). It’s when someone is harmed or treated unfairly because of their gender, how they express it or how others see it. Much of the GBV that youth face today happens through the technology they use to communicate.

Understanding tech-facilitated violence

For many young people, tech-facilitated violence is part of their reality. This might look like being forced to share their location, having intimate photos spread, being threatened with sextortion (which is when someone threatens to send sexual content to others unless they are paid or

sent more), harassing comments or memes, digital stalking or being outed online. These acts can cause deep and lasting harm that can affect life at home, at school and at work.

Young people are more vulnerable because their lives are deeply connected online, thanks to smartphones, social media, and an increased digital presence. Many find community through the web—it’s also a way for them to socialize, forge their identities, improve their mental health and seek safety and support. But this online life comes with risks and vulnerability. Young people often have less power to push back, and abuse can escalate quickly behind a screen.

Making a positive impact

Trusted adults can step in by modelling empathy and respect

and keeping communication open with the young people in their lives. It’s important to check in with youth regularly to gauge how they’re doing online and if they feel unsafe. Adults can help educate them by showing them safe online activities and explain security and privacy settings they can update on their devices. Demonstrating how to stay safe while also ensuring they can participate in their social circles is critical.

If a young person tells you they’ve experienced GBV, the most important thing you can do is to listen, believe them and remind them they’re not at fault.

Young people need adults who will stand with them. Learn more about what you can do to make a difference and help end the cycle of violence at canada.ca/itsnotjust.



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Town of Whitecourt photo

Whitecourt Food Bank introduces new access guidelines

By Haylee Winger

For more than three decades, the Whitecourt Food Bank has played an essential role in supporting individuals and families experiencing food insecurity, serving well over 2,000 people in the community each year.

The Food Bank operates out of the Carlan Services Community Resource Centre at 76 Sunset Boulevard. Services are available on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., with the final intake accepted at 1:45 p.m.

To access the Food Bank, clients must present identification for every member of their household at each visit, along with proof of residency. In addition to providing food hampers, the Food Bank also offers referrals to other community programs

and resources that may assist families in need.

New intake requirements will take effect in the new year. Government-issued identification will be required for every household member, and proof of residency dated within the past three months must be provided for all individuals aged 18 and older at every visit.

Under the updated guidelines, households will be eligible to receive up to 12 food hampers per year, with a maximum of two hampers per month. Each hamper is designed to provide approximately one week's worth of food.

The Whitecourt Food Bank remains committed to meeting community needs while ensuring fair, consistent, and sustainable access to services for those who rely on its support.



On January 1 at noon, two groups from Whitecourt Taekwondo took part in the club's longstanding New Year's Day tradition of working out together in the snow. Mirrored after the idea of a cold plunge, members typically remove their boots and socks, wear their doboks (uniforms) and push their way through a workout of push-ups, jumping jacks, kicks and punches, all while trying to forget how cold they are. The small group doing the workout in Whitecourt met at Festival Park at noon, prepped with hot chocolate and blankets for afterwards. The second, much larger group, had to get up really early and be at their chosen spot for 2:00 am, armed with headlamps and flashlights, but that wasn't the only difference. The larger group didn't have to contend with snow because they were on a beach in Thailand! The two groups Facetimed to watch each other's very different workouts, all in the spirit of fun and tradition.

PUBLIC NOTICE

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



Christmas Tree Pick Up

Starting on Monday, January 5, crews will be picking up trees from across the community on a weekly basis throughout the month of January as time permits. There will be no set schedule, and pick up may be delayed due to snow or other higher priority tasks.

Please place your tree where you would normally place your garbage. For those residents in cul-de-sacs who place their garbage further out into the street, please don't place your tree where it will obstruct traffic.

Trees must be free of all decorations and tinsel. Please do not place the tree in garbage or tree bags.

The Whitecourt Regional Landfill also has a drop-off area for you to dispose of your tree. The Whitecourt Regional Landfill is open Monday to Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. has the right to appeal prior to the above date.



Rotarians with municipal and provincial leaders at the multi-use court announcement.



Standing guard over the hilltop fire early last year.

Town of WCT

As is customary for us here at The Press at this time of year, here's a lookback at a few of the standout moments from 2025.



The burned engine finally saw its last day.

2025

A YEAR IN REVIEW

| By Serena Lapointe

It does not feel as though 365 days have passed since the last yearly look back article here inside the pages of your printed, locally owned, and community-minded newspaper, but the calendar says otherwise. Twen-

ty-twenty-five arrived quickly and seemed to leave quicker than any year before it, or so it certainly felt.

One of the biggest differences between the start of 2025 and the start of 2026 is the

continued on page 10



Victor Hass donated over 70 pounds of food.



A massive dumping of snow in late 2025 turned a trampoline into the perfect fort.



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

For over 50 years, the Northern Lakes College vision has been to increase accessibility to educational opportunities. With 25 locations across northern Alberta, program sites throughout Alberta, and a unique Supported Distance Learning model, students can access quality educational opportunities without leaving their community. Students can study from the comforts of home, work, on the road, or from one of the many College locations. Northern Lakes College offers a variety of university transfer, diploma, and certificate programs, including Academic Upgrading, Business & Administrative Studies, Health & Human Service Careers, Pre-Employment & Apprenticeship Trades, Resource Technology, University Studies, and Continuing Education & Corporate Training certificates and courses. We support and promote professional development and wellness opportunities, and provide our employees with an attractive benefits plan and competitive salaries. The College service region offers numerous recreational activities for the entire family to enjoy!

Northern Lakes College has the following **temporary position** available:

Student Learning Assistant

Reference #NLC-2236R

Salary Range: \$20.85 to \$24.66 per hour

February 16, 2026 to April 24, 2026

Location: Fox Creek

Qualifications:

- A High School Diploma or equivalent and experience working with the public are required.
- Experience with Microsoft 365 software is required.
- Experience with teleconference and video equipment would be assets.
- Experience working in educational environments would be an asset.
- Must have a clean criminal record check prior to commencement.
- Class 5 driver's license.
- A combination of education, training and experience may be considered.

This position is covered under the Collective Agreement between Northern Lakes College and the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees.

Successful candidate must provide college or university transcripts and criminal record check to Human Resources prior to commencement.

For complete details on this employment opportunity, visit us online at: www.northernlakescollege.ca click on **Careers at NLC**. Please submit a resume **quoting the reference number NLC-2236R** to: Northern Lakes College, Human Resources, 1201 Main Street SE, Slave Lake, AB T0G 2A3 or alternatively Fax: 780-849-5881

Closing Date: January 26, 2026

Note: Northern Lakes College thanks all applicants for their interest in employment; however, only those candidates selected for interviews will be contacted.



Town of WCT

Cement floors, walls and windows in the CEC as of November.



Dino-RAWR!

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

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If you enjoy a fast-paced, progressive work environment and you have a passion for serving the local community, then this may be the opportunity for you! We believe that our values of diversity, collaboration, innovation and mutual respect bring out the best in our team, and we are currently looking to fill the following position:

Job#: 25-064 – Energy Manager – Contract Position – Closes January 15, 2026

Please visit www.whitecourt.ca for all employment opportunities and details on how to apply.



continued from page 9

amount of snow in the region. Scrolling through the Whitecourt Trailblazers social media, posts from early in the year showed low snow accumulation, with grasses visibly popping up from beneath winter's blanket. But unlike the disastrous season of 2024, there was actually some snow to cruise on.

However, it was certainly not the winter wonderland they are enjoying today. At the end of 2025, average snowfall accumulation data was shattered throughout much of the region. Although specifics for Whitecourt were not available, Edmonton was 416 percent above its 30-year average for December snowfall, and Grande Prairie was just slightly above that, at 418 percent. Talk about a white Christmas!



One of the sights to see during the Japan exchange trip.

In February, the Town of Whitecourt held a snow sculpture contest, encouraging residents to use some of the snow on the front lawns to create a masterpiece. Several folks took part, including one resident who built a monstrous Godzilla-like creature, and another who created a massive shark charging out of the ground, mouth open wide. Time will tell what creations are made this year with the mountains of snow we've got now!

In April, as drought conditions swept across the region, the risk of wildfire ignited. Mid-month, a small fire in the Hilltop East Industrial Park, which was quickly handled, upped the nerves as everyone patiently waited for rain to reduce the hazard. But the rain did not come in the amounts needed, and for most of May and part of June, the Whitecourt community remained under a fire ban.

Up the highway, in Swan Hills, a fire was dangerously close to the community, within eight kilometres, leading to the community's evacuation on May 26. Whitecourt became the home base for evacuees, as it has done several times in the last five years, for various affected communities. Swan Hills residents remained in Whitecourt until June 5.

A significant piece in Whitecourt's wildfire defense, the Community Fireguard Project, was started and completed in 2025. It begins near the Kanata hotel on Highway 43 and ends just past Ecole St. Joseph School. The strategically placed gap is 100 metres wide and 4.5 kilometres long. Brush, trees and other fuel sources were removed within the stretch, creating a break in the forest and an accessible zone for emergency responders to attack an incoming fire. The community snagged an impressive \$1,534,180 from the Forest Resource Improvement Association of Alberta to construct it.

A change in the visual landscape last year included the removal of the burned CN train engine, which had become a seemingly permanent installation near the pedestrian crossing bridge. The burned wreckage was



The pager ceremony for the newest firefighters.

from the August 2023 fire involving a fuel truck, which shut Highway 43 down for hours near the Highway 32 junction. In April, the charred skeleton was meticulously taken apart piece by piece and removed over just a few days.

In May, the Whitecourt Fire Department handed out some hardware to its newest firefighters. Following three months of hard work and extensive training, the group of eleven received their pagers. Now, when a call comes through, and someone is having their worst day, these new firefighters are ready to respond and help keep their community safe.

In June, the Rotary Club of Whitecourt announced its next collaboration with the Town of Whitecourt to enhance Festival Park. Multi-use courts will be constructed near the bouncy pillow and parking lot, thanks to a partnership between the Active Communities Initiative Fund, the Rotary Club and the Town. The courts will allow for pickleball, basketball, tennis and ball hockey, and will be a fun spot for residents once it opens.

Also slated to open this fall is the new Culture and Events Centre, which saw tremendous change over 2025. The construction site started the year fairly bare, with steel columns showing the building's skeleton. However, the year ended with colourful exterior walls, windows in, a full parking lot complete with lights, and busy bees working inside on interior projects. By November, wall framing was near completion in the library and theatre spaces, and tile work started in December. Roughly 2,100 cubic metres of concrete will

be used to complete the structure, which is over ten million pounds.

In July, Whitecourt sent a delegation to its sister community, Yubetsu, Japan. Youth, from grades 8-12, and their chaperones enjoyed a two-week immersive visit, which included one week staying with families in Yubetsu, visiting locals and attending school with similarly aged students. The second week took the visitors outside of Yubetsu to visit Hiroshima, Kyoto and Tokyo. Before going, students and chaperones had the chance to meet a delegation from Yubetsu, which visited Whitecourt in 2024.

One of the special pieces that make Whitecourt the community that it is are the people willing to help others. The Whitecourt Food Bank received a lot of support from generous Whitecourtians last year, including a 71-pound donation of much-needed pantry staples from Victor Haas, 960 boxes of Kraft Dinner from Mike and Rebecca at No Frills, 1,100 pounds of non-perishables and nearly \$1,400 from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. And that's just the start.

There were also the schools, including Ecole St. Mary School, where students raised 1,855 pounds of food plus \$2,700 through their Food Fight event, and Percy Baxter Middle School, where a food drive raised 521 pounds of food. Also, Hilltop High School's 12 Days of Christmas food drive brought in 556 pounds of food.

As for the Whitecourt Food Bank's largest individual supporter, that title goes to none other than Marilyn Stevens. Since bringing the idea of meat draws with her when she moved

to Whitecourt, she has raised nearly \$120,000 for the food bank. Two events held in November at the Road House raised over \$1,000 alone.

How can anyone read that and not feel emotional? The amount of time and money that supported these events is nothing short of amazing. And remember, this is a very short list compared to the actual list. To properly name each group, individual or company that donated would require this entire paper. Every single donation, no matter the size, puts food in someone's belly where they may have had none otherwise, and with food bank use continuing to grow, support remains critical.

As we head into 2026, ready to take on whatever the year has to offer, keep in mind how blessed we are to live where we do. Things might not be perfect, and there are always things that can change, but there are many people in our area who are a special breed and whose actions should stand as encouragement for others.

So, be the helper, the difference maker, the silent supporter. It doesn't always mean money, and there are many opportunities where even the smallest gift of time has a big impact. It could mean shovelling your neighbour's walkway, joining a committee, smiling and saying hello, supporting a fundraiser, helping someone who doesn't expect it, waving to a driver for being courteous, donating to a non-profit, visiting with Whitecourt's seniors, or simply remembering to say please and thank you. Let's make 2026 one for the books. Cheers!



A big food bank donation from Pat Hardy students.



Mike from No Frills with a big donation.



Dirt floors and steel beams inside the CEC in May.



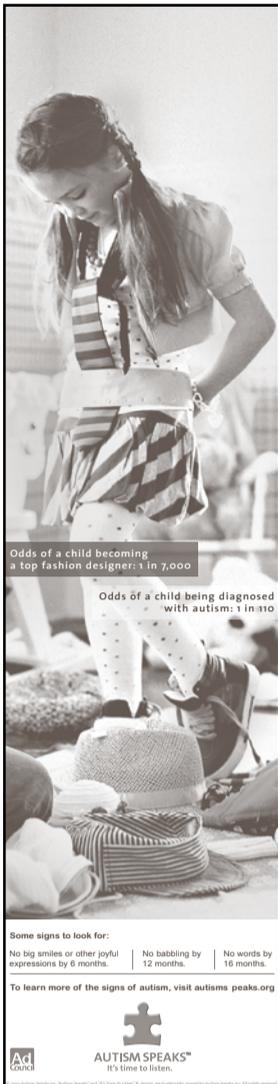
Meat draw super host, Marilyn Stevens (left).



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Snow removal safety tips for seniors

(NC) Winter in Canada brings its share of beauty, as well as challenges. For many Canadians, shovelling snow is part of the routine, but it can also be tough on the body. For seniors, staying safe during snow season means working smarter, not harder. Here are some simple safety tips:

Clear snow early and often. It helps prevent buildup and icy layers, reducing strain and lowering the risk of slips or falls.

Warm up before heading out into the cold. Clearing snow is hard work—help your body prepare for it with a quick warm-up before you get started.

Use the right tool for the job. Choosing equipment that reduces physical effort can make snow removal safer and easier, especially for older adults. Some manufacturers, like Garant, now offer cordless electric snowblowers that require less pushing and

lifting than traditional models, helping make winter upkeep more manageable.

Tip: When choosing a snowblower consider what type you will need. A single-stage model is good for easy handling where a two-stage model is self-propelled, which can reduce pushing effort.

Stay hydrated. Did you know that cold weather can take as much water from your body as summer heat? Make sure to get plen-

ty of fluids before starting to clear snow.

Be kind to yourself when shovelling. Remember to pace yourself, take regular breaks and don't hesitate to ask a neighbour for help. Snow removal is a workout, not a race.

With a few smart strategies and the right tools, seniors can enjoy winter confidently keeping their driveways safe, accessible and injury-free. You can learn more at garant.com.



Letter to the Editor policy
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.

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With big hearts and strong community support, the Whitecourt Wolverines U11 Team 2 helped collect 132 pairs of pajamas for Wellspring Family Resource & Crisis Centre, showing that teamwork matters just as much off the ice as it does on it.

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