

Plain & Valley

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Local poker professional wins big in Vegas

BY CHRISTEEN JESSE

Moosomin native Tyler Bonkowski's perfect poker face has led him all the way to the top at the world's biggest poker event.

The World Series of Poker is a big deal, with more than 70,000 participants competing for more than \$180,000,000 in prize money. Surrounded by ESPN cameras and live streaming online, players compete for more than just money—but for poker's most prized possession, a WSOP bracelet.

Playing in the Limit Hold 'Em event last week, Bonkowski sat at a poker table with a world wide audience, and put it all on the table.

"After day two, there were 18 players left, I was third in chips and I was thinking 'I've got a really good shot at winning,'" he says in an interview from his Las Vegas condo.

"Then when it got down to four players, I was chip leader and I was sure I would win . . . but anything can happen still. It doesn't matter who the best player is, there is still a lot of luck involved."

After eliminating more than 300 players throughout the tournament, Bonkowski found himself face-to-face with his final opponent.

"We started off heads-up, but then he got up to a 12:1 chip lead, so things weren't looking good," says Bonkowski.

"But I still thought 'This is destiny, I did not come here to get second.'"

With his sights set on winning, Bonkowski had more than just cards on his mind. He wanted to take down his opponent and prove himself to the audience.

"The atmosphere for the final table, there was probably 20 or 30 players cheering for this other guy, and I had one of my buddies in my corner and that was it," says Bonkowski.

"I just wanted to silence the crowd, because they were cheering every time he won a hand and it was dead silent for me."

And the underdog came out on top—Bonkowski won the final hand, his K-10 trumping his opponent's K-Q after the dealer revealed a 10. The win came along with \$220,817, a coveted WSOP gold bracelet and Championship bragging rights.

Bonkowski is thrilled with his winnings, but says the cash wasn't his only motivation to do well.

"It wasn't so much about the money. I was happy with anything in the top four for a payout—once I was in the top four I just had to win," he says. "I just had to come out as the winner of the tournament."

"The bracelet is also big, and I know a lot of my friends and family were watching so I didn't want to fall short, I wanted to do it for them too."

Adding to the loot that came along with victory, Bonkowski was the first Canadian to win a series tournament this year at the



Photo courtesy of World Series of Poker

Moosomin's Tyler Bonkowski after winning \$220,000 and a gold bracelet at the World Series of Poker in Las Vegas this month.

world-renown Las Vegas showdown. Although he exuded confidence and came out on top, Bonkowski started out shaky at the World Series.

"Starting in the tournament, I was kind of miserable," he says. "I had just lost a tournament, and some big money. I was thinking maybe I shouldn't have registered for this."

But as he gained confidence, his playing hand improved and Bonkowski pushed forward in the tournament.

"Things just fell into place the way they should," he says.

And as things fell into place, money fell into Bonkowski's hands. What will he do with the six figure sum?

"Nothing in particular. I have a house and that was my biggest goal money-wise—to get a house and be comfortable," he says. "So now I'm going to continue playing poker and I don't have one special thing that I will go out and spend it on."

"There have been a lot of ups and downs along the way—I have failed a ton of times but you just never quit."

—Tyler Bonkowski

This wasn't Bonkowski's first time playing his hand at the World Series. Last year he won a total of \$19,710 in three different events. Also winning at a number of other international tournaments, Bonkowski is gaining some major attention in the poker network. But it's more than just talent that is leading the young poker pro to the top. His poker face might have something to do with it too.

"I think it's pretty stone cold," says Bonkowski. "I've got some compliments before from pros in Australia that said 'If I could just have that poker face, I would be unstoppable.' I don't give off too much emotion or anything."

Although he is now playing in the most major international poker tournaments, Bonkowski started his career as a university student, experimenting with the card game and looking for some extra cash.

"Me and my friend Kurt Russell from Moosomin were living together in Regina

and we had just finished moving . . . we sat down and started watching poker on TV, and it was the World Series," Bonkowski remembers.

"Once we got back to Moosomin for the summer, we started playing home games. I wanted to be better than everybody. I'm pretty competitive, so I bought a strategy book and that ended up making me a little bit better."

As he learned more about the game and improved his skills, Bonkowski decided to try playing poker online.

"I deposited 20 bucks and within a year, I turned that 20 into a few thousand," he says.

His confidence continued to build, and before he knew it Bonkowski had caught poker fever. The young student quit school and his job to pursue the game as a career.

Although it was a risky move, Bonkowski is happy with his gamble.

"It worked out really well," he says. "There have been lots of ups and downs along the way—I have failed a ton of times but you just never quit. And as long as you think you're good, you're probably good."

He admits that being a professional poker player is very unpredictable and he compares it to flipping a coin, but he does his best to keep his spirits high, even when he's losing.

"The biggest downside is that you never know whether you're going to win or lose going into a day, you just know that overall in the long run you should be ahead," says Bonkowski.

"It's easier to handle if you're just having a bad day, but if you're having a long streak, it can be quite tough."

But Bonkowski has no regrets with his choice to pursue the game of chips and chance.

"None whatsoever. I am extremely happy with my choices and I always think that if I want to go back to school I can go instantly."

"If I want to do something else I always can, I like having that option."

Bonkowski will continue to try his hand at winning some more money, and maybe another bracelet. Over the course of the World Series, he will play in about 20 tournaments, in addition to the five or six tournaments he plays at international venues during the year.

"There are tournaments here every day until the middle of July, and then there is the final event, so I'll be here for that time," he says.

"After that I'll probably relax in Regina for the summer and get back to the tournament grind."

At 26, Bonkowski has bluffed his way to the top, and gained championship status at the biggest poker event in the world, but he certainly doesn't plan on folding anytime soon.

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Organizers happy with Snowbirds show

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK
Showers were in the forecast, but the clouds broke up and the sun shone through just as the Snowbirds took to the air above Moosomin on June 22.

On the ground, about 5,000 people took in the show. Even more wanted to be there, but with many people heading to the shuttle bus pickup point in the last hour before the show started, the crowds overwhelmed the roads and the shuttle buses, and not everyone who wanted to make it to the airport for the show. Some of those people watched from other locations and still had a good view of the show. Organizer Bill Thorn

said he couldn't believe the number of people who attended the show.

"It was just an overwhelming success," he said. "It was just more than we anticipated. The support we got from volunteers, sponsors, and the general public was more than we could have hoped for."

"I think there were close to 5,000 people there at the airport. I would think we're right in that ballpark."

Thorn said organizers had tried to emphasize that people should head to the airport early, but many headed to the site in the last hour before the Snowbirds took to the air. "That was a bit of a problem," he said. "If we could do anything



The Snowbirds in flight in Moosomin on June 22.

differently we would have more buses and we would find a way to handle parking differently.

"We had lots of parking lined up early, but with the weather this year it was just too muddy. We

had quite an area south of the main show area where people could have parked, but we just couldn't get to it—it was just too wet." Thorn had no issue with the weather once the Snowbirds took to the air, however. "When the actual show was on, there was no wind, it was nice and warm, I think we really lucked out," he says. "One of the Snowbirds told us how nice it was there was no wind—he said you don't usually get that in Saskatchewan. They were really happy with the weather, and especially that there was no wind."

Thorn said it was a thrill to see the show unfold before his eyes after months

of planning and preparations.

"It was better than I even thought it would be," he says. "I couldn't help but put my hands up in the air and cheer. It just overwhelmed me. I thought 'what a show this is!' The show was more than I thought it would be. The enthusiasm from the crowd was more than I expected. I'm just really pleased how successful it was."

Organizers don't know how much money the event raised yet. They will be tallying that up over the next few weeks, and all the proceeds will be going to the sound system and acoustics at the Moosomin Convention Centre.

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VCI celebrates its 100th anniversary



Rob Tomlinson, principal of VCI, welcoming the crowd to the 100th anniversary.



Left to right: Former VCI Principal Bob Chalmers escorting 93-year-old Isabella M. Dryden to the stage.



VCI student Stephanie Chase performing a piano solo.

BY ED JAMES

When built in 1911, Virden Collegiate Institute was the fourth biggest high school building in Manitoba.

Recently, a 100th anniversary celebration was held at the VCI with a large turnout of former and present students, school staff, school board officials and a number of local and provincial political leaders, including the Manitoba Minister of Education.

The Sunday afternoon event featured entertainment from students involved with the school band and music program, school yearbook displays, sports memorabilia, and lots of photos of students, staff and events from years gone by.

In the entry of the school, there was one of the original 1911-era teacher's desks set up complete with a brass hand-held bell and a real Province of Manitoba School Register that was being used as a guest sign-in book.

School principal Robert Tomlinson began the program by welcoming everyone to VCI and introduced a number of invited guests who brought greetings and congratulations on the school's 100th anniversary.

Their collective comments all praised the school, staff and students past and present for its long tradition of leadership, community involvement, school spirit and commitment to quality education, while the school division superintendent hoped that VCI's school bell would ring loud for another 100 years.

Marilyn Brick, Manitoba's Minister of Education, expressed similar feelings and said the school's long life was a testament to the community's belief in education, even during these difficult times with the flooding.

During the program, a dedication was made of the "Isabella M. Dryden Business Suite" established in the school recently, Dryden, who in 93 years old, came out for the dedi-

cation ceremony from Winnipeg. A brief history was given of Dryden's life and work in the area of business education, which has won her honors and recognition around the world. She came up to the stage to express her thanks.

She spoke of her time as a student at VCI and later as a business education teacher. She implored everyone there to always be thankful to those who help you out in life and try to keep true to the VCI motto "Nothing but perfection is satisfactory" in your school life and in your adult life and to try to make the world a better place in which to live.

Former VCI principal Bob Chalmers then gave a 100-year history of the school from its earliest day, through times of war, the depression and the 1950s oil boom in the Virden area that saw the VCI student population reach over 700 and require new additions to be built onto the original 1911 structure. This followed an unveiling of a commemorative piece of artwork done by the students to remember the 100th anniversary.

Closing remarks were made by school vice-principal Emma Lou Evanson, who thanked everyone for coming out and invited them to stay and visit the school and enjoy the refreshments, which featured a very large 100th anniversary cake in VCI colors, made by school trustee Margaret Walker.

Principal Tomlinson offered these final words:

"We were happy with the turn-out considering that it was the second date due to the April snow storm (the original event was cancelled due to weather) and the current challenges facing our area this June.

"People and relationships make a school, along with programming or the physical building. Today was a great opportunity to reconnect with old acquaintances and to remember the history and the people who made VCI what it is over the last 100 years."



Adelyn Ross performing a ballad.



Marilyn Brick, the Manitoba minister of education.



Right: Larry Maguire, MLA for Arthur-Virden.

Below: VCI vice-principal Emma Lou Evanson manning the guest registration book at an early period teacher's desk.

Ed James photos



Komarnicki wants ag minister to see flooding

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK

Souris-Moose Mountain MP Ed Komarnicki wants to bring Federal Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz to southeastern Saskatchewan to show him the effects of flooding on the region.

Komarnicki raised the issue of flooding in the House of Commons last week. "I felt it was important to refer to the dire circumstances facing the constituents of Souris-Moose Mountain due to the extreme moisture and wet conditions," he said. "It was important to speak of the frustration and strain that has been experienced by the many people doing their utmost to stay on top of the situation.

"This has to be a once in a lifetime situation for sure, and I hope when this year is over it won't be repeated again."

Komarnicki says the federal government works with the provincial government in helping to fund programs like Agri-Recovery, the Provincial Disaster Assistance Program, crop insurance, unseeded and flooded acres payments as well as business risk management programs for the

agriculture sector. "I have raised these wet conditions that we are experiencing with the Saskatchewan caucus and the Minister of Agriculture, Minister Ritz, who I have also invited to have a first-hand look at the conditions," said Komarnicki. "I expect this will happen as soon as we are able to arrange it given the House agenda and the Minister's travel commitments."

"It will be important to ensure that government programs will do the job they were designed to do and that farmers' concerns will be adequately addressed."

Komarnicki said he wants Ritz to see how devastating the flooding has been for farmers and residents.

"I think it's hard to understand without seeing it, just how devastating it is, where homes have been flooded out, where farmers haven't been able to plant a crop. It's been devastating to people and if it continues to rain it's only going to get worse. It was initially an issue with farmers getting onto the land, now it's more than that."

Komarnicki said programs like PDAP should meet people's immediate needs for

relief from the flooding.

"I think the provincial disaster relief program was designed for exactly the kind of situation we're seeing now," he said. "For the cattle people who lost cattle in the snowstorm there may be some issues, but generally it's working the way it should."

The MP suggested the federal government could be involved in projects to try to prevent flooding in southeast Saskatchewan in the long term.

"I know the premier has contacted the prime minister, and we may need to look in the future at some works that need to be done to prevent flooding," Komarnicki said. "If you look at Kipling, for example, there are four or five outlets coming into Kipling Marsh and only one route out. We may need diversionary works there and in other areas. I know the premier has said he would like to see some federal provincial co-operation on remedial works."

Komarnicki said he will be working this week on trying to get the ag minister to the riding.

"Once the house closes there will be

more flexibility to arrange something," he said.

Moosomin MLA Don Toth said he has heard good reports from people who have dealt with PDAP so far. "From what I've seen and a number of people I've dealt with over the past month and a half and talking to PDAP officials I think PDAP has been doing what it's supposed to do," he said. "What most people have been saying is they are really pleased. The public meetings were a good idea. They gave people the chance to speak one-on-one with officials."

Toth finds himself in the same boat as every other farmer in the southeast. He didn't manage to get any crop seeded this spring and his brother, who he farms with, managed to seed a grand total of 35 acres.

He said he may be still seeding some green feed, but believes the crop insurance coverage for unseeded acres will be a big help for a lot of farmers.

"I think every producer is happy to be getting something for unseeded acres," he said.

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7-10

Hal Schmidt working in health system again

BY CHRISTEEN JESSE

A year after resigning from the Sun Country Health Region, following the release of details about his past, Hal Schmidt's is back in a senior position in the health care system.

Schmidt has been employed with three different Canadian health employers in the last fifteen years, leaving a string of incidents in his wake.

These issues came to light last June—as he was serving as vice-president of finance for the Sun Country Health Region—when the World-Spectator published a series of articles exposing Schmidt's questionable past.

He was accused of mis-handling funds while serving as CEO of St. Mary's Hospital in New Westminster, B.C. back in the late 1990s. Court documents from 2005 indicate that Schmidt borrowed \$75,000 from the hospital—an amount that was never paid back. A civil lawsuit was filed against him, and the court-ordered judgement still remains outstanding.

In 2004, Schmidt was briefly employed as CEO

with the IWK Health Centre in Halifax. After 12 weeks, he was fired for misrepresentation when it was discovered that he had lied on his resume—claiming to be a chartered accountant, when he did not have the designation.

He then moved on to take a position as vice-president of finance with Sun Country Health Region in Saskatchewan in 2010.

After the allegations against him garnered media attention last spring, Schmidt resigned from his position at Sun Country.

He was hired again this spring as Executive Director of the H'ulh-etun Health Society in Chemainus, B.C. The organization, located just outside of Victoria, is a private health care agency—now overseen by the B.C. Ministry of Health—and represents the four communities within the Coast Salish First Nation.

"I'm stunned," says Judy Junor, NDP Health Critic. "A guy with an outstanding judgement in B.C. gets hired here again. They must not have known."

The World-Spectator received a tip about

Schmidt's new position from a woman in the B.C. community of Halat, who expressed her concern about his hiring.

The woman, who wishes to remain anonymous, says she was left with an uneasy feeling after meeting Schmidt for the first time.

"I can't put my finger on it, but when I met the man, my spidey senses went 'You are somebody that I don't think we can trust,'" she says.

"The more I spoke with the man, the more I got the impression (he thought that) I was one that he needed to watch—because I ask a lot of questions."

The woman says her suspicions were confirmed after she came across the stories that exposed Schmidt's previous employment history. She also says she isn't the only one with uneasy feelings about the new executive director at H'ulh-etun.

"One person became suspicious and asked him about the \$75,000 and that's when Hal said, 'That was a loan. They used to do that years and years ago. They used to give out loans to their hospital employees and it's just somebody out to get me. Somebody is out to soil my name,'" she says.

The woman believes the Board of Directors took Schmidt at surface value, and hired him in a time of

desperation, as the position of executive director at H'ulh-etun was vacant.

"I don't think they looked into him close enough (when they hired him). I really don't. I think he probably dazzled them with talk," she says.

"It truly worries me because there is not a lot of accountability on reserves. There truly isn't. And that's the part that's so unsettling."

The woman says she does not have malicious intent, but is rather looking out for the best interests of the health society.

"I want people to question his background," she says. "I just want (the health unit) to start working for the people that it is there for."

The World-Spectator contacted David Harry, Chair of the Board of Directors at H'ulh-etun Health Society, who was taken aback by news of Schmidt's past.

"This is a bit blind-siding for me, so could you enlighten me where this is coming from?" said Harry in an interview on Wednesday.

When told there were a number of issues regarding Schmidt's previous employment record, Harry requested printed evidence of the allegations against Schmidt.

When asked if he was aware of Schmidt's history, Harry responded, "At the time of hiring—no."

After reading the string of stories that were printed last spring regarding Schmidt's employment past, Harry said the information was enlightening.

"(The stories) are definitely a little interesting," he says. "When we hired him, we had taken all the right steps in that process however we thank you for your information. It helps paint a picture on our end and make things a little more clear."

Harry said the Board of Directors took all the necessary steps when hiring Schmidt by reviewing his resume and inquiring with the references that were provided.

When asked if he contacted Schmidt's most recent employer, Sun Country Health Region, Harry said he had not.

Junor says she doesn't know of a way that the government can monitor employees with questionable pasts and prevent them from being hired elsewhere.

"It sure begs the question," she says. "We didn't know (about Schmidt's allegations) either—he came from B.C. to Nova Scotia, to Saskatchewan and now back to B.C."

"He obviously has moved across Canada, but he hasn't had any accountability," she says.

Junor admits that it would be hard to regulate the employment records

of all health employees—especially when they get involved in private health agencies—but it's an issue that is worth looking into.

"I think it does speak to 'How can these people be kept accountable for what they've done?' They can just jump into another jurisdiction and act almost as if they have a clean slate."

Harry confirms that he had no previous suspicions about Schmidt's past, but says that they will now be taken into consideration.

"I want to connect the dots on some of the things that you sent me," says Harry. "And some of it... it sums things up fairly nicely. Let's put it that way."

"It just makes things more clear," he said. "Your information helps me decide the next steps."

Harry would not comment on what those steps might be, and when they might occur, but he did confirm that the issue will be addressed with the Board of Directors.

"There will be a conversation in the very near future. The very, very near future," he said.

Schmidt did not return any phone calls requesting comment. As the Executive Director of H'ulh-etun Health Society, he oversees the entire health agency, including the finance department and all other staff. He started the position on April 29.



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Christeen Jesse, Kara Kinna, and Kevin Weedmark photos



When Aaron met Erin:

Nortons find love on Facebook

BY TAYLOR SHIRE

When Erin Norton saw that Aaron Norton added her as a friend on Facebook, she thought nothing of it.

"I got this friend request and I was like 'Oh, that's funny. I'll accept it,'" said Erin, who is from Ellington, Conn.

She had no idea that after a click of the mouse, she would be moving from Connecticut to Saskatchewan or that the same guy who added her to Facebook would be slipping a ring onto her finger a short while later.

Erin accepted Aaron's friend request in July 2009 after Aaron, who is from Rocabville, typed his own name into a Facebook search out of curiosity. He found several people named Aaron Norton and Erin Norton.

"I just thought I'd add them," said Aaron. "Then only a couple of them added me and I never really thought anything of it after that until I saw (Erin) message me."

Seven months after they became "friends," contact was made when Erin sent Aaron a message on Facebook.

"He must have came up on my newsfeed or something and he just looked funny and his (Facebook statuses) would make me laugh," said Erin.

"It said, 'Hey, how's Canada?' " said Aaron. The two 21-year-olds sent Facebook messages back and forth for a month, talking about "the basics."

"Then we realized how much we had in common and how similar our senses of humour were," said Aaron. "While we were Facebook (messaging), I obviously didn't know I was going to fall in love with her."

They exchanged phone numbers and the first text message was sent last March.

"He texted me and, oh my gosh, I got butterflies," said Erin. After two weeks of texting, Erin decided to "take it to the next level," and asked Aaron to call her.

Aaron said he "worked up the courage" and dialed her number. Three-and-a-half hours later, they hung up.

"My cheeks hurt from smiling when we got off the phone," said Erin.

After that phone call, Aaron knew the relationship was going somewhere.

"I'm not going to lie, I was scared before calling because I didn't know that this was actually going to be the person that was on Facebook," said Aaron.

"Once I heard her voice, it was pretty awesome. I could feel the chemistry as we were talking," Erin and Aaron talked on the phone every night until the early hours of the morning—with Aaron's "cute Canadian accent" putting Erin at ease.

"Then we got our cellphone bills and mine was \$200 and his was \$1,000," she said with a laugh.

Skype accounts were created in April 2010, which meant the relationship would move forward with live video and audio over the Internet.

But seeing his love on Skype wasn't enough for Aaron. He had never met his Facebook friend, but he knew she was the "real deal" and he decided to meet Erin in person.

"There were people saying, 'What if you go there alone and she's crazy? What if she's not even her? What if it's a bunch of guys that are going to beat you up and kill you and stuff?'" said Aaron.

"But I knew that it was her and it was going to be okay," Erin said she wasn't even nervous, but excited instead. "I've seen him on Skype. I could see his Facebook account. He has 700 pictures. I talked to his friends and I knew everything was real," she said.

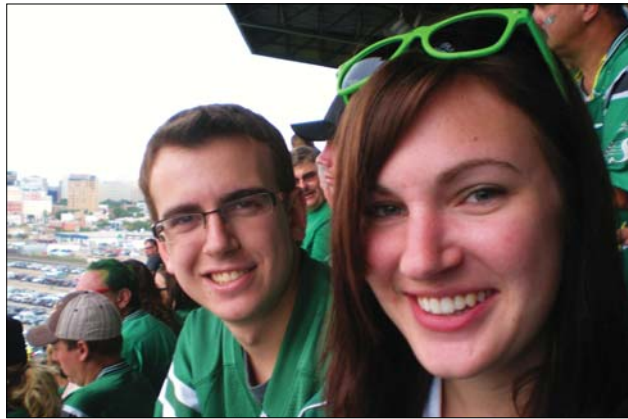
On the May long weekend last year, Aaron boarded a flight in Regina and headed for Connecticut.

"At that point, I was really nervous and my heart was beating a hundred miles an hour the whole plane ride," said Aaron. "I was excited, but at the same time, I was scared."

Erin and her brother went to pick up Aaron at the airport in Newark, N.J., a three-hour drive from Ellington. Erin's parents made her brother go with just in case Aaron wasn't actually "Aaron."

When Aaron stepped off the plane, he had thoughts that Erin might not be there. But all was confirmed when Aaron saw Erin facing the other way, with Erin's smiling brother peering over her shoulder.

"My heart just started going nuts," said Aaron. "Once (the plane) landed, I was freaking out," added Erin. "We saw people



Rocabville's Aaron Norton met Erin Norton on Facebook and the couple soon found out they have much more in common than their name.



Rocabville's Aaron Norton and . . . Erin Norton.

walking from the gate and I turned around and looked at my brother and I was like, 'Oh my gosh, I'm so scared, what if he doesn't like me?'"

Twenty steps from where Aaron first saw Erin, a comforting hug confirmed their love was real.

"When I got to her, I grabbed her from behind and hugged her and it was pretty much history from there," said Aaron.

He saw the biggest smile he had ever seen on Erin's face. "I totally relaxed," said Erin. "I just thought he was so cute. He was everything I expected. Everything and more."

Aaron stayed with Erin for a week, spending time together and seeing the sights of the northeastern United States.

"We barely slept the whole week. We would stay up all night talking," said Erin.

Erin said her family loved Aaron right from the start and the feeling was mutual. "By the end of (the week), I kind of knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her," said Aaron.

The couple knew that, although it would be difficult to carry on a long-distance romance, they were going to do whatever it

took to make it work.

"After I left, we didn't really know what was going to happen," said Aaron.

All Erin could think about was the next time she could see her Canadian boy. Aaron left on a Friday and by Sunday, Erin had her flight booked to Regina for July 20.

Once she got to Rocabville, she fell in love with the town—population 1,000, a 15th of the size of Ellington.

"It's just so nice to breathe," said Erin. "Everyone is so busy and hectic and everyone's just worried about themselves (in the northeastern U.S.), but in Rocabville, it's so relaxing. You can take the time to do whatever you need to do. People hold the door for you and are so nice."

Erin stayed in Rocabville for a week, attended Aaron's cousin's wedding and then flew back home.

"When I went home after that week, I knew that I couldn't be without him," said Erin.

And even fate intervened on her behalf. When she returned to Ellington, her workplace had been closed down, so Erin was out of a job, something she considered "lucky."

She knew she had to return to her small-town Saskatchewan boy. So, 12 days after she got home, she was on her way back to Rocabville, sending Aaron fake flight information and surprising him a few days early.

She got to Rocabville and was waiting in Aaron's room for him to come home from work.

"It was just awesome seeing his face and how happy he was to see me," she said.

Aaron said that when she arrived in Rocabville a second time, "we knew we couldn't be apart from each other."

Erin stayed in Rocabville until October and then went home for a couple weeks to gather her stuff and say goodbye to her family and friends to start a life in Saskatchewan with her new boyfriend.

But at that point, Aaron wasn't content with the word "boyfriend."

"Before she went back in October, I was thinking to myself that I knew I wanted to marry her," he said.

On Nov. 30, Aaron proposed. He got home from work one night and Erin had made supper. He looked Erin in the eye, with his mom's engagement ring in hand, and simply asked her to marry him.

"I'm not a very romantic guy or anything," said Aaron. "She said 'Are you serious?' and I said 'Yep.'"

The couple was married on Dec. 17 with Aaron's immediate family and grandparents present. Erin's parents, brother and cousin watched the reception on Skype.

"We were both really excited and couldn't believe we were actually doing it," said Aaron.

Their first names may vary slightly on paper, but in speech, they are identical. Finding someone with the same name is as easy as a Facebook search. But marrying that person is a far stretch, according to one expert.

"The fact that these two people have the same name, that's pretty funny," said Randall Craig, a social media expert in Toronto.

"The whole use of social media to meet new people—meeting completely new people—is less common," explained Craig. "Meeting people through connections is easy and more common and frankly encouraged by these sites."

As social media strategist Mark Evans explained, the obstacles of meeting someone have evaporated.

"You think about the different ways that people used to meet, whether it was through clubs or family or different activities, and you think about how online dating has really made that connection process a lot easier, and social media has even made things even easier," said Evans.

Dating sites are different than Facebook, but love can be found at both.

"When you go to an online dating site, it's pretty obvious what you're there to do," said Evans. But with social media, things aren't that blatant. People can start off fairly innocently by having conversations with strangers.

"Social media really helps to facilitate meeting new people and maybe that leads to something else," said Evans.

Aaron and Erin are planning on having a bigger wedding reception on June 11 in Rocabville and then another in Ellington sometime later. They are moving to Moose Jaw in August to attend SIAST. Mostly "excitement" lies ahead for them.

Erin has been getting used to having the same name as her husband. "I don't even notice anymore. Someone says 'Aaron,' we both look up," she said.

The couple's friends sometimes distinguish them by calling them "Aaron the boy" or "Erin the girl." Or even "Ron" and "Rin."

For Erin, the toughest part about being with the man she loves is the immigration process, not knowing when her immigration papers will be processed.

"Most people think that once you're married, you have all the rights of a citizen. But I don't," said Erin, who has been awaiting her papers for two months. "I have no idea when I can go home."

Getting the papers is the next step for the couple, while having more Aarons and Erins aren't in the plans just yet.

But if they do have children, Erin said they wouldn't be named Aaron or Erin.

"It's confusing enough with the two of us having the same name."

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Deer population down after wicked winter

BY CHRISTEEN JESSE

This winter was a long, brutal season of excess snow and freezing temperatures, and it often seemed as though the brutal conditions would never end. Thankfully it did, but now that the sun is shining and the grass is green, the effects of winter are coming to the surface. The harsh weather proved to be detrimental to deer in the area and we are now seeing a significant decline in the deer population this spring—especially white-tailed deer.

Luc Syrenne, Moosomin's Conservation Officer, says this year's winter kill was major and he has calculated a mortality rate of 40 to 50 percent—the largest percentage he's ever seen.

"It's the most significant, most difficult winter that I've known to experience in the 14 years that I've been here in this particular area," he says.

Over the last several years, Syrenne has been conducting personal surveys in the spring time to assess how the winter affected the deer population in the area.

"I do an annual road survey, usually in the month of April, when deer start to come out in the Qu'Appelle Valley, and as I'm driving along, I'll count the deer along the road," he says. "Last year there was 800 or 900 but this year it was closer to 500 deer or under spotted."

Adam Schmidt, a wildlife biologist in Melville with Saskatchewan Environment says that once some official surveys are conducted this fall, they will likely see a similar decline in numbers.

"We don't have an exact number now," he says. "We'll have a better idea this fall when we do some herd structure surveys and spotlight surveys, but everything that's happened so far has been consistent."

"It's been a tough winter and during a tough winter we can lose 30, 40, 50 percent of deer, depending on the area."

The significant decrease that Syrenne and Schmidt are noticing is being seen throughout many areas in the province, with most of the loss along the Saskatchewan-Manitoba border and down through Weyburn and Estevan.

"Generally all throughout Southern Sas-

katchewan the deer population has been reduced," says Syrenne. "When you have the early onset of winter in November that extends well into April, (the deer) basically lose their energy reserves during the critical time for them."

Schmidt agrees that survival for deer in Saskatchewan was difficult, but says that some areas were hit harder than others.

"People will notice it will be harder to find deer but there are always pockets where deer do a little better so it's not uniform across the province . . . but in general it was a pretty tough winter," says Schmidt.

He says the mortality rates this winter were caused by two major factors.

"A combination of colder than normal temperatures and above-average snowfall—this year winter carried on right until the end of April."

Deer struggled to forage for food in the deep snow, and the extreme temperatures made them weak and vulnerable to predation. Schmidt says that the six months of extreme winter took a toll on the population of other wildlife in Saskatchewan.

"It has an impact on upland birds, especially the species of grey partridge," he says. "Like deer, they have to forage underneath the snow and when we get above average snowfall that will have an impact on them."

Although certain wildlife populations have taken a plunge this year, the ministry of environment is used to seeing these fluctuations.

"Populations don't stay the same, they're weather dependent," says Schmidt. "So these things have happened not on a regular cycle, but periodically. We get tough winters and populations drop. When normal weather returns they will produce more young and recover."

Fawning season was at its peak in the last week of May and first week of June, but will continue to drop fawns over the next few weeks. After that time, specific surveys will be done by the ministry of environment to gather numbers on the fall population. By looking at results from previous years with harsh winters, Schmidt predicts fawn productivity to be low this year.

"In really good years in the 1990s when

we did our herd structures in the fall, there would be over 120 fawns per 100 does but after a tough winter like in 1995 and 1996, that number dropped down to 60 or 70," says Schmidt. "There was almost a 50 percent decline in fawn productivity so that affects your fall population for sure."

Even though the whole impact of the winter cannot be evaluated yet, Schmidt is certain that the fall population will be smaller than usual. Because of weakness and predation, hundreds of deer died over the winter and the remaining herd will not be able to reproduce at a normal rate.

"After a tough winter they won't produce as many fawns as they would in a normal year, so not only did we lose some animals, we will have a smaller fall population," he says.

The numbers fluctuate every year, but after

a winter with such a dramatic drop in population, the government is taking steps to ensure the number of deer stays at a reasonable level during hunting season.

In seasons when the deer population is high, there are two licences available to hunters—one is good for hunting any sex and age, the other validates shooting only does and fawns.

"This year there will just be one either-sex licence and on that licence, most people will just shoot bucks," says Schmidt.

The ministry of environment will continue to monitor the situation this summer, and protect the population of deer that was lucky enough to survive the wicked winter. "It's not unusual and we don't like to see it happen but unfortunately we have no control over the weather," says Schmidt.

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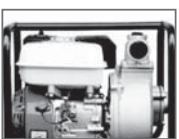
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Is the dawn of the flying car finally here?

"Hey, dude, where's my flying car?" is a cry every science fiction writer has heard—and every science fiction reader has uttered—since the future supposedly arrived on January 1, 2001, and we found ourselves still stuck to the ground, rolling along on rubber tires.

The problem has been that we really only have a few ways to get ourselves into the air, and none of them really lend themselves well to flying cars.

But a new technology presented at the Paris Air Show proffers the possibility of, not only flying cars, but more stable, easy-to-fly and mechanically robust aircraft for a plethora of purposes: the first "disruptive technology"—technology that changes everything and seriously shakes up an industry or market—in aviation since the jet engine.

The brainchild of the Austrian research company IAT21, the D-Dalus (a play on Daedalus from Greek mythology, which you have to admit is a much better choice than Icarus) is neither a fixed-wing nor a rotor aircraft. Instead, it is propelled by four mechanically linked contra-rotating cylindrical turbines, all spinning at 2,200 rpm.

Servos can turn the blades through a full 360 degrees around all three axes. That allows the D-Dalus to launch vertically, hover perfectly still, and move in any direction, a complex process made simple by computers: all the operator has to do is manipulate a simple joystick. That means the D-Dalus is far simpler to fly than any helicopter. (That's not the only way it's simple: it's also simple mechanically, so simple that it requires little maintenance and what little is required can be done by someone with no more mechanical expertise than your average auto mechanic.)

Speaking of helicopters, they and all our other existing VTOL (vertical take-off and landing) aircraft are challenged by bad weather and flying long ranges. They're also hard to land on moving platforms, such as boats in rough water.

But D-Dalus, according to its developers, suffers from none of these problems. Its ability to thrust upward allows it to "glue down" as it lands, even on a moving vehicle or tossing boat. It's extremely stable, handling rough weather



Edward Willett

with ease.

That stability, combined with a built-in sense-and-avoid system to keep it from running into things, and the fact it has no vulnerable external parts (unlike a helicopter, for example) means the D-Dalus can hover very close to cliff faces and building walls (making it potentially very useful for search and rescue missions).

The lack of external moving parts also gives the D-Dalus 360-degree vision: no blind spots in any direction. Throw all of these capabilities into the pot, along with the fact it's nearly silent, and it's not surprising the military is interested in it for surveillance drones.

But there are many other potential uses. The D-Dalus is so stable, it could even be flown safely into a building through an open window. Once inside, it could be used to remove explosives or contaminants, extract injured people, or even hold and direct water hoses for fire fighters.

D-Dalus aircraft can lift heavy loads, and the bigger

they are the more efficient at lifting they become, which means they could be used as skycranes for loading and unloading ships when regular cranes aren't available. The current D-Dalus has a 120 bhp engine, rotors five feet long, and can lift up to 70 kg, but IAT21 is working with Cranfield University in the UK on a version with a larger, more powerful engine, a new hull shape, and advanced guidance and control systems.

Every new technology runs into challenges. In the case of the D-Dalus, in early testing, all available bearings failed due to the huge forces on the blade pivots. In response, Austrian inventor Meinhard Schwaiger (who already has 150 patents to his name) created (and, of course, patented) a new, near-frictionless swivel-bearing.

You'll notice there's no mention in any of this of a passenger-carrying version: but there's no reason one couldn't eventually be developed "for public transit," as the news story I read put it.

"Public transit" conjures up images of airliners, or maybe airbuses, but really, we all know what it really means.

Flying cars!

And once we have them, the future really will be here ... at last.

About time, too.

Edward Willett is an award-winning writer of fiction and non-fiction from Regina.

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A view of the Cypress Hills from the back of my horse, Partner.

Christalee Froese photo

A reprieve on the high ground of the Cypress Hills

BY CHRISTALEE FROESE
The rain pelting South-east Saskatchewan threatened to sink my soul, so I headed for higher ground.

So high in fact, that it just happened to be the highest point in Canada between the Rocky Mountains and Labrador.

Even in Saskatchewan's Cypress Hills there were sloughs filled to capacity, impromptu brooks spilling over their banks, and fields drenched with water, but as I climbed higher and higher, relief arrived.

The winding road up to Reesors Ranch was bone dry. The horses and cattle lumbering up and down the grassed hills here seemed at peace, not having to contend with muddy pastures and rain-created lakes in the middle of their breeding grounds.

I'd been hearing about the historic Reesors Ranch in the Cypress Hills for years, always imagining that I'd find real cowboys who roped cattle, held branding days and lived off the land.

I was not disappointed as Scott and Teresa Reesor greeted me at the Texas gate and directed me to the

quaint cabin that would be home for a few days.

The Reesors have created a living tribute to the cowboy culture of Southwest Saskatchewan and South-east Alberta at their guest ranch near Maple Creek that sleeps up to 100 and hosts visitors, weddings and family reunions all year long.

As daughter Leanne Reesor and I prepared for our afternoon ride high atop the hills at the northernmost edge of Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park, I could see the ranching culture oozing out of her pores. At just 19 years of age, Leanne hoped to take over the operation one day and return the 2,000 acres of ranch land to a place that is home to 350 cattle like in her great-great-grandfather's day in the early 1900s.

The ranch today boasts 100 to 150 cattle at any given time, as they graze on the abundant rolling pastures and calve in May and June in order to avoid the spring snow storms that are known to cause chaos in these historic hills that reach 1,234 metres above sea level.

"I love that we're ranchers and I'm always trying to explain the difference between farming and ranching to people who visit us," says Leanne. "Most people think ranchers and farmers are the same, but many farmers don't have horses whereas we need them for what we do and here in these hills there is natural grass and vegetation that is not found anywhere else."

Even the air at Reesors Ranch is different. With freshness that only a high elevation can bring, and hints of pine from the abundant evergreens that appear in patches on the hills, the air soothes like none other.

And while mosquitoes did appear to be congregating in record numbers, much like they were doing back home in my south-eastern neck of the woods, these mosquitos chose not to bite. After two full days laying in the tall grass to take photos of sunsets, hiking the hills coated with wildflowers and horseback riding up steep ridges and down bush-filled coulees, I did not receive one single mosquito bite.

This ranch, that dates

back to 1904 and even predates the founding of the province in 1905, certainly did provide the relief I was looking for. With its cozy cabins, historic ranch house, quiet horses, high hills and scenic views for as far as the eye could see, Reesors lifted me up above the quagmire forming in my water-soaked part of the province and offered two days of dry, peaceful cowboy comfort.



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I think of her often. In those moments when life seems a little challenging, or I have an ache here, or a pain there, I think of her. I'm sure she has her challenges too, but you'd never know it.

She always has a smile on her face, she has traveled, studied, trained, and she just happens to have swam for Canada in the paralympics in Beijing.

Now she's off to the national championships in another sport—running.

And did I mention Jacqueline Rennebohm cannot see. When the 21-year-old Saskatchewan native was diagnosed with a degenerative eye condition at age nine, she could not even dream of a life in sport.

"I tried a lot of team sports, but things would happen like not seeing the ball or scoring on my own team, and I always felt like I was letting people down."

Despite being legally blind, she tried swimming at age 13 and fell in love with the freedom, independence and empowerment it offered. Her passion for the pool eventually led her to train five to six hours a day, seven days a week, which earned her a spot on the 2008 Canadian Paralympic team.

Finishing in the top 10 in four out of five events in Beijing left Rennebohm wondering if she could find the same speed on land that she had found in the pool. That question was unequivocally answered in 2009 when she



Christalee Froese

moved from her hometown of Regina, Saskatchewan to London, Ontario to join the University of Western Ontario (UWO) track team.

As a UWO Mustang, the 21-year-old dynamo used her training expertise and her unstoppable determination to record para-athlete times never clocked in Canada before.

But her eyesight remained an issue. With cone-rod dystrophy taking away all central vision and most of her peripheral vision, Rennebohm could not even see her feet when she raced, never mind the lane lines or her fellow competitors.

A fellow teammate quickly offered his services. Racing at her side and shouting out instructions like, "bend," "straighten" or "lane 8 is making a move," a fellow runner by the name of Simon Hodge guided his teammate to a Canadian record in the 200 metres and a place on Canada's national team.

When life has been challenging for Jacqueline, she lives by the philosophy that there is always more to be thankful for than there is to be disappointed about.

"The best thing to do is to take a seat and have a time of reflection and I ask myself "What do I have and what can I have?" No, I can never have my sight back, as much as I try to think there's going to be something out there, I can't hope for something to drop in my lap. If I want something, I have to go get it and sport has helped give me that mentally. If I'm facing something really challenging, I just look at what I have—I'm living, I have a wonderful family, there's so much I can do and I can help others who are facing the same challenges as I am."

Now, that's a glass-is-half-full attitude if I've ever witnessed one.

So on those days when the lawn needs mowing, the dishes are piling up, a desk full of work remains to be done and the dog is looking longingly at me for her 30 minutes of time, I simply think of Jacqueline and her mantra, "what do I have?"

I have a lawn that needs mowing, dishes to do, a desk full of work and a dog who can't wait to get my attention.

Life really isn't so bad.

Christalee Froese welcomes comments at Lcfroese@sasktel.net or visit www.westwords.net.

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