



110
SASKATOON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
Maestro
Victor Sawa's
Farewell Concert

The Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra Presents
The People's Choice - Brahms Symphony No. 1
Featuring **Kerry DuWors**, violin and the **Saskatoon Youth Orchestra**

Led by Maestro **Victor Sawa**
Post-Concert Reception in the Lobby
Saturday, May 23rd

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SASKATOON, SASKATCHEWAN

The StarPhoenix

BREAKING NEWS AT THESTARPHOENIX.COM

FRIDAY, MAY 15, 2015

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Everyone knows **SOMEONE**

Suicide in La Loche
an epidemic PAGES A10, A11



LIAM RICHARDS/The StarPhoenix

Deandra Janvier visits her mother's grave marker in La Loche. Janvier lost her mother to suicide in June 2007. In the aftermath, she tried to take her own life.



Jeffrey Lundstrom, owner of The Lounge in the Loft, is shutting down his marijuana salon but vows to push for the legalization of pot.

GREG PENDER/The StarPhoenix

WEED

Marijuana lounge closed, owner offers free pot

HENRYTYE GLAZEBROOK
THE STARPHOENIX

A Saskatoon-area marijuana lounge has shuttered its doors, but its owner says the closure won't stop him from pushing for legalization, even if accomplishing that goal means giving it away himself.

Jeffrey Lundstrom, owner and operator of The Lounge

in the Loft, said representatives from the city's community services branch, the fire department and Saskatoon Health Region requested access to the property for inspection purposes on May 11.

Rather than grant entry to the business, he instead chose to close it down permanently.

"They were very persistent about the inspection.

My basic thoughts on it were that this is the first stage of them attempting to push my business out," Lundstrom said.

The Lounge in the Loft has been open since February, offering a place for both recreational and medically licensed marijuana enthusiasts to use cannabis in a social setting.

See LOUNGE, A2

VETERINARY COLLEGE

U of S fund helps therapy cat for boy with autism

ANDREA HILL
THE STARPHOENIX

When nine-year-old Peyton Weiderick learned he might have to give up his beloved therapy cat because of the

hefty cost to fix her teeth, he was devastated.

"He was really off for probably about a month from when we first found out (the cat) needed surgery," said Peyton's mother, Karlinda Weiderick, from

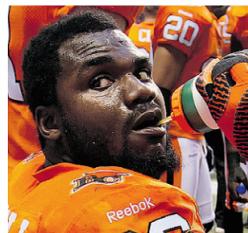
her home in Outlook, just outside of Saskatoon. "But we didn't have money set aside for that kind of bill, so we weren't sure what to do."

See FUND, A8



ART GALLERY EXPANDS AGAIN

Ellen Remail pitches in another \$2 million to cover costs of addition. A6



TWITTER CFL CONTROVERSY

Tackle Khalif Mitchell in hot water after denying Holocaust on social media. B3



FULLER SUMMER JOB

Cam Fuller recalls his first summer at work as a budding painter, sort of. A3

Today's weather
High 19
Low 7



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PHOTOS: LIAM RICHARDS/The StarPhoenix

A collection of old grave markers sits in the centre of a La Loche cemetery.

WHO is it now?

When sirens wail in LA LOCHE, people can't help but wonder if it's yet another suicide

ANDREA HILL
THE STARPHOENIX

LA LOCHE —

In her final year of high school, Deardra Janvier tried to take her own life. After classes ended one day, she went to her father's house and walked down the stairs to the basement. She was carrying the bottles of antidepressant and anti-anxiety medications she had been prescribed a year earlier — after her mother committed suicide.

She poured the tiny pills into her hand and swallowed them all.

"I wasn't thinking clear at all. I was in some kind of a panic," recalled Janvier, who is now 25. "All I could think to myself was that this pain that I've been carrying for the longest time, I just wanted to get rid of it."

Self harm is frighteningly common in the small northern town of La Loche, which has faced and continues to face what some in the community describe as a suicide

"epidemic."

Residents say the numbers started soaring in 2005 — two years before Janvier's mother took her own life — and continued to climb until 2010. When the deaths started climbing, the local Friendship Centre documented them. In a four-and-a-half-year period from August 2005 to January 2010, 18 people in the town of 2,600 took their own lives. Many more attempted it.

Janvier knows the constant suicides in La Loche — a community

where everyone knows each other — contributed to her own attempt.

"It was happening over and over again," she said. "It seemed like a lot of people were dying by suicide."

Each time, she was reminded of her mother's death. Each time, she felt more hopeless and helpless.

Yet after consuming the pills in her father's basement, Janvier realized she didn't want to die.

"It hit me. I just thought to myself, 'I don't know why I'm trying to leave so early; why am I leaving everybody behind that loves me so much?'"

She picked up her cellphone and called her older sister in Saskatoon, 600 kilometres away. By then, the pills had started to take effect.

"I couldn't really speak well, I couldn't really move well and I could feel that I was kind of drifting to sleep," Janvier said.

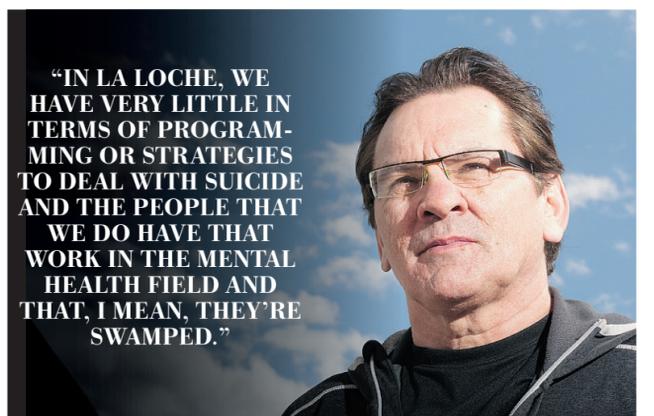
Her sister knew something was wrong. She called 911 in Saskatoon, then phoned Janvier's father's house. Janvier's younger brother, who was upstairs at the time, picked up.

An ambulance arrived and emergency responders pumped Janvier's stomach. She slowly regained consciousness and began her long journey to physical and mental recovery.

The annual number of suicide deaths in La Loche has dropped since 2010, but the problem remains.

Three young people in the town have taken their own lives since the start of this year. The last, a 20-year-old man, died in early March. At least five others attempted suicide that same week.

"Our community, it's in a crisis," said Connie Cheecham, who works



LEONARD MONTGRAND, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE LA LOCHE FRIENDSHIP CENTRE

"IN LA LOCHE, WE HAVE VERY LITTLE IN TERMS OF PROGRAMMING OR STRATEGIES TO DEAL WITH SUICIDE AND THE PEOPLE THAT WE DO HAVE THAT WORK IN THE MENTAL HEALTH FIELD AND THAT, I MEAN, THEY'RE SWAMPED."

for the La Loche Strengthening Families Program. "We could declare this as a state of emergency."

The annual suicide rate in the Keewatin Yatthe Regional Health Authority is the highest of any health authority in Saskatchewan. The area, which includes La Loche, Buffalo Narrows, Ile a la Crosse and other communities in the province's northwest, averaged 43.4 suicide deaths per 100,000 people between 2008 and 2012. That's more than triple the average annual provincial rate of 12.7 suicide deaths per 100,000. The average annual suicide rates in the Saskatoon and Regina Qu'Appelle health authorities were 10.2 and 11.5 per 100,000 people respectively for the same time frame.

"I think everybody would have somebody in their family who has committed suicide," said Lorna Lemaigre, coordinator of the La Loche Strengthening Families Program.

The reasons are multiple and

complex. Lemaigre said perhaps the biggest factor is loss of cultural identity in a community that's predominantly Dene.

When she first came to La Loche in 1984 to work at the school, every child spoke Dene. When she checked back in 2012, just four of 63 preschool children could do so.

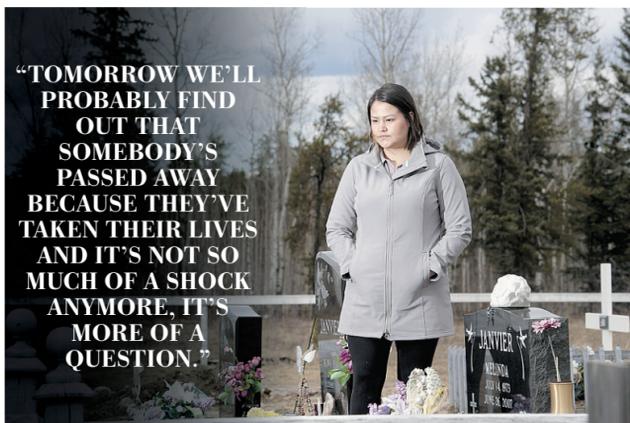
"That abrupt change is a huge contributing factor to the pain inside our community," Lemaigre said.

Many in La Loche went through residential schools or are descended from those who did.

Leonard Montgrand, head of the community's Friendship Centre and a residential school survivor, said the experience has led to family "dysfunctionalism."

"This caused a lot of parenting problems and a lot of addictions problems among a lot of our elders and our ancestors before that," Montgrand said.

Continued on Page A11



DEARDRA JANVIER, LA LOCHE RESIDENT

"TOMORROW WE'LL PROBABLY FIND OUT THAT SOMEBODY'S PASSED AWAY BECAUSE THEY'VE TAKEN THEIR LIVES AND IT'S NOT SO MUCH OF A SHOCK ANYMORE, IT'S MORE OF A QUESTION."

MORE than words

La Loche residents were asked to respond to the word "suicide" in the space above an instant-film portrait



Left to right: Lorna Lemaigre, Connie Cheecham, Deardra Janvier, Brendon Toulejour and Georgina Jolibois.

Continued from Page A10

"When a child or young person grows up seeing all this despair, loneliness and the addictions and everything, it becomes very heavy on them."

La Loche is also isolated, with few amenities. It has no hotels, no sit-down restaurants, no movie theatres or recreation centres. It doesn't even have a bank. The nearest Tim Hortons — a self-serve coffee bar in a grocery store — is more than 100 kilometres away in Buffalo Narrows.

"It's crazy, it's unbelievable," Montgrand said. "We lack the basic essential services that we deserve ... If people from the south had to live like this, they would just say, 'To hell with this.'"

Problems in the community have led many to drink, something Montgrand and Cheecham acknowledge is a problem La Loche.

"Mental health and addictions come hand-in-hand," Cheecham said. "If you're depressed or whatever, you cope with drinking or whatever or drugs or whatever. And a lot of our people, they don't know how to cope. They have lost all ways, all mechanisms to cope, so you just drown your pain. It's very sad. I really feel for my people when I see them downtown."

It's easy to overlook the La Loche downtown — a small strip of businesses along La Loche Avenue that locals refer to as "the main street." It features a couple of gas stations, a couple of takeout places, the Strengthening Families Program office, the elementary school, a liquor store and a couple of bars.

Before the liquor store, La Bar or Trappers open for the day, handfuls of people are sitting outside, waiting for booze to be served.

"It has to stop," Cheecham said, recalling a recent conversation with an elder.

"He was saying the government gives you the cheque in one hand and takes it back in the other hand at the liquor store."

Drink was one of the factors believed to have pushed Danny Montgrand to take his own life in July 2005, a month before the Friendship Centre started keeping track of suicide deaths. He was 29 years old.

"The part that I don't really understand is, he was such an outgoing person, he was very outdoorsy," said Kathy Montgrand, Danny's older sister. "There will always be unanswered questions."

A decade after Danny's death, Kathy still often refers to him in the present tense. Her voice halts as she remembers the man she lost.

Her brother — like many in the community — downed alcohol before deciding to take his own life, she said.

"I think it gives them more courage. If he was sober, I don't think he would have done it."

Danny had struggled with depression since his mother died of a heart attack in the late 1990s and had attempted suicide several times before succeeding in 2005. He never received help.

"Some people knew about it, like

"THESE KIDS WHO TOOK THEIR LIVES BACK THEN, I'M REMEMBERING STRAIGHT-A STUDENTS INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES, A LOT OF SUPPORT AROUND THEM. AND THEY END UP HURTING THEMSELVES AND DYING."



GEORGINA JOLIBOIS, LA LOCHE MAYOR

friends and family, but no one came forth," Kathy said. "If somebody would have come forth, I think help probably would have been there, I probably would have got help for him."

Danny's silence was not unusual.

Kathy said a heavy stigma surrounds mental health in La Loche, and many people are uncomfortable going to the clinic for help because the community is so small that word of the visit will likely get around.

"They're afraid of being seen walking into the hospital with patients sitting there," Kathy said. "They're more afraid of being judged."

Language is also a barrier to those seeking professional help in La Loche, Kathy said. The six physicians who fly in and out of the community do not speak Dene. The same is sometimes true for local mental health workers and counsellors.

Kathy said she would like people from La Loche who know the language and culture to get training to treat mental health problems.

"That would be a great resource for the community," she said. "A lot of these young people need to know how much education is so important so they can educate themselves — they can leave town and make themselves something — and they can come back and bring their career back to the community where it can help."



CONNIE CHEECHAM, WORKS AT THE LA LOCHE STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROGRAM

"I THOUGHT ABOUT GOING WHEREVER, BUT THE HELP IS NEEDED HERE, THIS IS WHERE WE NEED TO BE TO SERVE OUR PEOPLE."



Kathy Montgrand, left, and Leonard Montgrand.

In the aftermath of Danny's death, Kathy went through counselling in La Loche, which she said helped her cope with her grief. But healing was difficult with suicide after suicide rocking the community. She lost her niece, her cousin's son, her friend's son.

"I don't know what it was, but it was like a chain reaction," Kathy recalled. "It affected the community a lot. Every time you hear the sirens from an ambulance, you're wondering 'Who is it now?'"

As suicide numbers climbed, La Loche reached out for help.

A federal grant was obtained to start the Strengthening Families Program that delivers community workshops on parenting. Federal, provincial and town funds were used to build a Dene Empowerment Centre. The provincial ministry of social services gave money so the elementary and upper schools could have a social worker apiece. Two suicide prevention days were held in town.

Money was poured into affordable housing — \$19 million from the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation since 2007 to deliver 69 new rental units — to assuage what Leonard Montgrand of the Friendship Centre described as a "major housing crisis" that saw 10 or more people living in a home.

"That causes despair, causes a lot of hardship and anguish in families, especially young people," Montgrand said. "It's tough to grow up and learn yourself and be your own identity when you're having to share everything with everybody else. So times have changed. We're growing, we're getting better."

The Friendship Centre brought in a Saskatoon-based consultant to develop a long-term strategy for suicide prevention that was published in 2010. It also received a provincial grant to create a documentary about the impact suicide has on the community and to inform viewers about the resources available to help people struggling with depression.

"We've become stronger as a community," Montgrand said. "We've tried to encourage and empower community members to make change in the community themselves and to better themselves. But as far as La Loche as a whole, we still have a ways to go."

He said the community still needs more investment to build infrastructure — including basic amenities such as recreation centres and banks — and to bring in specialists who have been trained to provide aid to people struggling with mental illness.

Despite its high suicide numbers, La Loche lacks a suicide prevention worker. There's an opening for a second mental health worker in the community, but it has yet to be filled. Unlike larger towns in Saskatchewan's other two northern health authorities, La Loche receives no visits from a psychiatrist.

Lemaigre, the Strengthening Families Program coordinator who used to work as a career transitions teacher at the school, said because the community lacks the capacity to help suicidal youth, those who come forward are sent south, mostly to North Battleford, for treatment. Physicians there don't speak Dene, and overcrowded hospitals sometimes have no room to accommodate people from La Loche.

"I've had many experiences where students were flown south and returned the next day and they come home distraught. They say, 'See, they don't care, nobody cares about me.'" Lemaigre said. "And what do you say to a kid when — clearly, I'm not a mental health worker, I don't have the background — they've reached out, they've done their part, and the system turfs them out?"

Suicide in La Loche happens in cycles.

Some years, suicides snowball and the numbers climb drastically. Other years, there's nothing. In years like this one, when there were three suicides within three months, some people start to feel on edge.

"Even one suicide scares me, because it's going to start the epidemic again?" Montgrand said. "I'm scared of that almost starting up again and becoming more and more suicides and more and more people catching on. That's the scary part. I don't want to compare suicide to a flu epidemic or anything, but I get scared that it's going to pass from one person to another."

A suicide epidemic like the one Montgrand describes is not unheard of.

Laurence Thompson, the Saskatoon-based consultant who helped the La Loche Friendship Centre develop its suicide prevention strategy, said suicides tend to happen in "clusters," with one suicide or suicide attempt increasing the like-

The NUMBERS

Average annual suicide rates per 100,000 population (2008-2012)

43.4	Keewatin Yatthe	11.5	Regina Qu'Appelle
30.9	Mamawetan Churchill River	11.1	Sunrise
16.3	Kelsey Trail	10.2	Saskatoon
15.4	Prince Albert Parkland	9.7	Sun Country
14.3	Heartland	9.5	Cypress
13.1	Prairie North	12.7	Saskatchewan
12.8	Five Hills	Athabasca — Data not shared due to health authority's small population	

Source: eHealth Saskatchewan



Malina Herman outside of La Bar in La Loche.



LORNA LEMAIGRE, COORDINATOR OF THE STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROGRAM

"I WAS ACTUALLY LIVING IN THE HOSPITAL WHILE MANY OF THE SUICIDES WERE BEING BROUGHT TO THE HOSPITAL AND IT WAS HORRIBLE. YOU NEVER LOSE THE SOUND OF A MOTHER WHO HAS LOST HER CHILD."

lihood that others within a community or group will also attempt or complete suicide.

"There's kind of a copy-cat effect, especially among young people," he said. "Once they start, in theory, you want to get on top of it quickly because there may be others."

La Loche mayor Georgina Jolibois, who helped secure provincial and federal grants for the community at the height of the suicide epidemic, said the existing funding may not be enough to keep the problem at bay.

"Unfortunately, the support that we're getting right now isn't as fast as we did at the beginning, it's dwindling," she said. "We're more invisible to the government now than we were then."

Yet Jolibois, like many in the community, is adamant there remains a strong sense of hope despite the loss of so many lives and the pervasiveness of social problems.

"Even in the midst of pain, we have a sense of humour, we have young kids, we have joy and beauty and the nature," she said. "It's amazing."

The sentiment is echoed by Janvier, who sought treatment in Saskatoon following her suicide attempt, more for the sake of her brothers, who were also depressed, than for herself.

"I was the only person that they looked up to and so I just thought to myself: Enough is enough, I just need to show them that they can get help," she said.

After receiving counselling in the Bridge City, Janvier returned home and participated in the community's first suicide prevention day. Dozens of people were sharing stories. Many were crying. And Janvier stepped up to the microphone.

"The motivation that I guess I had was I really wanted to show people that there's more than just thinking that you can commit suicide and end it all," she said.

Janvier said it seemed like she talked for three hours. After, people told her she'd inspired them.

Since then, Janvier's spoken at the La Loche school and community hall, letting people know there's help if they need it.

"I've gotten a lot of powerful responses," she said. "Some people have actually come to me and said that they know exactly how I'm feeling and where I'm coming from and that it's great that I'm doing something like this because it's showing other people that you can get help."

It's a message that could help prevent epidemics like that seen a decade ago.

"I don't have that fear in the back of my mind, thinking it would go back to the way it was before," Janvier said. "There is always someone that can help you."

SATURDAY

Reporter Andrea Hill travels to La Ronge to meet Northern Saskatchewan's only psychiatrist.



"WE HAVE SO MUCH ISSUES IN THE COMMUNITY WITH DRINKING, DRUGGING, GAMBLING. IF WE HAD LESS OF THESE THINGS AND PARENTS SPENDING MORE TIME WITH THEIR FAMILIES, I THINK THEY WOULD BE ABLE TO ... LEAD MORE POSITIVE LIFESTYLES."

KATHY MONTGRAND, LA LOCHE RESIDENT