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Photo by Justin Greaves

Chris Byford stands in front of the remains of his 150-year-old barn. Two hundred and fifty sheep, many of them pregnant, were lost in the barn fire Saturday on Bethel Road in Prince Edward County, causing an estimated \$400,000 in damages.

Family reeling after barn fire

Two hundred and fifty sheep casualties of fire in Prince Edward County

By Justin Greaves

Hundreds of sheep, many of them on fire, tore out of Chris Byford's burning barn early Saturday morning.

Two hundred and fifty were lost, leaving a farmer and his family having to make the difficult decision whether to continue raising livestock.

The sheep, many of them pregnant, were lost in the barn fire on Bethel Road

in Prince Edward County. The fire cost an estimated \$400,000 in damages to livestock, building and a large quantity of hay.

The call to 911 was made after farmer Chris Byford was woken up by his brother at 2 a.m. The 150-year-old barn was fully engulfed within flames in minutes.

"My first thought was, holy, I need to get the animals. I only had one leg in my pants and I came running out," said Byford, who has been living on the farm for 58 years, and farming since he took it over from his father.

The fire department was on the scene within minutes.

"The building was like a red hot iron, it was massively hot. The steel was keeping the heat in, but every opening had a fire. It's something I never want to experience again. When I opened the door, 200 sheep ran out like a bullet, some were on fire, I had to shoot them," said Byford.

For over 12 hours, 40 firefighters fought the fire, using over 90 tanker loads of water.

"The first priority when we arrived was dousing the surrounding barns so the fire doesn't spread," said Deputy Fire Chief Robert Rutter of the Prince Edward Fire Department.

Rutter said the fire is suspected to be

electrical and accidental.

On Sunday, the wind swept up, reigniting the fire again, spreading through the hay. The fire department was called and quickly put the fire out. The snow blocked the fire from being able to do any more damage. Despite the intense conditions, no one was injured the whole weekend.

The Byfords have an estimated 1,000 sheep on the farm. The 250 sheep that died were only supposed to be in the barn from Feb. 1 to 15 while in labour. Byford said he only keeps the sheep in the barn when they're pregnant. A fire sale will be held to sell 100 sheep, and the rest will

stay with his neighbour. Each sheep is worth an estimated \$400.

In late fall, Byford and his two sons put \$20,000 into the roof of the old barn in an attempt to update it.

"You can update all you want, but you have to pay big premiums if you want insurance on old barns," said Byford.

"It's funny how things happen, I'm never a sound sleeper, but that night we all slept so deeply. If it wasn't for my brother and sister-in-law, we never would have seen it," said Byford's wife Shirley.

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Photo by Kaitlin Abeele

Jacques Villeneuve and Colt Dellandrea (right) collide, coming out of the fourth turn on the oval track during the final lap of the final race in the Hastings Cup snowmobile race in Bancroft. Both riders slid across the finish line on their backs, but Villeneuve was disqualified for causing the crash, giving Dellandrea the win of the Hastings Cup.

Hastings Cup battle ends in crash

Jacques Villeneuve among racers at weekend event

By Kaitlin Abeele

It wasn't the way Colt Dellandrea wanted to win Sunday's Hastings Cup, sliding across the finish line on his back, his Arctic Cat snowmobile crashed 100 feet behind him.

"This race was one of the best of my life, battling with Jacques Villeneuve. For it to end this way is kinda rough."

Dellandrea had been trailing first-place rider Villeneuve until the third turn on the final lap of the oval ice ring in Bancroft.

Dellandrea took the inside track in the turn and passed Villeneuve going into the final turn before the finish line. It looked like Dellandrea would win the race.

Villeneuve tried to take Dellandrea on the outside track coming out of the final turn. In a split second, both snowmobiles were spinning out of control, then both riders were airborne.

They slid across the finish line on their backs, Villeneuve's snowmobile scrapping across the ice in between them.

Villeneuve crossed the line first, but was disqualified for causing the crash.

This meant Dellandrea had won the Hastings Cup. It may not have been how he wanted it to end, but it was

'This race was one of the best of my life, battling with Jacques Villeneuve. For it to end this way is kinda rough.'

Racer Colt Dellandrea

still a win.

"But at least I know I would have beat him clean and this is my first pro win, so it means a lot," said Dellandrea.

The final race had been delayed and restarted after a crash between Andrew Darraugh and Mike Van Dolder, halfway through the first lap. Van

Dolder dragged down the straight-away on his back underneath Darraugh's snowmobile.

Van Dolder was removed from the track on a stretcher in an ambulance, but was responsive.

This was the first year that Bancroft hosted the Hastings Cup. It hosted the Madawaska Cup three years ago, which used to be hosted every year in Bancroft during the '70s.

Vaughn Lloyd was a race official for the event and the main organizer for the weekend-long competition this year. He said that calling a winner before the final race is impossible since the races can be so unpredictable.

"It's anyone's guess. You can have a breakdown or an accident, and it switches. The speeds are pretty high. Anything can happen," said Lloyd.

Residents evacuated from retirement home

By James Wood

Residents from the Bel Marine Retirement residence, located in the east end of Belleville on Dundas Street, have been evacuated from their complex following an inspection by the Electrical Safety Authority.

The bright building has been cast into the dark, with ice forming on the windows and undelivered newspapers cluttering up the front steps.

According to fire prevention officer Norm Mitts of the Belleville Fire Department, the ESA inspection found too many discrepancies in the building's electrical systems for the residence to continue operating safely, and the occupants of the 110-bed retirement home were evacuated to other sites across Belleville. Mitts also said that power to the residence has been cut off by the ESA.

Homes, hotels and other residences have taken up the responsibility of sheltering the former Bel Marine occupants as they wait for the power in their home to be restored.

Half of the fourth floor of the Belleville Travelodge has been used to house the former residents of Bel Marine. An impromptu nurse's office has been set up in the middle hotel room, with the door open and the nurse on watch.

It is not clear how long the seniors will be living in the hotel. One of the owners, Raj Uthaya, told the Pioneer that he had hoped to have residents back into Bel Marine by today, only to have that timeframe change as the situation continued to develop.

According to Mitts, in order to restore power to the building, contractors will have to be called in and a period of repairs will have to be undertaken.

The repairs required could take some time, he said, which will continue to delay the return of the homes occupants.

Staff at the Travelodge said the reservation for the Bel Marine group extends for a few more weeks.

Veterans upset with office closings

By Kaitlin Abeele

Canadian veterans are at war once more, this time with their own government.

Eight Veterans Affairs offices were closed on Friday, despite overwhelming opposition from veterans across Canada, who staged protests outside the offices on the day of the closures.

The Conservative government announced in June that they would be cutting back the number of jobs within Veterans Affairs Canada, followed by the announcement that they would be closing nine Veterans Affairs offices across Canada by early 2014.

The office in Prince George, B.C. was first on the chopping block, which closed earlier this month followed by eight more closures Jan. 31. The Trenton office remains open.

There are currently 750,000 veterans in Canada, and 110,000 men and women currently serving in the military and the RCMP, all of whom rely on Veterans Affairs Canada for help with a variety of issues, including physical and mental injuries.

Frank Luxford, a member of the Trenton Legion, served for 25 years in the Royal Canadian Air Force, and his brother John is a Second World War veteran living in Windsor. Luxford said he fears that his brother will no longer receive the help he needs now that the Windsor office has closed.

"He had to have surgery and he had to go all the way from Windsor to London, Ont. to get the work done. And now, they're closing the Windsor office, and in order to get any assistance, he's going to have to go all the way to London. And because he is 89, he has lost his driver's licence," said Luxford.

Another Trenton Legion member, Don Ferguson, served for 11 years in the Canadian Forces in Egypt and Cyprus. Ferguson became choked up when asked about the closures of the offices.

"I think the veterans are mistreated very...I get emotional when I talk about this. There's not enough being done, especially for the young ones that are coming back from Afghanistan and Bosnia, you know, where they really have a problem mentally," said Ferguson, his eyes watering and a single tear trailing down his face.

The reason given for the closures was that the chosen offices were not in high use.

'The people running Veterans Affairs are not military. They don't know what we go through. When they cut services, they don't know the effect it has on us.'

Veteran Harry Van Stijn

and that Service Canada offices and online services would better serve veterans.

But older veterans may not have access to a computer at home, or simply don't know how to navigate the Veterans Affairs website. And someone coping with post-traumatic stress disorder may not want help online.

Another major concern of veterans is that in-home visits will become few and far between with the loss of 89 employees, which is not an option for older veterans or those dealing with trauma such as PTSD. Veterans Affairs Canada promised to take one employee from each of the closing offices and to relocate them in the closest Service Canada office, which will mean that eight employees will be in charge of the 17,000 veterans that were previously overseen by the now closed offices.

Veterans Affairs Canada promises to keep in-home visits available for those that require them.

"Regardless of where veterans live, they can continue to rely on home visits from registered nurses and their Veterans Affairs case managers for those that require them," said Simon Forsyth, a media relations officer for Veterans Affairs Canada.

As well, many veterans that are older or have a physical or mental trauma are unable to travel, especially long distances, which has become a reality now that the local VA offices have closed. Veterans in Corner Brook, Nfld., one of the eight offices that closed on Friday, have an eight-hour commute to St. John's to access the next closest VA office.

Not every veteran is in complete opposition to the closures. John Evans served 27 years in the military. Evans said he understands the Conservatives' need to cut spending because of fiscal restraint, and that means closing offices that don't have the required clientele. He worries that if the Liberals take over after the next general election in 2015, military spending will be cut drastically and in turn will affect Veterans Affairs.

"I don't support some of the things I've seen with veterans, but since I got out of the military and needed assistance from Veterans Affairs itself, they've served me greatly. And I have nothing but fine words for Veterans Affairs the way they are right now," said Evans.

Still, there seems to be more opposition to the closures than support from veterans.

Harry Van Stijn served in heavy artillery for five years and is almost completely deaf in both ears as a result. He has an explanation for why the closures were suggested in the first place.

"The people running Veterans Affairs are not military. They don't know what we go through. When they cut services, they don't know the effect it has on us.

"I'm not getting rewarded for what I lost."

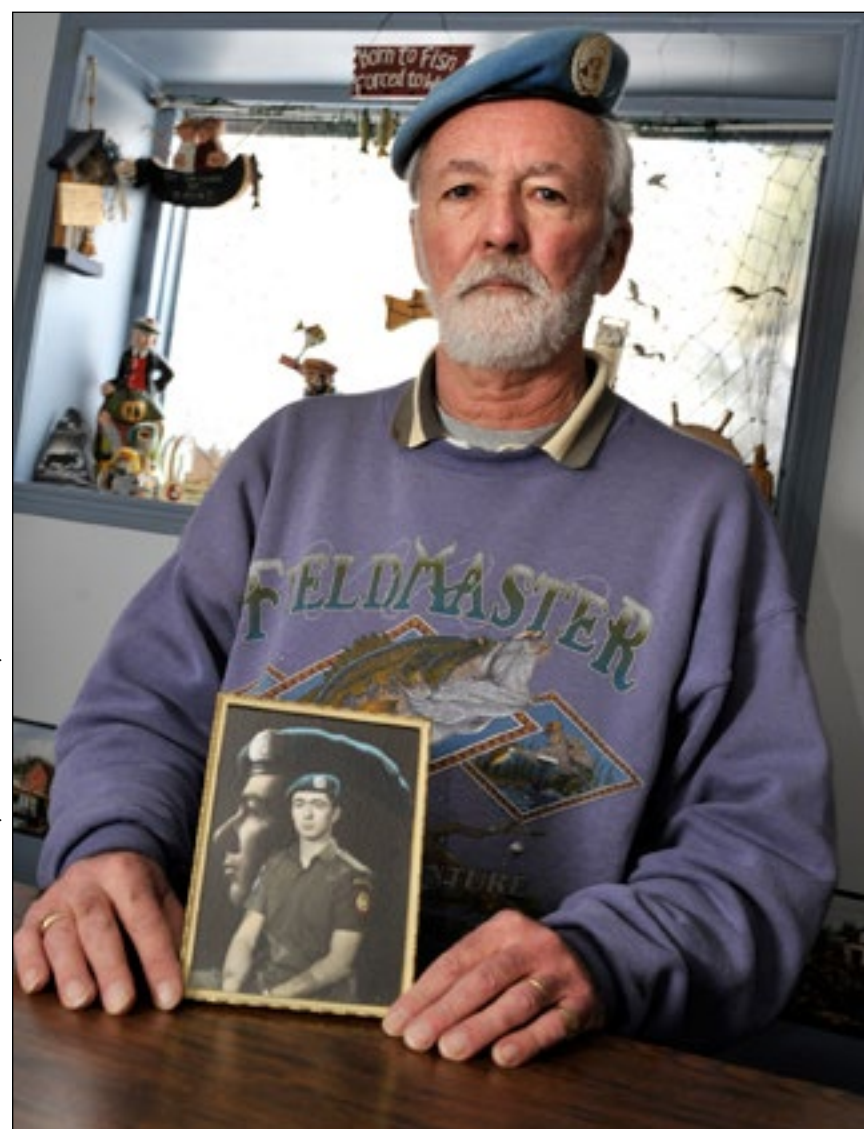


Photo by Kaitlin Abeele

Don Ferguson, who served for 11 years in the military and is a 50-year member of the Trenton Legion, said he is very distressed by the closing of eight Veterans Affairs offices across Canada.

Getting cold in support of those who don't have a home



Photo by Justin Chin

From left, Barker Waswa, 14, Tyler Prinzen, 14, and Jordan Olson, 14, participate at the Sleep Out! So Others Can Sleep In event on Friday in Belleville. They were among 50 people who spent the night outside in the cold weather under cardboard instead of the comfort of their beds to help raise awareness of those who are homeless and raise money for mental health.

Belleville's Market Square site of box forts to raise awareness of homelessness

By Dayna Lefebvre

More than 100 people crowded in box forts in Belleville's Market Square Friday night during the Canadian Mental Health Association's Sleep Out! So Others Can Sleep In.

Everyone was bundled to withstand the -10 C weather – a reality faced each winter by many homeless Canadians.

The annual sleep out, which is in its seventh year, raises funds and awareness for mental health and homelessness in the area.

This year, it raised \$13,320 – surpassing the goal of \$10,000 – which will go towards repair, maintenance and supplies to the three housing programs in four transition shelters for those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless in the Belleville area.

According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, in 2010 there were 511 people in Belleville living on the streets, and another 955 at risk of becoming homeless.

Despite the loud pumping music, the seriousness of the issue was not

lost among the participants.

"To know how others feel, you have to feel it yourself," said Amy-Lynn Boyle, a 15-year-old student from Trenton High School. "It's so powerful that so many people care enough. It's cold, but people want to embrace the cold and be part of something."

Participants made box forts, danced to music and participated in awareness-raising exercises throughout the night.

"What better way to get out there and participate," said Jennifer Cotnam, a teacher at Trenton High School. "The thing is, though, we are here by choice. It's one night. It's good energy here, but it's humbling and quite sad to know that for people who are homeless... this is not a choice. It's their reality. This is great for education – that's why we're here."

Sandie Sidsworth, the executive director of the CMHA's Hastings-Prince Edward branch, explained her personal resonance that makes this work so important to her.

"My mother suffered from mental health issues and she was very brave in her struggle," Sidsworth explained. "I've been a poverty advocate for over 30 years so this just makes sense for me. We do housing and food security and making sure people are okay. This is all part and parcel of it."

For another look at this story, go to: <http://www.qnetnews.ca/?p=34008>

Family deciding whether to keep livestock

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Both the Byfords are considering giving the livestock up, but never the farm.

"Do you rebuild? You don't know what to do. It's all so stressful. We're going to have to wait and see what's good for us, we don't want to be in debt the rest of our lives," added Shirley.

"I've been doing a lot of thinking about what's next. I'm pretty much about done. I'm almost 65, I ain't no young chicken, farms a tough old go, and if you don't have a good income you're euchred. And we're not getting any help from the government. They don't have any money to give us in their programs. This has discouraged me, that's what it does."

Byford's insurance will only cover the cost of cleaning up after the fire.

All the remains of the barn and hay will be piled up and left to decompose for at least three years.



Photo by Justin Greaves

Chris Byford feeds the five-month-old lambs, now motherless, at his farm on Bethel Road. The Saturday fire in Prince Edward County, caused an estimated \$400,000 in damage.



Photo by James Wood

Belleville Youth Swim Team member Alexander Grant comes up for breath during the 200-metre 13-14 boys' butterfly swim at the Quinte Sports and Wellness Centre. The BYST hosted the Eastern Ontario Swimming Association's latest regional meet this past weekend.

Sports Centre location of swim meet

By James Wood

Shouts of encouragement, shrill whistles and the ringing of bells filled the air of the pool at the Quinte Sports and Wellness Centre over the past weekend. Twenty-one teams from across Eastern Ontario came together in friendly competition, part of the Eastern Ontario Swimming Association's first big meet for 2014.

Swimmers ages nine to 25 participated in numerous events, competing to set the fastest time for strokes such as the butterfly, breaststroke and backstroke, along with longer events that were a test

of their endurance. The grueling 800 and 1,500-metre freestyles proved to be a significant challenge.

However, swimmers were never alone in the competition, with teammates and parents lining the walls of the pool. Their cheers and shouts of "Go!" would help keep the would-be champions forward throughout the race.

The Belleville Youth Swim Team was out in full force at the meet. Swimmers from the BYST took part in many of the time trials of the event, which was being hosted in their own home pool.

"I've been swimming since I was six

months old," said BYST swimmer John Butler, an 18-year-old student from Bayside Secondary School. "It gives me something to be part of a team of, and it's something cool that not a lot of kids in my school can say they're able to do."

This was the first championship meet hosted by the BYST in their new location. Co-meet manager and BYST organizer Kim Isaak said she was excited to see so many teams and athletes out for the event, which showcased how the versatility of their pool.

"It's fabulous to have our own space," said Issak.

Before the Quinte Sports and Wellness Centre was completed, the BYST would have to train out of several different pools around the area.

With the completion of the centre, the team was given a new home, one that allowed them to train regularly and host events such as the championship meet.

Issak was part of the nerve centre for this event, watching from the lifeguard's office, where she updated times and made note of who was doing well.

"Swimming is all about their times," said Isaak, her eyes watching the pool through the glass. "As they get their own

personal best times, they get faster and faster, this will be the first sort of entry-level of qualifying."

However entry-level this meet may be for some athletes, for others it will be the start of a long swimming career.

"Some of these kids could be future Olympians," said Issak.

Medals were awarded to the first, second and third place finishers in each event. Awards were also given out on a team basis, with the team having the best overall time across the board receiving first place.

Nursing student cares about the health of others

Special events planned to provide information on local health services

By Sarah Taylor

A busy and passionate second-year nursing student is hard at work to give students the opportunity to learn about local health services.

Mahoganie Hines, 27, has put together the first Health Awareness Market here at Loyalist College, running now until Wednesday.

"I'm on student government as well and I'm the health sciences leader so I felt it was my responsibility to show the students what we do have available within the school," said Hines.

The focus of the market is to get students thinking about their own physical, mental and emotional health and what it means to them.

For improving mental health, there are St. John's Ambulance therapy dogs, alternative therapy such as a therapeutic touch healer, and counselling at the school.

"I wanted people to know that we have counselling services available that are free. Being a student is extremely

stressful all year, not just at exam time," said Hines.

Mood-changing lights will also be a part of the market. According to Hines, there are three people within the school that suffer from seasonal affective disorder, which affects depression from lack of vitamin D in fall and winter seasons.

"The light actually provides you with vitamin D," said Hines.

Hines and others involved with the market are setting up a blood pressure station. This started on Monday until noon Wednesday in the Lancer lounge. For smokers, it is an option to have it taken before and after having a ciga-

rette to show the impact smoking has on your blood pressure and your health.

"It's good to make people aware of their body and their health. If you're not healthy, you can't really study that well," said Loyalist student Behzad Tagik, while getting his blood pressure taken.

The timing of the Health Awareness Market is to correspond with New Year's resolutions, which often includes goals of improving one's health.

"I definitely wanted to have it at the end of January because everybody's got their New Year's resolutions at the beginning of the year and health is kind of in the forefront of their mind... I wanted to reintroduce the idea of reevaluat-

ing your health," said Hines.

Hines is also involved with the food services committee. Last week, they had a heart-healthy menu and they are continuing to accommodate vegan and vegetarian students as well as providing healthier options in the cafeteria.

"I try to advocate for healthy food at an affordable rate... They have the two for \$5 on fruits and veggies... They are trying to incorporate it in a way that we can actually afford it because the reality is, I don't think it's overly accessible," says Hines.

Hines and her team are hoping to continue the Health Awareness Market each month.

Weekend of SnoFest activities

By Sarah Taylor

It was a true Canadian winter wonderland as the sled dogs tore through the fairgrounds at Marmora's annual SnoFest.

The event brought many participants and spectators to the Marmora Fairgrounds this past weekend to enjoy dogsledding and other winter activities.

"It's hard to find something to do when you don't have a mountain around in the winter... I think the community enjoys having something to do and they really want us to do it well," said the chair of the festival, Jennifer Bennett.

SnoFest held several sled dog races as well as skijoring (skiing while pulled by one dog) and art displays. The dogsledding races were cancelled last year and the festival has been cancelled twice since 2008. Increased social media and excited locals contributed to a successful turnout this year.

This was Bennett's first year as chair; she joined the board in October of last year. She remembered coming to the festival when she was little and said she hopes to use her marketing skills towards rebranding it.

"I was looking for something to do to start working within the community and I love dogs, I remember going to SnoFest as a kid so I was excited to get involved in that," said Bennett, who has never been on a sled.

Among the changes are the sled dog races. They are now 10 and 20-mile races rather than 150 miles and take place in the trails around Marmora's

fairgrounds. The longer race went from Marmora to Maynooth and took several days to finish. This has been taken out of the festival for several years now.

"We wanted to do shorter races so that there were more starts and finishes for everyone who is watching. We really wanted to make it as much of a spectator sport as we could because without them, we can't really have a festival," said Bennett.

For some of the mushers, the event was closer to home than others. Mushers from Quebec, New York and all over Ontario brought their dogs and sleds to the races.

Frank Horn, from Elphin, Ont., has been coming to SnoFest to participate in the dog sled races for eight years.

He said he likes "when they go fast and swishing through the bushes, just the adrenaline."

He owns 19 dogs and nine puppies. This year, he raced 13 of them.

"The rest of the dogs... they're slower and most of them are tired and then there's some that just don't get the concept."

Horn placed sixth in the 20-mile, eight-dogsled race in which he was one of 10 mushers.

Once results from this year's SnoFest are reviewed, the organization will spend the next year undergoing plans to rebrand the festival for 2015. Bennett said she hopes to get bigger sponsors involved. SnoFest is to be held again on the first weekend of February.

For a multi-media version of this story, go to <http://www.qnetnews.ca/?p=34037>



Photo by Maggie Naylor

Kathy MacKay leads her dogs to the finish line at Marmora's SnoFest on Sunday. MacKay finished with a time of 44 minutes and 55 seconds, placing fifth out of 15 racers.