

Plain & Valley

Covering Southeast Saskatchewan and Southwest Manitoba

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Eli Barsi defines the 'prairie girl' with 13th CD

BY CHRIS ISTANCE

"Her life's become a portrait, Of a cowgirl true and strong,

"She always takes the high road, And her heart's in tune with God,

"She's a picture perfect lady, An angel in my eyes,

"She's a portrait of a cowgirl, Forever painted in my life."

—Eli Barsi, "Portrait of a Cowgirl"

Eli Barsi's path as a singer, songwriter and recording artist has run as straight as a well-strung barbed wire fence.

It's true that the Kennedy-raised artist has wandered the map of the country-western music scene. Like so many other songwriters, she moved to Nashville in 1987 to hone her writing, performing and guitar playing skills. She has since lived in Edmonton and Stony Plain, Alta., and had an eight-year stay in Branson, Missouri performing with the Sons of the Pioneers beginning in 2002.

Artistically, however, Barsi has rarely ventured far from the kind of music that has granted her a multitude of award nominations and allowed her to perform throughout North America. In that regard, she has stayed true to her roots on the farm. Her repertoire of music over the past 25-plus years may be categorized into several genres—Western Roots, Bluegrass, Gospel, Contemporary Country, Traditional Country or Folk—but it's all rural, it's real and it's from the heart.

In other words, Eli Barsi's music is a pure artistic representation of herself, says her husband and band-mate, John Cunningham.

"The honesty and heart that she wears on her sleeve shines through her music," he said on April 29 by email after attending the Saskatchewan Country Music Awards and Conference in Saskatoon.

"Her delivery is always without compromise and genuine. Something special happens when Eli sings. I love being a part of that."

Barsi and Cunningham, a bass guitar player and lead guitarist, now live in Moosomin where they have established a home base from touring over the past two and half years. It's also where they laid the foundation for Eli's latest CD, "Portrait of a Cowgirl." The recording, her 13th since 1995, is scheduled to be released throughout Canada and the U.S. on June 1.

"(Moosomin) is close to family, close to my past and the good memories on the farm," Barsi said. Her childhood home was located about seven kilometers southwest of Kennedy. "We enjoy small communities, and Moosomin is a great town with great people."

Barsi admits that it is more difficult to network with others in the music industry from here, but finds the internet a great tool for doing so.

"I have become very used to travelling



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—Eli Barsi, "Portrait of a Cowgirl"

a great distance to get to work. It's easy to get to the airports and the U.S. border from here. When I get to go home after a long road trip, it's nice to have a quiet, small town to return to."

This rural lifestyle—particularly her experiences with the culture's sensibilities, morals and ethics—inspired her to write much of what is contained on "Portrait of a Cowgirl." The CD's twelve songs reflect this theme as it pertains to a woman's experience on the Prairies.

"I think that my audience wants to hear real stories about real people, stories that they can relate to," she said. "I wanted (the CD) to be honest and positive, with a little bit of an edge and some fun elements as well."

Barsi wrote the songs for the CD in spurts over about two years. She collaborated with three other songwriters on four of the numbers, but is the sole author of eight of the tracks. The project was completed in Saskatoon, but the work on the demos and preproduction was conducted in Barsi's home studio.

"Farm Girl" sets the path the CD will follow. It profiles a girl leaving the farm for the city, but she is constantly mindful of home wherever she may be.

The CD's title track, "Portrait of a Cowgirl," is a gently tempoed song that tells the story of the 20th Century farmwife,

explaining the moral character and work ethic she develops through that experience.

"This song is a true story that was inspired by my mom's life," Barsi said. "She has made such an impact on my life and made a difference in the community and beyond. I have dedicated the album to her, my sister and my daughter, along with many other strong women that I have been blessed to know thus far."

Barsi came up with the title of the CD long before she wrote the song of the same name. After beginning to write other songs that would follow the "Portrait of a Cowgirl" theme, she realized how well the title would fit a song about her mother.

"She was a hard working farm girl on the Prairies in the 1930s and '40s, a one-room school teacher, 4-H leader and farmer's wife for 60 years," Barsi said.

"When I finally got to sit down with the idea, it didn't take very long for the lyrics to flow," she said. "The music took a little longer to develop. I was happy with how it turned out and glad I didn't rush the process."

The first single release off the CD is "Hitch Your Wagon to a Star." This track is an uplifting, mid-tempoed contemporary country song that urges the listener to chase their dreams regardless of where they are or what their circumstances may

be. "You've gotta reach no matter where you are. Hitch your wagon to that golden star. It's never too late to make your mark. Don't be afraid to raise that bar. Hitch your wagon to a star," Barsi sings in the chorus.

Wherever she is during the process of creating a song, she leans heavily on her faith.

"I do a lot of soul searching when I'm writing. I feel very fortunate to have been blessed with the gift of music and that God has guided me to use it," she said.

PORTRAIT OF A SINGER-SONGWRITER

Barsi began singing at the age of three, following along with her father's records at the Barsi farmhouse near Kennedy. When she was nine, she began singing at church and local events.

Three years later, she learned to play guitar and travelled to talent shows and music festivals throughout the Prairies. This was also when she penned her first song.

She hasn't stopped since.

By the time she was a teenager, she was being asked to perform at weddings, anniversaries and some paying gigs.

Eli Barsi was now a professional musician.

"My mom did a little bit of singing and playing Hawaiian-style guitar. My dad was a multi-instrumentalist, playing fiddle, banjo, guitar and a bit of mandolin and piano," she said. "He stopped playing many years before I was born, so I never got to hear him play."

Nevertheless, Barsi's parents fully supported her musical endeavors. "Dad was always eager to find different instruments for me to try—guitar, mandolin, four-string banjo," she said. "Mom got me started on a Sears chord organ and drove me to talent shows across the Prairies."

Barsi is also well-known for her talents as a yodeler. Her ability to yodel developed from her mother's inability to accomplish the singing form. Although she was 10 years into her career before she added yodeling to her repertoire, Barsi believes it adds a valuable dynamic to her show.

"My mom had done a little bit of singing at the Kennedy Rodeo years ago. She didn't do any yodeling, but her performance story encouraged me," said Barsi.

"She told me that she and a girlfriend would sing before the Rodeo up in the announcer's booth and her favorite song was Patsy Montana's 'I Want to be a Cowboy's Sweetheart.'"

"When it came to the yodeling part, she would leave it out, not knowing how to do it. People would compliment her, but add, 'Too bad you didn't yodel.' She always remembered that and told me that I should learn how to yodel . . . My mom was right."

Continued on Page 18 ^{ESP}

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P&H purchases Langbank facility

Parrish & Heimbecker Limited announced the acquisition of a crop-input facility at Langbank, expanding services to farmers through its network of grain-handling and crop-input facilities.

"P&H has operated in Western Canada for more than 100 years," said Lance Jorgenson, Facility Manager at Langbank. "This company is an integral part of the agricultural fabric of the Prairies. We are also strongly focussed on continuing to offer the highest level of service to customers."

P&H at Langbank offers a full-service granular fertilizer operation with custom blending services, liquid fertilizers, canola and pedigreed bulk seed, as well as a full line of crop-protection products.

P&H also officially announced that Darryl Balog has been hired as Crop Inputs Manager in Langbank. "Not only does P&H have the bricks and mortar, we've also ensured we have top-notch staff to advise and service our customers," Jorgenson said. "I'm very pleased that Darryl is joining our team. He is well known to many people in this area and brings a wealth of experience in crop inputs and sales."

Parrish & Heimbecker Limited is a private, family-owned business



founded in 1909. This Canadian-owned, vertically integrated business is one of the largest full-service grain-handling and crop-input supply companies in Canada. It is also the largest Canadian-owned milling company in Canada, with animal nutrition, poultry farming and food-processing divisions in Western and Eastern Canada. Today, P&H is focussed on supporting its customers and nurturing strong business relationships through a process of continued improvements and acquisitions in assets, as well as valuable human resources. Learn more about P&H at www.parrishandheimbecker.com

Above: The P&H facility at Langbank

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Sask increasing funding for rural physician locums

Saskatchewan is increasing funding for rural physician locums.

The province is providing \$3 million (\$1.5 million increase) for the rural physician locum pool. Locum physicians temporarily fulfill the duties of physicians who are away from their practice.

"Retaining and recruiting doctors to rural Saskatchewan is a big priority for us," Rural and Remote Health Minister Randy Weekes said. "We are committed to building a 20 physician locum pool to provide additional coverage to rural doctors. We want to make sure all Saskatchewan residents have access to physician services."

"This year's funding will allow every health region to have at least one full time locum position. This investment will fund approximately 12 full time locum positions, which puts the government on track to fulfill the four-year commitment of a 20 physician locum pool."

"We're pleased to receive the news of the increase in resources for the rural locum pool," Prairie North Health Region's Senior Medical Officer Dr. Bruce Murray said. "This service has helped our region provide continuing care when our local practitioners are in need of relief. Our rural communities benefit directly from the ability to maintain physician services during these times."

Since the program's inception in May 2012, locum physicians have helped stabilize physician services in rural communities such as Maple Creek, Leader, Shaunavon, Kelvington, Kipling, Maidstone, Balcarres and La Ronge.

"We had the opportunity to engage the services of a regional rural locum," Cypress Health Region's Senior Medical Officer Dr. Ivo Radevski said. "It worked very well for our rural physicians and patients, allowing us to provide relief to rural communities and reduce disruption of services. I am very pleased that the ministry has decided to enhance and strengthen the program by providing additional funding."

The program is administered by Saskatchewan's health regions.

The rural locum pool is among a number of initiatives underway to improve physician services in Saskatchewan.

An incentive program provides \$120,000 in funding to recent family medicine graduates who establish practice in rural communities.

Training and resident seats have been added to the College of Medicine in Saskatoon.

More international doctors are coming to Saskatchewan through a new assessment process (Saskatchewan International Physician Practice Assessment, or SIPPAA) that accepts applications from a wider range of countries.

More physicians are being trained in rural Saskatchewan, recognizing that experiencing a rural lifestyle increases the chance that they will stay for the longer term.

More than 2,000 physicians are currently working in the province. This represents an increase of 15 per cent from March 2008 to March 2013.

Sask exports reach record levels

BY JENNIFER GRAHAM
THE CANADIAN PRESS

Exports of Saskatchewan-made products have hit record levels to push the province into fourth place when it comes to shipping goods out of the country.

Revised data from Statistics Canada says Saskatchewan exporters sold more than \$32.6 billion worth of products in 2012.

"Saskatchewan is now the highest per capita exporter in the country," Premier Brad Wall boasted Wednesday.

"Saskatchewan businesses . . . are responsible for us now exporting more to the world than British Columbia—not bad for a province without any ports. And we've seen in the last 10 years a tripling of our exports all over the world."

"It's not just food. A lot of it's food. It's not just fertilizer, though a lot of it's that, and it's not just hydrocarbons or oil. A lot of it's manufacturing."

About one-third of the exports in 2012 were in the form of energy—oil, gas and coal—and another one-third were food.

The top country to which Saskatchewan exports is the United States. But Wall noted that exports to China have doubled in the last five or six years. There's also been a lot of growth in shipments to other emerging economies such as Indonesia and Bangladesh.

Exports to China reached \$2.5 billion last year and exports to Indonesia were pegged at \$786 million.

There's a growing demand in China for Saskatchewan canola oil and canola seed, the premier said.

"As the Chinese middle class grows, their ability to have more protein in their diet and frankly different edible oils grows as well."

Saskatchewan manufacturers were proud of the numbers.

Brian Olson, founder of Power Pin, which makes drawbar hitches for farm implements, said 95 per cent of his production is exported around the world.

Olson said business has steadily grown for the company based in Fort Qu'Appelle, east of Regina.

"It's evolved and we don't know where it's going . . . \$9 million last year and \$14 million this year. It's going to keep growing steadily," said Olson.

He added it's a thrill to see his product on farming equipment around the world.

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Large increases in farmland values

A strong agricultural economy fuelled by low interest rates, growing world food demand and resulting higher commodity prices, continue to underpin a national increase in average farmland values, according to the Farm Credit Corporation (FCC).

The average value of farmland in Saskatchewan increased by 9.7 per cent during the second half of 2012, according to a new FCC Farmland Values Report.

The latest increase is part of a trend that shows farmland values rising in the province since 2002. In the two previous six-month reporting periods, farmland values increased by 9.1 per cent and 10.1 per cent.

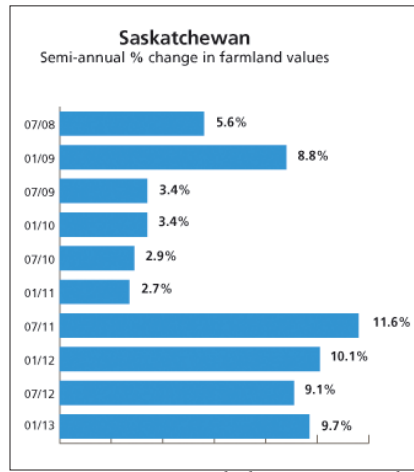
Farmland values in Manitoba increased an average of 13.9 per cent in the second half of 2012, the second highest provincial increase in the country. The previous two reporting periods saw increases of 10.3 per cent and 1.9 per cent respectively.

Farmland values in Manitoba have risen consistently since 2001 and this is the highest increase seen since FCC began reporting results in 1985.

The FCC report provides important information about changes in farmland values across Canada. The average value of Canadian farmland increased by 10.0 per cent during the last six months of 2012, following gains of 8.6 per cent and 6.9 per cent in the previous two semi-annual reporting periods. Average farmland values remained virtually the same in British Columbia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador. Average farmland values increased in the other provinces. Quebec experienced the highest average increase at 19.4 per cent.

Canadian farmland values have continued to rise over the last decade. The current average national increase of 10.0 per cent is the highest since FCC began reporting. The second highest increase of 8.6 per cent occurred in the first half of 2012. The last time the average value decreased was by 0.6 per cent in 2000.

"The market is currently being driven by existing producers interested in expanding their current land base," said Michael Hoffort, FCC Senior Vice-President of Portfolio and Credit Risk. "With most transactions involving



an incremental addition to the holdings of established operations, it is common to see aggressive bidding to secure land available for sale. Producers want to achieve economies of scale and use newer technology to farm larger areas. They also recognize limited opportunity to purchase land near their current operations.

The national value of farmland has increased at the annual rate of 12 per cent on average since 2008, about twice the level it did from 2002 to 2007.

"Strong crop receipts create a favorable environment for higher farmland values," said J.P. Gervais, FCC Chief Agricultural Economist. "Low interest rates make it easier for producers to consider expanding their farm opera-

tion." He cautioned buyers to do their homework and ensure their budgets have room to flex should commodity prices fall back from current highs or interest rates rise to more traditional levels.

Gervais noted that current farmland values also reflect expectations of future crop receipts. Recent agricultural outlook reports in Canada and the United States suggest that while crop prices are expected to come down from recent highs, prices are projected to remain above historical averages over the next ten years. "The outlook for Canadian agriculture is really positive," Gervais said.

"While there is some concern that farm debt in Canada is increasing, net farm income—especially in the grain and oilseed sector—has roughly increased at the same pace," Hoffort added.

Increasing farmland values might make it more difficult for young producers to expand or get into the business.

Alternatives are to lease some of the land—not giving up the possibility to build equity by purchasing land, but complementing the business model by looking at the leasing market. Crop share rental agreements and joint ventures can sometimes meet the needs of the landlord and the farmer, but the decision to buy or lease really depends on the financial situation of individual producers.

According to the 2011 Ag Census, the majority of the total land in agriculture (including areas that were used by others) in Canada was owned by those who operate it, at 61.5 per cent. This is followed by rented land at 21.9 per cent and land leased from government at 13.1 per cent.

The FCC Farmland Values Report has been published since 1985.

FCC established a system with 245 benchmark farm properties to monitor variations in bareland values across Canada. FCC appraisers estimate market value using recent comparable sales.

These sales must be arm's-length transactions. Once sales are selected, they are reviewed, analyzed and adjusted to the benchmark properties.

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12:30 pm Shot Gun Start
Courtesy rides for golfers — Sponsored by Baker Hughes
7:00 pm Steak and Lobster Dinner
— Sponsored by Gillis Power Tong Services
11:00 pm — Grounds Closed
— Security Sponsored by Scotiabank Group

Wednesday, June 5, 2013

10:00 am to 7:00 pm Show hours
12:00 pm Awards Luncheon — Sponsored by Grimes Sales and Service Co. Ltd.
12:30 pm Guest speaker — Honourable Minister Bill Boyd, Minister of the Economy
1:00 pm 2013 Saskatchewan Oil and Gas Recognition Awards
— Presented by the Board of Governors
2:30 pm PSAC/SE Saskatchewan Business Forum — by invitation only
7:00 pm BBQ Pit Roast Beef Dinner — Sponsored by Control Technology Inc.
8:30 pm Opening Ceremonies
Guest speakers: Honourable Tim McMillan, Minister Responsible for Energy and Resources and Mayor Debra Burton, City of Weyburn
SE Saskatchewan Oil Person of the Year Awards
11:00 pm — Grounds Closed — Security Sponsored by Scotiabank Group

Schedule of Events

Thursday, June 6, 2013

7:30 to 9:30 am PSAC Barnstorming Breakfast
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Temporary Foreign Worker Program:

Changes could affect local businesses

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK

Proposed changes to Canada's Temporary Foreign Worker Program could impact local businesses that have come to rely on the program to fill service industry jobs that were becoming difficult to impossible to fill with local employees.

Under proposed changes employers will no longer have flexibility to set the wages for foreign labor, and the Conservative government is calling for a temporary halt to a program that fast-tracked the ability of some companies to bring in workers from outside Canada through an accelerated labour market option.

Public opposition to the program has mounted since Royal Bank contracted a supplier to provide IT assistance, which resulted in the bank outsourcing some Canadian jobs, and the supplier brought its own employees into Canada under the temporary foreign worker program so they could be trained in the jobs that were being outsourced.

Last year, a mining firm came under scrutiny for being approved to staff a B.C. mine entirely with Chinese miners by claiming the ability to speak Mandarin was an essential requirement of the job.

Souris-Moose Mountain MP Ed Komarnicki says the program has been an important tool for businesses trying to expand in a tight labor market.

"It does work great and it has been a great opportunity for those who want to expand their businesses in areas like Moosomin, Estevan, and Weyburn, where unemployment rate is low and the economy is hot.

"There have been abuses, and the government is saying look, we need to ensure that program is not being abused. One of the changes is that English and French will be the only languages which can be required, which would prevent cases like the one where Mandarin was required.

"In a case like RBC, people want to be sure that people aren't displaced by temporary foreign workers, and there will be a provision dealing with that."

He said those changes are written in stone, to prevent another case like the RBC outsourcing or the case of the Chinese miners, but the government will be consulting on other provisions.

"It's going to be tougher, and the government will expect employers to pay fees for permits—it will be more user pay—but they will look at various sectors of the economy and regions," Komarnicki said. "We're going to do some cross-country consultations. We will be talking to business, industry and trade organizations. Almost everything will be open for discussion."

Employers hiring temporary foreign workers will be required to provide a plan for making the transition to Cana-

"Quite frankly I've mentioned this directly to the prime minister, that while there have been abuses. we can't shut the program down where it's needed."

—MP Ed Komarnicki

dian workers, but in a region like Saskatchewan, with a provincial immigrant nominee program, applying for permanent resident status for temporary foreign workers could be a way of transitioning to Canadian workers.

"Whether they become Canadians or whether there are other Canadians who can fill those jobs, the long-term goal is to have jobs filled by Canadians," said Komarnicki.

He said the temporary foreign worker program has become important in southeast Saskatchewan. "Because the economy is doing so well, you have the service industry, the hospitality industry left to fend for themselves."

He said the federal government has been working on programs to try to get First Nations and other under-represented groups more engaged in the workforce.

In the meantime, however, he said he realizes that the temporary foreign worker program has allowed many employers in southeast Saskatchewan to expand where they otherwise couldn't because there simply aren't the workers available.

"Quite frankly I've mentioned this directly to the prime minister, that while there have been abuses, we can't shut the program down where it's needed.

"For the government, it's a dilemma where you have high unemployment in one region and a shortage of labor in another region."

Komarnicki urges employers worried about the proposed changes to put their concerns and their experience of the program in writing.

"Get a letter to me and I'll forward that on to the appropriate people," he said. "I will make sure those concerns get to the ministerial and the prime ministerial level.

"There are legitimate concerns and we want those to be heard.

"Things will change—it won't be the same, it will be more rigid—but we don't want it to be so rigid that it prevents businesses from being able to fill the jobs they need."

Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism Jason Kenney said he knows employers won't be happy with the changes.

"Our message to them today is don't

just double, but triple your efforts to hire and train available Canadians for the work," he said.

"This will affect their businesses but we're sending a message that Canadians want them to send: do everything you can to find Canadians first."

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce has criticized the proposed changes. "What is being proposed by the government today is not in the interest of Canadian business," the Canadian Chamber said in a statement.

"It's frustrating to see Canadians underemployed. It would be worse to see whole communities damaged because a key employee relocated elsewhere."

In 2012, some 213,516 people entered Canada via the temporary foreign worker program, more than three times the number admitted a decade ago.

Put another way, the private sector brought in 25 per cent more foreign labourers last year than the number of economic immigrants accepted by the government, which has long insisted caps on its own programs are necessary so as not to flood the Canadian labour market.

The government spends approximately \$35.5 million per year processing applications, at a cost of approximately \$342 per application, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada told a pre-budget briefing earlier this year.

Dan Davidson runs the Red Barn, Dano's Lounge and Subway in Moosomin, and says the temporary foreign worker program has allowed him to expand his businesses.

"We would like to hire locally, but in all reality there aren't the people," he said.

Employers will be required to come up with a plan to transition to Canadian workers rather than relying on a revolving door of temporary foreign workers.

Davidson said his plan is to transition many of his temporary foreign workers to permanent residents.

"My plan is to make permanent job offers to my employees so they can apply for permanent resident status," he said.

"I'm starting to get some who are residents. Right now, if your business is accepted under the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program, six months into their job, you can make them a permanent job offer. They have to approve it at Service

Canada, and once they get that approval, they can become a permanent resident."

While temporary foreign workers have no choice but to work for the employer who brought them in, once they are permanent residents they have the same rights as any other Canadian resident to work for any employer.

"I do get worried that the LMOs are going to disappear in the future," he said. "We can't fill our jobs just in Moosomin, and we do get people who want to apply for 35-40 miles around, but it's just too hard, based on vehicle and gas costs. I don't want to be in the situation again where I just can't get people."

He said the current program has helped him expand his business.

"When you can't find enough employees, if you're stressed and short-staffed, you pull back on the reins and your business growth slows. When the government did give us this program, the reins did not get pulled back—you feel unlimited growth potential because the government says if you cannot find a Canadian employee we'll let you bring one in.

"I love how the program works. I've got amazing Canadian workers who I was able to surround with foreign workers.

"I know there have been some abuses and I'm not going to say they don't need to make some changes—I just think to make them so widespread that it hurts the businesses that really need it might be a little bit of a mistake. I would hate to see everyone hurt because some corporations abused it. I understand some changes like making LMOs harder to get in Ontario where the unemployment rate is high, but to make it harder where you just can't find employees wouldn't help anything."

Davidson says he simply wouldn't be operating his business on its current scale without the temporary foreign worker program.

"For me, I can't say enough about what the Conservative government has done with the program," he said. "A lot of our businesses in town have benefited from this program, and I have to give the Conservative government a lot of credit. Their program has allowed a lot of business expansion. I just hope they don't go and scale it back here, where we need it."

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Skilled labor shortage worst in Sask, Man

BY JULIAN BELTRAME
THE CANADIAN PRESS

Is there a skilled labour shortage in Canada? Many employers say there is, but only in certain parts of the country.

The Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters Association. The lobby group released an internal survey of members showing half reporting difficulty finding qualified workers, and expecting the problem to worsen in the next five years.

The organization's vice-president of national policy, Mathew Wilson, says shortages are widespread but particularly acute in certain industries and regions, particularly Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Newfoundland.

"The companies we talked to in Sas-

"The companies we talked to in Saskatchewan will literally hire anyone who shows up to work every day. They are that desperate."—Mathew Wilson

katchewan will literally hire anyone who shows up to work every day," he said. "They are that desperate."

Wilson says there has been plenty of jobs lost in the manufacturing sector—including 71,000 in the last year alone—but adds that there's a skills disconnect with those that have been laid off in Ontario and the needs of the expanding resource sector in the West. As well, getting workers to move is difficult, he says.

"A lot of the manufacturing jobs are not in the biggest centres of Canada," said Wilson. "It's hard for a company in a town of Saskatchewan, population 300 people, to be able to draw in workers from Toronto. It's hard for someone in Windsor to go to the peninsula in Newfoundland to work in the mines."

The survey results are at times, in line with alarmist declarations by government ministers—including Finance's Jim

Flaherty and Human Resource Minister Diane Finley—that Canada faces a critical skills mismatch that is impeding economic growth.

The main data on employment—Statistics Canada's labour market survey—places the unemployment rate at 7.2 per cent, more than one percentage point higher than in 2008, and the number of jobs less at almost 1.4 million, also higher than before the recession.

Andrew Sharpe of the Centre for the Study of Living Standards says a key indicator of whether any profession or industry has a shortage of available bodies is salaries.

If salaries go up, shortage of supply is a likely cause.

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Health complaints on the rise

Saskatchewan's ombudsman says complaints about the province's health-care system are double what they were five years ago.

Kevin Fenwick says in his annual report that there were 186 health-related complaints in 2012, compared to 78 complaints in 2007.

"They are up significantly. Over the course of the last number of years actually, the number of complaints that have come to our office have just about doubled with respect to health and that's for a number of reasons," Fenwick said

Thursday.

"We think that the primary reason for the increase is because of increased public awareness about our office."

In short, more people are learning that they can go to the ombudsman if they have trouble.

Fenwick says there is a spike in numbers every time the minister of health mentions the ombudsman office in the legislative assembly.

Fenwick says the concerns cover many issues, usually about fairness.

"Often they're issues involving policies that are good policies,

but they're applied too strictly, so the concern is that they result in unfairness," he said.

For example, Fenwick says there was a man who needed a particular piece of medical equipment that wasn't covered under health policies. But Fenwick says the man's situation was different than what the policy was designed for.

In another case, a man needed a medical procedure that wasn't covered in Saskatchewan. But again, Fenwick says the reason the man needed the procedure "was very different than the norm."

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Survivor Contact:
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sksmurray@hotmail.com

Suzanne Eisler
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Volunteers contact:
Dalelynn Fahman
(306) 739-2912
dalelynn.fahman@hotmail.com

Team Recruitment Contact:
Ely Van Winkoop
(306) 577-2215
winkoop@sasktel.net

Amanda Marcenko
(306) 739-2239
amanda.marcenko@gmail.com

Luminaries Contact:
Tamara Schill
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Ag coalition planning to buy tree nursery

BY KRISTEN MCEWEN

More than a year ago, the Canadian government announced that the Prairie Shelterbelt Program would end on Dec. 31, 2013.

The Prairie Shelterbelt Program has provided trees and shrubs free of charge to rural land owners with five or more acres of land, to promote conservation and to prevent erosion of land.

Now, the Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan (APAS) has formed a coalition with a number of other agricultural groups to purchase the tree nursery located at the Agroforestry Development Centre in Indian Head.

The RM of Indian Head, Town of Indian Head, Wild Rose Agricultural Producers, Keystone Agricultural Producers and Peace River Regional District are part of the coalition.

"Virtually every tree in every farmyard across Western Canada has Indian Head nursery trees in it," said APAS president Norm Hall.

Since 1901, the Indian Head tree nursery has distributed more than 610 million trees to producers across Western Canada.

APAS met with the groups in Regina on April 22 to discuss what needs to be done to preserve the tree nursery and to continue to provide trees at a low cost to farmers.

The group held a phone conference with Michel Falardeau, the director of real property and building



The picture above is an overhead view of the tree nursery located at the Agroforestry Development Centre at Indian Head.

operations for Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

The meeting determined what steps are required to keep the Indian Head tree nursery running.

"The first step is doing a business plan," Hall said. "And the step prior to that is getting funding to do a business plan because none of our farm groups have enough money that we can do that."

Hall said the coalition is asking the Canadian Agriculture Adaptation Program (CAAP) to fund the business plan before they can approach the federal government to begin negotiations on purchasing the nursery.

The business plan would outline how much money would be required to purchase the nursery from the Canadian government as well to run it as a not-for-profit business, keeping costs minimal for producers.

The tree nursery distributes about three million trees per year. Hall estimated that approximately \$3 million is needed to produce the trees. With a cost-recovery business model, each tree would cost \$1.

"If (farmers are) putting out 5,000 or 10,000 trees and if we take over and we charge them a buck a tree, \$5,000 or \$10,000, that sounds like quite a bit of

money," Hall said. "But if you go to a nursery and you're paying \$5 or \$10 a tree, that can turn into \$25,000 to \$100,000, which is really unaffordable."

In order to continue the tree nursery, the government's co-operation is needed, said Reeve Lorne Scott of the RM of Indian Head.

The coalition met with additional federal government representatives on April 29 to discuss further options.

One option the coalition would like to explore is to have the federal government work with the third party for two to three years while transferring control

to the new owners.

"It's a not a matter of Dec. 31, the government is not having any presence there and the new third party interest takes it over, it just can't work that smoothly," Scott said. "So we need a two or three year time frame to transfer the facility and that's what we're looking for."

Hall said if a private company makes the purchase, he is concerned the facility will no longer be used to produce trees.

Scott estimated that the tree nursery would be beyond saving if the transfer of operations to any third party is not completed by the end of June.

"There's some people with good expertise getting laid off by the end of June," Scott said. "If people are gone in June there's still weeding in the summer, watering if it's dry and also in the fall a lot of planting takes place."

Without proper care, it would be difficult to resurrect the nursery, he said.

There are approximately 30 full time workers at the nursery and 30 or more are hired during the spring and fall seasons.

Scott said many of these workers have already received layoff notices for June to November.

On May 3, the coalition held another phone conference with Federal Agriculture Minister Gerry Ritz.

"(Ritz) clarified that the nursery will be running at full capacity throughout the summer and fall," Hall said.

Shipments and planting of trees will continue this spring. Weeding and irrigation will continue this summer and harvesting will continue this fall.

"The facility will remain open through the 2013 season," Ritz said in a statement to The World-Spectator. "We will not entertain a continuation year."

"To reiterate, shelterbelts are now a well-established practice across the prairies, and this change provides a great opportunity for the private sector to step in and deliver the service should the demand exist," the statement read.



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CFIB report: Labor shortage impacting businesses

A new report from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) shows a serious shortage of qualified people is impeding the growth and success of small and medium-sized businesses in Western Canada.

Most notably, half of the entrepreneurs in the West say they are giving up business opportunities as a result of the shortage of labor and skills.

The report, Looking for Hire Ground, analyzes the severity and impact of labor shortages in the Western provinces and territories from a small business perspective, looks at how business owners are coping, and recommends a number of ways governments can help.

"In Saskatchewan, 88 per cent of small business owners (79 per cent in West-

ern Canada) who were looking to hire within the last three years say they had difficulty, and 50 per cent (44 per cent in Western Canada) believe finding new employees is only going to become more difficult," said Marilyn Braun-Pollon, CFIB's Vice-President Prairie and Agribusiness.

As a result of a shortage of qualified people, half (51 per cent) of small and medium-sized businesses in the Western provinces and territories have had to pass up new business opportunities. Saskatchewan business owners are harder hit by labor shortages, with 76 per cent working longer hours (71 per cent in Western Canada), 66 per cent have increased labor costs (59 per cent in Western Canada), 56 per cent have re-

duced productivity (53 per cent in Western Canada) and 44 per cent have deteriorating customer service (48 per cent in Western Canada).

The report also reveals certain positions are particularly difficult to fill. Small businesses in Western Canada have the most difficulty hiring for skilled and technical positions that usually require a college education or apprenticeship training (43 per cent).

In contrast, only five per cent say they have the most difficulty hiring for professional positions that typically require a university education.

The top 10 types of employees small and medium-sized businesses are looking for include: salespeople, construction workers, auto mechanics, service

staff, general labourers, truck drivers, service technicians, welders, office staff, and general managers.

"In Saskatchewan, to cope with labour shortages 69 per cent of entrepreneurs hired underqualified workers, 66 per cent increased salaries and benefits, 48 per cent ignored new business opportunities, 32 per cent increased training, and 26 per cent have recruited outside of Canada," Braun-Pollon added.

"There is no silver bullet solution to solving this significant and growing challenge. Policy-makers have begun to respond, but much more needs to be done to help employers find the qualified people they need to build their business and grow our economy," Braun-Pollon concluded.

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Leads Swedish Elite League in points for the season • Wins championship with Skellefteå AIK

Bud Holloway a hero in Sweden

BY KEVIN WEEDMARK

Bud Holloway's hockey career has taken him from the Wapella rink to the Seattle Thunderbirds to the NHL draft to the pinnacle of the Swedish Elite League.

Holloway was a third-round draft pick by the LA Kings in 2006, but was kept on the roster of the Manchester Monarchs of the AHL, where he was the leading scorer in 2010-2011 with 28 goals and 33 assists for the season.

In the 2011-2012 season he made the move to the Swedish Elite League and Skellefteå AIK. He made an impact immediately, setting the all-time record for most goals scored in the Elite League playoffs.

Last year he was the fifth-leading scorer in the Swedish Elite League and this year Holloway led the Elite League in scoring through the regular season with 71 points.

Holloway also scored the game winner for Skellefteå in

overtime in game 1 of the final series.

On Thursday, April 18, Holloway and Skellefteå won the Elite League championship.

The celebration started at Skellefteå's home arena that night, and continued into the next day.

"We just had a big celebration in the town square," Holloway told the World-Spectator in an interview Friday.

"The whole team was on stage, the whole square was full of people, everyone was jumping around, they were so excited."

He said nothing can beat the feeling of being part of a championship team. "It feels great. It's fantastic just to win the championship. A lot of hard work goes into it. We've got a great team, and it's been a great season for us."

Holloway says the calibre of play is similar to the American Hockey League, in which he played with the Man-

chester Monarchs.

"It's similar to the AHL—it's a pretty elite league," he said. "It's a little more open—it's really good hockey and it's fun to play in. You can be a little more creative than in North American hockey—less grind, not as much dump and chase, a bit more finesse."

Continued on page 16



Bud Holloway, right, in the Swedish Elite League championship game Thursday, April 18.



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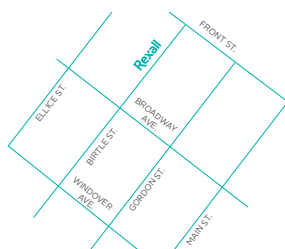


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Holloway elated

Continued from page 15

Holloway says he is very happy with how the season went. "I was blessed with a great year here," he said. "It goes with having a great team—they were the calibre of players to help me out."

He went from being fifth top scorer in the league last year to top scorer this year. "I just have a bit more experience, and my team was so good this year I was able to generate some good offence," he says.

Holloway has become a bit of a celebrity in hockey-crazy Sweden.

"It's kind of crazy," he says. "I love being at home in Wapella, being able to blend in. Here people will stop and take pictures of me in the grocery store, or walking down the street."

"It's nice to come home to Saskatchewan and be myself—it's kind of like two different worlds."

One of the brightest moments of the playoffs for Holloway was when he scored the winning goal in overtime in game 1 of the final series. "That was insane," he says. "It was a 0-0 game going into overtime. The crowd went insane. It's kind of hard to explain the atmosphere over here in the rink and town. They're really die-hard hockey fans here."

The celebration after his team won the championship was amazing, he said. "They presented us with gold medals and everything. We won away, and when we came home to the rink it was just pandemonium in the arena. People were singing, flags were flying, flares were going off—it was crazy. It's hard to take it all in and explain it."

"In this town they love hockey. It's the hockey team. It's what everyone talks about, just like you would in a town in Saskatchewan."

Holloway still maintains strong ties in Saskatchewan, and he has some fans who watched the Swedish playoffs at his parents' restaurant—Wendy's Place—in Wapella.

"It's still home," he says. "I still come home in the summers. Nine months away is a pretty long time to be away and I'm a pretty big family guy, I want to get back."

"Mom and Dad have the playoff games on the TV at the restaurant. Dad says it was almost full watching the games through the playoffs."

"I thank everyone who took the time to come out and cheer me on. Even though they are across the ocean it means a lot to me."

Holloway comes from a hockey family whose name is synonymous with Wapella—his dad George had offers to play in the WHL and his grandfather, also George, was one of the five Holloway brothers who were known in rinks across southeast Saskatchewan in decades past.

Does he plan to continue his career in the Swedish Elite League? "I'm happy here," he says. "I love the town and the team and the organization, but I don't know what the future has in store."



Bud Holloway in The final game

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Pipeline proposal getting support

BY LAUREN KRUGEL
THE CANADIAN PRESS

The Conservatives in Ottawa are staunch supporters, the New Democrats have called it a "win-win-win" and the premiers of Alberta and New Brunswick have loudly touted the benefits of an oil pipeline from west to east.

But the degree to which Canadian consumers will benefit at the pump is unclear, as it's up to the pipeline's customers—oil producers at one end and refineries at the other—to determine which barrels go where.

"One thing that I've learned over the years is the market will do what the market will do and it's difficult to predict beforehand," said Geoff Hill, oil and gas sector leader at Deloitte Canada.

The crude could flow to Eastern refineries clamoring for cheaper domestic supplies. Or, offshore buyers may drink it up. Most likely, it will be a combination of both.

"If you're a supplier of oil, you're going to be sending it to whoever gives you the highest price for it," said Hill.

"You're probably going to see a healthy amount of export as well as domestic

supply, depending on the market for oil at any given time."

Calgary-based pipeline giant TransCanada Corp. is in the process of determining what, precisely, the market wants out of its Energy East pipeline through a process known as an open season, which will wrap up in June.

Energy East involves configuring part of TransCanada's underused natural gas mainline between Alberta and Quebec to handle oil, as well as laying down a chunk of new pipe to the East Coast.

The line, which could carry up to 850,000 barrels of oil per day, would deliver crude to refineries in Montreal, Quebec City and Saint John, N.B.

TransCanada rival Enbridge Inc. has a plan of its own to reverse the flow of an existing pipeline between southern Ontario and Montreal—Line 9—in order to send Western crude east. So far, it has not announced plans to extend it to the East Coast.

Eastern refineries have been struggling, as they rely on expensive crude imported from overseas. Most are configured to handle light, sweet oil, not

the heavy stuff produced in the oilsands.

That imported oil follows prices of Brent, a benchmark for light crude produced in the North Sea. Brent trades at a big premium to West Texas Intermediate, the inland North American light benchmark, even though the two are of similar quality.

Last year, Eastern refineries imported some 720,000 barrels of oil per day from overseas suppliers—many of which are far from being political allies—to meet virtually all of their needs, said Alex Pourbaix, president of energy and oil pipelines at TransCanada.

"There's a very significant prize," he said of the Energy East proposal.

Alberta oil prices, which themselves trade at a discount to WTI, should improve with the new Eastern market access, he said. At the same time, the ailing refineries should see better profit margins.

And consumers are likely to benefit to some degree as well, Pourbaix added.

"Just removing reliance on a higher priced, much more risky feedstock I

think will have an impact on the perception of scarcity, which should have an impact on gasoline prices," he said.

"In any sort of market, if you add an incremental volume of supply to a fixed level of demand, you should see some price benefits."

Pourbaix expects that, at least in the beginning, Energy East will carry light oil. Large amounts are being produced in the Bakken formation, underlying parts of Saskatchewan and North Dakota, as well as central Alberta. Some oilsands producers also upgrade their crude into a refinery-ready product called synthetic crude oil.

"What we've seen so far is that there's been a lot of interest to use this pipeline to move light to the Eastern Canadian and Eastern U.S. markets."

But if heavy oil producers want to ship product east, too, the pipeline will be capable of moving both types of crude to various locations in batches, Pourbaix said.

Though the Eastern market is thirstiest for light oil, Irving Oil's massive refinery in Saint John

can handle some heavy grades.

But it's not necessarily Eastern Canadian refineries that producers are eager to access.

Accessing the port at Saint John, N.B., would enable them to ship their oil, perhaps unprocessed bitumen from the oilsands, to lucrative overseas markets by tanker.

Cenovus CEO Brian Ferguson was frank about his company's preference in a February interview, saying it was the export option that was most enticing about TransCanada's proposal.

And Alberta has blamed its budget squeeze on insufficient capacity get oilsands crude to tidewater.

"I would say the real target here is to get it to the deep sea port at Saint John and export it either down to the U.S. Gulf or to India or wherever—whoever wants it," said

Roger McKnight at EnPro International, which helps clients manage their fuel and energy costs.

"I don't see how it's going to benefit consumers. I just don't see it."

Even if refiners do replace pricey barrels imported from overseas with cheaper Canadian crude, it doesn't necessarily follow that their lower costs will be passed on to consumers, said McKnight.

"There's some confusion here, because the prices at the pump do not follow the input costs of crude, they follow the whims of the Wall Street speculators," he said.

"So we could have situations where crude could actually go down, but the prices of gasoline could go up because the speculators see some geopolitical threat on the horizon and they're guessing that the price of gasoline is going to go up."

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Eli Barsi defines the 'prairie girl' with 13th CD

Continued from Page 1

Barsi's recording career began in 1995 with "Unmarked Trail." She followed that up with "The Way the West was Herd" three years later. She released 10 more CDs and a Christmas album through the next 13 years. In that time, she charted 11 radio singles in Canada and produced three videos for Country Music Television while touring throughout North America.

The accolades for her work were numerous and came from a variety of sources. Since 2001, she has been nominated about 30 times for a wide range of awards, from Female Vocalist and Female Yodeler to Best Album, and Song Collaboration of the Year honors.

Among the organizations noting her accomplishments are the Academy of Western Artists, the Western Music Association (WMA), the Saskatchewan Country Music Association (SCMA) and the American Academy of Western Artists (AAWA).

In 2002, Barsi won an AAWA award for Female Vocalist in Fort Worth, Texas. Four years later, she earned two awards. The AAWA gave her the Will Rogers Award for Female Vocalist in Dallas, Texas, and the WMA gave her the Crescendo Award for Best New Artist.

Barsi met her husband, John Cunningham, on stage in Edmonton in 1989. They were playing the same show in separate bands at the time.

Cunningham was born in Timmons, Ont., but raised in Ottawa, Ont. from the age of six. He grew up playing piano, and later took up the guitar and bass. He began performing professionally when he was 16, when he played lead guitar for a variety of groups in several different genres.

When he picked up the bass, the list of bands he backed grew even longer. Among them were Brad Johner, Jackie Allan (The Tommy Hunter Show), Ronnie Prophet, Tony Michael and a handful of Branson theatre shows.

"Every song that I have had to learn, I have learned something from it," Cunningham said. "I have had the opportunity to learn and play thousands of songs and witnessed many live shows, learning from those people as well."

Cunningham and Barsi have been married for 22 years, but have worked together on a fulltime basis for about eight. Barsi is more than confident in her husband's capabilities as a musician.

"He's well versed in guitar, bass guitar and harmony vocals," she said. "He has been my main sound person for a number of years and is technically savvy with great ears, which is such an asset when we are on the road. I can always depend on having really great sound at every show. And he's a pretty good yodeler too."

The list of artists that have influenced Barsi is long and varied. Among those that stand most prominently in her mind are The Carter Family, Roy Acuff, Wilf Carter and the Sons of the Pioneers. The songwriters that have moved her include Dolly Parton, Nancy Griffith, Gary Fjellgaard and others.

Barsi's songwriting process is somewhat solitary. She is most productive while driving her vehicle, where she can be alone with few distractions. During these periods, she is developing the melody and lyrics, although each song comes to her in a different way.

"It all depends on the story and where I think it needs



Eli Barsi performing at a recent concert in Moosomin.

to take the listener," she said. "Once I have the ideas started, I like to sit down at the kitchen table to fine tune everything. That being said, I don't always have the luxury of being 'at home,' so my writing locations have become flexible."

Barsi and Cunningham do most of their recording at their home studio, where nine of the 13 CDs have been set down. Barsi said working at home is easy and convenient, but requires more responsibility with additional arranging, producing and engineering.

"Sometimes you need to distance yourself from all of that and just focus on the songs and vocals," she said. "I was happy that I went that route this time (for 'Portraits

of a Cowgirl')."

However, Barsi finds the most fulfilling part of her career outside of the studio. She loves to travel and meet people where ever she is performing.

"Throughout the last 27 years, I have been so blessed to have had the opportunity to meet some really great people from all walks of life," she said. "Traveling with my husband is also a highlight. We make a good team and we have a lot of fun."

That aspect of the business is important to Barsi. She and Cunningham have a wide range of responsibilities as independent artists in an industry she describes as "a very tough road."

But the feeling she gets while performing on stage compensates for the hard work required to get there.

"That is when I feel most like myself and at home. It takes a lot of work to get there and keep the shows rolling in," she said. "Being on stage is about 20 per cent of what I do. The other 80 per cent is set aside for rehearsing, writing, booking the shows, emailing contacts, advertising, booking flights, renting cars, booking hotel rooms, radio interviews, marketing, etcetera."

Outside of all of that, Barsi is also considering a venture into television. Some time ago, she auditioned for a job hosting a travel show, where she was among the final three candidates to be handed the job. This experience brought opportunities to host two other travel shows which had pilots shot in 2012.

"Both travel shows have unique themes which my disclaimer does not allow me to discuss. However, they also incorporated my music and writing, which was very exciting for me," she said, adding that the programs are currently being shopped to several Canadian and European broadcasters.

"Time will tell when and where the shows will be aired," she said.

Barsi will continue to tour her "Portrait of a Cowgirl" CD through to the end of September. She played the Moosomin Community Theatre on April 18, where she was well received by her home audience. May through September, she and Cunningham will perform shows in Saskatchewan, Alberta, New York and Nashville.

A full schedule of her shows and her CD discography is available at elibarsi.com.

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Housing markets vary around the province

BY DREW FOSSUM

Ask real-estate agent Don DeMarsh how the housing market in Tisdale is faring and he answers a question with a question.

"Depends on what version you want. Do you want doom and gloom, or do you want the rosy one?" he jokes.

When Albertans started moving back to Saskatchewan in 2007, prices rose and construction boomed, says DeMarsh. A three bedroom, 25 year old bungalow which used to sell for \$60,000, started going for \$160,000. People were coming back to Tisdale for the first time in years, as the town's population increased by 180 people between 2006 and 2011.

Tisdale's housing market hasn't quite kept pace with the hot markets around the province. Prices have cooled, down 10 per cent from their peak in 2011.

"Northeast Saskatchewan is one of the only places without a commodity boom right now," says DeMarsh explaining why prices have dropped.

Tisdale's agriculture-based economy is stable, the timber industry has lost much of the steam it once had, and known natural resources in the area aren't being developed. The area has grown by a healthy four per cent a year for the last five years, but economic activity has tapered off.

"We aren't boom town but we're not sliding either. Holding our own and growing ever so slightly," says DeMarsh.

Like Tisdale, many towns exist outside of the natural resource bubble. Agriculture is healthy right now, with higher than normal commodity prices, but its ability to increase a town's population is limited. Farming is becoming more advanced and less labour intensive, and farms are consolidating, meaning fewer and fewer people across the countryside. This gives rise to the question: are rising real estate prices in small towns sustainable if there isn't a local resource boom driving the increase?

Statistically, the ability to make a living is driving Saskatchewan's real estate market says Goodson Mwale, a senior market analyst for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

A strong economy, matched with low unemployment, is drawing people from across the country and the world. In 2012, Saskatchewan's unemployment rate was 4.7 per cent, second only to Alberta, and the province boasted wage growth of six per cent in Saskatoon and five per cent in Regina. Mwale says this equates to an increase in population of 97,000 since 2006 and a rise in the price of an average Saskatchewan home from \$132,000 to \$289,000.

The province's economic performance and job openings had an effect on Mwale too. He pulled up stakes and moved from Ontario to take his current position. "I guess I am one of those statistics," he says with a laugh.

But do population and increased wages account for rising prices in rural Saskatchewan too? Partially, he says. Saskatoon and Regina are the preferred cities for people moving into the province but they can't absorb everyone. Many people spill into the rural areas to chase jobs in the oilfield or potash. At this point it becomes a simple case of supply and demand, where demand drives up the price.

Some towns have job opportunities to match the rise in housing prices. Southwest and southeast corners of the province can take advantage of the oil and gas developments and parts of eastern Saskatchewan have attracted workers for new potash finds and increased production.

This doesn't mean real estate will be cheaper the further it sits from natural resources. Take Assiniboia for example. It's set deep in the south central region between the two energy-rich corners. It's a service hub for all the smaller agriculture communities as far south as the U.S. border.

House prices in Assiniboia are not as high as they are in the cities but they are higher than they have ever been, says local real estate agent Shirley Grabeldinger.

She explained the town's housing market didn't start to move when the rest of the province did in 2007. But when prices began to climb in 2009, they shot sky high. A three bedroom bungalow with a garage that used to cost between \$80,000 to \$100,000, went up to \$250,000.

There hasn't been a real influx of economic activity into the area either, but speculators have been the driving force in the real estate game as the oil patch creeps closer to the town, Grabeldinger says.

"We do have some oil and gas moving in, but whether they stay or go, we are primarily an agriculture based community," says Rochelle Neff, the town's economic development officer.

She says oil crews stay in Assiniboia, spreading money around town, but no oil related businesses have started up. New businesses are taking root, an \$8 million dollar hotel and a strip mall are being built, but high paying oilfield jobs have yet to move Assiniboia's economy forward.

Six hundred kms northeast of Assiniboia, Meadow Lake is perched above a belt of boreal forest and nestled in rolling farmland. Unfortunately the town is just beyond the oil and gas exploration and there isn't any potash in sight. Housing prices have risen independent of this though. Homes which went for less than \$100,000 five years ago are reaching nearly \$280,000. The market has cooled over the last year the prices have yet to go down.

When housing prices rose there wasn't anything driving them up; they just followed the provincial trend. The town has three lumber mills which employ large numbers of people and farming continues to inject money into the local economy, but nothing to increase the housing market by over 150 per cent.

"When people move here and are looking at houses they can't believe how high the prices are," says real estate Catherine Aldous. First time home buyers are struggling to find a house which doesn't require lots of renovations and is still within their price range. "It's getting to the point where you just about can't buy a house," she says.

Meadow Lake is doing well but there is nothing brewing to increase its economic fortunes. SaskPower is teaming up with a mill to build a bio-mass power converter, though it has yet to get off the ground, and tourism continues to bring money into the area. But as Saskatchewan's economy slows in 2013, is there enough provincial momentum to keep house prices at the current level?

"I think we are seeing a bit of a bubble," says Dwight Heinrichs, a marketing instructor at the University of Regina. He believes the rural housing market is artificially inflated by low interest rates. Even without an influx of industry, people can afford a loan for an overpriced house.

This is where the small town real estate bubble could burst. If interest rates rise a couple of points, the housing market will become a lot more restrictive and prices will hit a period of stagnation. There is only so much demand for homes out in small communities and if you take away one of the major draws, low interest rates, markets could quickly depress.

This is why bringing in new industries is so important to maintaining a small town's existence. It allows properties to maintain value, provides jobs to attract young people, keeps schools open, and helps towns flourish. Outside the resource areas, if industry doesn't come in another form, real estate could devalue slowly.

That being said, the average price of a house in Saskatchewan runs \$289,000, nearly \$90,000 less than the national average. Homes in some small towns run far less than this amount which means it makes good sense for people to sell their homes in large urban centres for \$400,000 to \$500,000, buy a nice house in a smaller community, and have some money left over.

Back in northeastern Saskatchewan, home prices are still fairly reasonable. Since they peaked in 2011, they have dipped about 10 per cent. A well-built 25 year-old, three bedroom bungalow will cost \$125,000, well below the provincial average.

DeMarsh argues that Tisdale is the best place in province to settle down. There are lakes and forests, it's a quiet town, and a wonderful place to fish. He also notes that there has been some oil and gas located in the area (though it has yet to be developed) and some jobs could come their way from the proposed diamond mine near Prince Albert.

DeMarsh says the town is ready for the next boom but there are some advantages to slow sustainable growth. "You hear the stories about Estevan's boom and you think, 'do you want that?'"

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Gov'ts spending \$65 million for farm irrigation needs

CP—Farmers in Saskatchewan are getting help with irrigation to provide water for livestock and to spray crops.

The federal and provincial governments said that they are adding \$65 million over five years to the Farm and Ranch Water Infrastructure Program.

Saskatchewan Agriculture Minister Lyle Stewart said the program, which started in 2008, has been invaluable.

"There were almost 5,500 projects completed across the province, including 12,000 additional acres of irrigated land, and 98 per cent of those projects were on farm. The balance would be community wells," he said.

"With the additional funding, I think we can expect great things."

The projects include wells, dugouts, running pipelines, connections to rural water utilities, well-head protection and well decommissions.

Dave Marit, president of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, said his own community, the Rural Municipality of Willow Bunch, set up three community wells and two ranchers have tied in to get water for their cattle. Other ranchers have taken similar action, he said.

"We had guys that did pipelines for a mile to get water to pastures that were critical for their live-

hood and to increase the herds. I think that was the important thing," said Marit, who added the program helps develop long-term, reliable sources of water.

"They had the grass, but they didn't have water and now we've done that." Stewart said he doesn't expect demand for the program to let up, even though 5,500 projects have already been completed.

"There's great demand for water improvements out there and this program makes many water improvements feasible that otherwise wouldn't be."

The \$65 million is to be split 60-40 between the federal and provincial governments.

Building permits set record

Construction across Saskatchewan has picked up according to the latest building permit numbers released by Statistics Canada May 6. In March 2013, building permits in the province totalled \$270 million, the highest on record for the month of March. This was a 22.6 per cent rise from March 2012, the third highest percentage increase in the nation.

"In spite of less than ideal weather conditions, Sas-

katchewan's construction businesses were still able to make progress," Economy Minister Bill Boyd said. "That says a lot about the quality of the companies and the skilled workers who make up one of our economy's most important sectors."

Non-residential building permits were up by 32.7 per cent on a year-over-year basis, while residential permits were up 14.5 per cent over the same pe-

riod. On a month-over-month basis, building permits were up by 26.6 per cent between February 2013 and March 2013 on a seasonally adjusted basis.

"Saskatchewan's economy is making gains at a steady pace," Boyd said. "It's the growth in residential and non-residential projects that's making the difference, and that's creating jobs and impacting overall economic growth."

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The Manitoba government is supporting 15 more medical residencies and expanding doctor recruitment incentives, Premier Greg Selinger announced on May 3.

"While there are more doctors practising today in Manitoba than ever before, we know we need more to give families access to better care sooner and closer to home," said Selinger. "By investing in more training opportunities in Manitoba and more doctor recruitment grants, we are moving closer to ensuring all Manitobans can access a family doctor by 2015."

Budget 2013 includes over \$4.5 million to expand doctor training and recruitment initiatives including:

- 15 new medical residency positions including seven family medicine residencies in rural Manitoba and eight specialist residencies in Winnipeg in emergency medicine, adolescent psychiatry, vascular

surgery, internal medicine, and obstetrics and gynecology;

- over \$300,000 for additional grants that can cover the full cost of medical school for up to 23 more students who agree to practise in under-served communities after graduation; and

- increased support for internationally educated doctors working toward being fully licensed to practise in Manitoba.

"The University of Manitoba has focused on increasing the number of Manitobans in medical school," said Dr. Brian Postl, dean of the faculty of medicine at the University of Manitoba. "With new funding from the Manitoba government for additional residency positions in rural Manitoba as well as Win-

nipeg, we can train even more doctors to give families the care they need, especially for under-served communities in the prov-

ince."

The Manitoba government has expanded medical school training to 110 seats after it had been reduced to 70 seats during the 1990s, Health Minister Theresa Oswald said. Medical residencies are the last stage of training for doctors following medical school.

"When medical training is expanded, more doctors are recruited, but when it's cut, you end up with fewer doctors," said Oswald. "Our government won't repeat short-sighted cuts to medical school training that led to fewer doctors working in Manitoba in the 1990s. Manitobans deserve better."

According to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, there are over 2,500 doctors working in Manitoba, over 500 more in the province than there was in 1999. Between 1993 and 1999, the college reported a decrease of 116 fewer doctors working in the province.

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