

NTM

NORTHERN THREADS MAGAZINE



Our Northern Stories Woven Together

Est. 2025

PEOPLE • PLACES • STORIES • COMMUNITY



From the woods, the water, and the people who call the North home.

Reflections From The Editor



Beneath the Pines, I Found Pieces of Myself

There is something about summer camp that is almost impossible to explain to someone who has never truly experienced it.

Maybe it is the smell of pine needles warming beneath the afternoon sun. Maybe it is the sound of a screen door slamming on an old wooden cabin, followed by the laughter of kids running toward whatever adventure is next. Maybe it is the songs sung slightly off-key around a campfire or the quiet that settles over a lake after the last canoe has been pulled onto shore.

For me, summer camp has been all of those things—and so much more.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of giving pieces of my summers to youth camps across Ontario and beyond, from Bancroft to Whitefish Falls, Hudson Township and all the way to Rennie, Manitoba. Each place was different. Each had its own traditions, its own rhythm and its own little pieces of magic.

Yet, somehow, every camp offered the same incredible gift: the chance to unplug, breathe and reset.

At camp, the outside world seems to grow quieter. Cell phones lose their importance—or sometimes their signal altogether. Schedules are measured by meal bells, activity periods and the fading afternoon sun. Conversations happen face-to-face. Laughter is real and immediate. You begin to notice the stars again.

And, perhaps most importantly, you begin to notice each other.

I think of tiny Camp Temiskaming, tucked beneath the shadow of towering pines. Just six cabins, a pavilion and a crystal-clear lake that seemed to hold every shade of blue depending on the time of day. Kids ran and played with the kind of freedom childhood is supposed to hold. They created skits and performed them in the pavilion, laughing at inside jokes that had somehow been born only days earlier but already felt years old.

There was something wonderfully simple about it.

Then there was Camp Diamond, beautiful in an entirely different way, and its unforgettable leader, affectionately known as “Buttons.” Under her leadership, girls and families came together to

experience camp, community and connection. There was swimming and archery, crafts created with careful hands, and conversations shared between activities. It was a place where relationships were built quietly, often without anyone realizing just how important they would become. At Camp Manitou, on the North Channel of Lake Huron, the landscape itself seemed to demand that you pause and take it all in.

I can still imagine the old open-air chapel filled with young voices, songs ringing out loud and clear beneath Mount Stadnyk. There was something powerful about hearing those voices together, surrounded by rock, trees and water.

Someone once told me at Manitou that when you needed to hear the voices of those who came before you, you could always return to that old chapel. Their voices would still be there in the wind.

I have carried those words with me for years.

There are places that seem to hold memories differently. Places where laughter, songs and whispered conversations somehow become woven into the landscape itself. That chapel has always felt like one of those places to me. If you sit quietly enough, with the wind moving through the trees and across the North Channel, perhaps you really can hear an echo of every young voice that once sang beneath that roof.

Days at Manitou were spent in canoes and kayaks, paddles dipping into the North Channel. There was the excitement—and sometimes courage it took—to jump from the rocks at Shark’s Jaw. Kids challenged themselves, encouraged one another and discovered that they were often capable of far more than they believed when they first arrived.

And then there was Red Rock Bible Camp in Rennie, Manitoba.

There, young people gathered in prayer and spent their days testing themselves on the rock wall, building rafts and heading to the beach. They learned to work together. They learned to trust the person holding the rope. They learned to cheer for someone else’s success.

Those may sound like simple camp activities. They aren’t.

Because summer camp has never really been just

about swimming, crafts, canoeing or campfires.

It is about relationships.

It is about the child who arrives painfully shy and, by the end of the week, is standing on a stage performing a ridiculous skit with five new best friends.

It is about the camper who is afraid of heights taking one more step up the climbing wall because an entire group of kids below is shouting their name.

It is about the young person sitting quietly beside the lake who finally finds the courage to talk about something they have been carrying.

It is about belonging. But here is something I have learned after summers spent at camp: the campers are not the only ones who are changed.

Summer camp builds relationships among those of us who give our hearts to the mission, too.

The leaders. The counsellors. The kitchen staff. The volunteers. The people who spend their summers covered in bug spray, smelling faintly of campfire smoke and wondering how one group of children can possibly lose that many water bottles.

We become connected.

There is a unique bond created when you work alongside someone to make a child feel safe, included and valued. You learn each other’s strengths. You step in when someone is exhausted. You laugh until your stomach hurts over things that would make absolutely no sense to anyone who wasn’t there.

And sometimes, years later, you realize those relationships never really left you.

Neither did the kids.

There are campers whose faces I can still picture. Moments I can replay like scenes from an old home movie. Songs that instantly transport me back to a chapel, a pavilion or a campfire circle.

I have often said that we never fully understand the impact we have on another person’s life.

Summer camp taught me that lesson over and over again.

As volunteers and leaders, we arrive believing we are there to give something to young peo-



Photo Credit: Karrie O’Connor
A group of campers and volunteers at campfire. Circa 2007 Camp Manitou



Photo Credit: Karrie O’Connor
A group of campers performing the laama song. Circa 2009 Camp Temiskaming

ple—our time, our patience, our encouragement and our experience.

But camp has a funny way of giving back.

It reminds us how to play.

It reminds us to laugh loudly.

It reminds us to sit beside the water and be still.

It reminds us that a conversation does not need a screen between two people to matter.

And it reminds us that sometimes the most important thing we can offer another human being is simply our presence.

When I look back at the summers I spent beneath the pines, beside Northern lakes and surrounded by the voices of young people discovering themselves, I realize I didn’t simply volunteer at summer camps.

Those camps became part of the threads of my own story.

From Bancroft to Whitefish Falls. From Hudson Township to Rennie.

Different camps. Different lakes. Different traditions.

But the same beautiful truth. When people come together, unplug from the noise and give their hearts to creating a place where young people can belong, the relationships built there have a way of lasting long after the cabins are empty, the canoes are stored and the final campfire has faded into embers.

And if I close my eyes, I swear I can still hear the songs beneath the pines.

Maybe they really are still there in the wind.

Many of these camps operate on a limite budget and donations in order to make it affordable for all youth. They offer bursaries and grants and focus on providing the experiences in a manner all an attend.

This author has often thought of penning a book



Photo Credit: Karrie O’Connor
The Chapel as seen from the shore. Circa 2007
Camp Manitou

to benefit them all. I think I would title it, ‘Magic Beneath the Pines’. My problem rests in what is the beginning, the middle and the end? While I haven’t volunteered in several years due to life changes and health issues, these places still hold

a magical place in my heart and I long to one day go back and continue giving to them because in all honesty they have given me lifelong friends, treasured memories with my kids and the knowledge that magical and wonderful places do still exist in this world.

Perhaps now is the time to write the story so that others can know the same beauty I have.

If you would like to donate to any of these amazing camps you can visit their websites here:

Camp Temiskaming:
www.camptemiskaming.com/

Camp Manitou:
www.manitoucamp.org

Red Rock Bible Camp:
<https://redrockbiblecamp.com/>

Camp Diamond was closed about 10 years ago but it enjoyed an amazing run and touched many lives.

One Man. One Dog. One Mission: Why James and Muck Keep Walking

by KARRIE O’CONNOR

Most of us have never had to choose between a roof over our heads and the family member who never leaves our side. Yet for thousands of Canadians experiencing homelessness, that impossible decision is a reality.

For James Caughill, better known across the country as Homeless James, that choice changed the course of his life forever.

When James lost his housing in 2016, he sought help through the shelter system. What he says he discovered was devastating: if he wanted a bed, he would have to give up his beloved dog, Muckwah. To many, a pet is “just an animal.” To someone living through trauma, addiction, loneliness, or homelessness, that pet is often family—the one constant source of unconditional love in an otherwise uncertain world.

James refused to abandon his best friend.

“Muckwah was my first Dog on this Walk (I lost her to Cancer in 2019) Muck was named in Honour of Muckwah, I’ve been doing this Walk for almost 10 Years Now. I Actually Started on September 24 2016 at 2:00 in the Afternoon,” said James from his current campground in

Instead, he chose a path that few would ever consider.

He began walking.

Not for days.

Not for weeks.

But for years.

With everything he owns packed into a cart and his faithful canine companion by his side, James set out on what has become one of Canada’s most remarkable grassroots awareness campaigns. Today, he and Muck continue what James describes

LIVE CARICATURE DRAWING

10AM - 5PM JULY 18, 2026

LEE PARK, NORTH BAY



as “an amazing adventure,” literally walking across Canada to advocate for people experiencing homelessness who refuse to leave their pets behind.

The journey has taken them through communities from coast to coast, where they have shared their story with anyone willing to listen. James says that when he began his walk in 2016, he could not find a homeless shelter that would accept both him and his dog.

Through years of advocacy, conversations, and public awareness, he says their journey has in-



Photo Credit: Homeless James and Muckwah
Muck with the cart that houses all of their belongings, as well as Muck’s food and water.

spired 400 shelters, across Canada and 120 Micro Communities to open their doors to people with companion animals.

Currently they are camping at the Bouctouche Baie Chalets and Camping Adventures Campground in Bouctouche New Brunswick so be sure to keep your eyes peeled. They plan to be back on the road Wednesday.

If true, that is more than a policy change.

It represents dozens of people who no longer have to choose between safety and the companion who may be keeping them alive emotionally.

The road has been anything but easy.

James has endured blistering summer heat, freezing winter temperatures, relentless rain, aching muscles, and the loneliness that comes with spending years on the road. Every kilometre has been earned one step at a time.

Heartbreak has accompanied the journey as well. In 2019, James lost his original companion, Muckwah, to cancer. Rather than end the mission, he honoured her memory by adopting another husky-malamute cross and continuing the walk with Muck, carrying forward both the name and the purpose that had become larger than either of them.

Like many Canadians living outdoors, winter presents an entirely different challenge. This past winter, James and Muck found refuge in Miramichi, New Brunswick, where they paused their cross-country trek before preparing to continue their remarkable journey when the weather allowed.

The mission extends beyond awareness.

Along the way, James has written and independently published six volumes chronicling the true story of his walk across Canada. He says 90 percent of the royalties from those books are being placed into a trust with the long-term goal



Photo Credit: Homeless James and Muckwah
Despite the challenges Muck and James are most importantly together and healthy.

of building three homeless shelters specifically designed to accommodate both people and their pets, while he and Muck retain the remaining ten percent to help sustain the journey.

James’ audience isn’t found in auditoriums or conference halls. It is the curious child who wanders over to meet Muck at a campground, the couple who pull over to offer a coffee, the restaurant owner who insists on buying supper, or the family who opens their home for a warm night’s sleep. These simple encounters have become the heart of his journey. One conversation at a time, James gently challenges the stereotypes surrounding homelessness and reminds people that compassion often begins with listening to someone’s story before judging their circumstances.

His message reaches far beyond homelessness.

It is about compassion.
It is about recognizing that every person has a story worth hearing.

And sometimes, the only thing standing between someone and hope is the wagging tail waiting faithfully beside them.

As the founder of Northern Threads Magazine, this story resonates with me on a deeply personal level. I share my life with Casper, my service dog, whose quiet presence has become an essential part of my everyday world. He is more than a companion—he is my constant source of comfort, the one living being who instinctively understands my needs without explanation. The thought that a sudden change in my circumstances could one day leave me unhoused and force me to choose between a roof over my head and keeping Casper by my side is almost unimaginable. That possibility carries a weight that is difficult to put into words.

It is why James’ journey speaks to my heart.

His story is a reminder that for many people, a pet is not a possession to be surrendered during hard times. They are family. They are a lifeline. And sometimes, they are the very reason someone finds the strength to get up and keep moving forward.

As homelessness continues to rise across Canada and shelters struggle to meet increasing demand, James and Muck remain on the road, reminding communities that solutions often begin not with government policy or large organizations, but with ordinary people willing to stop, share a conversation, and see the person behind the circumstances.

For James, the journey is measured not only in kilometres walked but in hearts changed. Every handshake, every shared meal, every child who smiles as Muck trots by, and every person who leaves with a new understanding of homelessness becomes another step toward the future he envisions—one where no one is forced to choose between shelter and the companion they love.

Their story isn’t simply about homelessness.

It is about loyalty.

It is about resilience.

It is about hope.

It is about refusing to leave family behind, no matter how difficult the road becomes.

What Comes Next—When They Finally Finish?

As for what comes next when James and Muck finally—finally—finish their incredible journey, the plans are already taking shape.

James has already written Volume Three of Book Two, and he believes there may be another two volumes still to come. One thing is certain: when the final steps of the walk have been taken and the last volume of their story has been written and published, James and Muck have some very big plans.

James intends to put the rights to their story—including the books and potential movie or mini-series rights—up for auction. With the

mission firmly rooted in giving back, he says the planned opening bid will start at \$6 million.

According to James, 90 percent of the final proceeds will go toward building three Muckwah Memorial Micro Home Communities for people experiencing homelessness and their pets. James and Muck will receive the remaining 10 percent, but even then, the mission will not end.

James says a portion of their share will be used to establish The Muckwah Memorial Foundation for the Homeless and Their Pets, with the hope of carrying the work forward long after the final page has been written and the last kilometre has been walked.

Because for James and Muck, finishing the walk was never meant to be the end of their story.

It may simply be the beginning of what comes next.

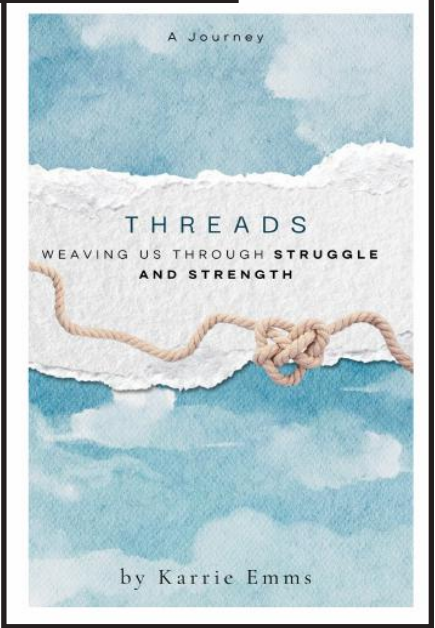
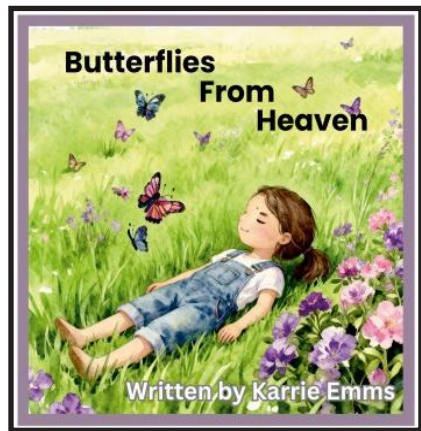
Sometimes changing the world doesn’t begin in a boardroom or a legislature.

Sometimes it begins on the shoulder of a Canadian highway—with a man, his dog, and a promise that neither of them will ever walk alone.

To support James and Muck e-transfers can be sent to: jamesandmuckwah@hotmail.com

You can also purchase their books on amazon by searching for the ‘Homeless James and Muckwah Collection!’

Books By Karrie (Emms) O’Connor



AVAILABLE AT:



The Northern Chuckle

by GILLIAN HEBERT@StudioGillian
Artwork By Gillian Hebert

During my time as a cashier at a pharmacy, there were moments when business was slow. I would seize these quiet times to browse through the book rack. One particular book caught my attention, and I managed to read a few chapters of the intriguing mystery. However, as luck would have it, a customer arrived who also had an interest in crime-solving.

Regrettably, I can't recall the title or the author of that book, and I never discovered how the story concluded.



Meet The Frequency 'X' Youth

Artwork by Gillian Hebert - Studio Gillian



Haven
I'm 17 years old and have a love for the theatre, being outside, and making art. I was born and raised in northern Ontario. I wish to have a lasting impact on my community, which is why I am writing for Frequency 'X'!



Brody
I'm 17 years old, I enjoy writing my own music, learning about new things, and helping other people. I joined Frequency 'X' in hopes that my contributions will continue to help everyone I can through my unique perspective and creativity!



CJ
I'm 19 years old, drawn to sharks, every shade of blue and the freedom that comes with creating art. The ocean inspires my creativity and I love turning ideas into something interesting. I wanted to be part of a space where youth can speak up about things that matter to us. I think it's important to share our perspectives and to help people understand what's important to the youth.



Roz
I'm a 16 year old curler who loves volunteering. You might have seen me at Bonfield Summer Camp and Reptile Camp. This summer, I aim to have fun and inspire others through Frequency 'X' to explore and try new things.

Why Cartoons for Frequency 'X' Youth?

I have created the Frequency 'X' Youth using whimsical characters for their storytelling to reduce pressure during photography, fostering a relaxed environment. This allows young people to focus on creativity and narrative rather than appearance, decreasing anxiety and encouraging authentic self-expression. By shifting focus from physical looks, youth can explore their identities and ideas, leading to richer storytelling.



Image: Stock Photo

When the North Burns: Wildfires Leave Their Mark Far Beyond the Forest
by KARRIE O’CONNOR

There is a particular smell that hangs in the air when the forests are burning. For those of us who live in Northern Ontario, it has become increasingly familiar. Smoke settles over our communities, the sun takes on an eerie orange or red glow, and a haze stretches across lakes and highways that, on a clear day, seem to go on forever.

This summer, however, the threat is much more than a smoky horizon.

As of July 13, Ontario was reporting 29 active wildland fires in the Northeast Region alone. By the morning of July 14, evacuation orders were in place for Armstrong and Cushing Lake, as well as Collins First Nation, Whitesand First Nation and Lac des Mille Lacs First Nation. Residents were being directed south toward Thunder Bay, while people in Ignace, Crystal Lake and along the Highway 633 area were being told to prepare for the possibility of evacuation.

At the same time, much of Northern Ontario was under a severe heat warning, with temperatures forecast to reach 36 C and humidex values making it feel as hot as 40 C. It is a difficult combination of heat, dry conditions, fire and smoke, and its impact reaches far beyond the trees being consumed by flames.

When Home Becomes a Place You Have to Leave

It is easy to look at a wildfire map and see dots, shaded areas and numbers. Behind every evacuation order, however, there are people suddenly facing decisions most of us hope we never have to make.

There is a parent deciding what can fit into the vehicle and medication being quickly gathered from a bathroom cabinet. There is a child asking whether their bedroom will still be there when they come home and a family looking at a beloved pet and making absolutely certain there is room. There are elders leaving familiar communities, sometimes travelling hundreds of kilometres to temporary accommodations in cities they do not know.

For smaller and remote Northern communities, particularly First Nations, evacuation is not as simple as getting into a car and driving to the next town. Geography, transportation, limited road access and the enormous distances between communities can complicate every part of an emergency response.

The Government of Canada acknowledged in its July wildfire update that, although national seasonal fire activity remained below the five-year average at that point, fire danger was continuing to rise as summer progressed.

That is an important distinction. A wildfire season does not have to break a national record to devastate a community. For the person standing outside and watching smoke rise behind their home, statistics offer very little comfort.

The Businesses That Depend on a Northern Summer

There is another side to wildfire season that often receives less attention. Northern Ontario businesses live and die by the seasons.

For a small outfitter, campground, marina, lodge, roadside restaurant or tourism operator, July and August are not simply busy months. They may represent the revenue needed to survive an entire year.

Northern Ontario’s visitor economy is significant. Destination Northern Ontario reported \$2.8 bil-

lion in visitor spending in 2024 and says 91 per cent of tourism revenues stay within Northern Ontario, supporting the businesses and communities that call this region home.

Now imagine losing part of an already short summer.

A family in Southern Ontario sees a social media post showing flames somewhere in the North and cancels a campground reservation. An American angler hears the words “Northern Ontario wild-fire” and postpones a fishing trip. Someone planning a road trip worries about highway closures, smoke and visibility and chooses another destination.

The fire may be hundreds of kilometres from the business that loses the reservation, but that does not make the financial loss any less real.

We have seen this before. During the 2018 Temagami-area fires, businesses reported significant losses as fear and misinformation discouraged visitors. One local aviation and houseboat operator reported flights dropping from a normal 15 per day to roughly five or six, while restaurant owners described a summer in which their businesses should have been full.

A wildfire does not need to burn down a business to damage it. Sometimes, all it needs to do is change someone’s travel plans.

The effect then ripples through an entire community. Fewer tourists mean fewer restaurant meals, fewer gas station stops and fewer motel rooms. It means fewer bags of ice purchased at the corner store, fewer fishing licences, canoe rentals and souvenir purchases.

For Northern communities where small businesses already operate on narrow margins, a lost summer weekend matters. Several lost weeks can be devastating.

The Weather Feels Different Under a Sky Filled With Smoke

Then there is the weather—or perhaps more accurately, the way we experience the weather.

Wildfire smoke contains fine particulate matter, including PM2.5, and smoke concentrations can shift with winds and atmospheric conditions. Canada’s Air Quality Health Index helps communicate the short-term health risks associated with air pollution, while smoke forecasting tools attempt to estimate where wildfire smoke may travel over the following days.

For the average person, however, the science often translates into something much simpler.

The air feels heavy. The sky looks wrong. The sun appears muted and the horizon disappears.

You step outside expecting the familiar smell of summer trees and water and instead breathe in smoke.

The haze can make an already oppressive heat wave feel even more unsettling. Northern communities facing wildfire threats at the same time as severe heat are dealing with overlapping challenges, particularly for people who work outdoors, children attending summer programs and camps, seniors and those managing heart or lung

concerns.

Outdoor activities may be changed or cancelled. Windows that would normally be opened to catch an evening breeze remain closed. People begin checking the Air Quality Health Index with the same regularity that they once checked only the temperature.

We watch the wind and hope for rain, perhaps recognizing more than ever how little control we have over either.

Fire Changes the Rhythm of a Community

Northern Ontario communities are accustomed to helping one another. We see it after snowstorms and when highways close. We see it when a family loses a home, and we see it again during wildfire season.

Emergency workers, wildland firefighters and aviation crews face difficult and often dangerous conditions. Municipal staff and First Nation leadership work through rapidly changing information. Hotels and temporary accommodations may suddenly receive displaced residents, while community organizations begin gathering supplies.

Neighbours ask one simple question: What do you need?

That may be one of the most Northern things about us.

But we also need to recognize the exhaustion behind that resilience.

There is stress in watching an evacuation alert appear on a phone. There is anxiety in seeing smoke rise in the distance and uncertainty for a business owner staring at a growing list of cancellations. There is physical exhaustion among those fighting fires and emotional fatigue in communities that seem to move from one emergency to another.

We often describe Northern communities as resilient, and they are. But calling people resilient should never become an excuse to ignore what that resilience costs.

A Landscape of Memories

For me, this story is personal. I grew up in Northern Ontario, and I have spent time in many of the communities now affected or threatened by fire and smoke. They are not simply names scrolling across an emergency update or dots on a wildfire map. They are places I have driven through, stopped in, laughed in and built memories in. I can picture the highways, the tree lines and the lakes. I know the feeling of travelling through Northern communities where the landscape becomes part of how you remember a place.

That is one of the things about forest fires that breaks my heart the most: fire can change the landscapes of our memories.

Once flames rip through an area, the devastation can leave a once-familiar landscape almost unrecognizable. A stretch of highway once framed by thick green forest becomes blackened and bare. Trees that stood for decades are reduced to charred trunks. The places we remember from childhood trips, family vacations or quiet drives

across the North can suddenly look completely foreign. The fire may eventually be declared out, but its presence remains written across the land for years to come.

Growing up in the North, we are taught about fire from the time we are children. We learn how to safely build and extinguish a campfire. We are told never to leave a fire unattended. We learn to drown it, stir it and check it again. Fire bans are taken seriously because we understand, perhaps more than most, how quickly one spark can become something impossible to control.

But understanding wildfire and actually feeling threatened by one are two very different things.

While I was working at a summer camp in Ren- nie, Manitoba, we experienced that reality when fire threatened the area. Suddenly, wildfire was no longer something happening somewhere else or a story playing on the evening news. It was something we were watching, discussing and preparing for. When you are responsible for young people, the possibility of evacuation carries an entirely different weight. Plans have to be made. Children need to feel safe even when the adults around them are quietly watching conditions and considering what may come next.

That experience stayed with me because it showed me how completely fire can interrupt a life.

Sometimes it means evacuating a summer camp filled with children. Sometimes it is a family packing a vehicle and leaving the only home they have known. Sometimes an entire town is displaced under the threat of approaching flames. And sometimes, the fire itself never reaches the community at all, but smoke drifts in, changing the air people breathe, closing outdoor programs and forcing people indoors.

The impact is different in every community, but it touches nearly every part of life.

Perhaps that is why, when I look at the wildfire maps now, I don’t simply see fire numbers. I see the places behind them. I think about the people, the familiar roads and the forests that have quietly stood as the backdrop to generations of Northern memories.

And I know that even after the flames are gone and the smoke finally clears, some places—and some people—will carry the mark of that fire for years to come.

More Than Trees Are at Risk

When we talk about forest fires, we naturally talk about hectares burned and fire status. We hear the familiar terms: not under control, being held and under control. We follow maps and instinctively search for the little fire icons closest to our own homes.

Perhaps, though, we also need to look at everything surrounding those dots on the map.

The communities. The businesses. The families. The tourism operators who have twelve short weeks to make a year work. The children watching smoke roll across a lake. The elders being moved from home. The firefighters walking into conditions most of us instinctively move away from.

Northern Ontario’s forests are part of who we are. They surround our towns, line our highways and frame the lakes that appear in our family photographs. They provide employment, recreation and tourism, and for many of us, they create a sense of home that is difficult to describe

When those forests burn, the impact travels.

Smoke is carried hundreds of kilometres by the wind. Communities are forced to evacuate. Businesses watch reservations disappear. The fires change our weather, our routines and even our conversations.

This summer, as we watch the skies and follow fire reports, perhaps the most important thing we can do—beyond following official restrictions and emergency directions—is remember the people behind the maps.

Check on those in affected communities. Before cancelling a Northern trip based solely on a frightening image from hundreds of kilometres away, check official fire, highway and air-quality information to understand the actual conditions in the community you plan to visit.

Support the businesses that remain safely open. Respect fire bans and restrictions. Remember that one careless decision can put forests, homes and lives at risk.

And never forget the men and women working in the heat, smoke and wilderness to protect communities they may not even call home.

Because when the North burns, it is never only the forest that feels the heat.

The effects are woven through all of us.

Editor’s Note: Wildfire conditions can change rapidly. Readers are encouraged to consult official Ontario forest fire updates, the Canadian Wildland Fire Information System and Canada’s Air Quality Health Index for the most current information before travelling or making decisions based on wildfire and smoke conditions.

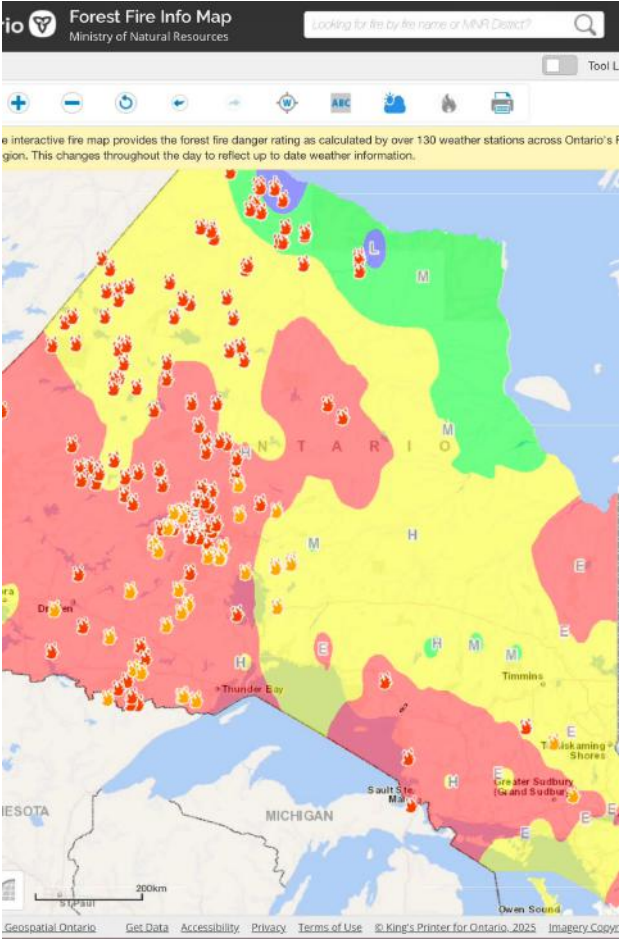


Photo Credit:Gov’t Of Ontario
A map showing wide spread and numerous forest fires throughout Ontario.

When 30 Degrees Became Normal: The Changing Summers of Northern Ontario

by KARRIE O’CONNOR

I remember Northern summers when you packed a sweatshirt no matter how warm the afternoon had been. By the time the campfire was lit and the sun disappeared behind the pines, there was a good chance you would need it.

Of course, we had hot days. We complained. We jumped in the lake. We sat in front of fans and ate Freezies until our tongues turned blue, red or green.

But lately, summer in the North feels different.

Somewhere along the way, 30 degrees stopped feeling extraordinary.

I grew up in Mattice, a small Northern Ontario community tucked between Kapuskasing and Hearst. The summers I remember were warm, often somewhere between 25 and 30 degrees, but there were cool breezes and evenings when the temperature finally gave us a break.

And there was rain.

Plenty of it.

Summer storms rolled through with dark clouds and that unmistakable smell that told you rain was coming before the first drop hit the ground. Thunder cracked across the sky, and when the storm passed, it left wet roads, dripping trees and air that felt cooler and cleaner.

Growing up in Mattice, we worried far more about being carried away by the blackflies than extreme heat warnings lasting day after day.

Blackflies, mosquitoes and horseflies were the enemies of a Northern childhood. We knew the art of waving our hands around our heads while carrying on a conversation and understood that leaving a screen door open for three seconds too long was essentially an invitation for half the forest to move in.

And we travelled.

Anyone raised in a small Northern community understands that getting almost anywhere meant getting into a car and driving—a long way.

We travelled endless stretches of Northern highway with the windows rolled down and music playing. Air conditioning wasn’t yet a common feature in every vehicle, and somehow, we survived without it. The wind messed up your hair and made conversation difficult, but that was part of the drive.

We were taught to respect the forest surrounding those highways. As kids, we knew not to throw shiny things from car windows for fear they could contribute to a fire. My parents never threw cigarette butts from the vehicle. Whether we understood every detail of fire science or not, the message was clear: you didn’t do anything that might put the forest at risk.

Yet, along those long drives, I seldom remember actually seeing a forest fire.

I don’t remember smoke constantly hanging over highways or checking a fire map before travelling. Most of the time, if smoke drifted through the open windows, it smelled like a campfire from a nearby provincial park.

Yes, we had occasional fire bans and grass-burning restrictions, but they seemed few and far be-

tween.

Today, fire bans, wildfire smoke and air-quality alerts have become a much more familiar part of the Northern summer conversation. Increasingly, we travel those same highways with the windows rolled up—not simply because our vehicles now have air conditioning, but sometimes because the air outside smells of smoke.

Maybe memory is imperfect. I’m sure there were brutally hot days when I was young.

But they felt like hot days.

Now, increasingly, we seem to experience hot weeks.

The Northern summer of my childhood had extremes, but they felt like events. A brutally hot afternoon. A powerful thunderstorm. A dry spell. A fire ban.

Today, the extremes seem to linger.

The heat stays. The rain doesn’t always come. The smoke travels, and warnings remain on our phones day after day.

My years volunteering at summer camps only added to my picture of a Northern summer. At Camp Temiskaming, Camp Diamond and Camp Manitou, the lakes were always part of the experience. You ran down the dock knowing the first plunge would be cold.

Sometimes painfully cold.

You jumped anyway.

The shock took your breath away, and then the water became the most refreshing place on earth.

Now, on some summer days, I step into a Northern lake and think: this feels like bathwater.

I also don’t remember hearing nearly as much about things like swimmer’s itch when I was growing up. That doesn’t mean it didn’t exist, and swimmer’s itch is not simply caused by hot weather. Still, changing water conditions and shoreline ecosystems give us reason to pay attention to the health of our lakes.



Photo Credit:Township Of Matice
Next to blackflies the dinosuars as you drove into town were the biggest attractions. Now one remains.

For youth camps and outdoor programs, extreme heat changes the rhythm of summer. Staff watch water bottles. Activities move into the shade. Hikes are reconsidered. Children don’t always recognize when their bodies are becoming overwhelmed, so adults need to pay closer attention.

Our homes face challenges too. Northern houses were designed with winter in mind. We built to keep heat in when January temperatures plunged. Air conditioning was once considered a luxury.

Many of us grew up without it. We opened windows, closed curtains and put a fan beside the bed.

But what happens when the temperature doesn’t drop at night?

For seniors, people with health concerns and those living in older homes or apartments without effective cooling, extreme heat is more than uncomfortable. It can be dangerous.

And what happens when you don’t have a home at all?

In Northern Ontario, we often discuss homelessness as a winter emergency. We worry about frostbite and hypothermia. But imagine carrying everything you own when the temperature climbs into the mid-30s. Imagine searching for shade, water and somewhere to simply sit without being asked to move along.

Perhaps cooling spaces and accessible drinking water need to become as much a part of our emergency planning as warming centres.

Our pets feel it too. Casper, my service dog and constant companion, is rarely far from me. I think about pavement temperatures, water and shade before we leave home. Walks happen earlier or later, and time outdoors becomes shorter.

The forests, wildlife and lakes feel these changes alongside us.

I don’t believe Northern summers are disappearing, but I do believe they are changing.

Maybe nostalgia has softened my memories. Maybe I’ve forgotten some of the sweltering afternoons and sleepless nights.

But I remember open car windows and music playing along endless Northern highways.

I remember thunderstorms and the smell of rain. I remember cool lakes. I remember sweatshirts around campfires.

And I wonder how often the next generation will experience those same things.

I still pack a sweatshirt.

Maybe it is habit. Maybe it is nostalgia. Maybe some part of me will always believe that when the sun disappears behind the pines, the Northern air should turn cool enough to make me pull it over my head.

But increasingly, I leave it folded in the car.

And I can’t help but wonder if the Northern summer I remember is slowly becoming just that.

A memory.

What If the Next Big Idea Doesn’t Have to Leave the North?

by KARRIE O’CONNOR

For generations, Northern Ontario has watched some of its brightest people pack their cars and head south. We have almost come to expect it. Young people graduate, find an idea, begin building a dream and then leave for Toronto, Ottawa, Waterloo or somewhere even farther away.

We tell our young people to chase opportunity, but perhaps we have not always done enough to make sure opportunity exists here when they are ready to chase it.

As someone who grew up in Northern Ontario and has spent much of my life working with young people, entrepreneurs and creative thinkers, I have heard the same statement repeated in countless different ways: there is nothing here for me.

I have never completely believed that.

The North is filled with ideas. We are resourceful by nature because, quite honestly, we have to be. We live in communities separated by hundreds of kilometres, build businesses in smaller markets and find ways to make things work without every resource sitting conveniently down the street.

Northern entrepreneurs know how to improvise. They know how to stretch a dollar, build relationships and look at a problem from a slightly different angle. They know how to stare at something that is not working and say, there has to be another way.

The problem is not necessarily a lack of ideas. Sometimes, it is finding someone willing to invest in them.

That is what makes a new regional initiative, Venture North Bay Pitch, worth watching.

The first Venture North Bay Pitch event is designed to strengthen entrepreneurship and investment across the region. The initiative brings founders, investors and business-support organizations together, with four companies ultimately selected to move forward as finalists.

The program is focused on qualifying companies operating in Nipissing, Timiskaming, Parry Sound and Muskoka. The selected entrepreneurs are not simply handed a microphone and told to sell their idea. They receive coaching and investor-readiness support before stepping onto the stage for the live pitch event.

That support may be just as important as the pitch itself.

Because having a good idea and knowing how to convince someone to invest in that idea are two very different skills.

I know that firsthand.

I have started organizations, created youth programs, launched a magazine and podcast and published books. I have sat with an idea that made perfect sense in my own head and then struggled to explain it to someone else in a way that allowed them to see what I could already see.

Entrepreneurs are often emotionally connected to the things they create. We know every tiny detail. We remember the exact moment the idea arrived. We have imagined where it could go and what it could become.

But an investor does not live inside our head.

They need to understand the vision. They need to believe in the person presenting it. They need to see not only what the business is today but what it might become tomorrow.

That is where mentorship and investor readiness can make a difference.

Organizations including Northern Ontario Angels and Innovation Initiatives Ontario North are involved in supporting the Venture North Bay Pitch initiative and helping Northern entrepreneurs develop the knowledge and connections needed to pursue investment.

For me, though, the larger story is not really about a pitch night.

It is about changing the way we see Northern entrepreneurship.

Too often, we speak about Northern Ontario through the language of what we don’t have. Not enough workers. Not enough housing. Not enough doctors. Not enough investment. Not enough opportunities.

Perhaps we need to spend a little more time talking about what we do have.

We have people who understand remote communities because they live in them. We have entrepreneurs who recognize gaps in services because they have personally experienced those gaps.

We have people building solutions for mining, health care, tourism, transportation and small communities because these are not abstract industries to us. They are part of everyday Northern life.

Some of the best ideas begin with a simple sentence:

“Why doesn’t someone make something that does this?”

Maybe the person asking the question should be the one who builds it.

The challenge is making sure that person does not feel they have to leave Northern Ontario to find the money, mentorship and connections needed to try.

I have spent a lot of time thinking about what it means to keep the next generation in the North. We often focus on jobs, and jobs certainly matter.

But perhaps we also need to create space for young people to build the job that does not exist yet.

The business that hasn’t opened.

The technology that hasn’t been developed.

The service we don’t yet realize we need.

Entrepreneurship is risky. Not every idea will work. Not every pitch will receive investment, and not every startup will become the next great Northern success story.

But what if one does?

What if an idea born at a kitchen table in North Bay grows into a company employing 50 people?

What if someone in Temiskaming develops a solution that is eventually used across Canada?

What if a young entrepreneur in a small Northern community watches a business succeed here and thinks, maybe I can do that too?

That is how an entrepreneurial community grows.

One person sees another person try. One entrepreneur introduces another to a mentor. One investor takes a chance. One idea becomes a business, and that business creates jobs.

Slowly, the story we tell about the North begins to change.

Venture North Bay Pitch will ultimately put four entrepreneurs on a stage. They will have a limited amount of time to explain what they have built and why someone should believe in it.

But perhaps the real pitch is much bigger.

Perhaps Northern Ontario itself is making a pitch.

A pitch to entrepreneurs.

A pitch to investors.

A pitch to the young person wondering whether they need to pack their car and drive south to build a future.

Stay. Build it here. Give the North a chance to believe in your idea.

Because the next big thing does not necessarily need a Toronto postal code.

Sometimes, it begins at a kitchen table somewhere along a Northern highway, with a notebook, a cup of coffee and someone brave enough to say:

“I have an idea.”

A Quick Note to Our Readers

Northern Threads Magazine is moving!

As we continue to grow, we are transitioning from our Heyzine platform to a new publishing platform that gives us a little more flexibility as the magazine evolves. You can now find our growing collection of issues on our new Northern Threads digital bookshelf. For the next two months, we will continue posting each issue on both platforms, giving our readers plenty of time to find, follow and bookmark our new home. After all, the stories are what matter most—and we want to make sure you can continue finding the Northern voices, people and communities woven into every issue.

<https://anyflip.com/bookcase/uvand>

What If the Next Big Idea Doesn't Have to Leave the North?

by KARRIE O'CONNOR

Somewhere in Thunder Bay tonight, there is probably a woman sitting at her kitchen table with an idea. Maybe it is scribbled in a notebook she keeps tucked into a drawer. Maybe there is a half-built website sitting unpublished on her laptop. Maybe she has talked about the idea so many times that her family simply smiles when she starts another sentence with, "You know what I would really love to do someday?" Or maybe she has never told anyone at all.

Women are full of ideas. The problem is that many of us become very good at putting our own ideas on hold. We raise children, work, pay bills, care for aging parents and support partners and friends. We volunteer, sit on committees and somehow find the time to help other people build their dreams. Then, somewhere between packing lunches, answering emails and trying to remember why we walked into a room in the first place, our own idea gets pushed to the corner of the kitchen table.

I'll get to it later. When the kids are older. When I have more money. When life settles down. When I'm more confident. Someday.

That is why a new initiative connected to Thunder Bay caught my attention. Thunder Bay-founded rideshare company Uride has launched the Uride Women in Business Fund, an initiative aimed at helping women take their business ideas from something they have been thinking about to something they may actually be able to build.

The initiative was announced with plans to select three women to receive \$5,000 each to help launch their businesses. Founder and CEO Cody Ruberto described the idea as a way to support women who have ambition and ideas but may be missing some of the financial resources needed to begin.

Fifteen thousand dollars divided between three entrepreneurs may not sound like an enormous amount in the world of million-dollar investment deals and television shows where people casually toss around six-figure valuations. But I think anyone who has ever started something from nothing understands just how much \$5,000 can mean. It can purchase equipment or materials. It can help cover insurance, software or the cost of building a brand. It can secure the tools needed to turn an idea into an actual product or service. Sometimes, it simply buys a little breathing room.

I know something about ideas. I have had a lot of them. Some have worked. Some have changed direction so many times that they barely resemble the original idea. Some have kept me awake at night, and a few probably should have remained safely tucked inside my head.

I have started organizations and youth programs. I have written and published books. I launched Northern Threads Magazine, a podcast and other creative projects. I have sat at a computer staring at a blank screen and wondered if anyone would ever read the words I was about to write. Through it all, I have learned that having an idea

and having the resources to build that idea are two very different things.

There is a period at the beginning of almost every project when you are the only person who can completely see it. You can picture the finished product, understand the mission and imagine what it could become. Then someone asks you to explain it, and suddenly the brilliant idea that has been perfectly constructed in your head comes out of your mouth sounding something like, "Okay, just stay with me for a minute because I know this sounds a little crazy."

I have been there. More than once.

The truth is that starting something requires courage, but it also requires money. We don't always like to say that part out loud. We love the inspirational stories about people who started billion-dollar companies in garages. We tell entrepreneurs to hustle, work hard and believe in themselves. Those are wonderful messages, but belief doesn't purchase equipment. Hustle doesn't always cover a registration fee, and passion cannot be tapped at the checkout machine when your business needs supplies.

For women, there can be additional barriers to finding the money and support needed to begin. That is why programs specifically encouraging women to take their ideas seriously matter. But I think there is another part of initiatives like this that is much harder to measure.

Someone is saying, "Tell us your idea."

Think about the power of that invitation. Not, "Do you have experience?" Not, "Why haven't you done this already?" Not, "Are you sure people will buy that?" Simply: tell us your idea.

For the woman who has spent years putting herself last, that question may be exactly what she needs to hear.

I have spent a great deal of my life working with young people, and one of the things I have learned is that human beings often grow when someone believes in them before they completely believe in themselves. I don't think that stops when we become adults. Sometimes, we still need someone to look at us and say, "I see something there." Sometimes, we need permission to try.

And yes, I know we shouldn't need permission.



We are adults. We can make our own decisions. But let's be honest: how many of us have talked ourselves out of something before we ever gave anyone else the opportunity to say no?

We decide we aren't qualified enough, young enough or experienced enough. We don't have enough money. We don't know the right people. Someone else is already doing it. Slowly, we build an entire case against our own idea, and eventually it goes back into the drawer.

This is where I think Northern Ontario has an incredible opportunity. Our region is filled with women who understand Northern communities because we live here. We know what it is like to travel hours for a service that might take someone in Toronto twenty minutes to access. We understand small towns, isolated communities and businesses that survive through relationships, reputation and word of mouth. Northern women see gaps because we live inside those gaps, and that can be the beginning of innovation.

Maybe the next great Northern business will not start in a corporate boardroom. Maybe it will begin because a mother in Thunder Bay is frustrated that she cannot find a particular service for her child. Maybe a woman in Nipigon sees a gap in tourism. Maybe someone in Marathon has an idea for an online business that could serve customers around the world, or a young woman in Dryden has been sketching designs in a notebook for three years.

Maybe someone is reading this article right now and thinking, I have an idea.

Good.

Write it down. Tell someone. Research it and ask questions. Let it change and let it grow. Most importantly, understand that the first version of your idea does not have to be perfect. Mine certainly never are.

I think we sometimes look at established businesses and forget that they had a first day. There was a first customer, a first invoice and a first social media post that probably received three likes—two from family members and one from the person who posted it. Every business was once an idea someone could have abandoned.

That is why I like seeing a Thunder Bay-founded company turn around and create an opportunity for other people to begin. There is something particularly Northern about reaching back after you have found some success and helping someone else take a step forward.

Maybe three women will receive funding and three businesses will begin. Maybe one will grow into something none of us can imagine yet. But I also wonder about all the women who will hear about the fund, open an old notebook and look at an idea they once put away.

Perhaps they will start thinking about it again.

Because sometimes the first investment an entrepreneur needs isn't \$5,000. Sometimes, it is someone looking at her idea and saying, "I think you should try."

And sometimes, that is exactly where a dream begins.

More Than Colour: Thunder Bay Prepares to Celebrate
What Brings Us Together
by KARRIE O’CONNOR

There is something wonderful about an event where the expectation is that you will leave looking absolutely nothing like you did when you arrived. Your hair may be pink. Your shirt may be covered in blue, yellow, green and purple. There may be colour on your face, your arms and quite possibly in places where you will still be finding it several days later.

But perhaps that is part of the point.

On Sunday, July 19, Thunder Bay’s Marina Park will become a sea of colour as the Festival of Colours returns to the city’s waterfront. Beginning at 3 p.m., the celebration is expected to include colour throws, music, dancing, DJs and food. The festival describes the colours as representing unity and equality among people, regardless of colour, gender or status.

In a world that sometimes seems determined to remind us of every possible difference between one person and another, I love the simplicity behind an event like this.

For a few hours, everyone gets covered in colour.

The expensive shirt and the bargain-store T-shirt eventually look pretty much the same. Perfectly styled hair is no longer perfect. Strangers laugh together. People dance, and children discover that throwing colourful powder into the air is exactly as much fun as it sounds.

Perhaps, without anyone really noticing, a few barriers begin to disappear.

Thunder Bay has always struck me as a community built from many different stories. The deep Indigenous history and cultures of the region are woven alongside the stories of generations of people who arrived from Finland, Italy, Poland and other parts of the world. New families continue to arrive, bringing their own languages, foods, traditions and experiences.

The result is a Northern city whose identity could never be told through one person’s story alone.

Maybe that is why an event centred on colour and unity feels so fitting.

The Festival of Colours is organized by the Vedic Cultural Centre – ISKCON Thunder Bay. The celebration brings together music, dance, food and the throwing of dry coloured powder, creating an event that is perhaps as much about participation as it is about watching from the sidelines.

I think sometimes we underestimate the importance of events like these. We call them festivals, put them on community calendars, share a poster on Facebook and decide whether we have time to go.

But festivals can be one of the easiest ways to learn about people whose lives and traditions may be different from our own.

You don’t need to register for a course or read a textbook. You don’t need to know the right words or understand every part of a tradition before you arrive.

Sometimes, you simply need to show up.

Listen to the music. Watch the dancing. Try food you may never have tasted before. Ask a respectful question and have a conversation with someone you might not otherwise have met.

I have spent a great deal of my life working with young people, and one thing I have learned over and over again is that children often connect long before adults finish explaining why connection is important.

Kids play.

They laugh.

They create.

They ask wonderfully direct questions that occasionally make every adult within hearing distance hold their breath.

Then they move on to the next adventure.

Maybe adults could learn something from that.

We spend a tremendous amount of time talking about division. We debate what separates communities, generations, cultures and people. We become so focused on finding the right way to talk about inclusion that sometimes I wonder if we forget one of the simplest ways to build it.

Create opportunities for people to actually meet each other.

I believe it is much harder to reduce a person to a stereotype once you have shared a laugh with them. It is harder to fear a culture you have been warmly invited to experience. It is harder to see someone only as “different” when your children have spent an afternoon dancing beside each other.

That does not mean a festival solves every issue of discrimination or division. Of course it doesn’t.

But connection has to begin somewhere.

Sometimes it begins with a conversation.

Sometimes it begins over food.

And apparently, sometimes it begins when someone throws a cloud of bright pink powder into the air and you happen to be standing directly underneath it.

There is something else I love about Northern Ontario festivals: summer is when the North comes outside.

We spend a good portion of the year planning our lives around snow, ice and temperatures that

make us question every decision that led us to live here. Then summer arrives and suddenly our parks, waterfronts and community spaces come alive.

We gather at powwows, Pride celebrations, fall fairs, music festivals and community fundraisers. We gather around campfires and on beaches. We drive hours down the highway because, in Northern Ontario, saying an event is “only two hours away” somehow makes it feel local.

Our communities may be separated by hundreds of kilometres, but we understand the importance of gathering.

Thunder Bay’s waterfront will become one of those gathering places during the Festival of Colours.

The event will undoubtedly create spectacular photographs. Clouds of colour will hang in the air. Faces will be covered in powder, and somewhere, a parent will probably look at a child’s clothing and wonder if the washing machine is truly prepared for what is coming home.

But I hope people notice more than the photographs.

I hope they notice who is standing beside them.

Maybe it will be someone they would never otherwise have met. Maybe they will share a laugh. Maybe one person will explain a tradition and another will take the time to listen.

Maybe a child will go home asking questions about a culture they experienced for the first time.

Those moments may seem small, but I have come to believe that many of the strongest threads connecting our communities begin with small moments.

A conversation.

A shared meal.

A song.

A laugh.

An invitation to join in.

On July 19, Thunder Bay is being invited to show up, throw some colour into the air and celebrate together.

For a few hours, perhaps it will matter a little less where someone came from, what they do for a living or how different their story may be.

They will simply be people standing together on a Northern Ontario waterfront, covered from head to toe in colour.

And maybe community really can begin that simply.

One gathering. One conversation. One colourful moment at a time.

The Festival of Colours is scheduled for Sunday, July 19, 2026, beginning at 3 p.m. at Marina Park in Thunder Bay. Readers can check current event information through the official Festival of Colours website before attending.

A New Door Opens in Hearst: Why Small-Town Businesses Still Matter
by KARRIE O’CONNOR



There is something different about a new business opening in a small Northern town. In Toronto, a new restaurant can open three blocks away and you may not even notice. In Hearst, people notice. They watch the signs go up, drive past and wonder when the doors are opening. Someone hears something from someone’s cousin, who knows someone working there, and before long half the town has at least a vague idea of what is happening.

That is small-town Northern Ontario, and honestly, I love that about us.

On June 27, a new set of doors officially opened in Hearst when Sam’s Grill Hearst celebrated its grand opening at 3 15th Street. The restaurant arrived with burgers, poutines and smoked meat on the menu and a promise of free poutine for the first 100 customers willing to show up early.

Now, I grew up in Mattice. For anyone unfamiliar with the geography of the Highway 11 corridor, Mattice sits between Kapuskasing and Hearst. Growing up there meant both communities were part of our world. You went to Kap. You went to Hearst. Sometimes the decision depended entirely on what you needed, who you were visiting or simply which direction someone felt like driving that day.

So, when I see a new business opening in Hearst, I don’t simply see another restaurant. I think about what a new business means in a small Northern community.

It means jobs and another choice for families. It means somewhere for travellers passing along Highway 11 to stop. It may mean a local teenager has another place to apply for their first job and an opportunity to learn customer service, food preparation or the simple but important lesson of what it means to show up for a shift on time.

It also means someone took a risk, and I think we forget that part sometimes.

We see the sign, the menu, the social media posts and the grand-opening balloons. What we don’t always see are the conversations behind the scenes, the numbers calculated and recalcu-

lated, the paperwork and the sleepless nights. We don’t see the moment someone stands in an empty space and tries to imagine customers sitting at the tables.

Opening a business anywhere takes courage. Opening one in Northern Ontario brings its own unique challenges. Our communities are smaller. Shipping can cost more. Finding staff can be difficult. Supplies travel farther, and winter has an incredible ability to disrupt even the best-laid plans.

There is no hiding in a small town either. If people love your food, everyone hears about it. If something goes wrong, well, everyone probably hears about that too—maybe before you do.

That is why relationships matter so much in Northern business. People don’t simply support a logo; they support people.

A local restaurant can become the place where someone grabs supper after hockey or stops before a long drive home. Teenagers gather over fries. Families pick up food because no one has the energy to cook. Friends run into each other while waiting for an order and spend ten minutes catching up when they only intended to pop in and leave.

Eventually, if the business is fortunate, people stop referring to it as “the new place.” It simply becomes part of town.

According to its own business information, Sam’s Grill is a Canadian burger-and-poutine brand that has been expanding into additional communities. The Hearst opening adds another food option to a town where restaurants and gathering places have long played an important role in community life.

And yes, I know. It is a burger restaurant, and perhaps I am getting a little philosophical over poutine. But I think every new business opening in a Northern community deserves a moment of recognition.

Because someone chose Hearst.

Someone looked at a Northern town and saw pos-

sibility. In communities where we often spend a lot of time discussing what has closed, what we have lost and what we wish would come back, there is something hopeful about a new sign going up and a door opening for the first time. Maybe the food will become a local favourite. Maybe a teenager will earn their first paycheque there. Maybe a traveller will stop for a burger, have a conversation with someone local and remember Hearst as more than a town they passed through on Highway 11.

That is the thing about small businesses. Their impact is rarely measured only by what appears on a receipt. They become part of our routines, our conversations and, eventually, our communities.

So, to Priyanka and Shailesh, congratulations on taking the leap and choosing Hearst. Judging by the attention surrounding the launch, the community was certainly watching and ready to see what came next.

Welcome to Hearst.

May the grills stay hot, the customers keep coming and the poutine gravy always find its way onto at least one person’s shirt.

Because honestly, that’s usually how you know it was good.

Calendar Of Events

Summer is in full swing across Northern Ontario, and our communities are making the most of every warm day. From country music and fireworks in Kapuskasing to colourful celebrations on the Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie waterfronts, music in Timmins and Mattawa, and art taking over the streets of Sudbury, there is plenty happening across the North. Pack the car, grab the sunscreen and maybe plan a Northern road trip—here are a few events happening between now and August 15.

Kap Kraze Tailgate Country Derby
July 17–18, 2026
Kapuskasing

Festival of India
July 18, 2026
Marina Park, Thunder Bay

Festival of Colours – Thunder Bay
July 19, 2026
Marina Park, Thunder Bay

River & Sky Music and Camping Festival
July 22–26, 2026
Field, West Nipissing

Rock on the River
July 24–25, 2026
Hollinger Park, Timmins

Mattawa Voyageur Days
July 24–26, 2026
Mattawa

Festival of Colours – Sault Ste. Marie
July 25, 2026
Roberta Bondar Park, Sault Ste. Marie

Capreol Days
July 31–August 2, 2026
Capreol, Greater Sudbury

Sudbury Poutine Fest
August 14–15, 2026
Sudbury

Up Here Festival
August 14–16, 2026
Sudbury

Submit your event to:
info@northernthreadsmagazine.ca

When a Community Disappears: Growing Up in the Shadow of CFS Lowther
by KARRIE O’CONNOR



There are places we remember because of what is still there. Then there are places we remember almost entirely because of what is gone.

For me, Lowther is one of those places.

I grew up on the pipeline station just outside Mattice, about five kilometres from CFS Lowther. The radar domes, military families and station were not some distant piece of Cold War history I would one day read about. They were simply part of the landscape of my childhood.

Lowther was part of our community, and we were part of theirs. Looking back now, I realize what an incredibly unique way it was to grow up.

The military families from the base and the families living at the pipeline station created a community built around something that sometimes seems increasingly difficult to find today: togetherness. Everyone knew everyone, and community events were a regular part of our lives.

There were winter carnivals with themes, snow sculptures and friendly competitions. People put time, effort and imagination into creating something from the enormous amount of snow Northern Ontario provided us every year.

There were dances and youth events. There were activities designed not simply to entertain people but to bring families and neighbours together.

I went to Brownies on the base. I went to Guides there. I even attended preschool at Lowther.

At the time, I didn’t think there was anything particularly unusual about that. It was simply where we went. The military base was woven into our lives in much the same way the pipeline station and Mattice were.

As a child, you don’t always stop to consider how unique your world is. You simply live in it.

The summers had their own traditions. There was the rock quarry up the road, a place tied to memories of swimming, corn roasts and people gathering together.

Summer days seemed to stretch forever when you were young. Somehow, the adults around us were capable of turning something as simple as corn and an outdoor gathering into an event we would still remember decades later.

There was laughter. There were families and kids everywhere. Most of all, there was a sense that everyone knew who you belonged to.

That could occasionally be a problem, of course.

Growing up in a community where everyone knew everyone meant there was a very good chance your parents knew what you had done before you arrived home to explain your version of the story. Sometimes, I am fairly certain the news travelled faster than we did.

But there was safety in it too. People watched out for one another. Adults knew the kids, and the kids knew

the adults.

Families shared celebrations, activities and traditions. The base, the pipeline station and the surrounding communities created this strange little world along Highway 11 where people’s lives became intertwined.

There was, however, one part of growing up near a military base that I never really became good at.

Saying goodbye.

Military families moved. That was simply part of life at Lowther.

Every two or three years, it seemed someone you cared about was packing boxes and preparing to leave. A friend you had played with, gone to Brownies with or sat beside at an event suddenly had a new posting somewhere else in Canada.

When you are a child, two or three years can feel like a lifetime. You build friendships believing the people around you will always be there because children haven’t yet learned how temporary some things can be.

Then the moving truck arrives.

You say goodbye, another family moves into the community, and eventually you learn to begin again.

I sometimes wonder how much that experience shaped those of us who grew up around Lowther. We learned early that people could become incredibly important to you and still leave.

We learned to make friends quickly. We learned that goodbye was sometimes simply part of friendship.

Then, in 1987, it wasn’t one family leaving.

The base closed.

CFS Lowther had been part of the Pinetree Line, a network of radar stations created during the Cold War to help detect potentially hostile aircraft approaching North America. The station became operational in 1958 and eventually came under Canadian control. After nearly three decades of watching the skies, CFS Lowther officially closed in 1987.

For historians, that is the story of Lowther: radar, the Pinetree Line, the Cold War and continental defence.

For those of us who grew up there, the story is also about what happened when an entire community disappeared.

Families left. Buildings were emptied. The activities stopped.

Places that had once been filled with children, music, dances and community events became quiet. There is something difficult about watching a place that helped raise you cease to exist.

Over time, much of CFS Lowther was removed. Buildings came down and the radar equipment disappeared. The forest began doing what Northern Ontario forests do so incredibly well—it started reclaiming the land.

The pipeline station changed too. The houses where our families once lived were eventually removed.

The quarry where we spent summer days and gathered for corn roasts is now gated off.

Sometimes, you can still walk parts of the old Lowther grounds. If you know where to look, there are old cement pads where trailers once stood.

To someone who didn’t grow up there, they probably mean nothing. Just concrete in the bush.

But memory has an incredible ability to rebuild a place. I can stand there and almost see what was once around me. I remember the children, the families and

the winter carnivals. I remember the snow sculptures and dances.

I remember Brownies and Guides. I remember the simple excitement of a youth event and the corn roasts at the quarry.

I remember people whose names I may not have thought about in years, yet their faces can suddenly appear clearly in my mind.

That is why I sometimes find it difficult to drive past Lowther now.

My memories are far more tied to what once was than to what remains.

The highway is still there. The trees are still there. The turnoff still exists.

But the community I remember lives largely in the minds of the people who were fortunate enough to experience it.

I think there is a particular kind of grief connected to losing a place. We talk often about grieving people, but perhaps we don’t talk enough about what happens when the physical places that hold our memories disappear.

The house is removed. The building comes down. The road grows quieter. The gate closes.

Suddenly, there is nowhere to physically return to, even though some part of you still desperately wants to go home.

Lowther taught me about community long before I ever understood the word. It taught me that gathering matters and that children need places to belong.

It taught me that families and communities become stronger when they play, celebrate and create traditions together.

Perhaps some of what I have spent my adult life trying to build—youth programs, community spaces and places where people feel they belong—began there without me ever realizing it.

Maybe my belief in giving young people something to be part of came from dances, Brownies, Guides and youth events on a radar station in the Northern Ontario bush.

Maybe my obsession with bringing people together started with corn roasting at a rock quarry five kilometres from home.

We rarely recognize the threads of our lives while they are first being woven. Sometimes, it takes decades to look back and see where they began.

CFS Lowther is remembered in military history as part of Canada’s Cold War defence system, and I understand the importance of that history.

But I remember something else too.

I remember a community. I remember families who showed up and children who played together, even knowing one of us might eventually have to say goodbye.

I remember snow sculptures, music and laughter. I remember corn roasts at the quarry.

I remember belonging.

Today, there are concrete pads in the bush, a locked gate at the quarry and empty spaces where the pipeline houses once stood.

But when I drive past, that isn’t really what I see.

I see what was.

And perhaps that is the strange beauty of growing up in a place that no longer exists.

The buildings can disappear. The houses can be removed. The forest can reclaim the land.

But somewhere inside those of us who grew up there, Lowther is still very much alive.

YOUTH. VOICES. CREATIVITY. COMMUNITY.

FREQUENCY

A YOUTH RUN SEGMENT OF
NORTHERN THREADS MAGAZINE

LAUNCHED
MAY 2026

REAL STORIES.
BOLD VOICES.
BRIGHT FUTURES.

A space for Northern
youth to be heard,
celebrated and
empowered.

YOU HAVE
A VOICE.
USE IT.



FROM THE NORTH. FOR THE FUTURE. 

The Art of Hydroponics

By CJ Makara Artwork By Studio Gillian

Hydroponics is the method of growing plants without soil. Instead, plants are grown in a water-based, nutrient-rich solution. The roots are supported by inserting them into the rockwool growing media.

This method of growing plants uses up to 90% to 95% less water than traditional farming. Plants can grow up to 30% to 50% faster and yield larger harvests because of direct nutrient absorption. Enables vertical farming and gardening in areas with poor or no soil. Ideal for indoor environments or controlled greenhouses where climate conditions are regulated.

Hydroponics is the method of growing plants without soil. Instead, plants are grown in a water-based, nutrient-rich solution. The roots are supported by inserting them into the rockwool growing media. This method of growing plants uses up to 90% to 95% less water than traditional farming. Plants can grow up to 30% to 50% faster and yield larger harvests because of direct nutrient absorption. Enables vertical farming and gardening in areas with poor or no soil. Ideal for indoor environments or controlled greenhouses where climate conditions are regulated.

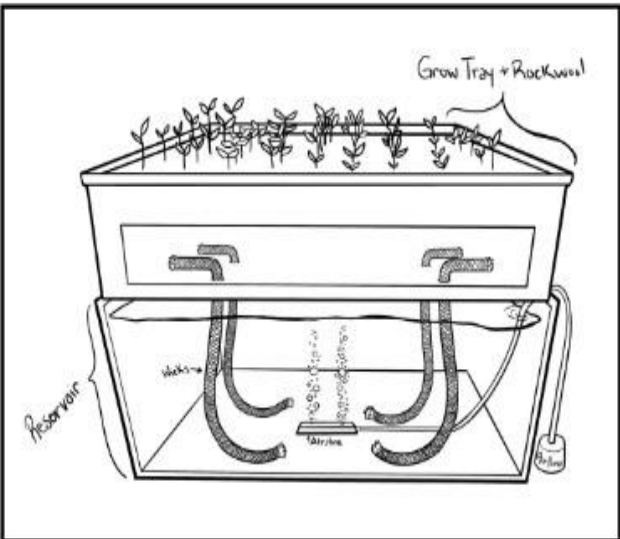
ROCKWOOL

Rockwool is the most widely used medium in hydroponics. Rockwool is ground-up basalt rock that is heated then spun into threads making wool. It is very light and is often sold in cubes. Rockwool can hold water and retain sufficient air space (at least 18%) to promote optimal root growth.



SEEDING

Each plant requires a different seeding process. For example, lettuce varieties such as Five Star, Butter Crunch and Monte Carlo have different amounts of seeds planted together in a single rockwool hole. Spinach seeds are soaked in 3% hydrogen peroxide on a napkin overnight before seeding in order to soften the shell for easier sprouting, then you can plant 3 seeds to one rockwool hole. The seedlings are kept in a specific area, with a seedling specific tank that uses water that has been treated specifically for the seedlings.



GRADING

When you are growing food, the seedlings need to be graded by growth, healthiness, and amount. Grading is used to determine when each of the seedlings are transplanted when. Lower graded seedlings are transplanted later while the higher graded are transplanted first.

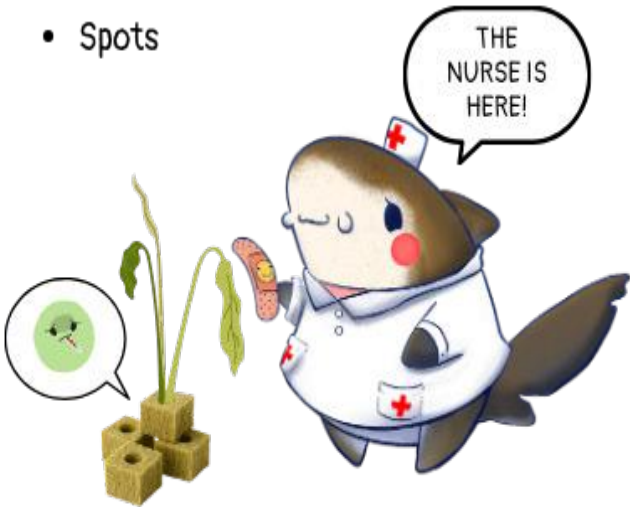
When grading, here is what to look for:
High Grade:

- Larger leaves
- No twist or spiraling
- No splotches
- Good sturdiness

What you don't want to find:

Low Grade:

- Smaller leaves
- Limp stems
- Twisted leaves
- Spots



TRANSPLANTING

Transplanting is a simple process; the graded seedlings are placed into the rafts in order from high grade to low grade.



HARVESTING

The plants are harvested by cutting at the base of the plant above the rockwool. When I am harvesting for selling, the plants are placed in a bagged bin. During this time, the smaller leaves, and/or bad leaves are placed in separate bin to be put in the compost.

The bins are then weighed and are marked which raft they're from with their weight. They are then placed in a fridge to preserve their freshness.



MNOGIN GREENHOUSE

A community-driven, sustainable indoor growing facility owned and operated by Nipissing First Nation.



www.mnogin.ca

