

Northern Threads Magazine

Our Northern Stories Woven Together

Est. 2025



From the Editor...



Spring is coming, I promise.

Here we are in the middle of February when it seems like just yesterday we were celebrating the rush of the Christmas season.

Now even though this can be a gloomy time for some with the ice, snow, thaw repeat weather patterns it is almost as though we get used to the winter months just in time for them to change and slowly morph back into warmer times where often a sweater will suffice.

Event Calendar...

TFEC Presents - Girls Night Out
Sat, 07 Mar, 2026 at 08:00 pm - 03:00 am
McIntyre Ballroom
85 McIntyre Rd, Timmins, Canada

On Thin Ice (World Premiere) By Drew Hayden Taylor
Friday, February 27, 2026 7:30 pm
Saturday, February 28, 2026 2:00 pm
Saturday, February 28, 2026 7:30 pm
Magnus Theater:
10 Algoma St. S. Thunder Bay ON

North Bay Home & Garden Expo
Friday February 20 3PM-8PM
Saturday February 21 9AM-5PM
Memorial Gardens \$5 admission fee 16+

YES Theatres Young Company Presents:
Disney's HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL
Limited Run March 5 - 12 @ the STC
Tickets only \$25 - YESTHEATRE.COM

The 2026 Black History Celebration event
February 28, 2026, commencing at 5:00 P.M
Grand Gardens, Sault Ste. Marie, ON
<https://accano.ca/2026-black-history-event>

The \$1,000 Trap: Inside the Alouette Bus Strike and the Fight for Regional Equity

by KARRIE O'CONNOR



Northern Ontario school bus drivers are on the brink of a work stoppage, not over greed, but over a pay gap that's impossible to ignore. As conciliation looms and picket lines take shape, one company letter reveals just how far employers will go to protect the status quo.

The Vote That Changed Everything

On February 5th, school bus drivers at Alouette Bus Lines delivered a message management couldn't ignore: 83% voted to reject the consortiums latest contract offer. It wasn't even close.

The rejection wasn't about benefits packages or scheduling quirks. It was about something far more fundamental, pay equity across regions.

Drivers in Northern Ontario communities like West Nipissing are doing the exact same job as their counterparts in Sudbury and other neighboring regions, but they're earning less per hour. Same training. Same responsibility. Same kids' lives in their hands every single day. Different paycheque.

And that gap? It's not sitting well anymore.

Now, with conciliation scheduled for February 20th and a legal strike position beginning February 21st, the pressure is mounting on all sides. At least seven buses in North Bay alone could be affected if drivers walk off the job, leaving families scrambling for alternatives and students facing disruptions they didn't ask for.

This isn't just a labor dispute. It's a fight for fairness in a region that's been overlooked for too long.

What's Happening Behind the Scenes

While the public waits to see if school buses will roll on February 23rd, the first working day of a potential strike, the union has been anything but idle.

Kevon Stewart, the union's director, has reached out to the Minister of Education multiple times. The response? Silence. No reply. No acknowledgment. No intervention.

"We tried to allow the Minister of Education to do something about our situation," union representatives said in a recent update to members.

"We will proceed with the next phase of our strategic campaign."

That strategic campaign is already in motion. Behind the scenes, the union is preparing for every possible outcome:

- Contacting the OPP to notify them of strike plans
- Securing a trailer for picket operations
- Arranging snow removal services (because this is Northern Ontario in February, and picket lines don't get a snow day)
- Lining up winterized porta potties
- Securing strike insurance
- Contacting the bylaw office to obtain necessary permits
- Selecting picket captains and planning shift rotations

There's also a petition that's already been sent to the Consortium, the Minister of Education, MPs, and MPPs. Social media campaigns, text blasts, and email outreach are set to launch shortly.

It's meticulous. It's organized. And it's a clear signal that drivers aren't backing down.

"There is a lot of work going on in the background," the union reminded members. "Please keep working as usual in the meantime. Solidarity at this point is paramount for our success."

The Letter: A "Reminder" or a Threat?

Just as tensions were escalating, Alouette Bus Lines sent drivers a letter. On the surface, it looked informational: a simple update about the Recruitment and Retention bonus and how a potential strike might affect eligibility.

But drivers saw it for what it was: leverage disguised as a memo.

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The Northern Chuckle

by GILLIAN HEBERT @StudioGillian
Artwork By Gillian Hebert

January is over, and somehow we survived it.

That feels worth acknowledging. We made it through the darkest stretch of the year, through the post-holiday drop where the lights come down, routines return, and everyone collectively acknowledges winter still has a lot more still left to say.

January always feels like the month where time moves strangely too slow on weekdays, too fast on weekends and the creativity tends to freeze along with everything else. And then February arrives, quietly and out of seemingly nowhere. No big reset. No fireworks. Just the cold. A very familiar cold.

Lately, I've struggled to make art. Not in the stereotypical dramatic "tortured-artist" way. In a more stagnant, numbing way. I find myself starting something, and almost immediately feel bored or overwhelmed with it. The spark flickers out before it even has a chance to grow. The idea of setting up materials feels heavier than it should. It's easier to curl up under a blanket, turn on the TV, or disappear into a game for a few unhealthy amount of hours. And honestly, that's what has been winning more often than not. It's what the chilly winter air and the overwhelming workloads does to me. That overwhelm can shrink our world down to a few warm rooms and familiar auto piloted routines.

February feels like everything continues to be on pause. The days are still shorter but somehow dragon, plans are postponed until "it's nicer out."

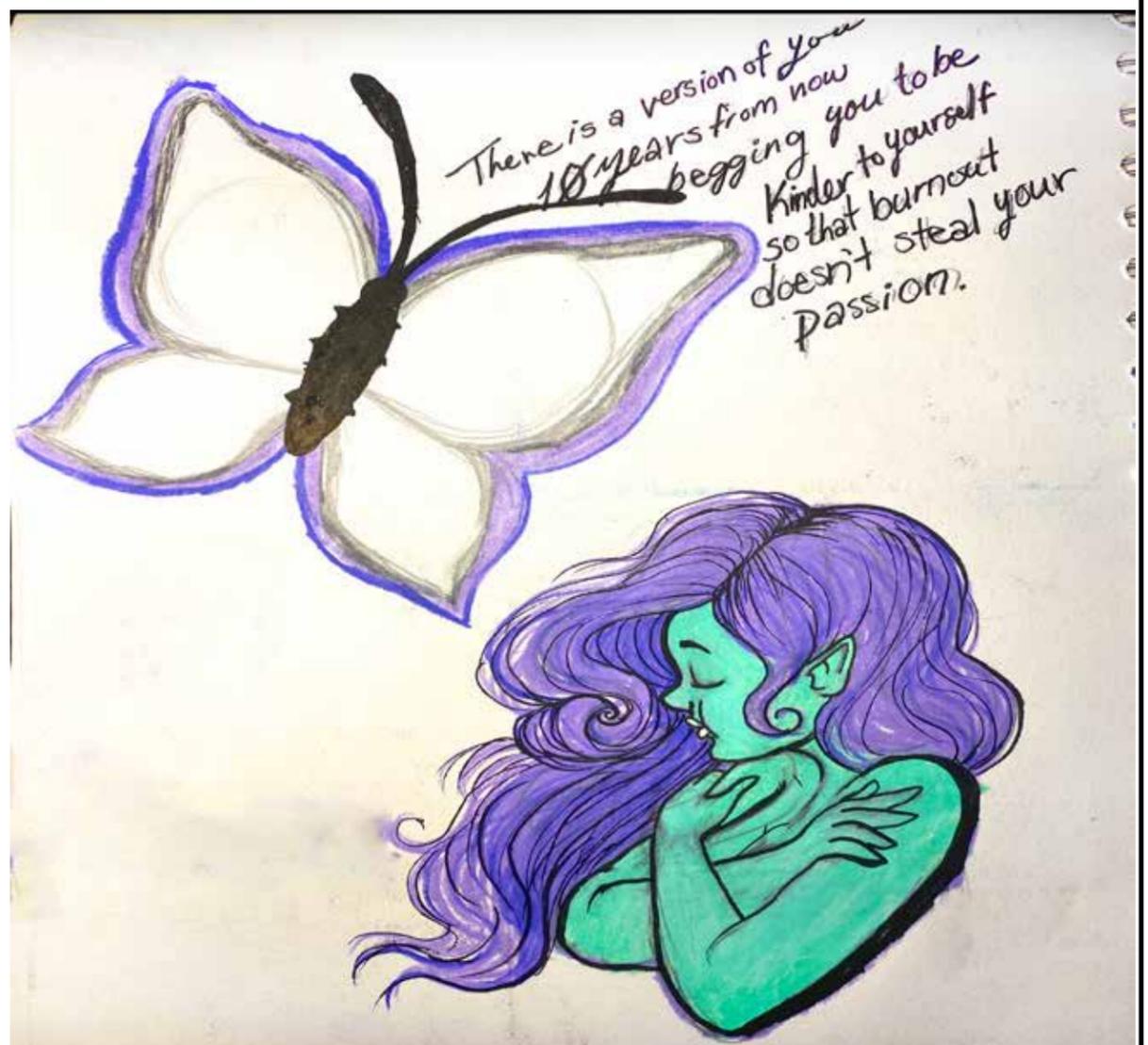
Sometimes winter is just simply a season of endurance. I think we underestimate how much energy it takes just to exist through months like this up north. It takes a lot to get through cold commutes, wearing heavy boots, gray sunless skies, and the mental weight of waiting for change.

It's no wonder creativity feels sluggish. No wonder a day spent in bed looks so very appealing.

So this month's artwork comes from that place. Not from a burst of inspiration, but from showing up gently. From accepting that not every piece needs to be ambitious or profound. Sometimes the act of just making anything, a sketch, a mark, a quiet moment at the table with your pencil, is enough, and it's okay.

If you're feeling the same way, I hope you know you're not behind. You're not failing. You're just in winter survival mode. Spring will come. It always does. And when it does, we'll all have something to say again through that creative little spark.

But for now, you're not alone and surviving the cold might be its own quiet accomplishment.



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The letter outlined the bonus terms: \$1,000 per semester for drivers who work at least 95% of school days. That means you can miss roughly 4.5 days per semester and still qualify. But here's the kicker: absences related to a strike count against that threshold.

"The bonus is based on Ministry of Education guidelines," the letter explained, "and absences related to a school bus driver strike will impact your ability to qualify for the bonus."

Technically accurate. Strategically calculated. The timing wasn't coincidental. Sending this letter days before conciliation and a potential walkout wasn't about clarity: it was about creating doubt. It was about making drivers think twice before standing on a picket line in minus-twenty weather, knowing that doing so could cost them a thousand bucks.

And let's not forget: that \$1,000 is taxed. So it's not even the full amount hitting your account.

Why the Bonus Letter Misses the Point

Drivers and union representatives didn't mince words in their response. "This letter is a classic example of management trying to look 'informative' while actually applying pressure," one driver noted. "It frames the bonus as if they're simply relaying neutral Ministry rules, but the timing and tone make it clear they're using it as leverage."

The letter presents the bonus as if it's a generous gift from the company: something drivers should be grateful for. But here's the reality: the Recruitment and Retention bonus is a Ministry-funded program designed to address the provincewide shortage of school bus drivers. It's not Alouette's money. It's not a favor. It's a public investment in keeping qualified drivers on the road. Using it as a warning right before a work stoppage? That crosses a line.

"It's disappointing, but not surprising, that instead of addressing the real issue: fair pay that reflects the work we do and the standards in surrounding regions: the company chose to send out a letter reminding us that striking could cost us our retention bonus," one driver said in a post.

The letter also avoids the question at the heart of this dispute: Why are drivers in other regions being paid significantly more for the same work?

Drivers in Sudbury and surrounding areas earn

\$20 to \$25 per hour compared to less than \$18.11 per hour for those in West Nipissing, North Bay and other Northern Ontario communities served by Alouette.

They're driving the same routes in similar conditions. They're responsible for the same precious cargo: kids getting to school safely. They've completed the same training and meet the same standards.

So why the gap?

It's not about qualifications. It's not about effort. It's about regional disparities that have been allowed to persist for far too long, and a company that's benefiting from paying Northern drivers less simply because they can.

The Demanding Reality of the Job

Let's talk about what school bus drivers actually do, because it's not as simple as turning a key and following a route.

They're responsible for the safety of dozens of children every single day. They navigate rural roads in blizzards, black ice, and whiteout conditions. They manage behavioral issues, medical emergencies, and split-second decisions that could mean the difference between life and death. They start work before dawn and often finish after dark during the winter months. And they do it for wages that lag far behind their peers in neighboring regions.

This isn't a job you can phone in. It requires focus, patience, and a level of responsibility that frankly deserves better compensation than what Alouette is offering.

The union's message has been consistent: drivers aren't asking for a handout. They're asking for equity. They're asking to be paid what their counterparts earn for doing the exact same work.

That's not radical. That's reasonable.

What Happens Next

February 20th is the big day. That's when the employer and union will sit down for conciliation and try one more time to reach an agreement.

If they succeed, drivers will have another contract offer to vote on.

If they don't, the union will be in a legal strike position starting February 21st, with picketing

set to begin on February 23rd: the first working day of the potential strike.

The union has committed to updating members every Friday, or sooner if significant developments arise.

For families in North Bay and surrounding areas, the message is clear: make backup plans. With at least seven buses potentially affected, parents may need to arrange carpools, adjust work schedules, or find alternative transportation for their kids.

For the Minister of Education, who has yet to respond to repeated outreach from the union, the silence is becoming increasingly costly: not just politically, but for the students and families who will bear the brunt of a work stoppage that might have been prevented with timely intervention.

Solidarity in the Cold

This strike, if it happens, won't be comfortable.

February in Northern Ontario is brutal. Picket lines in subzero temperatures are no joke. And the financial uncertainty: especially with that \$1,000 bonus hanging in the balance: adds real pressure.

But drivers are standing firm

"We're stronger when we stand together," they've said repeatedly. "Solidarity matters now more than ever." Because at the end of the day, this isn't about disrupting families or making life harder for students.

It's about refusing to accept a system that treats Northern workers as less valuable than their Southern counterparts. It's about demanding that companies and governments alike recognize that fair pay isn't a perk: it's a right.

And it's about showing that when people organize, when they prepare, and when they refuse to be divided by strategically timed letters or financial intimidation, they can challenge inequities that have gone unchecked for far too long. The buses may stop rolling on February 23rd.

But the fight for regional equity? That's just getting started.

Northern Threads Magazine will continue to follow this story as it develops.

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After Tumbler Ridge: The Questions Canada Can't Out-source

by KARRIE O'CONNOR



The scene outside Tumbler Ridge High School in the aftermath of one of the deadliest Canadian School Shootings.

The tragedy in Tumbler Ridge, BC has left families living inside a kind of grief that doesn't have a tidy shape. It's shock, then numbness, then the slow, sick realization that other parents are living your worst fear. They're waiting at hospital beds. They're answering phones they never wanted to answer. They're trying to explain the unexplainable to siblings and grandparents and friends. It is never okay to take a life. And it is never okay to take the life of a child.

Northern Threads Magazine is rooted in Northern Ontario, which means we understand how quickly resources thin out when you're far from big-city systems and how often help is "coming," but not fast. So let's say the part that matters most, plainly: this isn't just a BC story. It's a Canadian one. And if you're reading this from a small Northern Ontario town where everyone knows your name, or from a big city where you can disappear into a crowd, the question still lands the same way. If it happened there, why couldn't it happen here?

After events like this, the public conversation often gets dragged toward the person who caused the harm. We analyze and speculate. We repeat details until the perpetrator becomes the headline. But the centre of this story should be the victims. The kids who left for school thinking it was just another day. The families who said "see you later" and meant it. The teachers, staff, classmates, and first responders who now have images in their minds they didn't ask for and can't unsee. If you don't know what to do with your grief, start there. Remember the victims as people. Hold their families close in your thoughts. Let that be the part you refuse to forget.

There's another temptation that shows up fast, too. When people are scared, they reach for a shortcut, a label, a group to blame, a demographic to point at. But violence isn't owned by any gender identity. It isn't owned by one race. It isn't owned by one sexuality. There are good and bad people in every group, and turning one person's actions into a story about "a whole kind of person" doesn't prevent the next tragedy. It just spreads fear sideways. If we're serious about prevention, we have to focus on what's actually in front of us: a specific individual, a documented history, and a chain of missed chances that ended in lives being taken.

We're told—reportedly—that the individual responsible had mental health issues documented by their mother since age 7. If that detail is true, it changes what this tragedy demands from us, because it suggests this wasn't an invisible crisis or a bolt from the blue. It was something a family saw early, lived with, and tried to name. And it leads to the most basic question of all: where was the system while a child grew up in crisis? Early intervention matters. Consistent care matters. A parent being taken seriously matters. If there were years of documented concern, then "we didn't know" can't be the end of the story.

And then there's the question that keeps returning because it's painfully practical. How did guns become accessible? Not as a political argument. As a prevention argument. If a child has a long, documented mental health history, what safeguards are supposed to click into place? What should be required of adults, of institutions, and of the law? If guns were returned to a home connected to a documented crisis, Canadians deserve to ask why that decision was made, what standard was used, and what risk assessment counted as "good enough." We also deserve to ask why the law isn't more absolute when the stakes are this high. This isn't about demonizing responsible gun owners. It's about acknowledging a reality that no amount of rhetoric can soften: when something is designed to kill, "maybe it'll be fine" is not a safety plan.

Canada will regulate you tightly in some places and look away in others, and that paradox shows up in a way that should make every parent pause. A youth can't get a driver's license, but in some cases they can obtain a hunting license. A youth can be considered too young for one kind of responsibility, but old enough for access to another. And in some situations, they can refuse mental health care they desperately need. How does that make sense? If we recognize immaturity and risk in one system, why ignore it in another? These contradictions aren't theoretical. They are the cracks people fall through.

There's another layer Canadians avoid because it's uncomfortable: accountability. Youth know right from wrong well before 18. They know what death is. They know what harm is. They know what fear looks like in another person's face. So why does our legal framework sometimes treat serious violence as if it came from someone who couldn't possibly understand consequences? This isn't a call for revenge. It's a call for a legal system that matches reality, protects the public, intervenes earlier, and has modern consequences when someone commits acts that change other families forever. Updating the Young Offenders Act should be part of that national discussion—not as a slogan, but as serious reform that weighs safety, intervention, rehabilitation, and accountability without pretending any one of those can stand alone.

I also can't stop thinking about parents, not just the parents who are grieving, but the parents who are trying right now to raise kids in a world that feels less stable than it used to. Parents need their tools back. Real tools. Not paperwork. Not waitlists. Not "your hands are tied." If your child is in crisis, you should be able to access youth mental health care quickly, get crisis support without having to "prove" disaster first, push for urgent intervention when safety is at risk, and receive support that lasts longer than a single appointment and a pamphlet. Sometimes love isn't enough without authority and resources, and it's cruel to pretend otherwise.

If you're reading this and feeling grief and anger at the same time, that makes sense. You can mourn and still ask hard questions. You can honour victims and still demand answers. And you should, because unless we confront the systemic failures around this tragedy—mental health access, gun access, and a legal framework that hasn't kept up—we're just waiting for the next community to get the call Tumbler Ridge got. Our hearts are with Tumbler Ridge today and in the long days ahead. May the lives lost be remembered for who they were, not as a headline and not as a statistic, but as people.

And if you're a parent reading this, you may be asking yourself what you're supposed to say to your own kids, especially if they've already heard something at school or online. Start by asking what they've heard, where it came from, and what part they can't stop thinking about, and then pause long enough to let them answer. Keep your language honest and simple: something very sad happened at a school, people were hurt, and it's okay to feel upset or confused. Avoid graphic details, and

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if they press for specifics, answer calmly and briefly. Reassure them with what is real and concrete in their world by talking through what their school does to keep kids safe and what they should do in an emergency. Ask if anything at school makes them feel unsafe, and if they name something specific, write it down and follow up.

It also helps to name feelings out loud, including your own, without letting them take over the room. Tell them you feel sad and shaken too, that being scared makes sense, and that they aren't in trouble for having big feelings. Then do something grounding together—eat something, drink water, go for a short walk, do something normal at home—because the body needs a signal that life is still steady. In the days after, keep an eye out for changes like trouble sleeping, headaches, clinginess, irritability, shutting down, or avoiding school, and check in gently instead of interrogating. And if your child talks about self-harm, violence, or feeling unsafe, act quickly by calling your local crisis line or your doctor, and if you believe there's immediate danger, call 911. That isn't overreacting.

That's parenting.

NOTE: *If you or someone you know is struggling with mental health issues, please reach out. Crisis services are available 24/7 through the Canada Suicide Prevention Service at 1-833-456-4566 or via text at 45645. You are not alone.*



Canadian Representatives of Parliament in an act of support and solidarity for the victims, the families and the survivors. It seems for a moment sides were lost, there were no lines drawn in the sand and people came together to show that these youth and this community now have the support of a nation. Photo Source: Vancouver City News



Abel Mwansa



Ezekiel Schofield



Ticaria Lampert



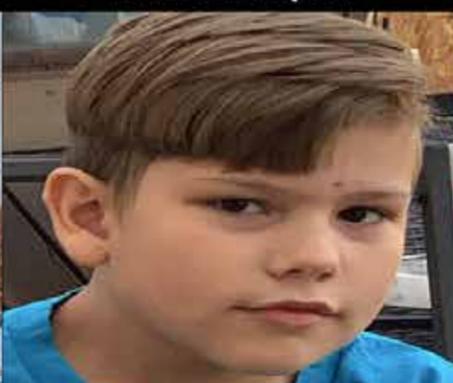
Shanda Aviugana-Durand



Zoey Benoit



Kylie Smith



Emmett Jacobs



Jennifer Jacobs

We want to respect the privacy of the victims recovering while also honoring the lives taken too soon. Please remember these families and strive to put aside differences in order to work together as a country to ensure history never repeats itself and no more lives are lost. The thoughts and prayers of Northern Threads is with you all. (Image Src. Social Media)

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Stitched in the North: Meet the Makers Redefining Northern Style

by KARRIE O'CONNOR

When you think about Northern Ontario, you might picture endless forests, frozen lakes, and long winter nights. But there's another side to the North that's quietly thriving, one that's stitched together with craftsmanship, quality, and a whole lot of Northern pride. While fast fashion chains churn out disposable trends, two Northern Ontario businesses are taking a different approach entirely. They're making clothes that last, clothes that matter, and clothes that are made right here in the communities we call home.

Let's talk about 49th Apparel and Little Pear, two businesses redefining what it means to dress Northern.

49th Apparel: Three Decades of Cozy, Canadian-Made Quality

If you've ever wondered whether it's possible to run a successful manufacturing business in Northern Ontario, 49th Apparel has been answering that question with a resounding "yes" since 1992. Based in Sault Ste. Marie, this isn't some fly-by-night operation riding the "shop local" trend. They've been at it for over thirty years, quietly making some of the coziest pajamas and loungewear you'll ever slip into, and doing it all right here in Canada.

Walking into their shop at 480 Queen Street East feels less like a retail transaction and more like discovering a well-kept secret. The racks are filled with classic flannel pajamas, plush robes, and sleepwear that actually looks like something you'd want to wear, not just something you'd shuffle around the house in before changing into real clothes. This is the kind of quality your grandparents would recognize, the kind that doesn't fall apart after three washes or pill into oblivion by Christmas.

What makes 49th Apparel stand out in an age of offshore production and razor-thin margins? They manufacture locally. In an industry where "Made in Canada" is increasingly rare, 49th Apparel has held the line. Their Sault Ste. Marie facility employs local sewers, cutters, and quality control staff who take pride in what they're creating. Every seam, every button, every hem is done right here. You're not just buying pajamas, you're supporting Northern jobs, Northern families, and a business model that values people over profit margins.



And then there's the Pancake Bay Plaid. If you know, you know. This signature print has become something of a cult favorite among 49th Apparel fans, a nod to one of the most beautiful spots on Lake Superior's eastern shore. It's that perfect blend of nostalgic cabin vibes and modern comfort, the kind of pattern that makes you want to brew a cup of coffee, light a fire, and settle in for a long winter's read. The Pancake Bay Plaid isn't just fabric, it's a feeling, a sense of place woven into every thread.

But 49th Apparel isn't stuck in the past. They've evolved with the times, offering online shopping for those who can't make it to the Soo, while still maintaining that personal, small-business touch. They know their customers by name. They remember what you ordered last time. It's the kind of service that big-box stores simply can't replicate, no matter how sophisticated their algorithms get.

How to Find Them:

You can visit 49th Apparel in person at 480 Queen Street East in Sault Ste. Marie, or check them out online at 49thapparel.com. Follow them on social media to catch new releases, seasonal prints, and behind-the-scenes peeks at the manufacturing process. When you're shopping for quality Canadian-made sleepwear, this is where you start, and probably where you'll end up staying.

Little Pear: Slow Fashion, Handmade in Sudbury

If 49th Apparel feels like the cozy classic your family swears by, Little Pear is the kind of Northern maker you find when you're looking for something better for your kids: fewer

"one-season" outfits, more real-life wear. Based in Sudbury, Little Pear leans hard into slow fashion, sustainability, and quality: the stuff you care about when you're dressing little humans who crawl, climb, spill, grow, and somehow end up with grass stains in February.

"Slow fashion" can sound trendy, but here it's simple. Little Pear makes children's clothing by hand in Sudbury. Cut, sewn, and finished with care. Not mass-produced. Not rushed. Just thoughtfully made pieces that are meant to be worn again and again: by your kid, then the next kid, then passed along.

So what does that actually mean for you as a parent? Less stress. Better basics. Clothes that can handle daycare days, weekend adventures, and family photos without falling apart after a couple washes. And because the work is local, you're also putting your money into Northern skills and Northern paycheques, not a far-away supply chain you'll never see.

Little Pear's vibe is kid-friendly and practical. Think comfy fits that let kids move. Soft fabrics that feel good against sensitive skin. Details that feel intentional instead of fussy. It's the kind of quality you notice when you're folding laundry and realize you're reaching for the same pieces over and over because they just hold up.

The sustainability part matters here, too. When kids outgrow things fast, it's easy to end up in a cycle of buying cheap and replacing constantly. Little Pear pushes back on that with better materials, careful making, and timeless styles that don't feel "done" in two months. Pay a bit more once, and you'll see it in the wear: and in what you don't have to re-buy.



(Continues On Page 7)

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And honestly? There's something nice about knowing who made your child's clothes. In a world full of mystery labels, Little Pear offers that small-community transparency. You're not just clicking "checkout." You're choosing a Sudbury maker and a slower, more thoughtful way to shop for your family.

How to Find Them:

Little Pear operates primarily online at shoplittlepear.com, where you can browse their latest collections and learn more about their process. Follow them on social media for updates on new pieces, trunk shows, and the stories behind the garments. When you're ready to invest in clothing that's made with intention and care, Little Pear is waiting.

Why Northern-Made Matters

So why does it matter that these businesses are Northern? Couldn't they operate just as easily anywhere else? Technically, sure. But there's something about creating in the North that shapes both the product and the people behind it. The winters are long, the communities are tight-knit, and there's a DIY ethic born from living in places where you can't just pop over to the nearest big-box store when you need something.

Northern Ontario makers understand quality because they rely on it themselves. They know what it means to invest in something that lasts through a real winter. They know their neighbors, their customers, and the people who work for them: because up here, we're all connected in ways that don't happen in sprawling urban centers.

When you support businesses like 49th Apparel and Little Pear, you're not just buying clothes. You're keeping jobs in the North. You're supporting families, funding local paychecks, and ensuring that the next generation has a reason to stay here instead of moving south for opportunity. You're proving that it's possible to build sustainable, ethical businesses in places that the rest of the country often forgets about.

And let's be honest: there's pride in wearing something made in your own backyard. It's a conversation starter. It's a way to support the place you call home. It's fashion with a backbone.

The Bigger Picture

Both 49th Apparel and Little Pear are part of

a larger movement that's pushing back against disposable culture. They're proving that you don't need to sacrifice style for sustainability, or quality for affordability in the long run. They're showing that Northern Ontario isn't just a place people pass through on the way to somewhere else: it's a place where real, meaningful work is happening every single day.

So next time you're tempted to click "add to cart" on another cheap shirt that'll fall apart in three months, pause. Think about where your money is going. Think about who made that garment, and under what conditions. Then head over to 49thapparel.com or shoplittlepear.com and see what's possible when fashion is made with intention.

Your wardrobe: and the North(will be better for it.)

Lapse in Judgement, Impact in Action: Meet Jayson John Stewart

by KARRIE O'CONNOR



There's something quietly radical happening in Espanola, and it starts with a teacher who refuses to stay in one lane. Jayson John Stewart is the kind of creator who makes you rethink what it means to be an educator in Northern Ontario. By day, he's shaping young minds at Espanola High School. By night (and weekends, and summers, and probably every spare minute in between), he's directing films, writing screenplays, acting in productions, and building a creative empire under the banner of Lapse in Judgement Studios.

The name itself is perfect, a wink at the messy, imperfect process of making art. Because that's what Stewart does: he makes art, lots of it, and he does it with a fierce commitment to telling stories that matter.

The Filmmaker Who Teaches (Or Is It the Teacher Who Films?)

Stewart's work spans an impressive range of creative disciplines. He's directed three short films: REZilience and The Philanthropist (both of which he wrote himself) and Overdue, based on a screenplay by the late Marla J. Hayes. These aren't vanity projects or week-end experiments. They're thoughtful explorations of identity, culture, and what it means to be human in a world that often asks us to choose between survival and authenticity.

REZilience, in particular, speaks to Stewart's commitment to centering Indigenous voices and stories. It's the kind of project that doesn't just entertain, it challenges viewers to think differently about resilience, community, and what it means to hold onto your identity in the face of systemic pressure. That's not easy subject matter, and it's not the kind of thing that tends to get mainstream attention. But Stewart isn't here for easy or mainstream. He's here to tell the stories that need telling, especially the ones rooted in Northern Ontario's complex cultural landscape.

Acting Across Genres and Platforms

If you think Stewart's creative output stops at filmmaking, think again. He's also an accomplished actor with a resume that reads like a masterclass in versatility. He's played serial killer Isaac Lowen in "Black Forest," Inspector McEachern in "The Pasta Killer," mob boss Viktor Rominov in the TV series "14 Keys," and even a Scientist Salesman in "Veracitum." That range, from law enforcement to crime lord to scientist, shows someone who's not afraid to disappear into a role.

Stewart's recent 2025 work includes Agent Jax Steele in "Stairway to Murder," a murder dinner theatre production that combines live performance with audience participation. He also appeared as Master Jarek in "Shattered Dawn," a fan-made Star Wars project that's already generating buzz in sci-fi circles. And let's not forget his turn as Colonel Mustard in Espanola Little Theatre's production of CLUE, because apparently this man also does community theatre in his spare time.

Beyond the screen and stage, Stewart has lent his voice to audiobooks, including the Raven's Child series and "Magi & The Quest for Christmas," as well as video games and commercial projects. He's represented by Quintia Talent, which speaks to his professionalism and the in-

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dustry's recognition of his skills.

In 2026, Stewart completed an "Emotion on Demand" workshop at True Acting Institute, because even multi-talented creators understand the value of sharpening their craft. That commitment to continuous learning is something he brings back to the classroom, modeling for his students what it looks like to stay curious and keep pushing yourself creatively.

The Classroom as Creative Laboratory

Here's where Stewart's work gets really interesting: the intersection of education and artistry. Teaching high school isn't just his day job, it's integral to who he is as a creator. He brings the same energy, curiosity, and commitment to storytelling into his classroom that he brings to his film sets.

For Stewart, education isn't about memorization or standardized tests. It's about empowering young people to find their voices, tell their stories, and understand that creativity is a form of power. In a region where opportunities for artistic expression can feel limited, where the path to success is often presented as leaving for bigger cities, Stewart represents a different possibility: building something meaningful right here, in Northern Ontario, with the resources and communities we already have.

He integrates social justice themes into his teaching, encouraging students to think critically about representation, power, and whose stories get told. This isn't abstract theory, it's practical, urgent work that helps young people make sense of the world they're inheriting. When students see their teacher directing films about Indigenous resilience, acting in projects that challenge stereotypes, and actively contributing to regional arts infrastructure, they learn that creativity isn't frivolous or self-indulgent. It's essential.

Building Northern Ontario's Film Future

Stewart isn't content to just create his own work, he's actively building the infrastructure that will support the next generation of Northern filmmakers. He moderates the Facebook group "Northern Ontario Talent for Film," a vital hub for regional creators looking to collaborate, share resources, and support each other's projects. In a region where film industry connections can feel impossibly distant, this kind of community-building is invaluable.

He's also served on selection and judging committees for the 2024 Junction North Film Festi-

val in Sudbury and the 2025 Deep Cuts Film Fest in Kitchener. That's not glamorous work, it's the behind-the-scenes labor that keeps regional film culture alive. Stewart understands that for Northern Ontario to have a thriving arts scene, it needs people willing to do the unglamorous work of reading submissions, providing feedback, and championing emerging talent.

What's Next for Lapse in Judgement Studios

Stewart's currently developing four new screenplays, because apparently three completed short films and a full acting career weren't enough. He's working on a supernatural ecological revenge thriller (yes, please), a far-north zombie film feature (finally, zombies in a setting where winter actually matters), a psychological horror romance (that sounds deliciously unsettling), and an abandoned building siege adventure.

These projects show Stewart's range and his refusal to be pigeonholed into any single genre. He's equally comfortable with horror, thriller, and romance, and he's particularly interested in stories that explore the darker edges of human experience without losing sight of hope and connection.

Why This Matters

In an era when "content creation" often means churning out forgettable social media posts, Stewart's work stands out. He's making art that requires time, attention, and emotional investment from both creator and audience. He's telling stories rooted in Northern Ontario's landscapes and communities, stories that center marginalized voices and challenge comfortable narratives.

And he's doing it all while teaching full-time, which might be the most impressive part. Because Stewart isn't choosing between being an educator and being an artist, he's proving that those identities strengthen each other. The same skills that make him a compelling filmmaker, empathy, attention to detail, commitment to authentic storytelling, make him an effective teacher. And the patience, adaptability, and communication skills required for teaching undoubtedly make him a better collaborator on film sets.

For students at Espanola High School, having Stewart as a teacher means seeing that creative careers aren't just for people in Toronto or Los Angeles. They're possible right here, in Northern Ontario, if you're willing to work hard, stay curious, and build community along the way.

Finding Lapse in Judgement Studios

You can follow Stewart's ongoing projects through Lapse in Judgement Studios online, where he shares updates on new films, acting roles, and creative ventures. For a region that sometimes struggles with brain drain, with young people leaving because they don't see opportunities here, Stewart represents a compelling counter-narrative. You don't have to leave to make art that matters. You can build something meaningful right here, in the communities that shaped you, with the people who understand where you come from.

That's the real impact of Stewart's work, not just the films he makes or the roles he plays, but the example he sets. For every student who watches him balance teaching with creative work, for every emerging filmmaker who finds support through the Northern Ontario Talent for Film group, for every festival attendee who sees a Stewart-directed short and thinks, "I could do that too," he's proving that Northern Ontario has room for artists, storytellers, and dreamers.

Lapse in Judgement Studios isn't just a clever name. It's a philosophy: sometimes the best creative decisions look like mistakes from the outside. Sometimes taking the unconventional path, staying in Espanola instead of heading to Toronto, teaching while making films, building local instead of going big, turns out to be the smartest choice of all.

Stewart's impact also stretches into visual arts and hands-on learning. As a multidisciplinary artist, he uses Lapse in Judgement Studios as a collaborative space, inviting people to make things together, not just watch from the sidelines. He offers workshops that focus on visual arts and graphic design, with a simple goal: help you (and your neighbours, and local youth) build skills, spark ideas, and feel more confident creating.

And then there's the "O Canada" anthem project, a community-minded release with a bigger purpose. It's a trilingual recording (Anishinaabemowin, English, and French) featuring Mary Bryton Nahwegahbow, with 100% of profits going to Indigenous education and language preservation charities. You can find it on all streaming platforms, and it's also offered for free to all schools and First Nations, with Stewart developing accompanying educational resources for the classroom.

Check Out Jayson John Stewarts website at:
<https://lapsinjudgementstudios.com/>

If you are a teacher you can even get a copy of "O Canada" from the site.

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Our Northern Stories Woven Together

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The Long Thaw: Finding Spring's Rhythm in the North

by KARRIE O'CONNOR

Here's the thing about February in Northern Ontario: it's a liar.

One day you'll step outside and smell something that isn't diesel exhaust or woodsmoke, something almost green and alive, and your brain will do a little flip. Spring, it whispers. Maybe. Then you check your weather app and it's still -18°C, there's three feet of snow in your yard, and you won't see bare ground until May if you're lucky.

Welcome to the long thaw. It's not quite winter anymore, but calling it spring feels like a cosmic joke.

The Groundhog Doesn't Live Here

Every February 2nd, the rest of the country gets weirdly invested in whether a groundhog in Pennsylvania sees its shadow. Six more weeks of winter, they say, as if that's a threat. Up here, we laugh. Six weeks? That's adorable. We've got twelve weeks minimum, buddy, shadow or no shadow.

The whole Groundhog Day tradition feels especially absurd when you're scraping two inches of ice off your windshield in the dark at 7 a.m. A rodent's opinion on meteorology seems quaint when you're living in a place where winter starts in November and sometimes forgets to leave until late April. The groundhog could do a full TED Talk about his shadow and it wouldn't change the fact that you're still wearing your parka to the grocery store.

But here's the weird part: we still check. We still want to know what Wiarton Willie predicts, even though we know better. Maybe it's hope. Maybe it's just nice to pretend that spring is something decided by cute animals rather than the cruel mathematics of latitude and lake-effect weather systems.

Either way, the groundhog has no idea what he's talking about when it comes to Northern Ontario.

The In-Between Season

February through March is its own season up here, something that doesn't have a proper name. Not winter, winter is confident, it knows what it is. This is something else. The sun starts

setting after 5 p.m. and you can actually feel the difference. The light changes quality, goes from that flat white winter glare to something warmer, more golden.

The snow starts to get dirty. Not the fresh, pretty dirty of new footprints, but that tired, gritty grey that happens when snow has been sitting around too long at the party. It crusts over at night and gets slushy during the day. Your boots are constantly wet. Everything is constantly wet.

And then there are the days where it hits 2°C and everyone loses their minds.

Suddenly there are people outside in T-shirts. Someone's wearing flip-flops. You see a brave soul attempting to jog without seventeen layers. The Tim Hortons patio has actual humans sitting on it, pretending their coffee isn't steaming in the cold air. This is Northern Ontario spring fever: the irrational exuberance that comes from temperatures above zero.

It won't last. Next week it'll snow again. But for today? Today we're all optimists.



A group of youth enjoying the spring thaw and early greenery near North Bay, Ontario.

The Symphony of Dripping

The first real sign of spring isn't visual. It's auditory.

You hear it before you see it: the steady drip-drip-drip of melting snow from your eaves. It's the soundtrack of the long thaw, this constant percussion of water finding its way down. At first, you notice it during the day. Then, if you're

lucky, you start hearing it at night too. That's when you know things are really changing.

Icicles get longer and fatter before they crash down. Gutters overflow. Little streams appear in places where there are no streams, running down driveways and across sidewalks. Your whole world becomes a complex system of drainage and melt patterns, and you find yourself noticing things like "oh, that snowbank is finally below fence-line height" or "the pile at the end of the driveway has exposed the recycling bin."

This is the poetry of northern spring. It's not flowers or birds or any of that southern nonsense. It's infrastructure. It's water management. It's the slow revelation of everything winter buried.

What We're Actually Waiting For

Ask someone in Toronto what they look forward to about spring and they'll say cherry blossoms or patio season. Ask someone in Northern Ontario and you'll get a completely different list.

We're waiting for the day we don't have to start our vehicles ten minutes early. We're waiting to stop carrying a scraper in our car. We're waiting for the morning when we walk outside and don't immediately regret all our life choices.

We're waiting to see the ground again. Not snow-covered ground or ice-covered ground, but actual ground, with dirt and maybe some dead grass. When you spend months looking at white, brown earth feels like a revelation.

We're waiting for the smell. It's hard to describe if you haven't experienced it, that specific scent of frozen ground starting to thaw. It's part mud, part decay, part possibility. It smells like wet pavement and old leaves and lake water warming up. It doesn't sound pretty, and it's not, but it's ours. It's the smell that says "you made it through another one."

We're waiting for longer days. Not just longer in theory, but long enough to actually matter. Long enough to drive home from work without your headlights. Long enough to take the dog for a walk after dinner without feeling like you're venturing into the void.

And yeah, we're waiting for that first genuinely warm day. The kind where you can open your windows for twenty minutes before it gets too cold again. The kind where you debate whether you actually need your winter coat or if you can get away with just a hoodie. (You can't. Bring

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the coat. But the debate itself is part of the spring ritual.)

The Patience of the North

Living here teaches you a specific kind of patience. Spring doesn't arrive on the calendar date. It doesn't burst forth in a week of blooming flowers. It creeps in over weeks, sometimes months, with false starts and setbacks and days where winter decides to make a surprise comeback appearance.

You learn to celebrate the small victories. That first day above freezing. The first time you hear water running under the ice in the creek. The first robin (which always shows up too early and looks immediately regretful about its life choices). The first day you can walk on the sidewalk instead of the snowbank beside it.

People from away think we're obsessed with the weather. They're right, but they don't understand why. When your environment actively tries to kill you for six months of the year, you develop a relationship with it. You watch it closely. You notice its moods.

And when it finally shifts, when spring actually arrives: real spring, not February's false promises: it feels earned.

Living in the Thaw

So here we are in mid-February, caught between seasons, wondering if Warton Willie knows something we don't (he doesn't), watching for signs, listening for drips, waiting for that shift that says winter's grip is finally loosening.

It's not glamorous. It's not the spring of garden magazines or inspirational Instagram posts. It's messy and wet and muddy and long.

But it's ours.

And when you finally shed that parka, when you finally drive with the window cracked open, when you finally smell that earthy almost-green smell on the wind, you'll understand something that people in warmer climates never quite grasp: spring isn't just a season up here. It's a victory. It's proof that everything frozen eventually thaws, everything buried eventually emerges, and everything that seems endless eventually changes.

Even if the groundhog did see his shadow. Especially then.



Early Winter Photo from C.F.S Lowther which was once located between Kapuskasing and Hearst Ontario where Spring was a welcome sign as winters often hit -40 and below for prolonged periods



Children skating in Sault Ste. Marie are likely not thinking about the joys of summer but guaranteed they enjoy the change from bundling up to swim-suits and sunscreen.



Ice coming off the river near Thunder Bay Ontario where winters are long and cold and spring is a welcome sight.



St. Matthews Cathedral, Timmins Ontario in winter. White on white can be beautiful or monotone depending on the eye of the beholder.