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Our next edition will be published January 12, 2022

Parents sue Quebec over Covid decree...



The Laval News Exclusive

Page 5

The Riverains de Laval win 2021 Monteuil de Laval tournament.



30^e ÉDITION
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2021

Page 14

As you celebrate this Holiday Season, I wish to all of you and your loved ones

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

2022



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2022 BUDGET



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- More police officers to fight violent crime
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- Stronger bond between the police and the community



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- Program to attract major events to Laval
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Laval budget 2022: City plans to spend \$969.9 million next year

Annual fiscal exercise includes a \$29 million hike for employees' salaries



MARTIN C. BARRY
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While the City of Laval's latest operating budget calls for the average property owner to pay just 1.9 per cent more in taxes in 2022, the \$969.9 million fiscal exercise includes spending that is 4.3 per cent higher than it was last year.

City sets priorities

In a statement issued by the city last Thursday when the budget was released, finance department officials said their priorities over the coming year will focus primarily on improving the security of residents as well as municipal employees, optimizing services to citizens, following sound environmental practices, enhancing the quality of life and managing finances responsibly.

Although much of the operating budget consists of business-as-usual expenditures adjusted slightly upwards to take inflation into consideration, there are a few notable exceptions. Perhaps most outstanding among these is a significant increase in the city's payroll expenses, which is the total amount Laval expects to pay in 2022 to its thousands of employees.

\$29 million more in salaries

Answering questions from journalists about the budget last week, Pierre Beaudet, the city's director of finance, said the payroll is going up by two per cent or roughly \$29 million next year. The city will be paying its employees around \$412 million in 2022 (not including more than \$100 million more for social benefits).

The two per cent hike reflects not only salary increases written into unionized workers' contracts, but also the fact that the city is hiring

269 new employees. In an interview with the Laval News, Mayor Stéphane Boyer explained that as the City of Laval expands and its population rises, the municipality has no choice but to hire new employees almost every year to meet the rising demand on services.

Hiring for growing population

"To maintain the level of service, we have to hire, because each year we have more kilometres of streets to clear of snow, more residents who want to access municipal services," he said. "There's always an increase that is due simply to an increase in the population." Mayor Boyer pointed out that the 269 new workers includes 60 who are re-hired annually on one-year contracts which are renewed. He said the actual number of new positions is 111.

Although the Covid pandemic is taking a toll on the city's expenses, it's not as devastating as might otherwise be expected. According to the new budget, \$15 million has been allotted for pandemic-related costs in the coming year.

Some of this will be going towards the purchase of PPE (personal protective equipment) to safeguard employees against viral spread. As well, the city has found it necessary to purchase laptop computers and other equipment so that employees can work from home during periods of mandatory isolation.

Covid pandemic expenses

But that's not all. Around \$6 million of the sum will be going to the Société de transport de Laval to make up for the STL's steep decline in revenue from the loss of passenger traffic during the pandemic. Thorough cleaning of municipal offices to minimize the risk of Covid spread is also an additional expense resulting from the pandemic.



Mayor Stéphane Boyer, city manager Jacques Ulysse and municipal finance officials are seen here following the presentation of the City of Laval's 2022 budget last week.

The city has also made room on the 2022 budget for better public security. Laval has allotted \$1.7 million to provide its police force with better resources to deal with sexual exploitation by pimps, as well as the illegal spread of firearms and the presence of organized crime on the city's territory. The city says more than \$2 million has been set aside for programs to encourage inclusion and diversity within institutional settings.

\$65K to protect firefighters

The city plans to spend \$65,000 next year implementing a new system designed to protect its firefighters from hazardous and potentially carcinogenic smoke and fumes. The fire department will be purchasing an additive to be fed into the water that's poured onto fires; it is designed to chemically absorb carbon molecules and smoke, thus minimizing the health impact on firefighting personnel.

The city is allotting \$1.9 million to improve snow removal, and an additional \$1.7 million to improve the current system of alternative street

parking during snow removal operations. As well, the city says it is continuing to improve traffic management with the purchase of more illuminated speed indication signage.

Jeux du Québec next year

The city is allotting \$285,000 to support the opening in the fall of 2022 of the Centre d'interprétation des biosciences Armand-Frappier. Currently located on des Prairies Blvd. in Laval-des-Rapides, the museum is moving next fall into a brand-new facility next to the Cosmodôme in central Laval.

And finally, despite all the turmoil and postponements brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, the city hasn't forgotten its commitment to hosting the Finals for the Jeux du Québec which were supposed to take place in 2020. According to next year's budget, \$2 million has been set aside for the provincial athletics and sporting event scheduled to be held in Laval sometime next year.



Happiest holidays to all Laval citizens !

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OPINION & Editorial



A 2021 Christmas like no other in history... or is it?

At this-time-of-year, bombarded with 'happy' and "merry" from every direction, an inward/outward look into what and where we are at end of 2021 is worth exploring.

Happy greetings abound in cards, store windows, e-mails. Colourful lights flash

happiness everywhere. Beaming Santas, frolicking reindeer, smiling snowmen, and scenes of 'happy' family gatherings surround us. Messages/Texts wish happy Christmas, happy holiday, happy new year and while we're at it - happy life!

Too much *happy*? Excessive? Demanding too much happiness of ourselves and others? Is narrowing expectations to this single emotion good for us? Might other forces want to crash our festive celebrations? As a third extraordinary year of Covid-19 bodes more difficulties, complications, trials, and tribulations - might we do better to challenge this 'happy' time? True, some of us will welcome guests into our castles, but we may have to share home-sweet-home with other not-so-pleasant visitors.

These are desperate times, too many of us living lives of quiet desperation. Has it ever been this bad, we ask? Has humanity ever been threatened with anything similar to the apocalyptic threat of Covid-19? Yes, it has, and worse, much worse. In retrospect, the Spanish Flu pandemic of the early 20th century proves that today's crisis is neither new nor unique, and apparently much-less-deadly.

That was then...

A century ago, 1918, the advisory - *Beware the mistletoe* - warned about the lingering pandemic: "Not only should you resist the temptation of holiday kisses and hugs, but you shouldn't even be at social gatherings where it might come up." Sounds familiar? In hindsight the catastrophic flu of 1918-1919 remains the deadliest event in modern history, apart from world wars, taking 50 million lives from 500 million infections. To date, 5.31 million have died from Covid-19 world-wide since March 2020; from 271m infections), a drop-in-the-bucket. Fatal to 30,000 Canadians (1.86m infections), and 798,000 Americans (50.1m infections), Covid-19 pales in comparison to tragic losses from Spanish Flu.

We're confronting critical periods of humankind's history, engendering reflection on how the planet survived the last pandemic, origins of which are debated; England, France, China, U.S. considered possible sources. Naming it the *Spanish Flu* resulted from Allied media censorship by the military during World War I, suppressing public reports of the virus and its high tolls among soldiers. In neutral Spain the media publicly signaled high incidences of death from the illness, thus the *Spanish* link. The flu's pandemic's effects cannot be underplayed. Children sang haunting playground nursery rhymes: *I had a little bird, its name was Enza, I opened the window, And in-flu-enza.*

Just weeks after Christmas 1918, the virus's third wave swept Europe, lasting to Summer 1919, adding substantially to death-tolls. Sounds familiar? Moving fast, it killed entire families, hours or days after symptoms, with high mortality among children five-and-under, adults-20-40 and over 65. Patients struggled to breathe as fluid filled lungs; starved of oxygen faces, lips, ears, fingers, toes turned blue. Social-economic inequality exacerbated suffering, also true of Covid-19.

December 1918, after three Christmases with little to celebrate during World War I, Europe faced constraints comparable to Covid-19. In its path, the flu infected one-third of the world's population, costing 228,000 lives in Britain alone. Mysteriously, by December 1918, weekly British deaths dropped to 1,029, after reaching November deadly-peaks when 8,000 people died first-week alone.

With no explanation for these dramatic drops, deprived of peace-time Christmas for three years, residents were left with difficult decisions - to meet with family over the holidays? Many did. Gift-buying rushes were commonplace. Shopkeepers applied one-in-one-out practices now familiar to us as social-distancing.

Some businesses closed or prohibited those under 14 from entering. Dancehalls, cinemas, theatres were shuttered. Schools with significant infections closed, but churches stayed open for worship. No central lockdown was imposed but local councils had power over closures.

To Canada, come from away

The 1918 pandemic came to Canada with returning troops, infecting even remote communities, wiping out entire villages. Labrador, Québec,

First Nations reserves were hard-hit. Quarantine measures failed. Overextended medical facilities compelled set-ups of infirmaries in schools and hotels. Unlike most strains of influenza, dangerous for those with reduced immunity (elderly, very young, pre-existing conditions), the 1918 flu inexplicably killed young and hearty alike. Pneumonia developed by flu-weakened patients, rather than influenza itself, was the major cause of death. Long-term consequences, for some, included parkinsonian syndromes and marked tremors.

The pandemic brought death, suffering and social/economic hardship. Children became parentless, families lost wage-earners. Businesses profits declined from lack of demand and/or inability to meet demand due to reduced work forces.

To control the spread, Canadian municipal governments closed all except necessary services. Quarantines and public mask-wearing became mandatory. Although Canadians unhappily accepted these restrictions, they defied federal government requests for postponement of end-of-war-celebrations. Positively, the pandemic gave birth to Canada's Department of Health in 1919. As good as these measures were, it was too-little-too-late for Canadians in tens of thousands

And this is now...

Christmas 2021 isn't Christmas 1918. No cures/vaccines came from the Spanish Flu. Its sudden disappearance proved as puzzling as its origins. Herd immunity? Less-lethal mutation? Simple burn-out? Running out of new live hosts to infect? Most crucial, now that there's another contagious and deadly pathogen in the world, have we learned enough to make better choices? Home for Christmas?

Third/fourth waves of Covid-19 are out there. U.S. deaths are the highest ever, showing no signs of waning. But the Spanish Flu killed far more Americans (675,000) and Canadians (50,000) in much smaller populations, than has Covid-19. It isn't over by-any-means. A world-wide Omicron wave has already struck whether Christmas likes it or not.

Despite serious variant increases, we don't need to pour salt into wounds by recapping the misery touching every part of the globe, or citing divisiveness and anger tinging pandemic-altered days for so many. Struggling to get through to 2022, even those who have it relatively good are fearful of incoming uncertainty. Unavoidable job losses portend toward overwhelming financial/social challenges.

To pay bills, savings/retirement nest-eggs may have to be tapped. Lost gigs, pay-cuts, investment-gutting of portfolios have wreaked havoc, provoking worries about mortgages, personal illness or that of others, and more. Need we throw in the scourge of galloping inflation of 2021? Amid this misery, is it futile to talk Merry Christmas/Happy New Year?

Understandably, as Christmas rapidly approaches, generous giving may not suffice to deflect Covid's negative effect on our celebration-and-gifting-traditions. Yes, surveys show that people feel like Christmas 2021 will be normal, but a majority of hosts will only invite double-vaccinated guests and two-in-five will demand Covid-19 tests for visitors, with 25% admitting anxiety about carriers.

Begging your pardon, Covid-19 be damned

Sadly, faint-of-heart folks will show love for parents, brothers, sisters by staying home, with others risking family-reunions and parties, vaxxed or not. No doubt, most will exercise "caution" until we're out of the woods, whenever that may be.

In the meantime, let's affirm that sooner or later, in tomorrows around the corner or far-off in the unfolding-of-the universe, humankind will fundamentally re-embrace the best of yet to come, prevailing with the hope, courage, strength, humility and grace of the good news delivered by the child in the manger, for there is no Christmas without Christ and no Christ without Christmas ... the truth of which will never be lost to time, pandemic or not ...

On behalf of The Laval News, I'll impose on John Lennon for last words, in his timeless insight into what's ahead for humanity:

"And so, this is Christmas for weak and for strong, For the rich and the poor ones, the road is so long. A very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, Let's hope it's a good one, without any fear."

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Parents sue Quebec over Covid decree banning unvaccinated teens from sports



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More than 100 families from across Quebec – including some from Laval – are suing the provincial government over a National Assembly decree which forbids their children from taking part in extra-curricular group sports or physical activities if they haven't been vaccinated against COVID-19.

The families who have signed on maintain that the fundamental rights of their children are being violated by the government's insistence their teenage children must have vaccine passports.

National Assembly decree

The decree, which was passed by the National Assembly on Sept. 1, effectively forbids children 13 years of age and older from taking part in sports competitions, in organized leagues or in tournaments.

The claim, filed at the Montreal courthouse last month, maintains that the decree unjustifiably impedes upon several of their children's fundamental rights and liberties and that it thus must be declared non-applicable in part.

"Basically, it's an action about the vaccine passports, but only for the teenagers who are 13 to 17 years," says Me William Desrochers, a lawyer in Gatineau QC who is representing the parents. "What the decree says is that you

'It's something that's extremely hard on these kids,' says Me William Desrochers who filed the lawsuit on behalf of the parents

cannot do anything that falls outside the regular school program.

Limited in taking part

"So, if you're in a sports/study program and you're doing maybe volleyball, then you can do physical education, you can do volleyball six or eight hours a week. But once you have a competition on a Saturday, you cannot go. If you have an extra practice on a Monday night, you cannot go.

"And it's not only that. If you can't do the practice with the team, they're not going to put you in the front position – you're not going to be the quarterback on the football team if you can't play. You end up being left out or only in practice or even sitting on the bench. It's something that's extremely hard on these kids and we feel that the decree is an infringement of several human rights and not reasonable under the circumstances."

Is it reasonable and why?

Among the issues the lawsuit hopes to raise is the scientific validity of the government's

insisting that all school children must be vaccinated in order to fully participate in the sports programs.

"We understand or we believe that the vaccination rate is pretty high," Desrochers added. "Sometimes if you're in a program in school, you might have one kid who is not vaccinated. So, how is it so important that this kid must be vaccinated at all cost? That is the question: Is it reasonable and why? That is the question we're raising here."

Case to be heard by May

Desrochers said he expected the case to be heard by next May, hopefully with a decision rendered before the beginning in the fall of 2022 of the next school year.

In the meantime, he said the parents were pleased with the government's announcement that mandatory vaccine passports would not be demanded for younger students.

"Still, for 13 to 17 years old it still raises the question as to why is it okay for them, but it's not okay for the five or eleven or twelve-year-olds," he said.



Gatineau, QC lawyer Me William Desrochers is presenting the case of more than 100 parents from across Quebec who are contesting the provincial government's decree preventing teenaged students age 13-17 from participating in extra-curricular sports if they are not vaccinated against COVID-19.



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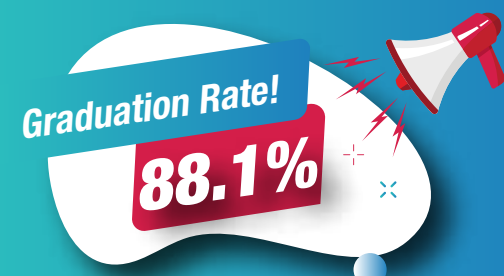
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Tourisme Laval to administer Quebec business tourism fund

\$2.5 million to be overseen by tourism industry players and Ministry

Tourisme Laval has been chosen by the Quebec government to administer a new provincial fund that will support the post-Covid resurgence of business tourism across the province.

The fund, containing \$2.5 million in seed money allotted by Premier François Legault's Coalition Avenir Québec government, was announced by Quebec Tourism Minister Caroline Proulx at the Sheraton Laval on Dec. 6.

Business tourism

Tourisme Laval is an independent agency set up by the City of Laval to promote tourism in the Laval region. The fund will be administered by a board within Tourisme Laval made up of representatives from the tourism industry as well as from the Quebec Ministry of Tourism.

"Business tourism is a very important sector for the Quebec economy and our government is taking decisive action to support it during its resurgence and its return to growth," said Proulx.

Tapping their expertise

"Touristic businesses in Quebec have the opportunity to be guided by an association that has developed valuable expertise in business tourism," said Environment Minister Benoit Charette who is also Minister Responsible for the Laval Region.

"Tourisme Laval thanks the Ministry of Tourism for creating this fund, which will be furnishing the support necessary to the business tourism sector all over Quebec so that all the players can go from the current crisis to a rebirth," said Tourisme Laval executive-director and CEO Geneviève Roy.



Photo: Seen from the left at the Sheraton Laval on Dec. 6, Tourisme Laval executive-director and CEO Geneviève Roy, Quebec Tourism Minister Caroline Proulx and Quebec Environment Minister Benoit Charette who is also Minister Responsible for the Laval Region. (Photo: Martin C. Barry, Newsfirst Multimedia)

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STL says drivers refusing to provide bus service on strike days



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After receiving the third strike notice from the drivers' union for last Saturday Dec. 18 and Sunday Dec. 19, the Société de transport de Laval (STL) said it asked the union to provide at least minimum service to the public.

The STL said its request was rejected by the union and that it regretted the union's decision to leave Laval residents without any public transit for the weekend before the Christmas holidays.

"This decision needlessly hurts transit users," the transit agency said in a statement. "Not to mention local businesses that will inevitably suffer the consequences of this lack of transit service. The STL still believes in reaching a settlement through negotiations, not through actions that hurt transit users."

STL management noted that public transit has been severely impacted by the pandemic, resulting in a significant drop in ridership and a considerable decline in revenues for the entire Montreal metropolitan region. They said that in Laval as of last week, ridership had returned to about 65 per cent of the 2019 level.

The STL said that as it continues to navigate challenging financial times, it just recently renewed collective agreements with the maintenance and clerical workers' unions. They said the overall proposal made to the bus drivers' union "is fair and comparable to those agreements," according to the STL.

Last weekend, no STL bus was running in Laval as of 4 a.m. Saturday until service resumed at 4 a.m. Monday December 20. The following routes were also cancelled:

- 360 shuttle bus to downtown Laval
- Illumi shuttle bus

- Place Bell shuttle bus

However, the STL said there was no impact to regular service which was being maintained on the following services:

- All shared taxi routes
- Paratransit service

However, they said delays were to be expected as there would probably be an increase in ridership.

Practice a cultural leisure activity during a pandemic



Last fall, Ville de Laval asked itself the following question: how has the practice of cultural leisure been going since the start of the pandemic?

To find out, the City of Laval has mandated Signé Lavalto meet the world of cultural leisure. Two Laval cultural leisure organizations were met through this process: Harmonie Laval and the Laval Amateur Astronomers Club. Harmonie Laval is made up of 3 harmony groups and offers musical awakening lessons. The Laval Amateur Astronomers Club offers weekly meetings and runs the Laval Observatory located at the Center de la nature. It was open to the general public from May to October this year.

During the confinement, the 2 organizations set up original initiatives to keep the link alive with their members. Thanks to the return to face-to-face activities since spring-summer 2021, musicians and astronomers rediscover the moments of meeting and sharing that are dear to them.

This project is made possible thanks to the financial support of the Government of Quebec and the City of Laval within the framework of the Cultural Development Agreement.

STL news December 2021



Great offers to enjoy the Holidays

Whatever your plans may be for the Holidays, we have great options for all occasions.

- Take the bus **for free** on December 24 and 31st
- Try our free 360 shuttle, in service from December 20 to January 2nd
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STLaval.ca/holidays



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Holidays schedule

Don't forget to check the schedule in effect on statutory holidays.

- **December 24 and 31st:** Saturday schedule
- **December 25 and January 1st:** reduced Sunday schedule
- **December 26 and January 2nd:** Sunday schedule

Find all the details at
STLaval.ca/public-holidays

New schedules in effect as of January 8

Slight schedule changes will come into effect on January 8 for various bus routes.

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Francine Charbonneau bows out of 2022 provincial election

*Four-term Liberal MNA served Mille-Îles
riding for more than 12 years*



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After more than a dozen years in office, Mille-Îles Liberal MNA Francine Charbonneau says she will not be seeking a fifth term in the provincial general election taking place in October 2022.

First elected in 2008, Charbonneau served as a cabinet minister under former Premier Philippe Couillard. From 2014 to 2018, she was Minister Responsible for Senior Citizens, as well as for families, and for anti-intimidation.

Many roles at National Assembly

From 2008 to 2012, she was a Parliamentary Secretary. She was the spokesperson for the official opposition from 2012 to 2014 for dossiers involving primary and secondary school education.

Her current role in the Liberal opposition shadow cabinet is party spokesperson for issues

involving forestry, fauna, parks, professional training and adult education.

Among other things, she is considered to have made important contributions to the National Assembly's research on legislation regarding death and dying in dignity and the legislation on end-of-life care that followed.

As well, Francine Charbonneau guided the process leading towards the National Assembly's adoption of its first legislation putting in place elements for the protection of senior citizens.

A real 'people person'

In a statement released by Charbonneau's office this week, she said her greatest satisfaction was the personal interaction she had with all the constituents who came to her with questions or seeking help from her team.

Quebec Liberal Party leader Dominique Anglade issued the following statement after learning of Francine Charbonneau's decision.

"I would like to point out the great political contribution made by Francine towards the improvement in the lives of Quebecers," said Anglade. "For more than a decade, she worked with all her heart and with devotion towards



June 5th 2017: Seven Laval-area groups providing assistance to senior citizens and their caregivers will be benefiting from \$1.2 million in subsidies announced by Quebec Minister for Senior Citizens Francine Charbonneau who made the announcement at the Place des Aînés community centre in Chomedey. (Photo: Martin C. Barry, Newsfirst Multimedia)





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[Québec.ca/YOUTHvaccine](https://Quebec.ca/YOUTHvaccine)

Getting vaccinated is the best way to protect us all.

Beware the “The Twelve Scams of Christmas”

Cybercriminals Aiming to Steal Canadians’ Money, Identities and Financial Information

As Canadians gear up for the final countdown to Christmas, consumers should be vigilant with their information this holiday season. “Scams continue to be big business for cybercriminals who have their sights set on capitalizing on open hearts and wallets this holiday season,” said Dave Marcus, director of security research for McAfee Labs. “As people jump online to look for deals on gifts and travel, it’s important to recognize common scams to safeguard against theft during the busy season ahead.”

Twelve Scams of Christmas

1. iPad Offer Scams

With Apple products topping most shopping lists this holiday season, scammers are busy distributing bogus offers for free iPads. McAfee Labs found that in the spam version of the scam consumers are asked to purchase other products and provide their credit card number to get the free iPad. Of course, victims never receive the iPad or the other items, just the headache of reporting a stolen credit card number.

In the social media version of the scam, users

take a quiz to win a free iPad and must supply their cell phone number to receive the results. In actuality they are signed up for a cell phone scam that costs \$10 a week.

2. “Help! I’ve Been Robbed” Scam

This travel scam sends phony distress messages to family and friends requesting that money be wired or transferred so that they can get home. McAfee Labs has seen an increase in this scam and predicts its rise during the busy travel season.

3. Fake Gift Cards

Cybercrooks use social media to promote fake gift card offers with the goal of stealing consumers’ information and money, which is then sold to marketers or used for ID theft.

One recent Facebook scam offered a “free US\$1,000 Best Buy gift card” to the first 20,000 people who signed up for a Best Buy fan page, which was a look-a-like. To apply for the gift card they had to provide personal information and take a series of quizzes.

How to teach kids the value of money this Holiday Season



For most children the holiday season is a wonderful time, with tasty treats, vacation from school, and plenty of toys and gifts that seem to magically appear.

Of course, parents know it’s not magic -- those gifts cost money! Not having to worry about that part of it is a gift found only in childhood, but young children do need to learn to appreciate the value of a dollar.

When children are ‘spoiled’ and never taught the value of money, parents have neglected to empower them with the ability to budget and prioritize resources. As a start a percentage of money children earn or receive as gifts this holiday season should be put aside for at least one of four pockets.

Fun and games

Children need to know that the entertainment they consume on a regular basis – including TV, movies, internet and video games – isn’t free. Having them help pay for a video game or a summer trip is a direct and concrete way for a child to experience the necessity of giving up something in order to gain something they’d like to have. It also helps them become

more discerning about requests for toys, games and outings.

God Pocket

While the ability to save money is a virtue to a child’s future well-being, giving part of one’s savings to a higher purpose is a way of acting on their values. Giving donations to a church, charity or to buy a friend a treat teaches children that money isn’t the ultimate goal in life.

Saving for the future

Can a child always predict her money needs to the last dollar? Can adults? Of course not, and that’s why a pocket for general expenses is useful. It could be that a charitable effort takes off within the community, which could require travel. Or, she may accidentally break a window while playing catch with her friend. However the money may be needed for future use, it’s great to be able to supplement the other pockets with savings.

Your city councillors wish you

*Happy Holidays
and Happy New Year!*



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SAINT-BRUNO

Aglaia Revelakis
CHOMEDEY

Achille Cifelli
VAL-DES-ARBRES

Isabelle Piché
SAINT-FRANÇOIS

Paolo Galati
SAINT-VINCENT-DE-PAUL

As people seek extra cash for gifts this holiday season, Twitter scams offer dangerous links to high-paying, work-at-home jobs. Users are asked to supply personal information such as their email address, home address and Social Security number to apply for the fake job.

Cybercrooks are now “smishing,” or sending phishing SMS texts. These texts appear to come from your bank or an online retailer, saying that there is something wrong with an account and you must call to verify your information. In reality, these efforts are merely a ruse to extract valuable personal information from the targets. Cybercrooks know that people are more vulnerable to this scam during the holiday season when consumers are doing more online shopping and checking bank balances frequently.

During peak travel times when consumers often look online for affordable holiday rentals, cybercrooks post fake holiday rental sites that ask for down payments on properties by credit card or wire transfer.

Scammers target vulnerable consumers with recession related scams such as pay-in-advance credit schemes. McAfee Labs has seen a significant number of spam emails advertising prequalified, low-interest loans and credit cards if the recipient pays a processing fee, which goes directly into the scammer's pocket.

E-cards are a convenient and earth-friendly way to send greetings to friends and family, but cybercriminals load fake versions with links that spread computer viruses and other malware instead of cheer. According to McAfee Labs, computers may start displaying obscene images, pop-

Shoppers should be cautious of products offered at prices far below competitors. Cyber scammers use auction sites and fake websites to offer too-good-to-be-true deals with the goal of stealing your money and information.

The holidays have historically been a prime time for charity scams since it's a traditional time for giving, and McAfee Labs predicts that this year is no exception. Common ploys include phone calls and spam e-mails asking you to donate to veterans' charities, children's causes and relief funds for the latest catastrophe.

Holiday-themed screensavers, jingles and animations are an easy way for scammers to spread viruses and other computer threats, especially when links come from an email or IM that appears to be from a friend.

During the holidays many people travel and use free wi-fi in places like hotels and airports. This is a tempting time for thieves to hack into networks hoping to find opportunities for theft.

- Stick to well-established and trusted sites that include trust marks (icons or seals from third parties verifying that the site is safe), user reviews and customer support. A reputable trust mark provider will have a live link attached to its trust mark icon, which will take visitors to a verification Web site of the trust mark provider.

- Do not respond to offers that arrive in a spam email, text or instant message.
- Preview a link's web address before you click on it to make sure it is going to an established

- Make sure to use trusted wi-fi networks. Don't check bank accounts or shop online if you're not sure the network is safe.

Sellers are offering phoney proof-of-vaccination documents for several provinces that apparently look just like the real thing. Some of them even claim to be able to enter the data from the fake certificates into official government databases.

Provincial health authorities call into question sellers' claims that they can ensure the fake vaccination data is inserted into government databases.

Some sellers' claims that they have access to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control's website of vaccinated people across Europe and can register their customers there.



Cybersecurity experts implore governments around the world to come together on a unified global database to verify legitimate vaccination certificates.

Till that happens unvaccinated people will have easy and cheap access to forged documents, but those documents now appear to link to credible-looking websites, making it even easier for fraudsters to slip through the net.

Canada's decentralized approach — with each province running its own proof-of-vaccination system — has created an opening for the sellers.



Construction of Giant Steps Autism Centre gets underway

Ground broken for comprehensive new facility at Technopôle Angus



MARTIN C. BARRY
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter
For The Laval News
marty@newsfirst.ca

A groundbreaking ceremony was held on Dec. 13 marking the start of construction of the Giant Steps Autism Centre, a new facility that supporters say will make Quebec a leader in autism education, research and services across Canada.

Excavation work began this month and the doors of the centre are scheduled to open in the summer of 2023. A state-of-the-art building with a surface area of 66,500 square feet is being erected in the Technopôle Angus neighbourhood of the City of Montreal's Rosemont district.

Designed by the architectural firm Provencher Roy, the centre will be meeting specific sensory and perceptual needs of autistic people, particularly in terms of the organization of spaces, the choice of materials and the types of lighting used.

Focused on four services

The Giant Steps Autism Centre will offer lifelong services grouped into four areas: the Giant Steps School, the Adult Education and Employment Centre, the Resource and Community Centre and the Research and Innovation Hub.

With a major investment of \$15 million by the Quebec government as well as contributions from donors from the private sector and the autism community, 84 per cent of the total fundraising goal has been reached, although more than \$7 million is still to be raised.

As part of the 'Take a Giant Step for Autism' fundraising campaign which is still underway, the organization is looking to raise the balance in the private sector as well as from the federal government.

'Simply delighted,' said Metropolis Minister

"A few weeks after announcing the government's investment in the construction of the Centre À pas de Géant, we are already at the ground-breaking, and I am simply delighted," said Minister Responsible for the Metropolis and the Montréal Region Chantal Rouleau who was among those attending the groundbreaking.

"I am very proud that this project is taking root here in Montreal, at the heart of one of our most inclusive living environments," she added. "This centre, which will reach many young people and adults with autism, will benefit their close friends and loved ones, their families, and the entire community."



Officials from the Quebec government, from the Giant Steps School and from Technopôle Angus are seen here on Dec. 13 ceremonially turning the first ground for the future Giant Steps Autism Centre (inset) scheduled to be completed by the summer of 2023.

A 'milestone,' said Roberge

"This is a major milestone not only for the Giant Steps Centre, but also, and especially, for young people living with an autism spectrum disorder and for their families," Minister of Education Jean-François Roberge said in a statement.

"These young people will soon have access to a school environment designed and built with their specific needs in mind. I am very happy for the young people who will attend this school. The support they will receive there will enable them to develop their full potential."

A major step taken

"It is a real pleasure for us to welcome and contribute directly to the development of this unique project, which is so close to our hearts," said Christian Yaccarini, president and CEO of the Société de développement Angus. "The start of construction is just one of the major steps ahead that will reinforce our pride in being part of it."

Lavaller, Nick Katalifos, a long-time member of the Giant Steps School board of directors, said the groundbreaking was the culmination of years of efforts by everyone in the Giant Steps community. "It was very emotional for all of us," he said.

"We're all thrilled. It was a lot of hard work by a lot of good people. There was a big, big group of people who were involved with this.

We are extremely grateful to all of our donors and supporters, as well as to the provincial government for supporting the project."

More inclusive society

Among autism experts and community supporters, there is a growing conviction that autistic adults have the potential to become active members of the workforce and to contribute actively to the post-Covid economic recovery now getting underway, as well as to the development of a more inclusive society.

While news report suggest that a critical labour shortage is holding back the province's economic recovery, supporters from the autism community say a surprising majority of adults with autism (approximately 86 per cent) are still unemployed or are underemployed.

However, they add, many employers who have hired autistic individuals report above average overall job performance, less absenteeism, higher levels of accuracy in their tasks and other positive qualities. They say there are also many positive impacts on company culture, on the pride of other employees, on a company's image and even on customer loyalty.

Building for the future

Having already assisted many autistic adults find employment with Quebec companies, Giant Steps administrators say they are determined to continue in this direction. They believe

that by helping people with autism build on their positive characteristics and strengths, sharing their knowledge, and partnering with businesses and organizations, they will create a more inclusive society and new opportunities for everyone.

"There is a clear business case for hiring autistic individuals," said Andre Pereira, Project Manager – Employment Initiatives at Giant Steps School. "This is not about charity or social responsibility, but rather about creating a more diversified workforce with employees who think outside the box, are loyal, productive and detail-oriented."

A unique approach

Giant Steps has been regarded as one of the leaders in autism education for more than 40 years. The school's intensive educational and therapeutic programs, offered in both French and English to 90 students ages 4 to 21, are recognized as unique in Quebec and have been emulated worldwide.

"Giant Steps provides a learning environment where the diversity and unique strengths of each individual are celebrated," said Thomas Henderson, director-general of Giant Steps School. "Today's event reminds us that we will soon be able to do more and better to enable people with autism to develop to their full potential."



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Roche's SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Self Test approved under Health Canada's Interim Order

CNW Telbec/ - Roche Diagnostics, division of Hoffmann-La Roche Limited, based in Laval, Quebec, has announced an important step forward in the fight against the pandemic: The SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Self Test Nasal has received approval under Health Canada's Interim Order. This new rapid test is commercialized by Roche under an exclusive Global distribution agreement with SD Biosensor Inc. It can be performed at home and congregate settings providing Canada's provincial and territorial health care systems with a new option for decentralized testing.

With results ready in 15 minutes, the SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Self Test Nasal increases Canada's testing capacity to detect infections and control outbreaks.

The SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Self Test Nasal enables individuals to test themselves quickly and conveniently at home using a short nasal swab for easier sampling.

This nasal test is intended for symptomatic and asymptomatic self-use, providing reliable results within 15 minutes, allowing informed decisions including rapid isolation.

The test will be available in packs of five tests to individuals through locations in accordance with local public health testing guidelines.

This test procures easy and safe handling using the pre-filled tubes, which reduces handling errors and waste. Also, virus inactivation by extraction buffer increases protection of users.

"The approval of this at-home test is an important advance in Canada's answer to COVID-19 as testing remains crucial to preventing its spread," said Peter Geimer, National Healthcare Director



SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Self Test Nasal Kit content: 5 test devices (individually in foil pouch with desiccant), 5 extraction buffer tubes, 5 nozzle caps, 5 sterile nasal swabs, 1 tube holder, the instruction for use and quick reference guides. (CNW Group/Roche Diagnostics Canada)

- Point of Care at Roche Diagnostics. With the reopening of Canada's economy and the relaxation of some sanitary measures for outdoor and indoor activities such as the capacity for mass gatherings including festivals and events, rapid self testing would enable fast decision-making and rapid isolation, thus reducing the risk of further spreading the virus."

The SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Self Test Nasal collects the sample from the front area of the nose resulting in a simplified and faster testing procedure.² By following simple instructions, individuals can perform the test at home or a

suitable place using a nasal swab without special training or the supervision of a healthcare worker. The test provides results in as little as 15 minutes and can help people to conveniently check if they are likely to be infectious from the comfort of their home.

"Thanks to our high-quality and reliable SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Self Test Nasal, Canadians are now empowered to make safer decisions to protect themselves and others. Since this test is easy to carry and use, it can be performed whenever and wherever needed, ensuring appropriate measures are taken in case of a

positive result, said Michele D'Elia, Executive Director, Medical and Scientific Affairs at Roche Diagnostics. This test offers an additional tool to current screening methodologies already in place and facilitates testing in places where laboratory instruments are not available and quick results are needed, such as nursing homes, educational settings like universities and other congregate settings. From an economic recovery perspective, rapid testing can play an important role by helping to reduce the risk of outbreaks at workplaces and thus ensure the stability and functioning of their operations."

The main use cases of the self-test

The SARS-CoV-2 Antigen Self-Test Nasal allows frequent testing for those at risk of exposure without having to see a healthcare professional first. It also helps protect others as fast results offer more confidence about returning to normal life activities. Quick self-test verification reassures and contextualizes minor symptoms after potential exposure. According to local public health guidelines, this screening tool could be used to provide access to certain locations using rapid test results.³

In addition to diagnostic testing, preventive measures remain key for protection against SARS-CoV-2. It is recommended to continue wearing masks, socially distance and practice good hygiene. Roche Diagnostics praises the efforts of healthcare providers and frontline workers in communities all around Canada



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Québec

The Riverains de Laval win 2021 Monteuil de Laval tournament

Local hockey team prevails under pressure to become champions

(TLN) After a rough 1-0 overtime loss in the quarter finals, the Riverains de Laval had one thing in mind: to win the 2021 Monteuil de Laval tournament.

So, after a hard battle and a 5-0 record in the tournament, the Riverains finally brought the championship home.

According to Riverains management, it had been a challenging year-and-a-half for everyone, but mostly for the young hockey players who had missed a whole year of their sport.

Off to a good start

The game started with a bang, and it only took the Riverains 2:01 to get on the board with a beautiful goal by Dayron Jimenez-Giraldo, assisted by Davide Petrangelo. It then took 1:29 for Gianluca Garippo to put his team ahead 2-0 with the help of Justin Iannetti and Ethan L'Ecuyer.

The period ended with a 2-0 lead. After two periods, it was 2-1 for the Riverains and their goalie Ayoub Halhoul stood on his toes to ensure his team was in a good spot entering the third period.

The third period started with another quick goal by Gianluca Garippo with a snipe top corner to ease the stress off the team.

Empty net goal

At the end of the period, the battle between both Laval teams was intense and incredible to watch. However, with only a minute left in the game, Justin Iannetti secured the lead for his team and pulled off an empty net goal.

With only seconds remaining, the team began to celebrate. Finally, when all was said and done and the final buzzer went off, the Riverains threw their gloves and helmets high with excitement because they could finally call themselves champions.

They got the job done

According to team management, it was not an easy journey despite what anyone says. They worked hard every shift and in every game with one goal in mind and they got the job done.

With the hard work of all the players, the encouragement from all the parents, the dedication of the coaching staff and, most importantly, the hard work of manager Paolo Girardi, Riverains de Laval are the champions of the 2021 Monteuil de Laval tournament.



HEAD COACH Tony Polito Assistant Coach Richard Guillaume Assistant Coach Samuel Latreille



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LPD seeks two suspects wanted for arson incident



The Laval Police Department is asking members of the public for help in identifying two suspects who are believed to have threatened to commit arson at a residential condo building in Sainte-Dorothée.

On Dec. 6 around 10:50 pm, the two male suspects turned up in the entrance lobby of the building, after which they made their way to an apartment where they left a device for the purpose of starting a fire.

The LPD hasn't revealed who the target of the threat was, nor the extent of any ensuing damage.

The first suspect is a Black male, 6'3" tall, weighing around 250 lbs. At the time of the incident, he was wearing blue slacks with a Nike logo and blue and white shoes. He spoke French.

The other suspect was a Black male, 5'7" tall, weighing around 150 lbs. He was wearing a black coat, black slacks and black and

white shoes. Anyone who believes they have information that could help the LPD find these individuals is encouraged to call the LPD's Info-Line at 450 662-INFO (4636).

Autoroute 15 closes after driver slams into overhead sign

The southbound Autoroute 15 towards Montreal reopened to traffic on Dec. 14 after it had to be closed for a few hours by the Quebec Ministry of Transport following the collision by a car with the structure supporting an overhead piece of signage, weakening and rendering it hazardous.

The heavily-trafficked provincial artery was shut for several hours after 1:50 am between Autoroute 640 and Sainte-Rose Blvd., in order to allow the MTQ to carry out repairs on the signage, a large part of which ended up smashing through the roof of the vehicle after the collision.

The driver, said to be in his 20s, lost control of his vehicle around kilometre 15, leaving the road and slamming into the supports for the signage. He had to be cut with special equipment from the wreck, following which he was taken by ambulance to hospital with serious but not life-threatening injuries.

Laval restaurant shuts temporarily after 30 infected with Covid

The Boating Club restaurant in Laval announced on Dec. 16 it was voluntarily closing for a week after a staff member and about 30 patrons caught COVID-19 during a party at the restaurant.

At least one of the infections linked to the establishment on Curé Labelle Blvd. in Sainte-Roe is believed to be the highly-contagious Omicron variant.

According to Laval public health spokesperson Marie-Eve Despatie-Gagnon, the outbreak may have been an early sign of the virulence of Omicron, a new mutation of the Covid virus. The restaurant closed voluntarily rather than being ordered to shut by local health authorities.

Last week, Laval was tied with the City of Montreal for the third-highest COVID-19 rate in Quebec. Both had 259 active cases per 100,000 population.

Distribution of gifts and toys



On Saturday December 18, nearly 50 police officers and employees of the LPD were distributing gifts to the children selected as part of the Sharing Tree on a voluntary basis! In total, 400 children were visited by the police.

The Police Department would like to thank the great generosity of all the donors and their partners Rocket de Laval and Guy Saint-Jean Éditeur who made this second edition a great success!



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DIRECT? ANSWERS

From Wayne & Tamara

Provenance

Q I met my now husband seven years ago. When I first met him, he was getting out of a tumultuous relationship with a woman who ended up pulling a gun on us one night. It was horrible.

Another night we drove up to his house and found a "box of love" that she left. In it was everything he ever gave her. I didn't look, but he told me he brought her pearls and she returned them. I'm not sure what type of pearls, or if it was earrings, a necklace or a bracelet. He just said "pearls" and that he gave them to his mother.

Here we are seven years later, and I had my birthday over this past weekend. At my party, I received a beautiful pearl necklace, bracelet and set of earrings. I was extremely happy and they are beautiful. Twenty minutes later, it felt like a ton of bricks hit me. I thought back to the time this woman returned his gifts.

So I nicely said, "How did you do this without me knowing?" He said, "A little bit at a time." You see, we share a bank account and we both keep an eye on it. So I just said okay, and let it go.

Today, for some reason, I can't let it go and it's making me feel like an unappreciative, selfish person. Maybe I am since I'm thinking this way! We did receive cash from his mom for Christmas, and he put that in a safe place in the house. I saw he deposited some of it in our account, and I believe I accounted for the rest after we used it on a trip.

Should I let this go and be happy with pearls that I'm going to make a family heirloom, to be passed down to my daughter and to her daughter? I don't see any way of asking him, "Are these the pearls you gave so-and-so?" But should that matter?

Kirsten

A Kirsten, in one Zen teaching story two monks, a student and a master, are traveling along a road. When they come to a stream, they see a beautiful young woman unable to cross, so the master picks her up and carries her to the other side. Then the monks resume their travels. Later that night, when the student scolds the master for having intimate contact with a woman, the master replies, "I put her down on the other side. Are you still carrying her?" Sometimes it's hard to know what to put down and what to carry. There are reasons to think these are not the same gems. Would an ex-girlfriend return a set of heirloom-quality pearls? Would someone who pulls a gun be likely to think, "The right thing to do is give them back?"

But even if this woman once had them, after seven years the whammy has worn off the pearls. And if they are not the other woman's, what a horrible thing to bring up to your husband. We look at it this way. Pearls are assets, like bonds, Krugerrands or diamonds. It would be ridiculous to let something of great value go to waste, or to take them to a jewelry store and not receive full value. After seven years it is not regifting. After seven years, they are his.

Our favorite detective story is The Moonstone by Wilkie Collins. In that tale, a gem is stolen from the head of an idol in India and, through treachery, ends up in England. But legend says the jewel will always return where it belongs, and in the end that is what happens.

Perhaps this incident is a sign to let this woman go as if she never existed. Even if she once had the pearls, they have returned to their proper place. They were meant to adorn the woman who is his wife.

Wayne & Tamara

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HOROSCOPE

Week of **DECEMBER 26, 2021 TO JANUARY 1, 2022**

The luckiest signs this week:

SAGITTARIUS, CAPRICORN AND AQUARIUS



ARIES

It would be wise to steer clear of family conflicts, especially if they don't concern you. However, you might be able to save the day helping two relatives bury the hatchet.



TAURUS

You won't be able to sit back and relax at parties. You'll be on your feet serving or otherwise helping out. When it comes to matters of the heart, the magic of the holidays will reignite passion in your relationship.



GEMINI

You'll find yourself the focus of everyone's attention. You can make people laugh with your sarcasm. You might even get a round of applause from time to time, which will give you an ego boost.



CANCER

You'll spend the week with your family. You'll enjoy lots of quality time with your children or elderly parents. You'll also have the opportunity to recharge your batteries. Some time alone at home will spark your imagination.



LEO

You'll be outspoken and assertive, which will help make things run smoothly. You're always right, even if you're not always tactful. The important thing is to get results.



VIRGO

The parties you host are sure to be spectacular despite your limited budget. Your ideas and determination are remarkable. You'll also receive a lot of affection from your partner.



LIBRA

You'll be surprised by how many initiatives you put forward. People will follow you without question, even when you're acting on impulse. You'll organize a unique event at the last minute.



SCORPIO

For some people, now is a good time for recollection. You'll spend some time reflecting on the good and the bad. By taking stock, you'll find that you have a particular openness to some form of spirituality.



SAGITTARIUS

You'll pull off quite a feat, and it'll be remembered for a long time, especially if it involves bringing together people who don't get along very well. If you're single, a co-worker will take advantage of a quiet moment to get to know you.



CAPRICORN

There's lots to do. You'll organize a marvelous event for the whole family, and it'll be a success. Be careful, and make sure the end of the year doesn't catch you off guard just because you didn't prepare enough.



AQUARIUS

You'll buy lottery tickets as a family, and it wouldn't be surprising if you could afford to end the Christmas holidays with a trip. At the very least, you'll have a lot of fun and spoil your loved ones.



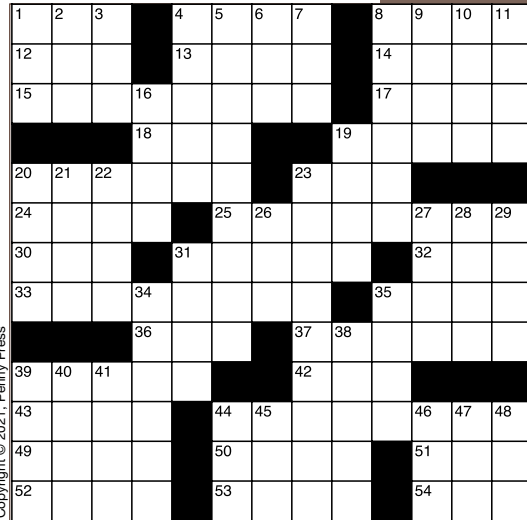
PISCES

A family secret will be revealed to you. You're a sensitive soul, and you'll deliver a moving speech. An emergency at the office will require your attention while you're in the middle of a celebration.

Coffee Break

CROSSWORDS

PUZZLE NO. 108



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ACROSS

1. Vintage
4. Switch
8. Trademark
12. Very small
13. Caesar's garment
14. Sleeping
15. Dawdled
17. Curved roof
18. Olive ____
19. Make holy
20. Marzipan flavoring
23. Slapstick prop
24. Juvenile
25. Collection of clothes
30. Rowboat necessity
31. Farm towers
32. Is allowed to
33. Comes before
35. Mud
36. Head of a suit
37. Corrected text
39. Separate

DOWN

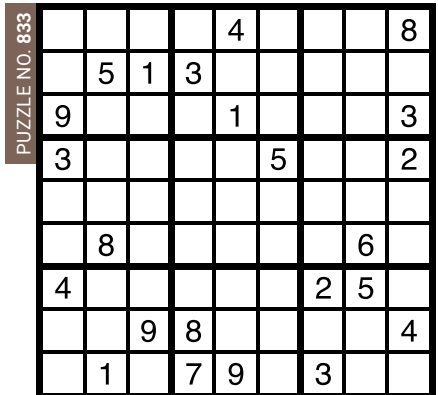
1. Night bird
2. Luau welcome
3. Bear cave
4. Beer mug
5. Global
6. Vital statistic
7. Shoulder enhancer
8. Soup server
9. Clarinet's cousin
10. Valued minerals
11. Keats poems
16. Thug
19. Auction calls
20. On the summit
21. Shakespeare's "King ____"
22. Nothing more than
23. Bring to trial
26. Brewery beverage
27. Forget
28. Unadorned
29. Saw
31. Religious faction
34. Calling
35. Catcher's catcher
38. Loves excessively
39. Copied
40. Game played on horseback
41. Likewise
44. "____ Done Him Wrong"
45. Impose a tariff
46. 19th letter
47. Sharp knock
48. Barnyard pen

Sudoku

HOW TO PLAY:

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 only once.

Each 3x3 box is outlined with a darker line. You already have a few numbers to get you started. Remember: **You must not repeat the numbers 1 through 9 in the same line, column, or 3x3 box.**

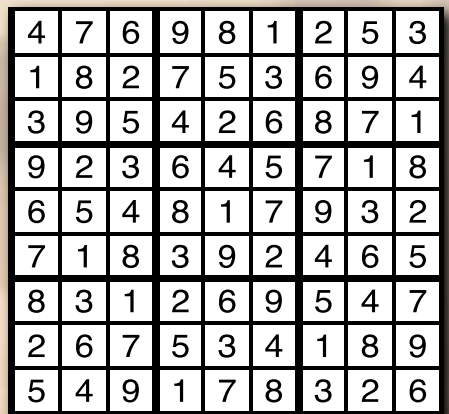


Last Issues' Answers

CROSSWORDS



Sudoku



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