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Teachers' strike continues



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ROGERS Authorized Dealer

Devastating fire engulfs grocery store and mosque in Park Extension

No injuries reported in early morning blaze on Jean-Talon Street

DIMITRIS ILIAS

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A three-alarm fire wreaked havoc in Park Extension early Friday December 15th morning, engulfing a popular grocery store and impacting a mosque located on the second floor of the building. The blaze, which started in the basement, led to the evacuation of nearby residences but, fortunately, resulted in no injuries.

The incident began when employees at BK Marché, who were starting their early shift, heard a startling explosion followed by the sight of smoke rapidly filling the building. The grocery store, a staple in the community with over 50 employees, found itself at the center of a crisis. Approximately 90 firefighters rushed to

the scene at the corner of Jean Talon Street and Bloomfield Avenue just after 6 a.m., battling the flames that originated in the basement. Their swift action was crucial in preventing further damage and ensuring the safety of those in the vicinity.

The event drew several people from the area, who gathered near the site, offering support and solidarity to the store's owner and employees affected by the disaster. This communal response highlighted the close-knit nature of the Park Extension community. Jean Talon Street was closed to traffic between L'Acadie Boulevard and Querbes Avenue throughout the morning, causing significant disruptions. As of now, the fire department continues its investigation into the cause of the fire, seeking to understand the origins of this unexpected tragedy.



Number of patients who died while waiting for medical care hits 5-year high

Over 17,000 patients died before they could be treated with surgery or diagnostic scans, a new report says

By Chandra Philip

The number of patients who have died in Canada while on a waiting list for medical care is at a five-year high, according to a new report.

At least 17,032 patients died while awaiting surgery or diagnostic scans in the study period from April 1, 2022, to March 31, 2023, says the SecondStreet.org report.

"The data consists of cases where patients died waiting for procedures that could have potentially saved their lives (e.g. a heart operation) and procedures that could have improved their quality of life (e.g. hip operation)," the Regina-based public policy think tank said in a Dec. 6 news release.

The report is based on data obtained through freedom-of-information requests filed with government health-care bodies nationwide, including provincial health departments, health regions, and hospitals.

Data from those that provided figures for each of the past five years shows a 64 percent increase in annual surgical waiting list deaths since 2018, the report said.

In total, over 58,600 patients died while waiting for care since April 2018.

The report said the data it contains is under-reported, as some health-care bodies did not track that data in the past or only tracked partial information. However, it said SecondStreet.org was able to obtain "at least partial data from 12 health bodies, altogether covering more than 73% of the population's health care."

"Patients died after waiting anywhere from less than a week to nearly 11 years," the report said.

SecondStreet.org president and report author Colin Craig described the situation as "deplorable." "More money won't solve the problem. Governments have tried that for 30 years. Only meaningful health reform will reduce patient suffering," he said in the news release.

According to the report, per capita government health-care spending has risen from \$1,714 to

\$5,607 since 1992, nearly double the inflation rate.

Mr. Craig said more needs to be done, "At the very least, governments need to do a better job of tracking this problem and assessing just how many patients died because they had to wait too long for surgery."

Recommendations

The report suggested that governments consider partnering with the private sector to improve patient outcomes, where the cost would be covered by government, something Saskatchewan has been doing for over a decade.

Another policy option is to offer more health-care choices.

"Instead of forcing these patients to decide either to wait for the provincial government to provide a particular health procedure or to leave their province (or country) for care somewhere else, the government could keep the public health care system, but allow non-government clinics in Canada to provide the same procedures."

Following the EU system is another option, where patients can travel to other EU countries for care, pay for the procedure, and then be reimbursed by their home government.

"Reimbursements cover up to the amount their government would have spent to provide the surgery locally," the report said.

October 2023 public opinion research commissioned by SecondStreet.org found that 74 percent of Canadians support the EU policy.

Another option is reforming the way hospitals are funded to an activity-based model, where they are paid based on services provided to patients instead of annual cheques that cover nearly everything.

This means "patients are no longer thought of as people 'to have to help' but rather as customers that should be welcomed as they represent additional funding," said the report. "This approach incentivizes output as every patient that receives a surgery or other procedure, results in more funding for the hospital."



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OPINION & Editorial



THAT'S WHAT I'M THINKING

Robert Vairo



Polls, Politics and Power Dictate Policies

I suppose we should not be surprised that our federal government tolerates, perhaps condones scandalous intrusions in the life of Canadian citizens in Québec. After all, most would agree this is a lame and limp bunch of leaders who feel quite comfortable with the Québec government's legal seizure of computers and cell phones in our English universities. And now imposing a French language requirement on visiting English university students. Most in our community are convinced it's an attempt to destroy the English infrastructure in the province. The Feds are busy calling for, well let's see, first, the Israeli right to defend itself, then a ceasefire in the Middle East. All the while capping oil and gas production, taxing burping cattle, and bashing Conservative-led Alberta. These are all desperate attempts at diverting Canadians' attention away from the incompetence and mismanagement of just about every thing the government touches.

Québec though, is the sacred cow of the Liberal party of Canada. The action of Premier Legault's CAQ, and inaction of the Trudeau Liberals, is a nightmare, enough to make one ill. All of Canada suffers when elected bigots in Québec tell English international students not to come here. Ironically, the reason Legault is firing all his cannons at the English population is because he is in a free fall in the polls. And the reason the Trudeau Liberals are refusing to intervene is because they are in a similar catastrophic slide to oblivion, for now. Canada's Federal Government is made to lead, and it is not. Its mandate is to instill unity where there is division, and it has not. It is mandated to seek justice, and act when there is a flagrant violation of rights of Canadian citizens living in Québec. It has not.

We have a government that has mismanaged our economy, immigration, housing, and failed miserably to intervene to right the wrong in this country, including terrorism within our borders. What a sad, frankly revolting state of affairs.

Yet here we are with puffed out chests

preaching to Italy that "Canada is concerned about their LGBT rights," evangelizing to Israel, our environment minister telling China to clean up and shut down its coal mines. Why is Canada sermonizing other countries on what they should or should not be doing? Would we not be at least a bit credible if we were to get our own house in order before throwing stones?

Help our Military

What deserves attention and should be remedied is the fact that members of our armed forces are having to ask for donations so they can afford housing for their families. This is so shameful. Budget cuts to our Armed Forces are so severe (one billion dollars) that the country's Chief of Defence Staff Wayne Eyre told a government committee that Canada cannot help improve "the declining security situation around the world."

Limping Canadian Economy

Why is our economy limping along while that of the US and Europe is flourishing? For example, the US GDP (gross domestic product) is expected to grow almost 5% this year, while Canada's will grow by 0.9%. Economists point to an overabundance of immigration, putting stress not only on health care, and housing, and employment, but Canada's overall economic production. We now have a lower standard of living. Even newly arrived immigrants, and permanent status individuals, are leaving because they cannot afford to live in this once great country.

Accept Canada's values and principles

It's so nice to hear our leaders praise the virtues of diversity as being our strength, but these same leaders should be held accountable for the results. And right now, the results of diversity in Canada are ugly and brutal. No one is in charge.

Critics of our federal government's open-

door policy (allowing legal and illegal newcomers into the country), say no one told these same individuals that if they come to Canada, they must respect and live by their adopted country's values and principles. That's exactly what a recent Leger poll says Canadians are demanding from our federal leaders. It perhaps explains why a war thousands of miles away is having such a terrifying impact on our communities. Most Canadians told Leger pollsters that government and other institutions "should do more to encourage newcomers to Canada to embrace the Canadian values of tolerance of people of other faiths, races, and orientations." Amen.

Homeless in Canada

Statistics are staggering. Financial challenges are said to be the leading cause of homelessness. That may be so, but addiction to opioids is the cause of more daily deaths in Canada than Covid. Ontario, Québec and BC take the lead, with 8 people dying in BC alone, every day. There have been close to 13 thousand since 2016. It has prompted BC's chief coroner Lisa Lapointe to resign "frustrated and disappointed."

She began providing monthly updates, (similar to Covid deaths) to bring awareness to the situation but never got the response or commitment from governments for help.

Ask organizers of Christmas dinners for the underprivileged and homeless. Attendance is reportedly down from several years ago because of fentanyl deaths. The figures have been propped up by a record wave of people losing their homes and unable to afford living.

It's not a vote-getter for politicians, so we are just letting Canadians die on the streets or in their beds, if they have one.

Merry Christmas Dear Nurse

One last item. Who do you remember most when leaving a hospital? Your nurse. God bless our nurses who are missing time with their loved ones, so we can share Christmas with ours. Merry Christmas.

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Montreal clamps down: major overhaul in spending on dining, bonuses, and executive perks

DIMITRIS ILIAS

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In a major policy shift, the City of Montreal, including the borough of Park-Extension, is poised to transform its financial management approach. New regulations targeting restaurant expenses, alcohol consumption, and executive bonuses are set to be implemented city-wide from next month. This comprehensive reform signals the end of discretionary executive spending and the practice of awarding bonuses.

Prompted by the excessive spending scan-

dals uncovered by the Bureau of Investigation this fall, these changes aim to bring a new era of fiscal responsibility across all boroughs, reflecting the community-focused ethos of areas like Park-Extension. Serge Lamontagne, the general director, unveiled these significant reforms during the latest executive committee meeting, setting a precedent for a more accountable and transparent governance structure in Montreal.

End of discretionary expenses

Beginning January, city executives will lose their annual "functional expenses" budget, which previously amounted to several thou-

sand dollars. This fund was primarily allocated for employee recognition and engagement activities, such as Christmas or farewell parties. However, these events are not expected to be completely scrapped. Instead, funds will now be distributed per unit, based on employee numbers, allowing employee committees to oversee their management.

The abolished discretionary fund was previously criticized for its lack of oversight, leading to questionable expenses. A notable instance involved the former president of the executive committee, Dominique Ollivier, who justified a \$347 oyster dinner in Paris as part of this fund.

Stricter rules on meal and alcohol expenses

The city is also clamping down on expenditures for meals and meetings. No exceptions for alcohol reimbursement will be allowed, except during protocol activities. This decision follows revelations about the taxpayer-funded wine served during a meal for Mayor Valérie Plante and guests in Vienna. Moreover, any hospitality expenses exceeding \$100 will now require prior approval and cannot be charged immediately to the City's credit card.

Elimination of performance bonuses

Starting in 2024, Montreal's city executives

will no longer receive performance bonuses. The last of these bonuses will be paid in the spring of 2023, marking an end to an annual expense of around \$7.8 million. This move comes after the Plante administration faced criticism for awarding a double bonus to compensate for the year 2020.

Additionally, new executives will not receive a car allowance, and existing allowances will be reviewed for relevance.

Ongoing review and savings

These reforms are part of a broader review aimed at refining spending directives. While the potential savings are not quantified, these measures are seen as steps toward fiscal responsibility, especially after a 4.9% average increase in residential property taxes for Montrealers.

Mayor Plante emphasized the importance of responsible spending, stating, "We wanted to show how important Montreal taxpayers' money is and we want to spend it well."

The opposition party, Ensemble Montréal, welcomed the end of performance bonuses but pointed out contradictions in the mayor's earlier defense of the double bonus. Opposition leader Aref Salem urged the administration to clarify these inconsistencies.

In summary, the City of Montreal is taking definitive steps to curb unnecessary spending and ensure fiscal responsibility in the wake of public scrutiny and budgetary challenges.



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Quebec teachers' strike continues as salary negotiations crawl

A look at the proposed salary increases

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In the borough of Parc-Extension in Montreal, the impact of the ongoing teachers' strike is particularly palpable. Teachers affiliated with the FAE (Federation Autonome de l'Enseignement) in Quebec, including those in Parc-Extension's schools, have been absent from their classrooms for nearly a month. This situation arises as negotiations with the Quebec government continue at a frustrat-

ingly slow pace. These teachers, are actively voicing their demands for improved working conditions on the streets. A critical concern is the current composition of classes, which in this borough, like many others, are brimming with students who face various challenges. This issue is especially significant in Parc-Extension, where the diverse student population often requires additional resources and support to thrive academically.

Meanwhile, the government has leaked snippets of information about the salary increases it is proposing for teachers. Here's a breakdown

of what these proposed salary increases entail, in addition to the impact of increases already granted in 2021 to make the profession more attractive.

Annual Salary at Entry Level (Step 3)

Governmental offer: \$60,684

Current salary: \$53,541

Before the last collective agreement: \$46,115

The current government proposal represents a 13.34% salary increase for teachers entering the job market. If accepted, the entry-level salary will have risen by 31.59% from 2019 to 2026.

Annual Salary After 13 Years (Step 17)

Governmental Offer: \$104,282

Current Salary: \$92,027

Before the last collective agreement: \$82,585

The government's offer represents a 13.31% salary increase for teachers with 13 years of experience. If this proposal is accepted, the maximum salary for teachers will have seen an increase of 26.27% from 2019 to 2026.

For comparison, the average salary in Quebec was \$60,492 in 2023 and has increased by about 26% since 2019. During the same period, the minimum wage evolved by approximately 27%.

Celebrating community heroes: the 12th VSP Volunteer Recognition Awards

Honouring the heartbeat of Villeray-Saint-Michel-Parc-Extension

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The borough of Villeray-Saint-Michel-Parc-Extension is set to celebrate the invaluable contributions of its volunteers with the prestigious 12th VSP Volunteer Recognition Awards. This highly anticipated event, culminating in a grand Volunteer Party in April 2024, will show-

case the dedication and spirit of the community's unsung heroes.

Categories of Excellence

This year's awards will honour volunteers across five distinct categories, reflecting the diverse ways in which individuals contribute to the community: District of Villeray, District of Parc-Extension, District of Saint-Michel, District of François-Perrault, Emerging Talent (Ages 13-17).

Eligibility and Nomination

To be considered for these prestigious awards, nominees must meet specific criteria: they must have executed a noteworthy volunteer activity within a non-profit organization in Villeray-Saint-Michel-Parc-Extension; their

nomination should come from a member of an NPO partnered with the Borough; the nomination process is streamlined and digital, with submissions due by January 31, 2024.

Each organization is limited to one nomination per category, ensuring a diverse and competitive selection.

A Legacy of Recognition

Since its inception in November 2012, the VSP Volunteer Recognition Awards have become a cornerstone event in the borough. It's not just an award ceremony; it's a testament to the power of community spirit. The awards are a beacon of appreciation, acknowledging the extraordinary efforts of volunteers in each district. A specialized committee carefully reviews each nomination, tasked with the challenging yet rewarding

job of selecting one outstanding individual per category.

The Impact of Volunteering

These awards do more than just honour individuals; they highlight the essence of community service and the impact one person can make. The nominees and winners of the VSP Volunteer Recognition Awards embody the spirit of altruism and community engagement that is vital to the vibrancy and health of Villeray-Saint-Michel-Parc-Extension.

As the borough prepares to celebrate its dedicated volunteers, the excitement and anticipation build. The VSP Volunteer Recognition Awards are not just an event; they are a tribute to the spirit of community and the individuals who tirelessly work to make a difference.



Photo: Louis-Étienne Doré

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HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

4 tips for staying healthy throughout the holidays

With the holidays fast approaching, it can be easy to let your healthy habits slip. Here are four valuable tips to help you navigate the festive season while maintaining your health and happiness.

1. PRIORITIZE NUTRITIOUS CHOICES

While it's tempting to indulge in all the holiday treats, try to incorporate nutritious foods into your meals as much as possible. Fill your plate with delicious fruits and vegetables, lean proteins and whole grains. However, don't obsess about eating too much. Spoiling yourself during festive meals is good for your mental health.

2. STAY ACTIVE

Schedule time for physical activity, even if it's just a short walk after meals, dancing to festive music or ice skating with the family. Exercise helps boost your mood and improves your overall well-being. Move your body to feel good, not to make yourself feel less guilty about having overindulged.

3. MANAGE STRESS

The holiday season can be exhausting and stressful. Prioritize self-care by engaging in activities that help you relax and un-

wind. This could include meditation, deep breathing exercises or engaging in hobbies you enjoy. Setting healthy boundaries with your family and seeking support when needed can also alleviate stress.

4. GET ENOUGH SLEEP

During the festivities, it's crucial to prioritize sleep. Aim for seven to nine hours of good-quality sleep each night. A well-rested body and mind are better equipped to handle the demands of the holiday season while also supporting your overall health.



Remember, the holidays are a time to celebrate and enjoy yourself, but taking care of your health should remain a priority.

Celebrate a green Christmas with these 5 eco-friendly tips



The holiday season is often a time of over-indulgence and excess. However, it's essential to remember that the choices you make during this festive period can impact the environment. This year, celebrate a green Christmas by incorporating eco-friendly practices into your traditions.

1. GIFT-GIVING

Choose thoughtful and sustainable gifts such as experiences, homemade treats or eco-friendly products. Wrap presents in recycled or reusable materials like brown paper and fabric to reduce waste.

2. CHRISTMAS TREE

If possible, choose a live, potted Christ-

mas tree that can be replanted after the holidays. Alternatively, opt for an artificial tree made from recycled materials, which you can reuse for several years.

3. DECORATIONS

Use LED lights for your Christmas tree and decorations, as they consume significantly less energy than incandescent lights.

4. FOOD

Plan holiday meals with locally sourced, organic and seasonal ingredients to support local farmers and reduce your carbon footprint. Minimize food waste by repurposing leftovers or composting.

5. REUSE AND RECYCLE

Encourage guests to bring reusable containers for leftovers to minimize single-use plastic waste. Set up designated recycling bins to ensure proper disposal of recyclable items throughout the celebration.

Embracing these eco-friendly tips will help you enjoy a meaningful Christmas with loved ones while taking care of the environment.

*May you be blessed
by the spirit of the season!*

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À toutes les citoyennes et tous les citoyens que j'ai l'honneur de représenter, à tous les groupes, organismes communautaires et commerces avec lesquels j'ai le plaisir de collaborer ainsi qu'à toutes les Québécoises et tous les Québécois de tous les horizons, **je vous souhaite de joyeuses fêtes!**

To all the citizens that I have the honour to represent, to all the groups, community organizations and businesses with which I have the pleasure to collaborate as well as to all Quebecers of all horizons, I wish you happy holidays!

– **Andrés Fontecilla**
Député de Laurier-Dorion



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HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

3 alternative ways to give back this Christmas

The holidays are a time for giving, but it doesn't always have to mean buying gifts. There are other ways to give during Christmas that are just as meaningful, if not more so. Here are three alternative ways to give back during Christmas.

1. VOLUNTEER

Many community organizations need volunteers during the holidays. Consider helping out at a soup kitchen, homeless shelter or animal shelter. You could also volunteer to help with holiday events, such as carolling at a nursing home or wrapping gifts for children in need.

2. DONATE

Many organizations help vulnerable people during the holidays. You could donate money, food or clothing to a charity you care about. You could also donate your time to help with fundraising or other activities.



3. BE KIND

The holidays are a time for kindness, so do something simple like holding the door open for someone or

giving up your seat on the bus. You could also get more involved, like organizing a food drive or lending a helping hand to a neighbour.

By exploring alternative ways to give back during Christmas, you can spread the true spirit of the season and make a lasting impact on the lives of others.



5 random acts of kindness for a meaningful Christmas

Christmas is a season of love, joy and giving. What better way to embrace its spirit than by spreading kindness to others? Here are five random acts of kindness to make this holiday season truly meaningful.

1. GIFT OF WARMTH

As the winter chill sets in, consider donating blankets, coats or warm clothing to local shelters or organizations supporting people in need.

2. SURPRISE TREATS

Prepare a batch of homemade cookies or treats and share them with your neighbours, co-workers or even strangers you encounter during your day.

3. HELP THE ELDERLY

Reach out to senior citizens in your community who may be spending Christmas alone. Offer to run errands, decorate their homes or simply spend quality time with them.

4. SECRET SANTA FOR A CAUSE

Organize a Secret Santa gift exchange among friends or colleagues, but with a twist. Instead of gifts, each participant donates to a charity.

5. SPREAD POSITIVITY

Write heartfelt letters or cards expressing gratitude and love to individuals who have made a difference in your life. Whether it's a mentor, friend or family member, your words of appreciation will brighten their day and strengthen the bond you share.

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ICI Television throws a party to celebrate its first 10 years

Montreal's sole independent ethnic station serves 17 cultural communities

MARTIN C. BARRY
marty@newsfirst.ca

The entrepreneurial family behind one of Canada's most ambitious multicultural broadcast media ventures hosted a celebration for its many loyal clients and supporters in Montreal last week to mark the anniversary of its first decade of operation.

ICI Television, an independent multicultural station with its transmitter near downtown Montreal on top of Mount Royal, has seen its share of challenges over the past 10 years.

David vs. Goliath

But, as in the storied biblical tale of David and Goliath, ICI Television overcame initially great odds against a mighty foe, to gather a loyal following of supporters and a comprehensive schedule of programming in 17 languages.

Although ICI Television has undergone

several transformations over the years, the station's most recent incarnation dates back to 2013. That's when Mohammad Norouzi, a Persian Montrealer, struck a deal with Rogers



Silvana Di Flavio and Angela Mariani were the Master of ceremonies.



A number of ICI Television's content producers were presented by Sam Norouzi with recognition awards during the station's 10th anniversary celebration at the Volare Plaza Hotel on Côte de Liesse Rd. in Montreal. Among them Maria Santz. (Photo: Martin C. Barry, Newsfirst Multimedia)



ICI Television founder and president Mohammad Norouzi, centre, is seen here during the anniversary celebration with his son, Sam, senior vice-president and general manager of ICI, along with Sam's two children. (Photo: Martin C. Barry, Newsfirst Multimedia)

Media to support ICI Television.

ICI first started airing programming in December 2013, taking on the role as Montreal's sole dedicated multicultural television broadcaster.

CBC's pre-emptive strike

However, not long before this, the aforementioned Goliath (a.k.a. CBC/Radio-Canada) came along. The federal government-owned national network claimed in a lawsuit, filed pre-emptively in March 2013, that ICI Television's branding violated a Radio-Canada claim to "Ici" as a registered trademark.

In spite of that, ICI Television has managed to survive and even flourish for 10 years in an increasingly turbulent mass media environment.

As for the CBC, they recently announced a hiring freeze, as well as plans to cut 600 jobs to help make up for an anticipated \$125-million shortfall. This in spite of the more than \$1 billion in funding CBC/Radio-Canada receives from the federal government annually.

The 'power of dreams'

"A decade ago, an ambition was realized when ICI Television was born," Sam Norouzi, Mohammad's son who is senior vice-president and general manager of ICI, told a gathering of several hundred guests at the Volare Plaza Hotel on Côte de Liesse Rd.

They celebrated with beverages from an open bar, before enjoying a lavish seafood buffet and a full-course meal.

Sam called the station's success "a testament to the power of dreams, hard work and the unwavering support of our viewers, partners and dedicated teams," while adding that "we have strived to provide quality content that entertains, informs and resonates with our

diverse audiences."

Video clip from Trudeau

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who normally might issue a written congratulatory statement on a PMO letterhead when acknowledging a significant milestone by a person or organization, sent a videotaped message several minutes long, suggesting the high regard he has for ICI Television.

"To everyone celebrating this evening and to all of you who've worked so hard in the past 10 years, thank you – here is to many more years of success," said the Prime Minister.

In an interview with *Newsfirst Multimedia*, Sam Norouzi pointed out that of the many ownerships ICI Television has been through, the current one under the Norouzi family is the first to have lasted a full ten years. "So, it's quite a milestone, it's quite humbling, and it's a very exciting experience," he said.

Coping with the turbulence

As these are turbulent times for everyone with a stake in mainstream media, Sam acknowledged that ICI Television is not an exception to this trend – although it is managing to cope while maintaining a positive outlook towards the future.

"With the phenomenon of cord-cutting and ad revenues transitioning to streaming services, that effect is compounded and multiplied for ethnic media, because we have to play the same game but with one hand tied behind our back," he said, noting they don't have access to big advertisers because of differences in how ICI's viewership gets rated.

"So, it is a difficult situation," Sam added. "Still, we've been able to survive so far through very responsible management. And, for that reason, we are very optimistic about the future."

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Shield of Athena celebrates 32 years of helping victims of family violence

\$150,000 raised for Second Step Shelter in Laval through 'Lilac Event'



From the left, Chris Ann Nakis, president of the Shield of Athena board of directors, CJAD traffic reporter Debbie Marsellos who helped host the evening, Carole Leblanc, president of Mercedes-Benz Laval and Godmother of the Second Step Resource and Melpa Kamateros. (Photo: Martin C. Barry, Newsfirst Multimedia)

MARTIN C. BARRY
marty@newsfirst.ca

For the last 32 years, when many women and children have been in crisis in the greater Montreal region, they turned to the Shield of Athena for help.

With that in mind, a cross-section of supporters from the community came together recently to raise \$150,000 to help fund Shield of Athena's biggest expansion to date: the Second Step Shelter, which is being built in Laval.

Family violence

The Shield of Athena is a non-profit organization for victims of family violence. It has three points of service in Montreal and Laval, as well as a community outreach department.

Their network offers emergency shelter and professional services to women and their children. Shield of Athena's multilingual

support, intervention and prevention services are also adapted to meet the needs of many of the region's communities.

Thousands reached

As well, the Shield of Athena reaches thousands more through information sessions, publications, videos and media programs offered through their multilingual community outreach.

The Shield of Athena's Lilac Event, which was held at the Palace Convention Centre in mid-November, celebrated the work the Shield and its staff conduct on a daily basis.

As the need for the Shield's services has continued to grow, funds raised will ensure the completion of Laval's only Second Step shelter, while supporting the expansion of Athena's House, the Shield's emergency shelter.

The support they need

Set to open in 2024, the Second Step shelter

will have 17 apartments which will be able to house women and children for up to two years. During their time at the Second Step shelter, the women will receive the specialized support they need to emerge stronger and self-sufficient.

"Our Second Step shelter will be able to house between 34 and 54 people at any given time," Melpa Kamateros, executive director of the Shield of Athena, told 200 supporters who turned out on Nov. 17 at The Palace congress centre in Laval for the Lilac Event.

"On behalf of our entire organization – and the people that their contributions will help to lift up – I cannot thank our community and our sponsors enough for their support."

Just the beginning...

"Our Lilac Event was an incredible success, and this evening is only the beginning of a concerted campaign to increase the support for women and children in crisis," added Chris Ann Nakis, president of the Shield of Athena board of directors.

"Currently, we provide services in 17 languages and to 1,100 women and children annually. Every penny raised is critical to continuing and expanding our work," she said.

"Our ultimate goal is to eradicate violence against women and children," said Carole Leblanc, president of Mercedes-Benz Laval, Godmother of the Second Step Resource, and a Silver level premium donor to the Lilac Event.



Shield of Athena's Lilac Event, held on Nov. 17 at The Palace congress centre in Laval, drew 200 guests who had fun while supporting a great cause. (Photo: Martin C. Barry, Newsfirst Multimedia)

A precious resource

"Unfortunately, until that dream becomes a reality, the women working at the Shield and all the resources they provide are so very precious to our community," Leblanc said.

In addition to a host of individual donors, premium sponsors of the Lilac Event were: The Azrieli Foundation (Platinum), Schwartz's (Gold), Global Montreal (Media), ICI Television (Media), Mercedes-Benz Laval (Silver), Banque Scotia (Silver), Pantazis and Associates (Silver) and The Papadimitriou Family (Silver).



Photo: Martin C. Barry, Newsfirst Multimedia

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Ali Ngarukiye found guilty of attempted murder of Montreal police officer

DIMITRIS ILIAS

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter for Parc-Extension News
dimitri@newsfirst.ca

In a significant development, Ali Ngarukiye has been found guilty by a Montreal jury on Wednesday of the attempted murder of a city police officer, along with several other charges stemming from a 2021 incident.

The 2021 Attack on Officer Sanjay Vig

The incident that led to Ngarukiye's conviction occurred in January 2021 in Parc-Extension. During a routine traffic stop on January 28, Ngarukiye attacked Officer Sanjay Vig. In a shocking turn of events, he managed to disarm the officer and fired his service weapon before fleeing the scene. This act of violence prompted an immediate and intensive investigation by Montreal police.

Wrongful Arrest of Mamadi III Fara Camara

The attack had far-reaching consequences, leading to the wrongful arrest of Mamadi III Fara Camara, who was present at the site of the attack. Camara faced charges of attempted murder and was detained for six days. However, he was released shortly after when further investigations cleared him of any involvement in the attack on Officer Vig.

The Capture of Ngarukiye

Ngarukiye's apprehension came nearly two months after the attack, on March 25, in Toronto. He was already known to the authorities there due to a history of fraud charges. A breakthrough in the case came when DNA traces found at the Montreal crime scene led investigators directly to Ngarukiye. This evidence played a crucial role in his trial and subsequent conviction.

Charges and Conviction

Ali Ngarukiye faced several serious charges, including attempted murder, aggravated assault, disarming a police officer, discharging a firearm, and carjacking. The jury, after hearing all the evidence, found him guilty of all charges.

A Second Trial Awaits

In a further twist, Ngarukiye is also facing charges in a separate case. He is accused of second-degree murder in the death of his cellmate, André Lapierre, at the Rivière-des-Prairies detention center in June 2021. This case adds another layer of complexity to Ngarukiye's legal troubles and highlights the ongoing challenges within the criminal justice system.

The conviction of Ali Ngarukiye marks a significant moment for Montreal's law enforcement, reflecting the city's commitment to bringing perpetrators of violent crimes to justice. However, the incident also raises questions about police procedures and the swift administration of justice, especially in light of the



Elfriede Duclervil, serving as a defence lawyer, represented Ali Ngarukiye during a court proceeding in Montreal. (Photo: Ivanoh Demers/Radio-Canada)

wrongful arrest of Mamadi III Fara Camara. As the city moves forward, these issues will likely continue to be a topic of public and legal discourse.



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DIRECT ANSWERS

FROM WAYNE & TAMARA

THE DEAD

Q I love my wife with all my heart and soul. She is now and will ever be the other half of my heart. Twenty years ago I felt much the same about another woman. She was my first true love. Unfortunately, her parents did not see us having a future together. Although I had a hard time letting go, I respected their wishes.

We both went on to live separate lives. We married different people and had children, and we moved thousands of miles apart. I found out she died yesterday. I did not expect the news to affect me this way, but I am shattered.

I feel the grief of loss, even though her love is something I have not had, nor could hope to have, for the last 20 years. I feel guilt for feeling this grief and do not know how to explain this to my wife. She can see the news affected me. How do I cope with this? Is it appropriate to send my condolences to her husband and children. What would I say?

Guy

Back in their hotel room Gretta, in tears, explains that the song reminded her of a boy she once loved. The boy died after standing in the rain outside Gretta's window the night before she left home. Gabriel then realizes how deeply his wife loved this boy, and he realizes "how poor a part he, her husband, had played in her life."

It's hard to share this memory with your wife without her wondering how poor a part she, your wife, has played in your life. To tell your wife she is the other half of your heart, and then to say 20 years ago you felt the same about another woman, may undermine the sincerity of your words.

And what would you tell the husband and children of your first love? That you are the man who should have been her husband and their father? That won't help them. There is no reason to feel guilt, but you should realize this is all about you, your feelings, and your imagining of what might have been.

We suggest two things. Write out all your feelings, perhaps even the entire story of your relationship, in private. In the writing you may come to understand why her death has affected you so deeply. And get a book on grieving as a way to get in touch with your emotions and accept her death. Some things must be faced alone.

Wayne & Tamara

A Guy, in James Joyce's story "The Dead," a man named Gabriel Conroy goes with his wife Gretta to the annual Christmas dance given by his aunts. At the end of the evening, with most of the guests gone, a tenor sings a song which stirs a memory in Gretta. Gabriel's heart is brimming with happiness because he thinks his wife's thoughts are running with his.

A DAY AWAY

Q My friends and teachers take the mickey out of my name by singing "The Sun Will Come Out Tomorrow" from the musical "Annie." But they replace tomorrow with Tamara, and it really hurts my feelings. What should I do?

Tamara

A Tamara, I bet my bottom dollar you'll be having people use word play on your name not just tomorrow, but for the rest of your life. Like you, I pronounce my name like

the day after today, except the o's become a's and the w is dropped.

People love making puns, and teasing or "taking the mickey out" of a name makes them feel clever. But isn't the mickey really on them? When you walk into a room, you are able to make people break into a happy show tune, whether they can carry a tune or not. That song makes people smile, and it ends with "I love ya, Tamara." Take it as a compliment and smile with them.

Tamara

WAYNE & TAMARA MITCHELL are the authors of YOUR OTHER HALF (www.yourotherhalf.com)

Send letters to: Direct Answers, PO 964 Springfield, MO 65801-0964

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Details of the Federal Dental Care Plan for Seniors

The federal dental care program, already available to children under the age of 18, will be phased in to Quebecers and low-income Canadians over the age of 65, the Trudeau government announced Monday.

Invoices related to Sun Life dental insurance will be partially or fully reimbursed by federal funds based on the applicants' income.

Letters will be sent to those who are eligible. "Seniors who receive an invitation letter will be able to call Service Canada to apply for membership and will only have to answer a few questions," Public Services and Procurement Minister Jean-Yves Duclos said Monday.

An online application portal is also planned by May.

Applicants must not already have dental insurance and be Canadian residents.

Dental Services Covered

- Preventive services, including descaling (cleaning), polishing, sealants and fluoride

- Diagnostic services, including examinations and x-rays
- Restoration services, including fillings
- Endodontic services, including root canals
- Prosthodontic services, including removable full and partial dentures
- Periodontal services, including deep scaling
- Oral surgery services, including extractions

Total repaid based on adjusted family net income

- \$70,000 or less: 100%
- Between \$70,000 and \$80,000: 60%
- Between \$80,000 and \$90,000: 40%

Dates from which applications will be accepted

- Seniors aged 87 and older: December 2023
- Aged 77 to 86: January 2024
- Aged 72 to 76: February 2024
- Aged 70 to 71: March 2024
- Aged 65 to 69: May 2024

Dentists and their patients still have questions about the Canadian Dental Care Plan

After the announcement that eligible seniors will be invited to apply for enrollment in the Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP) starting this month, and care could begin as early as May 2024, many questions remain. It is unclear how this new program will affect patients and dentists across the country. The CDCP will only succeed if the federal government taps into the expertise of practising dentists, through their provincial and territorial dental associations, right at the start.

The CDCP is intended to help millions of people without dental benefits access essential oral health care. Although this is an historic investment, the CDCP has been developed under tight timelines and with limited involvement of practising dentists. It is critical that the government has a full understanding of the impact it will have on patients trying to access the program.

Despite an announcement about the start of patient enrollment, Canadians still don't know:

- Will I be allowed to choose my own dentist?
- Will the plan replace my current work, school and/or group dental benefits?
- What will happen to any other public dental programs that I am already eligible for?
- Will the plan be easy to use or will there be needless administrative hurdles and red tape?
- What will I have to pay for my dental care?

Patients are already asking their dentists these questions, but the answers they need from the federal government aren't yet clear.

Since the first federal announcement almost two years ago, dental associations have clearly said they know how to build a plan that will work for patients, dentists, and taxpayers. As experts in oral healthcare delivery, dentists

across Canada prepared their advice to the federal government in [A Proposed Framework for the Canadian Dental Care Plan](#), which was shared publicly in November. The comprehensive and actionable framework is based on decades of data, research and expert input from practising dentists across regions and specialties. It outlines ways in which the CDCP could be successfully implemented.

While some of the information was considered by Health Canada, the dental associations see some important concerns and gaps that need to be filled. Recently, the dental associations met with Health Canada to outline this framework and their remaining questions. Today's announcement reveals that there is still more to discuss and much more work to be done before the plan can launch.

In the meantime, to address some of the immediate concerns surrounding the CDCP, the provincial and territorial dental associations:

- Remind patients not to delay treatments or dental appointments. Regular checkups now can help catch problems before they become painful and expensive to treat.
- Strongly encourage employers and other groups to keep the dental benefits for their employees and members, so they don't lose access to care.
- Urge the government to implement a coordinated plan to increase skilled labour for dental offices. Without it, patients could face delays in getting the dental care they need.

Dental associations look forward to working with federal government officials to help them with their implementation plans for the CDCP. Dentists want to help make great access to care a reality for everyone.

HOROSCOPE

Week of DECEMBER 24 TO 30, 2023

The luckiest signs this week:
LEO, VIRGO AND LIBRA



ARIES

You'll use your persuasion skills to avoid being pushed around, ensuring everything runs smoothly. You're right, even if the way you express yourself may lack delicacy. The main thing is to obtain satisfactory results.



TAURUS

Your festivities are sure to be spectacular even if you're on a tight budget, thanks to your creative ideas and determination. You'll also show a great deal of affection for your partner.



GEMINI

The new ideas you come up with will amaze even you. Your enthusiasm will be contagious, and others will follow you, whatever your plans. You'll succeed in organizing a memorable party.



CANCER

Now is a time of reflection and introspection for some people. Take the time to recognize your successes and failures and open your mind to a new form of spirituality.



LEO

You'll be responsible for a great achievement that will be remembered for a long time, especially if you manage to bring together people who don't get along. If you're single, a colleague will take advantage of this quiet time to get closer to you.



VIRGO

You have a lot to organize to create a memorable event for your family. Don't let yourself be caught off guard. Make sure everything is ready in time for Santa's arrival. Otherwise, the children will be disappointed.



LIBRA

Organizing a family lottery could give you the chance to round off the festive season with a trip. Either way, there's plenty of fun to be had. You'll show great generosity toward your loved ones.



SCORPIO

You'll be told a family secret at a party. You'll give a speech that will move everyone. You'll also be needed to sort out an emergency at work, even if you're at a party.



SAGITTARIUS

Don't get involved in family quarrels, especially if they don't involve you. Otherwise, you'll play the role of referee to help resolve conflicts between family members.



CAPRICORN

You'll be proactive at gatherings and won't sit idly by. You may help serve the guests. The atmosphere of the holiday season will strengthen the love between you and your partner.



AQUARIUS

You'll be the focus of attention, making people laugh with your cheeky quips. You may even receive some applause, which will naturally flatter your ego.



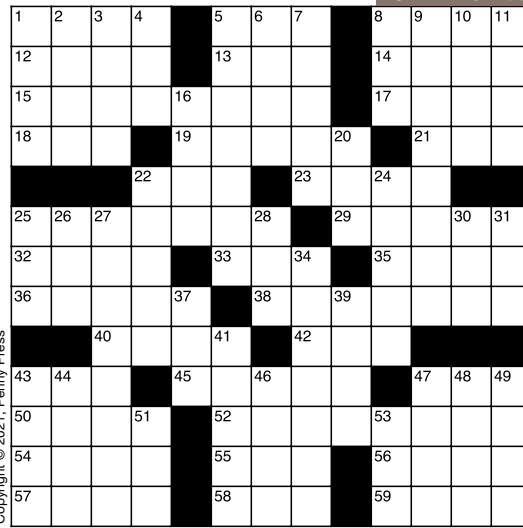
PISCES

For part of the week, you'll be with your family or taking care of your children or elderly parents. You'll also be allowed to recharge your batteries. The peace and solitude of home will stimulate your creativity.

Coffee Break

CROSSWORDS

PUZZLE NO. 163



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ACROSS

1. Bass bait
5. Secret agent
8. Venomous serpents
12. Notion
13. Shoe tip
14. Halt!
15. Scary creatures
17. Welfare
18. Con's companion
19. Made a choice
21. Guided
22. Lid
23. Eternal spirit
25. Decorate again
29. Felony
32. Opera highlight
33. Water barrier
35. Objective
36. Nervous
38. Nurtures
40. Dateless
42. Get free of
43. False front

DOWN

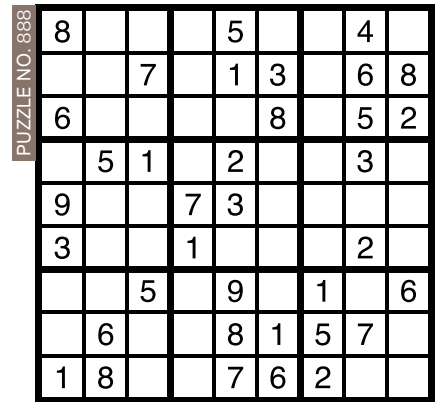
45. Proportion
47. Cut wood
50. British title
52. Octopus's arm
54. Row of seats
55. Timetable info
56. Grate
57. Nothing but
58. _____ Moines
59. Snag
20. One of Snow White's seven
22. Shore
24. Encouraged
25. Informer
26. Before, to poets
27. Medieval singer
28. Race circuit
30. Thick pad
31. Subways' cousins
34. Boat basins
37. Cock an _____
39. Uproar
41. Like some communities
43. Choir voice
44. Mint issue
46. Beret filler
47. Read hastily
48. Plus
49. Mourned
51. Thirsty
53. "Raiders of the Lost _____"

Sudoku

HOW TO PLAY:

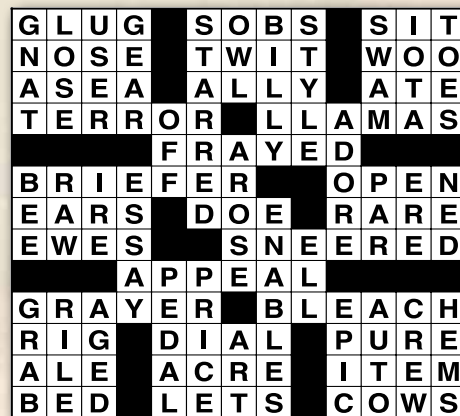
Fill in the grid so that every row, every column, and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 only once.

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.

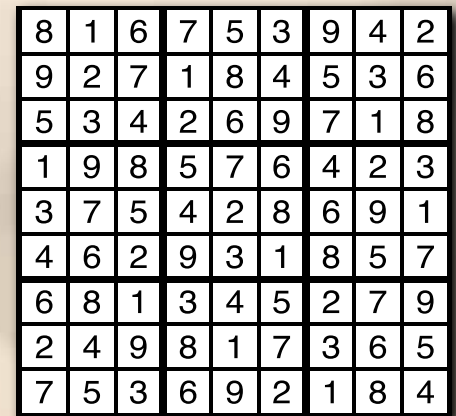


Last Issues' Answers

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Sudoku



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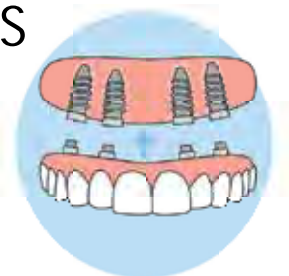
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