

2011 Year in review 2011

In light of what happened in May of 2011, most of what appeared in *The Leader* in the early months of last year looks pretty ordinary. But that's small town news, week to week. Until something big or bad happens.

January

The front page of the first issue of *The Leader* in 2011 did not – as one might expect – feature the first baby born in Slave Lake in the New Year. That was a bit late in coming, so we ran a photo of a pair of skiers from out of town, enjoying the deep snow and pristine forest landscape on the Nine Mile trails near Widewater. Exactly a year after that photo was taken, there not only wasn't any snow to speak of, that forest was a black shadow of its former self.



Heavy snow in January had some people on their roofs cleaning it off.

Also in the news in early January, 2011, was the bustling activity in town caused by the Pembina Pipelines construction project. In a story that appeared in the Jan. 5 edition, a company spokesperson said there would be 900 workers employed on the project by the middle of the month. A story in the Jan. 12 *Leader* reported that hotels were doing a booming business, pretty much for the first time since the 2008 recession hit.

Slave Lake's New Year's Baby came along on Sunday, Jan. 8, and was, as always the recipient of all sorts of gifts donated by local merchants. Mom Lisa Gladue and her as-yet-unnamed daughter appeared on the front page of the Jan. 12 *Leader*.

Two untimely deaths were reported in January. One, a man known as 'Uncle Sammy', was found dead – possibly of exposure – near downtown Slave Lake. The other, a Smith mother of three, died in a house fire on Jan. 4. Police did not release names in either case.

January was notable for huge amounts of snow – at least by northern Alberta standards. There really was a lot of the white stuff around, leading to predictions of a messy spring if it melted too fast. Those predictions, as it turned out, were dead wrong.

On the sporting front, wrestling continued to be one of the good news stories of 2011. The Roland Michener team, coached by Ian Doetzel earned good results in several tournaments over the winter.

February

Lesser Slave MLA Pearl Calahasen said Premier Ed Stelmach's announcement he would be resigning came as a surprise to her, *The Leader* reported in a Feb. 2 story. She predicted "an exciting and challenging time" ahead for the party in its effort to find a new leader.

The Town of Slave Lake, after a search of several months, announced Brian Vance as its new chief administrative officer. Vance, an engineer by trade who grew up in Widewater, had been working as the

town project manager for about three years. Projects he had been working for the town included the arena/field house, the new water reservoir and the addition to the seniors lodge.

The Winterhawks, Slave Lake's senior men's hockey team, finished the regular North Central Hockey League season in first place and faced Athabasca in the first round. They won the series handily.

The Jr. 'B' Wolves, meanwhile, did not have a very successful season, but as reported in the Feb. 9 issue, they had a good game at home, defeating the Dawson Creek Jr. Canucks, late in the regular season. Facing the mighty Whitecourt Wolverines in the first round, their playoffs ended in the minimum number of games.

Town of Slave Lake councillor Rob Irwin went on the record in February with the charge that highways in the Slave Lake area were in worse condition than elsewhere. He made the statement at a town council meeting and said he would like to find out why. In a subsequent meeting with Alberta Transportation and highway maintenance contractor officials, council learned about various complicating factors that contributed to the bad roads.

Tolko Industries announced in February that they hoped to re-open their idle (and brand new) Slave Lake engineered wood products mill in 2012. A key consideration, said company VP Jim Baskerville, was Tolko's unwillingness to start up again if there was a risk of having to shut down again. In other words, they had to be confident in the recovery of the market.



On the arts side, the Pubble People mural, created by 324 local contributors, was revealed on Jan. 27 at the government building.

March

Town and M.D. councillors took their concerns about local health care provision to Edmonton, *The Leader* reported on March 2. They told a deputy minister about gaps in coverage, ambulance response time concerns, and worries about what the closure of Edmonton's City Centre Airport would mean for medical evacuations. The advice they got was to prepare a solid business case and come back.

The Slave Lake Midget Female Thunder capped off a good season with a win over Boyle to take their league. Jordyn Spilak, Brianne Welygan and Brettlyn Bannister scored for the Thunder in the final game.

Gordon Kercher's rink won the Slave Lake Oilmen's Bonspiel in early March, defeating Mike Skrynyk's Diamond 'S' team in the final. Kercher said he'd been competing in the Oilmen's for over 20 years and had never won the 'A' event.

The Town of Slave Lake received a nasty shock

from the provincial government in March. You know that new government building you said was worth \$33 million? We say it's only worth \$17 million, so your grant-in-lieu of taxes is going to be \$150,000 less than you budgeted for.

Town councillors expressed outrage at the devel-



Slave Lake's field house was progressing nicely.

opment, but there didn't seem to be much they could do about it.

The Winterhawks advanced to the league final by knocking off the Onoway Ice Dogs, but could not handle the revitalized Drayton Valley Wildcats. They lost the best-of-five series three games to none.

Two Slave Lake minor hockey teams competed in provincial championships in late March. The Midget Thunder went 1-1-1 at the provincial 'A' championship. The Pee Wee 'A' Thunder won a game and lost two at provincials in Drumheller.

April

Big news in early April was the upcoming federal election. Our first issue of the month reported that four people had put their names in to run for Member of Parliament in the Fort McMurray-Athabasca riding, including Conservative incumbent Brian Jean.

The Leader reported on April 13 that despite a winter of heavier-than-normal snowfall, conditions were still drought-like! That was the assessment from the local SRD office, reported in a week when the town was awash with lakes of run-off water. *The Leader's* front page showed a photo of three men canoeing in the Northern Lakes College parking lot.

Slave Lake's new (but unfinished) field house received a \$250,000 donation in April from an oil company operating in the area. As a result, the field house will carry the name CNRL.

Super volunteer Terry Tonsi was named Slave Lake's Citizen of the Year for 2010 in a ceremony at the Slave Lake Native Friendship Centre in April. At the same ceremony, Stella Boisvert received the Lifetime Volunteer Award.



Slave Lake residents heard federal election candidates debate during an April 27 forum.

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M.D. #124 residents learned, via a front-page story on April 20, that their property taxes would be going up by 10 per cent. The culprit, as reported, was a big drop in the amount of tax money coming from the oil and gas industry. The Town of Slave Lake, it was reported elsewhere in the same issue, was calling for a two per cent increase.

In sports news, the April 27 *Leader* displayed a smiling group of Roland Michener School badminton players and reported that some of them, along with a pair from Kinuso School, had advanced to the zone finals.

May

The continuing saga of protest against Bigstone Band Chief and Council for dismissing Child and Family Services workers continued in May. *The Leader* reported the latest development on May 4: certain band members were calling for the resignation of Chief Gordon Auger.

Incumbent Tory MP Brian Jean was a landslide winner in the May 2 federal election, joining his Conservative colleagues in a majority in parliament after several years of minority government.

Slave Lake's Jr. 'B' Wolves would be taking the 2011/12 season off, *The Leader* learned in May. Clarence Malbeuf told *The Leader* the executive thought it was going to be too difficult to recruit players. The year after was looking better, he said, based on the numbers coming up in Midget hockey.

It actually happened in April, but the first report in *The Leader* about a major pipeline break near Little Buffalo, northwest of Slave Lake, appeared in May. The report had to do with concerns of local residents about health effects from fumes from the crude oil released onto the landscape. The size of the leak was estimated at 28,000 barrels.



The fire that hit the South Shore area was quite selective, sometimes burning a shed but leaving the house, sometimes the opposite. Some buildings were also saved by firefighting efforts.

Slave Lake burns!, blared the headline in the May 18 *Lakeside Leader*, along with a photo of bumper-to-bumper vehicles fleeing in a yellowish haze. The accompanying story, about the destruction of a large portion of the community in a May 15 wildfire, was written by Chris Clegg, editor of the High Prairie *South Peace News*. The entire *Leader* staff had been evacuated along with most of the rest of the residents of Slave Lake and surrounding communities, on the evening of May 15.

"The only blessing in the tragedy," Clegg wrote, "is that no one was injured or perished."

Hundreds of firefighters and other emergency response people turned out to help local officials extinguish the fires and make Slave Lake and M.D. communities safe for residents to return. Alberta Premier Ed Stelmach visited the area on May 18 and Prime Minister Stephen Harper also stopped in. Both pledged support for the rebuilding process.

The May 25 edition of *The Leader* – produced largely by the efforts of High Prairie *South Peace News* reporters Mac Olsen and Diego Syz – gave some idea of the scope of the devastation by means



Taken from the air at about 4:00 p.m. on Sunday, May 15, this previously unpublished photo by Caezer Ng shows the Mitsue fire building in the direction of Slave Lake. He'd been invited on an air tour by SRD when things were relatively calm. By the time he got home to his 12 St. S.E. residence, all hell was about to break loose.

of photographs. Also in that issue was the first of very many stories about donations; also of the hospitality shown by other communities who ended up hosting evacuees.

June

Residents were allowed to return to Slave Lake and surrounding communities on May 27, as reported in the June 1 edition of *The Leader*. This was earlier than officials had been predicting, but the 12 days away from home was more than enough for many residents, who expressed their frustration at every opportunity. However, as local leaders explained, there were issues of safety that had to be taken care of, not to mention the re-establishment of basic services, before officials were willing to welcome the citizens back.

The first order of business for returning residents: get rid of (or clean up) fridges and freezers full of spoiled food. Several thousand such appliances ended up at the regional landfill, which had to triple its workforce for that and other reasons.

What exactly had happened and how – maybe even why – was the subject of some *Leader* news coverage in early June. Alberta Sustainable Resource Development officials said dry conditions and fierce winds, led to multiple fire starts on May 14 and 15. Winds of over 100 kilometres per hour were reported, and firefighting resources stretched way beyond capacity.

As to why Slave Lake was not evacuated prior to the fire actually entering town, the official word was that until it actually started happening – apparently due to a shift in wind direction – it seemed as if the



Homeowners left their refrigerators and freezers outside for garbage pickup since two weeks without power produced a lot of spoiled food.

fire would miss town, and the plan was to 'stand and defend.'

All agreed it was little short of a miracle that the southeast part of town was evacuated without injury or loss of life, under the circumstances.

Loss of life did occur, though. Helicopter pilot Jean-Luc Deba died when the chopper he was operating in the firefighting effort dropped into Lesser Slave Lake off Canyon Creek.



In June, donations began pouring into Slave Lake by the truckload.

Reports on the damage varied quite widely. Something like 430 buildings were destroyed in Slave Lake, Mitsue, Widewater and Canyon Creek. The number was around 50 in the M.D. communities and the rest in Slave Lake. These included six apartment buildings, three churches, several downtown businesses and about two thirds of the brand new government centre and library. In the M.D., besides homes and many outbuildings, the Widewater fire hall was a casualty.

And vehicles? SL Ford lost a row of about 40 pickups, but the rest of their lot and building were relatively untouched. Next door, Slave Lake Yamaha burned to the ground, as did the Lakeland apartments and the Century 21 office on the other side. By one estimate, about 500 vehicles were destroyed by the fires, although only the insurance companies know for sure.

Schools would remain closed for the remainder of the school year. This was welcome news for displaced families trying to cope with more basic challenges, but some worried it would put students at a disadvantage come the new school year.

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'Housing becomes the hot new issue', said *The Leader's* front-page story on June 8. The province had already pledged \$50 million in relief, but officials said much more would be needed if interim housing for displaced people were to be in place before winter. In the meantime, the provincial government had contracted the Red Cross to meet the immediate needs for accommodations.

The community gave a royal send-off to out-of-town emergency crews, who had been on the job since the middle of May. It was a touching ceremony when the departing emergency vehicles paraded out of town, flanked by saluting RCMP officers on their way out of town.

Fire relief donations were pouring into Slave Lake during the month of June. The question became how to handle them. A small group of volunteers organized a donation clearing house of sorts at the Slave Lake curling rink, and other volunteers were assigned to deal with financial donations.

A map released by SRD in mid-June showed a dozen wildfires still active in the Lesser Slave district. The largest by far was one north of Utikuma Lake that had started at roughly the same time as the fires around Slave Lake.

There was a bit of flooding in areas east and west of Slave Lake in the third week of June. Nobody knew it at the time, but it was a sign of much worse to come. And it didn't take long for worse to come. A heavy downpour on June 24 caused streets and some basements - mostly in the northeast part of Slave Lake - to flood.



The police salute to the out-of-town fire crews as they leave the Slave Lake area.

Meanwhile, some residents expressed frustration at a town hall meeting about many issues - mainly uncertainty and perceived delays with interim housing and the rebuilding process. Another story from the June 24 *Leader* reported that the provincially-appointed task force was aiming for 400 interim housing units to be in place by the fall. The government also announced an additional \$50 million in recovery money in late June.

July

July was a real emotional roller coaster. It started on a high note with the Concert of Hope, which ran from June 30 to July 2. The event, free for residents of Slave Lake and area, featured some big name North American musicians, such as Dwight Yoakam and Susan Aglukark.

The emotional roller coaster continued its upward ride when the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge visited Slave Lake on July 6. Their brief stay was easily the highlight of the month. More than 3,000 people waited at Northern Lakes College and Main Street hoping to get a glimpse of William and Catherine, who spent about three hours in the town touring the scorched areas, mingling with residents who lost their homes and walking around the front entrance of the college to greet the public.

Slave Lake's devastated areas were also cleared for demolition on July 6, but work had to stop for a few hours because of the royal visit.

When private bids failed to impress the Govern-



William and Catherine, the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, toured the southeast part of Slave Lake with premier Ed Stelmach, reeve Denny Garratt and mayor Karina Pillay-Kinneen.

ment of Alberta, the province decided to manage the interim housing project. Town council heard the news during the July 12 meeting. Council also heard that clean up of the worst fire-affected area (Zone 4) could begin immediately, which was much earlier than the spring 2012 date determined in June. Throughout the month, curious onlookers saw mountains of rusty metal pile high.

Meanwhile, at the M.D. of Lesser of Slave River, its council agreed to build a new fire hall in Widewater, which burned down as a result of the mid-May fire. The M.D. also issued demolition permits "like crazy," said CAO Allan Winarski.

The downwards spiral began when serious flooding in early and late July busted a section of Hwy. #88, decimated guard rails, clogged passages and flooded roads and dozens of basements in the town and M.D.

High creeks overflowed, making a few roads impassable. The estimated damage to M.D. roads, said public works manager Charlie MacDonald, was about a million dollars. Every vacuum truck in the fleet was deployed and over 120 volunteers filled bags with sand and stacked them behind the Slave Lake Health Complex as a precautionary measure against rising Sawridge Creek water.

Canyon Creek's annual Canada Day parade and the Chamber of Commerce's Riverboat Daze parade were inspired by the spring fires so they celebrated the achievements of local firefighters. Many float displays were fitted with firefighting themes, with some honouring deceased pilot Jean-Luc Deba.

The Insurance Bureau of Canada released a damage report, estimating costs created by the

mid-May fire to insurance companies to be around \$700 million. It is the second most costliest after the 1998 ice storm of Ontario and Quebec.

On July 19, then-Minister of Seniors and Community Supports Mary Anne Jablonski came to Slave Lake to recognize five people for their contribution in evacuating seniors during the disaster.

On the legal front, several lawyers from Edmonton and Calgary came to Slave Lake. They offered some free legal advice to individuals. Most issues were about property contents being scooped out during the state of emergency.

In sports, children and adults were treated to a free soccer clinic on July 9. Slave Lake hosted CBC's Soccer Day in Canada, one of four communities in Canada featured on the annual television show.

Bantam baseball team, the Slave Lake Heat, took the provincial crown on July 24 in Carbon, Alta. The Heat had a monster of a tournament, winning games 12-4, 20-5, 24-11, 13-2 and 15-5.

Buried beneath all the fire-related news was word on the losing battle against mountain pine beetles. The provincial forestry department, Sustainable Resource Development, announced that the beetles' area grew larger in northern Alberta, spreading as far as Saskatchewan.

August

The Government of Alberta announced its commitment to help Slave Lake cope with the aftermath of the May disaster when then-Minister of Municipal Affairs Hector Goudreau and then-Minister of Infrastructure Ray Danylyuk told residents in Slave Lake of the \$189 million funding on Aug. 3.



The Concert of Hope weekend at the Widewater ball field was a lively place, filled with concessions, music, people and a beer garden.

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Demolition also ended in some zones, so the construction of new homes began. New foundations were being laid throughout the month, in both the southeast and northwest areas of Slave Lake.

M.D. property owners, on the other hand, had been building since July because they had fewer issues to deal with than the town.



Roland Michener's graduation was a hit, and after the convocation, students invited community members for a free barbecue.

Both ATCO Gas and Electric announced that they would increase their rates because of \$27 million damage to power lines and gas metres from the mid-May fire. The news did not sit well with some residents, who felt that ATCO should have taken responsibility for inadequately covering their own losses.

University of Lethbridge researchers received the green light from town council to study the social impacts of fire disasters on families, children and the community. The outcome of the study will appear in 2012.

Roland Michener School presented its 114 graduates at an Aug. 6 ceremony held at The Gathering Place. Paul Brandt's Small Town and Big Dreams song was also the theme of the graduation. Many students wore gowns donated by various Albertan shops.

Also graduating from high school were three students from Slave Lake Koinonia Christian School on Aug. 21. The ceremony was considered to be a major milestone because the graduates were the first to receive their diploma in the new school building and the first to graduate after a major disaster.



The annual Smith-Hondo Fall Fair during the Labour Day weekend was, as usual, colourful and entertaining.

Skydiver Dumitru Streza of Canyon Creek was asked to join the national parachute team, after promising results of previous months.

Dave L'Hirondelle was the big winner at the 46th Annual Oilmen's golf tournament, which drew 132 participants.

The Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory reported a diminishing number of banded birds for its fall monitoring program. Bird bander Nicole Linfot said the decline has been happening over the years. Hopefully, by the end of winter and after some number crunching and analysis, they can form a hypothesis as to why the trend exists.

September

September was just as busy as May, June and July and so many other months – just the nature of disaster recovery. Still, communities must deal with the usual business, such as implementing new laws.

Alberta launched its distracted driving law on Sept. 1. Local RCMP nabbed a few people talking on their mobile phones while driving during the month. Despite the new legislation, we still see people who cannot resist the urge to yak on phones and drive at the same time.

All eyes – including those of city news crews – were on the first day of school. Even teachers and administrators were anxious to know how many students would show up.

Official enrollment numbers were gathered after the month of September. High Prairie School Division #48 was pleased to announce that fewer students than expected left the community. E.G. Wahlstrom's population declined from 297 to 265 students, C.J. Schurter's went from 442 to 400 students and Roland Michener went from 592 to 561.

Kinuso School had been renovating for three years and its completion was celebrated with a grand opening on Sept. 21. Improvements included SMART Boards in every classroom, a new mezzanine in the library, two new classrooms and shop with new equipment.



Olympian Hayley Wickenheiser and skeleton racer John Fairbairn (wearing jersey #3) played street hockey at Hilda Eben Park on Sept. 9.

Fish and Wildlife told us that bear sightings were twice more than previous years' due to an abundance of berry crops. The local game wardens were mostly preoccupied with capturing and releasing bears during the beginning of the fall season.

Bev New of Faust was re-elected as the Métis president of Region 5. She edged out rival Kim A. Courtoreille of Wabasca by 104 votes to 92. Darrell Ghostkeeper won the vice-presidency position by acclamation.

Country music star Paul Brandt raised more than \$170,000 from his Sept. 14 benefit Up from the Ashes concert in Edmonton. The regional library was the recipient of the donation. About 25 per cent of the proceeds were paid toward Haiti.

Slave Lake saw more of Brandt on Sept. 21 when construction company UFA announced the winner – the firefighters of the Lesser Slave Regional Fire Service – of its 'Small Town Heroes' contest.

The Town of Slave Lake voted in favour of eliminating fluoride from the water supply. The chemical had been used for 40 years because it was thought to be good for health, but it turns out that it might have done more bad than good.

The road access saga of an isolated property east of Smith finally concluded when members of M.D. #124 council voted in favour of allowing the owners access via an M.D. road allowance. It was an option council did not want to pursue, but members were left with little choice on the matter.



By early September, most of the debris in the town's most devastated area, the southeast region, was cleared.

Slave Lake resident Cleo Carifelle started her 400-kilometre walking and jogging trip on Sept. 11, to thank various Alberta communities for taking care of Slave Lake residents during the state of emergency. Carifelle returned to Slave Lake on Sept. 24 with a sore heel that forced her to use crutches.

The Rotary Club of Slave Lake and the Gilwood golf club teamed up to host a sports celebrity weekend to help boost residents' morale and raise money for fire relief. Hockey players Hayley Wickenheiser and Jordan Eberle, skeleton racer John Fairbairn and several Edmonton Eskimos alumni showed up for the weekend.

Minor hockey teams and the senior men's hockey team struggled to find ice time and were forced to start their season later than other teams in the league else because the Arctic Ice Centre was not ready until early October. During the down time in September, some teams used the ice in Athabasca and some in Wabasca for training.

West Fraser Timber gave big on Sept. 21. Officials came to Slave Lake to donate a fire engine truck from Kitimat, B.C. to the Lesser Slave Regional Fire Service.

Seniors home Vanderwell Heritage Place celebrated the grand opening of its 50-room expansion on Sept. 20. Longtime lodge resident Fred Bittman cut the ribbon with MLA Pearl Calahasen and then-Minister of Seniors and Community Support Mary Anne Jablonski.

In its Sept. 22 announcement, oilfield service company CCS donated \$100,000 to the Arena Fundraising Committee to help the Slave Lake arena complete its project. CCS and E.G. Wahlstrom School organized a shootout hockey game in the gymnasium.



The first set of interim mobile homes at Sunset Place were planted in mid-September, but they were not ready for occupancy until later in the month.

As September came to a close, residents who lost their homes to the mid-May fires began moving into the interim mobile units, starting at The Point. Local churches had been stuffing boxes with household materials for the delivery on Sept. 28, welcoming residents into their interim homes.

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October

By Oct. 3, 51 families and individuals had moved into interim homes. While there were some quibbles and serious hiccups, such as a gas leak at The Point, families were generally happy to finally have a warm place to call home – that is, until they move into a permanent one.

Slave Lake heard for the first time that it would lose five of 13 doctors when Minister of Municipal Affairs Doug Griffiths came to town, on Oct. 19. He returned on Oct. 27, with premier Alison Redford and several other cabinet members. She assured Slave Lake that support from the province will continue.

Greyhound's passenger service ended on Oct. 24. The company cut services to Slave Lake because it was unprofitable. A High Level bus firm, Northern Express, currently fills the service gap left by Greyhound.



Arena 2 was the first to open at the Arctic Ice Centre, and the first minor hockey league games were played on the weekend of Oct. 14.

The 'Save Our Parks' journey came to an end during the weekend of Oct. 14 and 21 when volunteers rolled up their sleeves and renovated two tot lots in the southeast of Slave Lake.

Slave Lake's minor hockey and senior hockey teams began playing, and a month without ice in the arena showed how rusty teams were. Following Hockey Canada's new rule on forbidding headshots, Hockey Alberta takes it one step further for the young ones by banning head contact altogether.



Paul Brandt was very visible in September and October. A concert in Edmonton on Sept. 14 was dedicated to fire relief. He then played in Slave Lake on Oct. 11 because the community of the winner – the regional firefighters – of UFA's Small Town Heroes contest gets to see Brandt perform.

Fish and Wildlife allowed fall commercial fishing to take place in both the west and east basins of Lesser Slave Lake simultaneously for the first time.

Slave Lake took part in Alberta Arts Days for the first time, on Oct. 1. The May fires inspired organizers to host 'Fired Up about the Arts'. Then-Minister of Culture and Community Spirit Lindsay Blackett was invited to see the work of local artists.

Between Slave Lake Pulp and Alberta Plywood, 44 of West Fraser's employees lost their homes to



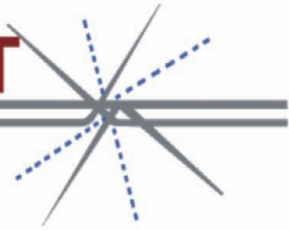
Premier Alison Redford with MLA Pearl Calahasen in Slave Lake on Oct. 27.

the May fires, reported Alberta Plywood mill manager Kevin Arnell. He said housing was a challenge, but since employees have chosen to tough it out by staying, the mills have benefitted greatly.

Slave Lake Pulp received some federal support after the Government of Canada announced the recipients of grant funds for green initiatives. Slave Lake Pulp received \$5.1 million, which went towards a building expansion and energy-saving technology.

Quarter sections of public land in the Smith/Hondo area were approved for sale when the M.D. council voted in favour of the motion on Oct. 12. The program was revived, after it had been dormant for years.

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If Slave Lake residents want a rebuild then they will get it. By late November, the southeast part of the town was beginning to look a lot like pre-fire Slave Lake and not the dirt patch seen earlier in this review.

November

The month began with an announcement from Minister of Sustainable Resource Development Frank Oberle on Nov. 1, saying that the May fire that swept through Slave Lake was a result of arson. Investigators did not come to the judgement lightly, since most human-caused fires are a result of carelessness.

Since the conclusion is a criminal matter, SRD handed the case over to the RCMP. Members of the local detachment were exempt from taking part in the investigation due to conflicts of interest.

Also on Nov. 1, the regional landfill officially opened its new cell, years earlier than expected. This was due to the large amount of trash going in.

A team of Slave Lake and Calgary street hockey players, calling themselves the Slave Lake Sting, won \$25,000 on Oct. 29 at the Play On! National Street Hockey Championships. The Slave Lake players of Daryl Marcoux, Shawn Gramlich and Lane Caffaro shared their winnings with four other players from Calgary and they were featured on CBC's Hockey Night in Canada.



Audrey Auger and her partner Kevin Soto stopped in Slave Lake for a week in mid-November before continuing her memorial walk to Edmonton. She organized the 450-kilometre walk to honour her slain daughter.

A local Community Donation Allocation Committee (CDAC) was formed, consisting of volunteers from the M.D. and town to operate at arm's-length from tri-council. Their mandate is to distribute fire relief funds to community projects (not individuals). They were quick to start. Two weeks after it was formed, committee members began distributing earmarked funds.

The local RCMP detachment released some year-end statistics for us, and while most numbers have remained the same, some crimes were mark-

edly higher. These included peace disturbance, theft over \$5,000 and drug trafficking.

Living Waters School Division administrators asked town council to help the school board lobby the provincial government to have a section of Hwy. #2 – the two Cornerstone intersections – be designated as a school zone. Council asked town administrators to explore options.



The most visible FireSmart activity was a work bee held on Dec. 7. A work bee is local people pitching in to help perform a task. A crew of about 30 government workers and civilians took part thinning the forested areas along Birch Road.

The 233rd mobile trailer, the last of interim homes, was placed at the Sunset Place trailer court during the middle of the month.

Northern Lakes College held a grand opening of its new Trades and Technology Building on Nov. 15, to meet the rise in demand of trades and oilfield operations positions.

Slave Lake District and Chamber of Commerce held its annual Santa Claus Parade on Main Street, the Christmas Craft Fair and Family Fun Day on the Nov. 18 weekend. Spectators enjoyed the festivities, despite the cold weekend.

The M.D. unveiled its slick new website, md124.ca, on Nov. 22. On it will be highlights from every council meeting, day-to-day updates of M.D. business and a calendar of events.

Similarly, Slave Lake's council agreed to revamp the town's website. While they agreed to spend approximately \$10,000, no date of completion was discussed.

Stage North: the Spirit of Slave Concert series introduced The Good Lovelies to music listeners at the St. Peter's Ecumenical Church on Nov. 20. The local trio of Richard Woodman, Carla Boisvert and

Will O'Donnell, called Acoustic Slave, opened for The Good Lovelies.

It was the second part of the series; the first was held on Oct. 1 when Al Brant was in Slave Lake.

The province had been preparing its FireSmart program for quite some time, and some results began to show in November. The newly-formed FireSmart Regional Action Team began working on a wildfire preparedness guide for emergency personnel, examining the purchase of new firefighting equipment and community hazard reduction in the form of work bees.

By the end of the month, the Animal Rescue Committee was about \$100,000 short of its \$350,000 goal of building a new shelter. Even so, the group decided it will begin building the shelter in 2012.

At the Chamber of Commerce's Nov. 28 meeting, members heard the Chamber office will be relocated to the Slave Lake visitor information centre. Also, members heard that fees will be doubled.

December

M.D. council moved to resolve the Flatbush water issue by engaging with an engineering firm to find the best way to provide potable water. Currently, residents of the hamlet must truck water from Smith, which is too costly, said M.D. manager Allan Winarski.

The Smith Hondo Agricultural and Recreation Association decided not to ice the indoor rink of its complex this season because only about nine people expressed interest in it. The building opened its doors for horses instead, which easily attracted about 50 people. Economically, instead of spending \$12,000 to put ice in, the complex can earn about \$6,000.

Daniel Stoesz, a Child and Family Services worker and former Slave Lake resident, was charged with possession of child pornography. Stoesz, 62, was arrested in Lac La Biche by the RCMP after a tip from the FBI in Connecticut informed the Canadian police force of Stoesz's alleged activities. His next court appearance is Jan. 23, for the purpose of entering a plea.

Singer and songwriter Jim Cuddy and Entertainment Tonight Canada's host Rick Campanelli were in Slave Lake on Dec. 15. The free show for families who lost their homes was performed by Cuddy while Campanelli was the evening's host.

Operation Christmas Cheer was in full flight on Dec. 4. Gifts, decorations and Christmas carolers made its way to trailer courts in Phoenix Heights, Sunset Place and The Point.



The Stanley Cup in Slave Lake was a major December highlight.

The Stanley Cup came to town on Dec. 13, courtesy of oilfield company CCS. Handlers, CCS big wigs and Hall of Fame chairman Bill Hay visited E.G. Wahlstrom School, the seniors lodge and the Arctic Ice Centre. Coordinators brought NHL championship mug to the annual charity hockey game, attracting a crowd large enough to almost fill all of Arena 1's seats.