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Former Arthur resident thankful for hometown donations to help Fort McMurray

by Olivia Rutt

ARTHUR - Crystal Conway (nee Bartholomew) has lived in Fort McMurray, Alberta since 2008, but before that she called the Arthur area home.

She went to school in Arthur and her family still lives in the area.

Crystal, along with her husband Nick and their two children, Maddison, 4, and Maxim, 2, have been displaced due to the 200,000-plus hectare wildfire that has been burning in the Fort McMurray area since May 1.

Their neighbourhood of Gregoire was one of the first to be evacuated the first night. Crystal and her family headed for the downtown area, but they were back in their home the next day.

By May 3 the fire had grown from 120 hectares to over 2,600 hectares, forcing thousands to flee the city.

After her husband left for work that morning, Crystal went about her day, taking her daughter to school then heading to the grocery store. Around 1pm she got a call from her daughter's school asking her to pick up Maddison.

"They were all in the gym. You have to sign out your children so that everyone was accounted for, so that's kind of when it really hit me that this is really serious," Crystal said.

"Within an hour everyone was evacuating."

With her husband still at work, Crystal started packing.

"I was kind of packing random things... getting stuff for the kids, their special blankets; I was thinking overnight kind of thing - nothing to this extent," she said.

Nick, who works for the fire team with the Syncrude oil company, was originally asked to report to the fire hall there. Crystal said Syncrude allowed members whose neighbourhoods were affected to leave.

"He jumped in the car with some other people and was headed south, but with the traffic ... they didn't want to go down the highway, so they actually took an off-road trail through the bush," she said.

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Tulips - Arthur resident and Second World War veteran Art Cassel reflects on the Dutch-Canadian Friendship Tulip Garden at the Arthur cenotaph. The Arthur and Area Historical Society and the Arthur and Area Horticultural Society and friends held a blooming ceremony on May 10 after planting 700 tulip bulbs last fall. The ceremony celebrated the history and the friendship between Canada and the Netherlands. Cassel was in a regiment that helped liberate the Dutch people during the war. The memories of those years brought tears to his eyes as he recounted the cease fire and starving Dutch citizens. Cassel said Tuesday's ceremony reminded him how bad off the people really were, but he agreed the garden is a symbol of the friendship that bloomed out of hardship. "When I see a tulip, I think of Holland," said Cassel. The Grand Valley Horticultural Society is holding a blooming ceremony on May 14 at 11am at the Grand Valley cenotaph. The 71st National Tulip Festival at Lansdowne Park in Ottawa takes place May 12 to 23.

photo by Olivia Rutt

Fort McMurray couple escapes wildfire; plans stay in Rockwood

by Jaime Myslik

CALGARY - "It's the closest thing to hell that I've ever seen," recalled Fort McMurray resident Matthew Salem, who escaped the wildfire raging through northern Alberta.

On May 3, the day the Fort McMurray evacuations began, Salem, son of Rockwood resident Stephenie Salem, and his girlfriend Caitlin Hare had been back in town for just one night.

The pair attended the Calgary Comic and Entertainment Expo, returning to Fort McMurray on May 2.

"When we had drove in from Calgary we saw the fire; it looked like the Eye of Sauron from *The Lord of the Rings* if you can imagine this thing," Salem, 30, told the *Advertiser*.

"It was huge, but the next morning when we had woken up it looked like everything was okay."

On May 3, Salem and Hare went about their normal day because they didn't see, hear or smell anything out of the ordinary. Luckily, one of their errands was to fill up their car's gas tank. It was at about 2pm when Salem noticed something wasn't right.

"I looked outside and the light coming from the sun was bright orange ... unlike anything you'd ever seen before," he said. "So I went out on our balcony ... and all you can see ... is smoke and just orange."

He took a video and posted it to Facebook - and that's when Stephenie realized just what her son was going through.

"Of course we knew about the fires, but everybody was still in their home. In fact it had only gotten so far and no one had been evacuated yet," Stephenie told the *Advertiser*.

"And then my son posted [the] video ... and it made us realize, oh my God, how close it was and the smoke ... it was so frightening."

At that point Salem's downtown apartment wasn't yet in the evacuation zone, but he and Hare packed a bag in case they had to make a hasty exit.

Their friends came to the apartment and the foursome combed Twitter and Facebook and listened to the

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Minto Rural Health Centre provides central location for delivery of care

by Patrick Raftis

PALMERSTON - Five years in the planning and just over a year from ground-breaking the Minto Rural Health Centre (MRHC) became a reality on May 4.

Dignitaries and community members gathered to celebrate the opening of the new 11,750-square foot medical arts building which houses a variety of community partners in the delivery of health services to area residents.

Tenants include the Palmerston and District Hospital Foundation, Minto-Mapleton Family Health Team, Canadian Mental Health Association, St. Elizabeth's Wound Clinic and Community Care Access Centre.

Palmerston family physician Dr. Christopher Cressey is the first doctor to open an office in the facility, which

can accommodate up to three more physicians as well as additional community services.

At the opening, Cressey said the centre is integral to providing up-to-date medical care and attracting medical professionals to the community.

"I couldn't do it in my 1,000-square-foot converted Anglican manse downtown. There was no room to grow," he said.

North Wellington Health Care (NWHC) board chair Tom Sullivan stated, "The Minto Rural Health Centre provides the venue for integrated and collaborative primary health care to flourish. No longer will patients have to travel far to receive the care they need."

"In one convenient location patients can access their family doctor

and allied health support services.

"We also now have the space to accommodate new family physicians to our community - a key to the long-term health care strategy for the Minto area."

The MRHC is located beside Palmerston and District Hospital (PDH), allowing easy access for patients to flow to and from the hospital.

The reception area for the building is a large, bright atrium and the building also includes facilities for telemedicine and an activity room stocked with treadmills, stationary bicycles and other equipment.

Financing for the \$3-million facility came from three sources: the PDH Foundation, NWHC, and a debenture which NWHC arranged through the Town of Minto.

"The Town of Minto is a strong believer that having quality care in our community is a key element of economic development and essential to the growth of our community," said Minto Mayor George Bridge, who is also warden of Wellington County.

"We are proud to have been involved in this project and congratulate everyone on this beautiful new building."

While many communities are facing closure of schools and other facilities due to declining populations, Bridge said, "our population is going up because of projects like this."

"Without the hospital and facilities like the one we have behind us, our quality of life would suffer and we wouldn't be able to attract those people."

PDH Foundation chair Dan Hill said the foundation was pleased to partner with NWHC on the project.

"This building, and the health care services made available here within a community setting, will assist us in our mandate of keeping quality care close to home," said Hill.

Minto-Mapleton Family Health Team executive director Shirley Borges said the team is "very excited" to be able to expand many FHT-based programs and services to the community.

"Minto residents have been looking forward to the day that they can access our programs on a regular basis in Palmerston," she stated. "The centre will also provide a wonderful venue for fostering community partnerships"

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