

Welcome to Northern Threads Magazine

Our Northern Stories Woven Together

Est. 2025

From Our Home to Yours... Happy Holiday's!



FROM THE EDITOR...

Northern Ontario shines because of its people—resilient, creative, and endlessly connected. Even across miles of snow and forest, we show up for one another.

Northern Threads celebrates that spirit by bringing our stories together, one thread at a time.

Here's to the North, and to the community that binds us.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- ✳️ **Teddy Bear Toss - North Bay**
December 18, 2025 7PM
Toss a teddy during the Battalion's first goal to support local children's charities.
- ✳️ **Agnico Eagle Winter Classic**
Jan. 29-Feb. 1 2026
Porcupine Minor Hockey hosts teams in a weekend of competitive youth hockey at various local areans.
- ✳️ **Winter Festiglace - Kapuskasing**
March 7-16, 2026
Big Winter Festiglace returns to Kapuskasing with a 10-day winter carnival packed with family-friendly indoor and outdoor activities.
- ✳️ **Santa's Circus - Thunder Bay**
December 16 2025, 7Pm
A 90-minute Christmas-themed circus show delivers acrobatics, comedy, magic, and family fun, plus meet-and-greets with festive characters at the Thunder Bay Auditorium.
- ✳️ **SnowFest - Hearst**
January 26, 2026 9AM
A snowmobile event with tons to do meeting at The Companion Motel.

Northern Innovators

A Season of Stories: The Launch of Northern Threads

Northern Threads Magazine has been created to serve as a dedicated storytelling and community publication for Northern Ontario. The magazine's purpose is to document, highlight, and share the people, places, events, and creative work that shape life across the North — from small towns and rural highways to urban centres and remote communities.

The publication was founded to address a clear gap: the need for a platform produced in the North that focuses specifically on Northern perspectives. Northern Threads aims to provide consistent, thoughtful coverage of arts and culture, community initiatives, local history, emerging voices, and current happenings, while also preserving the stories that risk being lost over time.

Northern Threads will feature a mix of written articles, interviews, photography, and creative submissions. Planned content includes profiles of artists and community builders, coverage of local events, reflections on Northern heritage, youth perspectives, and stories that explore both contemporary issues and lived experience in Northern Ontario. The magazine will balance storytelling with accessible, community-driven reporting.

The magazine is edited and published by Karrie O'Connor, a Northern Ontario-based writer, artist, and community advocate. O'Connor brings years of experience working in arts, youth programming, event planning, and storytelling, with a strong focus on community engagement and creative expression. As editor and founder, she oversees editorial direction, contributor coordination, and the magazine's long-term vision.

A core goal of Northern Threads Magazine

is community involvement. The publication will actively seek contributors from across the North, including both established and emerging voices. Submissions will be welcomed from adults and youth who wish to share stories, commentary, creative work, or coverage of what is happening in their communities. The magazine is intended to reflect a wide range of ages, backgrounds, and perspectives.

Looking ahead, Northern Threads aims to grow into a trusted regional publication that connects communities through shared stories and experiences. By creating space for Northern voices to be seen and heard, the magazine hopes to strengthen understanding, preserve local narratives, and support the arts and culture sector throughout the region.

"We will be looking to connect with the people who make up the north including northern Ontario schools, businesses, residents and anyone who has a story to tell and the desire to write and have it featured. The Magazine is really about bringing community together and sharing what makes the communities I grew up in unique," said O'Connor adding it is for the communities and all regardless of age are welcome to submit content.

As this inaugural issue is released during the holiday season, Northern Threads Magazine extends warm wishes to readers across the region. We wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays, and we thank you for being part of the beginning of this publication.

Northern Threads Magazine looks forward to growing alongside the communities it serves. The magazine will be released each month on the 15th with a submission deadline of the 10th.

Resilience Report

Psychotherapist Brittany McCrea Builds Accessible, Community-Rooted Mental Health Care in the North

by KARRIE O’CONNOR



Bridging Gaps Through Accessible Support

McCrea’s professional background spans more than a decade in crisis and case management, often supporting individuals living with schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and other complex needs. Those years gave her a deep, practical understanding of the barriers northern residents face when trying to access consistent mental health care.

“There are very limited one-on-one supports for people who can’t afford private therapy,” she explained. “Some people don’t want group therapy. Others can’t leave home. The resources just aren’t there.”

In response, McCrea has been developing in-home therapy options—an uncommon service in North Bay but one she believes is essential. For individuals with severe anxiety, agoraphobia, mobility challenges, or those needing exposure therapy within their own environment, in-home care can be the difference between remaining stuck and finally moving forward.

Her experience entering clients’ homes during her years in community mental health gave her the confidence and skillset to provide this level of support safely and effectively.

“For some people, healing has to start where they live,” she said. “If we want therapy to be truly accessible, we have to be willing to meet people where they are.”

A Structured, Compassionate Approach

Clients often describe McCrea as warm, grounded, and easy to talk to. Her calm presence helps put people at ease, especially those who arrive in their first session carrying heavy anxiety. But alongside that gentleness is a clear sense of direction. Her approach is structured and skills-focused—something many clients say they were missing in past therapy experiences.

North Bay psychotherapist Brittany McCrea has built her career around a clear purpose: strengthening mental health support in the North and ensuring accessible, practical care for the people who call it home. Through her private practice, Wellness Waves, she blends years of front-line experience with a grounded, down-to-earth approach that reflects both her professional training and her deep roots in Northern Ontario.

Although McCrea once imagined leaving North Bay behind, she ultimately found herself drawn back to the community that shaped her. Returning home brought clarity: the North is where she wants to live, work, and raise her family—and where she believes her skills are most needed.

“When I look around today, I see people talking openly about mental health in ways we never saw ten years ago,” she said. “The conversations are happening now, and the stigma isn’t what it used to be.”

She credits the pandemic with accelerating that shift. More people sought help, therapy became more normalized, and virtual support opened doors for individuals who struggled to attend in person. McCrea now works with clients across Ontario, but her primary focus remains on improving access for Northern communities where gaps in publicly funded mental health services continue to leave many without adequate care.

“Talking is important,” she said, “but people also need tools they can practice between sessions.” McCrea began her career using cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), but now focuses on acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) and exposure therapy. ACT helps clients understand their internal experiences and reconnect with what matters most, while exposure therapy is especially effective for anxiety. “Avoidance reinforces fear,” she explained. “Exposure helps retrain the brain so people can feel safe again.”

Mentorship has played a major role in her development. She began with longtime mentor Brooke Bertram at Bright Raven Psychotherapy, where she started as an independent contractor while building her own practice. “There’s no handbook after graduation,” she said. “You learn through research, trial and error, and by leaning on people who’ve done it longer.” McCrea maintains her connection with Bertram as her present supervisor.

Outside her clinical work, McCrea leads a grounded northern life with her partner and blended family of five children. She describes their home as joyfully busy, full of school runs, shared meals, and new projects. Recently, the family has taken up gardening and homesteading, spending time outdoors learning skills together. Whether planting a garden or tending their property, she values the connection that comes from doing things as a family. “That time grounds me,” she said. “It resets me so I can show up fully for my clients.”

Balancing family life with a growing practice is challenging, but the flexibility of self-employment has been invaluable. “It was extremely hard getting to this point,” she reflected. “But now that I’m here, it’s been great.”

To aspiring therapists, she emphasizes mentorship, curiosity, and learning from mistakes. Looking ahead, she hopes to continue expanding accessible mental health care in the North, offering structured, evidence-based support with a relatable, down-to-earth approach.

“I’m proud to be here,” McCrea said. “This is home, and I’m committed to supporting the North for the long haul.”

www.wellnesswavespsychotherapy.ca to get to know Ms. McCrea listen to her Universal He-ART podcast appearance [HERE](#).

Submissions

Northern Threads Magazine is seeking engaging, heartfelt, and community-focused stories that reflect life, creativity, and culture across Northern Ontario.

We are currently accepting articles between 600–900 words for upcoming issues. Human-interest stories, profiles, lifestyle pieces, arts and culture features, and thoughtful reflections on northern living are all welcome.

If you have a story to share, we’d love to hear from you.

Please submit your article to:
info@northernthreadsmagazine.ca

Artists Spotlight

Clay, Colour, and Courage: The Creative Life of Northern Artist Marie-Josée Boucher-Basque

by KARRIE O'CONNOR



In Hearst, Ontario—where winters linger and creativity often grows quietly in the corners of ordinary days—artist Marie-Josée Boucher-Basque has shaped a life defined by clay, colour, and quiet resilience. Her pottery studio, tucked into the basement of the home her great-grandfather built, is a space that waited patiently through decades of raising children, running a business, volunteering, and weathering life's more difficult chapters. Today, she returns to it with a tenderness that feels both like rekindling an old love and meeting herself anew.

Her bond with clay began early. At fourteen, she enrolled in a sculpting course taught by well-known Northern artist Maurice Gaudreau, celebrated for his intricate nativity figures and an ambitious pottery series depicting the life of Jesus—a body of work that toured throughout Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritimes. The experience planted the first seeds of an artistic life. But it wasn't until years later that clay became a true lifeline.

After the birth of her first child, Boucher-Basque struggled with postpartum depression. Her sister-in-law, recognizing the weight she carried, gently nudged her back toward creativity with an invitation to the Kapuskasing Art Centre. She began taking Wednesday's off work to spend long, restorative afternoons at the pottery wheel. Her cousin, a probation officer, dropped her off on his weekly route

and picked her up afterward. "I got the bug," she says. "I was hooked."

She purchased one of the centre's old kick wheels, fitted with a small motor, and, without a kiln of her own, transported her pieces back to Kapuskasing for firing. When she and her husband moved into a log house on Lake Johnson Road, she assembled a small basement studio and bought a second-hand kiln.

But as her family grew—two more babies and countless responsibilities—pottery gradually slipped into the background. After a divorce, she purchased her great-grandfather's home and, in 2005, built her dream studio in the basement. Still, with three daughters, schoolwork, and a long list of commitments—including volunteer firefighting, Rotary, hospital work, and her animal rescue—her studio often sat untouched, even becoming a storage space for a time.

Her creativity, however, never disappeared; it simply shifted forms. She painted in oils, acrylics, and watercolour, following inspiration whenever it stirred. A large dragonfly painting for her daughter now rests in a back room, waiting patiently for the moment its muse returns. She tied fishing flies for local anglers—"a little sideline," she says—and maintained a small art-supply section in her family's Benjamin Moore store, Décorific.

The business itself has deep Hearst roots. Her great-grandfather founded Boucher Plumbing in the 1930s. It was later run by her grandfather, father, and brother, and is now operated by her nephew. Her mother, Marcelle, brought the Benjamin Moore franchise to Hearst in 1971, and today the store belongs to the two of them, with Boucher-Basque as a partner. In the 1990's, she operated a full arts-and-crafts department and offered night classes because the community had nowhere else to buy supplies—an issue that persists today. Frozen glazes, winter shipping delays, and unreliable deliveries remain familiar frustrations for Northern artists.

Tattooing also found its way into her life by accident. After recolouring an old tattoo for her husband, word spread quickly. Soon she was tattooing far more than she intended and eventually chose to scale back, now working only by appointment from a sterile room in her home. Her desire to try everything, she says with a smile, is simply part of who she is.

Throughout the years, she carried heavy community responsibilities, including serving as Interim Fire Chief and Captain for many years, as well as training officer since 2003—work that brought its share of stress and difficult moments. Art often became her way of processing those experiences. Eventually, the emotional toll grew too great, and Boucher-Basque recently took a three-month leave, the first in 41 years. Only then did she realize how exhausted she had become.

"I come home now and my mind is clear," she says. "I go into my basement. I'm in my bubble. I don't think. I actually sleep better." Creating once again became a refuge.

Her artistic roots stretch back as far as she can remember. She still owns a small watercolour set she received at six or seven, used endlessly at the family cottage to paint rocks. During a renovation, a childhood drawing—a princess and castle—was found preserved behind the siding. Even the natural clay in nearby fields became little sculptures she fired in the ashes of a campfire. It all seems inevitable now: art wasn't something she sought out, but something she naturally returned to.

Today, as she cleans and reorganizes her studio in preparation for potential pottery and painting classes, Boucher-Basque feels a mix of excitement and gentle patience. More than a dozen people have already expressed interest, but she is in no hurry. She imagines retirement as the perfect moment to immerse herself fully in making and teaching—shaping a slower, more joyful creative life.

When asked what advice she would offer emerging Northern artists, she answers simply: do what makes you happy. Don't let anyone discourage you. She knows how long a single negative comment can stay with someone. Then she laughs softly, adding, "Before 40—hurry up. Fifty comes fast."

Boucher-Basque's story is one of circling back to the things that sustain her. Her life has been shaped by service, family, challenge, and deep resilience, yet through it all, art remained quietly patient. Now, as she sits at her pottery wheel in the home her ancestors built, she has created the space to breathe, to make, and to rediscover herself—an artist whose hands never truly stopped creating, even when the world pulled her away.

Community Threads

A New Kind of Northern Magic: The Midnight Court Fae Ball Arrives in North Bay

by KARRIE O’CONNOR

Northern Ontario has always been a land rich in imagination — a place where stories of forests, creatures, and unseen realms feel as natural as the wind through the pines. Now, that sense of wonder is taking shape in an entirely new way as North Bay prepares to host its first-ever Midnight Court Fae Ball, an immersive, multi-event celebration created by partners Andrew Burleigh and Alexandra (Alex) Brassard.

Inspired by their children and united by a passion for bringing creativity back into community spaces, the pair recognized a gap in what the city currently offers. North Bay, they felt, needed something bold, whimsical, and welcoming — an event that invited both youth and adults to dream together.

As Alexandra explains, “I’ve watched other places build incredible, imaginative events that become annual landmarks — Anime North, Anirevo Toronto, Graphic-Con, Sudbury Comicon. These gatherings bring people into their communities, and they give people something to look forward to. I would love to see North Bay have something like that. I love the wonder that fairies and the fae bring into our world, and knowing how many people still believe in that mystical, magical realm makes me want to bring that feeling home.”

Their vision has now grown into a full-day celebration at the Best Western North Bay, supported by Bay Today with additional sponsorship opportunities available. In true community spirit, a portion of

the proceeds will also be donated to a local charity or nonprofit, ensuring the magic of the event ripples outward long after the night ends.

The day begins with the Enchanted Fairy Bazaar, running from 10:30 AM to 5:30 PM. Guests are invited to wander through a marketplace filled with handcrafted treasures, enchanted oddities, shimmering crystals, spellbound jewelry, and fae-inspired art. The bazaar blends fantasy with small-business pride, giving Northern artisans a lively platform while offering visitors the joy of stepping into a shopping experience that feels part marketplace, part storybook.

As early evening approaches, the lights soften for the Little Sprites’ Enchanted Dance, a two-hour celebration from 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM crafted especially for youth 15 and under. Children are encouraged to don their wings, crowns, and most whimsical attire as they dance among fairy lights, sparkling music, and a gentle dusting of pixie magic. It is a moment designed to remind families of the power of imagination — something too often overshadowed by screens and schedules.

But as twilight deepens and the veil between worlds grows thin, the magic shifts once more. From 9:00 PM until 2:00 AM, the Midnight Court Adult Dance opens its shimmering gates for ages 18+. This portion of the event invites guests to step into an ethereal ballroom alive with haunting melodies, glowing lights, and characters fit for a fae court. Here, adults are encouraged to dress in their

finest fantasy finery and embrace a night of enchantment, elegance, and playful mystery. It is a rare chance for grownups to experience an immersive world built purely for wonder — a reminder that joy and imagination don’t have age limits.

Across all three components, the Fae Ball stands as a testament to what happens when creativity becomes a community endeavor. Andrew and Alexandra saw a need for events that brought generations together, encouraged artistic expression, and allowed people to reconnect through shared experience. Instead of waiting for someone else to create it, they built it themselves — and in doing so, they may well be shaping the beginning of a new Northern tradition.

With fantasy, family, and community woven throughout the day, the Midnight Court Fae Ball offers something Northern Ontario has been waiting for: a celebration that invites everyone — young and old — to step away from the ordinary and into a world where imagination leads the way. Tickets are now available, and if enthusiasm already building across the region is any indication, North Bay is more than ready to believe in a little magic.

For Tickets Visit:
<https://www.themidnightcourtnorthbay.com/>



Event Coverage

Do you have an event happening in the north that you would like to see featured in an upcoming issue? You do? Great! Submit your event details and we will be in touch if your event is selected for coverage. We are also developing an event calendar for the North.

Please submit your article to:
info@northernthreadsmagazine.ca.

North In Focus

Highway 11/17: Northern Ontario’s Lifeline – and a Growing Winter Danger

by KARRIE O’CONNOR

Highway 11 and Highway 17 have long been the essential arteries of Northern Ontario, connecting remote communities, moving goods, and supporting daily life. But over the last 15 years, these corridors have also become synonymous with tragedy. Increasing winter severity, rising transport-truck traffic, and outdated infrastructure have transformed 11/17 into one of the province’s most dangerous routes – a reality Northern leaders continue to highlight.

The Ontario NDP recently described Highway 11/17 as “some of the deadliest roads in the country,” urging the province to take Northern highway safety seriously (Ontario NDP, It’s Time to Take Northern Highway Safety Seriously). For many residents, this feels less like political rhetoric and more like lived experience.

Highway 11 – Ontario’s second-longest route at 1,785 km – remains largely a two-lane, undivided highway across its northern stretch. Highway 17 faces similar challenges. Narrow shoulders, limited passing lanes, and minimal median protection were acceptable decades ago, but not in an era of high commercial traffic. Rugged stretches like the steep Montreal River Hill illustrate how terrain amplifies risks during winter storms (Montreal River Hill, Wikipedia). Despite being part of the Trans-Canada system, many sections have not been modernized to match current traffic loads. Northern Ontario’s winter weather adds another layer of danger.

Destination Northern Ontario’s 2025 Transportation Challenges

and Solutions report identifies heavy snowfall, freezing rain, drifting snow, and long winter nights as major safety risks. Nationally, nearly 30% of all collisions occur on wet, snowy, or icy roads, according to the RCMP’s Just the Facts: Winter Driving. In the North, where winter conditions can last half the year, this vulnerability is far greater.

As a major freight corridor, Highway 11/17 also faces increasing truck volumes. A 2025 analysis by TruckStop Canada found 21 fatal collisions in remote northern regions in 2024 – 13 involving commercial motor vehicles, a 30% increase over the five-year average (TruckStopCanada.com, “Ontario Highway 11–17 Crashes”). The combination of narrow roadways, winter conditions, and heavy trucks produces disproportionately deadly outcomes.

The Ministry of Transportation’s 2020 Technical Review of Winter Service Levels acknowledged growing safety concerns. While contractors generally met standards, the review called for more proactive anti-icing, better equipment allocation, and faster storm response. In 2022, the province strengthened winter maintenance requirements, mandating bare pavement within 12 hours on 11/17 and investing in new plows and weather stations (NWO Newswatch, , Fatalities Increased Sharply in 2021).

In 2024, the region recorded 21 fatal collisions , more than half involving commercial trucks (TruckStopCanada.com, 2025). Political leaders note that a disproportionate number of severe crashes happen along 11/17, fueling calls for widening,

median barriers, and modern safety upgrades.

For communities dependent on these roads, the consequences are deeply personal. Highway closures strand travelers, disrupt supply chains, and isolate entire regions. Families fear routine travel to medical appointments, school events, or work. Each fatal crash leaves families grieving and first responders stretched thin.

Local leaders consistently propose clear, practical solutions:

- Widening key segments and adding divided lanes and median barriers (Ontario NDP).
- Strengthening truck enforcement with more inspections and staffed weigh scales (SN Newswatch, “New Bill Aims to Tackle Deadly Conditions on Hwy 11/17”).
- Improving emergency access, rest stops, and cell coverage (Destination Northern Ontario, 2025).
- Continuing investment in winter maintenance technology (MTO 2020 Review).

Highway 11/17 is vital to Northern Ontario’s identity and sustainability. Yet in winter, it has become a corridor where preventable deaths occur far too often. Incremental improvements help, but they do not address the central issue: 11/17 needs modernization. For the sake of the communities who rely on it every day, the North deserves a transportation system that protects lives – not one that puts them at risk.

A request For Interview with John Vanthof, MPP were unanswered as of press time.



The Northern Chuckle

by GILLIAN HEBERT @StudioGillian



WAITING FOR SANTA TURNS AN ORDINARY NIGHT INTO A MAGICAL ONE.

Studio Gillian: Whimsy, Wonder & Art That Sparks Imagination

by KARRIE O’CONNOR

Studio Gillian is a creative force whose whimsical artwork brings joy to children and adults alike. Based in North Bay, her work spans vibrant illustrations, playful designs, and imaginative visuals that have been featured in children’s books by Kim St. Onge as well as in a variety of public and private spaces throughout the North Bay region. Her art is recognized for its cheerful spirit, storybook charm, and ability to captivate young audiences.

At its heart, Studio Gillian blends graphic design and illustration services with a distinct flair for storytelling and color. From gentle scenes that delight young

readers to bold, expressive murals that transform everyday walls into magical environments, her artistic voice is both engaging and accessible. The characters she creates often seem to dance off the page, inviting children into worlds of curiosity and wonder.

Gillian’s collaborations with author Kim St. Onge have helped bring enchanting stories to life. Through her illustrations, she adds depth and personality to narrative worlds — enhancing each story with images that resonate emotionally while delighting the imagination. Her artistic contributions to these books help foster a love of reading and visual exploration in

young audiences.

But Studio Gillian’s influence isn’t confined to the pages of books. Her artwork also appears throughout various spaces in North Bay, where playful visuals and imaginative motifs bring community spots to life. Whether featured in local galleries, children’s areas, or public installations, her pieces serve as vibrant reminders of the power of creativity and the joy that art can bring to daily life.

Though she keeps much of her personal story private, Studio Gillian’s work speaks clearly about her passion: to inspire joy, spark imagination, and create visual stories that connect with people of all ages. In a world that often moves too fast, her art encourages us to slow down, dream a little, and see the world with fresh eyes — the way children do.

Her cartoons will be featured monthly in Northern Threads Magazine bringing a touch of joy.

Northern Newsline

When a School Board Stumbles: Inside the Takeover of the NNDSB and the Parry Sound Super School Delay

by KARRIE O’CONNOR

When families in Parry Sound prepared for the 2025–26 school year, they anticipated the long-awaited opening of the new JK–12 “super school,” a project promoted for years as a symbol of modernization and unity for the community’s students. Instead, September arrived with uncertainty, disruption, and disappointment. The new building that was supposed to usher in a fresh educational chapter was nowhere near ready, forcing students into temporary—and in some cases unsafe—learning environments. What unfolded was not just a construction delay, but a deeper unraveling within the Near North District School Board that would ultimately lead to a provincial takeover.

At the board’s November 11 meeting, officials reported that the new school was “over 90 per cent complete,” yet far from suitable for occupancy. A construction deficiency inspection, normally a routine part of the process, had revealed numerous unresolved issues across the building. The board expressed frustration, noting that deficiencies were still being identified “at this advanced stage of the JK–12 project,” though it declined to specify what those deficiencies were. The lack of clarity, combined with slow progress in key areas, left families with more questions than answers.

Despite these concerns, certain parts of the project had moved forward. Classrooms had finished flooring, lighting, whiteboards, and tack boards installed. New furniture—long stored and awaiting delivery—was slated to arrive within weeks. The gymnasium floor

was complete and ready for bleachers, while the athletic training room had finished flooring in place, waiting for equipment from the old school. Portable classrooms had been set up and were awaiting electrical hookups and final inspections. The cafeteria and lobby ceilings were nearing completion, and the science labs and learning commons were described as nearly ready to use once furnishings were in place. These signs of progress, however, did little to soothe the immediate challenges facing students and teachers.

Because the new school could not open, older students are being taught in a partially demolished high school while younger students were spread across various schools throughout the community creating significant logistical challenges for teachers and families. For a project intended to bring students together, the delay created the opposite effect—fragmentation, uncertainty, and frustration.

Overlaying the construction concerns was a parallel crisis unfolding within the board’s leadership. Staff received a brief email announcing that Director of Education Craig Myles had retired, though the message was notable for what it lacked: any expression of gratitude, acknowledgment of leadership, or well-wishes for the future. His retirement followed a murky leave of absence that even the Minister of Education publicly questioned, saying he was uncertain whether Myles remained an employee of the board. A provincial governance review had raised serious

issues regarding Myles’ conduct, including the revelation that his corporate school board credit card had been used for personal purposes by a family member. The report also noted longstanding concerns about his absence from the main board office, as Myles continued to operate out of the shuttered Widdifield Secondary School despite ministerial direction to return to headquarters.

Educators had long expressed frustration over Myles’ visibility and leadership. These leadership concerns prompted Minister Paul Calandra to order a full governance review of the NNDSB. The findings were serious enough that on December 1, the province officially took over the board. Calandra confirmed he intended to appoint a new interim director.

The impact on families and educators was immediate and deeply personal. High school students—already coping with learning in a partially demolished environment—worried about their academic futures, extracurricular opportunities, and post-secondary readiness. Younger students struggled with transitions, new classmates, and inconsistent routines. Parents faced logistical and emotional stress, managing new schedules, transportation issues, and a sense of disillusionment with a system that seemed increasingly unstable. Teachers did their best to provide stability, yet were stretched thin trying to create meaningful learning experiences in improvised spaces.

For Parry Sound, the delay of the super school was not just an inconvenience—it was the culmination of years of governance concerns, communication failures, and eroded trust. The North relies heavily on its schools as community anchors, places where education, social connection, and identity intersect. When leadership falters, the effects ripple outward, touching every student and every family.

Still, hope remains that the new school will fulfill its promise sooner than later. Once deficiencies are resolved and occupancy is granted, Phase Two will begin, including completing the demolition of the remaining high school structures, grading the land, adding curbs and sidewalks, paving roadways and parking lots, and landscaping the grounds. The board maintains that despite the challenges, it is working diligently to ensure the new school opens as a safe, functional, and welcoming space.

Yet for many, the opening of the building is only one part of the healing that needs to occur. Rebuilding trust will require transparency, accountability, and leadership rooted in community values. The people of Parry Sound—and the entire Near North region—have shown resilience through uncertainty. As the project nears completion, the true test will be whether the board and province can learn from the past and build not just a new school, but a stronger foundation for the future.

Threaded Through the North

Reflections on a Life Woven in Northern Ontario

by KARRIE O’CONNOR

I was born in Thunder Bay, though I barely remember my first two years there — my real beginnings took root on a quiet TransCanada Pipeline station outside Mattice, where my family moved when I was just two years old. For the next fifteen years, that tiny outpost was home. Three houses, miles of forest, endless sky, and a way of life shaped by distance, community, and the kind of Northern spirit you can’t fully explain unless you’ve lived it.

Growing up in the country meant the wilderness was our playground. We played in the woods until the sun dipped behind the treeline, building forts out of fallen branches and convincing ourselves we were explorers charting lands untouched. Winters gave us a different kind of freedom—skidooing before any of us were old enough for a driver’s license, zipping across frozen fields and forest trails like it was the most natural thing in the world. In the North, it was.

Living near CFS Lowther (closed in 1987) meant we grew up with a sense of safety that feels almost impossible today. Everyone knew everyone, and on base this was even more true. If you were out past curfew, it wasn’t just your parents who noticed—you could count on one or two neighbours kindly asking, “Shouldn’t you be home by now?” Adults weren’t just adults; they were community guardians, extensions of your family who cared enough to step in. It wasn’t nosey—it was

protective, and it made childhood feel incredibly secure.

Holidays were full-community events. Winter carnivals, teen and youth dances, skating parties, and gatherings where the whole base came alive. We didn’t worry about safety. We didn’t worry about anything, really. We were Northern kids: resilient, imaginative, and raised with a deep sense of belonging.

School was a 40-minute drive away in Hearst—sometimes longer in the dead of winter when the roads drifted over faster than plows could clear them. I spent my early years at Clayton Brown Public School and later Hearst High School, making that trip to town multiple times a day for classes, sports, or extracurriculars. Times were different then. Schools held dances, clubs, and after-school activities not because they had to, but because they knew community starts with connection. Teachers didn’t just teach subjects—they taught people. They knew your siblings, your parents, your cousins, and likely your entire family tree. School life and family life were tightly woven together because in the North, those lines blur.

Sports trips meant sleeping in school gyms, sharing pizza with teammates from other towns, and learning early on that the North stretches far, but the people within it are close-knit. When someone was in need, the

community didn’t hesitate. Meals appeared. Snow was shoveled. Rides were offered. Fundraisers happened overnight. It didn’t matter if you knew the family personally—Northern life has a way of making everyone feel like kin.

Growing up here shaped me in ways I only truly recognized as an adult. The North taught me to be strong, to adapt, to face challenges with grit and a kind of steady calm born from stormy highways and long winters. It taught me community isn’t a place—it’s a practice. It taught me resilience, courage, and the power of showing up for others.



Winter Carnival at CFS Lowther. The base was divided into color teams who did skits (above), created snow sculpures and took part in skill competitions. Families and employees participated. Circa 1984

Most of all, it taught me that every thread of my life—every lesson, every hardship, every joy—is woven into the larger tapestry of the North.

Even now, no matter where life takes me, I carry those Northern lessons with me. They surface in the way I build community, the ways I seek connection, and the ways I choose to show up for others. They shape my work, my worldview, my sense of responsibility. They remind me, always, that home isn’t defined by how many people live in a place, but by how deeply those people care for one another.

This series will share some of the stories stitched into my Northern life—the communities where I grew up, the ones I’ve visited, and the people and places that have shaped not only who I am, but how I see the world.

Because in Northern Ontario, every story is connected.

Every life is threaded into another.

And every memory reminds us that the North isn’t just where we live—it’s who we are.

Threaded Through the North

Access Isn't Equal: Living With the Healthcare Gap in Northern Ontario

by KARRIE O'CONNOR

When Sarah's phone finally rang, it wasn't the news she hoped for — it was another delay. Her child's specialist appointment, already months away, had been pushed again. Like many Northern Ontario families, she marked the new date on the calendar and began rearranging work schedules, childcare, and transportation. The appointment wasn't in her hometown. It was several hours away.

Stories like Sarah's are common across Northern Ontario, where access to healthcare often depends not just on need, but on distance, availability, and endurance. For residents in smaller communities, healthcare frequently involves travel. A routine specialist visit can mean a full day on the road, winter driving conditions, overnight accommodation, and lost income. For seniors and people living with chronic illness, the logistics alone can be overwhelming. For families without reliable transportation, accessing care can feel nearly impossible.

Wait times add another layer of strain. Months can pass before a referral leads to an appointment. In that time, symptoms worsen, anxiety grows, and families are left managing without answers. Mental health care is particularly difficult to access, with many residents describing long waits for counselling or psychiatric support — even during moments of crisis.

Healthcare workers are

feeling the pressure too. Nurses and doctors in Northern hospitals speak quietly about burnout, staffing shortages, and the emotional toll of providing care with limited resources. In some communities, emergency departments have closed temporarily due to staffing shortages, leaving residents unsure where to turn in urgent situations.

The human cost of these gaps is often invisible. Parents make difficult decisions about whether to relocate for medical reasons. Seniors delay care because travel feels daunting. Young people leave the region, worried about future access to healthcare for themselves or their families.

Yet, alongside these challenges, Northern communities continue to show resilience. Volunteers drive neighbours to appointments. Families open their homes to relatives travelling for care. Local organizations step in to provide support where systems fall short. Telemedicine and mobile clinics have offered relief for some, though they remain limited in scope.

At the same time, many Northern residents have stories of care that made a difference — moments of compassion, dedication, and life-changing support delivered by healthcare workers doing extraordinary work under difficult circumstances. These stories matter too.

Northern Threads Magazine is inviting readers to share their experiences with healthcare in the North — both positive and challenging — for possible inclusion in future stories. The issues facing Northern communities are at the core of what this publication seeks to explore, and lived experience is an essential part of that conversation. By sharing these stories, readers help build a fuller picture of what access to healthcare truly looks like across the region.



Smooth Rock Falls is a regional centre for medical care: its state-of-the-art hospital provides 24-hour access for emergencies; serves as a primary care hospital; houses a long-term care unit, detox center, lab and heliport.

Advocacy efforts continue across Northern Ontario, led by healthcare workers, municipal leaders, and residents who believe geography should not determine quality of care. Many are calling for healthcare planning that reflects Northern realities — long distances, smaller populations, and the need for consistent, community-based services.

For families like Sarah's, the hope is simple: timely care, closer to home, without the added burden of distance and delay. Until then, Northern Ontarians continue to navigate a system that asks more of them — not because their needs are greater, but because access is not equal.

Northern Threads Magazine will be continuing this conversation in upcoming issues and invites readers to be part of that work. Those willing to share their healthcare experiences — whether stories of struggle, resilience, or exceptional care — are encouraged to submit their perspectives for possible inclusion in future coverage. Submissions from patients, caregivers, healthcare workers, youth, and seniors are welcome, and stories can be shared with names or anonymously. Experiences can be sent to **info@northernthreadsmagazine.ca**, helping ensure that the realities facing Northern communities remain visible, documented, and part of an ongoing regional dialogue.