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SVJETLANA MLINAREVIC *THE CARILLON*

Town of Ste Anne Deputy Mayor Jason Einarson waves the Gay Pride Fag during the Queer Country Fair march through downtown Steinbach on Oct. 25. Einarson, who is bisexual, came out to the event because he was disappointed that Steinbach Pride was cancelled. He said it's important that the LGBTQ community is seen and is allowed to enjoy the world like anyone else.

Steinbach holds Queer Country Fair in lieu of Steinbach Pride

by SVJETLANA MLINAREVIC

It was a day filled with love, joy, and resilience. The first ever Queer Country Fair was held in Steinbach on Oct. 25 where more than 100 people attended from the Southeast and Winnipeg.

"After Steinbach Pride was canceled on (Sept. 13), I was pretty upset and sad, and I thought, well, what can we do that would be meaningful to our community to show that we can rise up and say that we're here and we want to be together and we can't have that far right violence stop us. So I came up with the idea of a Queer Country Fair," said Dr. T Sheppard-Luangkhot.

The organizers for Steinbach Pride were not involved in the Queer Country Fair.

Sheppard-Luangkhot is the founder of OPEN (Organization for Peace, Equity, and Nonviolence), which is a non-profit developing research, training, advocacy, policy, and programs to prevent hate and extremism towards victims and to prevent and exit perpetrators of extremist violence. The non-profit also created Awesome Queer Kids, a group for trans and queer gender expansive kids in Steinbach.

"They go through a special kind of bullying and extra levels of discrimination," said Sheppard-Luangkhot.

See 'Celebrating safe spaces' on 2A

No provincial records exist from Hanover School Division's advisor

by SVJETLANA MLINAREVIC AND MATTHEW FRANK

After more than a year on the job, no reports or records of any kind exist from the provincially-appointed advisor to the Hanover School Board, according to a FIPPA request made by *The Carillon*. Experts say the lack of documentation is "bizarre."

The Carillon requested the briefing notes and records from the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning more than a month ago and in response the province said there were no records to be found.

"Their job is to produce records, essentially to say that there's no records, it just doesn't make any sense," said Kevin Walby, director of the Centre of Access to Information and Justice, who said positions like Barkman's should have a paper trail documenting their work.

Provincial special advisor Kelly Barkman was appointed in August 2024 by former Minster of Education Nello Altomare. Barkman is a retired superintendent who was hired to be a resource for the trustees, giving guidance on governance issues, hiring practices, policy development, but ultimately leaving the final decision making to the trustees.

Barkman began his career as a teacher at Niverville Elementary and worked in Hanover for 21 years. He became superintendent at Red River School Division and River East Transcona School Division before retiring in 2022.

Altomare wouldn't say what prompted the special advisor, but the minister's office did receive a letter from the Hanover Parent Alliance for Diversity in April 2024 complaining about discriminatory practices amongst six board members.

See 'Critic concerned' on 3A



MIKAELA MACKENZIE *WINNIPEG FREE PRESS ARCHIVES*

Minister of Education Tracy Schmidt in her office at the Manitoba legislative building. Schmidt was asked why there are no written reports from Hanover School Division special advisor Kelly Barkman and she replied that all reporting was done verbally.

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