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Oscar Molina (from left), Gerald Dieleman and Chris Siow with lingonberry shrubs and a basket full of the nutrient-dense berries in the Kitchen Garden at The Leaf.

Researchers wild about health benefits of lingonberry

TESSA ADAMSKI

THEY'RE small, bright red, tart-tasting and packed with three times more antioxidants and anti-inflammatory properties than blueberries and cranberries.

While lingonberries are popular and widely available in Scandinavian countries, the lingonberry bush grows wild in parts of Canada and is not yet commercially grown in the province for consumers to enjoy and benefit from.

"I have never seen a berry with so many antioxidants," said Chris Siow, a scientist at Canadian Centre for Agri-Food Research in Health and Medicine at St. Boniface Hospital.

"With better public knowledge, maybe the demand will increase, and then commercial growers will be more interested in it," said Siow, who

has dedicated more than 15 years to researching the health benefits of lingonberries.

They grow on short, evergreen bushes in densely wooded areas, sandy bogs, rocky mountain cliffs and mossy grasslands and go by many names, such as the lowbush cranberry, moss berry, partridgeberry, among others.

Lingonberries prefer soils that are acidic and low fertility. They can also survive in climates as low as -40 C.

Preliminary research of the fruit-bearing plants is being tested at the Prairie Berry Farm, 10 minutes south of Winnipeg in Glenlea, and at Agri-Food Canada's Research and Development Centre in Morden.

The pilot projects focus on acclimatizing the berries to southern Manitoba and developing a hybrid between the European lingonberry

with the antioxidant-rich wild variety that grows in northern Canada but is more difficult to harvest on a broad scale.

"Weather conditions play a big role, and our goal is to see how they grow," said Oscar Molina, research scientist overseeing lingonberry test plots in Morden.

Researchers in Morden have planted 1,600 lingonberry bushes in a tight configuration and are evaluating how often the plant needs to be watered using an irrigation drip and monitoring the weather conditions it needs to thrive to determine how it could be commercially grown in the province, said Molina.

Some plants could take up to two years before their small, white flowers bloom, yielding berries.

"We hope by next year that we are going to have a really good yield,"

he said.

The research centres donated 50 lingonberry plants to the Kitchen Garden at The Leaf in Assiniboine Park. They were planted in June and should bear fruit next year in late July and August.

"The key aspect of the Kitchen Garden is the ability for people to connect with the plants," said Gerald Dieleman, senior director of horticulture for the Assiniboine Park Conservancy.

Lingonberries can be used as an alternative to cranberries in jams, syrups, sauces or juices.

He said chefs at Assiniboine Park's Gather Craft Kitchen + Bar will use their creative genius to utilize the berries in an exciting and new way for people to enjoy.

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School division bans 35 people who caused ruckus at June meeting

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

THE Louis Riel School Division is banning 35 individuals — all of whom disrupted a spring board meeting to protest disciplinary action against a trustee who shared transphobic content on social media — from local schools and sites.

Supporters of St. Boniface representative Francine Champagne, including high-profile "freedom fighters," showed up unannounced to a June 20 event.

As the meeting got underway, members of the group heckled trustees and alleged the board had stifled Champagne's right to express herself by handing her a three-month suspension without pay on June 6.

Ryan Palmquist, a board member who recently came out as bisexual, reported being subjected to derogatory slurs ranging from "pedophile" to "groomer" to "f---ing faggot" during the tense meeting.

Police were called to the boardroom at 50 Monterey Rd. amid the ruckus.

"The division has an obligation to protect students, staff and families from the aggressive and threatening remarks and behaviours that our community experienced at the meeting," superintendent Christian Michalik wrote in no-trespass order letters dated Aug. 18.

"As a consequence, you are no longer permitted at any of the division's properties and/or premises."

Every notice alleges the recipient either caused a disturbance, participated in the creation of a disturbance on division grounds, or engaged in



Louis Riel School Division superintendent Christian Michalik says the no-trespass order is a rare move.

both activities.

When reached by phone Tuesday, Michalik said division staffers are tracking down all 35 individuals who were part of the group that disrupted the June 20 meeting. So far, 21 letters have been sent to recipients.

Karl Krebs, a Winkler resident who gained notoriety for opposing COVID-19 mandates and has since been a vocal supporter of Champagne's, was among the first to receive one. Krebs posted the notice, alongside a statement ending with, "What's (the division's) motive?" on Facebook on Monday.

"Issuing a no-trespass order is a rare occurrence. It happens, but it's rare," Michalik said, adding the sheer number of notices being sent at once is a necessary first for the division to ensure future meetings are not disrupted.

The majority of Champagne's support-

ers did not register in advance of the last meeting of 2022-23, despite the board's ongoing request that members of the public sign up to participate in a virtual or in-person meeting ahead of time.

Tensions heightened shortly after the group was allowed in the boardroom on June 20 — especially after division staffers realized they were overcapacity and suggested some participants would have to wait outside to abide by the fire code.

Visitors shouted at employees throughout the meeting.

Palmquist said one individual made threatening throat-cutting gestures directly at him. At the request of his colleagues — at least one of whom expressed concern his presence was putting everyone's safety at risk because of attendees' irrational and emotional reactions, he excused himself from the main boardroom shortly after the event started.

"As difficult as it may seem to do when emotions run high on these issues, it is important that public institutions like schools and libraries maintain institutional neutrality regarding controversial topics," said Michael Dudley, a University of Winnipeg librarian who studies viewpoint diversity and intellectual freedom.

While the division's social media rules justify limiting what a board member can post online, his view is divisions should not impose their values on all members of a community or expect them to be universally shared.

Conflicts like the ones surrounding Champagne's suspension should be dealt with in good faith, and through transparent and fair processes, he

said, adding all actors need to accept the good will of speakers and address each other's concerns without making sweeping accusations.

"Accusing others of 'grooming' is an example of bad faith, an ad hominem attack. But so are sweeping accusations of 'hate,'" added the member of the Canadian Federation of Library Associations' intellectual freedom committee.

The board fully supports the no-trespass letters that have been issued and the rationale under which they were sent," chairwoman Sandy Nemeth said in an email Tuesday.

The letters reference the division's commitment to creating safe and respectful education and work spaces that are free of harassment and reiterate an expectation that all visitors show respect for human diversity, Nemeth said.

Champagne has not spoken publicly about her suspension or a \$2,000 cheque that she was sent from a group of her supporters last month in acknowledgment of the financial losses she has suffered as a result of her suspension.

The Ward 1 trustee is anticipated to resume her duties, including policy-making activities and representing the board at events, on Sept. 6.

The board's first public meeting of 2023-24 is scheduled for Sept. 5.

Michalik said members of the public will no longer be able to show up to an LRSD meeting without pre-registering in the future, along with a number of imminent changes that will ensure there is no repeat of June 20.

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'Bored' teen spared jail in child-porn case

ERIK PINDERA

A Manitoba youth who admitted to distributing sexually abusive images and videos of children he found online — because he was bored — has been sentenced to two years of supervised probation.

The 19-year-old man committed the crimes when he was 16 and 17 and cannot be named by law. In September 2022, he pleaded guilty to distributing porn from June 2020 to October 2021.

In a written decision, Dauphin provincial court Judge Geoffrey Bayly noted the crime, which he characterized as the distribution of another child's misery, abuse and neglect, had caused serious psychological harm to the victims.

The judge said he's satisfied a sentence with strict conditions and community work would balance the seriousness of the offence with the teen's degree of responsibility.

He prohibited him from being around children under 14 unless a responsible adult is present. The teen must complete sex-offender therapy and allow police and his probation officer access to his electronic devices.

The Crown had argued the teen sought out the material and should be sentenced to nine months in custody and two years of probation. The defence sought two years of probation, saying that although the offence is serious, the Crown's assessment of the teen's culpability was flawed.

The RCMP integrated child exploitation unit got an investigation package from mobile messaging application Kik on Feb. 18, 2021, regarding a user who had uploaded child sex abuse images to its forum and posted links to child sex abuse images to the dark web in June 2020.

The dark web refers to networks that require specific software or authorization to access.

The information indicated the Internet protocol address associated with the user had originated in a town in western Manitoba.

RCMP obtained a warrant for the residence, arrested the 17-year-old youth and seized his electronics on Oct. 15, 2021.

An RCMP analysis of the electronics found 1,105 child sex abuse images and 29 videos.

The judge had viewed a sample of the images.

"The images and videos depicted terrible crimes being committed against vulnerable children. What I observed was both disturbing and heartbreaking," the judge wrote.

The youth had a PDF document titled "How to Practice Child Love," which the Crown argued was evidence he is a pedophile who is contemplating "contact offending," or offending face-to-face, rather than online.

The defence argued those positions were outlandish and contradicted a forensic psychiatric report that assessed the youth at a low risk of such offending.

The youth told the authors of a pre-sentence report, his lawyer and forensic assessors that he became interested in the dark web because he was bored and isolated, following a period of bullying. He intended to explore his interest in horror and computer hacking.

He said he preferred the images and videos of teenage girls who were his age, but regretted looking at them, saying it is not "good to take people's suffering for granted, especially for nefarious purposes."

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PROBE LAUNCHED AFTER MAN DIES IN CUSTODY

MANITOBA'S police watchdog is investigating after a man died while in custody in Brandon.

The Brandon Police Service alerted the Independent Investigation Unit on Sunday that a man had died after being arrested for fleeing police, breaching a release order and drug-related offences.

The man displayed "unusual behaviour" while in custody, prompting police to call emergency services, the IIU said Tuesday.

"The male's condition deteriorated rapidly, and he was transported to Brandon Regional Health Centre, where he was declared deceased a short time later," the release said.

The IIU is asking anybody with information that might help its investigation to call 1-844-667-6060.

U of M students hope to raise Underwarness, encourage others to give the gift of gotch

A group of U of M students is hoping to help Siloam Mission stock up on socks and underwear donations through word-of-mouth, social media and a clever name for the effort.

The five participants — Allison Balasko, Hiwot Jonk, Jesse Shen, Joao Fildencio da Silva and Samuel Akinola — in the university's President's Student Leadership Program launched the Underwarness Project this week.

"We had to select a community need

and try to address that need and work together to start a project," Jonk said. "We noticed that there were a lot of unaddressed needs within homeless shelters, so we wanted to help out."

From there, the team contacted Siloam Mission. After discussing gaps in the organization's services, the project was born.

"It's not the first thing that would come to your mind when you're thinking of donating clothing, and it has to

be brand-new. So, we're just trying to spread awareness about that," Jonk said.

Luke Thiessen, a communications specialist with Siloam Mission, said socks and underwear are among the most difficult items for the organization to collect. He said it's not uncommon for Siloam to go through more than 100 pairs in a day in its Clothing Room "free store."

"We'll take in more than 100 custom-

ers to the free store every day and they may all take a pair or two on a given day if we have the supply," Thiessen said.

In past campaigns, many people opted to donate socks, but fewer did so with underwear. Thiessen thinks the initiative's catchy name will help change that.

"My theory is that underwear is a strange thing to buy for a stranger," Thiessen said. "It's not weird. You can

go buy a multipack of underwear and it makes a huge difference for somebody."

On Sunday, the Underwarness team will be stationed at Superstore at 3197 Portage Ave. to promote the project and collect donations from shoppers. People can contribute through monetary donations or by purchasing items directly from Siloam Mission's Amazon Wishlist.

—Cierra Bettens