

OUR COMMUNITY

FAMILIES 'R' US

Mission Statement: To promote Health and Wellness among young mothers and their families.

What started as a dream for a couple of local ladies years ago became a reality last November, as the new Families 'R' Us Center celebrated its grand opening here in Churchill.

Seeing a need for an independent, community based resource geared at helping young parents with the tough job of parenting, Georgina Berg and Verna Flett, with the Churchill Parent /Child Coalition, sought to establish a safe, open place for new parents and their children to gain skills, access resources, and just hang out and play.

Inspired by the Elspeth Reid Family Resource Center in Brandon, the goal of the new Center is to encourage positive parenting skills. This it does by offering support and programming in health and nutrition, learning and literacy, social skills, and community involvement.

Families 'R' Us is a place where young parents can go to learn budgeting skills, to learn to cook and to sew. It is a place to learn to write a resume or access information on going back to school, or career programs, or just to sit and have coffee with another young mom in a similar situation, while the kids play together.

By bringing people together in such an accepting and supportive environment, the kids as well as their parents learn to respect each other's



Kids readin' and learnin' at Literacy Day in Churchill - January 27th

differences, and even learn from each other. These are skills that they take with them back to the classroom and in the home.

Current programs offered at Families 'R' Us include Drop-In Playtime, Creative Corner (arts and crafts), and Homework Club. A breakfast program from Monday through Friday provides kids with a nutritious breakfast, and plans are in the works for cooking and healthy eating classes.

In the works is a toy library, where children borrow and trade toys. One of the rooms in the house has been turned into a thrift store, filled with barely used clothes for super cheap. On Valentine's Day everything in the store will be marked down to a dollar.

The Elders of our community are a precious resource, with their stories and skills, and Verna and Georgina hope to involve them with the Center,

out that Families 'R' Us is open for business, and that all are welcome. "This is a really good thing for the community", she says, "and it will keep getting better, so long as people use it!"

The dream is now a reality, and has tremendous potential to provide a valuable service to the youth and so to the future of our town. The programming possibilities are endless, limited only by a lack of interest. So far the community has been quite supportive. The house, located at 59 James St. was gifted to the Center by the Manitoba Housing Authority for the cause. The Northern Store donated a bike for the winner of the 'name our center' contest.

Others who deserve credit for making the Center happen are: Joanne Stover, Bobbi Sigurdson, and Debbie Lawson, who, along with Verna and Georgina make up the Executive. Irene and her husband Lance played an integral role in getting things set up and organized. Katherine Wainio's many volunteer hours at the house were well appreciated, as was the assistance provided by Nadia Duncan and all the other volunteers who have helped out.

For more information on how you can become involved, call Irene at the Center at 675-2273. For more information about Healthy Child Manitoba, go to www.gov.mb.ca/healthychild

- prepared by Carmen Spiech

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BUSINESS AS USUAL

IGOR'S ICEBREAKERS

The race is on... Northwest Passage vs. Canadian Government

As the arctic gets warmer, Russia is getting absolutely hot and bothered about tapping into the Port of Churchill. Arctic Bridge is back in the news, this time looking more and more like a reality - at least, from Russia's viewpoint. Canada, it seems, is still a little cool on the idea of opening up the arctic.

This winter, Russian Trade Minister, Igor Levitin was in Canada promoting the northern shipping lane to Federal Trade Minister Lawrence Cannon and Manitoba's Trade Minister, Ron Lemieux. The Arctic Bridge concept links the Port of Churchill, Manitoba with the Port of Murmansk via the north pole. A series of seven nuclear-powered icebreakers would keep shipping lanes open year-round.

Churchill would become a primary link for a northern route from Russia and much coveted Asian markets. Ships would leave Churchill loaded with grain only to return with raw ore and potentially liquefied natural gas or products from China. Materials then would be shipped to Winnipeg and transported by air or truck to their final North American destination.

However, Arctic Bridge has been slow out of the blocks. The concept has been around for fifteen years now and little progress has been made. The first trial shipment inbound from Russia was slated to arrive in Churchill last summer. A ship was scheduled to bring a load of Phosphate ore into Churchill by mid-



September. Its arrival was delayed and the shipment was pushed back to early November, the edge of freeze-up.

Unfortunately, the Canadian Coast Guard icebreaker only operates in Hudson Strait until November 10th, well before the Russian ship would be ready to leave Churchill. Without an icebreaker, the Russian captain did not feel that the ship, loaded with grain, could safely navigate Hudson Bay and Hudson Strait. The Canadian Coast Guard was unable to accommodate Omnitrax's last-minute request to extend the icebreaker season to November 30th.

Regarding the shipment, Canadian Coast Guard representative, Jean Oullett, was quoted in a recent MacLeans magazine article, 'It's not that the Canadian Coast Guard doesn't care. But it's a bit extreme to do it for just one company. If you want to explore your markets, you don't do it at the end of the season. You should have explored that all

Archangel. With a renewed economy thanks to the global oil boom, Russia is ready to develop their resources and reach out to new markets.

With our sovereignty over arctic waters in question, it is unlikely that Canada will grant this request to a foreign nation. Hopefully, the need to assert our sovereignty over the arctic will include additional Canadian icebreakers stationed in the north and Hudson Strait.

An air link between Winnipeg and Krasnoyarsk is also being negotiated. In the same fashion as arctic bridge, goods would arrive in North America via a polar route.

Representatives from both governments are scheduled to meet again at the end of March (probably just in time for another election and, inevitably, another Minister!)

In the mean time, northern Manitoba mayors and chiefs will also be meeting in mid-February to discuss concerns about the current state of the 'Bay Line'. They are gathering in the Pas for the NorMan Regional Round Table and as part of that will be discussing concerns with line maintenance and how to work with Omnitrax to ensure consistent shipping and passenger service for northern Manitoba.

As a result of this meeting, the mayors hope to get answers to some of these concerns and present a united front to lobby the federal government for greater support for the Port of Churchill.

- prepared by Kelsey Eliasson

