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Farmer hopes hemp lives up to potential

BY MARCY NICHOLSON

NESBITT — Horses gaze toward the curvaceous plot of dark soil where sandpipers scamper and a red tractor pulls a seeder along its grooves.

There is nothing out of the ordinary on this small farm 30 km south-east of Brandon — yet.

A good dose of warmth and moisture, however, will turn this Prairie land tropical.

"I don't know of anybody else in this area growing hemp. They all think I've lost my marbles," said Alan McKenzie.

The 31-year-old drives his old International tractor, looking back at the trailing double-disc drill press that drops organic hemp seeds into the ground.

Contracted with Hemp Oil Canada, he grows hemp to be sold as edible seeds and oil.

McKenzie's farming life pivoted in October 2003, when his family lost its pregnant mares urine (PMU) contract.

Leaving the farm was never a consideration for this young farmer.

"I've wanted to farm since I was five. I was the kid on the school bus who got excited when they saw a tractor," he said, laughing at himself.

"I always figured I'd find a way to make it work."

Like many devastated PMU ranchers, he looked to the niche market of organic farming.

"What everybody's doing isn't working any more. I'm trying to find something not everyone else is doing," he said.

So the former PMU rancher now farms organic cattle, flax, oat, timothy seed and hemp on the family land he bought six years ago.

And for someone who grows an organic crop related to marijuana, McKenzie dispels the stereotype.

People who know him would describe him as a "redneck farmer," he said through laughter.

Last year, McKenzie planted 45 acres of hemp, or cannabis sativa. Despite the crop's poor success, he has sown 200 acres this year in what he calls his "do or die" crop.

It's not a crop that's easy on the bank account. Organic hemp seed costs four times as much as organic oat seed.

"Last year was a flop but the potential's there," he said, shaking his head at the unfortunate combination of no experience and poor weather.

Hemp and marijuana are different varieties of the cannabis sativa plant, and both contain delta 9 tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, which is the ingredient in cannabis that causes psychotropic activity.

"I wanted to grow something that's too much of a pain that not everyone wants to do it," McKenzie said.

He's not kidding.

Not only does a hemp farmer need to undergo a criminal record check each year before planting another crop and obtain a licence, they also need to provide Health Canada with their field's global positioning system co-



Nesbitt farmer Alan McKenzie holds the organic hemp seed he hopes will turn into a successful crop.

Lunch event creates fun atmosphere, mayor says

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"It's a good way for camaraderie and it encourages more knowledge about what's going on," said Mayor Dave Burgess.

"It creates that much more of a fun atmosphere."

Others businesses hosting affordable meals include Westman Communications Group, Stream N' Wood (at The Riverbank Discovery Centre) and West End Subeys.

Burgess also looks forward to the June 11-12 Westman Airshow, kicking the weekend into high mode.

Airshow tickets include a coupon for half-price admission to the fair and one free Conklin ride.

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THAT'S ODD!

New Jersey police arrest 80-year-old madam

LINDENWOLD, N.J. — Police made a surprising discovery when they busted the alleged madam of a prostitution ring called August Playmates: The woman running the show was an 80-year-old grandmother.

Authorities arrested Vera Tursi last month during a sting operation to crack down on prostitution rings posing as legal escort services.

Police say Tursi ran the business from her two-bedroom apartment, taking \$60 of every \$160 US she charged clients for one hour with a call girl.

Law enforcement officials say Tursi admitted her role in the business, saying she took it over a few years ago from her daughter, who had died. Police say Tursi told them she needed money to subsidize her Social Security cheques.

Undercover police first began to wonder about the age of their suspect when they called the escort service as part of their sting operation. They said she seemed to have difficulty breathing.

"You get a feel for how old someone is when you talk to them," Det. Sgt. Thomas Cornely told the Sunday Star-Ledger of Newark.

"She sounded like an 80-year-old woman."

Town resumes water service

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But the system couldn't handle week's downpours, leaving council make a tough call.

"I've never seen this much water said Reeve Arnold Pirie as he sat pickup truck on Provincial Road between two small lakes where rain used to be. "We had a choice be water flooding the town or having here."

The RM opted to partially close culverts to stop too much water flow into town, but it flooded fields just off Highway 16.

Meanwhile, a sign posted to a highway sign said it all: "Lake M Fishing Derby, \$2, profits donat flood relief." The placard stands I Dennis Memryk's crop. On Sao his son and some of his buddies boating over the spot where he'd s Canola.

"I must have 20 to 25 acres in there," said Memryk, adding it's to re-seed. "That's all lost unless body comes up with something for government to cover this."

The RM turned the town's water ply off for hours at a time on Thu and Friday to prevent its sewer s from overloading.

It also cut canals through streets to bypass overloaded culvert ditches.

Shutting down the water gave 200 Strathclair schoolchildren Thu afternoon off.

But regular water service res yesterday, and the town's water is expected to stay on as long as drops don't fall.

"If we do get more rain, I guess bigger problem," said Coun. Rapley. "But there isn't much we can do."

Environment Canada's forecast nearby Shoal Lake, however, predicted chance of showers yesterday and Tuesday, and rain Wednesday Thursday. Brandon has the same cast.

Strathclair is a community of 400 residents about 90 kilometres north of Brandon.

— with files from thitcher@brandonsun.com

Deep Throat's daughter says money a motive in coming forward

SANTA ROSA, Calif. — daughter of the former FBI agent was revealed this week as Deep Throat has acknowledged that money played a role in the family's decision to go public.

Mark Felt, 91, was the key source of the Washington Post's Watergate investigation that helped bring down President Richard Nixon. Felt stepped forward this week, ending a three-decade debate about the source's true identity.

"He is relieved to get the secret out of his chest," Joan Felt said of her father in an interview published Sunday Press Democrat.

Joan Felt, 61, told the newspaper there were many reasons her father wanted to reveal the elder Felt's role in Watergate after three decades: added, "I won't deny that to money is one of them." Some 10 agents have said the family could make more than \$1 million US from a deal. /AP

ALTERNATIVE FARMING

ordinates so they can be inspected at any time.

Hemp fields are not permitted within one kilometre of school grounds or any public place where kids under 18 years of age frequent.

Industrial hemp farmers must send their product to laboratories to ensure it has not exceeded the legal 0.3 mg of THC.

Marijuana contains significantly more THC than hemp, typically ranging from five to 15 per cent.

According to the Health Canada website, a 70 kg adult needs to ingest a single dose of 20 mg to experience psy-

chotropic activity and 5 mg for any physiological effects.

Another difference is the way the plants are grown.

While hemp plants are grown close together to maximize stalk growth, marijuana plants are grown in open areas to encourage higher THC levels through maximum leaf growth.

Look for a future article on McKenzie and his second crop of hemp this fall during harvest.

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