

CLOSED!

by B. Heath

Note: Stanstead residents have seen 2 CIBC branch closures, 1 Royal Bank branch and 2 Caisse Desjardins closures over the past few years. See pictures on back cover.

Stanstead, Quebec, like so many small towns across Canada, recently saw their last bank branch close on June 13, 2019. The nearest CIBC branch is located in Ayer's Cliff, about a twenty-minute drive from Stanstead. This is a painful example of the predicament small towns face. The reality is sobering for the declining populations of small towns—there is an aging population and young people are heading out to the cities. This leaves great difficulty maintaining infrastructure, and results in sky-high unemployment.

On March 12, 2019, three directors from the CIBC held a public meeting in Stanstead. People spoke clearly of their needs, but the odds were against them before they even started. The decision had been made: NO BRANCH and NO ATM. That was final. The representatives were distant and cold; they knew little about the people they served or the needs of the community. They did not seem to care that the aging population either did not have the knowledge to use new technology or access to computers. "Cash! get it from your local stores," was the answer. And there was no recognition that some of the businesses located in the area operate across the Canada - U.S. border. Business account transactions for the U.S. cannot be done online or at the ATM; the business owner must go to the bank counter. There was no resolution suggested for this situation. So, was the CIBC prepared to address this move? I would say no. People were very upset with the lack of knowledge of their needs, and the lack of concern for their customers.

Were the CIBC bank directors aware that no public transportation was available in the town? The one and only taxi service recently closed following the retirement of the owner. There is no bus service to anywhere. So how do people get to an out-of-town bank for cash transactions? Were the directors knowledgeable about the needs of local farmers and lack of access to reliable internet? Farmers today require information and forms available only on the web to operate their farms. None of this made an impact or sparked any discussion with the bank

reps. If you wish to go to another bank, then that is your choice, was their stance. A statement of, "We will do our best to address your issues; we value you and wish to keep you as customer and then if you decide to go to TD, Royal Bank.... we will be very sorry to have you leave." We had little value to the CIBC - they were moving and that was that.

An article in the *Canadian Free Press* of August 13, 2011, reads as follows: "Unless they [small towns] are near an urban centre or a fabulous natural amenity like a mountain, many are in trouble... Although the prospects for survival seem bleak, residents of some small towns are working to reverse the trend, drawing both on creative ideas and on the good old-fashioned community spirit that tiny towns are known for."

I learned that municipalities with a population of 800 people or less are on a list of so-called "de-vitalized." The percentages are frightening. The municipalities struggle to maintain even the most basic of services (roads, sewers, schools, grocery stores, gas stations...)

The CIBC shows commercials on TV where a representative of the bank visits a penguin family's home. What about our homes? How far do we have to go to access our money and have our needs met? CIBC is not alone in this new direction: other banks have done the same. The Caisse Desjardins sent letters to their customers informing them of increased charges for services, while people with a \$5,000 monthly balance did not pay charges. I get it, but what about the people who pay the extra fees? They do not have the funds to have a \$5,000 balance at all. So, once again, the disadvantaged pay a price.

There are alternatives. England has put in place a protocol that the banks need to look at the communities they serve and address some key issues. I hear advertisements where U.S. banks offer no fees, week-end access, and real people to speak with, but here we are moving further and further away from the human factor. I was told by a bank rep that robots would serve the customer, and it is coming soon.

So, speak to your bank, speak to your local representatives, speak to your MNAs and let them know that *this is not acceptable*. It is time to stand

(CONT'D ON PG. 21)

(CONT'D FROM PG 20)

up, speak up and let our needs be known. The last bank branch is gone from Stanstead, and other towns have suffered the same loss. Let's make it our mission to **stop it from happening in other communities!**

A further note: I would like to share with you an excerpt from the magazine **Quoi de neuf**, a newsletter, which address issues for retired people who are members of the CSQ-AREQ. (AREQ is the retired association that covers employees under the CSQ). This is taken from the Summer 2019 issue. **WITHDRAWAL OF DESJARDINS BANKING SERVICES WHEN SENIORS ARE NO LONGER CONSIDERED PART OF THE EQUATION.** For several years now, the Desjardins Group, like many other financial institutions, has been withdrawing its service counters and ATMs from Quebec's regions.

Lise Lapointe, AREQ's president, pointed out, in an open letter, that it is unfortunately seniors who suffer most, "...those who depended on the services and who did not have the chance to grow up with new technology."



The only locally produced English-language broadcaster covering the Townships

88.9 FM

Local news, weather and timely interviews plus all the new hits you love:
the Qube is your home on the FM dial!

*



- Wholesale & Retail Service
- Home Cured Ham
- Home Made Cold Cuts
- Smoked Meat
- Meat for Freezer

83 COVEY HILL, HEMMINGFORD, QC J0L 1H0
TEL.: (450) 247-2130 TEL.: (450) 247 - 3561

