

Nurses not interested

July 27, 1999

Recruitment proving fruitless for northern Saskatchewan

Click.

Another nurse called. Another "No."

It's getting to be a routine for Mary Carlson, head of acute care nursing for the La Ronge Health Centre.

All Carlson wants is two more nurses, two trained professionals willing to work in a frenetically busy hospital, at strange hours, for low pay, in northern Saskatchewan.

In the last month, she's made 70 phone calls. There's been one bite: a young male nurse from the Phillipines

is willing to come, but getting him registered with the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association "is like asking for the waters to part."

With the Canadian nurses, even though they are looking for work, "when you tell them the wage, they say, 'Oh,' and just laugh."

It's not just wages, though, Carlson says. "Right now (in the health centre) you can't offer

"It's pretty difficult to ask someone to move ... and offer them casual work."

— Mary Carlson, RN

permanent work. It's pretty difficult to ask someone to move ... and offer them casual work."

La Ronge and the rest of the North have an additional problem: a bad reputation and no marketing. National news stories seem to focus on crime, and "Saskatchewan people think the province ends at P.A.," Carlson explains.

While she herself has family ties to keep her here, few of the nurses that do come North find a reason to stay. "Most people don't think of investing five, 10 years," Carlson says. "If they didn't get married and settle, they left."

Saskatchewan continues to turn out high-calibre nurses, but it actually works to the province's detriment — other provinces, and the U.S., come looking for them and entice them away to better wages, better working conditions and the promise of security. Carlson saw 80 per cent of her own 1992 graduating class move to the United States.

What good does pouring money into nursing education do, then, if the nurses themselves won't stay, she asks. "They've got to encourage these girls ... talk



Photo by Carmen Pauls
Mary Carlson spends hours on the telephone trying to recruit nurses for La Ronge Health Centre, but she finds that the North can't compete with the higher wages and incentives offered by other provinces and the United States.

to the girls and say, 'What will it take to make you stay?'"

Behind all the rhetoric from both sides in the recent Saskatchewan nurses' strike and subsequent contract negotiations, that's been the central question: what will it take to make the nurses stay? Tomorrow, the 8,400 members of the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses (SUN) will vote on whether enough of the answers have been found.

Among the concessions is a \$20 million commitment to recruitment efforts, but local SUN presidents such as Carlson have yet to hear what that would mean.

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La Ronge elite at Western Canada Games

Three out of three ain't bad.

When three local athletes travel to a high-level competition, you really want them to go and have some fun and maybe learn something about their sport. After all, it's not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game. Winning a medal is something you just hope for.

Melissa Leung, Daniel Renaud, and Dani Ivanochko all recently competed at the Western Canadian Summer Games in Prince Albert, and they knew how to play their games.

The three local athletes did their home town proud and all ended up on the medal podium.

The games were Leung's first. "It was the largest competition that I've been in," she said. "It was my first multi-sport games." Not that that fact stopped her from grabbing a bronze medal in judo for in her weight category.

Renaud also brought back a medal for judo. The brown belt claimed her silver medal after three rounds of wrestling. Despite the fact that most of Renaud's national competition comes from the east, the Western Games was "one of the best competitions we've had."

Ivanochko was equally impressed by the track and field competition. "It was a very well done," she said of the Games. "Everyone enjoyed it. I think P.A. did a really good job." Ivanochko also did a good job. The young athletics competitor established herself firmly on the podium even though every one of her rivals was older than her. Although only 17 years old, Ivanochko competed in the 23-and-under category. "Most of the competitors are over 20, except myself and a 19-year-old," said Ivanochko. Her bronze medal long jump set a new personal best for her by 14 centimetres.

Renaud thinks their results are fantastic. "I think it shows a lot for La Ronge athletes to compete, and win, on a provincial, on a national scale."

Saskatchewan finished second to B.C. in points, the first time ever that Saskatchewan has placed higher than fourth.

Pat Davidson

Staff

A real fan

Star Wars is working on its next generation of fans ...
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A housing development isn't going as planned ...
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No sale

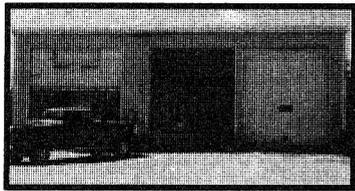


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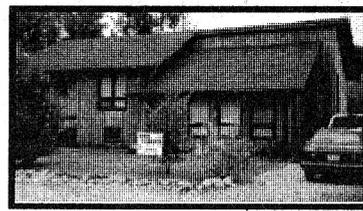


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New Listings

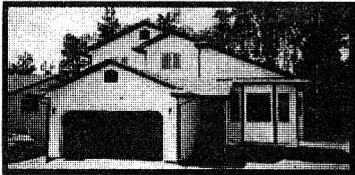


3 bay shop in industrial area with good highway access and visibility. 3 acres of land. **\$97,000.**



Cathedral ceiling in living/kitchen with sunken living room. European cupboards in kitchen, jacuzzi tub in bathroom. Screened in veranda off bedroom. If it's privacy you want then check this one out. **\$127,500.**

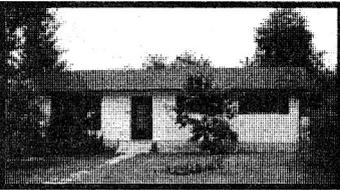
528 Cook Cres. 3 bedroom, 1200 sq. ft. Needs some improvements. **\$47,500.**



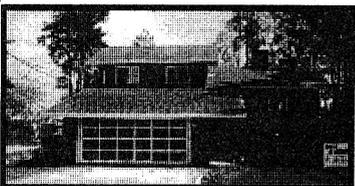
Very attractive new home. Oak cupboards in large open kitchen that connects to sunken family room. Hard wood floors, 3 bedrooms. This home has lots of room well placed in its 1736 sq ft.. **\$169,900.**



New home constructed in 1998/99. New home warranty, Oak cupboards. **\$127,500.**



This home has had lots of improvements over the past 4 years. Very good condition throughout. New double detached garage/shop. Fully landscaped with garden plot, quiet neighbourhood. Close to schools **\$94,500.**



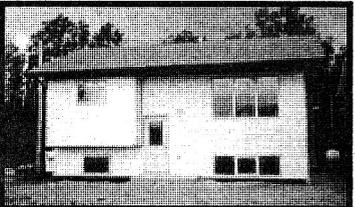
This home features a working fireplace in the living room overlooking Lac La Ronge. 6 bedrooms, 2 baths, family room, and craft room. Appliances included. **\$114,900**



3 bedrooms up, two down, hot tub room, fireplace in living room, large kitchen with oak cupboards, 3 bathrooms, garage, quiet neighbourhood. ~~\$111,900~~ **REDUCED TO \$106,000.**



New home constructed in 1997/98. Rooms are large, tile floors in kitchen and bathrooms. Lots of cupboard space, close to schools. This home is quality throughout. **\$143,500.**



New home constructed in 1998/99. New home warranty, Oak cupboards, room for a garage. **\$107,000.**



Very clean 3 bedroom home with large open kitchen and family room on the lower level, garden area, treed and fenced. **\$87,500.**



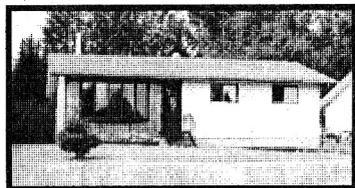
Close to school, this 3 bedroom home would make an ideal place to raise a young family. Quiet location with no thru traffic. **\$64,900.**



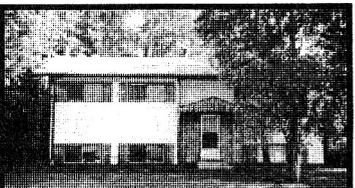
Excellent condition throughout, with large kitchen, lots of cupboard space, covered deck, ideal for the growing family. Fenced with underground sprinklers. **\$115,000.**



Close to schools, this home has had numerous renovations in the past 3 years. New windows throughout, lino in kitchen, new siding and upgraded insulation. **\$129,500**



3 bedroom bungalow with finished basement. Paved driveway, fenced, landscaped, recently painted, oak kitchen cupboards. Asking **\$84,700.**



This home offers lots of space, all rooms are spacious with a large kitchen, very good condition inside and out. New roof in 1997. Fenced, landscaped, garden and storage shed. **\$99,400.**



Executive home, 2064 sq. ft., 3 bedroom with a 24 x 30 attic playroom on top of double garage. Top quality interior finish. Oversize Jacuzzi whirlpool bath in master bedroom. A must see. Call for details.



This well kept 3 bedroom bungalow is located in a quiet downtown area.



1148 sq. ft. comfortable living space with attached garage, fully developed basement, fenced landscaped. Ready



This 3 bedroom home overlooks Lac

Nurses won't stay in Saskatchewan

Continued from page 1

Meanwhile, northern concerns such as the need for housing in remote communities have been tabled again.

The problem isn't only within the health centre, says Cynthia Armstrong, nursing manager of the Mamawetan Churchill River Health District. Armstrong, who is in charge of the district's primary care and public health nurses, has four positions to fill and, so far, has had even less luck than Carlson.

Despite all the district's advertisements on the Internet and in nursing journals, there have been no inquiries. "Norm (Hatlevik, the district's CEO) keeps saying, 'Be creative.' I don't know what else to do to be creative," Armstrong says.

Physicians turned the tide

The steady exodus of health practitioners has been happening for years, but the focus has largely been on physicians. Since the La Ronge Medical Clinic was taken over by the University of Saskatchewan's Northern Medical Services (NMS) a few years ago, the number of doctors in La Ronge has stabilized.

Going in, doctors have a guaranteed salary and benefits package. The Town of La Ronge built a 4-plex to house them. Student doctors have an opportunity to spend several months working in the community. "They can experience the people, experience the beauty, experience the work, and see if it's for them," says Dr. Peter Butt, head of NMS.

NMS also has a full-time recruiter, and doctors working in northern communities are checked with regularly to see whether they plan to stay. If a doctor is thinking of leaving, NMS begins searching for possible replacements several months in advance.

Nurses, however, receive

none of this attention, and since the job cuts and bed closures under health reform, the problem of keeping nurses has gotten worse. "The hit that nurses took to their morale was devastating. ... I'm just surprised it took this long (for them to go on strike)," Butt says.

"These people are highly mobile," he adds. "It's a highly competitive environment, and unfortunately we (in Saskatchewan) fall behind."

Health districts such as Mamawetan Churchill River are developing their own strategies. The district's administrators and nursing heads recently formed a recruitment committee to come up with ideas, and Armstrong has made a few attempts on her own: furnishing apartments in the outpost stations with satellite dishes and VCRs, for example, or hiring EMTs from Biggar and Swift Current to provide nurses with "a trained pair of hands".

"I don't know what else to do," she says

In the long term, the North may be able to solve its problems by training its own — though even then, there will have to be reasons for them to come back to the North, if the only training is offered down south. So far, there has been little incentive, or modelling, for northern children considering health careers.

Opportunities such as the Aboriginal Employment Development Program, which the Mamawetan Churchill River district signed on to last week, are still new. Even Saskatchewan Health's "Saskatchewan Recruitment Project", now in its third year, was used only to find physicians until three months ago.

There are signs that nurses are now being listened to, says Butt. "Their voice has been heard. The question is, can we respond quickly enough?"

Carmen Pauls

Staff