

## Hague students gearing up for first-ever musical

By TERRY PUGH  
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University of Saskatchewan student Emma Gillingham is sharing her love of music with students at her former high school in Hague.

The 21-year-old is directing a choir made up of about 20 students at Hague High School as they prepare for the annual Sask Valley Music Festival at the end of the month.

But they've also got their sights set on a much bigger project: a one-hour musical adaptation of the 'Wizard of Oz' tentatively slated for May 23.

Gillingham, an accomplished singer and pianist, said she wanted to provide an opportunity for students in her home community to experience the joy of music.

"When I was in elementary school and high school in Hague, one of the things I missed was a music program," she said. "I took music lessons and participated in the music festival every year, but it would have been nice to have a choir or band program."

"When I switched later to a different high school - Rosthern Junior College - I participated

in their musical when I was in Grade 12, and I really enjoyed it. When I graduated and started university, I wanted to give something back to the place where I grew up."

Last year, Gillingham approached Hague High School Principal Brett Barry and floated the idea of an extracurricular choir for students.

"He was very supportive," said Gillingham. "The first year went pretty well, and I felt I wanted to do it again this year. I learned a lot from the experience, and I think I'm a lot better organized this time around."

She said feedback on the program from students at the high school has been positive.

"A couple of the students who were involved last year are now taking piano or voice lessons on their own," she said. "The first year of the program, it was new, so some kids were a little reluctant to get involved; but this year it's more established and seems to be more recognized and valued. The big thing is, I think the kids recognize that it's not just for 'odd' people; music is for everyone." Gillingham said leading a

choir in her community is proving beneficial to her university studies.

"It's giving me more insight," she said, "and it allows me to share the skills I've learned with other people."

"One thing that's really hit home with me is how much impact music has on a person's well-being and mental health."

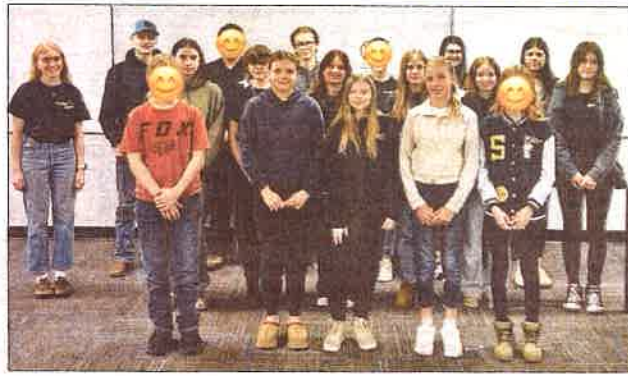
"Some of the kids who come in to choir practice may not have had a good day, but when they arrive at choir it's a safe space and they can spend a few minutes talking about their day with a group of people they feel close to. It makes a difference."

Music also helps brighten the lives of seniors in care homes, she said.

"When we sing at care homes, it's so nice to see that connection - through the music - between the residents and the students," she said. "Music touches everyone in a special way."

Gillingham said the musical slated for May 23 will include the choir, as well as other students in other roles.

"It's definitely a new thing for me," she said. "I've never



### HAGUE HIGH SCHOOL CHOIR

Emma Gillingham (left), a 21-year-old University of Saskatchewan music student, is volunteering at her former high school in Hague to organize and direct a choir made up of students age 12-16. The choir will perform at the Sask Valley Music Festival later this month, and will be taking centre stage in a musical adaptation of 'The Wizard of Oz' in May. (Editor's note: The photo was submitted as is, with the 'smiley faces' over certain students' faces, to conceal their identities. A long-standing school division policy does not allow publication of pictures of students whose parents have not signed a waiver allowing for publication in print media.)

directed a musical before, so I'm learning a lot as I go. It's challenging but it's also fun."

A couple of teachers are helping out with the production, but Gillingham said if any community members are interested in stepping up to help with things like costumes or props, the fledgling production welcomes their contribution. They can contact the high

school to sign up as volunteers.

Right now, though, Gillingham's goal is to get her choir ready for the Sask Valley Music Festival that runs March 25 to April 2.

She's enlisted pianist Chloe Kivill as accompanist for the choir's two pieces at the festival, and is hoping the group can build on last year's successful performance.

Gillingham's long-term goal is to do a master's degree in music and find a professional career in that field.

"I have a lot of goals," she said. "But they all include music in some form or other. This experience in bringing music to the Hague High School community has really showed me how important it is to share music with others."

## Johner Brothers take stage for hospital fundraiser

By KEVIN BERGER  
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Nearly anyone who has lived in Saskatchewan over the past 30 years has heard of the Johner Brothers, a country music duo hailing from a farm near Midale, Sask., who went on to release several critically-acclaimed and commercially successful albums in the 1990s.

After more than 10 years of touring and performing around the world, Ken Johner decided to retire from the music business, leaving his brother Brad to pursue a solo career for about a decade.

Years later, Brad was eventually joined on stage by his five sons, though some of them ended up taking up different instruments like the bass guitar, piano or drums.

"I never told anyone of them which to play; they just kind of found their own instrument," says Brad, who is an acoustic guitarist/lead singer.

Recently, Ken decided to get back into the music business, and so the Johner Brothers are back together again. However, they're mostly sticking close to home, performing at a number of gigs throughout western Canada.

"We don't want to be traveling all over the place. I'm getting too old for that long traveling thing," says Brad.

Incidentally, one of those concerts will take place on Saturday, March 22, at the Heritage Common in Hepburn.

That's where the Johner Brothers (plus a couple of Brad's sons) will be helping to raise funds for a new hospital in Rosthern during the Saskatchewan Valley Hospital Foundation's (SVHF) spring fling.

The *Clark's Crossing Gazette* reached out to Brad for an interview on March 7, just before he was about to head off to Alberta to see one of his sons perform in Calgary before embarking on a cruise ship as an entertainer.

Brad notes that two of his sons are performing on cruise ships — something that he and Ken have done the odd time with fans of the Johner Brothers — while another is studying music at Grant MacEwan.

"They're all musicians in some form. It's fun that we can go out and still play," he said.

Depending on which sons are in Saskatchewan and free at the time, they will likely be joining Ken and John at the

SVHF Spring Fling, performing either on stage with their dad or on their own.

When asked how he feels about his sons going into the music industry, Ken acknowledges it can be a tough business, but so are fields like health care or corporate finance.

"There's always ups and downs in anything you do, and music is just something that my brother and I have always done."

"I've just been very fortunate that I've been able to make a living and raise five boys with just playing music, because that's all I've done since 1989," Brad says.

"I can't discourage it, because that's what I did. I followed my dream, and my own passion, and it seems to have worked out for me. And they're doing the same thing."

So what will the March 22 concert be like? Brad says he and Ken will of course be performing some of the older Johner Brothers songs that have been on the radio for years that people will be familiar with, but they also have some newer songs.

For instance, they just came out a couple months ago with

a song called "Bring Back the Mullet," which was written by Brad and his son Luke. It was inspired by fans' frequent requests for the Johners to wear the mullet hairdos they used to have in the 90s.

"It's been out for a few months now and people... always request that one," Brad says.

Another newer song of theirs that will probably be coming out around the end of March is called "The Flatlands," which Brad describes as a kind of "epic cowboy song" inspired by life in Saskatchewan.

For the most part, Brad says their concerts are not very serious and are just meant for people to have a good time.

"I think it's interesting for people to see that Ken and I are back together, playing music again," he says. "It's also really, really interesting just to see my boys on stage."

On a final note, for anyone concerned about the acoustics at the concert given that it is a small-town venue, Brad says:



Ken and Brad Johner

he has performed at the Heritage Common in Hepburn before and knows that it is a good place for live music.

"Lots of times, you'll go out and play a show, and somebody will see you in a really nice venue. Then they go, 'Yeah, we want to book you for this,' and then they book it in some echo-

ry rink somewhere. It's not the same type of show; it doesn't sound really good. But that room sounds really good, and it'll be a really nice evening," he says.

Tickets for the Spring Fling can be purchased online via a link at the Sask Valley Hospital Foundation website.

## Taxpayers group encouraged by cut to education property tax

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation is applauding the Saskatchewan government for committing to lower the Education Property Tax mill rate in Budget 2025.

"Saskatchewanians need tax relief and this property tax cut will make a real difference for property owners," said Gage Haubrich, CTF Prairie Director. "Tax cuts like this help grow the economy and leave more money in taxpayers' pockets."

The government of Saskatchewan has announced that it will be lowering Education Property Tax mill rates in its next budget. The government previously raised Education Property Tax mill rates in 2022. This cut will save taxpayers more than \$100 million annually, according to the government. The provincial government plans to take in about \$805 million in property tax this year. A Regina family currently pays a total prop-

erty tax bill of about \$3,118 on a typical home.

Families need tax relief as a majority of Saskatchewanians report that they are struggling or uncomfortable financially, according to Angus Reid polling.

"This is a good first step that helps make Saskatchewan farmers and businesses more competitive amid economic uncertainty," said Haubrich. "But the government needs to offer more tax relief."

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