

We Build a Community

Pierre Burton (The Promised Land) writes of “dreams and illusions, escape and survival, triumph and despair...foolish optimism, political cunning, naïveté, greed, scandal, and opportunism...the search for Utopia, the promise of a Promised Land...of hope, fulfillment, and liberation as well as drudgery, loneliness, and disenchantment.” He speaks of populating “an empty realm, a thousand miles broad, with more than one million people in less than one generation”. The beginning of our community is part of this story of the building of our nation of Canada.

With pride of community, three individuals collaborated to realize their dream of visually

showcasing the development of the region of Strathcona County we call Josephburg. Their names are Dianne Kuhn, Althea Naundorf, and Diane Smith. Working with Strathcona County Parks, Recreation, and Culture, a mural with the theme “The Evolution of Community, Commerce, and Agriculture in Josephburg”, began to take shape. From a pool of fourteen submitting artists, a jury chose Yuan Cheng Bi. He was supplied with many photographs and a comprehensive list of the many items that should be represented.

The work, begun in 2003, upgraded in 2011, and refurbished in 2017, runs historically from left to right.

Panel 1

Imagine 1875 – poplar trees, sloughs, bison, deer, elk, moose – aspen parkland, home to Cree and Blackfoot. Anthony Henday’s voyage down the North Saskatchewan had already begun history’s transformation. The Sturgeon Creek Post was established (present day Fort Saskatchewan), not a fur trading post like Fort Edmonton, but a NWMP post built to bring safety and security to the region; settlers could envision this parkland for their homesteads. Two ex-Mounties running small cattle herds, were the only two settlers in the area. Edmonton’s population had not yet reached 150. Although the last spike was driven in 1885 linking East and West, trains travelled through Calgary, and it was the fall of 1891 before a line linked Edmonton and Calgary.



Panel 2

Several waves of settlers found optimism in the widespread advertising in Europe and Eastern Canada for free land in Western Canada. After an arduous sea journey to Halifax, German-speaking immigrants from the Austro-Hungarian Empire in Galicia, boarded trains and arrived in southern Alberta. (After many border changes, the ancestral home of these pioneers now lies in the Western Ukraine. The Josefsberg outside Vienna is not 'our Josephsburg'.) After two dismal years of brutal winters and crop failures, in 1891 they sent scouts on horseback north to the Beaver Hills. The names Krebs, Rippel, Becker, Mohr and Thomas hail back to these scouts. Their favourable report brought optimism to the weary group who brought their few possessions to the end of the steel in Red Deer. There they bought canvas-covered wagons and oxen to continue their journey. Fording rivers, fighting off mosquitoes, and birthing babies, they arrived in Edmonton by early May 1891 – fifty-three families with cattle, horses, chickens, and ducks. Nine of these families, associated by their religious beliefs, came east to the Beaver Hills. By fall, nine huts, hand-dug wells, and animal shelters gave evidence to a community committed to hard work and success. More settlers came, adding names like Broder, Berg, Hennig, Unterschultz, Frey, Manz, Kulak, Gauf, Koroluk, and Bomerlau. Families increased; children grew, married, and established families and farms of their own. With fond thoughts of their homeland, the community was called Josefsberg (first spelling).

In 1992, our community celebrated the 100th anniversary of the arrival of the second wave of settlers, the Parry Sound colonists. English and Scottish settlers, unsuccessfully farming on the Canadian Shield near Parry Sound, Ontario, were enticed by the CPR to relocate in the Beaver Hills. In the spring of 1892, two hundred carloads of livestock and household goods arrived in Edmonton with 298 colonists, who eventually ferried their goods over the river and sought out



homesteads. Not all persevered, but several hundred more colonists joined the group in a few years, adding names like Smith, Calvert, Campbell, Fluker, Hackett, McGee, Stoffard, Pearce, Feathersten, and Pollard.

More folk from Germany and Russia heard of brighter prospects in Western Canada. They had names like Guenther, Weder, Schreiber, Gabert, Fischer, Geislinger, Vollrath, and Schmidt.

By 1911, every quarter section was owned by one of these pioneers or their children.

Panel 3

Prior to the consideration of roads, homesteads were chosen, and related families established their homes in close proximity. Growing settlements birthed the need for roads, schools, and churches.

Large families scattered over the area meant many one-room schools a few miles apart. Each school district was responsible for electing its own board, collecting taxes, building their school, and hiring and paying their teacher.

By 1893, a school district was formed, and the board's secretary, Gus Doz, a settler from the Dakotas, recorded 'Josephsburg'; and so it stayed, no longer the Josefsberg of Galicia. In 1894, volunteers built a small frame school, replaced in 1917 by a two-room brick structure and teacherage, both residences today east of the hamlet.

Church congregations often met in homes and schools. The church in the hamlet today was first named "Friedens Gemeinde", meaning Peace Congregation. The German-speaking settlement was comprised of adherents of three denominations; they agreed to be united in one congregation. Now a Community Church, it has remained an icon in the hamlet. The original small frame building was eventually replaced with a brick



building in 1910. The two-storey brick manse followed in 1916. The cemetery on the northeast edge of the hamlet was in place before the railroad.

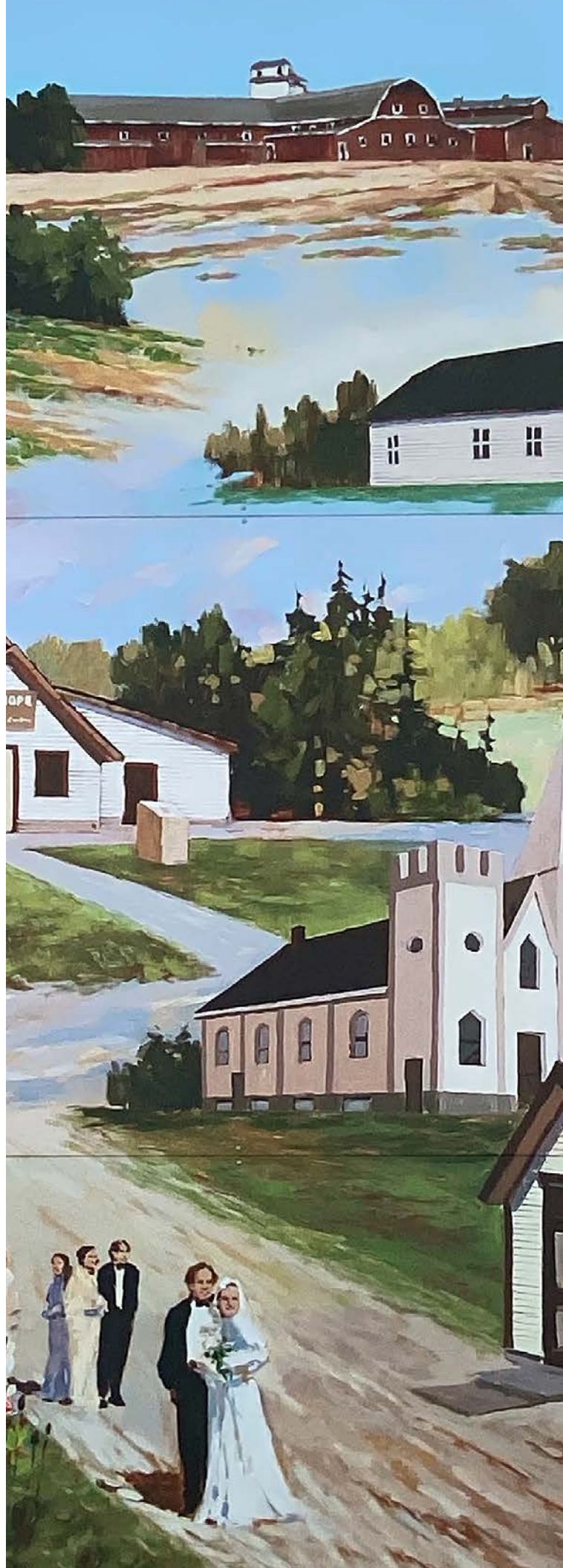
Lutheran pioneers came from both the Galician and Parry Sound settlers. After meeting in homes, the Josephburg School, and Mansfield School, they dedicated their first simple church in 1905. By 1945, Bethany Lutheran Church was built and then a parsonage.

The Parry Sound Colony opened Partridge Hill School in 1894. Over the years, the school served also as a church for Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian congregations. The present church opened in 1903, used jointly until church union in 1925, when it became Partridge Hill United, still an important part of the community. The brick school still stands as a residence on the southeast corner of Partridge Hill.

Besides Josephburg and Partridge Hill, other one-room schoolhouses dotted the landscape. School districts within an eight-mile radius, included Good Hope, Brookville, Ypres Valley, Mansfield, Deep Creek and Pleasant View. Children met and visited children from other nearby school districts at events like track meets. By the early 50s, the one-room schools began to close in favour of consolidation and busing to Fort Saskatchewan.

The Methodists from Parry Sound built the Beaver Hills Methodist Church (originally the Josephburg Methodist Church), one and one-half miles east of Josephburg (present Gymkhana grounds site). Eventually this church merged with Fort Saskatchewan First United in 1953. The church building was sold and relocated to the Scotford Hutterite Colony and used as a school. The Beaver Hills congregation bought chimes for the Fort Saskatchewan church, dedicated to mark the ministry of a pioneer church.

Good Hope School was also the meeting place for the Good Hope Standard Church. After a fire, the school was replaced in 1908, and a church was built in 1911.



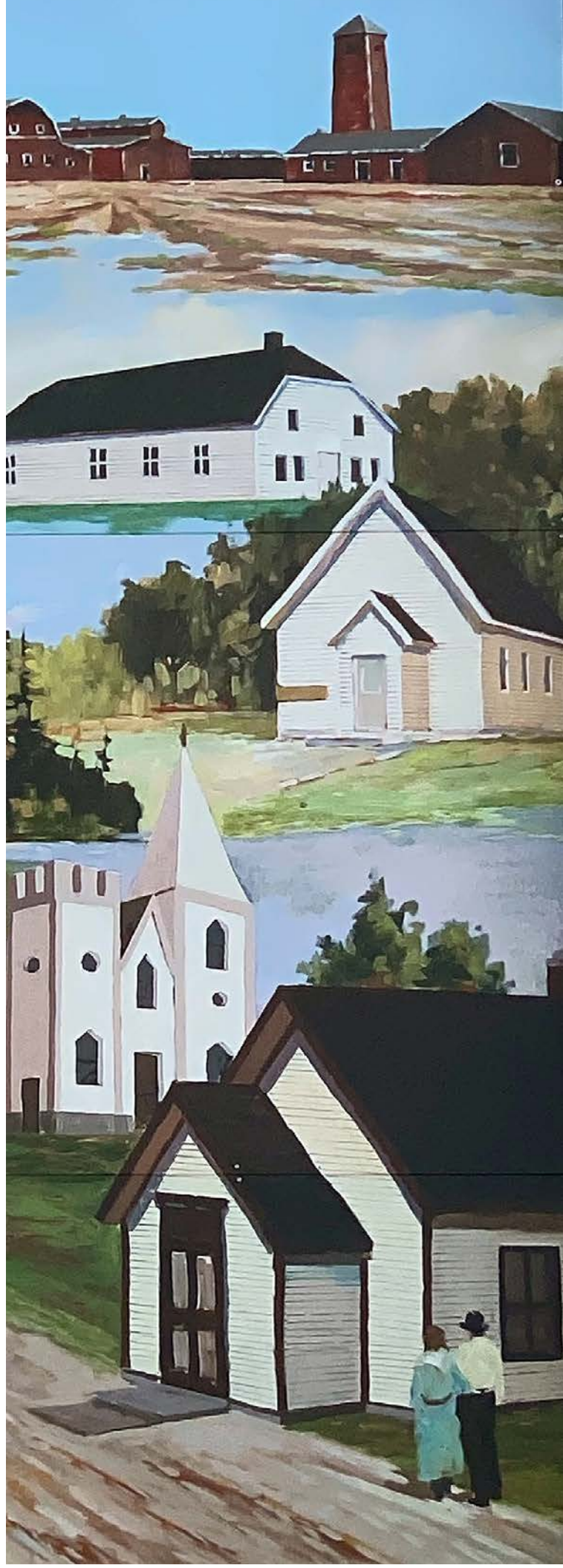
For several decades, this group also enjoyed a tradition of summer camp meetings. The church closed in the 1970s. The church building still stands across the road from the Good Hope Community Hall, which was converted from the old school house.

In 1946, the Church of God met in the Josephburg School, and a church building was dedicated nearby in 1948. Many of the Good Hope congregation attended. This church is now a residence.

In 1893, St Paul's Presbyterian built their church in the Agricola district. The church doubled as a school until Agricola School opened in 1898. The cemetery remains today, but the church closed in 1898, the building sold and moved.

In 1962, The Josephburg Citizens' Association purchased Mansfield School, moved it to the hamlet, constructed an addition, and was pleased to have a proper community centre for gatherings. After much planning and many volunteer hours, seniors formed the Strathcona Area 5 Senior Citizens' Association. In 1978, the completion of the Seniors' Drop-In Centre as an addition to the Josephburg Community Hall, provided a place for area seniors to play pool and shuffleboard and gather for social events. It also included a space for the thriving Art Club.

The first CNR stop east of Fort Saskatchewan was named after the first premiers of Alberta and Saskatchewan – from A.C. Rutherford and Walter Scott came the name 'Scotford'. The farm surrounding the station was called Scotford Farm. MacKenzie and Mann, huge contractors for the CNR, purchased the first land for their farm in 1906 from the original homesteader, Johan Berg. Scotford Farm eventually grew to 4800 acres. In 1932, Mann offered Roderick MacCrimmon the foreman position at the farm, really a small village. Ten years later MacCrimmon purchased 2700 acres of the farm. In 1953, the Hutterian Brethren purchased Scotford Farm.



Panel 4

The Chicken Supper began as an annual Sunday School picnic, lasting all day. First held at the Jacob Hennig farm, then at the John Mohr farm, and later at the Josephburg Recreation Grounds, by the late 1920's, fowl suppers were held in the church in Josephburg. Races and ball games were part of the fun. Later the event moved to the Community Hall. Eventually it took over the Moyer Recreation Centre arena, and established a Guinness Canadian Record for the most patrons served at a fowl supper. (June 14, 2000 – 2176 patrons served. One year later, 2719 were served and 100 hungry folks were turned away.) Homemade pies became a tradition. Every woman was expected to show up with her best pies.

Harold Mohr's 'kiddie-car' was a homemade affair, much loved by the children.



Panel 5

Calgary Power and the railway both reached Josephburg in 1928. Four grain elevators were built along with residences for the elevator agents (Province, becoming Reliance, and then Searle Grain Company; United Grain Growers, Ltd.; Alberta Wheat Pool; and Pioneer Grain Company). The CPR Station was a busy place, shipping freight, cream, and other produce and providing passenger service. Farmers no longer had to make the long haul with horse-drawn wagons to bring their grain to South Edmonton, later Fort Saskatchewan and Scotford.

Oxen often pulled ploughs. When a farmer was able, he would purchase horses. Always optimistic, the rainbow conveys the farmers' spirit.



Panel 6

Before the days of gas and diesel, farmers were exceedingly proud of their oxen and horses. Steam power for threshing required water and coal, both readily available. Crews were large. Women worked hard to feed the busy crews. The harvest brought people together. Although the days were long and the work was hard, there was a special feeling of community. Steam engines travelled the countryside to get the harvest in before winter.

During seeding and harvest, meals are still often consumed beside the implements in the field. Community life was of paramount importance. Weddings were huge celebrations, taking several days of preparation, butchering, sausage making, cabbage rolls, a must, and apple strudel the chief dessert. Nothing was too much trouble – perhaps even a temporary house addition to accommodate guests.



Panel 7

Businesses in Josephburg

With the building of the railroad, development followed. Elevators necessitated residences for the agents. Other homes followed.

In 1932, Leopold Thomas and George A. Mohr opened a gas station, which they sold to Albert Thomas the following year. He added groceries to the merchandise. Business grew and he opened a pool hall and barbershop in the basement of the store. Albert and Elenora added a coffee shop to the premises in 1945. The store changed hands several times and eventually closed in 1982.

In 1945, Frank and Ruth Becker opened their Hardware and sold Texaco Gas, supplies, and building products. Ray and Diane Schepp purchased the business in 1973; in 1977, it was converted to living quarters.

In 1962, Elenora's Lunch beside the Hardware, was leased by Danny Hicks from Albert and Elenora Thomas. Homemade pies were his specialty. Danny converted the little eatery into a residence in 1969.

In 1936, Rudolph Krebs and Adolph Becker built the Union 76 Service Station and later a garage. In 1950, Alfred and Elmer Thomas purchased the business, which had by then expanded into a large garage and service station. Alfred Thomas' green and yellow truck was a prominent feature in the hamlet. Alfred and his son, Terry, obtained the Case Dealership in 1951. In 1965, a larger garage with a showroom was built. In 1980, Strathcona County purchased the property and it became the Fire Hall. Many volunteers from the community participated in the Volunteer Fire Department, providing a much needed valuable service to the community.

In 1946, Mohr's Machine Shop moved from John Mohr's farm to the hamlet. Johnny Mohr was the blacksmith at the forge. Norman Mohr operated the family business until 1968.



In 1946, an egg grading station was built and managed over the years by Leonard Mohr, Donald Frey, Carl Stroehlein, Annie Strohle, and Kay Zotsman. In the late 50's it moved to Lamont.

In 1947, Art Barth built the Josephburg Feed Mill. Later, William Woodbridge purchased it. In 1966 it was sold to United Grain Growers. Fire took it in 1969, and in 1974, the new seed-cleaning plant, an initiative of local farmers, became a reality.

Panel 8

Cultural Events

Talk of a recreation structure began in 1972. Originally conceived as an addition to the community hall, the vision expanded to a new structure with an ice arena and a hall for athletics and social events, able to seat 500. Local women gave their input to the design of an excellent kitchen. The hall was planned to serve the needs of the citizens of Good Hope, Partridge Hill, Mansfield, Scotford, Bolton, Pleasant View, Galloway Park, and Josephburg. Construction of the Moyer Recreation Centre was the project that birthed the Josephburg Agricultural Society, a vibrant part of the community to this day. An agricultural board could apply for a government grant to assist in building. The Josephburg Agricultural Society (JAS) continues to act as an umbrella organization for many programs, its objective being the promotion and encouragement of activities to enrich rural life. To raise funds to keep the building operational, local women prepared frozen dinners that were gladly purchased by big industries in the area. This was a huge endeavour that allowed for a balanced budget. Strathcona County eventually assumed control. The centre was named in honour of Gordon Moyer, Area 5 councilor for almost 40 years.

In 2019, Josephburg Presents Concert series celebrated their forty-third year of entertainment on the Moyer stage. Many volunteers over the years have kept this venture alive. Some of the entertainment brought



to the stage include Frank Mills, Foothills Brass, Henri Loiselle, the New Orleans Connection, the Felix Possak Orchestra, Fiddler on the Roof, Pavlo, and Brett Kissel, as well as local talent, Billie-Jo and Mick-Lee Smith, just to name a few. Tickets are sold on a subscription basis, but singles are sometimes available. For many years, tickets have been sold out before the season begins. In addition to six annual dinner concerts, local talent shows and fiddle jamborees have also been included. The concerts are supported by the Josephburg Agricultural Society, the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, the County of Strathcona, and many others.

In the early 50's, the schoolteacher at Mansfield School, Birdie Hare, along with Isabel Dittrich and Doreen Smith, started the Elk Island Art Club. For some time, classes were given by various professors from the University of Alberta. When the Seniors' Drop-In Centre was built in 1978, it included a room for art, and Doreen Smith offered classes. Birdie Hare returned with a one-woman show in 1979. An official club was formed in 1983. Members continue to meet to paint and critique one another's work.

The internationally-travelled Josephburg Men's Chorus has been an ongoing success since 1979. Men from the surrounding area met in the church in Josephburg and presented concerts in various venues locally as well as traveling on tours. In 1983, Belles in Harmony began weekly practice sessions at the same time, and lent an additional aspect to the concerts. The group has expanded beyond the hamlet, and recently moved their rehearsals to Sherwood Park. From their roots in sacred music their repertoire has shifted to embrace more secular music (theatre, show tunes, modern, country) and they have learned that their audiences appreciate a little humour along the way.

Busy hands have long provided practical articles in homes. Quilting bees were a much-anticipated social time for women. In the mural, we see Emma Mohr quilting. For many years a group of women gathered weekly at the church in Josephburg repurposing fabric

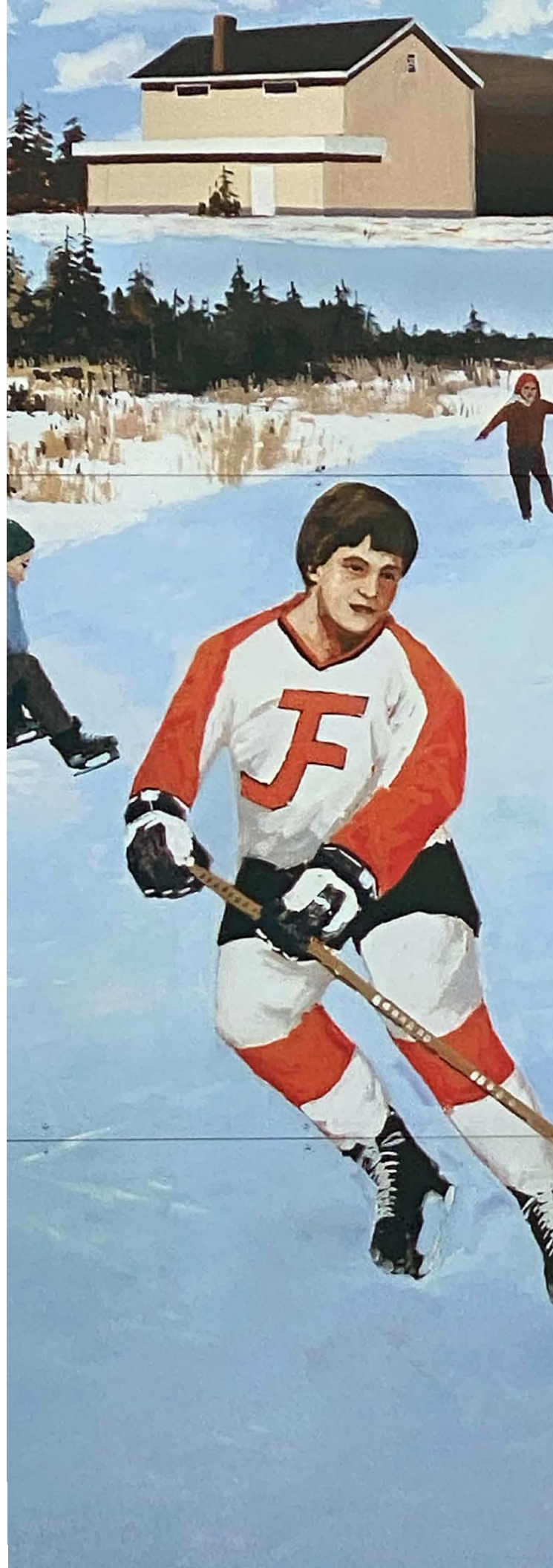


scraps and clothing, raising funds for various causes, and donating to those in need. In 2014, this group, the TAB (Take a Break) Group, won a Pride of Strathcona award for Community Service. In 2019, this group relocated to St. George's Anglican Church in Fort Saskatchewan.

Panel 9

In 1956, volunteers opened a two-sheet curling rink. By 1963, it boasted artificial ice. The upstairs served for meetings and socials. By 1976, JAS managed the curling rink. The curling rink closed in 1983, and the building was moved. Funds from the sale of the curling rink assets were given to the Historical Book Committee.

Hockey was once played on a snowplowed road in front of the Josephburg School with willow crooks, using a frozen "horse apple" for a puck. The slough on Franz Thomas' farm was also used for shinny on skates. Black's slough with a granary for a shelter later served for skating. A rink close to the school was built using water hauled from sloughs in tanks drawn by a team of horses. These were the days of the Josephburg Jays. Later a rink was built complete with a fence and lights, close to the well in Josephburg. This was the scene of hockey and skating carnivals. Volunteers built a proper skating rink with an out-building in 1960. When the Moyer Recreation Centre opened in 1975, hockey and figure skating moved indoors into a modern arena. In 1977 the Figure Skating Club began offering CFSA lessons and staging wonderful carnivals. The Josephburg Flyers enjoyed much success. Ray Whitney, pictured in the mural, once a Josephburg Flyer, went on to play professional hockey. Three ball diamonds west of Moyer Recreation Centre serve local youth. The tennis courts built in 1980 are scheduled for refurbishment and conversion to pickleball courts. A gazebo will soon be added to the farm-themed playground, an initiative of the Josephburg Agricultural society.

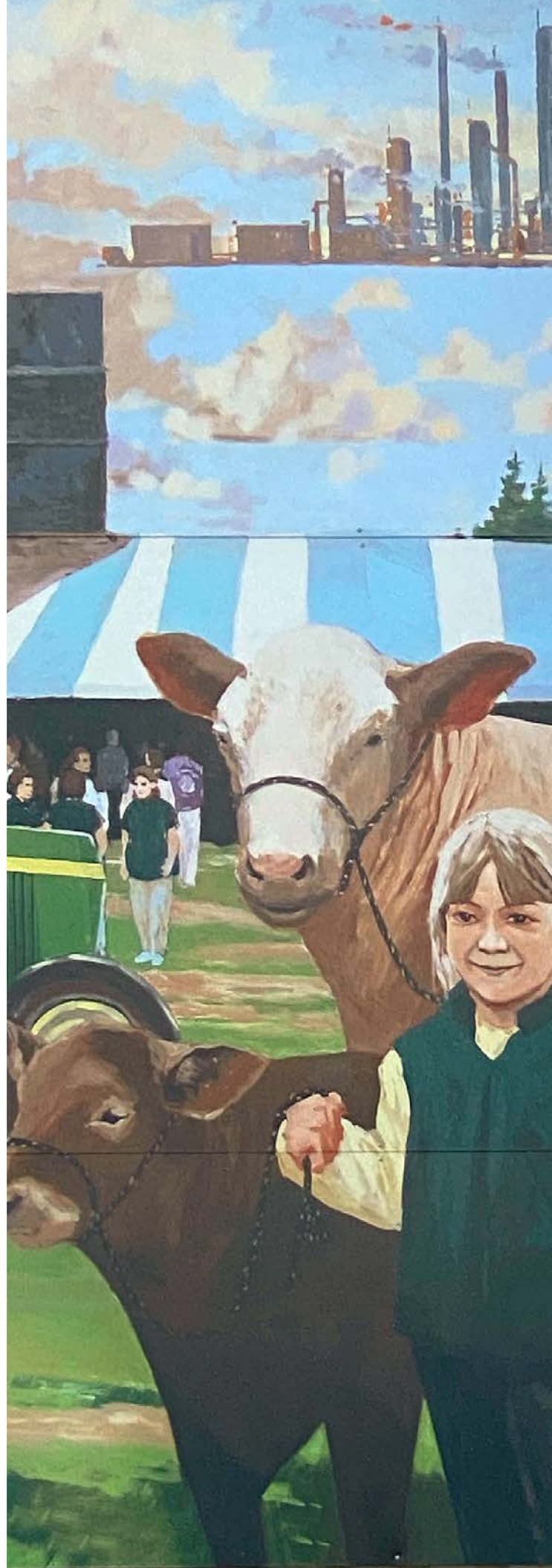


Panel 10

The availability of salt and natural gas, and the proximity of markets for their products, brought heavy industry to the region. Dow Chemical came in 1957 and over the years diversified and expanded to produce a wide range of products. It's now a world-scale petrochemical plant. Shell Scotford Refinery and chemical plant came on the scene in 1984. In 2000 a glycols plant was opened at Scotford Chemicals. Closer to Fort Saskatchewan, Sherritt Gordon Mines opened their plant in 1954. Sherritt was the first heavy industry in the area and transformed the small town of Fort Saskatchewan. In Many other industries have likewise been attracted to the region, providing employment and partnering with the community.

In 2018, the Fort Saskatchewan 4-H Beef Club celebrated its 75th anniversary. The Josephburg Agricultural Society proudly supports this club. The 4-H Beef Achievement Day show and sale takes place each year in late May following the Josephburg Agricultural Society's chief event, the JAS Country Classic. This event takes over the Moyer Recreation Centre and is an opportunity for the local club as well as surrounding clubs to show their projects and gain the necessary experience to better their knowledge of the beef industry.

Another organization under the umbrella of JAS is the Josephburg Riding Club, formed in 1961. The club's primary activity is to organize and produce gymkhana events for its members and guest riders, but it also works to encourage positive horsemanship and sportsmanship, proper equine husbandry and management, and youth involvement in the agricultural and equestrian communities. The local Josephburg Gymkhana Grounds is cooperatively maintained through members' volunteer efforts and support from JAS.





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