

Love is in the air for sweethearts

Candy, flowers and gifts all part of Valentine's Day

By Rachel Cohen

Every Feb. 14, across Canada and around the world, candy, flowers and gifts are exchanged between loved ones, all in the name of St. Valentine.

There are varying opinions as to the origin of Valentine's Day. Some experts state that it originated from St. Valentine, a Roman who was martyred for refusing to give up Christianity. He died on Feb. 14, 269 A.D., the same day that had been devoted to love.

Legend also says that St. Valentine left a farewell note for the jailer's daughter, who had become his friend, and signed it "From Your Valentine".

Other aspects of the story say that Saint Valentine served as a priest at the temple during the reign of Emperor Claudius. Claudius then had Valentine jailed for defying him. In 496 A.D. Pope Gelasius set aside Feb. 14 to honour St. Valentine.

Whatever story holds true, today we celebrate Valentine's Day to express how we feel to our loved ones.

"Valentine's Day is the symbol of love, and for us at Donini Chocolate, it's a pleasure to serve our local chocolate lovers all year round," says Lee Ann Brennan, store manager of Donini Chocolate on Bell Boulevard, in Belleville.

Every year it seems there is a debate among the population on the validity of



Photo by Rachel Cohen

Natalie Ackerman takes a moment to embrace her arrangement of roses during a busy day at Live Love and Laugh, located at 222 Bell Boulevard. "Roses are number one, they are classic, always have been, always will be."

the holiday. Whether it be the person who calls it a "Hallmark" holiday, and who refuses to acknowledge its existence, or the person who goes to extraordinary efforts

to impress their loved one.

Natalie Ackerman has been working at Live Love and Laugh flowers for 17 years, and for her family-owned business, Val-

entine's Day is something to look forward to.

"Florists alike have to designate Feb. 14 to spend our day at the shop. We are

constantly prepping starting this week for everyone's Valentine's Day passions," said Ackerman.

As the women of the crowded flower shop were busy at work, Ackerman shared her favourite Valentine's Day story.

"Every year, my boyfriend has the understanding that the shop is too busy, and working long hours is inevitable. But one year, my boyfriend surprised me on Valentine's Day with one of the most beautiful bouquet of tropical flowers I had ever seen, waiting for me at the shop. All of the girls kept it a secret. It was perfect."

The floral shop will be running its 17th Valentine's Day this year, and the employees say they share the same excitement.

"I started eight years ago on Valentine's Day, and even though it's crazy busy, I love seeing the men waiting in line ups with smiles across their faces. They don't mind the wait," said store employee Ellen Webb, in between serving customers.

It doesn't matter whether your gift of love falls in the form of a dinner reservation, a card professing your love, or chocolates.

"Roses are number one. They are classic, always have been, always will be," said Ackerman.

Live Love and Laugh expects to sell about 200-300 dozens of roses on Valentine's Day. On an average day, the shop sells up to five to ten dozens.

Snipping a handful of roses, Webb smiles.

"You can't deny what a great holiday this is — the season of love is so much fun!"



Photo by Mallory Haigh

First-year Loyalist College Developmental Support Worker student Liz McLennan is a participant in the Belleville General Hospital Foundation's Quinte's Biggest Loser competition. She utilizes the Loyalist College's student fitness centre in the quest for a healthy, active lifestyle.

Loyalist student joins Biggest Loser event

By Mallory Haigh

The Quinte's Biggest Loser weight-loss competition has almost drawn to a close.

The event, which is run by the Belleville General Hospital is a weight-loss competition modelled after a popular reality TV series.

Contestants, raising money for the hospital foundation, strive to have a healthier lifestyle and compete to see who can lose the most weight and raise the most funds. The contest was announced in December and ends next month.

Local businesses and fitness facilities were also encouraged to participate. Gyms including Belleville's Curves, Quinte West and Belleville YMCA and Goodlife Fitness are offering free gym time to competitors.

In addition to providing participants with a fitness outlet, the foundation has scheduled various health and nutrition classes to support the cause.

Liz McLennan, a first year developmental services worker student at Loyalist, said that joining the program and participating in the competition was a spontaneous decision.

"I need to lose weight but I'm so completely bad at motivating myself. The natural accountability and very public aspect of fundraising for BGH works to

keep me moving," McLennan said.

McLennan is both a mother and popular local blogger. She runs the Life With Bellymonster blog, which focuses on her day-to-day life as a mom and student. She has returned to Loyalist as a mature student, after having originally been educated in journalism.

With a long-term 60-pound weight loss goal in mind, McLennan has her short-term sights set on incorporating fitness and exercise into her life, and maintaining a healthy, active lifestyle.

"I walk every day. Well, six days a week. I've been trying to get to some yoga classes and "boot camp" like things, too. I'm not too into weights, but don't mind running, so I do that," she said.

McLennan noted that she has already noticed big changes in her life. In addition to healthier eating and an exercise routine (she frequents the Loyalist Student Fitness Centre), she has lost a few pounds and commented that she does feel healthier and can notice an improvement in her fitness and health.

Said McLennan, "I'm not even close to achieving my goal, but I've lost a few pounds and size since this competition began. Plus, I'm eating better so it's all good."

The final weigh-in for Quinte's Biggest Loser takes place on March 29.

Bus driver loves shuttling junior curlers

By Joanna Becket

A yellow school bus has been barreling east along highway 401 by 7:30 a.m. every morning this week with Rome Dorval at the wheel.

Dorval is shuttling competitors in the 2012 Canadian Junior Men's and Women's Curling Championships from the Fairfield Inn & Suites in Belleville where they're staying, to two locations in Napanee where they're competing.

The games are taking place at the Strathcona Paper Centre and the Napanee & District Curling Club and wrap up on Feb. 12.

The fact that Dorval's an avid curler makes this assignment that much more appealing.

"I belong to the Napanee & District Curling Club and I've been curling for five years, so I'm right in my element," he said. "I'm driving the buses which I enjoy plus I'm meeting people in a sport I enjoy. So I've got a big smile on my face."

Dorval, 70, was first inspired to drive a school bus by his daughter Julie. It's a big change from his previous career as the owner of his own business in metal fabrication in Mississauga, Ont., a company he ran for 20 years.

"After we were living here and we adopted our daughter Julie, she got so excited about riding in a school bus that she turned me on to it," said Dorval. "I enjoy driving and I'm very comfortable in the company of children, so driving a school bus is something I enjoy doing," he said.

Dorval now has his own route, picking up and dropping off elementary and high school students five days a week all over Lennox & Addington County.

"You get to know your kids," he said, "and all the different stops. You feel much more comfortable when you have your own route."

A temporary driver has taken over Dorval's route while he's providing the shuttle service.

Driving a school bus is only one of Dorval's passions.

Now married to Judy Dorval, 67, the couple moved four years ago from Mississauga to Napanee to be closer to their own children and to fulfill their dream of someday living in an old stone house.

The Dorvals have six children and 12 grandchildren between them.

They also have two adopted foster children, Crissy, 23, and Julie, five.

Judy Dorval has been fostering children for more than 30 years, many of them with special needs.

Rome Dorval has been involved in fostering since the couple met eight years ago. The Dorvals married in 2006 and adopted Julie in 2009.

Both Crissy and Julie were foster children from birth. Judy Dorval is the only "mom" they've ever known.

Life is busy for the Dorvals. They're the parents of a five-year-old with all that entails — pre-school classes, dance classes, birthday parties, family outings, and with Julie, medical appointments to monitor her care.

They also deliver meals-on-wheels in their community.

"There's never a dull moment," said Judy Dorval.

"I'm quite happy with our lives right now. It suits me well," said Rome Dorval. "And we're still fostering. We're still enjoying the fostering."

Artist suggests others 'listen to their voice'

Messages sent out regarding artist's beliefs about cars and their negative effects

By Megan Voss

What do muffin tins, road kill and car parts have in common?

Artist Jeff Mann's work includes — but is not limited to — those three things. His artwork is being displayed from Feb. 2 to Feb. 23 at the Belleville Public Library.

Mann says he hopes people enjoy the work. His goal is to inspire others.

"I'm not very good at drawing, so sculptures and print/painting are good for me," he said.

"I hope to encourage others who may feel discouraged that they aren't 'good' at art to listen to their voice and find a way to express themselves if that's what they want to do."

As well, he said he wants to get his message about cars out to people.

On his website, he writes a lot about his beliefs about cars and their negative effects. He strongly believes society should be setting goals about cars and reducing pollution, the improvement of fuel efficiency, and minimizing the use of natural resources.

On his website, he writes about creating a demand for non-car transportation, and doing so by increasing the efficiency of public transportation, removing the aspects that hinder it and encouraging transportation methods that use less energy and natural resources.

Mann portrayed this theme through his brightly coloured and textured artwork, using parts of cars as an element of it.



Photo by Megan Voss

Lilianne Denis pauses for a moment to examine some artwork by Jeff Mann at the Belleville Public Library on Feb. 7. She says the paintings say a lot, because a lot of the themes of the pictures are of cars, and a large number of people are killed by them every year.

He called the process, "Reconstructing the car." He described it on his website as the transformation from something he would generally think as malignant into something benign. He said that his approach is, however, not negative.

"I don't make ugly pieces to reflect the evils of the car, but rather celebrate the incredible beauty of car parts and their complexity."

There are different interpretations of his work. Lilianne Denis was attending a

meeting in another part of the library, and during a break, she came up to check out the artwork.

"It's very interesting," she said.

"There's painting and multimedia, and it says a lot. Quite a bit of his theme is cars, and with the large number of people killed every year by cars, it's quite relevant."

Mann said he gets his inspiration from car parts, although he has no idea how the end product is going to turn out.

"Generally, I work directly with no pre-

conceived idea," he described on his website. "I choose an object, an actual car part or a tire tread pattern and respond to it by focusing on what makes it interesting to me."

Mann began his artwork in 1999. He started with clay sculptures and moved to metal and concrete ... and recently, he has been using car parts.

In 2000, he presented his first show. He displayed his work at the Chocolate Church Art Gallery Juried Regional show in Bath, Maine.