



# Spring-Summer 2022 Visitor Services Report



GREATER PARKLAND  
REGIONAL CHAMBER

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## **Executive Summary**

Sarah Parry, October 2022

The COVID-19 pandemic had severely disrupted the visitor market, with most attractions, hotels, restaurants and retail operating to severe restrictions or closed. People were confined to their homes. This saw both attendance numbers and revenues plummet, and even as lockdown ended, many restrictions remained in place to limit capacity. Thankfully for 2022 we have seen those restrictions lifted and somewhat of a return to 'normal' however we have witnessed a wariness of crowds. It is anticipated that the visitor market; including those visiting attractions, is expected to fully recover by 2024.

As we move into Fall and into 2023 there are a number of current risks to the recovery and return to growth of visitor numbers. With the rising cost of living impacting paid travel, spending in areas such as food, higher energy bills etc. are adding financial pressures.

Our summer has been full of renewed energy, fun and welcoming people both here in the visitor centre and at the many events our team have been part of. The positivity of our summer staff was infectious and I am proud of the 'welcome' they provided on all our behalf. We understand that our region is diverse and offers so much for visitors and residents to experience; we must be able to move forward, accommodate and listen to what people are telling us and how they want to receive information and interact with us. We remain open to the numerous opportunities to tell new and untold stories, to embrace new visitors among previously under-represented groups and very much look forward to our continued relationships.

## **The Visitor Services Vision**

Our vision is to collaborate with stakeholders and partners to shape and develop visitor services for the region while understanding that tourism drives growth and visitor satisfaction drives repeat visits.

This was the first year for Miriam Gordon in the role of Visitor Services Manager, so the summer was a time of learning how the Visitor Information Centre runs and assessing what the long-term goals for Visitor Services should be.

### **Goals for Visitor Services**

- Create an attractive and welcoming environment that reflects the cultural emphasis of the Tri-Region, with particular reference to the Town of Stony Plain's Arts, Culture and Heritage Action Plan.
- Encourage visitors and residents to experience a wide range of local attractions and businesses throughout the entire Tri-Region area.
- Leave visitors with the lasting impression that the people of the Tri-Region are friendly and welcoming, with the hope that they will return.
- Develop connections between visitor services and stakeholders and promote connections between stakeholders.
- Be an informative resource for residents of the area.
- Continue the relationship building with the region's Indigenous neighbours to promote authentic experiences and crafts in answer to our visitor and resident feedback.

## **Elements to Achieve the Visitor Services Goals**

### **Summer Staff**

- Federal funding to hire summer staff was secured.
- Four summer students with specific skill sets were hired e.g., social media expertise.
- The students were trained and supervised. Through experience and training (two of them completed the Ambassador Training) they became knowledgeable local experts.
- A schedule was created to cover the Stony Plain Visitor Information Centre (VIC) as well as events and attractions in Spruce Grove and Parkland County. This schedule included at least one visit a week to Wabamun by the mobile VIC.
- Human interaction is important and memorable, so the VIC was rearranged to make the students the focus as people enter.
- Summer students also provided support with Chamber events such as: Expo, Picnic in the Park, the Indigenous Peoples Day Event and the Golf Tournament.

- It is the Chamber's desire that all staff feel included and part of the team. This is achieved through an open-door policy, inclusion in meetings, seeking their input and recommendations on topics and working with them to develop their skills.
- Assigning individual projects is a way of achieving inclusion and personal development. This summer we worked individually with the students to assign projects and they were held to account through project assessment and goal setting.

### **Data & Metrics**

- One master database was used to store all visitor statistics.
- Each team member collected standard information, including postal codes of visitors and information on the service that we provided for each visitor.

### **Think Locally, Act Regionally**

- We worked to increase awareness of events and experiences locally and throughout the Tri-Region.
- We were mindful that Canadians are still often making the decision to stay local and worked on increasing regional travel frequency and spend per trip.
- Focus was placed on a wide range of Tri-Region experiences, for example the VIC gift shop was used to promote local artisans.
- A focus on Indigenous tourism was introduced by collecting the information on Indigenous related visitor experiences in one place in the VIC.
- A brochure for Wabamun businesses was updated, printed, and distributed.

### **Improving Visitor Service Engagement**

- With the assumption that people want to experience the things that are unique to the Tri-Region area, we offered information on as wide a range of locally owned businesses and experiences as possible.
- Information was offered on experiences beyond what had been asked for – people do not always know what they want until they hear it.

### **Building & Amenities**

- The VIC is open from Monday to Friday, year-round. From June 4 it was also open at weekends. It closed on Sundays at the end of August but stayed open on Saturdays until the end of September.
- The public washroom is open all year, the summer staff clean and maintain it over the summer and the Visitor Services Manager, aided by professional janitorial services, maintains it during the winter months.
- Early in the year the VIC and Chamber offices, including the Board Room, were repainted and new carpeting installed to update the interior.

- The gift shop was transitioned to be a showcase for local artisans, phasing out the items produced outside of the region, and new furniture (supporting a local business) was purchased to house the items.
- The layout of the VIC was reimagined, some furniture was removed to open the room, and the emphasis was moved from the brochure racks to the people at reception.
- In response to the growing Indigenous Tourism sector, an Indigenous Artist has been commissioned to create a mural, and the painting is scheduled for December 2022.
- To showcase up-to-date attractive images of the area, in an attempt to entice visitors to stay and explore the county, a large monitor has been purchased and a local landscape photographer has committed to providing photographs for the display. The monitor will also be used to display local attractions, businesses and events.
- Through the Federal Government’s Shop Local Campaigns, the chamber secured sizeable funding to assist our business community. The Chamber has commissioned a local videographer who is currently working on a showcasing video of the Tri-Region. This video will be released shortly and will be provided to each Municipality for their use as well.

### Mobile VIC

- Following restrictions being lifted it has been a pleasure to attend and support the many local events being hosted across the region. Our summer staff worked tirelessly to ensure they were present, and prepared, always with a smile.
- The Mobile VIC attended over fifty local and regional events and attractions, providing up-to-date information.
- The students planned and executed the “Blueberry Welcome,” where they delivered lemonade, locally made snacks and information to campers at the Blueberry Bluegrass Festival, with the goal of pushing campers out of the Heritage Park parking lot and into the Tri-Region.
- The students organized the Town of Stony Plain’s scarecrow competition.
- The Mobile VIC was onsite in the Hamlet of Wabamun at least once a week.
- A written report was done for each major event, detailing every aspect of the event, including engagement, social media posts and number of brochures given out.
- A quiz was created to be used at some events to increase engagement. These proved to be very popular. A correct answer to the trivia question gave the person an entry to a draw for a gift card for a local business, this was a way of collecting postal codes.



## Mobile VIC Events

### May

19 Main Street Opening, Stony Plain

### June

4&5	Farmers' Days	18	Wabamun Provincial Park
9	Midsummer Thursday	21	Wabamun Provincial Park
10	Wabamun Provincial Park	22	Summer Sessions
12	Wabamun Market & Provincial Park	25	Community Street Market, Stony Plain
13	Parkland Food Bank Golf Tournament	26	Wabamun Provincial Park
16	Help & Hope for Ukraine Fund Raiser	29	Summer Sessions
17	Acheson Business Association Golf Tournament (promoted charity raffle tickets)	30	Wabamun Provincial Park

### July

1	Canada Day Spruce Grove	19	Wabamun Provincial Park
1	Canada Day Stony Plain	20	Summer Sessions
6	Summer Sessions	21	Cultural Campfires
7	Cultural Campfires	22	Glowing Embers RV Park
7	Tri Region Mayors' Golf Classic	23	Ribfest Spruce Grove
8	Wabamun Provincial Park	24	Chickakoo Lake
10	Wabamun Provincial Park	26	Stony Plain Spray Park
11	Wabamun Waterfront Park	27	Summer Sessions
11	Jubilee Park, Spruce Grove	27&28	Blueberry Welcome
12	Central Park, Spruce Grove	28	Cultural Campfires
13	Summer Sessions	30	Stony Plain Farmers' Market
14	Midsummer Thursday	31	Wabamun Market & Waterfront Park
17	Wabamun Market		

### August

1	Chickakoo Lake	14	City Centre Market, Spruce Grove
3	Summer Sessions	15	Jubilee Park, Spruce Grove
4	Cultural Campfires	18	Midsummer Thursday & Cultural Campfires
7	Wabamun Market	20	Waves & Wabamun Art Walk
10	Wabamun Waterfront Park	21	Wabamun Market & Waterfront Park
11	Cultural Campfires	24	Wabamun Waterfront Park
12	Wabamun Provincial Park	25	Cultural Campfires
		29	Wabamun Waterfront Park

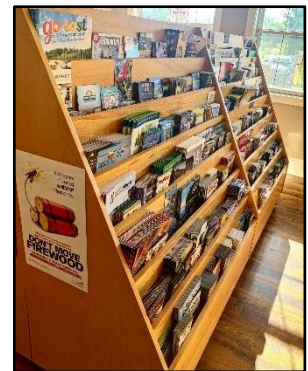
## Digital Marketing

In response to the waning popularity of paper brochures, we increased our focus on Social Media during the summer. This strategy captures a demographic that the brochures are not reaching. Our Facebook data reveals that our posts are reaching mostly age 35 to 54 women.

- Social media posts were planned and posts from other organizations were shared. These posts focused on local experiences, businesses and useful information for both visitors and area residents.
- A particular focus of the digital marketing was to promote businesses affected by the construction in the downtown area of Spruce Grove.

## Brochures

- Two students spent a considerable part of the early summer updating the brochure database and ordering updated brochures. Much had changed in the realm of paper information during Covid-19, and it was a big job to get everything back to pre-Covid standards.
- To reflect the current move away from paper information, one of the three brochure stands was removed, and the brochures were organized into the remaining two stands.



## Wabamun Farmers' Market

- One of the summer students took responsibility for the social media for the Wabamun Farmers' Market.
- The VIC team organized a draw which ran throughout the whole season of the market.
- Staff and students attended the market several times over the summer.

## Relationships

Nurtured and maintained relationships with:

- City of Spruce Grove
- City Centre Business Association
- Town of Stony Plain
- Parkland County
- Acheson Business Association
- Enoch Cree Nation
- Alexander First Nation
- Hamlet of Wabamun
- Other VICs across Alberta
- Visitor Information providers
- Businesses and attractions around Parkland County
- Paul First Nation
- Mackenzie Brown, Indigenous Tourism Alberta

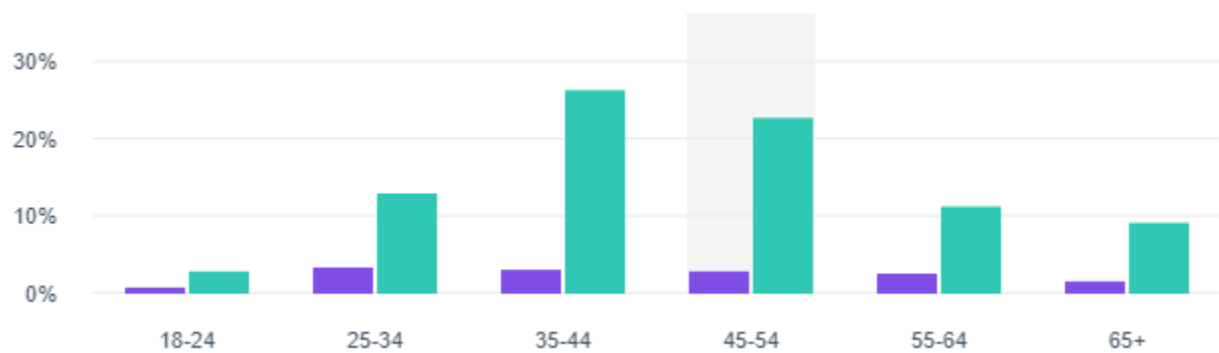


## Visitor Statistics

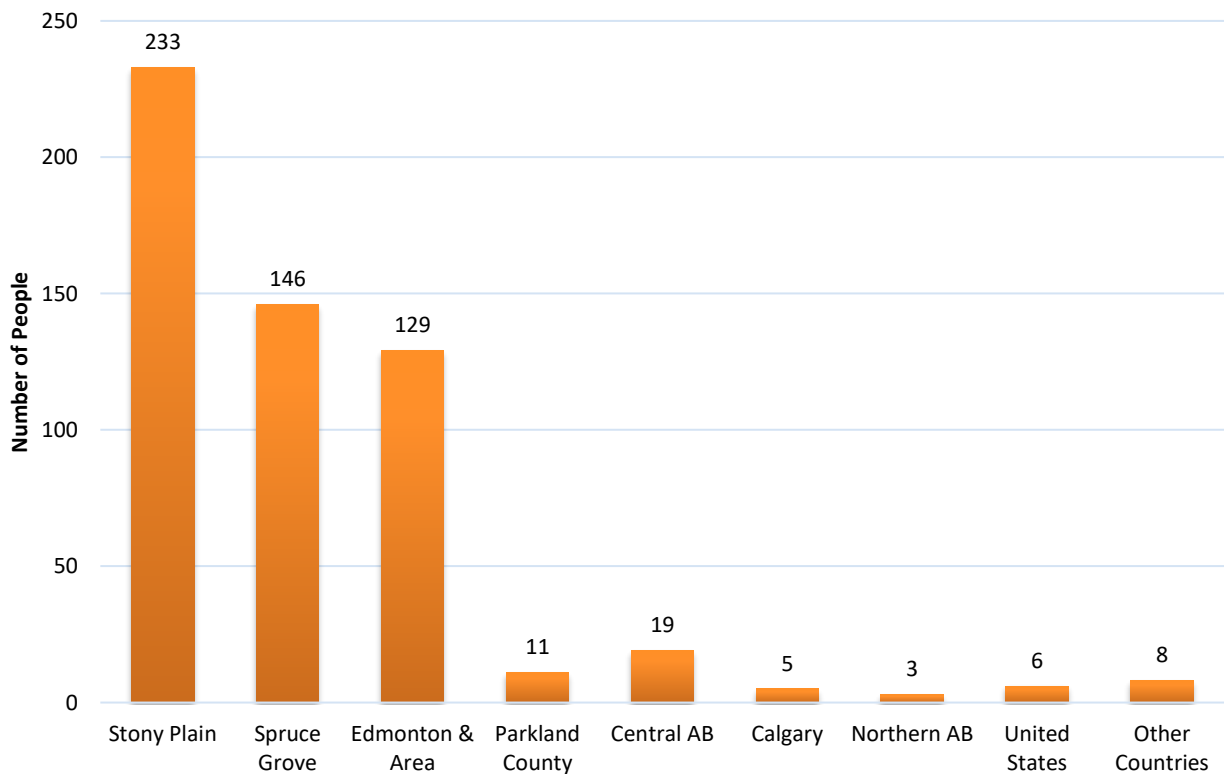
- Greater Parkland Information Centre Facebook followers: 847
- Facebook post with highest engagement: July 11 post encouraging people to visit Wabamun Waterfront Park, with 290 reactions, comments, shares, views or clicks.
- Facebook post with highest reach: August 15 post advertising Stony Plain’s scarecrow competition with a reach of 2954.

## Facebook Audience Age and Gender

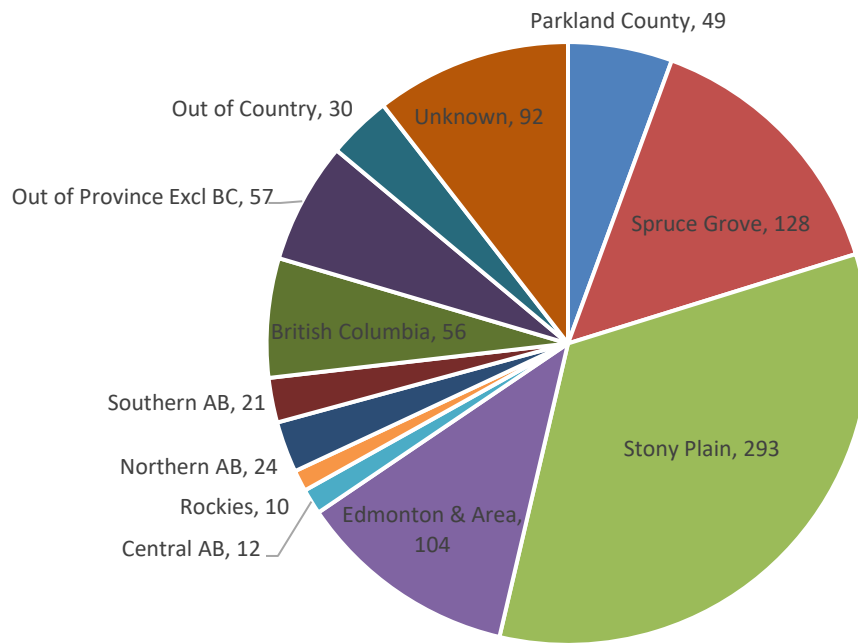
- Men - 14.40%
- Women - 85.60%



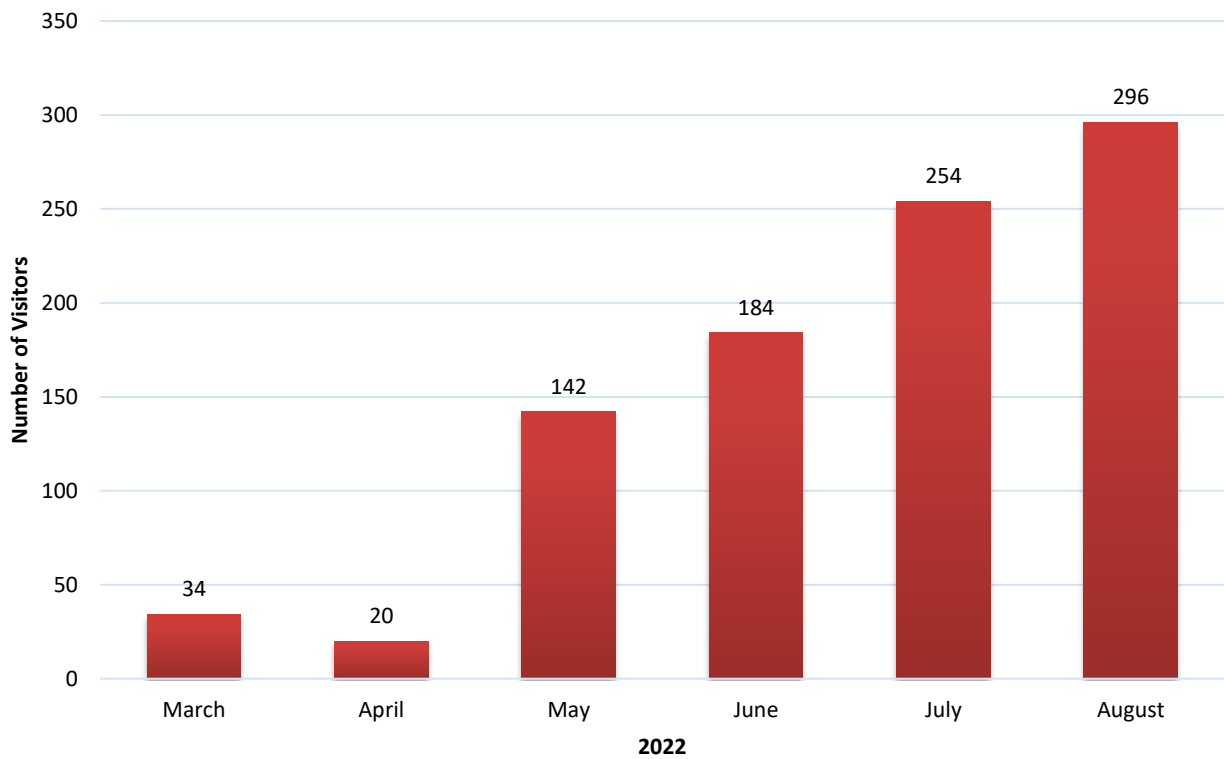
## Facebook Audience Location



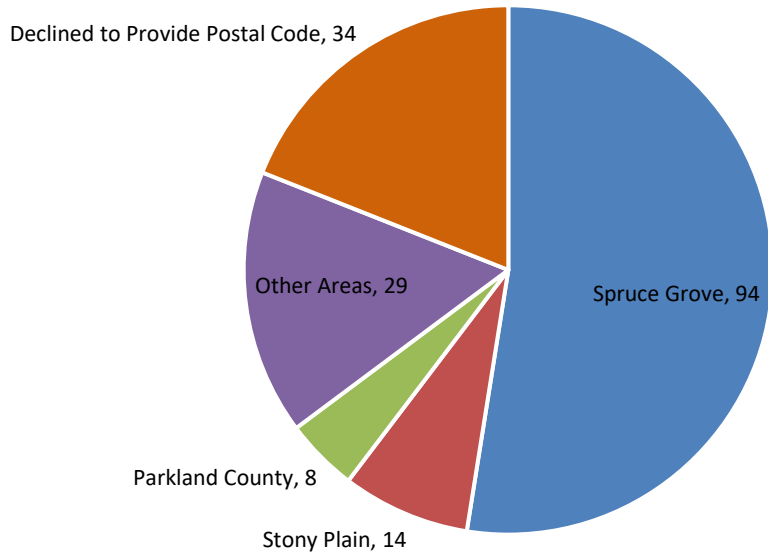
## VIC Guests



## VIC Visitors by Month



## Canada Day Celebrations – Spruce Grove and Stony Plain Area of Residence for Visitors to the Mobile VIC



Mobile VIC at Farmers' Days, Stony Plain

## A Summer Student Perspective



### Casey Gorieu

Going into my second summer working with the Greater Parkland Visitor Information Centre, I wasn't sure what to expect. I was excited, nervous, and anxious all at the same time. Partly because I knew how different the office would be with unfamiliar faces, different management, and a summer of re-opening from COVID. However, the work environment created by the Greater Parkland Regional Chamber and Visitor Services team continued to exceed my expectations.

It is a work environment like no other. All members of the crew demonstrated kindness through not only their words but their actions. They made me feel like I was part of something bigger, and that my thoughts and opinions were important. It was the feeling of belonging that really encouraged me to come back this summer. To come back a second time around and experience the same positive feelings, it shows a lot about the Chamber and the positive atmosphere they create for their employees.

As I head into my final year at Keyano College to complete my degree in Business Management and Human Resources, there are several things that I will take back with me. The first one being customer service. Visitor information counsellors are tasked with being knowledgeable of lakes, trails, and events, in and around the surrounding area. I take pride in providing others the customer service that would give others the real-life experience of what they can encounter in the area. Through report writing, scheduling, and mobile sessions, I have learned how to manage time while successfully completing tasks.

My time with the Greater Parkland Visitor Information Centre has been an absolute blast! I feel honoured to have been given the chance to work with such driven, dedicated, and hard-working individuals. I will always remember my time at the Chamber and the wonderful impact that each member had on my life. Thank you for the past two summers!



**Claire Buisseret**

The biggest takeaway I have from this summer as a Visitor Information Counsellor was the improvement of my interpersonal abilities. Confident conversation and professional communication were my biggest personal goals to improve on and the Chamber helped me to foster that growth within myself. Getting out into the community and speaking to people with all types of questions, backgrounds, and experiences was the most interesting part of the summer. This is a great job for someone who enjoys speaking to others while sharing knowledge and experiences.

Working alongside the Chamber, I was granted the opportunity to write the 2022 Women of Influence articles that were published in the GPRC newsletter. This article series reflected well on myself, the Chamber, and the Women of Influence as we were able to showcase female ability in the community in various ways. I interviewed, wrote articles, and edited audio to add to the publications. I was also tasked with taking on the social media pages of the brand new Wabamun Farmers' Market. I went into the summer with zero experience with social media or marketing, but over these past few months I grew to appreciate media as a tool for spreading information.

In the fall I will be returning to MacEwan University to complete my fourth year in the Communications Studies program as a Journalism Major. This summer job directly correlated with my career goals. I was fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to write these articles, and in turn, will be able to put more publications onto my resume. The Visitor Information Counsellor position will be infinitely helpful for me in the future as I learned technical, interpersonal, and communication skills. Thank you for having me this summer. I will always appreciate the Greater Parkland Visitor Information Centre.



### **Abigail Thiel**

When I look back on the summer and think about how much I have grown, I can certainly pinpoint a few areas in which I feel like growth has taken place. This summer taught me valuable lessons about myself, my abilities, and work ethic. Through the work I completed this summer, I was able to further develop my time management, planning, and teamwork skills. Working with a team that made me feel so supported and confident in my role allowed me the opportunity to try new things and be a better teammate in different working environments. Whether it was mobile events, Chamber events, or working in the office there was always an opportunity for growth at the Greater Parkland Visitor Information Centre.

Mobile events were an area that I particularly enjoyed this year. Whether it was Midsummer Thursdays, Cultural Campfires, Summer Sessions, City Centre Market, Wabamun or anywhere else in the Greater Parkland Area; being out in the community and chatting with community members was always a blast. The Greater Parkland area does a fantastic job of fostering community and encouraging engagement. Being out in the community requires a certain amount of preparation work, whether that be packing up brochures, packing up the tent or ensuring you know where you are heading. Mobile events encouraged me to be prepared, plan and always put my best foot forward.

Mobile events along with other tasks have prepared me for my career as a teacher. As I head into my first year of an After Degree in Education I can safely say that many aspects of this job have prepared me for what is to come in my career. This summer, I learned the importance of preparation work and planning, learning how to navigate different online platforms and improving my teamwork skills all of which will most definitely come in handy moving forward. I also had the opportunity to co-create a training slideshow for next year's students which of course directly ties into my upcoming career. As I look back on my time at the Greater Parkland Visitor Information Centre, I will always be grateful for the personal growth, the opportunities granted and lessons learned.



**Ian Fillinger**

My time at the Greater Parkland Visitor Information Centre has been a very fulfilling experience. I got to attend many local events and the people I worked with were great. The team I worked with throughout the summer has been very supportive in all areas of work. If I needed help with any projects or setting up at local events they were quick to assist. One of the most memorable parts about working here was the team! Everyone had great energy that was evident throughout the office. It made work not feel like work.

I was able to hone my communication and community engagement skills during this job. It can be nerve wracking talking to new people, let alone new people every day! I really enjoyed meeting community members and helping to encourage community engagement throughout the Greater Parkland Region. The Visitor Centre gave me the opportunity to meet people not only from the local community, but also individuals from across the globe. It was such a fun job and one that I will recommend to anyone if the opportunity arises!

This year I'll be attending my first year at Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) for Civil Engineering Technology; I will also be on the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology Students Association (NAITSA) team. Much like this summer, I will be working at several NAIT events throughout the year, where I can utilize my newfound communication and community engagement skills. A new start with new skills! I'm thankful for the opportunity this job has given me and the new skills I have learned.

## **Visitor Services Manager Conclusion**

Since Alberta lifted all their Covid-19 restrictions on June 14, the operation of visitor services was very much back to normal for most of the summer. The VIC team worked to deliver an exceptional visitor experience, always with the end goal of pushing visitors into Stony Plain, Spruce Grove and Parkland County for recreation or business. The four summer students did an outstanding job of advertising events and experiences on social media, posting on Facebook and Instagram from various locations around the Tri-Region. It was recognized that brochures are waning in popularity as people increasingly use their phones for trip planning, but it is always attractive to talk to local people about the area, so the VIC was reimaged to make people the focus, enabling the students to give every visitor a personal experience.

This was my first year in the position of Visitor Services Manager, so it was a time of learning how things work and assessing what the needs are. My observations will shape the goals for the VIC in 2023. One thing I did observe is that the VIC is not only a resource for visitors but provides much needed information to local residents, especially newcomers to the area and older people with limited access to technology. This has led me to produce a plan to provide a range of information for residents as well as visitors. The information in the VIC from Community and Social Development has been updated, and it has been suggested that I also produce a package of information for newcomers with leaflets on things like garbage collection etc.

As always, the main function of the VIC is to welcome and provide information for visitors to the area. Generous funding from the Town of Stony Plain, the City of Spruce Grove, Parkland County and the Federal Government allows us to provide the resources and staff to be that resource. I am very aware that the Stony Plain location is now the only dedicated information centre in the Tri-Region and hope to focus in 2023 on expanding our mobile VIC service into the region even more than this year.

We had four wonderful summer students this year who all brought different strengths to the team. In return, we were able to offer them opportunities to develop marketable skills and gain work experience. They did an excellent job of getting the mobile VIC out into the community and I received some very positive comments from community members on their visibility at events as well as their helpful attitudes. They developed a quiz to use at events as a way of gathering statistics on visitors, this proved to be extremely popular, and they were even able to give away a few gift cards for local businesses as prizes. One of the students also came up with the idea of a “Little Free Library,” which has proven extremely popular with visitors to Rotary Park.



In response to requests from individuals and organizations, the team produced various lists and plans for visitors, including a small brochure printed in-house with suggestions of restaurants and things to do in each of the three municipal areas. We also produced a plan of themed day trips for a tourism presentation in Edmonton which has proved a useful resource to have on hand.

Our database shows that most VIC visitors were from Stony Plain, Spruce Grove and Parkland County, with the others being from other parts of Alberta, other Canadian provinces and then a few from outside of Canada. We recognize that brochures are waning in popularity and, to remain relevant to all these groups of visitors, we will continue to diversify the range of services we offer. This year that included such things as adding chairs to our deck, including planters, a small library and attaching QR codes to our brochure stands, and we have begun looking at ideas for new services we can provide in the future.

As we close one summer we are looking to the next. The support from our Municipalities and Indigenous neighbours is vital for our success and ongoing development. We continue to look for innovative ways of delivering information and understand that technology plays a part however, there is nothing quite like human interaction.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, Miriam Gordon at [mgordon@gprchamber.ca](mailto:mgordon@gprchamber.ca) with feedback and suggestions. I look forward to working together to build on this year's success.