

Spartan pride GLOWED

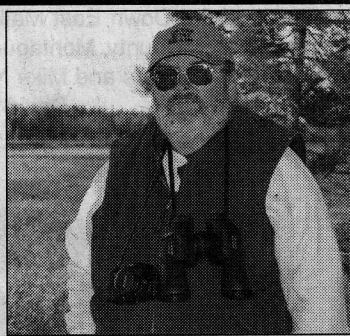
MAY 5
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Born and educated in Charlottetown, Rollo Bay West's Larry LeBlanc became a UPEI football Panther, then went on to teach in Moncton. There he coached football and soccer. Ten years ago, Larry and his wife settled permanently in the area of PEI, they came to love and became immersed in the community.

In his view something was missing. The empty Souris High weight room was situated out of sight and out of mind behind the gymnasium. With the support of the school principal, he hauled his own weights from home and spent money out of his own pocket. He got the word out; there was an opportunity for students to participate in the sport of power-lifting.

Fifteen started the program two years ago. The year finished with 20. Most had never lifted weights before. The community got on board with more area businesses, as well as the RCMP Foundation donating cash and materials. There was instant success in the first school year, with Souris High's Senior Women winning the provincial title. Eyebrows were raised.

Souris was not the first school involved. This has been a PEI-SAA sanctioned sport for the past five years. Six other schools joined Souris supplying 87 students participating in the 2010 Provincial Championships. There is some interest in two others and hoped for participation from the final two is



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encouraged.

The provincials held in Souris April 23 were an eye-opener. The three disciplines – squat, bench press and dead lift were performed in a well organized, well managed and well attended event. It was run in the same style as a Canadian or World event. The judges included Canadian champions who acted professionally. Equipment such as the weigh-in scales was borrowed from the PEI Power-lifting Association. A computerized scoring system arrived.

In Souris at the provincials, 14 was the minimum age. The lifters were all sizes and shapes. They were enthusiastic, focused and respectful. Coaches and athletes supported each other. A Three Oaks participant was visibly and vocally supporting a Souris student lifting for and succeeding reaching provincial records.

Souris winning the Men's and Women's titles, was not the story of the day. It was many of the competitors

reaching personal bests.

Souris and PEI power-lifters are noticed on an international level with Dan MacInnis' success finishing sixth in the world. Nationally, Kyler Burke brought home a silver and Nathan Conway a bronze from the 2010 Canadian championships that were held at Quebec City. Coach LeBlanc legitimately sees Souris as a breeding ground for future Canadian champions.

More important than the awards, banners, and medals is how power-lifting are the personal gains. For Larry, coaching is for the students – not himself. That's why he does it. He trains beside them and does not ask them to do something he would not do himself. The women, once they adjusted to three or four weeks of aches and pains, noticed positive changes to their bodies and personal fitness.

This sport, completely new to most of the athletes, saw the students doing better in class, being more focused and less troublesome in the school and community. One father sees the confidence level in his son arisen for the better. Another parent is impressed with his daughter's success – hoping she will translate it to taking the garbage out.

Spartan pride glowed with the effort put forward. Physical fitness, personal growth, achievement and fair play are what sport is about.

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