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| MSU logo.jpg. | REPORT*From the office of the…*Vice-President (Finance) & CFO |
| TO: | Members of the Student Representative Assembly |
| FROM: | Jess Anderson, Vice President (Finance) |
| SUBJECT: | SRA 20L Report |
| DATE: | January 5, 2021 |

Dear Members of the Assembly,

I hope you all are well and enjoyed your well-deserved, extended winter break! We are officially in the final stretch of the 2020-2021 academic year, with eight months behind us, and only four more still to go. To say this year has been full of ups, downs and surprises at every turn would truly be an understatement. Every single day presents its own set of successes but also challenges, as we continue to work to improve the life of students amidst a continuing global pandemic. Thank you to each and every one of you for your continuous support and willingness to continue to advocate on behalf of students to ensure their voices and concerns are heard throughout this unprecedented year. With this being said, in this report I will encompass an overview of all the various tasks I have been working on the last eight months, what their current status is, as well as what I still hope to accomplish in the last four months of my term.

You will notice throughout this report, I have created a new ‘Status’ for some objectives that I have labeled as ‘Changed’. This is referring to objectives that we originally on my year plan, but are no longer relevant in their original capacity, thus, I have highlighted how I have changed these objectives to align with the priorities that are present, knowing that the rest of Winter 2021 will remain online.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns for me at all, please do not hesitate to email me [vpfinance@msu.mcmaster.ca](mailto:vpfinance@msu.mcmaster.ca)

Wishing you all the best,

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Jess Anderson

Vice-President (Finance) & CFO

McMaster Students Union

**Objective #1:**

**Original:** Continue September and January Transparency Weeks

***Revised:*** *Effectively Execute our first Fully Online Financial Transparency Week*

Status: Complete

During the week of November 23-27th I worked with Michael Wooder, Director of Marketing and Communications, Negar Asli, Marketing and Communications Assistant, Khaleel Gandhi, Social Media Coordinator, Elisabetta Paiano, Communications Officer, and Adit Dixit, Media Production Coordinator, to orchestrate various take overs, videos and other ways to engage with student for a multi-day, financial transparency campaign on our social medias. We wanted to ensure students were aware of how the MSU decides on an operating budget annually, as well as how student fees have changed this year, given the online format. Here is a brief overview of a day-by-day breakdown of the campaign:

**MONDAY**: The week consisted of an Instagram takeover by myself on Monday to highlight my role, as well as answer any general questions students had surrounding their fees! Additionally, we shared graphics that showed the budgeting process within the MSU. I also made students aware that the MSU has committed to providing further reductions to our fees for Winter 2021, given its online nature.

**TUESDAY**: We did an Instagram takeover with Noel, our Clubs Accounting Clerk! He spoke about finances in regard to clubs, answered some FAQ’s about budgeting tracking & the process of applying for funding. We also posted our bubble graphics that outline the MSU Organization Fee, broken down to a per student cost.

**WEDNESDAY**: We did a takeover with Chen Liu our AVP Finance! He outlined what the Finance Committee does, interactions & oversight of the Non-MSU, Non-University groups on campus (voted into existence via student referendum), as well as highlighted the Sponsorship & Donation Fund and NEW this year, Our Youth Bursary!

**THURSDAY**: We released a video made by the one and only Adit Dixit, that had me speaking to what I do in my role, how do I interact with the MSU’s Finances, what is the budgeting process, Goals of the MSU, How our fees work to help us achieve our goals & overall better the student experience!

**FRIDAY**: Was our wrap up day! Once again, I returned to our Instagram to address any unanswered questions throughout the week, as well as provide any further clarity regarding points made within our Video.

**CONCLUSION**:

I think this week went INCREDIBLY well! This was the first weeklong, fully online campaign I have had the pleasure of leading and I couldn’t be happier with how it turned out. It is more important than ever, that we are able to continue to engage with students in this virtual environment and show the value, services & supports they are receiving through the fees that they pay. Our goal is always to enhance the student experience and we will continue to work to do so!

**Objective #2:**

**Explore Ways to Reduce Student Costs**

Status: Complete – Continue to Advocate to University

This objective has definitely been on the top of my mind for the past eight months as we continue to look for ways to further reduce costs to students given the financial precarity of this year, while also ensuring we continue to offer as many services as possible to provide support to students. Over the course of Fall 2020, we were able to provide students with savings of over $120 across the HSR Bus Pass, MSU Org Fee, CFMU Fee, and MUSC.

When Winter 2021 was announced to remain online, I worked with our Director of Finance and General Manager to find a way to provide students with a further reduction to their MSU fee, CFMU fee & the HSR Bus Pass. With this, we reduced the MSU Org Fee by a further 15% and the CFMU fee by a further 10% totaling a 25% reduction across the Fall & Winter for both fees.

As for the HSR Bus Pass, with the Fall semester suspended, students unable to utilize the HSR saved about $100. Upon the news that Winter 2021 would remain online, we went back to negotiate again with the HSR & City Council. Our ideal offer was to have the fee available as an opt-in for folks residing within the Hamilton area, however this was promptly struck down. In the end we were able to negotiate a further 58% reduction to the Winter 2021 semester fee, equally further savings of over $54 for all students.

While on the MSU’s side the objective is mostly complete, I will continue to advocate to the University to ensure they are adjusting their student fees to reflect the level of service they are providing as well. I will continue to have discussions with Giancarlo and university representatives to ensure student feels are actively being revaluated and lowered or refunded to align with the current limited-service operations. As many folks know, the University reduced the Athletics & Recreation fee by 75% for the Fall semester given it was online, and we expect this reduction to continue into the online Winter semester, especially given the recent provincial wide lockdown.

**Objective #3:**

**Educate Students on Financial Aid Available**

Status: In-Progress

For this objective, I plan to do another round of promotion for the various bursaries and financial aid available to students within the Winter 2021 semester. I will work with our Marketing & Communications team, as well as key university stakeholders to ensure we compile a list of the various financial aids that can be accessed by students, and where folks would go to apply. While January is a busy month with presidential promotions, I hope to have this piece released within January or February to ensure students meet any potential deadlines for applications.

**Objective #4:**

**Your Money/Financial Section of New Website**

Status: Complete

As we officially have our New Website up & live (Woo!), this objective was able to be completed! If you were to go under “Info🡪Your Money” you will see the new video that we created this year for Financial Transparency week, that outlines how the budget is created, approved, and allocated, as well as what my role is within all of that. Additionally, we draw attention to the reduction in our fees for the 2020-2021 year as a result of everything being online. We also include the current years’ operating budget that has been approved by the SRA, as well as the past three years Audited statements if students are looking for more detailed information. To try and make some of the information more easily digestible, we also uploaded the graphics that outline what encompasses our fee, and how much students pay towards various areas. This is all part of our attempt to increase financial transparency and ensure we are making the information readily available for those that may not want to review the full audited statement.

**Objective #5:**

**Develop Service Sponsorship Policy & Packages**

Status: In-Progress

For this objective we previously began conversations and established a working group, however as we neared the end of the fall semester, other priorities that were more time sensitive needed to be addressed first. With this being said, our working group consists of; VP Admin (Graeme), Michael Wooder, Paula Scott, Vlad Motorykin (Campus & Community Partnerships Coordinator), AVP Finance (Chen), and myself.

The finance committee did look to see if there were any comparable packages or policies at other post-secondary institutions, but to no avail. While it appears, we will be one of the first with such a policy, our next steps are connecting with Vlad to gain a better understanding of how he currently goes about accepting and rejecting companies that reach out offering to sponsor. From here, the group will work to create a set of criteria around sponsors and bring it to discussion at Executive Board. For this project, I hope to reach out to Vlad in the next few weeks to get the conversation started again.

**Objective #6:**

**Adhere to Health & Safety Guidelines**

Status: Ongoing

In the current climate of COVID-19, it is important that we are continuously assessing our operations and business units to ensure we are complying with the health and safety guidelines put forth by public health Canada and the Canadian government. This continues to be an ongoing objective across all of our departments and units. With the announcement of the provincial wide 28-day lockdown until January 23rd, we have taken steps to temporarily close our Food & Beverage operations as well as the front MSU Office until at least January 23rd to comply with the government regulations. At that point we will reassess based on the information provided by Health Canada.

**Objective #7:**

**Develop a Plan for the Long-Term Financial Stability of TwelvEighty**

Status: In-Progress

For this objective, in November & December, I worked with Adit Dixit & his group in the course “Market Research (Commerce 3MA3)” to create a survey about TwelvEighty and got students to fill it out to ensure we are receiving student feedback before deciding on any changes. The survey was open for just over 2 weeks and we received about 130 responses from students across different years of study, different faculties etc. The next step is to sit down with Adit to thoroughly review the results and their groups findings. After this is done, I plan to work closely with the Food & Beverage team to gain their input on possible directions moving forward (having consulted the data). I am hoping to have a set direction for TwelvEighty established by mid-March (At the latest). I will continue to keep the assembly updated on this, but we are also going to be bringing in Stu, Gabby and Kornelia into this conversation to ensure we are getting a well-rounded picture of where we are, and where we hope to be in one, two, three, four and five years down the road.

**Objective #8:**

**Revamp Menu & Increase Plant Based Options**

Status: Completed

**Objective # 9:**

**COVID-19 Interim Reduced Operations & Shift to Take Out**

Status: Ongoing

For this objective, we have 100% switched to offering take out only at all of our business units to limit the number of people within the restaurant at all times. Additionally, plexy glass has been placed around the entirety of the serving area at Union Market, and at the Checkout area of TwelvEighty to further aligns with Health and Safety Guidelines. All of our operational hours have been reduced, so The Grind is temporarily closed, TwelvEighty is open Monday-Thursday 11:00am-5:00pm and Union Market is open Monday-Thursday 10:00am-5:00pm and Fridays 10:00am-3:00pm. As we continue to evaluate the need for our various services, we will continue to monitor and adjust the operational hours on an as needed basis.

All business units & the main office are temporarily closed until January 23rd in accordance with the Provincial Wide lockdown.

**Objective #10:**

**Original: Student Staff & Student-Centered Culture**

*Revised: Online Student Staff & Student-Centered Culture*

Status: Ongoing

This objective was originally meant to work to create a student culture within our business units to ensure students always feel welcome at The Grind, TwelvEighty and Union Market. Unfortunately, due to the nature of this year, this in person student culture is much more difficult to emulate and thus I have switched this priority to be more focused on our online/social platforms. Through working with the new TwelvEighty & Grind Promotions Coordinator, Salsa, and Restaurant Manager, Gabby, I hope to work to continue this welcoming culture on our social medias as we continue to engage with students and make them feel supported during these unique times.

**Objective #11:**

**Increase Sustainability Initiatives within TwelvEighty & The Grind**

Status: Complete

**Objective #12:**

**Implement Event Catering Packages**

Status: Not Started

This objective will be started in the next month as although we are not currently able to hold events in person, I do believe it will be helpful to preemptively create these packages to offer once events are able to return to in-person. Additionally, with the delayed opening of TwelvEighty due to the provincial lockdown, I am hoping to find time to meet with the Food & Beverage team to have them begin thinking about potential packages.

**Objective #13:**

**Original: Incentivize Students to Eat at TwelvEighty**

***Revised: Create the MSU Courtesy Card that includes on campus & off campus discounts***

Status: Complete

This objective continues to be quite difficult to implement especially given Winter 2021 will remain online. Having said this, I have worked with our AVP Finance Chen, and The Underground to create MSU Courtesy cards for all of our Full-Time & Part-Time Staff, as well as executives & volunteers. This discount card provides discounts both at our business units on campus for those that need to come to campus, but also extends to some local Hamilton businesses to encourage our staff and volunteers to support local as much as possible!

**Objective #14:**

**COVID-19 Interim Reduced Operations – Union Market**

Status: Ongoing

As Union Market is currently obtaining the highest level of engagement from across our business units (likely due to its location), we made the decision to close The Grind that was not receiving much business and move the hot beverages and baked goods up to Union Market. So far this has been working quite well. Otherwise, Union Market is open from Monday-Thursday 10:00am-5:00pm and Fridays 10:00am-3:00pm. We have installed plexy glass to ensure our staff are safe when cashing people out, as well, we have placed floor decals to ensure anyone entering or exiting the space know the flow of traffic and where to stand when waiting in line.

**Objective #15:**

**Original: Increase Video Promotion for Union Market**

***Revised: Capture footage at Union Market when safe to do so for future promotions***

Status: On Hold

For this objective there are two different ways that I can see it going given the current circumstances. The first, is collecting some videos of the space to highlight the safety precautions that have been implemented and ensuring the target messaging behind the video is very much focused towards students need to be on campus for class, or staff and faculty that are required to be on campus opposed to the general undergraduate population. This idea would highlight UM as a place where students can safely, and quickly come grab a snack, drink or a ‘grab & go’ item that is made at TwelvEighty daily. The other option for this, is to film some videos that can be utilized as promotional pieces once restrictions are lifted. This would allow for our communications department to have extra video content of the space, that they can edit and promote in the future. Due to the current lockdown, I am putting this objective on pause to ensure that health & safety is our top priority.

**Objective #16:**

**COVID-19 Interim Reduced Operations -The Underground**

Status: Ongoing

While the front end of The Underground has remained closed for the past eight months, the team has continued to operate and fulfill all orders they receive. As there does not seem to be an overwhelming need for the service to students that are on campus, we plan to continue forward with operating our backend of the service and fulfilling any requests that come their way!

**Objective #17:**

**Contract External Advertising and Sales Position**

Status: Completed

**Objective #18:**

**Evaluate Potential of Establishing an Online Ordering System**

Status: Complete

I am happy to say that all of the base work for The Undergrounds website has been done and the website is live (undergrounddesign.ca). While the team still hope to add additional components to the website that will make it more user friendly, and allow users to fully preview all of their work being ordering, it is an amazing first step and will drastically help in the future when we look to expand in the greater Hamilton community!

**Objective #19:**

**Build a Rapport with University Faculties & External Clientele**

Status: Ongoing

This objective will continue to be something that needs to be worked on over the course of the year. Building rapport is something that takes time and I am hoping to set up a conversation with Paula about what services we hope to highlight that we provide when having conversations with the university and external clientele. Additionally, once the website is to a point where we believe folks can fully preview their orders etc. I hope to send an email to upper University Admin to let them know that we have this available to them, and they are more than welcome to utilize it.

**Objective #20:**

**Develop a Plan for the Long-term financial stability of the Underground**

Status: In-Progress

Now that the new MSU Website is officially launched, and we are in the works of hiring a new Full-Time, Permanent Graphic Designer to help support the demands currently flooding The Underground, Paula and I will have significantly more time to work on developing the long-term plan. The first step in this was hiring this additional designer to ensure the department is effectively supported and staffed. One of the points within the long term plan was more actively expanding our services external to the MSU to ensure more revenue generation. The development of the Underground’s website was a big step towards achieving this goal. I now hope to work with Paula to determine actionable, and feasible steps that we can continue to take to ensure the Underground continues to prosper and serve the student need.

**Objective #21:**

**Evaluate Purpose & Reimagine Compass Space**

Status: In-Progress

For this objective, the progress thus far has been to pause compass operations. With the current restrictions that are in place due to COVID-19, there is not a pressing need to have the space open and operational, as there are essentially no students on campus to serve. With this being said, the ‘help’ feature of Compass will be redirected to our website through the incorporation of a widget that allows students to enter a chat to ask any questions they may have.

With second semester remaining online, Compass will continue to be paused for in-person operations, however I will continue to work with John McGowan (General Manager) and Debbie Good (Compass Manager) to determine the future of the service and the space overall to ensure we are continuing to adapt and add value to the student experience.

**Objective #22:**

**Conduct a Review of the Silhouette**

Status: In-Progress

For this objective, I brought up the review at the last Silhouette Board of Publication meeting we had on October 8th 2020. All parties seem excited to conduct the review to ensure that the service continues to align and adapt with the student needs. For this review, we are leaning towards doing it internally via the AVP Services & Services Committee as with the unique nature of a student newspaper, it will be important for the committee to research and compare The Silhouette to other University Newspapers as well as municipal papers. In the coming weeks I hope to set up a meeting with the AVP Services, Martino and VP Admin, Graeme, to see if they have any recommendations for how the survey should be conducted.

**Objective #23:**

**Increase Collaboration & Shared Resources between the Sil & CFMU**

Status: Ongoing

While there continue to be some shared resources across The Sil & CFMU, I hope to continue conversations with both parties to evaluate the potential of continuing to increase the cross collaboration, especially given the difficult transition for both services to operate almost entirely online.

We finished hiring the Digital Media Specialist towards the end of October and Derrick is doing an incredible job! The digital content that he has been producing out of both The Sil & CFMU has been doing super well and gaining a lot of engagement. This role is a shared, full time position shared between the two services, and with this role we hope to continue to have further conversations about how we can emulate more cohesion and collaboration amongst the services as well.

**Objective #24:**

**Original: Create a Fund to Alleviate Financial Barriers to Attending Events**

***Revised: Work with University to temporarily Reallocate SLEF (Student Life Enhancement Fund) money to help aids the current challenges that students are undergoing (as a result of COVID-19)***

Status: In-Progress

As this year has had a tremendous impact on events, especially those that would normally take place in person; I have shifted my focus to evaluating other ways we can provide students with financial aid. Given the unique nature of this year, I believe that many students are experiencing a greater need of Financial Aid and thus, I am hoping to shift my focus to find ways of providing additional financial aid for the 2020-2021 year.

The way in which I am working on this objective is through SLEF (Student Life Enhancement Fund). Generally, SLEF is about $100,000 that is provided by the University annually to help fund student ideas on how we can enhance student life on campus. While the normal timeline consists of idea submissions in October, vetting ideas in November, and voting on idea in and around February, most ideas are not actually implemented until the following academic year at the earliest. While many great ideas have come from this initiative, I believe that with the current challenge’s students are facing, there is a more effective way to enhance student life, than planning for another improvement to campus.

With this being said, I have been working with the SLEF Sub-Committee and the Student Services Advisory Committee to determine three pillars that we wish to put resources towards in order to enhance the student life during these unprecedented times. The first is Financial Aid, with this we will be allocating an additional $100,000 towards the MSU Emergency Bursary to continue to help aid those who need it most. The Second is mental well-being, with this we have reached out and tasked the Student Wellness Centre with proposing an idea on how we can better support student’s mental well-being throughout the pandemic and beyond. The third is connectivity and social interaction. With everything being online this year, we recognize that many students feel alone, and it is more challenging than ever to connect with others; thus we tasked Campus Events & Alumni to propose events we could safely host that will provide students with an outlet and allow them to socially engage with one another in the online environment.

I am very excited to see everything play out this semester and will be sure to keep the assembly updated!

**Objective #25:**

**Assistant Accounting Department & Clubs Admin Through Internal Changes**

Status: Complete/Ongoing

For this objective, I am labelling it as both ongoing & complete. While we have made it through the summer and have solidified how the clubs banking will work, we are continuously evaluating the system to ensure we are making the process as effective and easy as possible. We are consistently receiving feedback from clubs and doing our best to meet everyone’s needs as well as improve our own systems to better serve the needs. With this, we will continue to work through any concerns that arise and do our best to address them!

**Objective #26:**

**Work with VP Admin to advocate for reduced WW Levy, Levy Review & Implement NODA recommendations**

Status: Complete/In-Progress

For this objective I have put complete & in-progress as I encompassed a few different components into one objective. Thus far we have successfully completed the reduced to the Welcome Week Levy fee for the 2020 year and couldn’t be happier!

As for the levy review, myself, and Andrijana have begun reviewing the Welcome Week related expenditures from all of the various departments/partners from the 2017/2018 up until present. We are planning to have several meetings in the up-coming weeks to work through all of the data that we have accumulated so that we are able to update WWAC. This process will take several months to complete, but the hope to have a full report by the end of my term. As for implementing the NODA Recommendations, this has been led by the VP Admin, but I will continue to provide support through my position on WWAC.

**Objective 27:**

**Develop and Run a General MSU Info Campaign**

Status: Complete

**Objective 28:**

**Utilize Information and Recommendations from the Org Review**

Status: Ongoing

For this objective, I have put it as ongoing simply do to the nature of the review. There are many different areas that we can improve within our own organization, and I have already begun discussions with Giancarlo and the rest of the board to establish what our main priorities are for the remaining four months, and what I should be included in the multi-year plan. As of right now, we are discussing what the priorities should be for this unique year as much of the work will need to be done virtually. Throughout the month of November and into December, the Board and I have begun to set up weekly meetings to discuss our top priorities from the Org Review to ensure we are all on the same page moving forward.

**Objective 29:**

**Oversee Implementation of New MSU Website**

Status: Complete

**Objective 30:**

**Board of Directors Update Videos**

Status: Ongoing

This is an ongoing objective for both myself and the rest of the board. So far, the update videos have been going very well and have really help us to connect with students on a more personal level outside of these more sporadic SRA reports. Even once we make it through this pandemic, I believe it will still be important to continue these update videos regularly as it is just another way that we are working to connect with students and share important & helpful information.

**Objective 31:**

**Increase Promotion of the Student Assistance Plan**

Status: Complete

**ADDITIONAL PROJECTS:**

* **Clubs Manual**

Over the past few months, I have also been assisting Jenna, The Clubs Admin in writing sections of the Clubs Manual. The manual is largely modelled off of the USC (Western) Clubs Manual and provide a lot of useful information to clubs on financial procedures, how to become a club, the ratification process & cycle, how to reapply for clubs status etc. The final edits are just being implemented into the package at The Underground, and we will be posting the manual for all the clubs to refer to.

* **Student Activity Building/ The Hub**

Another project that I have been working on is reassessing the various needs of space within The Hub as it is set to open September 2021. While we have not heard from the project manager for quite some time, I have had a few additional meetings with stakeholders to gain a better understanding of the initial intent behind the various spaces within the building, as well as reassessing to see what the currents needs are, and how these have changed over the last 4 years.

* **Assisting PTMs with Finances**

As financial training for all of the PTMs happened all the way back in the summer, I reached out to see if folks would be interested in having an optional refresher training, to which there was quite a bit of interest! With this, I am planning on hosting a mini finance training session that PTM’s can stop into but will also be recorded for those that may be unavailable. I want to ensure that given this challenging year, all of our PT staff feel comfortable handling their services finances, and are comfortable enough with me to reach out with any questions they may have ☺

* **Renegotiating the HSR Bus Pass**

While I touched on this above, I wanted to put it under additional projects as it was not initially something that I had written into my year plan but ended up taking up quite a lot of my time. I am so glad that we were able to come to an agreement with the HSR, City Council & The University to ensure students are receiving some financial relief given the straining year we are facing, while also ensuring that the service is available to those that require it, especially as we head into Winter that presents its own challenges with accessibility of getting around (i.e. walking & biking become increasingly difficult during snowy & icy conditions).

* **Hiring**

Another area that has been taking up quite a bit of my time has been hiring. I have sat on quite a few hiring committees within the past 2-3 months including the Digital Media Specialist, Interim Campus Events Director, TwelvEighty and The Grind Social Media Coordinator & the Graphic Designer Position. I have really enjoyed being on these hiring committees and am always excited to see new people wanting to get involved within the MSU! ☺

* **Financial Audit**

The Financial Audit is officially done and will be coming to the MSU & CFMU Inc meeting this Sunday (WOOO!). Truly we joke about this being the audit that never ends, but I expect nothing less in the midst of a global pandemic. I am so proud of the accounting team for working with KPMG to get this audit done as for a few of our staff, this was their first year working on the Audit and they did a stellar job!

CURRENT CHALLENGES

The largest challenge I am currently facing is working through my in-progress objectives and creating a feasible timeline to ensure I can wrap everything up within the next four months. The last eight months have oddly felt like it’s been years, but at the same time it went by in the blink of an eye! I am not too sure how to fully explain it. Over the next four months I will work with the Board to ensure all of our priorities are completed and to also begin planning for a successful transition of our successors, including working on our transition reports to ensure nothing is forgotten. This year has challenged me in ways I truly couldn’t have imagined, but I am very thankful for all that I have learned up to this point and will continue to learn over the next four months.

CLOSING REMARKS:

Overall, the year so far has been quite different than I had originally anticipated (I feel like I can include this in ever report as new challenges and unexpected turns continue to arise). Having said that, I feel that the challenges that are being presented to the MSU as an organization, all highlight new areas of improvement, and are pushing us to adapt, and implement new and effective ways to engage students in this online world. As always, if you have any questions, comments or concerns for me, please do not hesitate to reach out ☺

Best,

Jess Anderson

Vice-President (Finance) & CFO

McMaster Students Union

[vpfinance@msu.mcmaster.ca](mailto:vpfinance@msu.mcmaster.ca)