

# Around the Anglosphere: Arvida

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**A**nne-Marie Cronkwright is using her school French more than she anticipated. The Ontario-born military spouse moved to the Saguenay several years ago when her husband was posted to CFB Bagotville. She now works at the family resource centre on the base, helping mainly English-speaking military families navigate day-to-day life in one of the country's most solidly French-speaking areas.

"We learned French in grades four, five and six, that's it," she recalls. "I think I learned hello, goodbye and how to count to 10. We knew two things about Saguenay before we came here – that it's beautiful, which is true, and that no one speaks English, which is a lie."

Montreal-born Jamie Kirlin is the principal of Riverside Regional High School. The school shares a campus with Riverside Regional Elementary School; combined, the schools cater to 470 English-eligible students around the region, including students from military families and families connected to the still-vast Rio Tinto-Alcan aluminum processing operation,

and francophone students with English eligibility dating back decades. "English is a minority language in our English school ... we're moving toward a language-neutral school system," he says.

"The military base and the school are the two hubs of the English-speaking community in the region, because right now, there aren't any community organizations. It's unfortunate, but that's the way it is," Kirlin says. The last English-speaking community organization in the area, the Community Association of Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, closed in 2006. "The community is virtual, but there's nothing tangible," Kirlin observes.

"I moved here for my wife's job and she always told me the door was open if we wanted to go back, but I never found a reason to leave," he says. "It's a great place to raise kids." He considers himself fully integrated in the community. "I have one English friend, and he's someone I grew up with in Ontario," he says. He believes that increasing contact between anglophone and francophone culture has made the Saguenay "more bilingual than a lot of

people realize."

Off the military base, English speakers in the Saguenay face a dearth of bilingual services that would be startling for a member of a linguistic minority community in a larger city. "If I go to the doctor, it's in French. If I have to go to court for whatever reason, I'm sure it will be in French. If I go to renew my driver's license or buy or sell a house, it will be in French ... but work is in English," say Kirlin.

As a bilingual anglophone with a background in education, Kirlin says it took him "about half an hour" to find his first job in the Saguenay, teaching English to adults. Cronkwright says for her clients, who are often less bilingual, finding employment is often a challenge. "Even if your French is good, an employer might be worried that clients won't understand you," she says.

The basics of putting down roots can also be difficult. "One of the first things you have to do when you move is set up all your bills, get your health card and get your driver's licence, and that was a huge source of stress in my life," Cronkwright recalls. "It's important to get these



Photo by Ruby Pratkan

**Anne-Marie Cronkwright, Jamie Kirlin, Joan Monahan and Tom Monahan listen to audience members' questions at a panel discussion on the vitality of the Saguenay English-language community, at the Royal Canadian Legion in Arvida on May 10.**

things changed, and it was one of my scariest experiences.

"I do speak French now, but when people arrive and they don't, it's very scary," she says. "One time, I went to the doctor and I was more worried about making myself understood than I was about what was wrong with me. Are they just going to stare at me? That is one thing I wish there was more assistance for."

Joan Monahan, an Ottawa-based lawyer, grew up in the Saguenay at a time when there were many more English-

speakers in the area. However, far from staying in their bubble, she and her brother and sister took the opportunity to grow up in two cultures and ran with it. "When I was growing up here, the English were a privileged group; we had services in English, and schools and clubs in English," she recalls. "But one of the best parts of growing up here was to be able to learn French through contact with the francophone majority."

Cronkwright agrees that integration is an advantage for English speakers. "I know

that it's not the easiest thing, but you have to try," she says. "You can say 'I'm not going to learn French, I'm going to sit at home and only have English friends and talk to English people,' but you're making it hard for yourself and also for the wider community ... to believe that English speakers want to participate and better our community."

*Editors' note: This is the first piece in an occasional series on English-language minority communities across Quebec.*