

This Week

Quote OF THE WEEK:

"The long years of recovering lost market access are firmly behind us now, and we have the bonus of seeing new markets open up to high quality Canadian beef."

CCA PRESIDENT DAVID HAYWOOD-FARMER.

Thai team trains for world championships in Tawatinaw

Team visits Athabasca, Westlock and Rochester during their stay at the Pine Valley Gymnastics Centre

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The Pine Valley Gymnastics Centre in Tawatinaw recently welcomed the national men's gymnastics team from Thailand, who came to Canada for just under a month to train for the 2018 World Artistic Gymnastics Championships, which are currently taking place in Qatar until Nov. 3.

The team, who were in Canada Sept. 11 to Oct. 9, consisted of six gymnasts, their head coach and team vice-president and, for about five days, the president of the Gymnastics Association of Thailand (GAT).

Dom Kriangkum, owner of the Pine Valley Gymnastics Centre, said his son Bobby used to compete for the Thai national team, while he was a coach. In fact, he has attended two world championships himself.

"He has been retired for about three years now and he works for the Alberta Gymnastics Federation," Dom said.

The Pine Valley Gymnastics Centre is a 12,500 square foot facility located just south of the Tawatinaw Valley Alpine Nordic Centre. Normally it offers classes to amateur gymnasts, but it has also drawn many professional athletes who are preparing for national and international competitions.

Dom said the team has been meaning to come visit his facility for some time, but they didn't get a chance to do so until this year.

Training at the centre gave the team the opportunity to train with some equipment they don't have in Thailand, Dom said.

"They don't have the foam pit like we have. They don't have the trampoline and some of the other things," he said. "So it's a good opportunity for them. And it's always nice to train at a different location too."

Dom noted they also brought out a coach from Ontario to spend about a week with the Thai gymnasts.

"It's always nice to have another set of eyes and



Thailand's men's gymnastics team spent just over a month training at the Pine Valley Gymnastics Centre in Tawatinaw in preparation for the World Artistic Gymnastics Championships. During their stay they travelled throughout the region and even met with Westlock County reeve Lou Hall (right photo).

hands to assist them," he said.

According to the report, the day that the team arrived in Edmonton (where they were greeted by Dom and his wife Jitra) was very cold, wet and snowy. That was their first taste of Canadian winter.

"That was quite a surprise to all of them, and it was a nice treat because none of them had ever seen snow before," Dom said, noting that it also snowed on the team's last day in Canada as well.

While their purpose was to train, the resort staff wanted to ensure their time here included opportunities to experience Canadian culture in both urban and rural Alberta, Jitra said.

On Sept. 13, the group went on a tour of Edmonton, including stops at the University of Alberta, Rogers Place and West Edmonton Mall.

On Sept. 14, the team set off amidst more snowy weather to travel north to Athabasca. They were outfitted with some warm winter jackets and toques, which "certainly made the day

much more comfortable."

They first stopped at the Wildlife Observation Site located just north of Rochester, where they followed a snow-laden path to the observation platform.

"They had an opportunity to read about our native wildlife, which was very interesting to them, especially the moose and the beaver," the report said.

"It was fun showing them how to make a snowman! So many pictures were taken!"

They then headed on to the Forfar Recreation Park campground, which is located next to Long Lake southwest of Athabasca.

"They were amazed at the beauty of the sites, how they were organized and the conveniences that were provided," the report stated.

The group then headed on to the Athabasca Golf Course and the Fox Den Restaurant, where the team got to order from a Canadian menu for the first time.

Their last stop was at the Athabasca County office, where tourism and economic development officer Rachael Dragan greeted the athletes.



She presented the team with gift bags from the county.

Later, the gymnasts travelled to Rochester School to use the gymnasium for a game of basketball and floor hockey, which was a "completely new experience for the team."

They were also invited to attend the school's annual Terry Fox Run pancake breakfast and run on Sept. 14. In preparation for the event, the athletes watched the documentary *Terry Fox, Anything's Possible* the night before.

A few days later, the team travelled through the Westlock area, making stops at the North Central Livestock Exchange in Clyde, the Westlock Rotary Spirit Centre, the Westlock Aquatics Centre and the Westlock County office.

Westlock County reeve Lou Hall came out to wel-

come the team, correctly providing the Thai greeting of "Yin dee ton rup."

The athletes were invited inside to tour the council chambers and were also presented a souvenir package.

The team also had numerous opportunities during their stay to shop in Westlock and they enjoyed the variety and abundance of products.

On Thanksgiving Day, Pine Valley staff and their families joined with the athletes for a dinner at the Kriangkum home.

"They loved to eat turkey and ham and they loved the traditional meal," Dom said.

On behalf of the athletes and coaches, the head coach formally thanked everyone for their support, and an Asian Games jacket with autographs of athletes and coaches was presented to Dom.