

Riverview swim lineups cause anger

■ Parents frustrated by registration process, hours-long queues

BY BRENT MAZEROLLE
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT STAFF

It's one of the strangest local parenting rituals in Metro Moncton, long a complaint of Riverview residents.

A few times each year, hundreds of people line up on a Saturday morning in hope of getting their children into the swim classes they need, for which there are limited spaces.

Today is one of those Saturdays, and technically registration starts at 9 a.m. However, if previous sign-up days are any indication, the first parents will be lining up hours earlier.

Over the past few years, that first person has arrived ever earlier. At the last sign-up in the spring, the first parent arrived just after 3 a.m. By roughly 6 a.m., still three hours before registration officially began, there were 100 people in line. Hundreds more joined them in the intervening hours.

The sign-ups are held at Riverview High School in a classroom near the north entrance of the

school adjacent to the Pat Crossman Aquatic Centre. For the first few hours, until a keyholder arrives to unlock the doors, people wait outside in the pre-dawn hours, trying to stay warm or dry or fighting off mosquitoes, depending on the season and the weather.

There are no bathrooms available until doors get opened, and

➤ See RIVERVIEW, A15

Riverview parents want changes to registration process for swimming classes

➤ Continued From A1

sometimes bathrooms remained locked, even after hundreds of people have filed indoors and formed a long snaking line in the small portion of the school that is not barricaded off.

What remains unclear is if the hundreds crammed inside, most with lawn chairs and some with children who had no choice but to accompany their parents, exceed maximum occupancy.

Because of padlocked metal barricades, there are periods when those hundreds have only one exit to outdoors in the event of an emergency.

In the name of being prepared for emergencies at all times, an official from Riverview Fire Rescue demanded several people move their cars under threat of having them towed away at the last sign-up session in the spring. Because the pool

and school have inadequate parking to handle the crowds on sign-up day, several vehicles were parked in places that blocked access to a fire lane to the back of the school.

For years now, grumbling about the process has been the way people have passed the long hours of waiting, but now two of those parents have had enough and are speaking up.

Jennifer Steeves MacDougall and Kevin Steen say the means for signing up children for swim lessons must change, and they plan to encourage others to make their concerns public as well.

MacDougall said her children don't have their swim levels yet because there have been a number of occasions when she and her husband simply weren't willing or always able to put in hours of waiting with no guarantee of success.

She said yesterday that the mornings she wasn't there for registra-

tion, she'd monitor via social media her friends who were there and see their complaints and occasionally their frustration as classes they'd waited hours to get their children into filled up just before they got to the counter.

"I think we all consciously chose Riverview for our families and all the services the town offers, yet there are these roadblocks put in our way."

"That's not OK," she said. "We deserve better than that."

MacDougall questions why the town can't do the registration online, a common practice in other communities. She also says the situation could also be improved if a child who passes a level was automatically granted a space in the next level.

Demand might always exceed supply, but an online system would at least allow everyone to log on from the comfort of home at a pre-

determined time, and those parents not successful would have at least not waited hours in vain.

MacDougall said she told two candidates for council during last year's municipal election she would vote for whoever promised to fix the system. Neither candidate was successful in the 2012 election, but one of them was Kevin Steen.

Because of his run for council, Steen said he knows the last two councils have been well aware there are problems with the process.

"I've sat at council meetings where it has come up," Steen said, adding he doesn't understand why an online system couldn't be used.

If the argument is there are still some citizens who don't have Internet access, Steen suggested a phased-in approach.

"Let's say there's 150 spots. Maybe in the first year, you allot 80 spots for online."

In a few years, it could be totally

online, and for the few who don't have Internet access, they could go to the school as normal and access the Internet on the computers there. Coincidentally, a computer lab at the school is the room traditionally used by the town on registration day.

Steen believes money was budgeted for a new process in 2013, but that could not be independently confirmed. A call and email to Riverview town hall officials seeking response mid-afternoon yesterday were not immediately returned.

Noting many other local sports organizations have online registration, Steen said, "the argument has been it has to connect to our accounting software, but there's software right out of the box that could be used with a bit of tweaking."

"All they've done is talk about it," Steen said of the town. "It's time to make it a priority."