



Mona Peloquin and Catherine Robertson, two of three protesting the frog jumping competition at St Pierre's Frog Follies, suggest using mechanical frogs in the competition, or ridding the festival of the contest all together.

Fed up with frog jumping

by NICOLE BUFFIE

A frog jumping competition should end according to Mona Peloquin, Gisele Prefontaine and Catherine Robertson.

The trio are denouncing the long-standing tradition in St Pierre during the community's annual Frog Follies festival, the national frog jumping competition.

"It's time to stop this barbaric practice," Peloquin said from her home near St Pierre last Thursday.

The group are taking issue with the trapping of the amphibians, their capture for the four-day festival and the toxins they could be exposed to when being handled.

Northern leopard frogs, the species used during Frog Follies festivities, are native to parts of Canada and the U.S. Reaching about 11 centimeters in size, they're ideal for hopping competitions.

However, the creatures hibernate underwater and breathe through their skin, absorbing oxygen and passing carbon dioxide through diffusion. The three speculate products on one's hand could be absorbed by and poison a frog when being handled.

"They could die the next day and we wouldn't know," Prefontaine said.

Northern leopard frogs have been identified as a species at risk by the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve. Peloquin, too, has noticed a decline in the species around her property in recent years, a lush acreage which backs on to the Joubert Creek.

The three self-described animal rights advocates are boycotting the village's festival, a staple in the community.

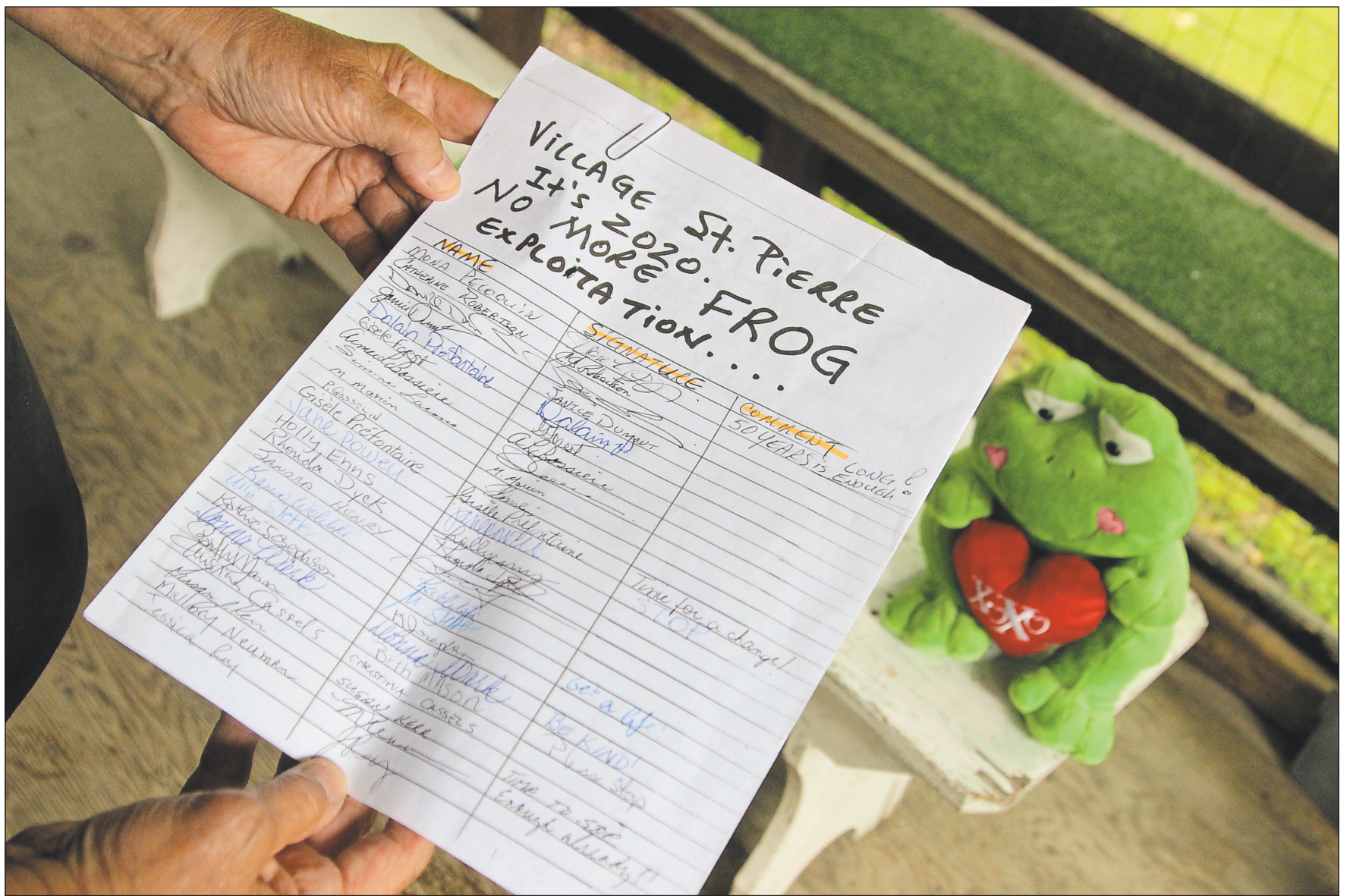
The idea for Frog Follies came during Manitoba's centennial celebrations in 1970. To poke fun at their own francophone manitobaine (SFM) chose a frog jumping competition as the theme for the festival which would honour its distinguished guest, Queen Elizabeth II, who was visiting different parts of the province for its birthday.

With that, Frog Follies came to be.

In the early years the frog jumping competition, the only one to be held in Canada, garnered serious participants; "frog farms" in secret abodes, special diets and training for competitors were some of the tactics used to win the cash prize promised for the farthest hopper. Others merely rented frogs for a dollar just to take part in the fun.

Tactics used to generate the furthest hop include blowing on its backside or capturing a fresh frog with an empty stomach, others involve ensuring a frog is without a crooked nose which can prevent a crooked jump.

These days, the festival has less jumping and more family-oriented activities such as a baseball tournament, children's activities and live music.



In 2020 Peloquin gathered dozens of signatures on a petition to end the frog jumping competition, which gained little traction from the Frog Follies committee.



Throughout the decades different tactics have been used to jump frogs the furthest, including blowing on a frog's backside to nudge it forward.

This year, Roland Gagne, acting president of the Frog Follies committee, said the three-day festival will feature less than 20 frog jumps during the competition, a stark departure from the upwards of 300 the festival used to see.

"We're trying to make both sides happy with this and I think it's more than fair," he said.

Gagne adding there will only be

one handler of the frogs, one day of jumping and the committee has implemented a system which will track where frogs are captured so they can be released at the end of the day back to their initial habitat. Gagne ensures the well-being of the slimy creatures is of utmost importance.

Prefontaine and Robertson argue compromise isn't enough.

"A little abuse is still abuse," Pre-

fontaine said. "Sounds like pie in the sky to me," Robertson added. Peloquin agrees.

"I just shake my head, because you're missing the whole point of it...the only option is not to have it, in our minds," Peloquin said.

Gagne, a lifelong attendee of Frog Follies and heavily involved member of the committee, agreed the festival has changed since its inception 53 years ago, only drawing 1,200 attendees versus upwards of 10,000 in its hey day. However, while the festival is geared towards families in recent years, the novelty of the festival remains, which includes the revered competition.

In other parts of the province, contests which seemed integral to a festival have stopped in the name of animal rights: Boissevain ended their nationally-regarded Turtle Derby in 2001 after a near-30 year run; this year, the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair in Brandon announced they would be doing away with hog and calf scrambles after animal welfare advocates cried foul.

In 2020 Peloquin informed the committee she had a petition signed by dozens to end the practice of frog jumping which garnered little action; she said members showed little interest.

The trio are also not without sug-

gestions for alternatives; paper, rubber or mechanical frogs could be used in place of the real thing, or people could be used to compete, too. They also suggest more education on frogs and their habitats replace the contest all together.

"The brand is already established, the Frog Follies is the Frog Follies whether there's a frog there or not," Robertson said.

The advocates do, however, give credit where credit is due.

"They're dedicated. They do a lot of good to try to keep the community together," Peloquin said.

They plan to demonstrate at the event, but they only wish to make people aware of the harm done to frogs through the event and educate the public on the species and their habitats, not abolish the three-day festival nor make enemies.

Gagne said there may be a day in which the frog jumping competition croaks, but until then the frogs will continue to hop.

When asked if she sees an end to frog jumping, if not this year but eventually, Peloquin's answer was simple.

"There has to be," she said. "I'm not going to stop until it does."

Frog Follies runs in St Pierre Sept. 15 – 18.