

STRATFORD TIMES

VOLUME 4 • ISSUE 15

MARCH 7, 2025

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CN Rail objects to Krug redevelopment, files appeal with Ontario Land Tribunal

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

During a public meeting surrounding a huge redevelopment project at the former Krug factory lands, many residents expressed concern for what this means for their neighbourhood.

Now, one neighbour in particular has expressed its own concern with the Ontario Land Tribunal (OLT).

In an appeal letter sent to city clerk Tatiana Dae and filed with the OLT, CN Rail said it was concerned the development will impact its operations at the Stratford Yard just 135 metres away. The yard “handles a significant volume of CN’s railway traffic in Canada” and is integral to not only the city’s economy, but Canada’s economy as a whole, CN Rail argues through its counsel Katarzyna Sliwa of Dentons Canada LLP.

The redevelopment project, undertaken by the BMI Group and called The Builders Block, is at the former Krug Factory located at 93 Trinity St. and is proposed to transform the factory and lands into a residential neighbourhood consisting of nine buildings – including what would be Stratford’s tallest building, a 10-storey apartment building – and 361 dwelling units. There would be 343 apartment units and 18 townhouse units if it proceeds as it was last presented to Stratford city council.

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Newly re-elected MPP Matthew Rae walks hand in hand with wife Meghan Thomson into the lounge at the Mitchell Golf and Country Club just minutes after the polls closed at 9 p.m. on Feb. 27. Rae will once again be heading to Queen’s Park as Perth-Wellington’s provincial representative. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Rae secures another decisive win, locking Perth-Wellington for PCs in Feb. 27 election

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Matthew Rae will once again be heading to Queen’s Park as Perth-Wellington’s MPP. He secured another decisive victory in the snap provincial election on Feb. 27.

At the Mitchell Golf and Country Club that evening, just minutes after major polls called his win, Rae thanked his supporters.

“The good people of Perth-Wellington and Ontario have made their voices heard,” Rae said. “They’ve chosen to re-elect a strong, stable, majority Conservative government in the Province of Ontario, a historic victory this evening for our Progressive Conservative Party. No premier has achieved three back-to-back majority governments and hopefully – fingers crossed, I know it’s early – an increased seat count.

“The night is still young,” he joked.

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CN Rail objects to Krug redevelopment, files appeal with Ontario Land Tribunal

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

At that meeting on Oct. 15, council passed the requested zone-change application, allowing for site-specific provisions of reduced parking rates, a maximum height of 36 metres (10-storeys), increased density and reduced setbacks for the existing and proposed residential buildings.

CN objects to the development for three reasons, arguing the zone change made by city council is not consistent with the provincial planning statement, it does not conform to the legislation surrounding the development of lands in proximity of railway operations and the application is “premature, does not represent good land-use planning and is not in the public interest.”

Additionally, within the report provided to council when it approved the zone change, CN Rail listed a num-



The former Krug furniture factory at 93 Trinity St., just 135 metres away from CN Rail's Stratford Yard. The short distance is the key reason why CN Rail has filed an appeal with the Ontario Land Tribunal. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

ber of issues:

- The Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Railway Association of Canada (FCM-RAC) provides guidelines for land-use planning that indicate “sensitive uses” should be prohibited to 300 metres away from a freight-rail yard.

industry.

- The lack of information regarding an air-quality or odour study being conducted.

- A development agreement and an easement agreement are required between the developers and CN Rail before the zoning change was adopted.

As the appeal is before the OLT, a quasi-judicial body, Dafoe, speaking for the city, did not comment. Likewise, neither did Hanna Domagala, director of land development and design with the BMI Group, save that they are “optimistic that outstanding issues can be resolved.”

- In the provincial policy statement, a needs and alternatives test must be completed in addition to assessing impacts from the

Rae secures another decisive win, locking Perth-Wellington for PCs in Feb. 27 election

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

According to the unofficial election results from Elections Ontario, with 8,073 of 8,079 Ontario polls reporting, Rae's last hope did not come true. The PCs won their third majority government with 80 seats. In the 2022 election, they won 83.

The Ontario NDP will be the official Opposition, securing 27 seats. The Ontario Liberal Party will have 14 seats, the Green Party of Ontario has two and an independent has one.

With 59 of 59 Perth-Wellington polls reporting their results, Rae secured 20,752 votes and 47 per cent of the vote, slightly up from when he was first elected to the legislature in 2022. That year, he secured 19,468 votes, over 10,000 more than the runner-up, the NDP candidate, Jo-Dee Burbach.

The runner-up this election is Liberal Ashley Fox with 12,547 votes, 28.42 per cent of the vote and nearly doubling her performance from the 2022 election. NDP Jason Davis secured 5,580 votes, Green candidate Ian Morton secured 3,299, New Blue candidate James Montgomery secured 1,284, Ontario candidate Sarah Zenuh secured 458, and Freedom candidate Rob Smink secured 229.

The voter-turnout rate rose from last

year's 50 per cent ever so slightly. This year, 53.33 per cent of eligible voters cast a ballot.

Speaking with reporters after his win, Rae said his priority on Feb. 28 is to check in with local small businesses, chambers of commerce and other levels of government on the region's plans to deal with the tariffs U.S. President Donald Trump has repeatedly threatened.

The threat of tariffs was the reason why Premier Doug Ford said he called the early election, arguing that his government needed a stronger mandate. When asked if the election was worth it, as the numbers trickled in that night showing no big changes in the legislature, Rae said that it was.

“The premier went to the people because it was necessary to hear from the people on something, as I mentioned in my remarks this evening, (that) is the greatest existential crisis our country's, my opinion, facing since our founding – and it's ensuring that we have a mandate, a strong, stable mandate, to outlast President Trump.”

Rae will join his colleagues from across Ontario in Toronto when Ford calls the 44th Ontario Parliament to session at a later date.



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MPP hopefuls vow to continue work even after election losses

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Ian Morton of the Green Party of Ontario is disappointed – not with his own performance in the Feb. 27 election where he and other candidates lost to incumbent Matthew Rae of the PC Party of Ontario, but at the results as a whole.

“I don’t know why there’s so many people voting for this government and this Conservative party that are experiencing so many difficulties,” Morton said the morning after the loss. “I don’t feel like our MPP really represented the people of the riding very well at all, and yet he’s getting ... the same level of voting. So, it’s pretty disappointing.”

That being said, Morton did say he was pleased with his own performance. Though he came in fourth with 3,299 votes, 7.47 per cent of all votes cast, it was growth for the Greens in Perth-Wellington. During the last election in 2022, then Green candidate Laura Bisutti netted 2,627 votes.

Morton has shared throughout the election cycle that his plans were to run long-term and to grow the Green Party steadily over many years and many elections. He said he is proud of himself and his team for running a good campaign and performing well in debates across the riding.

Jason Davis of the New Democratic Party (NDP) of Ontario said he’d anticipated the results of the election leading up to when they started trickling in.

Though other parties saw increased support this year, the NDP’s support dropped dramatically. Davis secured 5,580 votes,

12.64 per cent of the vote, compared to when candidate Jo-Dee Burbach secured 9,170 votes and 22.04 per cent of the vote in the 2022 election.

This is the second year in a row that NDPs hemorrhaged votes. In 2018, candidate Michael O’Brien had 14,385 votes.

Davis had heard from numerous residents. While they told him they wanted to support the NDP, they were voting strategically this election in order to oust Rae and party leader Doug Ford from the legislature.

“And I had those conversations with people,” Davis said. “I explained to them, ‘Hey, look, if the first thing that you care about is health care, I would suggest you vote for something instead of against. If your main concern is the affordability of housing, I would suggest that you vote for something instead of against.’ ... But we knew it was coming. It was somewhat expected.”

“The good thing that we had going for us, though, is that we had a lot of ... Conservative voters contact us and say, ‘We’re looking to make a change now because it’s not like the current administration has been fiscally responsible in any way,’ and it was nice to have those conversations. Obviously, it wasn’t enough.”

Although runner-up Ashley Fox of the Ontario Liberal Party lost to Rae by a wide margin of 8,205 votes, it was still a marked improvement over last election.

Fox received 12,547 votes, 28.42 per cent of the electorate that cast a ballot this election. That is more than double what she got in the 2022 election, when she netted 6,708 votes.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 4

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Editorial

I'm part of the problem

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Well, not this time around.

But certainly, in the last few years I have been part of the shameful problem, the problem that I abhor, the problem that I write about each election cycle.

On Feb. 27 I voted for the first time in maybe five years.

Over the last few years, I have lived in or around London and have worked in another town, mainly Stratford. For the most part, I have enjoyed this arrangement, having space for a personal life in my home city and a professional life in the city I have devoted my career to. During election cycles, however, it has been a challenge.

Election days are busy for me. There are people to talk to, photographs to be taken, polls to watch and upsets to monitor on top of the responsibilities I have on any given day. There are more stories, some just as important as the election, to devote my time to. And because I devote so much of my time to the candidates in Stratford or Perth-Wellington depending on the election, in my own backyard, I hardly know anything about the candidates or the debates or the sentiments of my fellow voters.

No, voting on election day is just not possible in my circumstances, I told myself.

But I could vote early. That has always been a possibility. The truth is, even though I have written about the importance of voting, believed in the importance of voting,

I have not voted simply because I could not be bothered to make the time. It is a strange cognitive dissonance I have had. I really do value voting, don't I?

But this year was different. Why? Well, I don't know. Maybe I was finally fed up enough with myself to drag myself into town. Maybe the circumstances were just right that I could afford to make the time and go vote. Then again ...

This election was also my daughter's first – not old enough to participate, mind you. She isn't even 18 weeks old yet, let alone 18 years old, but she did get to have a front-row seat to the civic duty we have all been charged with.

My wife and I made our plan. We got up at 8:30 a.m., left the house at 10 a.m. – nope, she needs to be changed. We left the house at 10:15 a.m. – nope, movers were blocking our driveway. We left the house at 10:45 a.m. – nope. "Honey, I think she needs to be changed again," my wife called out from the other room as I put on my boots.

We left at noon, all said and done, packed her into the proverbial-minivan and came to our local voting office in the riding of Elgin-Middlesex-London. There, half a dozen election officials dutifully helped my wife and I find our place, take our cards and cast our votes.

While I looked at my options, next to my wife and infant daughter, perhaps I should have thought about the Famous Five, Nellie McClung, Emily Murphy, Henrietta Muir Edwards, Louise McKinney and Irene Parlby, some

of Canada's most important heroes who advocated for the civic rights of women and children.

No, I thought instead about Katherine Graham, owner of The Washington Post during perhaps the most pivotal time for journalism ever, the Watergate scandal and the lesser known but just as important Pentagon Papers fiasco.

In her book, The Pentagon Papers: Making History at the Washington Post, Graham said "the only way to assert the right to publish is to publish." In Spielberg's 2017 film, The Post, Graham, played by Meryl Streep, says something similar.

Graham was right about publishing and about all rights we hold dear. The only way to protect our rights is to practice our rights. The only way to assert our right to vote, our children's right to vote, is to vote.

No, I don't think I voted this year because of me. I think it was because of her, snoring in the pram next to me. Men and women both have literally died for me to exercise my right to vote. I am fortunate that I don't need to do the same to enshrine hers. All I need to do – all we need to do – is write an "X" on a piece of paper.

In Perth-Wellington, the voter turnout for this provincial election was 53.33 per cent. For the other 46.67 per cent who did not make the time, we are fortunate enough to have another opportunity when the federal government calls another election later this year.

Let's not forget what's at stake.

MPP hopefuls vow to continue work even after election losses

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

"I had support across party lines, and that's amazing," Fox shared. "That's amazing to be trusted with their vote, to be trusted to advocate for them. I'm absolutely so proud and even though the results are not exactly what we were expecting, you know, it's so rare to see across-party-line support. And that thrilled me, like absolutely thrilled me, because people did realize that we need a change."

Morton, Davis and Fox said the voter turnout rate of 53.33 per cent was disappointing; however, Fox was the only one to point out a silver lining. It increased from 2022's 50.09 per cent in a winter election, when turnout

was expected to drop due to the weather conditions. It was also above the provincial average of 45.40 per cent.

Additionally, they thanked their supporters and said this won't be the last Perth-Wellington hears from them. All said they will work over the next four years to hold this new government accountable.

Rae will return to Queen's Park when Premier Ford calls the 44th Parliament of Ontario to session.

Along with Morton, Davis and Fox, Rae beat James Montgomery of the New Blue Party (1,284 votes), Sarah Zenuh of the Ontario Party (458 votes) and Rob Smink of the Freedom Party of Ontario (229 votes) to secure his decisive win.

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STRATFORD TIMES

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Downtown Stratford BIA's Shop Main Street Canada, Support Local campaign takes off amid US tariff threats

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

The Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area (BIA) launched the Shop Main Street Canada, Support Local campaign to encourage consumers to consider local businesses first and support Main Street businesses in the city's downtown core when shopping.

"The more local shopping that we can do, we're enhancing the lives and the business of the people that we go to church with, that give to all of our charities," said Jamie Pritchard, Downtown Stratford BIA general manager. "Their money is going back into our Stratford economy by shop-

ping local."

The Downtown Stratford BIA provided a toolkit for businesses that include logos, social-media assets, guidelines and marketing materials to promote the Shop Main Street Canada, Support Local campaign. Both business owners and residents are encouraged to engage with the Downtown Stratford BIA, update social-media profiles, choose products and services made in Canada, support local businesses and dine at independently owned restaurants.

Pritchard said shopping local has always been important, but more people were prioritizing it when small businesses were hit by COVID-19 Pandemic restrictions. With uncertainty in the United States, in-

cluding tariff threats, Canadians are prioritizing shopping Canadian and local.

As many tourists from the United States visit Stratford, especially during the Stratford Festival season, Pritchard said it's also important to demonstrate good hospitality to visitors from south of the border.

"There's a lot of animosity towards U.S. folks right now and we have to remember it's not the citizens of the U.S. that are creating all of this," Pritchard said. "Most of them don't realize the impact and they don't want any of this stuff to happen, so when they come to our city, we need to welcome them."

Some of the downtown merchants ex-

pressed concern to the BIA because they carry products made in the U.S. However, Pritchard said if the business is operated locally, they still need support.

"I don't think you need to say we're not going to shop there because they sell U.S. products. We do shop there because they offer a great selection of products that you've been buying all along and you've just got to figure out if there's going to be an impact to the pricing on them," he said. "When I talk about Shop Local, Shop Canadian, remember every business downtown is a Canadian business."

More information, including a business directory, can be found online by visiting downtownstratford.ca/directory.

Grand Trunk redevelopment takes big step forward

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

If eating an elephant takes one bite at a time, then Stratford city council took a proportionally large bite of the Grand Trunk renewal project this month.

At the Feb. 24 council meeting, the ad-hoc Grand Trunk renewal committee presented some preliminary findings and some recommendations.

As chair Dan Mathieson said, the plethora of information given to council did not simply appear.

"The renewal committee has worked tirelessly and had over 14 meetings in the past year on a monthly basis," Mathieson said. "So now, what we'd like to do is we want to start working on four distinct opportunities. If we get the endorsement today, this will allow us to come back in the next few weeks, if not a month, to give you the work plan for this year that will start to really take shape based on these four recommendations, and that will then ... inform our work over the next three to six months."

As Mathieson said, the committee will present council with their recommendations; however, it is ultimately council that will make the final decisions on how the project proceeds.

The four recommendations Mathieson and team presented, and approved by council, were to activate the site on an interim basis, to determine the scope, fund-

ing and design for a shared community recreation facility, to develop an expression of interest (EOI) for housing development and to develop an EOI for parking and mobility solutions.

To activate the site on an interim basis:

The site is currently restricted to the public due to safety considerations; however, the city will explore temporary uses in order to foster community engagement and increase public awareness – these could take the form of art installations, historical tours, community events, live performances and public markets.

As noted in the staff report, this will take time and work to make sure that structural and operational standards are met and the facility is safe for the public to be in.

To determine the scope, funding and design for a shared community recreation facility:

Both the Stratford YMCA and Stratford Public Library (SPL) have their eyes on the site as a possible place for expansion (with the YMCA having a formal memorandum of understanding and the SPL having just informal support from the ad-hoc committee and council). A community facility that houses the two would potentially be 70,000-110,000 square feet and would have a pool, gym, walking track, child care, library, meeting rooms, café, community spaces, auditorium, communal spaces, communal kitchen, lounge, changerooms and washrooms – expected to cost

\$48.5 to \$76.5 million.

According to the staff report, having a shared facility is the best balance of financial feasibility, operational efficiency and community impact. What percentage of the bill the municipality foots is dependent on the operating model. If it is operated entirely by a third party, i.e. the YMCA, the municipality could pay as little as 3.7 per cent of the costs (or as high as 62.2 per cent), but would play a limited role in the facility's design, development and operations.

Put in terms of what this would cost taxpayers, on the low end of the third-party operating model, the tax levy increase would be 0.19 per cent. If it is municipally owned and operated and is costed on the high end, the tax levy would jump up 7.47 per cent just for this one line item.

Coun. Lesley Biehn inquired about usage of the site if it is run by the YMCA, indicating that if the municipality is putting up more money, then the public and not just YMCA members should have access.

Emily Robson, corporate initiatives lead with the city, said that usage, and the form of that usage, is being investigated but certainly the space will be usable by more than just YMCA members.

To develop an EOI for housing development:

Parcel 2D, a 2.5-acre section of the Grand Trunk site along Downie Street, has the presence of heavy metals and hy-

drocarbons, though environmental investigations indicated these impacts are shallow. An EOI for housing developments in this space could be "a strategic first step in exploring housing development," according to the staff report.

Coun. Mark Hunter expressed concern that part of the value of the land is that it is so big and asked if having one developer for the whole site, rather than split it up piecemeal, was explored – to which Joani Gerber, CEO of investStratford, said that is a possibility.

"It could be 2D, it could be the entire 16-and-a-half acres, subtracted the (University of Waterloo's parcel)," she said. "But we're doing some more research and some more homework on that."

To develop an EOI for parking and mobility solutions:

A total of 437 parking spaces are currently located in the Grand Trunk site and as this project begins to develop, their losses will be felt by the many residents and visitors that currently use them – and the influx of residents and visitors that will be using the newly developed spaces.

"To proactively address these challenges, an EOI is proposed to explore potential solutions for a parking and mobility structure at the Grand Trunk site," the staff report reads. "Addressing parking capacity at the Grand Trunk site requires careful consideration of existing demand, anticipated growth and potential locations for structured parking."

Statement by the Prime Minister on unjustified U.S. tariffs

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau issued the following statement on March 3 regarding unjustified U.S. tariffs against Canada. We are reprinting this statement in your community newspaper due to the issue's importance to all Canadian citizens and secondly to document these developments within the historical record of this publication.

"Today, after a 30-day pause, the United States administration has decided to proceed with imposing 25 per-cent tariffs on Canadian exports and 10 per-cent tariffs on Canadian energy. Let me be unequivocally clear – there is no justification for these actions.

"While less than 1 per cent of the fentanyl intercepted at the U.S. border comes from Canada, we have worked relentlessly to address this scourge that affects Canadians and Americans alike. We implemented a \$1.3-billion border plan with new choppers, boots on the ground, more coordination and increased resources to stop the flow of fentanyl. We appointed a fentanyl czar, listed transnational criminal cartels as terrorist organizations, launched the Joint Operational Intelligence Cell and are establishing a Canada-U.S. Joint Strike Force on organized crime. Because of this work – in partnership with the United States – fentanyl seizures

from Canada have dropped 97 per cent between December 2024 and January 2025 to a near-zero low of 0.03 pounds seized by U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

"Canada will not let this unjustified decision go unanswered. Should American tariffs come into effect tonight, Canada will, effective 12:01 a.m. EST tomorrow, respond with 25 per-cent tariffs against \$155 billion of American goods – starting with tariffs on \$30 billion worth of goods immediately, and tariffs on the remaining \$125 billion on American products in 21 days' time. Our tariffs will remain in place until the U.S. trade action is withdrawn,

and should U.S. tariffs not cease, we are in active and ongoing discussions with provinces and territories to pursue several non-tariff measures. While we urge the U.S. administration to reconsider their tariffs, Canada remains firm in standing up for our economy, our jobs, our workers and for a fair deal.

"Because of the tariffs imposed by the U.S., Americans will pay more for groceries, gas and cars, and potentially lose thousands of jobs. Tariffs will disrupt an incredibly successful trading relationship. They will violate the very trade agreement that was negotiated by President Trump in his last term."

Stratford's Coldest Night of the Year surpasses fundraising goal

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Participants of Stratford's Coldest Night of the Year (CNOY) fundraiser walk on Feb. 22 bundled up and walked around the Avon River in solidarity with those without housing and helped organizers achieve and exceed this year's fundraising goal.

A press release from United Way Perth-Huron announced that as of Feb. 25, over \$220,000 was raised to support the United Way's Connection Centre and ShelterLink Youth Services, surpassing the \$200,000 goal. Stratford's event was also the fifth-highest fundraiser amongst all CNOY events in Canada.

Nearly 500 participants registered for the CNOY walk in Stratford. The city's top fundraising teams were Monteith Ritsma Phillips, The Sweet Samuels, Stratford Anglicans, ShelterLink Sprouts – Board and Staff, and Team Haggis. Mayor Martin Ritsma, Jana Bayer-Smith, Lucas Ryan, Joanna Gordon and John Wolfe were the top individual fundraisers.

After walking around in the chilly weather, participants warmed up with



oanne Ferguson, Rosemary Hall and Lisa Van Osch enjoy warm soup from Soup Surreal.

(EMILY STEWART PHOTOS)

bowls of soup from Soup Surreal, fire pits and warm drinks from Features' Barbeque while dancing to upbeat music.

"The day was absolutely perfect," said Cate Trudeau, executive director for ShelterLink. "We had a great turnout. It was a wonderful event."

fundraiser for ShelterLink.

"It supports our programs, it supports the services we provide and we really can't operate without this fundraising event, so this is exactly what we need," she said.

Sonya Heyen, manager of resource development and communications for the United Way Perth-Huron, said the "event is fun, but our cause is serious." She said people without housing face challenges during to the cold Canadian winters, so CNOY is a way to show solidarity and raise money for organizations supporting those without housing.

"The spirit of the event is to walk in solidarity with people that might be unsheltered and so we put on our hats and our coats, and we go for a walk," Heyen said. "Hopefully, there's a reflection of the privilege and the gratitude that we have when we go back to our warm houses, and that we can think about those that might not have that."

CNOY walks were also held in Goderich, Exeter, St. Marys, North Perth, Seaforth and Wingham.

Donate online by visiting en.cnoy.org/location/stratford until the end of March.

ShelterLink supports youth facing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness. The Connection Centre provides shelter and basic needs such as showers, hot meals and laundry for those in need. Trudeau said the event continues to grow each year since 2015 and is the main



Kerry McManus and Andy Linley wrapping up their stroll for Coldest Night of the Year.



Brianna Glosnek, Skye Potter, Melissa Dunphy, Tracy Mendhurst and Kate Ahrens warm up after their walk around the Avon River.

With one election down, another one is on the horizon ...



Perth-Wellington MP, and fellow conservative, John Nater (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO) introduces and congratulates newly re-elected MPP Matthew Rae at his election event on Feb. 27. When asked if the decisive PC victory has him feeling optimistic on his own re-election later this year, he told the Times that things can change on a dime — including the date. While the federal election would be held in October, many speculate it will be called early. "But I'm excited for the election, whenever it happens," Nater said.

Stratford manufacturer nets \$1.5 million in federal funding

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Just before trade tariffs were announced that stand to alter the economic landscape of the continent, the federal government was in town to announce support for a few notable businesses.

MP Ruby Sahota, minister of democratic institutions and the minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (otherwise known as FedDev Ontario), was in Stratford with London West MP Arielle Kayabaga and London North Centre MP Peter Fragiskatos on March 3 to announce over \$1.5 million to Accumetal Manufacturing, among other companies.

Sahota prefaced her announcement by reminding those in attendance the region of southern Ontario is home to over 14 million people and is a leader of emerging technologies that produce 40 per cent of Canada's gross domestic product.

"Part of southern Ontario's success is thanks to our rich industrial heritage, proximity to major markets and world leading strengths in sectors such as finance, automotive, aerospace, life sciences, manufacturing and more," Sahota said. "Accumetal is a prime example of the kind of innovation that this region is known for around the world."

With the money, the Stratford manufacturer will scale up production of its fabricated-metal components for off-

road-equipment manufacturing industries, including rail, defence, mining and recycling.

Bob Allen, president of Accumetal, said the funding will specifically go to implementing new technology into its 60,000 square-foot facility on the edge of town in Stratford. Accumetal will expand its robotics and implement some cobot welders, a robotic device that can weld alongside humans. It will go towards increasing the company's productivity and helping it remain competitive.

"In turn, it will allow us to grow our business and our workforce," Allen said.

Just hours after the announcement, U.S. President Donald Trump announced a blanket 25 per-cent tariff on all Canadian goods and a 10 per-cent tariff on Canadian energy would come into effect the very next day on March 4.

While the announcement was not made due to the looming tariffs, they were nonetheless top of mind for everyone at the event that day. When asked why Canadians, both local and across the country, could trust the current government to effectively deal with the tariffs, Sahota said they have "an appropriate response prepared that is well calibrated."

"You can count on a government that has, through the pandemic, been there for people," Fragiskatos added. "We've learned from that experience and we are absolutely ready to support workers and businesses through what could be some very, very difficult times."



MP Ruby Sahota, minister of democratic institutions and the minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (otherwise known as FedDev Ontario), was in Stratford with London West MP Arielle Kayabaga and London North Centre MP Peter Fragiskatos on March 3 to announce over \$1.5 million in funding for Accumetal Manufacturing, among other companies. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Sahota later clarified that as the tariff situation develops, the federal government will be looking for ways to support Canadian businesses.

The funding for Accumetal is part of an over \$24-million investment to support the growth of 10 businesses in southern Ontario, from Stratford to Whitby. Along with Accumetal, ArcelorMittal Tailored Blanks Americas Limited, Brannon Steel, CES Transformers, Met-

alWorks Corp., North American Steel Equipment, Quad Steel, Sensor Technology Ltd., Tempel Canada and Tipco Inc. are also receiving funding.

Since 2015 when the Liberal Party came to power in Canada, FedDev Ontario has invested over \$2.8 billion in more than 3,650 projects in southern Ontario, supporting over 275,000 jobs, according to a media release from the federal government.



Bob Allen, president of Accumetal, said the funding will specifically go to implementing new technology into its 60,000 square-foot facility on the edge of town in Stratford.



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Stratford mayor takes a pie to the face for a good cause

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

campaign takes place across the Global Pet Foods stores raised for over 130 animal shelters and pet-rescue groups in Canada. Since that time, over \$2.1 million has been across the nation.

As the door chime rang and Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma walked into Global Pet Foods Stratford one frigid February day, employees excitedly greeted him and owner Adam Quehl emptied two full bottles of whipped cream into a pie tin.

On Feb. 27, Ritsma came to the store to take a pie to the face after he won a vote to be this year's unlucky winner of the Show Us Your Heart campaign, an annual fundraiser for local pet rescues.

"The pie in the face thing started like five years ago," Quehl told the Times just prior to Ritsma's entrance. "One of our team members, Cole, has always won. And then this year, by popular demand, the mayor won."

"We emailed city hall and Lindsay, his secretary, got back to me and said, 'Yeah, no problem,'" Quehl laughed.

Christine Foster of Pawsitive Difference Professional Pet Care did the honours, but not before Ritsma shared a few words.

"Can I say something first?" he asked, slightly recoiling. "I'm happy to be here and I'm happy I dethroned Cole in the process. So, congratulations on the \$1,000-plus and to Global doing their part here in our community."

"Ready?" Foster asked.

"I am not ready," Ritsma laughed. "But I'm going to receive this just the same."

This year, \$1,234 was raised for Axel's Imprint Rescue and Sanctuary, a volunteer-run cat rescue in Shakespeare, surging over the \$1,000 goal they had. The money will go towards food, vet bills and general care of the animals.

Axel's Imprint Rescue and Sanctuary isn't the only beneficiary of the campaign. Since 2006, the annual



Christine Foster of Pawsitive Difference Professional Pet Care did the honours on Feb. 27, hitting Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma with a pie to the face – all for a good cause. It was part of Global Pet Foods Stratford's Show Us Your Heart campaign, which raised \$1,234 for Shakespeare based Axel's Imprint Rescue and Sanctuary, a cat rescue. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Athens Greek Souvlaki: celebrating two years of passion, community and success

JULIA PAUL

Times Correspondent

Nestled in the heart of Stratford, Athens Greek Souvlaki has become more than just a place to eat – it is a gathering place where hospitality, generosity and authentic Greek cuisine come together to create an unforgettable experience.

With more than 555 five-star reviews, it is clear the people who have come through the doors, enjoyed the food and shared their experiences are happy with Athens Greek. The locals have spoken and their message is clear – Athens Greek Souvlaki is something special.

"No one gives the quality, value and service that we provide here at Athen's Greek Souvlaki," said owner Terry Voukarakidis.

The journey to Athens Greek Souvlaki started with a love for great food and a keen sense of opportunity. Voukarakidis originally operated a small, low-profile restaurant in Breslau, where customers loved the food. One day, an offer came to buy that location and the decision was made to sell and search for the next opportunity.

Stratford was the perfect choice – a vibrant city filled with tourists and locals alike, all eager for high-quality dining

experiences. But the location Voukarakidis set sights on came with a challenge: three different businesses had previously failed there. Many would have seen this as a red flag, but for Athens Greek Souvlaki, it was a chance to prove quality food, excellent service and genuine hospitality could succeed anywhere.

Against the odds, the offer for the location was accepted. Some might call it luck, but as Voukarakidis says, "If you want to win, you have to buy a ticket." Within days of opening the doors, waves of customers filled the restaurant. Stratford locals, tourists from across the country and visitors guided by Stratford's tourism office all made their way to Athens Greek Souvlaki to try the amazing food at amazing prices, and the momentum has not slowed down since.

Since opening, Athens Greek Souvlaki has seen an overwhelming 92 per-cent repeat business rate. The reason? No one else provides the same level of quality, value and service. Google has even named Athens Greek Souvlaki the number-one restaurant in Ontario, a recognition that speaks volumes about its impact on the community.

But beyond business success, it is the acts of generosity that truly define Athens Greek. A woman from St. Marys

came in needing food for her daughter who was in the hospital. Without hesitation, the meal was on the house. In another instance, a German visitor had lost his wallet and Voukarakidis fed him on a promise he would return to pay. That visitor came back the next day with \$50, insisting on giving back. A doctor from Stratford General Hospital not only praised the restaurant's generosity but also donated \$900, trusting the owner to distribute it to families in need.

And the generosity doesn't stop there. Donations to the local Salvation Army made at the restaurant have totaled over \$9,000, all thanks to the giving spirit of both the restaurant and its customers.

"I look forward every morning to going and being at the restaurant," said Voukarakidis. "I have the most amazing customers. It's not about the money, I'm very happy with what I do."

At Athens Greek Souvlaki, food is more than just a meal; it is a reflection of culture, tradition and a passion for fresh, high-quality ingredients. From the famous Athens chicken souvlaki to fresh gyros and Mediterranean salads, every dish is crafted with care. The restaurant stays true to the authentic flavours of Greece while ensuring every customer, no matter their background, finds some-

thing to love. And when it comes to value, there are no extra charges – one price gets it all, from rice and potatoes to fries, salad and even an extra drink.

"One price and there's everything for you, no extra charge," said Voukarakidis. "That's the beauty about Athens Souvlaki."

Athens Greek Souvlaki is more than just a successful restaurant – it is the start of something even bigger. Plans are already in motion to open nine more locations within the next nine months. While details remain under wraps, one thing is certain: the passion and dedication that built the first Athens Greek Souvlaki will carry forward into every new venture.

"Keep smiling, keep coming back and keep enjoying great food," said Voukarakidis. "Live to be 100, eat well and know that at Athens Greek Souvlaki, you will always receive the best price, the best service and the warmest hospitality in Stratford."

Athens Greek Souvlaki is not just a business, it is a family, a community and a testament to what happens when passion meets purpose. And for those who have yet to visit, the doors are open Monday to Saturday with a plate of delicious Greek food waiting just for you.

Stratford extends PC Connect service another year, but its rural route shutdown is impacting region residents

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

By Connor Luczka, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

SJ Booth McCarthy was close to her 15-year anniversary with Bath and Body Works in Stratford and had a bright future with her company, she told the Times.

“But that’s all gone,” she said.

Booth McCarthy has been a Mitchell resident since 2021 and has been using PC Connect’s Rural Route, which connects Stratford, Mitchell, Monkton, Atwood, Listowel, Millbank, Newton, Milverton, Brunner, and Gadshill, to come to her job in Stratford since then, when it was first started that same year. Now that the service will be ending on March 31,

she doesn’t have any other options. She’s looked into other transportation services, but they are simply too expensive.

“Those are going to cost me like \$20 one way when the PC Connect costs \$6 ... and to take a cab, it’s \$49.13, I believe,” Booth McCarthy said. “It’s a lot more. So, at that point, I’m not making any money. I’m just traveling. So even then, it’s not worth keeping my job. ... I’m losing my income. I’m losing my friends.”

She has considered moving, but Stratford is just too expensive, she said. She works in retail and there aren’t enough opportunities in Mitchell, leaving her between a rock and a hard place. She isn’t the only one.

“This is affecting a lot of people who need support and help,” she said. “This

service really helps out a lot of people in the community, people who are using the service to go to the working centre or get treatment for substance abuse, or their parole meetings. Some of these people are single parents and they have children that they are providing for.”

Perth County council voted to discontinue the rural route in December of last year, ahead of when provincial funding dries up at the end of this March. Although at the Feb. 6 council meeting staff indicated there is an “openness” from the province to have another application for potentially more funding, councillors remained resolute in cancelling the service with a number arguing it is just too much money even with the support.

“In the end, they’re still not going to

contribute a very big percentage over time of what we’re going to have to (pay). I think we have bigger hills to get over,” Coun. Hugh McDermid said.

Importantly, the cancelling of the rural route does not affect the intercity routes of the PC Connect service: Route 1 which connects North Perth with Kitchener-Waterloo and Routes 2 and 3 which connect Stratford, St. Marys, Kitchener-Waterloo and London.

The City of Stratford operates these routes in an equal partnership with North Perth and St. Marys (which is operated under a unified PC Connect brand). On Feb. 24, Stratford city council approved a year-long extension of what is still called a “pilot project,” until Dec. 31, 2025.

— *With files from Galen Simmons.*



Council prepares as CAO announces retirement

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The City of Stratford’s top staffer will soon be leaving the municipality and council is already debating on how to find a suitable replacement for the ever-important job.

CAO Joan Thomson has announced her retirement, which prompted Coun. Brad Beatty to put forward a motion at the Feb. 24 council meeting to strike a selection committee.

Though Coun. Jo-Dee Burbach called it “standard practice” when Coun. Lesley Biehn asked about the current practice, Mayor Martin Ritsma clarified one difference is the selection of the committee members,

as Beatty indicated, would be done in open session.

“In the past, it might not have happened that way,” Ritsma said, “but we want to make sure it’s an open and transparent piece.”

At the next council meeting on March 24, a list of nominations will be presented to council for this selection committee. Once Thomson retires, an interim CAO will be selected first and then an incoming CAO will be selected by the committee and council.

Thomson has been with the city for over 30 years. She had a number of roles with the municipality before becoming city clerk in 1999 and CAO in 2020.

Thomson will be retiring at the end of March. Until then, as she indicated to the Times, it’s “business as usual.”

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Letter to the Editor

The times they are a-changing

Back in the day, I worked in the U.S.A. I was on a TN visa that allowed individuals with skills not met by U.S. citizens to work in the country. At the time, this permit had to be renewed annually, which I did for most of the years between 1996 and 2006.

On the whole, these were good years. I loved living in California and never felt like a foreigner; I “passed,” as they say. Working first in Susanville, in the north, then Hanford in the mid-state San Joaquin Valley, and then Chino near L.A., I experienced a range of temperatures and environments not unlike those in southwestern Ontario, and the people on the whole were friendly and civil.

Like many others, I am now viewing the U.S. with a dismay that is quite new. It started with the first Trump presidency but is now much more intense, disturbing and very sad. How have Americans – my friends – allowed this to happen? How could they have voted for this man?

While I was working in the U.S., I remember a time when I entered its “visa lottery.” In this contest, people could put their name in for a draw where winners would get citizenship without any of the usual complications. I remember thinking this would be easier than my yearly trek home for visa renewal and, as long as I could retain

my Canadian citizenship, it would be a win-win situation.

Things have changed, however; they’ve changed a lot. In early January I travelled to the U.S. to reclaim items I had left in a Hanford storage unit in the late ‘90s. I felt a sense of urgency in doing so; it was clearly my last chance to secure these mementoes of a better time before the Jan. 20 inauguration of a man who would destroy happiness, expel foreigners and effectively rule out any further visits on my part.

Hanford, which has always reminded me of Stratford, was much as I had left it. I stayed with a longtime friend there who thankfully watched only Perry Mason and other TV re-runs and played with her new pup; we didn’t discuss politics.

The local paper, the Hanford Sentinel, ran a story about Trudeau’s resignation on Jan. 6 (under the fold, but still on Page 1) which I read with great interest and a great sense of apprehension. What now? What’s next for both countries?

Isn’t that what everyone is asking? And then those bloody threats of tariffs began ...

*All the best,
Julia Schneider,
Stratford*

Gallery Stratford's new Battle of the Sommeliers fundraiser a sold-out success

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The pairing of wine with fine dining for a battle royale to see who brings the best vintage to the table at Gallery Stratford recently attracted all kinds of enthusiasts in support of a first-of-its-kind fundraiser.

The sold-out Battle of the Sommeliers successfully raised in excess of \$18,000 through donations and the online auction that accompanied the event.

"We were trying to find a signature event that we could do every February," said Robert Windrum, Gallery curator and director. "We did 40 years of the gala, but events have a lifespan. The idea came from Elizabeth Kerr, a gallery volunteer and supporter and sounded like a lot of fun. Coupled with Shadowbox(ing) (the exhibit) and the online auction brought in the art element of shadowboxes done by artists."

Seventy guests gathered for the three-course dinner prepared by Bob Friesen and his team at Gourmet Chef at Your Table, highly anticipating the pairings that were carefully chosen for each course. Three sommeliers were on hand for the battle; Rob Miller representing The Vine Agency, Steve Doyle representing Café Bouffon/Pazzo and Alexandra Evans representing the Stratford Chefs School. The emcee for the evening, James Cunningham, introduced the sommeliers and



Rob Miller, Steve Doyle and Alexandra Evans duked it out over three courses to make the best wine pairings in the Battle of the Sommeliers fundraiser for Gallery Stratford. (LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

gave thanks to supporters and volunteers before dinner was served.

The first course was a challenging pairing as the guests were served a smoked tomato bisque.

"The soup course was hard because pairing with soup isn't easy and we didn't know how much smoke was in the tomatoes; we haven't tried the soup so it's hard to know what it will taste like," said Evans.

Pairings offered were, from Evans, a 2023 Pardevalles Albarin Blanco from Spain, a 2023 Scarbolo Sauvignon from Italy from Miller and, from Doyle, a 2021 Tawse Carly's Block Reisling. Guests voted for each course pairing using an online polling app downloaded for the occasion with the winner having the most votes at the end of the night.

The second course was beef cheeks or a vegetarian dish of potato gnocchi paired

with some wholesome reds. Evans served a 2020 Chateau Tour Gilet Bordeaux Supérieur from France, Miller paired a 2022 Mosole Refosco del Peduncolo from Italy and Doyle a 2021 Telmo Rodriguez Pegaso Zeta Garnacha from Spain.

The dessert course saw some out-of-the-box thinking with pairings of port, sherry and sparkling wine as guests enjoyed the chocolate French silk mousse. Evans poured a 2023 Brachetto d'Acqui Sant Orsola from Italy (sparkling wine), Miller served a Kopke Fine Ruby Port from Portugal and Doyle a Bodegas Hedalgo N/V Trina Pedro Ximenez from Spain (sherry).

The evening was filled with talk of wine, food, art and the excitement of the online auction that was closing around the time of dessert. Over the course of the evening, around 633 glasses were poured for the appreciative crowd. The winner, who goes away with bragging rights, was Miller representing The Vine Agency. Funds raised directly benefit the Gallery.

"We are severely underfunded and we rely on the community support for everything from our education, our exhibitions, our staffing, everything. We hope that this will become an annual fundraiser," said Windrum.

Those who were unable to attend but would still like to donate to Gallery Stratford can visit their website at gallerystratford.on.ca.

Queer Book of the Month Club

EMMA BROMMER

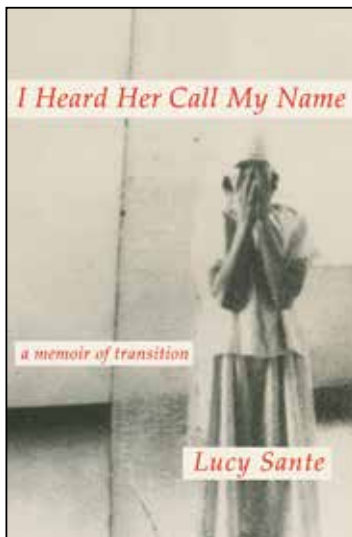
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I Heard Her Call My Name, by Lucy Sante

@SPL: 306.7680092 Sante

At sixty-seven – amid the COVID-19 pandemic – Lucy Sante, a New York writer, artist, critic, and teacher, penned a letter to her closest friends with some major personal news: after decades of living her life as a man, she would be transitioning. Her yearning for womanhood, though new to many of her peers, was something Sante had been repressing since at least the age of eleven.

What follows are vignettes of Sante's life, alternating between her transition journey and her upbringing, adolescence, and earlier adulthood. Guided by



vivid memory, readers come to know Sante quite intimately: from the impact of being a working-class Belgian immigrant and only child to conservative Catholic parents, to her maintenance of manhood despite the progressive and bohemian lifestyle she built for herself across the New York City art scene. With Sante, readers meditate on the social norms, taboos, and barriers that kept her from transitioning all those years.

In *I Heard Her Call My Name*, readers consider their author's existing multi-faceted life, and what meaning her transition brings to her artistic, personal, and professional worlds. How Sante's leap into womanhood manages to fit into her established life is the gem of this easy-reading and edgy memoir.

Weekend Quiz

By Jake Grant

1. Which country has the highest life expectancy?
2. What is the most common surname in Canada?
3. How many minutes are in a full week?
4. What is the 4th letter of the Greek alphabet?
5. How many dots appear on a pair of dice?
6. What is acrophobia a fear of?
7. December 26 is known by what name in Ireland?
8. Where would you be if you were standing on the Spanish Steps?
9. Which is the only continent with land in all four hemispheres?
10. What is the tallest type of tree?

This week's answers are found on pg. 34

STRATFORD **TIMES**

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Stratford and area launches tariff task force

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

With the imposition of across-the-board tariffs on Canadian industries by U.S. President Donald Trump on March 4, investStratford and the City of Stratford, in collaboration with the Town of St. Marys and Perth County, have launched the Stratford Perth Tariff Task Force.

This regional initiative will serve as a resource hub and advocacy group providing businesses and citizens with timely information, strategies and support programs to navigate the evolving trade landscape.

"The introduction of new tariffs has the potential to impact Stratford residents and businesses alike, making it more important than ever that we come together as a region to stay informed and prepared," Mayor Martin Ritsma is quoted in a media release. "Certainly, this is my greatest challenge and the greatest threat to the City of Stratford since taking on the role as mayor.

"The Stratford Perth Tariff Task Force will serve as a vital resource, ensuring that our community has access to the latest information, tools and support needed to navigate these challenges. By working collaboratively, we can protect local jobs,

maintain economic stability and advocate for the best interests of our citizens."

As part of this effort, investStratford has launched a dedicated resource page at investstratford.com/taskforce, where businesses can access the latest updates, expert insights and government-support programs related to the tariffs. The page will be continuously updated as new developments arise.

"Trade uncertainty can create real challenges for local businesses, particularly those in manufacturing, agriculture and small enterprise," investStratford CEO Joani Gerber said in that same release. "The Stratford Perth Tariff Task Force is

a proactive step to ensure that businesses across Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County have access to the information, resources and advocacy they need to remain competitive. I am pleased to work with my counterparts across the region. As a group, we are committed to supporting small businesses with guidance, resources and mentorship to help them navigate these evolving challenges. By working together, we can support our business community in mitigating risks and seizing opportunities for long-term economic resilience."

For more information and ongoing updates, visit www.investstratford.com/taskforce.

World Thinking Day had the Guiding community ponder leadership

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

World Thinking Day (WTD) is celebrated around the world every Feb. 22 since 1926.

WTD is one of the most important days on the Guiding calendar as Sparks, Embers and Pathfinders gather and ponder the big issues worldwide.

This year's theme was a celebration of women and guiding which was explored through different activities and presentations. A total of 70 girls and their leaders gathered for a day of fellowship where, collectively, they get to try so many new things. They challenge themselves to step out of their comfort zones to learn and acquire new skills.

Robin Heffner, an Ember leader, opened the day with an introduction of the theme and outlined the activities were planned for the group. There were hands-on activities as well as special guests to give presentations.

Megan Patterson from the Stratford-Perth Museum was on hand to give the girls a demonstration on butter-making. First, they explored types of milk and where it comes from, then, armed with a jar full of cream, they proceeded to shake, shake, shake the cream until a ball of butter was formed. The butter was washed with water to remove the remaining butter milk then lightly salted. The Guides gobbled up the butter on rolls and said it was better than what they had at home.

Rosemary Vail had the pleasure of overseeing the creation of granola bars using organic ingredients. Through teamwork and cooperation, they learned about measuring and mixing ingredients to create a delicious snack all could enjoy.

St. John Ambulance medical first responder Beth Wattam spent time teaching the basics of first aid with hands-on exploration of bandages, heart-and-blood pressure monitors, a medical first responder's kit, epi pens and puffers for breathing among other

things. The girls excitedly took each other's vitals and bandaged each other up.

The police came to talk. Const. Wanda Hughes and dispatcher Briar McLeod fielded questions about their jobs, tools of the job like her most valuable tool, her voice, which is used in a variety of ways depending on the situation. There was a great deal of interest about the tools on the constable's belt. Every year for a full week, the constables train just with the equipment on their belt so they can grab it in an instant on instinct.

The fire department brought one of their water trucks to the venue so the Guides could climb through. The department was represented by Chris Beach, Jeff Allen, Seth Knox and Steve Ford who discussed 911, fielded questions from the audience and dressed leader Sparkles in the 70 pounds of gear they wear when they fight fires. Upon leaving, Beach was beaming and said he had a lot of fun answering their questions.

Self defense was also on the agenda with

mother-son team Anna and Corson Winter from Kickmasters Karate and Kickboxing. They are both first-degree blackbelts and led the group through punches and kicks, and the challenge of standing from a seated cross-legged position without hands which had some participants roaring with laughter after failed attempts.

Days like this would not be possible if not for the dedicated leaders who volunteer to help shape the lives of youth every week. Volunteering is fun, rewarding, challenging and life changing. Leaders become an influential part of the girls' lives as they share in laughter and watch as their confidence grows and they learn to believe in themselves. Fourteen children were unable to join this year as there simply were not enough leaders.

Stratford Guides leader Rosemary Vail encourages anyone considering volunteering to visit girlguides.ca. Having children is not a prerequisite to becoming a leader with the Girl Guides.



Mika Turner and Maggie Terrill teamed up to make organic granola bars under the supervision of leader Rosemary Vail, who encourages potential volunteers to visit girlguides.ca to find out more.



Firefighter Chris Beach oversees the Girl Guides as they discovered the inside of the fire truck.

(LISA CHESTER PHOTOS)

United Way Perth-Huron accepting expressions of interest for three-year impact funding

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

The United Way Perth-Huron (UWPH) is aiming to provide funding for organizations that align with their values to ensure future impact on the fight against poverty.

The application process for organizations of the Perth-Huron community to receive funding closes on March 12. The funding cycle will begin in April 2026 and run until March 2029 following a two-stage application process to ensure applicants are a good match with the United Way's organizational values.

For the next funding cycle, UWPH aims to address the crisis of poverty and homelessness by supporting community members struggling to get by due to the high cost of living on lower wages.

"Starting with an expression of interest (EOI), this will remain open until March 12. All EOIs are reviewed and if people are eligible, we will then invite them to continue through the process with an application which will be next stage and that will open on the week of April 16 and will last for about a month as well," said Kristin Crane, director of community impact and research at UWPH.

Crane said the ideal candidates to receive funding are grassroots organizations new to the community that provide



Kristin Crane, director of community impact and research at United Way Perth-Huron.

(UNITED WAY PERTH-HURON PHOTO)

services and programs that support equity denied groups. She encouraged those types of organizations to apply and reach out to UWPH first so they can assist them in navigating the process.

Crane said the United Way is also willing to support larger organizations that may have received UWPH funding in the past and encourages them to reapply.

Crane is anticipating a large response to the UWPH's call-out for applications.

"We are looking forward to the new

ways to address homelessness and I think as an organization, we have been on a good path for the last three years," said Crane. "I don't think we are going to see any drastic shifts anytime soon, but it's essential to know who we are serving in the community. We are hoping through this next phase we have better data and evidence that we can apply to future efforts moving forward to better serve the community."

Crane said the United Way recognizes community programs and services are making impactful efforts towards addressing poverty and looks forward to seeing change develop within the community.

"It's a part of that collective impact; if we are able to provide that focus with our funding to these different organizations then we are able to provide all the different kinds of programs and services that we are financially supporting for."

For more information on impact funding, visit perthhuron.unitedway.ca or call 519-271-7730.

People's Party of Canada leader Maxime Bernier visits Perth South



Maxime Bernier, People's Party of Canada (PPC) leader, joined Wayne Baker, the PPC's local representative, at the Downie Optimist Community Centre in St. Pauls Station on Feb. 22 to discuss supply management with constituents. If elected, the PPCs mean to eliminate supply management to create an open market, phase out quotas over a number of years, and promote international sales for local farmers. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)



SOUTH EASTHOPE
MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY

NOTICE OF ANNUAL AND SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING of the SOUTH EASTHOPE MUTUAL INSURANCE COMPANY

Notice is hereby given that the 153rd Annual and Special General Meeting of South Easthope Mutual Insurance Company will be held at **Grace United Church, 116 Woodstock Street South, Tavistock**, Ontario, on **Friday March 21, 2025** at 1:30 p.m.

The meeting will commence with an informative presentation on Fire Safety in the home and Lithium-ion Battery Safety, put on by guest speakers from the Perth East and West Perth Fire Departments.

The business portion will follow the presentation for the purposes of:

1. Receiving and approving the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Corporation held March 8, 2024.
2. Receiving the Auditor's Report and Financial Statement for the year ended December 31, 2024.
3. Appointing Auditors for the 2025 fiscal year.
4. Electing three directors, each for a term of three years. Any member wishing to seek election or re-election as a director must have filed their intention to stand for election in writing with the Secretary of the Corporation at least thirty days in advance of the Annual Meeting.
5. To consider and if thought fit, to approve By-law 1 – 2024 being a General By-law of the Corporation passed by the Board of Directors at their meeting in December 2024, which repeals and replaces the previous General By-laws. The By-Law is available for review by all members of the Corporation at the head office of the Corporation during regular business hours or will be provided upon request.

A complete version of the audited financial statements for the year ended December 31, 2024 are available for viewing on the company website at www.southeasthope.com. A member may also request a copy by written request at least 14 days before the Annual Meeting.

Rachel N. Stewart
Corporate Secretary
For the Board of Directors

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“We stand on guard for thee”: Residents keep up tradition and stand up for Canadian sovereignty



Stratford residents cheer and wave their flags and hockey sticks as they are reminded of Canada's victory at the 4 Nations Face-Off last month. Market Square was packed on March 1 when Wise Communities hosted a rally in support of Canada in the wake of the threats to its sovereignty and economy made by U.S. President Donald Trump after he suggested it becomes America's 51st state. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTOS)



A resident holds up a “Buy Local” sign, a sentiment shared by Stratford and District Chamber of Commerce general manager Aaron Martin, who spoke about the significance of residents' dollars at the rally. Along with Trump's “51st state” rhetoric, he also implemented a 25 per-cent blanket tariff on Canadian goods and a 10 per-cent tariff on Canadian energy on Feb. 4, starting a trade war on the continent.



Newly re-elected Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae spoke to his fellow Ontarians and Canadians that day, saying this was a unique threat facing the country.

Fundraiser for St. James church belltower part of preserving a community mainstay for generations to come

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Anyone who has lived in Stratford for any period of time should recognize the sound of the bells tolling at St. James Anglican Church.

Whether they're signifying a solemn occasion like Remembrance Day or marking the beginning of Sunday service, the church bells have been rung during nearly every significant event since they were first cast and installed by Meneely & Co. at the top of a new, 100-foot belltower in 1909. Throughout that time, a series of church bell chimers have been responsible for hammering out the right tune for the right occasion for all to hear.

"I went to St. James when I was a baby; I was baptized here and I was in Sunday school and choir and all that stuff," said longtime bell chimer Peter Ryde. "I asked one day when I was 15, 'What's up in the belltower?' I was told, 'Come back next Saturday and you'll see what it is.' So, I came back the next Saturday and the gentleman in the belltower said, 'Hi, you're the new chimer and you're going to play the bells. Here's the music, this is how you play it and the key hangs down here. Good luck, I'm off to university.'

"It's been an advocacy I have never, ever regretted. It's been the most wonderful joy in the world to be the chimer at St. James."

While he said it helps to have a background in music, playing the bells is unlike playing any other instrument. As there are only enough bells to cover an octave and a fifth without a few of the sharps and flats, Ryde said those who play the bells require a true passion to be able to perfect the instrument.

"One of the things about having a chime of bells like this that is live, real and you've got a real person playing it; you can adapt it to the mood of the day," Ryde said. "So, I seem to be playing 'O' Canada' and 'The Maple Leaf Forever' a lot these days."

In addition to marking significant occasions, Ryde also plays short chime concerts every Wednesday at noon for half an hour. He said there are even some neighbours of St. James who host chime-concert parties in the summer and make song requests.



St. James chimer Peter Ryde stands next to his instrument, the 15 bells of St. James.

(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTOS)

To help preserve this musical tradition in Stratford, St. James is currently working to raise a little more than \$1 million to rehabilitate the belltower. Recently, the mortar between the belltower bricks has started to degrade, causing the bricks to crumble.

"They did repointing on it years ago and, unfortunately, they used harder mortar than the brick could handle, so the bricks are spalling, so there's just chunks of it breaking off up the tower," St. James Rev. Rob Lemon said. "There's a protective mesh on it that holds all the bits and pieces in, but we're finally at the point where we want to get it done. We actually started the project in 2020, and then it got canned because of the pandemic, it got put off, and now we're back on."

With roughly \$800,000 of the \$1,048,000 estimated cost already raised, work on the belltower, which is part of a larger roof-rehabilitation project, is slated to begin in April.

"The broken bricks are coming out and new bricks are being put in," Lemon said. "In some places the bricks are fine, and in most cases it's just repointing. It's just a huge, huge job."

As part of that fundraising effort, the church hosted a Music and Art Show March 1 in support of the belltower renovations. Visual artists from throughout the

community were invited to make works of art available for sale with a portion of all sales donated to the church's tower-restoration fund. Participating artists included Bob Lott, Norm Fielding, Mary Lou

ondary School Jazz Combo, Helen Harrison and Velvet & Ivory with vocalist Beverley Maranger and pianist Tim Elliott.

"I didn't expect much money to be made," said Mussen, who organized the fundraiser show, the first of its kind for St. James. "... I had no idea what to expect. I'm the committee of one. It's been a bit of a road to hoe because I had no idea how it was going to develop. I'm not a developer; I'm an artist and I'm a parishioner and I'm also a retired teacher. ... It's a hopeful thing."

Based on the response to this first event from the participating artists and musicians, as well as those who came out to support the belltower project, Mussen is hopeful similar events can be hosted in the future to benefit other important causes.

For more information on the bells of St. James, visit www.stjamesstratford.ca/ministries/the-bells-of-st-james--10/pages/history-of-the-chime to find out how to support to the belltower restoration, email office@stjamesstratford.ca or call 519-271-3572 from 9 a.m. to noon Monday to Friday.



Local artists sell their wares to shoppers at the St. James Music and Art Sale March 1 in support of the St. James belltower restoration project.

Kingman, Karin Mussen, Kathleen Freeman, Nancy Walsh, Nikki Wagler, Rebekah Lemon and others.

Also during the fundraiser event, a variety of musical artists entertained shoppers at the sale including The Stratford District Sec-



Tim Elliott and Beverley Maranger of Velvet & Ivory perform at the St. James Music and Art Sale March 1.



TAVISTOCK COMMUNITY HEALTH INC.

Tavistock Community Health Inc.
Notice of Annual General Meeting

**WEDNESDAY
APRIL 9, 2025**

Tavistock Men's Club
78 Woodstock St. N.,
Tavistock | 7:00 pm

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Stratford Fair Ambassador Represents Agricultural Society at OAAS Convention

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

It was an exciting weekend for Marshall MacCannell, the 50th fair ambassador of the Stratford and District Agricultural Society, as he represented Stratford at the Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies (OAAS) convention in Toronto.

MacCannell, who made history as the first male ambassador for the Stratford society, attended the annual event from Feb. 20 to 23, participating in workshops and networking opportunities designed to help ambassadors promote local agricultural societies and their programs.

“The convention is always an eye-opener for ambassadors,” said Susan McGonigle, executive director of the Stratford agricultural society, who attended the conference alongside other directors. “It helps them understand their role in promoting local agriculture and food throughout the year.”

The OAAS convention provides education and leadership training for fair ambassadors, equipping them with the skills to engage with their communities and advocate for agricultural awareness.



Stratford Fair Ambassador Marshall MacCannell stands behind the Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies (OAAS) letters at the start of the annual convention in Toronto. (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

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Mileage - 98,071 KM

2019 Hyundai Tucson Preferred



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Mileage - 98,953 KM

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Mileage - 111,753 KM

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Key Economic Metrics



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3%



Jan 29, 2025 **-0.25%**



2025 Inflation rate

2.0%



Decrease from 2023 **-2.0%**

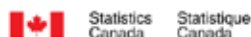


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Fighting Irish take 2-0 series lead on Petrolia

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

The Bentley's Stratford Fighting Irish started their first-round playoff series against the Petrolia Squires with back-to-back victories on Feb. 28 and March 1.

Stratford and Petrolia finished the season with identical records of 13-11, each with one overtime loss. However, despite their evenly matched regular-season results, the Fighting Irish have dominated the first two games of the series, outscoring the Squires by a combined 15-3 mar-

gin.

In Game 1 of the series, the Fighting Irish travelled to Petrolia and came away with an 8-2 win. Within a span of exactly eight minutes, Stratford jumped out to a 3-0 lead in the first period with goals from Ryan O'Bonsawin, Thomas Hernandez and Christian Polillo. Polillo's goal eventually went down as the game-winner.

The Squires got one back before the end of the opening frame and scored again in the second, but a pair from Mitch Casey, the second of the night for Polillo, and single goals from Matt Fuller and Zach Mag-

wood clinched the 8-2 final. Zach Weir made 34 saves in the Fighting Irish's net to secure the 1-0 series lead.

Stratford's offense stayed hot 24 hours later when they returned home for Game 2 and once again won by a six-goal margin, beating the Squires 7-1. Graham Brulotte scored the lone goal of the first period on a powerplay before the Fighting Irish's offense exploded for four goals in seven minutes and 38 seconds in the middle frame.

Cole Thiessen started the goal-scoring flurry, potting the eventual game-winning

tally, before Magwood buried two in a row followed by Polillo completing the quartet of second-period goals.

Polillo added another in the third and Jaden Peca found the back of the net en route to the 7-1 final. In goal, Weir made 29 of 30 saves.

Game 3 took place in Stratford on March 5 after the Times' press time, with Game 4 slated for March 7 in Petrolia. If necessary, games five and six are scheduled for March 8 in Stratford and March 9 in Petrolia.



Christian Polillo tucks home a goal during the Stratford Bentley's Fighting Irish's 7-1 win in Game 2 of their playoff series against the Petrolia Squires. Through the first two games of the series, Polillo has four goals.



Cole Thiessen rockets the puck by Squires' netminder Jakob Knowles for the eventual game-winning goal during the Stratford Bentley's Fighting Irish's 7-1 victory over Petrolia in Game 2 of their first-round playoff series. (FRED GONDER PHOTOS)

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2024-25 GOJHL Western Conference Regular Season Standings

(As of March 4, 2025)

TEAM	W	L	OTL	SOL	PTS	GF	GA
St. Marys Lincolns	40	6	1	1	82	219	84
Chatham Maroons	33	9	4	1	71	230	135
Stratford Warriors	32	13	3	-	67	166	100
Listowel Cyclones	29	14	2	1	61	179	132
London Nationals	29	15	2	1	61	185	154
LaSalle Vipers	29	19	1	-	59	174	178
Elmira Sugar Kings	25	19	4	-	54	186	157
K-W Siskins	23	19	4	2	52	144	153
Strathroy Rockets	22	19	4	1	49	139	159
Sarnia Legionnaires	17	26	3	1	38	174	209
St. Thomas Stars	12	32	3	1	28	142	242
Komoka Kings	5	41	2	-	12	90	246

Warriors win streak ends as playoffs near

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

A mostly solid effort was rewarded in a game against the team whom the Stratford Hunter Steel Ltd. Warriors were fighting with for second place in the Greater Ontario Junior Hockey League's (GOJHL) Western Conference and, as a result, the Warriors are likely destined to finish third.

That also means the LaSalle Vipers are the Warriors' most likely first-round playoff opponent.

Head coach Dave Williams said he was pleased with his team's performance in the latter half of their 3-2 loss to the Chatham Maroons on Feb. 28, but they were snakebit and unable to break through the goaltending of Samuel DiBlasi enough.

"We started a little slow, but I liked our back half of the game," Williams told the Times. "We started to play the way we had over the last few weeks in the second half of the game, but we struggled to capitalize on some of our scoring opportunities. You have to give credit to Chatham as well; they are obviously a very good team and their goaltender had a really good night."

Liam Campbell struck first for the Maroons just one minute and 43 seconds into the contest, which held up as the only goal of the first period. Brody Gillis extended Chatham's lead to 2-0 in the second.

However, as Williams alluded to, the Warriors found their stride in the second half of the game, outshooting the Maroons 32-10 in the final 40 minutes. Dracén Campbell scored on the powerplay at the 7:34 mark of the third, but Noah Mathieson restored Chatham's two-goal advantage almost exactly nine minutes later.

Colin Slattery's 17th of the year came with just 14 seconds left on the clock to make it a one-goal game, but the Warriors couldn't find the buzzer-beating equalizer and fell 3-2. Despite the relatively low-scoring nature of the game, it was actually the highest-scoring game between the two teams this season.

"It's a little bit of a surprise given how offensive Chatham is that in all four of our games against them, they've all been tight, low-scoring games," said Williams. "We're two teams in very similar positions but we've gotten here in very different ways, so it's a positive for our group that we've been able to do a pretty decent job containing a team that has the offensive firepower that Chatham has. We've also been really fortunate the entire year that both Carter (McDougall) and Chase (Furlong) have been excellent when we've had any sort of breakdowns defensively."

One week earlier on Feb. 21, the Warriors scored all four of their goals in the second frame while Carter McDougall made 21 saves in a 4-0 shutout over the Strathroy Rockets. Hudson Binder led the offensive charge, potting two goals. Kaedyn Long and Carter Petrie also scored, the latter of whom had entered the game with just one goal in his last eight.

The Warriors' nine-game winning streak came to a halt

on Feb. 26 when they fell 5-3 on the road to the London Nationals, with Williams noting the team made several atypical blunders that cost them the two points.

"We made a couple mistakes that weren't very characteristic of us so far this year. We got put on our heels a little bit after a fluky early goal. We had an opportunity to get the puck into the offensive zone and it ended up in the back of our net. We got into a four-on-four situation and lost a man. I don't want to take away from London because they are obviously a good team, but I felt like the loss was more of our own making."

Ryan Nichols scored the lone goal of the first period just two minutes and 47 seconds into the game. David Brown went on to net a pair, one of which was an empty net tally in the final minute, while Joshua Lepain and Ty Moffatt each scored once for London.

Binder, meanwhile, again carried the offensive load for Stratford, extending his goal streak to three games with another two-goal effort. Cole Lewis is also recorded his 18th goal of the campaign.

After losing to Chatham, the Warriors hosted the Listowel Cyclones on March 3 and came away with a 5-3 victory.

According to the bench boss, both squads were far from perfect, but the end of a long goal drought provided an early spark.

"It was a little sloppy for both teams," Williams said. "We scored a goal early and it gave us a lot of energy, and after Listowel tied it and Jack (McGurn) scored shortly thereafter, (it) gave our guys even more energy. It always provides a good boost when somebody like Jack, who hasn't scored very often recently, makes that contribution and gets us such an important goal. You could feel the excitement for Jack from the rest of the team when he was able to bang that goal in."

Hunter Nagge's icebreaker came at 3:12 of the opening stanza, but less than a minute later, Jordan Visneskie tied the game at one apiece for Listowel. The game remained deadlocked for just under 10-and-a-half minutes until

Jack McGurn ended a 19-game goal drought for his sixth of the season, giving the Warriors a 2-1 lead going into the second.

Aaron Green and Dracén Campbell scored for Stratford in the middle frame with Avry Anstis countering for the Cyclones.

Campbell, who added an assist on Kipfer's powerplay goal in the final 20 minutes, goes into the Warriors' second-last game of the regular season on March 7 – a rematch against Listowel – with points in each of his last five games.

"Dracén (Campbell) has a really good offensive skill set," Williams said. "I think the big thing for him to be successful is he has to move his feet, get the puck over the opposition's blueline quickly and find lanes to get the puck down to the net. He's been doing that really well the last little bit here and he's been getting rewarded for it as a result."

The Warriors have just two games left before the post-season starts and, much like most of their recent games, they are against playoff-calibre opponents including the Cyclones and Elmira Sugar Kings.

The strong end to the regular season is a good test for the team to end the season on, noted Williams.

"Our feeling as the coaching staff is that finishing the last couple of weeks against these kinds of opponents should prepare the group for the type of hockey that we're going to need to play. The game against London was essentially a one-goal game. The game against Chatham was a one-goal game. Those kinds of close games are ones you need to be comfortable in come playoff time.

"We've been preaching all year just how hard it is to win games in our league given the parity," Williams continued. "It's only going to get more challenging in the playoffs as everybody seems to tighten up. Every little detail has an impact on the game, so we need to be super consistent doing the little things right. If we do, I think we have an opportunity to compete with whoever we may play."



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SSC skaters compete in Lakeshore event



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

The Stratford Skating Club (SSC) had three skaters compete at the Skate Ontario Provincial Series No. 14 in Lakeshore from Feb. 14-16. Pictured from left to right are Amy Schroeder, Nicole Verhoef, and Mason Clemmer. Schroeder came in 10th place in Star-Seven Artistic Group Two, and 13th in Star-Six Women Group Two. Verhoef finished seventh in Star-Five Artistic Group Three, and 13th in Star-Five Women O-13 Group Three. Clemmer picked up a second-place finish in the Star-Five Men O-13 competition.

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SSC well-represented at Kincardine competition



The Stratford Skating Club (SSC) had skaters participate at the Star-1-4 Skate by the Lake event held in Kincardine on Feb. 22-23. Many Stratford skaters picked up medals, including Dani-ka Lingard, pictured, who captured the Bronze in Star-Three Group Two. Not pictured were Adele McCutcheon (silver in Star-One Group Eight), Katerina Schmidt (silver in Star-Three Group Six), Jane McCutchen (silver in Star-Three Group Five), Izzy Pritchard (bronze in Star-Two Group One), Clara Robertson (bronze in Star-Two Group Two), and Tessa Bell (silver in Star-Three Group Four).



Madeleine Milton (gold in Star-One Group Eight) and Laura Neeb (silver in Star-One Group Eight), who are pictured above in the front row from left to right. In the middle row, from left, are Melanie Milton (silver in Star-Two Group Two), Hailey Graul (bronze in Star-Two Group Three), Ellie Stewart (silver in Star-Two Group Five), and Emmy Ford (gold in Star-One Group Eight). In the back row, from left, are Olivia Clemmer (silver in Star-Two Group Nine), Jaida Ford (bronze in Star-Three Group Two), Gracie Sutherland (Star-Three Group One), and Annabelle Stewart (Star-Two Group Seven).



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

In addition to the SSC's strong slate of individual results at the Kincardine competition, the Stratford North Stars Synchronized Skating team also turned in a strong group performance in the Star-Four U12 challenge taking place the same weekend. Pictured are members of the North Stars' squad, who walked away with the silver medal on the backs of a second-place finish. In the front row, from left, are Izzy Pritchard, Melanie Milton, Hailey Graul, Emmy Ford, and Madeleine Milton. In the back row, from left, are Olivia Clemmer, Rose Clarke, Jaida Ford, Bella, and Clara Robertson.

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Stratford teams prevail at Wellington Bonspiel



(STEWART GRANT PHOTOS)

left photo: With two full draws and a strong contingent from both St. Marys and Stratford, the Wellington Brewery Bonspiel was a smashing success on Saturday at the St. Marys Curling Club. The winners of Draw 1 were Team Aitcheson. Pictured, skip Evan Aitcheson intensely surveys the stone thrown by Trevor Caven as sweepers Bri an Aitcheson and Taylor Yantzi are poised with their brushes.

right photo: Winning Draw 2 was another Stratford based team, that of Team Malcho. Pictured, skip Rob Malcho delivers his stone accompanied by teammates Jason Malcho and Craig Pearce, while Mike Elliott holds the broom off-camera. The St. Marys Curling Club thanks all for participating including those who made the short drive from Stratford to create some exciting rivalry games with the Stonetown squads. Many thanks are also extended to the event's sponsors: Wellington Brewery, Delmar Foods and Teahen Construction.

Here for Now Theatre to host first season in new space

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Here for Now Theatre, a theatre company known for showcasing new and underproduced works, will be hosting its 2025 season in its new, Black Box Theatre.

The 2025 season will be the first in Here for Now Theatre's history in its indoor theatre, which used to be the registry office on St. Andrew Street. The indoor space can host 65 people in the audience.

"It's extremely exciting, like every time I go into the building, it's taking shape, it's becoming a theatre and I think it's going to be the absolute perfect home for the kind of work that we do," said artistic director Fiona Mongillo. "The black box itself feels spacious. The ceilings are incredibly high, it's beautiful, but it still has this real intimacy and I can just see the plays living so beautifully in it."

The 2025 season kicks off with Rebecca Northan's *Stick Around*, a mother-daughter comedy based on Northan's mother's battle with terminal cancer and their last eight weeks together. The world premiere of *Stick Around* will run from May 28 to June 8.

The Ontario premiere of *Forget About Tomorrow*, written by Jill Daum of Vancouver, will take the stage from June 18-29. The drama centres on Jane, a mother

tackling a demanding job for low pay, a forgetful husband and two children who can't manage their lives. Jane meets a stranger, and her life becomes more complicated.

Here for Now Theatre will also feature Beverley Cooper's *Humour Me* about a woman who loses the ability to laugh, which runs from July 9-18. *The Rules of Playing Risk* by Kristen Da Silva will be on the stage for the first time after it was first produced by Theatre Orangeville as a video-on-demand during the COVID-19 Pandemic restrictions. Running from July 30 to Aug. 16, the play will introduce audiences to a grandfather recovering from a heart attack who is visited by his 14-year-old estranged grandson.

The season will close off with the Jennifer Fawcett drama *Apples in the Winter* about a mother making an apple pie as it's her son's last-meal request as he awaits his fate on death row. *Apples in the Winter* runs from Aug. 22-31.

Mongillo doesn't pick a theme for each season. Rather, the theme comes together organically through the selected plays. This year, the productions focus on family and the relationships that truly matter – a contrast to destruction and chaos around the world such as war, political unrest and climate change.



Here for Now Theatre's 2025 season will feature many stories about family and is the first season to be held in the new indoor theatre space. (ARTWORK BY MARK UHRE)

"There's so much existential anxiety about what's going on in the world and I think in those moments, often as human beings, it really focuses us on what actually matters and I think what

actually matters is love, right?" Mongillo said. "That manifestation is massive in the family unit and that's where you see love and relationships and what matters at the end of the day."

Here for Now Theatre will also host *Space Age Motel: A Best Western* performed by Booth Savage and Janet-Laine Green from June 12-15, and Joanna Rannelli's one-woman show *Bangs, Bobs & Banter: Confessions of a Hairstylist* from Aug. 7-10. Monday afternoon script readings will also occur throughout the summer.

Mongillo is thrilled to host additional programming thanks to the new Black Box Theatre space and is looking forward to collaborating with Stratford's flourishing arts community.

"Stratford is home to so many wonderful artists and creators and inventors, and I really want this space to be a place they think they can use to try out poetry readings, try out music nights, to gather and discuss ideas," she said. "I really want this to feel like a space that belongs to the community as much as it is our theatre company's home."

Mongillo also said there will be an inaugural winter season for Here for Now Theatre announced soon.

For more information and to purchase tickets online, visit www.herefornowtheatre.com.

Springworks Puppet Works! presents Emelio's A Million Chameleons

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Returning to Stratford is Adam Francis Proulx, whose exceptionally popular laugh-out-loud comedy, *The Family Crow - A Murder Mystery*, delighted audiences in 2023 at Factory 163.

On March 22, he will perform a family friendly piece called *Emelio's A Million Chameleons* at the city hall auditorium at 10:30 a.m.

This touching story is silly, zany and fun, with a sparkle and shine theme that features Proulx as Emelio who runs a circus act boasting a million chameleons. This musical comedy will charm and entertain both young and old with song and magic.

"It is catchy, accessible, with layers on a deeper level that resonate with youth and adults," said Eileen Smith, artistic director of SpringWorks. "The things that are great family theatre, children's theatre, is that it is immediately entertaining, and that is delightful unto itself, but it can speak to you on many layers, making it rich, good theatre."

The theme of the day is letting that inner sparkle shine, and the community is invited to shine in their best sparkles; princess dresses, taffeta, sparkling jewelry, glitter on the eyes. It will be a morning filled with sparkle, songs to sing-a-long and laughter.

"I think Adam is so imaginative, it is ri-



Emelio and Juan, the favourite chameleon of the circus, are appearing at city hall auditorium March 22 at 10:30 a.m.

(LISA STEINWEDEL PHOTO)

diculous, as is his co-creator Byron. How he works with people and because he tours all the time, there is extreme professionalism while making magic. He has a lot

of experience on crowd management and being in control; he's a real craftperson," said Smith.

Puppetry brings magic and wonder to

the imagination of a child and adult alike. The audience becomes invested and involved in bringing the object of puppetry to life. Internationally, this type of theatre is huge and celebrated, so it is with great pleasure that Smith brings this artform to the community.

"Live art, where you are together in the room, is an experience to be shared. There are all kinds of research about brain function, belonging and health when people exist together. Belonging, being together in a space consuming, appreciating, experiencing something together. Literally, as a performer, you can hear the audience gasp, their collective hearts beat," said Smith.

This is inter-generational theatre for families of all kinds to come together and share the experience and perhaps to sparkle a little if so inspired.

"People were jumping up and down, and laughing, gasping, the sing-a-longs, it is very high energy. There are spoilers and big reveals, special effects too. It is fun and delightful, so come and have fun," Smith said.

Tickets are available online at springworks.com and are \$16.95 for ages two to 12, and \$33.90 for adults and youth 13 and older. This includes HST. Tickets will be available at the door unless they sell out in advance, so purchase tickets soon.

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Stratford's Thundering Velvet Band to launch first double album, *Progression*, in concert at Revival House

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

For a bunch of old guys who like to play music together in their spare time once a week, the upcoming release of a double album full of mostly original songs is worthy of celebration.

Stratford musicians and members of the Thundering Velvet Band Neil Young (keys, guitar, vocals), Mike McCullough (bass, guitar, vocals), Lee Helperin (lead guitar) and Tim Adair (drums, vocals) are preparing to launch their first vinyl double album recorded together as a band, *Progression*, during an album-release concert at Revival House on March 28.

"It took us almost two years to put that together," Young said. "We write all of our own stuff; there's one traditional piece we did a heavy rearrangement on, but the rest we wrote between Mike (McCullough) and I, and together we all arranged it."

"We started just prior to the whole lockdown idea ... and we just sort of built from there," Helperin added. "We then did more recording, added more stuff; we only do this once a week. As things started to become more coalesced, we realized we had something kind of cool. I just thought, personally, this is something that should be commemorated. The results are great."

The band members recorded and mixed each of the album's songs at their studio located in the back room of what used to be Daddio's Barbershop at 2 Milton St. Noah Mintz of Lacquer Channel Mastering – one of the world's longest-running vinyl mastering studios – mastered the album for vinyl.

"We thought we'd just do a digital release, which we could do ourselves – we had that done – but to do analogue is a whole other craft," Young said.

"Vinyl had fallen off with the advent of CDs and cassettes, of course, but now, people are getting back into vinyl, so Lee (Helperin) was kind of the driver on that to get us to produce a vinyl album," Adair added.

"I love vinyl," Helperin said. "... For us growing up, you put the vinyl on and then you have something to read (the record sleeve). It's big enough that you can read it. It's experiential."

The album-cover artwork for *Progression*, which harkens back to some of the great rock album artwork of the '70s and '80s, was created by Stratford artist Dave Lawley based on a concept by Young.

The Thundering Velvet Band has been playing together for roughly a decade. Besides a four-track CD the band put out about five years ago, *Progression* is the

first official album released by the band.

While the band has been around for 10 years, its members have known each other for much longer than that. Young, McCullough and Helperin played together as the backing band for another musician, and when that musician parted ways with his band, they brought in Adair and formed the Thundering Velvet Band. Young and Helperin go back even further, playing together in Bobbi Lee Justice and The Scepters, a Stratford soul, rhythm and blues band.

Between the four musicians, the band has experience playing nearly every genre of music in the book from rock, country and new wave to church music and even big band. That extensive musical experience has led the band members to describe their current sound as Americana, a blend of mostly folk, rock and country with some hints of their other musical styles bleeding in throughout their new album.

"Some of these songs, the roots of the songs go years back," Adair said. "I've known Neil (Young) for a long time because I played in a group with one of his relatives, so he would be at the house when we were rehearsing and that's how I knew him. He gave me this cassette tape years ago and said, 'Listen to these songs. I'm thinking of producing something.'

And then for years I didn't hear anything. Then I get a phone call from him, 'Do you want to join this group of guys; we're putting a band together?' So, I said sure. Two or three songs on the album are from that cassette tape."

At the album-launch party on March 28, the band will play songs from their new album as well as some old favourites. They also plan to showcase three music videos produced for songs on the album, two of which – the videos for "Standing Behind The Man" and "I Know I've Lost You" – have already been released on their website at thunderingvelvetband.com, while the third will see its debut at the concert.

Tickets for the show are \$40 for table seats and \$25 for single seats. A table-seat ticket will also include a free copy of *Progression* on vinyl, which in turn includes a free digital download of the album. Single-seat tickets will allow attendees to purchase the album for just \$15 – a \$25 discount on the album price of \$40.

For more information and to purchase tickets, visit www.revival.house/events-calendar or call 519-273-3424. For more on the Thundering Velvet Band, visit thunderingvelvetband.com or follow Thundering Velvet Band on Facebook and Instagram.



Members of the Thundering Velvet Band rehearse for their album-release concert at Revival House on March 28.



Pictured from left to right holding their new album, *Progression*, (GALEN SIMMONS PHOTOS) are members of the Thundering Velvet Band, Neil Young, Tom Adair, Mike McCullough and Lee Helperin.

LOCAL MATTERS.

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Stratford poet releases second book in a series she calls her “love song to Stratford”

First book in the series translated to Chinese

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Multi-award-winning Stratford poet Heidi Sander recently released her second book in an ongoing series she affectionately refers to as her “love song to Stratford.”

Sander’s second book in the popular Stratford Gems series, *Stratford Gems Two*, continues to pay tribute to the rich cultural tapestry and vibrant history of her hometown through a blend of poetry and photography, making it the perfect guide to the Festival City for residents and visitors alike.

“*Stratford Gems Two* is just the continuation of my Stratford Gems series, which is my love song to Stratford,” Sander said. “There’s just so many people and places I want to feature, and I couldn’t fit it in one book, so that has led itself to book two and book three will be coming as well.”

“There’s so much here and all these new landmarks and events that are happening; there’s a lot here and Stratford is growing, which is lovely.”

In *Stratford Gems Two*, Sander offers readers a journey through Stratford’s vibrant gardens, serene countryside and dynamic murals. The poetry within explores themes of community, memory and the true meaning of home.

“I featured some of the key places in



Stratford poet Heidi Sander and Chinese translator Louise Liu holding the *Stratford Gems* English and Mandarin versions.

(HEIDI SANDER PHOTO)

Stratford like Tom Patterson Island, but there are some local gems not everyone might be aware of,” Sander said. “One is Organic Oasis Farm; I love them. Then there’s the memorial benches, and I find that people often just walk by them and

there’s a real story behind those, so I wrote a poem about them. The (Stratford) Normal School, as well, because I feel that sometimes gets overshadowed – this red building behind the Festival Theatre.

“The book is carried in the festival’s theatre stores, so a lot of visitors see them as well. I had a book signing (for the first *Stratford Gems* book) last summer. People weren’t aware of a lot of these areas. The books are almost like poetic guides, as well, because there is a little page in the back that gives details about the actual place or person I’m writing about.”

Now available in local stores and through the Blue Moon Publishers website after it was officially released in December, *Stratford Gems Two* and its predecessor are often given as gifts by city officials to visiting dignitaries and groups as a special way for them to explore the city.

In addition to releasing her second book in the *Stratford Gems* series, Sander has also been working with local translator Louise Liu on a version of *Stratford Gems* that can be read and enjoyed by a Mandarin-speaking audience.

“I’m learning so much; there are all these cultural nuances,” Sander said of the experience working with Liu on translating her first book in the series. “Chinese is the language and Mandarin is the spoken language. So, it’s a Chinese translation, but if it’s spoken, it’s Mandarin or potentially even another dialect.

“Louise actually approached me and asked me if she could translate the poems, and I was just deeply honoured by that. The *Stratford Gems* series is a love song to Stratford, but now, to have it open to an-



The cover for (HEIDI SANDER PHOTO)

the Chinese translation of poet Heidi Sander’s *Stratford Gems* poetry collection.

other culture in Stratford, it’s truly, deeply moving.”

Sander said she and Liu worked closely together on each of the poems in the first book. While, as a poet, Sander said she likes to leave her work up to the interpretation of the reader, the process of translating them from English to Chinese made it imperative she discuss the meaning and context of each poem with Liu to ensure they weren’t lost in translation.

“Perspective is an element of translation,” Sander said. “It’s a very intricate process to capture the essence of an original work, but the translation is based on the translator’s perspective of the poems. We met and she asked a lot of questions, but I kept saying to her, ‘The final decision is yours.’ This is as much Louise’s book as it is mine.”

“I’ve never worked with a translator before and it’s a really interesting experience for me. It really did deepen my understanding of her culture and also, I think, her understanding of ours.”

In the lead-up to a book launch for the Chinese translation of *Stratford Gems* at the Stratford Public Library April 5 from 2-3:30 p.m., the library is hosting an interactive display of Sander’s poetry and the accompanying photography from her books in the library auditorium from March 3 to April 12.

The book-launch event on April 5 will feature a panel discussion with Sander and Liu exploring how poetry serves as a bridge between cultures, fostering understanding and appreciation across linguistic boundaries, that will be moderated by Bruce Pitkin. Liu and Sander will also participate in an interactive Q&A session and a book signing during the event.

Both the English and Chinese versions of *Stratford Gems* are available for purchase at Dancing Waters Boutique (11 York St.) in Stratford, as well as online through the Blue Moon Publishers website at www.bluemoonpublishers.com.

Velvet and Ivory perform at the Local Community Food Centre



The well-loved duo of Tim Elliott and Beverley Maranger performing (LISA CHESTER PHOTO) as Velvet & Ivory during dinner at the Local Community Food Centre Feb. 24. Fresh and free community meals are served using ingredients sourced from the Local’s market and prepared onsite every Monday and Friday. See their website thelocalcfc.org for more information.

Kiwanis Festival of the Performing Arts benefit musical takes on a different tune

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The Kiwanis Festival of the Performing Arts (KFPA) has expanded its annual benefit musical in an exciting way.

With local residents and musical composers Christopher Norton and wife Wendy Edwards Beardall-Norton collaborating with KFPA, the concert will grip both local residents and international virtual viewers alike. The couple has graciously granted rights to livestream the event.

The concert, entitled Dream a Little Dream, will feature segments of the world premiere of the expanded version of A Midsummer Night's Dream in addition to original compositions by Norton and Beardall-Norton.

"I am beginning to appreciate how international (Norton) is. I knew he was the composer of some of the more popular pieces in the Royal Canadian Conservatory Syllabus, but I didn't realize how comprehensive his repertoire is," said KFPA executive director Pat McKinna. "He's written for all kinds of instruments and voice. The people who came forward when we announced that we were doing the first performance of this new show were really smitten with Chris' music and the collaboration between Chris and his wife."

So came the inspiration to expand upon the planned micro-musical, A Mid Summer Night's Dream, to include other music that Norton has written, as well as compositions by Beardall-Norton. Sandra Mogensen, who should be familiar to Stratford audiences and has an affinity to female composers, has agreed to perform some of Beardall-Norton's piano music. She will be among other guest performers.

"This will also be a wonderful opportunity to showcase some of our Kiwanis Festival alumni who have performed in the Kiwanis Festival and learned a Norton piece. In those

cases where an accompanist is required, the composer will step up to accompany the artist, which is a really special opportunity. We are so lucky that they live here and are so generous with their time," said McKinna.

The focal piece will be the premiere of the new version of A Midsummer Night's Dream performed by the Dream Ensemble, which is made up of non-professionals, primarily adults with four younger people. The guest musicians range in age from seven and up, and the third feature of the event will be piano duets on the single piano between Norton and Jamie Syer; four hands on one piano, as well as a trio with six hands on one piano.

Not only has Norton attended every rehearsal, he has also stepped in as the rehearsal pianist. McKinna said she feels very privileged to have him along with his commitment and dedication to the performers. She is thrilled they will be able to livestream the concert to reach a wider audience. The first person to sign up for the livestream was from New Zealand, instilling great excitement about the endeavour.

This is a pay-what-you-wish event, but concertgoers are encouraged to reserve their seats online at kiwanisfestivalstratford.com ahead of the March 28 performance. The fundraising event will be at Avondale United Church at 7 p.m. The online fundraising auction remains open and can be found at kiwanisfestivalstratford.com/auction featuring two different food-inspired experiences, and diamond earrings from sponsor Swansen's Jewellers. Site visitors will also find a button to donate to KFPA should they wish to contribute to the festival but are unable to attend. The benefit concert is sponsored by Home and Company and learning opportunities are sponsored by Swansen's Jewellers.

"There is a hunger in the community to find ways that we can agree and enjoy



The Dream Ensemble, of the (KIWANIS FESTIVAL OF THE PERFORMING ARTS STRATFORD PHOTO) Dream a Little Dream benefit musical, made up of non-professional performers, will bring the world premiere of Christopher Norton's A Midsummer Night's Dream to life along with other Norton compositions. "Each other's company, and this is one way," McKinna said.

Gallery Stratford's Artist Lounge a more conversational way to learn about the artist

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Instead of the usual lecture led by the exhibiting artist, Gallery Stratford wants to introduce a more casual atmosphere when discussing visual art.

Gallery Stratford held its inaugural Artist Lounge event on the evening of March 1, during which guests had conversations with artist Malcolm Pate while drinking zero-proof canned cocktails provided by the Starlight Lounge as projections from Pate's Nocturing exhibition were displayed to the backing of lo-fi music. The event provided a warm, cozy and relaxed atmosphere for socializing.

"We wanted to do something that was an alternative to the typical come in and sit down and hear a lecture and then leave," said Robert Windrum, gallery director and curator. "We wanted it to be more social, more relaxed, conversational and, at the same time, give insight into to the artist and what the work is about."

All other Artist lounge events will be held on the Third

Thursday of the month at Gallery Stratford. The featured artist may or may not be exhibiting, and staff from the Starlight Lounge will be there to promote and discuss their craft zero-proof cocktails.

"We wanted to provide ... a social environment connected to the community and their product and their market and make the gallery a bit of a social location," Windrum said.

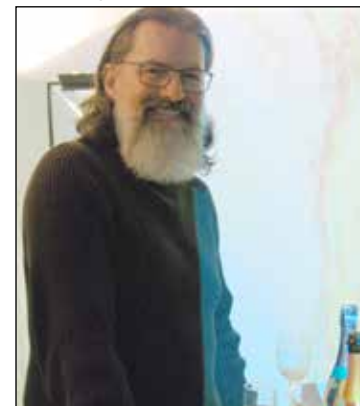
Pate's Nocturing exhibition, which highlights sensations and the ecosystem during winter nights in rural Ontario, closed on March 2. The first Artist Lounge was supposed to occur on Feb. 15 but was postponed due to a winter snowstorm that weekend.

"Weather is similarly wintry today but that's part of the charm and is kind of what the show is about, so that is a good thing and it feels like a nice way to round it off and give people a chance to have some insights after they had a chance to form an opinion on the thing," Pate said.

He added events like the Artist Lounge will make the gallery more accessible.

"Even for a public gallery like this that is so welcoming

and does so many events that are available people of different interaction levels with art galleries, I think there's still a reputation that art galleries have which can make some people a bit unsettled or uncomfortable," Pate said. "I think Gallery Stratford walks a really great line in terms of making sure people feel involved and accessible, and conversations rather than a talk is a really nice way of doing it."



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO) Robert Windrum, director and curator of Gallery Stratford, wanted to create a more casual, social atmosphere for discussing art with the gallery's Artist Lounge event. The event is also in partnership with the Starlight Lounge, which provided canned, zero-proof craft cocktails for the occasion on March 1.

Meet Stratford's Youth Poet Laureate Quinn Mayer

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Stratford's first ever youth poet laureate has been announced after a competition was held.

Quinn Mayer is thrilled to have been chosen for this inaugural position that comes with a one-year term. Mayer is a fifth-year student at Stratford and District Secondary School (SDSS). Mayer was inspired to start writing poetry as a young child. They were home-schooled until Grade 7 and there was a module on poetry where they got to paint along with the poems.

"I think the combination of the visual and the literary really solidified it as something that I was interested in," they said. "Then in Grade 7, I started writing a lot more because we had an actual poetry unit in class. I think that poetry is a beautiful way to express emotions and to connect people."

Influence comes from everywhere and everyone, but they count musician Anthony Green, lead singer of Circa Survive, as well as other bands as a great influence lyrically. A great deal of inspiration comes from music which they plan to pursue in university.

Their style is typically free-verse and tends to be rather long. They found themselves exploring metaphorical themes, like how machines and humans interact, or about the celestial sky.

"I explore a lot of things that I experience and find it is a way for me to work through things and find the way that I feel about things," said Mayer.



Quinn Mayer, a fifth-year student at Stratford and District Secondary School, has been selected as the inaugural youth poet laureate for Stratford.

(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

When Mayer first found out about being selected as the youth poet laureate, it was with a bit of disbelief and shock. It didn't feel real at first.

"It didn't really settle with me for a while; it didn't quite

feel real that I had won and got this really cool position. But when it did sink in, I was really, really excited. It's an honour to have this platform where I get to share poetry with people," said Mayer.

They found out over email while at school on their spare period hanging out in their favourite teacher's room, and they were able to share the news with that teacher, who was very excited about the prospect. In this role, they really want to inspire other youth to write their own poetry, or anything in the literary arts like short stories.

"I really want to make lasting, positive change and solidify a sense of community. The first thing that came to mind when I was filling out the application was that I wanted to do workshops to not only let youth explore what they want to write but also to provide mentorship and encouragement. I also want to do an open-mic night where people can come and perform their poetry," said Mayer.

Poetry provides a platform for people to express their emotions and also put their feelings out into the world. It also allows people to communicate how they feel about issues, advocate and raise awareness.

"For youth, this is a really powerful way to connect them with issues that they may not have thought about before and a great way to get people's minds thinking about certain topics more," said Mayer.

As a poet, Mayer aspires to get their work out to people. As a student, they are looking forward to going to university to study music where poetry transcends to lyrics. Look forward to seeing more of this youth poet laureate.

Inaugural poet laureate David Stones is excited to embark on three-year term

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

David Stones may have held many corporate roles, but he was a wordsmith at heart of them and now, his new role as Stratford's poet laureate seems like a natural evolution.

Being good with a pen and being good on his feet led him through his various creative endeavours. Now, after publishing close to 600 poems, Stones is excited to embark on a three-year term as poet laureate.

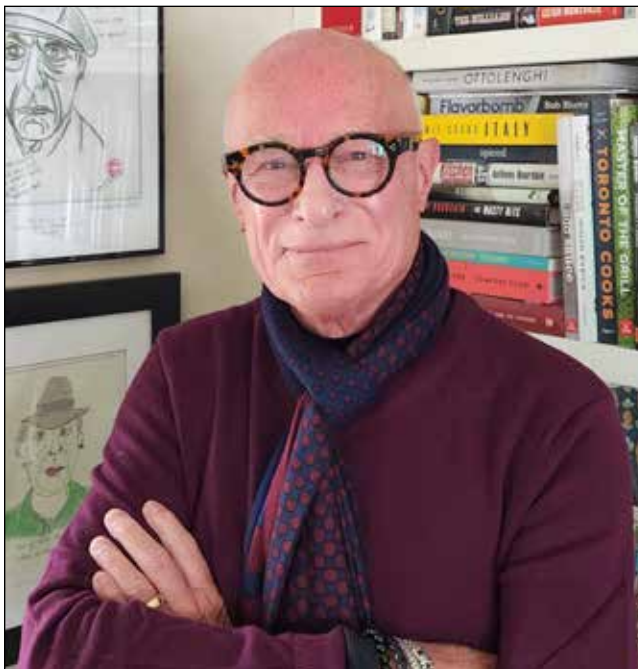
"It is wonderful to be the poet laureate anywhere, but to be appointed Stratford's first-ever poet laureate in this beautiful artistic city is a particular honour and delight," said Stones.

Being the first may be both a daunting and freeing prospect. He is not inheriting a program, nor an understanding of what the poet laureate does, so they are building that as a team with the library, Destination Stratford and youth poet laureate Quinn Mayer.

"I will be forging new ground and I like that. I've done that at the chefs school and at the museum, as well as in my professional life. I like that I'm a pretty independent operator in that way and I have great partners in the library and Destination Stratford," said Stones.

His contract requires three events then one major project with the library, however his plans are more ambitious with perhaps a few events a month. He has been reaching out to not-for-profits and service groups to see how his role might support their mission and goals. This could be in the form of workshops or perhaps opening a gala with an original poem for the occasion.

"One of my key proposals is to have a municipal poetry contest which I would like to do on an annual basis so there would be an adult and youth component with prizes. It would culminate in an anthology, there would be an annual theme like resilience or tolerance and acceptance or even beautiful Stratford and my favourite place to be. We would work hard to extract all the voices of the community; the ethnic cultural groups, First Nations and Indigenous, Strat-



Stratford's first poet laureate, David Stones, is thrilled with his new appointment and has already been hard at work networking and building connections.

(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

ford Pride. Some of the more marginalized voices would be especially encouraged to participate," said Stones.

In his own poetry, he explores the three L's in life; love, longing and loss. Most of his poems explore these themes, though he writes about others as well. Lately, he's been writing about acceptance and tolerance in part because of the conflicts in the world being experienced. Observing students at the museum's Anne Frank exhibit one day, there was a group of about 20 young female students of 12 or 13 years of age.

A lot of them really didn't know the story.

"To think that someone their age went through that, they couldn't really relate to that. I watched them get back on

the school bus and they couldn't say a word. They were affected by it," Stones said.

He wrote a poem called "Exhibit A" – A for Anne based on the experience. Stones was proud to be able to perform that poem at the National Holocaust Memorial Day at the museum to a packed house. He started the program with the poem and brought the audience to tears.

"I'm a performance and word artist because I do take the performance of my work very seriously. I practice and practice to bring the words off the page for my audiences. I know from experience and a lot of poets laureate say the same thing. I'm famously quoted on this. A lot of people do not like poetry, and my famous quote is, 'I do my shows my very, very best; my very, very best compliments come from those that come up to me and tell me how much they hate poetry,'" said Stones.

Coming from the corporate world, it is no surprise to learn Stones is a very dedicated and disciplined writer. He writes virtually everyday Monday to Friday from 7:30 to about 11 a.m.

"Poetry to me is 50 per cent inspiration and 50 per cent perspiration. I can't sit and wait for a poem to come to me. What comes first is a title or a first line. Dylan Thomas wrote that way. Almost every one of his poems starts that way. I build out from a title or first line," said Stones.

He works hard to develop the right tone, pace and cadence, and to shape it appropriately.

His legacy will first be the architecture of an intelligent, finely crafted community poetry program. Second will be the poetry contest to be held annually in the community and, thirdly, he would like everything he writes in his capacity as poet laureate to be encompassed in an anthology at the end of his term.

His work can be found in the library and at Fanfare Books on Ontario Street. Service groups and the like wishing to discuss poetry or some form of collaboration with the poet laureate are encouraged to contact Stones at dmstones@rogers.com. To learn more, visit his website at DavidStoneSPoet.com.

Help shape the Kroehler Girls musical with memories of the champion softball team

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

The Stratford-Perth Museum wants anyone with memories and memorabilia of the Kroehler Girls softball team to contribute to the development of a musical based on the beloved local team from 1953.

The Stratford-Perth Museum is gathering the community together for two events as part of the "Kray-ler Trailers," presenting excerpts from Kroehler Girls: The Musical and looking for stories about the team. The museum held a presentation on March 1 which Kelly McIntosh, museum general manager, said was successful.

"We had a full room of enthusiastic participants, people interested in the team, the play and the history," McIntosh said. "We had two families who were directly related to players on the 1943 team and, magically, a member of the 1957 team stopped in the day before to look at the Kroehler exhibit, Elaine Mohr.

"We learned so much from her. For example, 1957 was the last year Kroehler Girls was a factory team. After that, Stratford began a city league and the team became part of that. She also shared a story about her first try-out. It was a great story and she made the team, so it had a happy ending."

The Kroehler Girls was a wom-



The Kroehler Girls would play ball for 5,000 people a game.

(KELLY MCINTOSH PHOTOS)

en's softball team that came out of the Kroehler Manufacturing Company in Stratford and became champions in 1953 in both the PWSU Junior A and Intermediate A championships. Factory women's softball was a huge hit around the Second World War with 5,000 people showing up to see the Kroehler Girls play. Several players were being scouted for a chance to play softball professionally in the United States, but the league ended.

Stratford singer-songwriter Dayna Manning saw the Kroehler Girls play, produced by Here for Now Theatre, during its sold-out run at the Bruce Hotel in 2021 and wanted to write some songs for a musical. The museum's presentations feature songs written by Manning and an opening song from the 2021 play, as well as

slideshows and community storytelling. McIntosh encourages anyone with memorabilia to bring it to the event to put it on display.

"We hope that people bring stuff from their basement that they don't know what to do with like gloves and old uniforms, newspaper articles, photographs so that we can put them out," she said.

As a musical about the Kroehler Girls is in the works, McIntosh wants to make sure it is as accurate as possible with the help of audience feedback.

"It helps develop the play. It's always good for a play, for actors, for writers to really come fully in contact and be immersed in the subject and the people they're writing about to give it an ethical base," she said.

The museum held a similar

event with Ron Kennell's The Charms of Vera McNichol, which is to be presented at the Blyth Festival. McIntosh said the museum was filled with "so much love in the room" during the reading.

"These are the kinds of events that I like to put together," McIn-



Kelly McIntosh, Andy Pogson and Dayna Manning are hoping the Stratford and area community will share their memories of the Kroehler Girls champion softball team to help in the development of a musical about the team.

INNERchamber to present musical interpretation of Stratford children's book Tokyo Digs a Garden in concert

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Fans of Stratford's INNERchamber concert series will have the unique opportunity to experience a musical interpretation of the colourful and whimsical children's book, Tokyo Digs a Garden, written by Stratford author Jon-Erik Lappano and illustrated by local visual artist Kellen Hatanaka.

Set to take place at 7 p.m. March 23 at Factory 163, the musical foray into children's literature will feature narration by actor Deborah Hay and an original score by INNERchamber regular Ben Bolt-Martin as performed by ensemble members Laura Chambers (flute), Andrew Chung (violin and viola), Julia Seager-Scott (harp) and Graham Hargrove (percussion).

"Working with this beautiful book has really been an eye-opening reminder to look around me at the real living things that are trying, and often succeeding in strange and wonderful ways, to find a way through the concrete and asphalt with which we've covered everything," Bolt-Martin told the Times. "It's a beautiful story with thought-provoking and very funny images.

"As I write the music, I've been trying to bring out the quirkiness and subtle humour of the book while really leaning into the optimism of its message."

A thoughtful and inspiring fable of environmentalism and imagination, Tokyo Digs a Garden tells the story of Tokyo, who lives in a small house between giant buildings with his family and his cat, Kevin. For years, highways and sky-

scrapers have been built up around the family's house where once there were hills and trees.

One day, an old woman offers Tokyo seeds, telling him they will grow into whatever he wishes. Overnight, the seeds grow into a forest so lush that it takes over the entire city. Soon, the whole city has gone wild with animals roaming where cars once drove. Is this a problem to be surmounted, or a new way of living to be embraced?

The book won the Governor General's Literary Award for Young People's Literature in 2016.

"My children read the book as youngsters and we loved the environmental message, the way it got all of us thinking about how nature and human urbanism need to co-exist in a thoughtful way," said Chung, who is also INNERchamber's artistic director. "Ben Bolt-Martin has written original music for INNERchamber on many occasions and with his deep interest in creating music for children, we are delighted that he is writing an original score for Tokyo Digs a Garden.

"Well known Stratford actor Deborah Hay will be making her debut with INNERchamber and we are looking forward



(ILLUSTRATION BY KELLEN HATANAKA)

The cover artwork for Tokyo Digs a Garden.

to working with her as well. With all of these elements brought together to tell the story Tokyo Digs a Garden, it gives us a lot of space and opportunity using our wonderful musicians of the INNERchamber Ensemble to explore other music that also ties into the themes of nature's rhythms and childhood. With flute, violin, viola, harp, marimba and percussion, there is a wide range of colours and music that we can bring to this concert."

In addition to Bolt-Martin's original score, the concert will also feature performances of "Till Human Voices Wake Us" by Donald Davis, "Circadian" by Kenyon

Duncan, a new composition by Hargrove, "Caligo" by Daniel Inzani, A Celtic Suite by Turlough O'Carolan and selections from "Mother Goose Suite" by Maurice Ravel.

Tickets are now on sale at www.innerchamber.ca at a cost of \$50 in person, which includes dinner before the concert. Student and arts-worker discounts are available. Tickets purchased by 5 p.m. on Friday, March 21 will include dinner. Tickets purchased after this cut-off time may be available at the same price but will not include dinner.

Musings: The Farm that grew music



MARK HERTZBERGER

Times Freelance Columnist

If ever there was an environment that encouraged musical talent, it was the farm where Stephanie Martin grew up. Stephanie's home, near Atwood, Ontario, was filled with orchestral scores, records, and musicians. Her father was a professional conductor and singer; her mother, a pianist and choir director. As a young child, she listened obsessively to Machaut's "Messe de Nostre Dame," written in the 14th century – not standard fare for a kid growing up in the 60s. She was offered piano lessons and, not surprisingly, accepted them with enthusiasm.

Stephanie sang in successively more mature choirs until, at age 12, she became the youngest of 300 members in the Mennonite Mass Choir. The rest, as they say, is history. She now holds degrees from Wilfrid Laurier University, the University of Toronto, and the Royal Canadian College of Organists. She is currently an



associate professor of music at York University's School of the Arts, Media, Performance, and Design and is the recipient of numerous awards, including the York University AMPD research award, the Exultate Chamber Singers' competition, and the Association of Anglican Musicians competition.

Stephanie directs Schola Magdalena, a women's ensemble for chant, medieval and modern music. She is conductor emeritus of Pax Christi Chorale, and past director of music at the historic church of Saint Mary Magdalene

in Toronto. She has created an extensive body of work, including both orchestral and choral compositions.

Growing up on a farm taught Stephanie something else: the value of planning, organizing, and simple hard work. She says: "As a child I was allowed to have my own calf but I was fully responsible for it and paid for its food and care. I also learned to make the best use of my time as the weather allowed, to make hay while the sun is shining as they say!"

This self-discipline has prov-

en to be a valuable attribute as Stephanie often works by commission, setting deadlines for herself so the choir she is working with has sufficient time to rehearse. Having a relationship with the choir performing her work is important:

"I tailor my compositions according to the strength, scope, and purpose of the choir, often starting with a text, poem, or libretto which I write out to get a sense of the meter and rhyme scheme. I carve out blocks of time which allow me to think freely as I compose. If I am having a problem with the composition, I don't stay awake worrying about it. I have a good night's sleep and the answer is very often there for me in the morning!"

Seeing her creations performed well is Stephanie's greatest reward. A true highlight for her was attending the performance of Llandovery Castle, her opera about nurses who lost their lives in the first World War aboard their Canadian hospital ship. It was performed by students at Wilfrid Laurier University, her alma mater: "It was wonderful to see the professional caliber of this production – such an amazing job by the students."

"Kyrie" from Stephanie's Missa Chicagoensis will be performed by the Stratford Concert Choir as part of their next concert, Her Song, which exclusively features works by female composers. How Stephanie came to

compose this moving work was, in a way, serendipitous.

While curating the works of Healey Willan a University of Toronto music professor, whom Stephanie calls "the dean of Canadian composers," her various professional contacts brought her in touch with Father Scott, a priest at St. John Cantius Church in Chicago. Father Scott asked her to compose a mass for his choir and the result was Missa Chicagoensis.

I could tell you that this is an evocative work which stirs the soul – or you could find out for yourself by attending the Stratford Concert Choir's performance on March 22. We are delighted to include with your ticket a pre-concert presentation and chat with Stephanie Martin. Don't miss this rare opportunity!

Tickets are on sale now! You can buy them at Blowes Stationery or online at this link: <https://www.zeffy.com/en-CA/ticketing/169f5505-dcea-4505-ad07-d957841385d1>.

Mark Hertzberger is a former social services supervisor, human resources manager, conflict mediator, and literacy practitioner. He has since freed his mind and now writes poetry and occasional opinionated columns. Mark has lived in Perth County for 27 years, the last 12 of which have been in Stratford where he resides with his wife, novelist Yvonne Hertzberger.

As I see it from America



PATRICK D. BURK

Times Freelance Columnist

Today is the big day. For a few weeks we have been planning an economic hit on a single day to show the Trump government that they do not have a mandate. Will it work? Who knows. There seems to be a lot of discussion on social media about it. Will it have an impact on the new administration? No one really knows. What is the impact on the stock market? Trump feels he is impervious to all. And yet, his popularity is somewhat tak-

ing a dip. There are those that feel that he should be given a chance to succeed as he slashes and burns government departments and allows Elon Musk to remove everything from Consumer Protection to Foreign Aid to impoverished nations that we promised to assist. There are others that are attempting to halt his every move. It is making efforts like today's economic impact day and other protests in the forefront of the opposition, so incredibly important.

Americans think and vote with their wallets. During the Clinton administration, Democrat operative James Carville came up with the phrase, "It's the economy stupid." Not much has changed since then except that people are tending to make economic decisions and "vote the economy" without really knowing the actual facts. Many of the Trump voters did not have a clue of what was happening with inflation, the job market or the overall economy except that

Trump and his GOP cronies told them it was bad. They actually said that on the economy, "these little people are easily led". The economy wasn't bad at all. Prices had risen in some areas due to non-economic reasons. Bird flu raised the price of eggs, not politics. Weather and climate change impacted on the economy as the right-wing were telling people this was all political and that climate change was not real. But "It's the economy stupid." Its more like "You'll believe anything if you are stupid".

The impact of our new administration on the Canadian front seems to be in flux as well, however this morning I did hear that the President has decided to impose the 25% tariffs except in a few areas because "drug control has not been seriously handled by the Canadian and Mexican government." I really feel that Canadians need to know that most Americans oppose this strategy, instead working together to halt this common and tragic

problem. To listen to this administration speak you would think that the world crises of drugs in many cases was happening only in America. I am certain that there are strains on the Canadian law enforcement system as well.

I was intrigued by the Ontario Provincial elections that happened this past week. I am a familiar with Doug Ford and have heard him speak on American TV. He seemed to be quite the staple on our national political chat shows and quite the self-appointed Canadian Bulwark against our President, Trump's sidekick Musk and the potential tariffs that are certainly going to be a ruination to both sides of the border from the aspect of the economy. I heard that Ford will have a slightly smaller majority, but a majority none the less. I guess we shall see how that impacts us down here. It is a wait and see situation.

All in all, I do have a great deal of faith in the opposition that comes from the people. It seems

the big things that are eroding the Trump/Musk popularity are Veterans affairs, the Ukraine and tariffs raising the prices at the "Dollar Store". I kid you not, in the past week there have been at least a dozen posts on my Facebook page that this is the end of the Dollar Store. You see, it is when the people with the smallest impact on the economy – the elderly, poor and underemployed or underpaid – are hit with the reality that their world is going to change big time the spitfire of these regular folks starts to have an impact. When the \$1.25 item at the store that they can afford to shop at (how sad is this scenario) is now going to be \$2.00 because of the Chinese tariffs, they will start to become more involved and speak out against this anti-world administration. You see sometimes the "little people" can have a significant voice against the billionaire class, they just must rise up and shout!

Until we meet again, that's As I See It.

Spring forward like a pro: Beat daylight-saving-time fatigue



IRENE ROTH

Times Freelance Columnist

The days are getting longer, the weather is getting nicer, and we feel hopeful that life will become easier and much more enriching in the very near future. Yet this can be a difficult time for some.

Every March, millions of people set their clocks forward by one hour for daylight saving time (DST). While this adjustment helps us enjoy longer daylight hours, it can also disrupt sleep patterns and leave many of us feeling groggy and sluggish.

Fortunately, there are strategies to make this transition smoother and minimize its im-

pact on your well-being.

Here's how you can effectively deal with springing forward in March.

1. Gradually adjust your sleep schedule

One of the biggest challenges of DST is the loss of one hour of sleep. To ease into the change, start adjusting your bedtime and wake-up time by 15 to 20 minutes each night a few days before the shift. This gradual approach helps your body adapt naturally, reducing the shock of suddenly waking up an hour earlier.

2. Optimize your sleep environment

Since DST can throw off your sleep cycle, improving your sleep environment can be crucial. Ensure your bedroom is dark, quiet, and cool. Blackout curtains, white noise machines, and comfortable bedding can help improve sleep quality. Also, you may want to avoid screens (phones, tablets, TVs) at least an hour before bed, as blue light can interfere with melatonin production, making it harder to fall asleep.

3. Get plenty of morning

sunlight

Exposure to natural light in the morning helps regulate your body's internal clock or circadian rhythm. After waking up, and once it becomes warmer, step outside for at least 15 to 30 minutes of sunlight. This exposure signals your body that it's time to be awake, making it easier to adjust to the new schedule.

4. Avoid stimulants in the evening

Caffeine and nicotine can disrupt sleep, so try to limit consumption in the afternoon and evening. Instead, opt for calming herbal teas or warm milk before bed. Avoid alcohol as well, as it can interfere with deep sleep and make adjusting to DST more difficult.

5. Stick to a consistent routine

Maintaining a consistent daily routine can help your body adapt to the time change more smoothly. Wake up and go to bed at the same time each day, even on weekends. Engage in relaxing pre-sleep activities such as reading, meditation, or gentle stretching to signal to

your body that it's time to wind down.

6. Take short naps if needed

If you feel extra tired in the days following the time change, a short 10- to 20-minute nap can help refresh you without interfering with your nighttime sleep. Avoid long naps or late-afternoon naps, as they can make it harder to fall asleep at night.

7. Stay active during the day

Regular exercise can help improve sleep quality and energy levels. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise most days, but try to finish workouts at least a few hours before bedtime. Vigorous exercise too close to bedtime can be stimulating and make it harder to fall asleep.

8. Eat a balanced diet

What you eat can affect your energy levels and sleep patterns as well. To support a smooth transition during this time of year, focus on a balanced diet rich in whole grains, lean proteins, healthy fats, and fresh fruits and vegetables. Avoid eating heavy or spicy meals late in the evening, as they can cause

discomfort and disrupt sleep.

9. Manage stress with relaxation techniques

Stress and anxiety can make it more difficult to fall asleep and adjust to time changes. Incorporate relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or journaling before bed. These activities can help calm your mind and prepare your body for restful sleep.

10. Be patient with yourself

Adjusting to daylight saving time takes a few days to a week for most people. Give yourself some grace to be mindful of how you're feeling. If you experience excessive fatigue, irritability, or difficulty concentrating, prioritize rest and self-care during the transition.

Springing forward doesn't have to be a struggle. Actually, it can be enjoyable. By gradually adjusting your sleep schedule, creating a restful sleep environment, and practicing healthy habits, you can minimize the negative effects of daylight-saving time. Prioritize rest, stay consistent, and embrace the extra daylight to make the most of the seasonal change.

Web-crawling through the neighbourhood



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Freelance Columnist

I have a story to tell. The phone rang in the middle of the night. We know that when a phone rings in the middle of the night, it's never good. "SHEILA, OUR BARN IS ON FIRE!" As quickly as that, my husband was out the door to help. Neighbours gathered from all 'round to keep the house safe and to save what animals they could. We made coffee and sandwiches for the fire crew and for the men working so hard, our hearts in our throats filled

with fear and caring.

I have another story. When we moved to the farm, we met our neighbours here and there. "Let's have a neighbourhood party," suggested a few of us. And so we did. Everyone brought treats, there were decks of cards that began playing Euchre and Shoot, and there were stories and laughter. We were a close little corner of the township. We weren't nosy, but we kept track of one another, and we helped when help was needed. We're still in touch.

I have another story. In time, I was widowed and had to leave the farm. As I came to know my new neighbours in Stratford, I was deeply grateful. It was a lovely community. As time went on, the world kept turning – and not always well. In fact, one could say the times today are troubling, troubling enough to start worried little conversations slipping through the town. "Let's have a neighbourhood party," suggested a few

of us. And so we did. Everyone brought treats, and there were stories and laughter. We knew each other a little better, and our little community became closer – not nosy – but caring and stronger.

There is much on our plates these days, some that seems beyond our control: climate events (ice dams, anyone?), politics, inflation, to name but three. As one gardener said to me, "You know, working in the garden I chat with more people!" Personally, I wonder why we ever gave up front porches. A builder once said "Get rid of a porch?? Never! Porches build community!"

That idea of community is my story. These are times to talk with one another – to share, to laugh, and to help. Since I work in climate, that's a place for community too. I know of some people in Stratford who have started neighbourhood pollinator paths, filling their gardens with native plants to encourage the insects that are disappearing

(80 per cent!), the very insects that are food for our wonderful birds, who are also disappearing. I know of neighbourhoods where pesticide-free food gardens are appearing, and the produce is often shared.

There is a magical idea in the Stratford Climate Change Action Plan: community centred alternate energy especially through sustainable energy, such as solar panels. There are communities around the world where that approach is used, from Brazil to New York to London, U.K. and to West 5 in London, Ontario. There are even apartment balcony solar panels being used in Toronto as balcony railings. Communities could also gather to support a waterway or park through the neighbourhood. We have a cousin who has worked tirelessly in Guelph to build a supportive community park, filled with native plants.

Build your own community story. Share laughter, helping,

nature, and your own stories.

UPDATES:

1. Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of Feb. 24, 2025: 427 ppm. Safe level, 350 ppm passed in 1990 (one of the highest readings yet, since I began tracking two years ago).

2. Speaking of Nature... Don't miss the Climate Conversation on Thursday, March 27, 7 p.m. at Stratford City Hall! Don Farwell, our local Master Gardener guru, will share our relationship with nature in Stratford – how it affects climate change, how it affects us, and our relatives in nature. There will be exhibit tables and refreshments. The interconnected web of life was never more important. Come web-crawling with us.

Sheila Clarke is a Stratford advocate for the environment, of our community and of our planet. She is a member of CFUW Stratford, Stratford Climate Momentum, and the Perth County Sustainability Hub.

Stratford Legion hosts another Burger & Fry Night



The Royal Canadian Legion Stratford Branch 8 hosted another successful Burger & Fry Night Feb. 28, serving 150 delicious burgers with all the fixings to a hungry crowd. Pictured are Legion grill-masters Dan Kane and Rick Boon.



The regular Burger & Fry nights are fundraising events for the local Legion. Organizers said they appreciate those who came to eat and those who volunteered to greet guests, cook and serve the meal. (STRATFORD LEGION PHOTO)

COMING EVENTS Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

FRIDAY NIGHT EUCHRE

Friday, March 21
Stratford Legion

We have had a full house for each of our euchre nights. Come and enjoy some friendly competition on Friday Mar. 21st. Doors open at 6:00 pm. Register your team of 2 for \$20 by calling the Legion at 519-271-4540 or Anne at 519-301-0914.

KIWANIS FESTIVAL'S 2025 FEATURED MUSICAL

Friday, March 28, 2025; 7 p.m. (live & livestreamed)
Avondale Church, 194 Avondale Ave, Stratford
"A Midsummer Night's Dream" by Christopher Norton and Wendy Edwards Beardall-Norton
Singers accepted until Feb. 3. Great for families! All non-professional singers welcome, no audition required. Rehearsals begin in late January. Cast will receive script, music and rehearsal tracks to use during holidays. Visit kiwanisfestivalstratford.com/events

BURGER & FRY NIGHT

Friday, March 28 28; 5:30 - 7:30 p.m.
Stratford Legion

Don't miss out on our last burger & fry night of the winter. The burgers are great, and you have all the condiments you could want, plus gravy for your fries. The price is 2 meals for \$25 or \$13 each. No tickets are needed, simply show up. Please preorder take-outs at 519-271-4540 or 519-703-6544.

GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING

Monday April 7, 2025, 7:15 - 9:00 p.m.
Army Navy Hall, 151 Lorne Ave. E., Stratford
Featured Presentation: "Demystifying Plant Breeding: Experiences and case studies from my academic career in horticulture.", Rodger Tschanz, University of Guelph.
Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

STRATFORD SCRABBLE CLUB

Anne Hathaway Residence 480 Downie St., Stratford
Meets every Wednesday evening at 7 p.m. for 3 games. Check our website for further details stratfordscrabble.ca

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Every Tuesday 2-4 p.m.
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For more info call Oliver Davidson 519-508-5664

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Wednesdays; 6:45 - 9 p.m.
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STRATFORD TIMES

Deadline: Tuesday prior at 3 p.m.
Contact: stratfordtimes@gmail.com

PROMOTE YOUR EVENTS WITH US! HERE'S HOW:

- The Community Calendar is for non-profit organizations to promote their free admission events at no charge. Event listings can include your event name, date, time and location as well as a phone number, email address or website.
- If your event is not free admission or you would like to include more details than stated above, you have the following options:
 - Coming Events Word Ad in Classified section (50 word max.) - \$10 + hst
 - Coming Events Boxed Word Ad in Classified section (50 word max.) - \$15 + hst
 - Display Ad - Sizes begin at a classified business card size for \$35 + hst

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WORSHIP TIMES:
10 a.m. and 3 p.m.
stratfordarp.org

Invite readers to your worship services. Contact stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth underscores the life-changing impact of giving

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

After the successful February monthly giving campaign, Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth is hoping to continue the donation momentum.

Donation results are still being counted after The Hospice Hearts Monthly Giving Challenge, a new initiative partnered with Quadro Communications Co-operative Inc., which matches donations up to a maximum of \$25,000 for the year.

Lucie Stuart, director of fund development and stewardship, said running this monthly giving campaign has given the hospice new donors who have never donated before. It helps with operating costs of \$90,000 the hospice must raise monthly as the Ontario Ministry of Health only covers for 50 per cent of total operating costs.

Stuart reported the hospice saw 25 new donors last month due to the campaign. As a new initiative, the hospice plans to generate community awareness through future programming and events to demonstrate the organization's values and goals.

"We want people to come in for tours because they will realize that it's not such a

scary place, it's an environment that's warm and welcoming and everybody is taken care of, not just the individuals in the bed," said Stuart.

"Doing this campaign has given us another reason to reach out to the community. The more people know the hospice is here when they are in that crisis, they will know to reach out here or talk to their doctor that this is an option for end-of-life care."

Prior to accepting her current position as marketing and communications coordinator at Rotary hospice, Pippa Elliot was freelancing when she and her family brought her grandmother to the facility for care in her final days.

"Since working here, after having that personal experience, it's all so meaningful to me and my family. I'm proud to be part of this and it's so important," said Elliot. "People deserve to die a good death and it all was aligned with me to end up working here."

"The support my mother received after my grandma died was beautiful. It wasn't just caring for grandma while she was there, it was the support we all received and visiting her here rather than a hospital made all the difference. It was a no-brainer for me when this opportunity came up; I'm proud and grateful



Pictured from left to right are Nikki Gibson, Cam Gibson, Mya Gibson, Macy Gibson and Mike Gibson. The Gibson family donated \$50 from raising money at Mya's sixth birthday party after her grandfather was admitted in the hospice and passed away three days later. "The Hospice provided a very exceptional job of taking over the caregiving load so we could spend more time with my father-in-law. It was a beautiful experience at such a tough time in our life," said Nikki Gibson.

to be part of it." While there are only eight rooms inside the hospice, Stuart said a \$30 donation a month pays for one day of care over the course of the year for one resident room and elaborates that

the hospice is far from the dark and gloomy place it's been perceived to be.

Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth is focused on community engagement and encourages everyone to see what the hospice has to offer.

CLASSIFIEDS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

OBITUARY



SYLVIA ELAINE NELSON

Sylvia Elaine Nelson died on February 19, 2025 at Wildwood Care Centre, St. Marys, Ontario. at the age of 92.

She is predeceased by her husband James Nelson (1977) and her son Guy Nelson (2008) and she is survived by her son Garth Nelson.

A special thanks to Wildwood Care Centre staff in St. Marys for their care of mom.

It was her wish to be cremated and to be remembered privately by those who knew her. Should you wish to honour her through a donation, please feel free to donate to a charity of your choice, directly or through Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services. 804 Ontario St., Stratford, ON. N5A 3K1. 519-271-5062.

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Riddles

Why did the calendar break up with February?
Because March was just around the corner!

What's the best exercise during March Break?
Spring training!

Why do students love March Break?
Because it's the only time "marching" means straight to the beach!

What do you call a leprechaun on spring vacation?
A lucky traveler!

Why did the student bring a suitcase to class in March?
Because they were already packed for break!

What's the best way to enjoy March Break?
Take it one sunburn at a time!

Why don't snowmen go on March Break?
Because they'd have a total meltdown!

What's a vacationing student's favorite type of math?
Pi – because March 14th is the best snack day!

Why did the beach get so much homework over March Break?
Because it was under a lot of sand-ress!

Sudoku

2					8			9
1	7							5
		5	4	9				
			9	3	6			5
						7		1
	8	4		6		3		
			2					
		7				4	8	

Solutions on page 34



Pet of the Month



HUGO

Meet Hugo, a big-hearted, playful pup who's been waiting over 75 days for his perfect match! At just one year old, this 58-pound bundle of energy loves people and thrives on companionship. Hugo is working on his separation anxiety and needs a patient adopter ready to support his training journey. He enjoys outdoor adventures, puzzles, and playing with other high-energy dogs. His ideal home is active, with older kids and no shared walls. With the right guidance, Hugo will be a loyal, loving companion ready to take on life by your side. Could Hugo be your perfect match? Apply for Hugo today at kwsphumane.ca.

Word Search

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M U M Z Z T T F O R D M A J O R I T Y F
 G C M I A G K J B E R T E H O N W I E K
 B C Q B C A J Y O V N C A Q Z P H V T X
 J V W W T G G P B N K V S P F F J P A Y
 I T P H I L A D E L P H I A E A G L E S
 M A N U L I P L A N E T P A R A D E C U
 Q R B W E O N T A R I O E L E C T I O N
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 D F O T U F O U R N A T I O N S C U P X
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 N H F F Z D L E Y N F V D H Q S T M M W
 A R V V O L O D Y M Y R Z E L E N S K Y
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 M Y I H R A C N G R O U N D H O G D A Y
 P F E N F R I E D R I C H M E R Z Z N C

- Groundhog Day
- Super Bowl
- Philadelphia Eagles
- Friedrich Merz
- Family Day
- Tariff threats
- Four Nations Cup
- Ontario Election
- Ford Majority
- Donald Trump
- Volodymyr Zelensky
- Planet Parade

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3. 10,080.
4. Delta.
5. 42.
6. Heights.
7. Saint Stephen's Day.
8. Rome.
9. Africa.
10. Redwood.

SUDOKU

2	4	3	5	1	8	6	7	9
1	7	9	6	2	3	8	5	4
8	6	5	4	9	7	1	2	3
7	1	8	9	3	6	2	4	5
4	5	6	1	7	2	9	3	8
3	9	2	8	4	5	7	6	1
5	8	4	7	6	9	3	1	2
6	3	1	2	8	4	5	9	7
9	2	7	3	5	1	4	8	6

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