

# St. Marys Independent

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Issue #1243

Thursday, January 2, 2025

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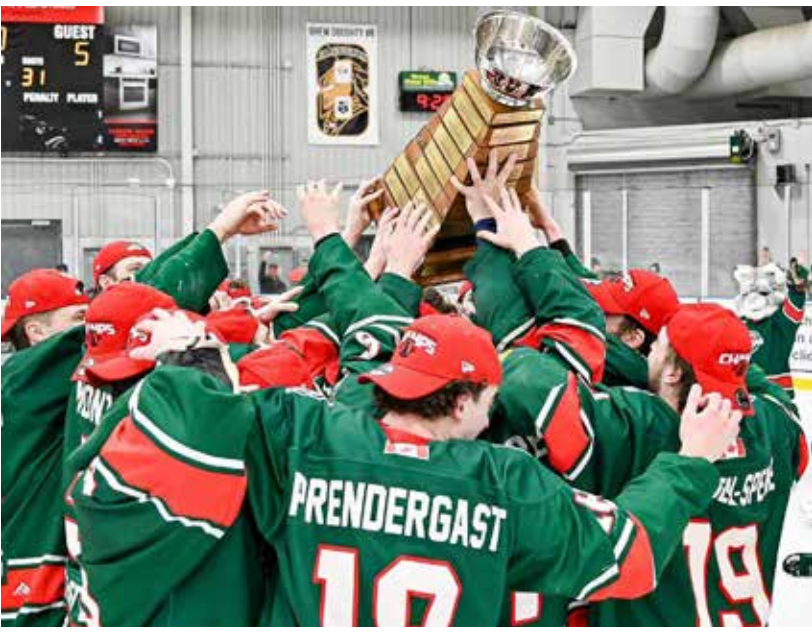



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## 2024 YEAR IN REVIEW



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Ron Morrison, Owen Lewis-Havard, Julien Polidoro, Emma James, David Forster, Heidi James

# 2024 TOP STORIES

## Locally, 2024 was wet but not wild

STEWART GRANT

Publisher

Worldwide, it was a tumultuous year. Conflicts escalated dramatically in the Middle East, Russia continued to wage war on Ukraine, and the balance of power in many countries, including the U.S., took a hard-right turn.

Meanwhile, here in St. Marys, 2024 is noteworthy for what didn't happen. It was a relatively quiet year.

There was great stability within the downtown. Looking at our annual map of the two major streets (Queen and Water), nearly all the changes were cases of businesses moving locations as opposed to closing for financial reasons.

The most noteworthy construction was not of a residential variety but rather to support the growth of successful local business, as Jacobs Liquidation and Express Sign Products will each have their new facilities complet-

ed in 2025.

Yes, it was a quiet year residentially. There were a few new houses, but St. Marys, like many places across the country, has seen a significant slowdown in the pace of new home construction and residential development. It makes one wonder why Canada continues to add over a million people to the population each year when we don't have enough places to put everyone.

One thing we did have an abundance of in 2024 was precipitation. Among the four photos on our cover page this year was a shot of the St. Marys Golf & Country Club partially underwater. Unfortunately, we had several photo choices from several different times of the year to choose from for this photo. In a year that so much rain fell from the sky, the golf course's location in the valley meant that it absorbed more than its fair share. Director of Golf Brandon De Groot recapped that between April 1 and Sept. 30, there were

39 inclement weather days, including 23 days where either part or all of the golf course was closed.

Spring did arrive early though, and winter arrived late. When the snow arrived on the first day of December, it hardly stopped for a week. As the month continued though, we've settled into our traditional rotation of cold and snow, then melting with rain.

One constant throughout the colder months of 2024 has been the domination of the St. Marys Lincolns hockey club. On April 14, the Lincs defeated London on the road in game 7 to win their first conference title in 30 years. Although they fell just short of taking the next step and winning the Sutherland Cup, the Lincolns have started the 2024/25 season with a vengeance and currently sit atop the standings in the GOJHL.

With the Lincolns on the rise and our downtown continuing to gain acclaim for its picturesque offerings, St. Marys is a place worth visiting. 2024 brought some positive developments in terms of accommodation. This year, the first phase of the beautiful Penrose Suites was opened at the St. Marys Golf & Country Club. Also, the Stone Willow Inn returned to action after closing during COVID, and after a couple changes in ownership, 2025 offers the possibility of further improvements and a return of the Wildstone restaurant.

Speaking of returns, the end of the year brought some optimism at the historic Andrews building. There's been considerable restoration activity occurring behind the scenes, and roughly a decade-and-a-half after the closure of Anstett Jewellers, the change in the calendar appears to offer exciting new possibilities for one of Stonetown's downtown gems.

St. Marys Public Library, another of our downtown landmarks, was the scene of our fourth 2024 top story. Perth South residents were shut out of borrowing services for much of the year due to a funding dispute between their municipality and the Town of St. Marys. Thankfully, the year ended with an announcement of a five-year agreement to settle the issue, and open services back up to Perth South residents.

In summary, 2024 was a year of stability for the Town of St. Marys, but also a year that set the table for changes to come in 2025. Jacobs Liquidation will be moving into their new facilities, thus opening up a spot downtown. O'Grady's Clothing will be advancing their expansion of offerings, moving into Stone Home Creatives spot while that business transitions to a home-based one. 2025 brings the chance of Wildstone restaurant returning to Stone Willow Inn, and we hope soon to step inside the Andrews building again and consider its future possibilities.

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## Weekend Quiz

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1. In what city were the 2024 Summer Olympics held?
2. What two pop stars collaborated on the hit song, "Die with a Smile"?
3. What Nordic country joined NATO in 2024?
4. Claudia Sheinbaum became the first ever female president of what country in 2024?
5. In what town did the July 2024 assassination attempt of Donald Trump occur?
6. What do the words "demure", "polarization", and "brat" have in common?
7. To the nearest million, what is the current population of Canada?
8. What was Dr. Ruth's last name?
9. What movie won Best Picture in February at the Oscars?
10. What is the world's most listened to podcast?

This week's answers are found on pg. 23

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3 yr - 4.06

5 yr - 3.65

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3 yr - 3.46

5 yr - 3.50

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\*Minimum may apply

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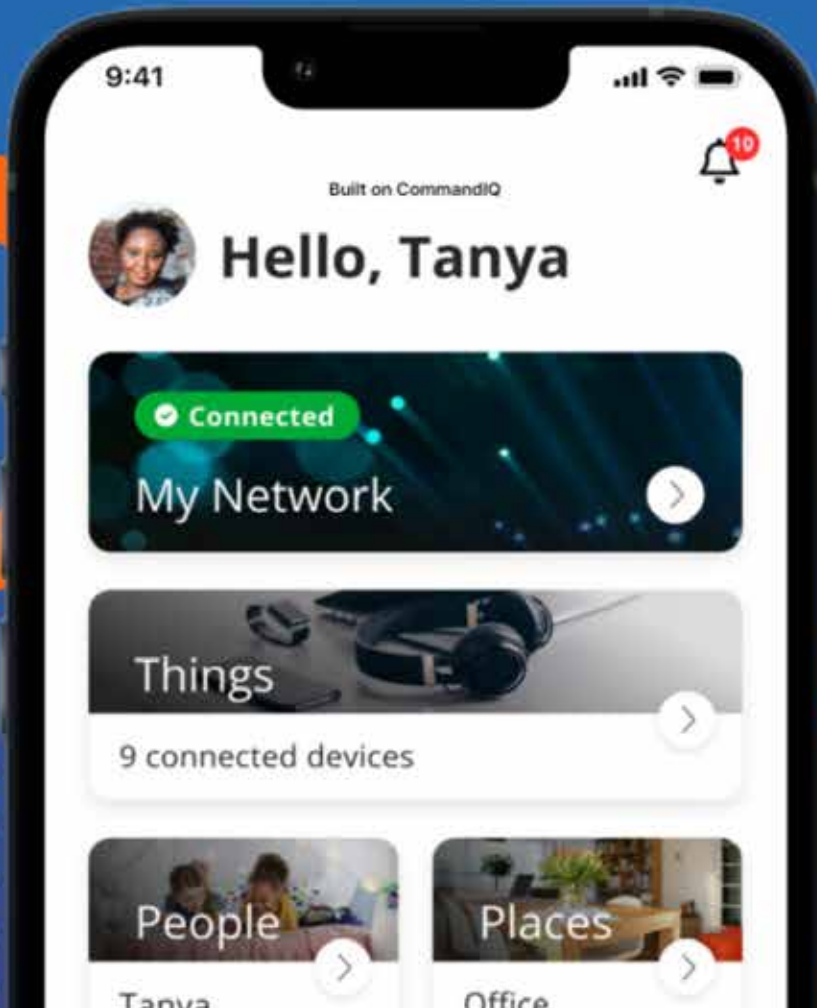
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# St. Marys Community Closet in Review

MARY SMITH

Independent Columnist

On a stormy Monday evening last December, approximately two dozen Community Closet volunteers gathered in St. James Anglican Church's parish hall. They shared a light supper and holiday treats. They also shared ideas about the Closet's first full year and considered strategies to improve its operations in the months ahead. The statistics are encouraging. Since the Closet opened at the end of September 2023, there have been approximately 750 visits by "shoppers" looking for clothing for themselves or their families. The Closet has items for men, women, and children from newborn to teens. Clothing items include coats, sweaters, shirts, pants, dresses, socks and underwear as well as hats, mittens, scarves and footwear – all absolutely free. Recently, two very organized volunteers have dedicated an evening each week to sorting items and refreshing the inventory so that new clothing is consistently available for regular shoppers.

As well as helping shoppers who come in person, Closet volunteers have prepared and delivered clothing parcels to local and area organizations that assist people in need. These include Shelterlink, Optimism Place, CMHA Outreach, City of Stratford Outreach and Housing, and Huron Farm Workers. Clothing assistance has been provided to local and area schools. The Closet has formed close connections with EarlyOn, the Nourish Market and the Coffee and



Volunteers, like Karen Ballard (left) and Marilyn Haywood, work two hour shifts at the St. Marys Community Closet once or twice each month.

Chat group that meets regularly at the Anglican Church. This group is well-known for producing blankets to donate to hospitals, nursing homes and schools. The members have become interested in Closet operations and are providing blankets for some of the families that it supports. The Closet also looks after a small food cupboard in the parish hall. Thanks to members of the congregation, it is kept stocked with non-perishable goods. Visitors who come to shop are

welcome to take home food items they need.

At the gathering on December 2, volunteers were asked to consider how to make people more aware of the Community Closet and what it has to offer. There were some excellent suggestions. The Closet could raise its visibility by taking part in other community events such as town-wide yard/garage sales and the Community Dinner program. A leaflet outlining the Closet's mandate

and the regular shopping days could be included in the Public Library's packages for newcomers. In good weather, a rack of items could be placed outside on shopping days to encourage people to come into the store. The Closet could advertise more aggressively in places like the Farmers' Market, the Friendship Centre, the medical clinic, and on Facebook's St. Marys Life.

The St. Marys community has been enormously generous with donations to the Closet. Currently, most needed items include winter clothing, including pyjamas, for children and teenagers, including slush pants in all sizes. Donors are asked not to leave bags of clothing outside the church hall but to deliver donations directly to volunteers when the Closet is open. Meridian Credit Union also accepts bagged donations of clean, gently used clothing on behalf of the Community Closet.

Volunteers have been taking a break during the Christmas and New Year's holidays but are back in action in early January. The Closet will be open for shopping on alternate Monday afternoons from 2 to 6, whenever there is a Community Dinner at the United Church across the street. Starting January 9, the Closet will be open every Thursday afternoon from 2 to 4. The last Saturday morning of each month from 9:30 to 11:30 will provide one more shopping opportunity for people who can't get there on weekdays. For more information, have a look at [www.facebook.com/stmaryscommunitycloset](http://www.facebook.com/stmaryscommunitycloset).

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# Overheard at the Coffee Shop

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- “The Detroit Lions are one win from the Super Bowl, is hell freezing over?” (January 25)
- “Now that it’s a two-person race, we’ll see if Republicans prefer a criminal, or a woman.” (January 25)
- “Thank you to Warton Willie for predicting an early Spring.” (February 8)
- “It was fun watching the Raes win on Family Feud!” (February 23)
- “Throwing a hat onto the ice to salute a three-goal game is one of hockey’s great traditions.” (February 23)
- “Spring is here, I am so excited I wet my plants.” (March 21)
- “Did anyone go to Niagara Falls to see the eclipse with a million of their closest friends?” (April 11)
- “Finally OJ can rest in peace knowing his wife’s killer is dead.” (April 18)
- “I’ll have 10 Timbits, a double-double, and a pepperoni pizza please.” (April 25)
- “Where were you 48 years ago, the last time the Lincolns went for the Sutherland Cup?” (May 2)
- “You can count on death, taxes, and the Leafs losing game 7.” (May 9)
- “A drought was predicted for May. This is the wettest drought I have ever seen.” (May 30)
- “What a pleasant surprise. There is an ‘Opening Soon’ sign at the Stone Willow Inn.” (June 13)
- “Grant Haven Media: restoring small-town journalism, one shirtless man over 50 at a time.” (June 20)
- “All I wanted for Canada Day was a Stanley Cup.” (June 27)
- “Many people went to sleep early and missed the big CNN debate... including Joe Biden.” (July 4)
- “What kind of lowlife steals from a volunteer service club?” (July 11)
- “Could we not have a nice gentle rain instead of these downpours?” (July 18)
- “St. Marys Golf Course is now offering white water rafting!” (July 18)
- “LCBO strike is over. I’ll drink to that!” (July 25)
- “Breakdancing doesn’t feel like an Olympic sport.” (August 15)
- “Despite the rain, the teddy bears still had their picnic.” (August 22)
- “What did the convenience stores get rid of to make room for all the beer?” (September 12)
- “MLB, brought to you by FanDuel and Draft Kings, ironically mourns the loss of Pete Rose” (October 3)
- “Mike Tyson seemed tired but at least he didn’t bite anyone!” (November 21)
- “Hopefully this will be the week the Canada Post strike ends.” (December 12)

Have you heard something humorous around town that you think might be of interest to others?  
Either email them to us at [info@stmarys-independent.com](mailto:info@stmarys-independent.com) with the title  
“Overheard at The Coffee Shop”, call 519-284-0041 or drop by the office to let us know!

## STONETOWN CRIER

The latest municipal news from the Town of St. Marys



### FREE FESTIVE SKATES

Pyramid Recreation Centre

The Optimist Club of Downie, Friends of the Library, Quadro Communications and the St. Marys Healthcare Foundation have generously sponsored public skating this festive season.  
[townofstmarys.com/skating](http://townofstmarys.com/skating) or 519-284-2160

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### HOLIDAY BREAK DAY CAMP

Pyramid Recreation Centre

We are hosting a Holiday Break Day Camp on December 23, 27, 30, 2024, and January 2 & 3, 2025, featuring crafts, games, and skating!

[townofstmarys.com/campprc](http://townofstmarys.com/campprc) or 519-284-2160

### CELEBRATE THE SEASON

November 15, 2024 to January 1, 2025

Celebrate the season in St. Marys! Join us for a merry lineup of festive fun and activities all through November and December. Let the celebrations begin!

[discoverstmarys.ca/happyholidays](http://discoverstmarys.ca/happyholidays)



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Pyramid Centre

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# YEAR IN REAL ESTATE

## Residential Housing Stats, St. Marys, Ontario

TRISTAN DUNDAS

REALTOR® on The Dundas Team

As we review 2024, it's an opportunity to reflect on the St. Marys residential real estate market and its evolution over the year. Gradual adjustments continued as the housing sector worked toward stability, with key influences including shifting interest rates and reduced inventory. Average list prices held steady, staying within \$1,000 of 2023 levels, while average sale prices rose by approximately \$20,000, showcasing sustained buyer demand despite some challenges. While it's valuable to consider larger real estate market trends, the small-town dynamics of St. Marys require a more nuanced analysis. With a smaller sample size, even one high-end sale can significantly affect our averages, highlighting the importance of context when interpreting the data.

A key trend was the decline in new listings compared to the prior two years. This tightening inventory limited buyer options and contributed to the relative balance seen in the market throughout the year. While some listings attracted

	2021	2022	2023	2024 AS OF DECEMBER 17, 2024
Average List Price	\$544,476	\$645,832	\$684,939	<b>\$685,549</b>
Average Sale Price	\$613,095	\$655,248	\$612,221	<b>\$635,933</b>
Number of New Listings	145	185	186	<b>151</b>
Average Days to Sell	15	25	42	<b>47</b>

multiple offers and achieved over-asking sale prices, others lingered on the market, requiring price adjustments, extended timelines, and negotiations to secure a deal. The average days on market reached its highest point in four years, a clear indication of a more deliberate pace in buyer activity. This slower tempo reflects an adjustment period as buy-

ers recalibrate following the fast-paced, competitive conditions of the COVID-era market boom. Overall, 2024 demonstrated the resilience of the St. Marys real estate market, where a mix of opportunities and challenges offered valuable insights for both buyers and sellers.

Interest rates played a central role in shaping 2024. The Bank of Canada

began the year with a key rate of 5%, curbing affordability and dampening activity. However, a series of rate cuts throughout the year brought relief, with the rate falling 175 basis points to 3.25% by early December. This shift fueled optimism and laid the foundation for a more active market heading into 2025.

The outlook for 2025 appears promising, particularly with predictions of further rate reductions. Improved borrowing conditions are likely to entice more buyers, energizing the market and driving a strong start to the spring season. That said, external factors may influence the market's trajectory. With Donald Trump set to return to the White House following the U.S. presidential election, economic uncertainty looms. Given Canada's close economic ties to the U.S., it will be critical to monitor how these developments impact buyer sentiment and financial markets.

As we enter 2025, the combination of lower rates and limited inventory suggests a competitive yet dynamic market. While uncertainties persist, both buyers and sellers stand to benefit from a more balanced and stable housing landscape.

# YEAR IN CONSTRUCTION



Pictured in March, Express Sign Products general manager Mark Giesbrecht stands in front of the company's new, 20,000 square-foot warehouse and office building on James Street South, near Highway 7, just across the St. Marys town border in Perth South. Photo by Galen Simmons.



Pictured in July, Craig and Deanna Jacobs get the shovels ready to break ground on James Street South where their new building will be ready in early 2025. Photo by Wendy Lamond



Phase I of the Penrose Suites opened for business in the summer of 2024. Contributed photo



One of the most noteworthy new buildings constructed in St. Marys this year was this multi-unit structure at 446 Queen St West, pictured in December. Photo by Stewart Grant.

**Queen Street, St. Marys: business changes over the year**

**December 31, 2023**

**December 31, 2024**

Queen Street from Peel to Victoria Bridge:

Queen Street from Peel to Victoria Bridge:

NORTH SIDE	SOUTH SIDE
Tim Hortons	Stirling's New Life Tattoos
Cenotaph	Naina's Indian Kitchen
St. Marys Town Hall	Stonetown Physiotherapy
	Circle K
	H&R Block
	Benchmark Real Estate
	Stonetown Osteopathy
Church Street	
TD Canada Trust	St. Marys Lawyers (McCotter, White)
Sapphire Ink	GC Boyle Law Firm
Peak Realty	The Chocolate Factory
Tutt Co.	Shackleton's Real Estate
Hubbard Pharmacy	Stone Home Creatives
Queen Street Dentistry	Dunny's Source for Sports
St. Marys Optometry	Heather Ringland Designs
The Flower Shop and More...	Stonetown Travel
Snapping Turtle Coffee Roasters	Coldwell Banker
O'Grady's Clothing & Accessories	Hyggeligt
Four Happy	Bungalow on Queen
Vacant	Vacant
Royal Bank	Bank of Montreal
Wellington Street	
Scotiabank	Meridian Credit Union
Vitality Health & Fitness	Eclectic Treasure
Vacant	Sukie Lee's
	World's Coolest Music Store
	Skippy's Pizza
Lyric Flowers	Urbshott, Galloway Insurance
Towne & Country Cheese Shoppe	Nail Effects
Hairitage / Thomson Martial Arts	ZenFire Pottery
Sun Rayz	Troyer's Spices
Green Haven Bakery	MacPherson's Barber Shop
Lauren Whitney	The Physio Nook
Revive Holistic Health Centre	168 SPA
Vacant	Foot Care Freedom Clinic
	Vacant
Water Street	
MacPherson Crafts	The Flour Mill (main floor)
Little Falls Artisan Crafters Market	The Yoga Chapple (upper floor)
Vacant	
Vacant	

NORTH SIDE	SOUTH SIDE
Tim Hortons	Stirling's New Life Tattoos
Cenotaph	Naina's Indian Kitchen
St. Marys Town Hall	Stonetown Physiotherapy
	Circle K
	H&R Block
	Benchmark Real Estate
	Stonetown Osteopathy
Church Street	
TD Canada Trust	St. Marys Lawyers (McCotter, White)
Sapphire Ink	GC Boyle Law Firm
Peak Realty	The Chocolate Factory
Tutt Co.	Partners in Employment
Hubbard Pharmacy	Stone Home Creatives
Queen Street Dentistry	Dunny's Source for Sports
St. Marys Optometry	Heather Ringland Designs
The Flower Shop and More...	Stonetown Travel
Snapping Turtle Coffee Roasters	Coldwell Banker
O'Grady's Clothing & Accessories	Hyggeligt
Four Happy	Bungalow on Queen
Vacant	Vacant
Royal Bank	Bank of Montreal
Wellington Street	
Scotiabank	Meridian Credit Union
Vitality Health & Fitness	Eclectic Treasure
Vacant	Sukie Lee's
	World's Coolest Music Store
	Skippy's Pizza
Lyric Flowers	Urbshott, Galloway Insurance
Towne & Country Cheese Shoppe	Nail Effects
Hairitage / Thomson Martial Arts	ZenFire Pottery
Sun Rayz	Troyer's Spices
Green Haven Bakery	MacPherson's Barber Shop
Lauren Whitney	Rodite Method
Revive Holistic Health Centre	168 SPA
Vacant	Foot Care Freedom Clinic
	Vacant
Water Street	
MacPherson Crafts	The Flour Mill (main floor)
Little Falls Artisan Crafters Market	
Raise Your Vibe	
Vacant	

**Water Street, business changes over the year**

**December 31, 2023**

**December 31, 2024**

Water Street from Green Bridge to McLean Taylor:

Water Street from Green Bridge to McLean Taylor:

EAST SIDE	WEST SIDE
Canadian Tire	McLean Taylor
n/a	Riverwalk Commons
St. Marys Insurance Group	Stonetown Financial Services
Adult Learning Pgms of Perth (back)	Andemar Dust & Ice
Synterra Security Solutions	Water Street Dentistry
	Alliance Wellness Centre
Jones Street	
Salvation Army Family Thrift Store	St. Marys Independent
Paint & Palette	Campbell's Canteen (back)
Square One Skate Shop	Sensations Salon
Vacant	Cascades Cleaners
Kalon & Co.	Angela Dawn
Quantum Massage	St. Marys Family Chiropractic
Gilly's Pubhouse	The Wine Lab
G's Quarry Room	Barista's
The Suds on Water Laundromat	Miss Jones Cannabis Outlet
Vacant (main level) / The National on Queen (upstairs)	Her Collab Co.
	Betty's Book Shelf
	Flour Mill (main) / Yoga Chapple (up)
Queen Street	
Vacant	MacPherson Crafts
Vacant	Roancroft
Famme & Co.	Carpe Vinum
	Bare Roots Wellness
	n/a

EAST SIDE	WEST SIDE
Canadian Tire	McLean Taylor
n/a	Riverwalk Commons
Atlin & Associates	Stonetown Financial Services
Vacant (back)	Andemar Dust & Ice
Synterra Security Solutions	Water Street Dentistry
	Alliance Wellness Centre
Jones Street	
Salvation Army Family Thrift Store	St. Marys Independent
Paint & Palette	Vacant (back)
Square One Skate Shop	Sensations Salon
St. Marys Nails Salon	Cascades Cleaners
Kalon & Co.	Angela Dawn
Quantum Massage	The Physio Nook
Gilly's Pubhouse	The Wine Lab
G's Quarry Room	Barista's
The Suds on Water Laundromat	Miss Jones Cannabis Outlet
Vacant (main level) / The National on Queen (upstairs)	Her Collab Co.
	Betty's Book Shelf
	The Flour Mill
Queen Street	
Vacant	MacPherson Crafts
Vacant	Roancroft
Famme & Co.	Carpe Vinum
	Bare Roots Wellness
	n/a

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# PREDICTIONS

## 2024 Predictions Revisited

My 2024 predictions were dominated by the U.S. election cycle because it was kind of a big deal! There were some things that I got right, like Biden dropping out, a woman running for president, the Lincolns winning the league and the Leafs getting bounced in the first round, but in general, my predictions didn't exactly pan out!

1. Despite his current high standing in the GOP polls, Donald Trump will fail in his bid to become the Republican nominee. This could happen early in the year when the Supreme Court rules that Trump is ineligible under Section 3 of the U.S. Constitution's 14th amendment which bars anyone from office who has engaged in insurrection. **WRONG: How naïve it was of me to think that Trump would ever face any consequences. In fact, not only did the Supreme Court not rule Trump ineligible, the court ruled that he could do whatever he wanted, provided it was "an official act."**

2. The United States will suffer significant instances of politically motivated domestic terrorism in 2024 as the divide grows between Democrats and Republicans. **MIXED: Thankfully, there wasn't widespread violence between sides to the extent I feared, but**

**two separate attempts on Trump's life were evidence that it wasn't all sunshine and roses out there.**

3. Nikki Haley will be the Republican nominee instead of Donald Trump, edging Ron DeSantis. **WRONG: Haley was the last candidate standing against Trump, but really it was no contest.**

4. Following Trump's removal from the ballot, Joe Biden will withdraw his candidacy for re-election. **MOSTLY CORRECT: Biden did withdraw, though it was reluctantly and only after everyone in the Democratic party told him that he had to.**

5. Several candidates emerge to challenge for the Democratic leadership including Gavin Newsom, Pete Buttigieg and Amy Klobuchar, but it is Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer who is chosen as the nominee. **WRONG: Who knows what could have been? Biden shut down any talk of an open Democratic primary about 15 hours after he decided to step down.**

6. Without Trump on the ballot, or Obama in the pre-Trump years, the United States election will feature lower voter turnout (as per cent of eligible voters) than any of the previous five elections. **WRONG: With Trump still**

**on the ballot, 2024's 63.9 per cent of Voting Eligible Population was lower than 2020's 65.8 per cent, but higher than the preceding elections.**

7. For the first time in American history, a woman will be elected president. **WRONG: Although Kamala Harris was nearly the first woman president, it didn't happen.**

8. In Canada, Justin Trudeau will attempt to take advantage of an upswing in polling during the year and calls an early election. However, the move backfires on the Liberals and the Conservatives win a majority government. Pierre Poilievre becomes the new Canadian Prime Minister. **WRONG: There was no upswing in polling for Trudeau, no election and Pierre Poilievre won't become Prime Minister until 2025.**

9. The wars between Russia/Ukraine and Israel/Hamas will each end in 2024. **WRONG: Wow I really haven't gotten much right at all, this is embarrassing.**

10. Stock market volatility will be higher than normal as things evolve on the world political stage, but the markets will end the year higher. **MIXED: Stock market volatility was actually at a five-year low, but the markets**

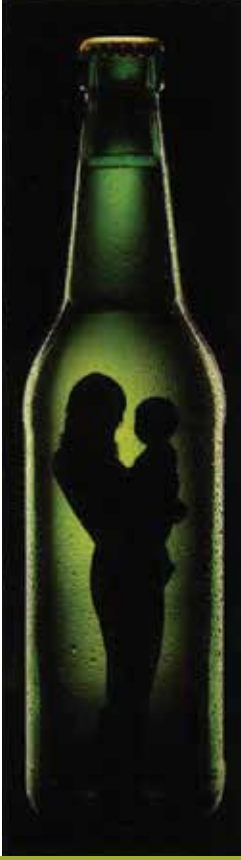
**were up approximately 30 per cent on the year.**

11. After years on the rise, the St. Marys Lincolns will reach the pinnacle of the Western Conference and will emerge as playoff champions this spring. **CORRECT!**

12. In a rematch of the 2014 Stanley Cup finals, the New York Rangers will defeat the Los Angeles Kings in six games. It's another short playoff run for the Toronto Maple Leafs as they lose in the first round. **MIXED: The Leafs did indeed lose in the first round, but the Florida Panthers won the Stanley Cup over the Edmonton Oilers.**

13. Though not as popular as pickleball, St. Marys Lawn Bowling will have its highest registration numbers in many years as many new people discover the sport. **CORRECT! The club had 11 new members in 2024, making it the highest single year increase the club has seen in a long time.**


14. The "Buck or Two" building and Andrews building remain vacant in the downtown, but the former Stonetown Coffee building finds a new tenant. **MIXED: All three are still vacant, but here's hoping for better news (and predictions) in 2025.**



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# MONTH BY MONTH

## 2024 Year in Review By Month

### January:

The pool at the Pyramid Recreation Centre was closed after a rainwater pipe fell from the ceiling into the pool. "The pool was empty at the time, so no one was injured, but we are treating this as a serious near miss," said Town Communications Manager Brett O'Reilly. The pool was re-opened roughly two weeks later, following signoff from an engineer that it was safe to be occupied by the public.

On January 9, OPP Const. Mike Garniss was presented with an award for his commitment to preventing impaired driving in Perth County. Garniss laid 36 impaired driving charges last year, the most laid by an officer in West Region and second-most in the province among OPP officers. "I only hope it can change someone's life for the better after each interaction," Garniss commented.

A new report by Huron Perth Public Health, "The Real Cost of Eating in Huron and Perth", indicates that low-income families in the region often face the dilemma of choosing between paying for essentials like rent and utilities or buying enough food. The report states that, in 2023, the cost of groceries for a family of four in the region was \$267 per week or \$1,155 per month, excluding non-food items.

Council has approved the Town of St. Marys' 2024 budget with a nearly \$14.9 million tax levy, roughly 5.9 per cent or nearly \$828,000 more taxes than what was collected from property owners last year.

At the same meeting in which St. Marys council approved its 2024 budget, councillors also gave their seal of approval to nearly \$106,000 in 2024

community grants.

Hope for Haiti, a longstanding St. Marys non-profit group, has made the difficult decision to disband. Murray Mitchell launched the St. Marys chapter in 1995.

### February:

St. Marys deputy fire chief Kevin Edwards has retired from the St. Marys Fire Department after 23 years of service. Since joining the department in January 2001, Edwards has responded to 2,200 emergencies.

St. Marys' Akoofilm Company's award-winning "Cry of Silence" film will soon be playing on silver screens for wider audiences around the globe, having penned a distribution deal with House of Film in Los Angeles.

Delmar Foods celebrated its fifth year in St. Marys this month.

To the delight of the St. Marys community watching nightly on television, the Rae family won three straight games of Family Feud Canada, beating the Azeez, Clarke, and D'Souza families.

St. Marys council is paving the way for the upcoming installation of electric-vehicle (EV) charging stations with an amendment to the town's parking bylaw that includes fines for improper parking at EV charging stations.

On Feb. 21, the Town of St. Marys hosted an event aimed at educating local realtors and builders about the benefits of accessory apartments. The move is part of the town's Opening Doors housing action plan, which aims to add 200 rental units to St. Marys by 2027, with 30 falling into the attainable housing category.

Perth County council approved the 2024 capital and operating budgets with

a 12.31 per cent increase to the levy. The new total of \$22,198,354 is an increase of \$2,432,781 over last year's budget.

The Yoga Chapple, located above the Flour Mill, will be closing up shop at the end of the month. Twin sisters Claire and Joanie Chapple have had an opportunity came up to move to Belfast, Ireland for the next few months.

The Town of St. Marys is expanding its electric vehicle infrastructure. This month, three Level 2 electric vehicle charging stations were installed in municipal parking lots – two at the PRC and one in the Jones Street lot. Each station features two ports, bringing the town's total to eight ports over three locations, with one post already installed at the train station.

### March:

Golf season comes early as temperatures hit 20 degrees during the first weekend of March. St. Marys G&CC general manager Matt Staffen told the Independent this year's March 3 opening of the golf course is a full week earlier than the previous record of March 10, 2012.

St. Marys council has given the go-ahead to establish a Sports Wall of Fame at the Pyramid Recreation Centre's Rock Rink that will commemorate the remarkable accomplishments of local athletes, teams and builders of sport.

As a result of health-and-safety concerns for students and based on advice from Huron-Perth Public Health, both the Avon Maitland District School Board and the Huron Perth Catholic District School Board have rescheduled a PA Day from April 19 to April 8 to coincide with the upcoming total solar eclipse.

On March 7, the Friendship Centre held its annual International Women's Day event with more than 200 people in attendance to listen to three guest speakers: Frances Taylor, Jenn Parsons, and Anne Innes.

St. Marys Legion Branch 236 held its annual 18-hole mini-putt course for families and friends to enjoy over March break. This is the eighth year the Legion has established a mini-putt course as a fundraiser.

The Province of Ontario announced that the Ministry of Transportation has allocated an additional \$159,406 for Perth County and \$590,000 for the City of Stratford through the Community Transportation Grant Program to support continued operation of the PC Connect regional transit service.

St. Marys Museum closed for a month starting on March 27 for minor renovations and preventative maintenance.

On March 16, many family members and friends got together at Kingsway Lodge to help Audrey Beadle celebrate her 100th birthday. Audrey has a total of 17 grandchildren and 31 great grandchildren.

A total of 23 light standards were installed along a recently improved section of the Grand Trunk Trail.

After a record-setting campaign, United Way Perth-Huron raised \$2,245,792 to support its efforts to address unignorable issues, including homelessness, mental health and access to support services.

### April:

Although Ontario Premier Doug Ford and others from across the country called for a pause on the increase, carbon pricing will rise to \$80 per tonne



This friendly polar bear from Good Mood Service rental company was out and about town in early 2024 greeting residents. Contributed photo



Lyric Flowers and Nina Polidoro Photography raised \$1,500 from their Santa photos with all proceeds being donated to the St. Marys Healthcare Foundation. A huge thanks to all those who came out for a photo with Santa and made this fundraiser such a success! Pictured, from left, Cindy Bilyea, SMHF Chair; Lanny, owner of Lyric Flowers; Santa; Nina Polidoro, photographer; Jay, owner of Lyric Flowers; Lori Currah, employee of Lyric Flowers and Bernice DeDecker, St. Marys Healthcare Foundation. Nancy Bickell photo

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on April 1, up from the current \$65. Perth-Wellington MP John Nater says this increase will not help rural communities but instead make it harder for small businesses and farmers to survive in the already strapped economy.

Five St. Marys businesses have been nominated for Stratford and District Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards: Betty's Bookshelf, Human Synergistics, Broken Rail Brewing, Social Thirty-One, and Lyric Flowers. Social Thirty-One would go on to win in the Hospitality category.

St. Marys council awarded a \$394,000 contract to McLean Taylor Construction Ltd. for preventative concrete and masonry work to the historic Sarnia Bridge.

A Perth South request for a significant reduction to what it will pay St. Marys this year for the town's library to provide free access to library services for residents of the township has been shot down by the local library board. At the April 4 library board meeting, board members discussed a March 20 letter sent by Perth South CAO Fred Tranquilli informing the board the township council had reduced its budgetary allocation for library services from both Stratford and St. Marys to just \$53,734 combined.

Over 2,000 people attended the Spring scrapbooking garage sale on Saturday, April 6 at the St. Marys Friendship Centre, taking advantage of the excellent selection of products offered by the 43 vendors.

It was a sombre mood laced with tears at the St. Marys Bowling Lanes on April 6 when YBC coach Helen Brockman informed the youth bowling league that their beloved coach Kelvin Chambers had passed away on April 5.

While most will remember April 8, 2024 as the day of the solar eclipse, Edison and Jessica Le will remember it for a different reason – the opening of their Water Street business, St. Marys Nails Salon.

As the main venue for St. Marys Community Players (SMCP) remains closed, the community theatre group found a new venue. SMCP announced on Facebook in an April 5 post they will host their spring productions at the River-

walk Commons under the theme, "One door shuts and another one opens down by the river." Four one-act plays will be featured starting with Norm Foster's My Narrator and The Death of Me on April 24 and 25 and then Colleen Neumann's Riverview Tape #23 on May 22 and 23.

The St. Marys Lincolns are 2024 Western Conference champions after defeating the London Nationals 5-2 in game seven on Sunday, April 14 to claim the Bill Weir Trophy.

Though additional amendments to St. Marys' downtown-patio policy may be coming following an upcoming update to the town's 2021 downtown-parking study, St. Marys councillors voted recently to eliminate a provision that gives businesses the option to establish patio seating in on-street parking spaces.

Towne and Country Cheese Shoppe is running a fundraiser for Dolly Parton's Imagination Library in St. Marys. Customers can order from a selection of popular cheeses including aged cheddars, flavoured cheeses and blue cheese from an online form. For every cheese order, 20 per cent of the proceeds will be donated to the local Imagination Library.

St. Marys council presented Strong As Stone awards to six local residents at the April 9 council meeting. Recipients were Cindy Bilyea, Phyllis Spearin, Pam Zabel, Ine Keller, Jeff Sager and Daniel Greig.

A large windstorm on Friday, April 12 knocked out power for several hours throughout the area.

When Todd Sleeper started the Thames River cleanup 25 years ago, it was after witnessing a lot of garbage and other debris in the area he grew up around on Fish Creek. This year, despite cold weather on April 20, 88 volunteers showed up to help at the 25th annual Thames River cleanup.

After more than a decade leading a group of St. Marys and area artists, Cathy Atwell and Chantel Marshall will step down as co-chairs of Stonetown Arts at its annual general meeting in June.

Responding to a need for after-hours and weekend support of locals experi-

encing food insecurity, the Multicultural Association of Perth Huron has officially launched its Mobile Food Bank program.

## May:

May 1 is opening day for Raise Your Vibe Movement Meditation Studio at 83 Queen Street East. Owner Andrew Neufeld says it is a calming place of reflection where patrons can join classes that focus on movement, breathing and connecting.

The Town of St. Marys hosted a small celebration on May 1 to acknowledge the big contributions of the donors and volunteers who supported recent improvements to the Grand Trunk Trail. Members of council joined representatives from the Lind family, the Kinsmen Club of St. Marys, Texo Terra Contracting, Forman Electric and volunteer Bill Richardson. Improvements to the trail include 23 new light standards and 700 metres of paving along a section that runs between Wellington Street North and just past James Street North. The trail has also been connected to the new trailhead parking lot on James Street North.

Stratford and District Chamber of Commerce general manager Eddie Matthews announced that in June he will retire from his position, which he has held for the past five years.

Over 1,000 meals were served at the 26th annual Firefighter's Breakfast on May 5.

A tourism trail encouraging outdoor dining returns with even more stops in St. Marys, as Destination Stratford's Savour and Sip Trail features six St. Marys businesses, including Stonetown Artisan Cheese, The Wine Lab, Tut-tCo., Stone Home Creatives, Towne and Country Cheese Shoppe and The Flour Mill.

The oldest continuous operating accounting practice in St. Marys has changed hands, with Daryl McClure giving way to Gemmar "Gem" Padin and Jack Eigenmacht.

A good crowd met on James Street on May 13 to officially open the new and

improved Rotary All Wheels Park. The budget that was needed for the upgrades was \$400,000. The Rotary Club of St. Marys made a commitment to donate \$100,000 over ten years, the skatepark fundraising steering committee raised another \$108,443, Saputo St. Marys contributed \$25,000 and the St. Marys Kinsmen donated \$10,000. These were just a few of the approximately 75 local donors who made the All Wheels Park possible.

Perth South residents can no longer check out books, e-books and other materials at the St. Marys Library amid a funding dispute between the library board and the Township of Perth South.

The St. Marys Lincolns season came to an end May 12 when they lost 4-3 in overtime to the Listowel Cyclones. The win ended the GOJHL championship series in five games and gave the Cyclones their second Sutherland Cup in franchise history.

After 99 years of being a quiet but impactful presence in our town, the fraternal chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star is going to be closing the St. Marys division and consolidating forces with the London Daylight chapter.

St. Marys council has awarded a nearly \$1.8-million contract for the reconstruction of portions of Wellington Street South and Victoria Street this summer to Omega Contractors Inc. of London.

Following their achievements from Cry of Silence, with more to celebrate from the hit film, St. Marys based AKoolFilm Company has more projects on docket. The film Cry of Silence had its run at the internationally renowned Cannes Film festival from May 14-25. The audience at the annual film festival in Cannes, France, responded positively to the film.

After 21 years of practicing in the Opera House block, Dr. Paul Battler of St. Marys Family Chiropractic has moved his clinic – offering acupuncture, chiropractic and rehabilitation services – to his family's home at Red Mill Farm. It's located at 2379 Perth Rd. 133 in the Township of Perth South, a five-minute



The Rae family from St. Marys appeared in an episode of Family Feud Canada which aired Feb. 12. Pictured from left are host Gerry Dee, Natasha Banks, Don Rae, Kathy Rae, Brent Rae and Shauna Rae. Photo courtesy of CBC



Some of the members of the St. Marys Kinsmen Club pose for a photo on the Grand Trunk Trail. The proud volunteers have completed their contributions to the beautification of the trail that includes paving and lighting. From left to right, Cliff Sterritt, Christopher Swarhout, Chris Smith, Sean Connolly, Lorne Culbert, Ryan Leaman. Contributed photo

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drive north on Emily Street out of St. Marys.

## June:

After addressing unforeseen structural challenges during renovations of the old Mercury Theatre building in St. Marys, council has approved a staff request for an additional \$70,000 in contingency funds as contractors embark on the second phase of the project.

More people can now access the Thames River in St. Marys, thanks to a Government of Canada investment, through the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) and a generous community donation. This week, the town installed a new, accessible dock in a section of the river near the north end of Milt Dunnell Field.

St. Marys Pride held its annual Pride in the Park event June 9 at the Milt Dunnell Field on a mostly sunny Sunday.

Six new members were inducted into the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum (CBHFM) in a ceremony on the Hall of Fame grounds June 15. Former Toronto Blue Jays all-stars Russell Martin (East York, Ont.) and Jimmy Key were inducted alongside national team infielder and trailblazing coach Ashley Stephenson (Mississauga, Ont.) and national team pitching legend Rod Heisler (Moose Jaw, Sask.). Onetime Blue Jays president and CEO Paul Godfrey, who played a significant role in bringing Major League Baseball to Toronto, and longtime Toronto Leaside baseball executive Howard Birnie was also honoured.

On Sunday, June 16, the Rotary Club of St. Marys hosted the fourth edition of the Brews and Food Fest at the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum.

After roughly half a year of renovations, St. Marys town hall is once again open to town staff and the public. Since late last fall, town staff and members of council who normally work in offices and from council chambers at town hall have been working elsewhere as the her-

itage building underwent a full remodel that includes an expansion to council chambers, new, gender-neutral washrooms, an accessible washroom and the installation of new technology that will improve both the public and staff experience in the building.

After closing at the onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the Stone Willow Inn in St. Marys is under new management and is ready to accommodate overnight guests. Speaking with the Independent after “Now Open” signs sprung up on the property across from the St. Marys Golf and Country Club, a representative of East Mount Hospitality – an experienced hotel-management firm that has taken over management of the Stone Willow Inn – said the 10-acre property and the hotel and restaurant on it was purchased by an unnamed company early last year.

The Friendship Centre celebrated 50 years on June 19 with lots of opportunities for visitors, volunteers and staff to socialize, reminisce and enjoy cake and ice cream. The Friendship Centre also celebrated a 20th-anniversary milestone, as it has been at its current location on 317 St. James St. S since June 18, 2004.

St. Marys welcomed a notable visitor and his team on Friday, June 21 at the Quarry where excitement and entertainment were brewing. Highly acclaimed YouTube star Aaron Esser and his crew made the trip from Watford, Ont., early Friday morning to shoot a water-gun video. Esser, who boasts an impressive 8.5 million subscribers on his YouTube channel, has been creating water-gun videos for the past six years, specifically featuring Nerf Super Soakers.

St. Marys town staff will soon bring a report for council’s consideration outlining all the tools council has in its municipal toolbox for dealing with vacant and damaged “eyesore” properties in the downtown core.

The ongoing funding dispute between

the St. Marys library board and Perth South has taken its latest toll as library board members reluctantly voted to rescind free access to the St. Marys Public Library for students who live in Perth South and do not attend school in St. Marys or its Perth County Information Network (PCIN) partner communities.

## July:

Roughly 25 downtown St. Mary businesses participated in the Where’s Waldo Shop Local Scavenger Hunt run by Betty’s Bookshelf from July 1-31.

At a time when the Kinsmen Club of St. Marys should have been celebrating a successful 50th-anniversary Summerfest weekend, organizers of the annual event were left with a sour taste in their mouths after a significant amount of alcohol was stolen from one of their secured event trailers.

New Orleans Pizza has officially reopened under new ownership. The new owner, Ajay Gautam, immigrated from India to Canada a decade ago.

The town of St. Marys is aiming the spotlight on Arts and Culture at this year’s Heritage Festival from July 12-14. Events Coordinator Alana Bowes said the annual celebration will highlight “the vibrancy that art brings to our community.”

Thanks to \$2.2 million in federal funding, St. Marys Cement is installing new cement-kiln infrastructure that uses lower-carbon fuels, including discarded wood and plastics deemed unrecyclable by recycling-processing plants, to replace up to 30 per cent of the high-carbon fuels required for the manufacturing process. The innovative technology will cut more than 39,900 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions in 2030, the equivalent of taking more than 9,400 gas-powered cars off the road for a year.

The Golden Oldies DCVI Reunion had great participation July 13 with about 220 people attending the gathering at the St. Marys Legion from 12-5 p.m.

Despite the many inches of rain that

came down the previous day, there was nothing but smiles from Craig and Deanna Jacobs as family, friends and local dignitaries gathered on James Street South at a groundbreaking ceremony for the new Jacobs Liquidation & Auction Ltd. building expected to be complete in 2025.

The St. Marys Kinsmen Club celebrated the end of their Kin year at a wrap up party that took place on the Sunday after Summerfest with the handing out of yearly awards to the Kinsmen of the Year and Rookie of the Year. Kinsmen of the Year went to two very worthy candidates, Ryan Leaman and Trevor Schram. The Rookie of the Year went to Mark King.

What started as a patient room refresh project in the East wing of the St. Marys Memorial Hospital ended up being a complete patient wing rebuild that was officially opened Monday, July 22 with the ribbon cutting ceremony looked on by staff, Foundation board members and local dignitaries.

St. Marys council has approved a zone-change request from Pol Quality Homes that will allow the local developer to build three low-rise apartment and stacked-townhouse buildings with a total of 35 new housing units, two of which will be designated as affordable for the next 30 years. Before approving the requested change from residential zone two to residential zone five to allow for the higher-density housing development at council’s July 23 meeting, councillors heard from several residents with concerns around how the development at 428 Queen St. W will affect everything from traffic, sightlines and parking to noise, privacy and available greenspace.

## August:

When it comes to hosting large sporting events, St. Marys put itself on the map recently when it successfully hosted the Ontario Summer Games triathlon Aug. 2 and 3. As the summer games



St. Marys council presented Strong As Stone awards to six local residents at the April 9 council meeting. Pictured in back row from left are Coun. Rob Edney, Mayor Al Strathdee, Coun. Jim Craigmile, Coun. Marg Luna, Coun. Fern Pridham and Coun. Dave Lucas. Pictured in front row from left are Cindy Bilyea, Phyllis Spearin, Pam Zabel, Ine Keller, Jeff Sager and Daniel Greig. Missing is deputy mayor Brogan Aylward. Photo courtesy of the Town of St. Marys



Council members sit within the newly renovated council chambers just prior to the Town of St. Marys council meeting on July 23. Photo by Jenna McCartney

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were hosted in London this year, organizers approached the town late last year seeking a suitable location for the swimming portion of the triathlon. The St. Marys swimming quarry, as it turned out, fit the bill and 60 young athletes, their families and fans converged on the Stonetown for the two-day event that included swimming in the quarry, biking on town roads and running on the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum grounds.

The Front Porch Show rode again with a one night-only, special-edition show on Sunday, Aug. 18 at its original location at 96 Robinson Street.

The Stratford and District Chamber of Commerce has announced the appointment of Perth South's Aaron Martin as its new general manager. Martin previously worked with the Western Fair District in London where he led the Grove Agri-Business Incubator and Accelerator, a position in which he supported agri-food businesses on the cutting edge of the industry.

After a slight delay caused by heavy rain earlier in the summer, work on the reconstruction of sections of Wellington Street South and Victoria Street has begun. The project, which spans from Park Street to St. Maria Street on Wellington Street South and from Church Street South to Water Street South on Victoria Street, is a continuation of the reconstruction of Wellington Street downtown from the Wellington Street bridge to Park Street East completed last year.

Despite the sporadic downpours that took place on Sunday, the 37th annual Teddy Bear Reunion at East Ward Park still drew a crowd.

St. Marys' Staffen family has added another business to the family legacy. Overlooking the ninth hole at the St. Marys Golf and Country Club, The Penrose Suites hosted its grand-opening ceremony Aug. 22, the same day the nine-suite accommodations business was set to welcome its first guests after

three years of construction.

## September:

Little Falls Public School principal Jeremy Brock says that 455 students are enrolled this fall, which is a slight increase over the previous year. At Holy Name, principal Jennifer Keene has 205 students registered, down from 215 last year. South Perth Centennial School has 202 students this year, up from 191 last year, says principal Robert Parkinson. St. Marys DCVI has 530 students enrolled under the new leadership of Petra Goetz.

Sept. 1 was a special day for Ukrainian school children because it marked the opening of the Ukrainian School in St. Marys. Thanks to the efforts of VJ Knutson, who has been helping Ukrainians for more than two years, the school is up and running. Thanks also to the St. Marys Presbyterian Church, which has offered suitable space to house the classes.

A significant change took place Sept. 5 as convenience stores in Ontario were allowed to start selling alcohol.

It was another successful year for the Kirkton Fair – an annual tradition since 1869.

Anyone who has tried to call a taxi in St. Marys over the last couple of years will be pleased to learn Stonetown Taxi is making its triumphant return to St. Marys under a new owner after it shut down in 2022. Mohit Kamboj, who drove for the previous owner of Stonetown Taxi before health issues led to the company's shutdown in 2022, officially brought Stonetown Taxi and Delivery Service back to St. Marys with the company's first full day of service Sept. 9.

The Town of St. Marys will apply for federal funding to revitalize an underutilized park downtown in the hopes of turning it into an accessible picnicking destination that would benefit restaurants without outdoor patios. At the Sept. 10 town council meeting, councillors unanimously endorsed a plan to

apply for as much as \$30,000 in FedDev Ontario funding towards upgrades to Lind Park at the corner of Jones Street East and Church Street South.

Local artists and those with a connection to St. Marys will soon have an opportunity to help beautify downtown through the St. Marys Business Improvement Area's (BIA) utility box art-wrap project.

"Cows just wanna have fun" was the theme as the 167th Thorndale Fall Fair had a successful weekend.

Little Caesars Pizza closed their doors on Sept. 29 after nearly 10 years in business, as owners Pam & Dan Ryan were unable to reach a suitable lease agreement with the building's new owners.

The Town of St. Marys will incur a major, unplanned expense to address the serious deterioration of equipment in the aquatics centre at the Pyramid Recreation Centre (PRC). At its Sept. 24 meeting, St. Marys council awarded a nearly \$1.75-million contract to Elgin Contracting and Restoration Ltd. for renovations that will close the PRC pool from November of this year until at least May 2025.

Upon the occasion of the May 6, 2023 Coronation of His Majesty King Charles III, a program was established to "recognize 30,000 outstanding individuals of all ages and from all walks of life who have made a difference in their communities." Following a nomination and review process here within the riding of Perth-Wellington, a ceremony was held on Sunday, Sept. 29 at Parkview Gardens (Royal Canadian Legion Auditorium) in Listowel where 20 individuals were presented with King Charles III Coronation Medals. Five of the 20 are based in St. Marys and area: Julie Docker-Johnson, Stewart Grant, Charles Hammond, Mary McIntosh, and Cameron Porteous

## October:

The person behind the St. Marys McDonalds recently received an internationally recognized award in honour of McDonalds co-founder Roy Kroc. Local McDonalds manager Jordan Bucht earned the Roy Kroc Award for his excellence in management at the St. Marys

McDonalds. The Roy Kroc award is given to the top one per cent of McDonalds restaurant managers from around the world. Bucht is one of the 398 recipients across 70 markets.

St. Michael Catholic Secondary School and St. Marys District Collegiate and Vocational Institute (DCVI) co-op students recently tried out firefighting. Kaylea Bains (DCVI), Carter Lemke and Campbell Ryan (St. Michael) were selected for the St. Marys Fire Department (SMFD) Co-op Program. The current program runs from September until January. This program allows students to shadow our firefighters and Chief Fire Prevention Officer while earning credits for doing so.

Beginning Oct. 17, St. Marys Community Players is performing the entertaining and hysterical The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee for local audiences to enjoy.

Those seeking guidance from the Town of St. Marys in organizing events may recognize the town's new events coordinator. Though she's new to this part-time role, Morgan Easton, who lives in Thorndale and grew up in London, is no stranger to the Town of St. Marys, having worked in a number of capacities both for the town and for other local organizations over the past three years.

Drivers on Perth County roads will notice two new all-way stops at the intersections of Perth Road 130 and Perth Line 20 north of St. Marys as well as Perth Road 107 and Perth Line 33 between Tavistock and Shakespeare.

St. Marys' Service Ontario office is on the move. As of Monday, Oct. 21, the office will open in a brand-new location, the Municipal Operations Centre at 408 James St. S.

Perth South Mayor Jim Aitcheson has stepped away from his council and other civic duties after his request for a leave of absence was recently approved by Perth South council. The request, which was made for unknown personal reasons, was approved by the rest of council at its Oct. 1 meeting.

While drivers in downtown St. Marys may need to drive around for a few



Jim and Candace Sheldon have had the experience of living in both a big city and the small town of St. Marys. Although both have their benefits and drawbacks, they both love the feel of our small town and being able to make a difference in our local hospital. The \$25,000 donation will go towards needed equipment. From left to right is Cindy Bilyea (past chair of the St. Marys Health Care Foundation), Candace Sheldon and Jim Sheldon. Photo By Wendy Lamond



Meadowridge Variety was busy getting ready to begin selling beer, cider, wine and ready-to-drink beverages. Pictured, owner Miriam Ryu shows a few of the beer choices available. Photo by Wendy Lamond

# 2024 Year in Review By Month

minutes to find parking around midday during the week, a recently completed downtown parking study shows parking availability in the town's downtown core is sufficient to meet current demand.

As municipalities across the province continue to struggle with rising costs and provincial downloading leading to double-digit tax-levy increases, St. Marys council has officially started deliberations over what town staff call a "boring budget" that comes with just a 5.83 per-cent overall levy increase.

The St. Marys Lions Club was recently awarded the 2023-2024 CNIB Club of the Year for its District.

Oct. 15 marked the 50th anniversary of the Inner Wheel Club of St. Marys. Members celebrated by enjoying dinner at Naina's Indian restaurant.

A selection of local artisanal cheese from St. Marys recently earned some accolades from the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. Stonetown Artisan Cheese announced on Facebook Oct. 23 that the cheesemaking team won several honours in the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair's Cheese Competition. Stonetown Cheese won first place and second place in the category, Firm or Hard - Surface Ripened, Natural or Brushed Rind for their Wildwood and Grand Trunk cheeses, respectively.

The Stratford General Hospital Foundation (SGHF) is hoping the Town of St. Marys will help it meet the \$30-million goal for its In Our Hands capital campaign with a 10-year contribution of \$300,000. The SGHF made the request at the Oct. 22 regular council meeting for councillors to consider as they make their way through the 2025 budget process.

## November:

Though St. Marys community outreach worker Brittany Petrie will be taking a leave of absence for a little more than a year, the town will soon have a replacement outreach worker in place ready to serve St. Marys' most vulnerable residents.

The St. Marys office for adult-learning programs of Perth is moving. As of Nov. 13, adult learning will be located at the St. Marys Public Library (15 Church St. N).

As locals honour those who served and are serving in the military during this year's Remembrance Day ceremony, the St. Marys Museum will launch a new exhibit highlighting an often-forgotten but no-less-important piece of the war effort during the first and second world wars. On Nov. 11, the museum will open its Behind the Battlefield: War on the Homefront exhibit showcasing the hard work and dedication of locals who may not have served overseas during WWI and WWII but did serve important roles at home that supported the war efforts all the same.

Canadians across the country gathered on Nov. 11 to show their respect for members of our armed forces who gave the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom and who are still serving our nation. At the St. Marys cenotaph, a large crowd

gathered for the Ceremony of Remembrance hosted by the Town of St. Marys. Mayor Al Strathdee shared some opening remarks recognizing the sacrifice of those who fought in battle and why we honour them.

Anyone who has needed to make a left turn from James Street South onto Queen Street East can attest to the danger that intersection poses for both drivers and pedestrians. At the Nov. 12 St. Marys council meeting, councillors addressed a letter from St. Marys resident Nadia Sommerville outlining her safety concerns with the intersection, a discussion that carried into infrastructure director Jeff Wolfe's presentation of a brand-new, comprehensive road-safety plan for the town.

Matthew Rae has been acclaimed as the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party candidate for Perth-Wellington in the next provincial general election.

The St. Marys Christmas Craft Show was held at the Pyramid Centre on Nov. 16 with approximately 2,000 people in attendance.

Fond memories and words of remembrance about his no-nonsense, practical approach to municipal politics are pouring in following the recent passing of Perth South Mayor and former Perth County warden Jim Aitcheson. Aitcheson passed away on Nov. 21 after a brief battle with cancer. He had been on leave from his duties as Perth South mayor and Perth County councillor since early October.

St. Marys egg and pullet farmer Scott Graham has been recognized with the 2024 Agricultural Recognition Award presented at the Perth County Federation of Agriculture (PCFA) Gala in Stratford.

The United Way Perth-Huron has been a longstanding partner with the Ontario Living Wage Network because they believe that solving poverty comes down to making sure people have enough money. While the current minimum wage is \$17.20, the living wage in the GreyBruce-Perth-Huron-Simcoe region has increased to \$23.05.

Murray Mitchell, one of the most well-known residents of St. Marys, was the worthy recipient of the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers at a recent ceremony at River Valley Golf Course.

## December:

As they have for the past six years, St. Marys council is once again encouraging the overwhelming generosity of town residents by proclaiming Dec. 3, 2024, as Giving Tuesday.

The Dec. 8 To St. Marys With Love supper event affirmed yet again why St. Marys is such a wonderful place to call home – the great sense of community through special events that many volunteers, organizations and individuals bring to life. More than 350 people enjoyed a meal prepared by many hands and served up by almost 80 volunteers including Mayor Al Strathdee, Perth-Wellington MP John Nater, Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae, deputy mayor Brogan Aylward and Coun. Dave Lucas alongside St. Marys

volunteer firefighters and members of the St. Marys community.

After eight years serving as the founding curator of St. Marys Station Gallery, Cameron Porteous is preparing to step down to allow new creative leadership a chance to continue shaping the gallery's impact on the St. Marys art community. In mid-December, the gallery hosted a special reception to thank Porteous for his years of work at the gallery and welcome new St. Marys Station Gallery curator Duncan MacDonald, a Canadian artist with an extensive background as both an art educator and curator, as he prepares to officially step into the role on Jan. 1.

As a result of the high cost per rider and the end of a funding agreement with the province, as well as to keep the 2025 proposed budget impact on county landowners down, Perth County council has voted to discontinue the PC Connect rural-route service as of March 31, 2025.

On Friday, Dec. 13, Harmony of Friends performed a cinematic Christmas concert with all proceeds going directly to the St. Marys Library Pantry.

Ultimate Foot Care by Eileen Stacey opened its doors at 194 Queen St. W. on Monday, Dec. 16.



Anyone who would like a turkey dinner for Christ-

mas day but can't host one of their own can have a chance to have one from the community. St. Marys resident Rachael O'Neill Roberts and a group of friends are gathering materials to cook Christmas dinners for whoever wants them for the fourth year.

Following a funding dispute that resulted in the withdrawal of library services for Perth South township residents at both the St. Marys and Stratford libraries earlier this year, all three parties now seem to be in agreement over a new, five-year library services agreement.

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# SPORTS



The Ashton Tire Service U15 LL Boys St. Marys Rock claimed the Gold Medal during the Stonetown Classic tournament in January. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Gavin Lang and Landon Lichti. In the second row, from left, are Rowan Pickel, Jaxon Brown, and Aiden Devries. In the third row, from left, are Colin Lichti, Chris Brown, Maguire Smale, Dylan Chateauvert, Abe Bender, Sydney Clarke, Mac Hern, Chase Jeffrey, Ben Robson, Cainin O'Doherty, Brody Cox, Logan Oake, Tys Dewitt, Connor McKichan, Daryl Hern, and Burton Pickel. Photo by Spencer Seymour



The Dunny's Source For Sports U10 A Boys St. Marys Rock played some of their best hockey of the season at the Garden City Warriors Tournament in March in St. Catharines when they captured the gold medal. Pictured in front is Franklin Anderson. In the first row, from left, are Kane Douglas, Cameryn Stokes, Edwin Froud, Finn Harburn, and Jacob Hahn. In the middle row, from left, are Harper Graves, Jakob Kittmer, Dean Feeney, Jaxon Wittig, Cooper Sass, Karson Garrett, and Jack Bilyea. In the back row, from left, are trainer Ben Douglas, trainer Marshall Graves, assistant coach Jared Stokes, head coach Brent Kittmer, and goalie coach Luke Binning. Contributed photo



The St. Marys Army Navy and Air Force Veterans U15 A Boys minor hockey team won gold at the Irish South Bend Cup in South Bend, Ind. Contributed photo



The Sam's Home Hardware U15 B Girls St. Marys Rock earned the gold medal at the Festival Cup held Nov. 15-17. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Maddie Jefferies, Jenna Gooder, Ramona Graham, Abby Russell and Ellie MacArthur. In the middle, from left, are Kayla Visneskie, Kasey Storey, Brooke Roth, Emma Carradine, Maeve Wheeler, Mira Broughton, Chloe Pethick, Avery Fifield, Janet Edge and Chandler Smith. In the back, from left, are Mike Carradine, Kelly Linton and Bob Wheeler. Contributed photo



The St. Marys Fire Department U13 A Boys St. Marys Rock pulled off a miraculous gold-medal victory mid March at the Garden City Warriors Tournament in St. Catharines. Pictured in the front row, from left, are Luke Savile and Braydon Wheeler. In the second row, from left, are Luke Simons, Ben Graham, Adrian Bes, Willy Richardson, Luke Showers, Landon MacDonald, Nate Hern, and Owen Pletsch. In the third row, from left, Lukas Francis, Elliot Hudson, Quinn Porter, Hayden Barker, and Jacob Savile. In the fourth row, from left, are coaches Rick O'Donnell, Sean Porter, Bob Davis, and Mike Davis. Contributed photo



The St. Marys Cement U18 A Boys St. Marys Rock captured the top prize at the Collingwood Silver Stick tournament Nov. 15-17. Pictured laying on the ice are Luke Binning and Trevor Aarts. In the first row, from left, are coach Mason Boonstra, Hayden Britnell, Nathan Wolfkamp, Connor Hall, Adam Turner, Sam Johnson, Finn Wright and Griffin McGregor. In the back row, from left, are head coach Gord Cookson, coach Kyle Spence, Blake Lalande, Myles Clinton, Jarred Ballantyne, Grayson Boreham, Evan Ballantyne, Simon Taylor, Colton Henderson, Trevor Richardson, coach Lucas Spence and coach Brendan Near. Contributed photo



The St. Marys Building Centre U12 A Boys St. Marys Rock claimed the gold medal and championship banner at the Owen Sound Silver Stick held Nov. 15-17. Pictured laying on the ice is Lucas Savile. In the first row, from left to right, are Lane Munro, Attley Ehgoetz, Theo Keller, Sam Richardson, Keaton Ward and Jax Parsons. In the second row, from left, are Joey Brown, Talon Ward, Nick Simons, Liam Showers, Ryder Boehmer, Hudson Monteith and Jacob Tschirhard. In the back row, from left, are Jonathan Ward, Mark Monteith, Jeremy Savile and Merlin Malinowski. Contributed photo



The St. Marys Landscaping U11 B Girls St. Marys Rock won the gold medal at the Nov. 15-17 Festival Cup tournament. Pictured laying on the ice, from left to right, are Mya Grose and Brynlee Pickel. In the second row, from left, are Amelia Falkiner, Jessica Zwambag, Jaynie Johnston and Audrey Parsons. In the third row, from left, are Emily Ewing, Kylie Blake, Alex Harlton, Samantha Matheson, Addison Hudson, Ellie McDonald and Emily Chateauvert. In the back row, from left, are coaches Dave Blake, Ian Johnston, Jamie Matheson, Marty Rutledge and Nicole Pickel. Contributed photo



The Home Hardware Building Centre U15 C Girls St. Marys Rock won their league championship in April when they defeated the Ayr Rockets 3-2. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Georgia Agar, Silver Breckon, Ramona Graham, and Brooklynn Roth. In the middle row, from left, are manager Jenny Roth, Mira Broughton, Ellie MacArthur, Kayla Visneskie, Emma Carradine, and assistant coach Janet Edey. In the back row, from left, are assistant coach Bob Wheeler, Lena Thompson, Abby Russell, Marci Linton, Maeve Wheeler, Ella Frayne, Lu Zulu, Kacey Storey, Georgia Edwards, and head coach Kelly Linton. Contributed photo



The St. Marys Lincolns hosted their annual awards banquet. During the event, Luca Spagnolo received the Harold Maxwell Trophy as the team's leading scorer in the regular season. Spagnolo led the Lincolns with 47 points in 43 games, which included 19 goals, tied for first on the team. The award was presented by assistant coach Mike Siddall. Spagnolo also accepted the Fan Appreciation and Frank Edey Awards on behalf of teammate Jaden Lee.



The U12 St. Marys Snipers won the Bronze Medal at the Ringette Ontario U12 Championships on Mar. 31 with a 6-4 victory. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Meredith Stokes, Adrianna McCutchen, Olivia Hendricks, Amara Grant, Lilly Garniss, Georgia Hunter, Ava Bastien, Kenzie Shackleton, Madi McCutcheon, Liv McCutcheon, Brenna Bearss, Kyla Graham, and Maelle Hachler. In the back row, from left, are assistant coach Kari Stokes, Lyla Habermehl, trainer Lori Bearss, Lily Johnston, Mary McCutcheon, assistant coach Christen Graham, and head coach Evan Habermehl. Contributed photo



Colton Henderson of the St. Marys Cement U18 A Boys St. Marys Rock was the recipient of the Bob Searles Award as the most outstanding male player in the St. Marys Minor Hockey Association (SMMHA).



The St. Marys DCVI Junior Girls volleyball team captured the Bronze Medal at WOSSAA late February in London. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Katie Namink, Nicki Wilson, Alanna Savile, and Naomi deVries. In the back row, from left, are Adrianna Hollestelle-Black, Libby McCurdy, Marin Chateauvert, Cortney Linton, Cammie Lobb, Gracy Schlotzhauer, and Jess Chateauvert. Contributed photo



The St. Marys DCVI ultimate frisbee team won the WOSSAA Championship May 22. Pictured in front is head coach Chris Marcou. In the middle row, from left to right, are Trevor Richardson, Harvest Elliot, Olive Aarts, Griffin McGregor, Jimmy Schiedel and Adam Turner. In the back row, from left, are Arthur Douglas, Hayden Brintnell, Grayson Boreham, Colton Henderson, Charlee Pickering, Marin Chateauvert, Ellen Thorup, Will Boreham, Trevor Aarts and Marieke van Lierop. Contributed photo



Pictured from left are Oliver Black, Trevor Richardson, Ellen Thorup, Kiara McGregor, and Griffin McGregor. Black and Richardson were co-winners of the senior boys' MSP. Thorup took the MSP on the senior girls' side. Kiara McGregor won the senior girls' MVP and Griffin McGregor earned the senior boys' MVP.



St. Marys DCVI earned a number of strong results during this year's cross-country season, capped off by DCVI's junior boys, pictured, who finished fifth overall at OFSAA. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Ben Robson and Zach Matheson. In the back, from left, are Abe Bender, Quintin Steffler, Charlie Bender, Kaleb Dingman, Nic Brintnell and coach Megan Bryan. Contributed photo



The St. Marys DCVI track-and-field team won the overall team championship and captured a litany of excellent individual results at the Huron-Perth Championship held May 14-15 at St. Anne's Catholic Secondary School in Clinton. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Trevor Richardson, Oliver Black, Charlie Bender, Zach Matheson, Vaughn Barr, Lila Corby, Kiara McGregor, Holly Black and Jane Arthur. In the back row, from left, are Coach Megan Bryan, Eden Sinnett, coach Nathan Good, Harvest Elliot, Adrianna Hollestelle-Black, Kylie Fifield, Payton Blight, Abe Bender, Ezra Bender, Bronwyn Hawkins, Kaleb Dingman, Donovan McGregor, Nic Brintnell, Tristin Langille, Anna Ropp, Danny Switzer, Bailey Ross, Walker Wakem, Charlotte Richardson, Cora Weber and coach Ian Morton. Not pictured are Luci Steffler, Charlotte Clinton, Avery Jennings, Becca Sleeper, Raella Brodhagen, Zach Larmer, Ethan Henderson, Myles Clinton, Owen Collings, Tyler Rooney, Charles Black, Trevor Aarts, Colton Hawkins, and Garrett Steffler. Contributed photo



The St. Marys DCVI Junior Girls basketball team captured the silver medal at WOSSAA on Nov. 13, making the finals after a thrilling 33-30 overtime win over the host Monsignor Bruyere in the semi-final. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Holly Black, Charlotte Richardson, Regan Jones and Alanna Savile. In the back row, from left, are head coach Tim O'Connor, Lena Thompson, Aryn Sheldon, Melody Weber, Reagan Stacey, Charlotte Johnson, Emma Hodgkinson, Lily Hollestelle-Black, Lu Zulu, Silver Breckon, coach Ellen Bettger, Maeve Wheeler and coach Jack Taylor. Contributed photo





On May 5, eight St. Marys YBC bowlers travelled to Victoria Lanes in Kitchener to compete in the Grand River Bowler of the Year tournament. Pictured from left to right are Jase Robertson, coach Gerry Brockman, Garrett Steffler, and Nathan McKeen. McKeen brought home the Junior Boys Gold Medal. Robertson took the Silver in the Bantam Boys' competition. Steffler rolled his way to a Silver in the Senior Boys' round. Kinsley Kosluk earned the Pee-wee Girls' Silver Medal and Brendon King also took silver on the Pee-wee Boys side. Helen Brockman coached the peewee team. Aisla Fisher finished fourth in the Bantam Girls category. Natalie McKeen placed third in the Junior Girls division while Rory Brockman placed fourth. The girls were coached by Aaron Fisher and Michelle McKeen. Contributed photo



Pictured from left to right are Shannon Campbell, sensei Jalyne Lorentz and Lisa Sheldon. The three Stonetown Karate Centre (SKC) students recently competed at the Canadian Open Martial Arts Championships held in Gatineau in March. All three earned a first-place finish in their respective divisions as part of the SKC's haul of medals. Contributed photo



Kenzie Shackleton of St. Marys represented Thompson's Martial Arts, located in downtown St. Marys, at the World Karate Championships Oct. 26 to Nov. 1 in Albufeira, Portugal. Contributed photo



Former St. Marys resident Michael Hitchcock helped the Special Olympics Ontario (SOO) London Blazers win the gold medal in Floor Hockey at the 2024 Special Olympics Canada National Winter Games held during the month of March in Calgary. After going 2-1 in the round-robin, Hitchcock and the Blazers defeated Manitoba 3-2 in the semi-finals to advance to the finals. In the championship game, London downed Team Alberta 4-1 to claim the gold. London was one of four floor hockey teams representing SOO at the games with the other three coming from Peterborough, Milton, and Newmarket. Sixteen teams in total from across Canada competed in Calgary. Contributed photo



St. Marys native Isabella Mills won gold in U16 female long jump at the Canadian Indoor Track and Field Championships in March in Montreal, Que. Contributed photo

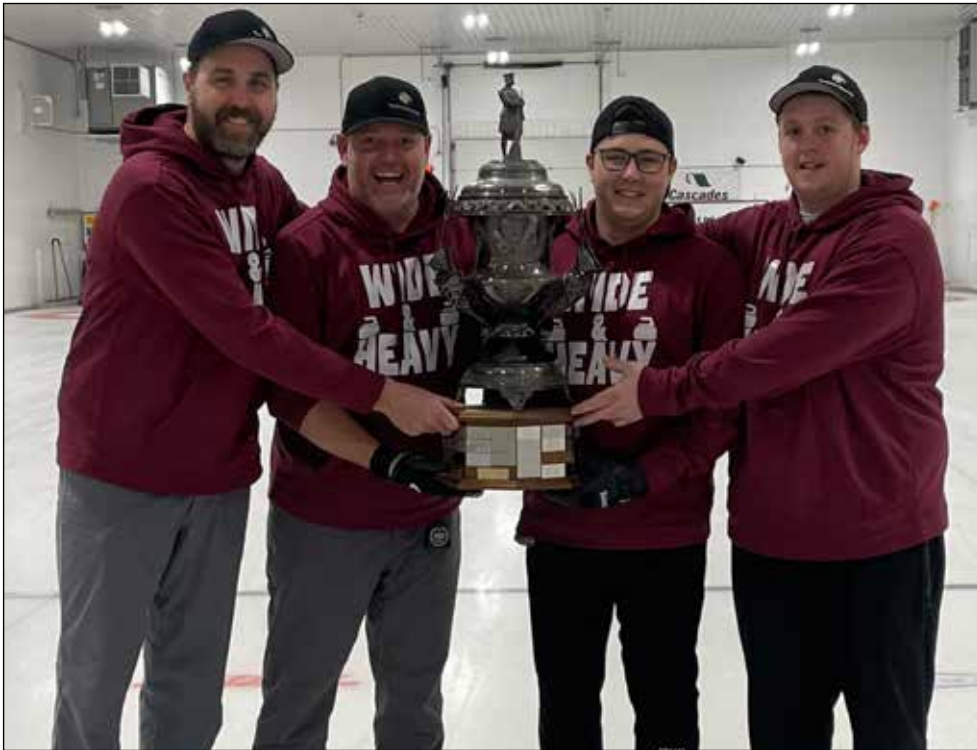


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A shot so great, it was like we were watching the Brier! Skip Brady St. Louis, who represented Nunavut earlier this year at the Montana's Brier, pulled off a daring, dramatic shot for four points in the fifth end on Wednesday night that propelled his team to victory in the 2024 St. Marys Curling Club's Competitive League "A" final. This year's "A" final was contested between Morris Van De Walle's team, who finished first during the regular season, and St. Louis' team who had not lost a game since prior to the Christmas break. After St. Louis' four-point shot broke open a tight 2-2 game, that momentum carried on into the sixth end where they were able to steal an additional four points to end the game 10-2. Pictured above, from left to right, are vice Jason Clarke, lead Mark King, skip Brady St. Louis and second Aaron Waugh. Next week we will share the winning teams in the "B", "C" and "D" finals for the Competitive League. Photo by Adam Hudson



On Tuesday, March 26, the father-son duo of Jake Grant and Stewart Grant narrowly defeated the team of Alan Johnston and Adam Winchester by a score of 6-5 to win the St. Marys Curling Club's Doubles Championship. The Grants, who finished the regular season in first place (12-2-2), had lost both of their earlier meetings against Johnston's team. After adding Adam Winchester to the team late in the season, the Johnston team impressively cruised through the playoffs with four straight wins prior to the finals, while the Grant team had to reel off five consecutive victories in the double-knockout format after dropping their first playoff game. Stewart said of the father-son experience, "I remember fondly growing up curling and playing on a team with my dad (Murray), and similarly it was very special to curl throughout this season with Jake." Photo by Andrew Zwambag



Six inductees were celebrated on Oct. 19 when the Town of St. Marys honoured its first Sports Wall of Fame class. Pictured from left to right are Mark Bell, Nelson Goad (representing the late Riley Hern), Dale Levy, Pat Payton, Ron Marriott (representing the Creamery Juniors), and members of the Stewart family (representing Ferris Stewart).



The St. Marys Pickleball Association (SMPA) hosted the Ontario Senior Games' District 29 3.0 Pickleball tournament on Saturday, June 8 at the Pyramid Recreation Centre. This was the first time SMPA hosted the event which was well-attended with over 33 teams participating in the competition. Pictured on the left are Ian Moore and Rob Wrigley who won the Gold Medal in the Men's 55+ division. On the right are Annette Wrigley and Linda Pickering who won the Women's 55+ Gold Medal. Contributed photo



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The Young Guys were winners of the 2024 Ryder Cup at St. Marys Golf & Country Club. Pictured above, from left to right, back row: Mark Vandenberg, Will Lamoureux, Evan Bechtel, Kenny Hutton, Johnny Alum, Mike Glover, Kyle Heinbuch, Matt Murray. Front row: Kellen Fifield, Ryan Luft, Alex Taylor, Jordan Leyser, captain Steve Hinz, Jarrett Smith, Scott Kemp, and Tristan Dundas. Photo by Stewart Grant



Eric Henkemans holds the winners' plaque after emerging victorious at the Senior Men's Invitational hosted June 26 at the St. Marys Golf and Country Club. Contributed photo



Fifteen-year-old Nathan Wolfkamp made this clutch putt coming down the stretch en route to winning the St. Marys G&CC Men's Club Championship. Photo by Stewart Grant.



The St. Marys Men's Slo Pitch league hosted their year-end tournament from Sept. 19-22 and for the first time in over half a decade, the Tribe did not leave as the champions of the top division. Pictured above are the Macindrivers, who defeated the Tribe in the semis before claiming the 'A' Division's Championship Trophy by defeating the Jets 17-2 in the final. In the 'B' Division, the Booze Brothers captured the championship with an 11-10 win over the Bomberadoes. Contributed photo

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# 2024 Baby Faces



**Travis James Warren**

**Date of Birth:** July 2, 2024  
**Place of Birth:** Sarnia, ON  
**Birth Weight:** 6lb 13 oz **Weight Now:** 14 lb  
**Parents Names:** Jake and Rebecca Warren  
**Siblings:** Teagan (3)  
**Grandparents:** Bruce and Shirley Mills; Pat Warren; Nicole and Marv Nelson  
**What I like best about 2024:** Lots of snuggles from my family



**Leona Muriel Sadler**

**Date of Birth:** March 12 2024  
**Place of Birth:** Stratford General Hospital  
**Birth Weight:** 7 lbs. 11 oz.  
**Parents Names:** Stacey Sheldon & Jason Sadler  
**Siblings:** None  
**Grandparents:** Chris Sadler, Allan and Paula Sheldon  
**What I like best about 2024:** Meeting all my cousins and getting to spend my summer camping with them



**Nate Petrie**

**Date of Birth:** March 17, 2024  
**Place of Birth:** Stratford General Hospital  
**Birth Weight:** 8lb 1oz **Weight Now:** 20lb 3oz  
**Parents Names:** Shania and Chad Petrie  
**Siblings:** Dax (3)  
**Grandparents:** Grandpa and Grandma V, Grandpa and Grandma Bun, Granny Sanny  
**What I like best about 2024:** Keeping up to my big brother, and finding crumbs on the floor

## Sudoku

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Solutions on page 23

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### 2024 BIG NEWS ITEMS

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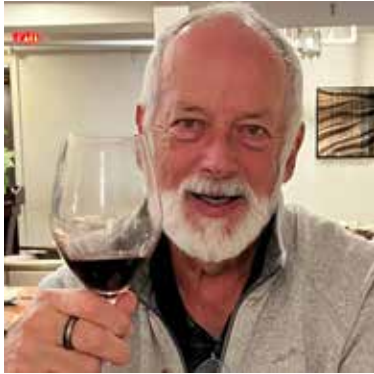
### Word List

- Caitlin Clark
- Kate Middleton
- Baltimore bridge
- Middle East
- POTUS immunity
- LCBO strike
- Trump shooting
- Biden drops out
- Kamala Harris
- Jasper wildfire
- Paris Olympics
- Johnny Gaudreau
- Shohei Ohtani
- Springfield cats
- Elon Musk
- Trump reelected
- Eras Tour
- Tariff talk
- Canada Post strike
- Bitcoin record
- UHC CEO murder
- Assad overthrown
- Freeland resigns

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# OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: The best of Europe, the US and Canada



PAUL KNOWLES

Independent Columnist

When publisher Stewart Grant told me about this year in review edition, it inspired me to review my own year in travel: six countries, nine U.S. states and six of Canada's provinces.

Choosing a list of highlights from these travel adventures has been a challenge, but here are my top 15 picks among dozens of travel experiences over the past 12 months.

**Hemingway Social Club, Key West, Florida:** Key West is perhaps my favourite destination in the U.S. This year, we discovered a Key West location quite different from the rest of this party town: Papa's Pilar Distillery and the Hemingway Social Club. The Social Club is dramatically different from the rowdy bars of Duval Street – it's laid-back and features amazing cocktails created just for you by craft mixologists, and performances by the best local musicians.

**Mount Vernon, Virginia:** This estate was home to first American President George Washington. So of course, there is a lot of U.S. history here, but what we found most intriguing is the honest effort to confront the horrific realities of slavery, woven into the very fabric of

the American story.

**Cabbage Key, Florida:** Every travel writer lives on the alert for a great day-trip story; Cabbage Key is one of the best. Visitors sail on the Lady Chadwick from Captiva Island to Cabbage Key, which lays claim (probably erroneously) to being the inspiration for Jimmy Buffet's "Cheeseburger in Paradise." But it's fun to pretend, to eat one of these culinary delights in the rustic restaurant decorated with thousands of dollar bills, to stroll the island and meet the local gopher tortoises, and to cheer the leaping dolphins accompanying the ship on the way home.

**Bratislava, Slovakia:** One of my favourite European cities for two very different reasons. First, the present-day ambience of the old city with its buskers, whimsical public art and unique food. Second, the sobering moment when, standing on the ramparts of Bratislava Castle, you realize we are only a few decades away from an era when people standing in that exact spot were trapped behind the Iron Curtain, but able to see free Austria just across the river. A sobering reflection in today's global environment.

**Budapest, Hungary:** There are dozens of reasons why visitors enjoy Budapest, but I especially love the view across the Danube from the Fisherman's Bastion, and the sight of the Chain Bridge in all its brightly lit glory at night.

**Passau, Germany:** 2024 was a tough year for Passau. Passau sits at the confluence of three rivers – ideal for trade in historic times, but a challenge when it comes to flood control. But that's part of the story in this ancient city where buildings carry historic high-wa-

ter charts on their walls, and where the high ground includes the impressive St. Stephan's Cathedral with its world-record pipe organ.

**Hébergement aux Cinq Sens, Québec:** Our travels in Canada provided unique moments you could not find anywhere else. That was certainly true here where we stayed in a wifi-free tiny house, learned Native Canadian lore mixed with current natural science and watched meteor showers in a dark-sky region.

**National Air Force Museum of Canada, Trenton, Ontario:** One of the best surprises of our 2024 travels. The museum – a huge indoor space and an outdoor field full of historic aircraft – offers fascinating historic and scientific exhibits, but also touches the heart with stories of heroes and fascinating individuals who have played a role in Canada's story.

**Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, Halifax, Nova Scotia:** You'll spend hours here, learning about the good, the bad and the truly ugly history of Canadian immigration. The place explodes myths about Canada as a nation with open arms to the world, but offers hope in that we have come a long, long way. And visitors can learn about their own genealogy at the family research centre.

**Sabian Cymbal factory, Meductic, New Brunswick:** The most unusual of our stops in 2024. This is where the finest qualify cymbals are crafted for shipment to musicians around the world. The tour takes you through the entire process of creating these amazing instruments and you will be walking in the footsteps of world-renowned drummers like Neal



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

In the old city of Bratislava.

Peart of Rush, Tyler Stewart of Barenaked Ladies, Carmine Appice of Vanilla Fudge, and many, many more.

**St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador:** On this list for all the reasons: live music, great craft breweries, colourful streetscapes, Signal Hill, the harbour and incredible hospitality.

**Cabot Trail, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia:** Unparalleled natural beauty, from the seashore to the wonders of Cape Breton Highlands National Park. You cannot hurry, whether you are navigating the roads on the edge of the sea, hiking in the park, or strolling on the sands of the many beaches.

**Stanley Bridge Ceilidh, Stanley Bridge, Prince Edward Island:** There is a lot of great stuff on P.E.I., from everything Anne to amazing beaches, terrific golf, theatre in Charlottetown and, of course, lobster feasts, but a highlight

was the highly entertaining ceilidh at the Stanley Bridge Hall, featuring the talented Pendergast family.

**Big Head Winery, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario:** Big Head offers great tours and tastings, and produces excellent wine. The name was coined by the owners, the Lipinski family, as a tongue-in-cheek riff on a Polish stereotype.

**St. Jacob's Farmers' Market, Woolwich, Ontario:** Open year-round, this market attracts thousands of visitors every Tuesday and Saturday (and Thursdays in the warmer months). Lots of crafts, clothing and collectibles, but the highlights are the food and produce vendors.

Paul Knowles is an author and travel writer, and President of the Travel Media Association of Canada. To contact Paul about travel, his books, or speaking engagements, email [pknowles@golden.net](mailto:pknowles@golden.net).



Ernest Hemingway presides at the bar of the Hemingway Social Club.



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

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- |                          |                          |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Paris                 | chosen as 2024           |
| 2. Lady Gaga, Bruno Mars | Words of the Year        |
| 3. Sweden                | 7. 41 million            |
| 4. Mexico                | 8. Westheimer            |
| 5. Butler, PA            | 9. Oppenheimer           |
| 6. Each were             | 10. Joe Rogan Experience |

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