

STRATFORD **TIMES**

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Downtown Stratford BIA's Winter Walk Around the Block Contest encourages supporting local to beat winter blues

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

The Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area's (BIA) new contest is encouraging residents to share their favourite retailers that help them get them through the cold winter months.

A Jan. 29 press release announced the launch of the Winter Walk Around the Block contest encouraging residents to get outside, shop at downtown local businesses and share their favourite cozy finds on social media for a chance to win \$100 worth of Downtown Dollars. The contest began on Jan. 30 and has a different theme every week connected in some way to staying warm and cozy during the winter.

"This time of year, we know it's cold. Everybody gets a little bit of depression, they get tired and they just don't get out enough," BIA general manager Jamie Pritchard said. "So, we're trying to get people out and about in the downtown area so they can get out and enjoy some nice fresh, crisp air."

The contest will run every Tuesday and Wednesday with a draw on Thursday. The Winter Walk Around the

CONTINUED TO PAGE 3



(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

SNOWMEN TO THE RESCUE

The snowman walk in Upper Queen's Park was wonderfully decorated by Perth County students in the theme of Superheroes. See more Winterfest coverage on page 10.

Ontario investing in long term care training for new staff

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Ontario government is investing \$100 million to improve training and retention of staff in long-term-care homes across the province.

On Jan. 31, Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae joined Ontario Minister of Long-Term Care Stan Cho at Spruce Lodge Active Living Centre in Stratford to announce that the province's intention to invest in the training and retention of

more than 32,000 new personal support workers (PSWs) and nurses in long-term care over the next three years.

The investments are part of the government's Your Health plan to recruit and retain tens of thousands of long-term care staff over the coming years.

"Our Premier, our minister and our entire branch of government is focused on building more long-term care homes," said Rae. "Over 900 beds will be right here in Perth County. We're also ensuring we have the health-care human re-

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2

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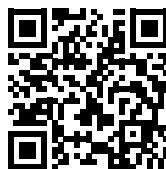
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Investing in Long-term care



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

The Honourable Stan Cho, Minister of Long-Term Care, speaking at Spruce Lodge to announce the Government of Ontario's investment of more than \$100 million to train and retain PSWs and nurses.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

sources to care for our seniors living in these homes.”

Ontario is said to be investing \$94.5 million over three years to extend the Preceptor Resource and Education Program for Long-Term Care. With the new investment, the program aims to train more than 3,000 new preceptors and support 31,000 new clinical placements by 2027.

“Let's not sugarcoat the challenge we face in this province,” said Cho. “When we say we're building 50,000 new and redeveloped homes [beds], they're not homes unless you have a team of health-care professionals and the resources behind it.

“We know that, globally, that supply chain is challenged right now. It's a hands-on effort from ... the ministry of long-term care and the ministry of health.”

Ontario is also said to be investing nearly \$11 million over three years to expand Living Classrooms, a program that helps students train to become PSWs on-site in local long-term care homes.

With this investment, the program aims to double the number of living classrooms from 20 to 40, which will support training up to 1,300 new personal support workers by 2026. Through this program, the Government of Ontario also aims to retain nurses

and PSWs through financial incentives.

“Ontario has invested \$300 million to provide incentives for PSWs to enter and stay within the long-term-care system,” said Cho. “Specifically, \$5,400 as an allowance while a PSW is in their clinical placement, a \$10,000 bonus if you stay within the long-term-care sector for 12 months, and an additional \$10,000 if you go to a rural or northern community. As you can see, the total investment for a PSW student is a little over \$25,000.

“That's not all we're doing to try and retain talent within the long-term care setting. We also have the LEAP program, which is a \$100 million investment to allow PSWs in the system to scale their skills up to an RPN or (from) RPN to RN so that we can maintain that talent.

“This is not going to solve the problem. We need more and we are working with the federal government to continue to try and address the problems we face here in Ontario.”

The government of Ontario is hoping to fix long-term care to ensure Ontario's seniors get the quality of care and quality of life they need and deserve. The plan is built on four pillars: staffing and care; quality and enforcement; building modern, safe and comfortable homes; and connecting seniors with faster, more convenient access to the services they need.

Stratford man arrested and charged with laundry list of fraud-related offences

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A former Stratford business owner with numerous business ties in the city and across the region is facing a laundry list of fraud-related criminal charges, Stratford police say.

In February 2023, Stratford police launched an investigation into allegations of fraud against Kevin Larson after police say several individuals raised concerns regarding their investments with Larson.

On Jan. 24, Larson was arrested and charged with numerous fraud-related criminal offences

including five counts of fraud over \$5,000, nine counts of uttering forged documents and one count of false pretences. Police say Larson cooperated with officers and turned himself in at Stratford Police Headquarters, where he was advised of the charges.

Larson was released from custody on an undertaking and is required to attend court on March 4.

The Stratford Police Service is encouraging anyone who experienced similar issues of concern with Larson to contact the Stratford Police non-emergency number at 519-271-4141 and speak with an investigator.

Downtown Stratford BIA's Winter Walk Around the Block

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Block kicked off with "Food, Food, Food" as the theme for the first week. For Jan. 30 and 31, participants were encouraged to share on Instagram where they like to purchase chocolate, soup, braised meats, fondue and spices, as well as cookbooks and kitchen gear to create a cozy meal at home.

"People are commenting on Instagram with what they would like to get, where they want to shop downtown and it's been going very well," Pritchard said.

The following week's theme for Feb. 6 and 7 was "Self-Care, Self-Love" focusing on businesses that offer candles, bath items, skin care, massages and haircuts. The Winter Walk Around the Block continues with "Drinks, Drinks, Drinks" Feb. 14 and 15, when residents can share where they like to purchase hot drinks like teas, coffee and hot chocolate as well as wine and cocktails. The final theme will be "Cozy, Cozy Clothes" on Feb. 20 and 21 and will centre on stores selling socks, sweaters, pyjamas and winter gear.

The Winter Walk Around the Block also helps local businesses during the lull after a busy holiday shopping season for retailers.

"The winter months are slower and it's great to get out and support those businesses," Pritchard said. "We want to keep them healthy. They're the kind of retailers we really want. They're independent mom-and-pop shops, for the most part, and it's great to support these folks. When you come and shop downtown, you're not supporting some huge conglomerate. You are supporting a family and the families that work for them."

The Downtown Stratford BIA will also launch the Ten Bucks Back program Feb. 15, which will run until Feb. 29. Shoppers who purchase \$100 or more worth of merchandise from participating businesses can bring their receipts to either Destination Stratford (47 Downie St.) or RBC (33 Downie St.) for a \$10 voucher for shopping Downtown. The BIA hopes to give away \$10,000 worth of Ten Bucks Back coupons.

Receipts will be accepted until March 11 and purchases with the vouchers must be made before April 30.

Visit downtownstratford.ca/whats-on/ten-bucks-back-2024 and downtownstratford.ca/whats-on/winter-walk-around-the-block for more information about either program.



Stratford Branch 8

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Welcome to the (social outrage) machine

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

As a local journalist always on the lookout for story ideas, I spend far too much time on community Facebook pages.

For the most part, these pages are invaluable repositories of important local information and events, and they serve to connect neighbours, friends, family and strangers to the wider community. And for their part, the people who run these pages do their best to uphold those values.

But there is a dark side to these online gathering spaces.

Many folks use these pages as a way to air their grievances with governments that spend too much (or too little), businesses that don't meet their customer-service expectations, neighbours who don't keep up with their lawn maintenance or snow clearing, dog owners who don't pick up after their furry friends, kids who maybe have a little too much fun on a Friday night – the list goes on.

Almost like clockwork, every time someone shares a strong opinion on a community Facebook page – especially if that opinion is negative – it opens the proverbial Pandora's Box and releases the opinions of literally everyone you know – and so many others you don't – into this world.

I can't count how many times I've seen someone who is perfectly pleasant offline latch onto an online argument like a dog with a bone – or my girlfriend's dog with one of my socks – and refuse to let go until someone threatens to quit Facebook for good. Problematic things are said, feelings are hurt and, in most instances, commenting is inevitably turned off.

And there always seems to be a pattern in how our local, neighbourhood keyboard warriors respond to a post. Some commenters agree with the poster's opinion and share their own experience with the subject matter. Others disagree with the poster and question (or attack) their

perspective, bias, political affiliations or intelligence (often all of the above). Then you have those commenters who respond to every single comment they don't agree with, somehow engaging in several separate arguments about the same thing at the same time.

Comedian Bo Burnham described this pattern best in his 2021 song, That Funny Feeling, when he said, "The backlash to the backlash to the thing that's just begun."

Then you have people like me who comment on the absurdity of the comment section playing out the same way again and again, post after post. I suppose those comments are just a much a part of the cycle they're criticizing, as is this editorial.

So, what's my point?

I'm not entirely sure I have one. If I did, it would be something along the lines of reminding our readers that no matter how upset you might be or how much you might disagree with a post or a comment, there are real people with real feelings, friends and family behind each of those opinions.

And these aren't just any people. These people live and work in our community. They live down the street or around the corner from us, shop at the same stores we do, and they all want the same basic things everyone wants – to love and be loved, to be respected, to find happiness and live a healthy life, and to contribute in a meaningful way to this community and this world.

I think if we treated each other online the same way most of us treat people in the real world, these social-media debates might actually result in something constructive. Instead of tearing each other down, let's build each other up and create an online community in which opinions and the people behind them are respected, and all ideas are considered.

I truly believe everyone has something valuable to contribute. We simply need to put our own opinions aside for a moment to hear what others have to say.

Letter to the Editor

We regularly visit Stratford from Guelph and enjoy it very much. Recently while there, we obtained a copy of the Stratford Times and were very impressed to see the local news coverage.

We miss that in Guelph. The online coverage by Guelph Today and The Guelph Mercury Tribune provides very

little information about local issues or what is going on. I wish we had a "Guelph Times". It is badly needed in Guelph.

Margaret and Albert Abbink,
Guelph

**SUBMIT YOUR LETTER TO THE EDITOR TO US!
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STRATFORD TIMES

Guiding Principles

1. Everyone has a story
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5. Newspapers document history
6. Newspapers strengthen communities
7. Advertisers, big or small, should profit from their ads (meaning sensible ad rates)
8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated

Budget deliberations finalized in Stratford: City holding at 7.73 per cent tax increase

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Stratford's finance and labour relations committee has finalized a 2024 draft budget for the city that will be presented for final approval at the next council meeting with a 7.73 per-cent increase to the tax rate.

The tax rate is based on a 9.93 per-cent increase to the tax levy.

Stratford treasurer and director of corporate services Karmen Krueger says owners of a home valued at \$350,000 can expect to pay \$404.64 more in property taxes this year, which works out to be just under \$34 per month.

Councillors proposed six cuts in services including deferring \$150,000 in post-closure landfill contributions; deferring a \$50,000 contribution to post-employment liability; reducing transfers to reserves by \$65,000 based on current balances and timing of capital (fire); reducing transfers to

reserves by \$75,000 based on current balances and timing of capital (cemetery); deferring the \$30,000 Lions Pool accessible parking project; and reducing the amount the city was going to pay to make on-line documents accessible by \$6,000.

Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma also proposed a motion to use \$250,000 from the tax-levy stabilization reserve fund to decrease the burden on taxpayers, which was passed unanimously.

Though approved by the committee, some councillors raised concerns regarding the increase in the tax levy, including Coun. Bonnie Henderson, noting she supports the budget but was torn based on concerns she heard from residents about rising costs.

Henderson also introduced a motion to send letters to the Ontario government to request recognition of the hardships these tax increases have on citizens, to which all councillors and Ritsma agreed.



COUNCILLORS DECIDE ON FINAL BUDGET

(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

All but two motion in favour of the 2024 draft budget meeting to increase Stratford's tax levy 9.93%

"We're starting to see a provincial government saying, 'Yes, we recognize municipalities big and small need support,'" noted Ritsma. "I'd certainly be delighted to champion this motion to move it forward." "We know across the board that we need to present a ful-

some picture of the impact on our citizens," said Coun. Taylor Briscoe. "It's our job to advocate for our most vulnerable citizens, so perhaps send a letter to capture those concerns, but through the cost-of-living lens, is a good idea."

The draft budget passed with

only Coun. Cody Sebben and Ritsma opposed.

"I think with this increase, we're really pushing those on fixed income, families and everybody else," said Sebben.

The final draft budget will be presented at the next council meeting in February.

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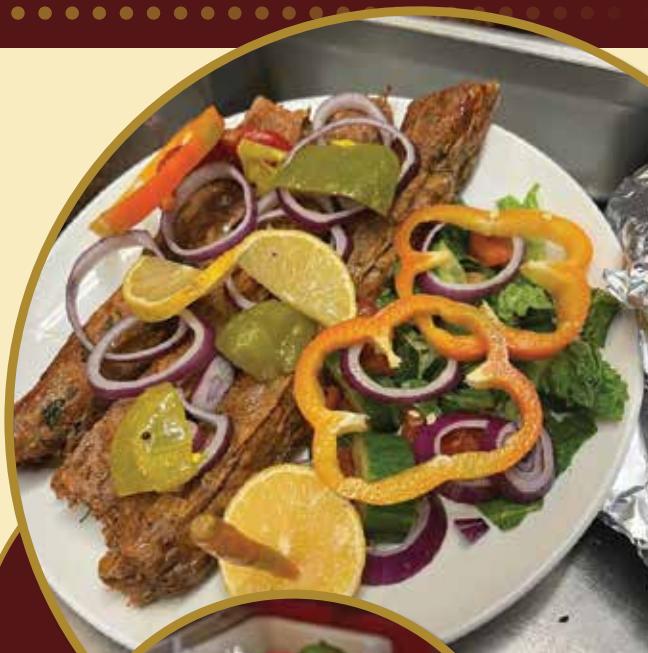
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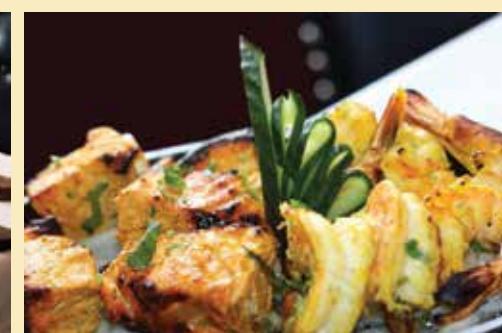
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Housing challenges deterring university students from staying in Stratford

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

While challenges finding housing have been an ongoing issue for students attending the University of Waterloo in Stratford for some time, the university is now working to encourage more landlords in Stratford to help students in need of housing.

At a recent housing fair held at the university atrium, landlords were able to advertise their space to prospective renters.

Kishori Opatha, events and student engagement specialist at the University of Waterloo said she believes by connecting students to appropriate housing opportunities, they can have the opportunity to stay in Stratford during festival season to take advantage of all the city has to offer during the warmer months.

“The question is whether the cost of housing or lack of options is a bigger issue for students,” she said. “A lot of the time, it’s tough to find landlords, but we’re always looking for good landlords with student living spaces for those attending university here.”

The Stratford School of Interaction Design and Business program is the only program offered at the Stratford campus and sees around 180 students each semester. This spring, Opatha said the first-year students will have the opportunity to stay in Stratford during festival season, and she hopes to see this attract more students to live and stay in the city.

“This will be the first summer that we actually have students in for a spring term. The spring term is from May to Au-



HOUSING FAIR

The University of Waterloo hosted a housing fair in hopes of connecting students to landlords throughout Stratford

(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

gust, so it's a great way for students to see the city when it's busy with festivals and many more tourists. I hope that'll change the stigma that Stratford is a quiet town

and ideally incentivize students to come and live here during their term.”

David Redfern, owner of Cambria Street apartments, was at the event hoping to attract students to his apartment-style, fully furnished, short-term rental properties.

He said offering space for students is not only a great way to make an income but also helps to build the community and adds more culture to the city.

“The University of Waterloo has such a great facility here in Stratford and if we can support it in any way, I think it just adds to the image and culture of Stratford. I’m quite happy to see students in and around town and offer them a safe, great place to live. I feel like I’m doing my part.”

Students attending university in Stratford seem to struggle with finding space for a group of four friends to live with. Students want to live in a three- or four-bedroom house with their own space, which seems to be somewhat difficult.

“Students seem to look for living spaces that can host 3 or 4 students together. This way, they can not only stay with their peers during their time in Stratford but also stay close throughout the program,” Opatha said.

“We would love to see more students live in Stratford. Our student community in Stratford is very, very tight knit. It is a small student community and, because of this, they’re all very close.”

Stratford landlords with available rental units can discuss renting opportunities with the University of Waterloo by contacting Opatha at kopatha@uwaterloo.ca or 519-888-4567 ext. 23026.

Athens Greek Souvlaki surpasses its donation goal for the Salvation Army



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

THANKFUL FOR SUPPORT

Pictured: Maria, employee; Terry Voukarakis, Owner of Athens Greek Souvlaki; Richard Honcharsky from The Salvation Army; and Pamela, employee, exchanging a cheque donated, thanks to the community's generosity.

Terry Voukarakis, owner of Athens Greek Souvlaki & Gyro, matched all donations from the Salvation Army's annual kettlepot fundraiser in his restaurant over the past two months.

Not only was he surprised by the generosity of the Stratford community, but he was blown away to find out that the kettlepot in the restaurant raised more than he ever thought possible. “We are overwhelmed,” he said. “Our goal was to raise about \$700 to \$800, and we have

surpassed that. We raise over \$4,000 [for the Salvation Army]. A lot of children and their families are going to be very thankful.”

Richard Honcharsky, The Salvation Army Stratford - St. Marys Executive Director, said he was overwhelmed with the single kettlepot's support. “Terry's got a big heart,” he said. “I’m thankful to the community for their support, but we couldn't do it without people like Terry and our many volunteers.”

Weekend Quiz

1. What is the most populated city in the world?
2. How long does it take for sunlight to reach earth?
3. What kind of reptile are leatherbacks and ridleys?
4. How many times did Ross get divorced on Friends?
5. In what country is Bethlehem located?
6. What year did Pluto become a dwarf planet?
7. How many Super Bowls have the Detroit Lions won?
8. What day is Groundhog Day?
9. According to Malcolm Gladwell, how many hours does it take to master a skill?
10. What does UV light stand for?

This week's answers are found on pg. 31

Boundary changes for Avon Maitland District School Board could disrupt some families

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

As the Avon Maitland District School Board continues to consider its options around proposed boundary changes for local schools, some parents are concerned the changes could have a disruptive impact on students and their families.

The Stratford and area boundary review committee (SABRC) hosted an open house Jan. 29 at Stratford District Secondary School to provide students and their families with information about several proposed boundary adjustment scenarios and solicit feedback from more than 70 people who attended.

The current options could redirect up to six different areas across Stratford to new school sites, leaving some parents questioning if their children will need to change schools when the boundary review is finalized.

Amanda Cortes-Martin and Brock Martin, parents of two young children attending school in Stratford, were at the consultation to learn about the proposed boundary updates and voice their concerns about the changes.

"Brock and I have always walked to school growing up," said Cortes-Martin. "We chose to move into our current neighbourhood because the school is only a five-minute walk. With the boundary changes, our kids could walk 15 minutes



SDSS HOSTS BOUNDARY REVIEW

Amanda Cortes-Martin and Borck Martin attend an in-person consultation to discuss potential changes to boundaries that could affect their children.

(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

to school across major roads, so it's not ideal."

"I don't think some people understand how these adjustments could impact children. Not only will they be changing schools, but this could also disrupt friendships and relationships they've made so far."

School boundaries determine which school a student attends depending on where they live. The possible boundary adjustment scenarios were created by an

independent consultant with feedback from the SABRC and are intended to help alleviate enrollment pressures at schools within the Stratford planning area.

Board members heard from parents about many other concerns, mainly about the distance students would need to walk to new schools, child-care issues, social issues and concerns related to relationships with teachers. Another concern for those who attended was that not all members of the school community are engaged, especially if they do not reside in an area that might be impacted.

The board was pleased to hear positive feedback about the evening's presentation as well, noting an appreciation for

the thorough consultation process and the opportunity to provide feedback.

"People appreciate the in-person format of the open house, the large displays presenting the options, and the presence of consultants and staff to answer questions," said Cheri Carter, superintendent of corporate services.

While adjustments to every school are said to be unlikely, all public schools in the region are being consulted. The information obtained from the consultation and the information provided in an online survey will help the committee address concerns about the proposed changes from the community.

"The consultant will consolidate the feedback, and a report with the options, recommendations and community feedback will be provided to the SABRC," Carter said. "With this information in hand, the SABRC will propose which scenarios staff should take forward to AMDSB trustees. The trustees will then decide what is best for the school board while understanding the needs and opinions of the school communities."

The consultation and online survey results will be discussed at a follow-up meeting with the board of trustees in late April. Parents and community members can expect more information later this year regarding boundary changes.

Anyone interested in submitting feedback can complete the online survey by Feb. 15. Paper copies of surveys are available in school offices.

For more information about this project, visit amdsb.ca/stratfordboundaryreview.



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Huron Street Shoppers Drug Mart remains closed after fire

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

The Shoppers Drug Mart on Huron Street in Stratford remains closed after an early morning fire nearly two weeks ago.

According to Stratford fire Chief Neil Anderson, firefighters responded to the store after a fire broke out in one of the floor-mounted freezer units shortly after 7:30 a.m. Jan. 28. Anderson said there were only two employees in the store at the time and they reacted quickly when they saw smoke coming from the freezer, calling 911 and leaving the store immediately. There were no customers in the store.

As firefighters were able to extinguish the fire within five minutes of arriving on scene, damage from the fire was contained to the freezer. There was also some water damage resulting from the activation of an overhead sprinkler.

Because the drug store also sells food, Anderson said Huron-Perth public health officials were responsible for determining the extent of the smoke damage in the

store.

Anderson said there was minimal smoke damage to the upper floor and the doctor's office upstairs was able to reopen two days later.

"The employees did a good job of quickly noting the issue with the smoke from the freezer and calling 911," Anderson said. "The sprinkler system also activated as it should, thereby reducing any possible further structural damage."

Anderson said he doesn't yet know whether the cause of the fire was mechanical or electrical in nature.

A little more than a week after the fire, Loblaw's Companies Ltd., Shoppers' parent company, said the store remains closed.

"The store is still closed," a Loblaw's spokesperson said. "We're working with city officials to assess when it may be safe to open. In the meantime, patients should visit the Ontario Street Shoppers Drug Mart location for their prescriptions. We thank everyone who's impacted for their understanding. We'll provide updates throughout the re-opening process."

United Housing welcomes former Stratford city councillor and mayoral candidate as new director

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Last year, United Way Perth Huron (UWPH) announced its new United Housing initiative and, earlier this month, they appointed the person who will help lead those efforts.

United Housing's focus is as a nonprofit developer and operator of affordable rental housing. United Housing also aims to take a lead role in helping current property owners by fundraising, renovating and operating units so buildings don't sit unused; partnering with developers to help meet government requirements around affordable housing units; and creating workforce housing so people can afford to live in the community they work in.

Recently, the United Way Perth-Huron announced that former Stratford city councillor and mayoral candidate in the last municipal election Kathy Vassilakos had been appointed as director of United Housing.

"We're really excited to welcome Kathy," said UWPH executive director Ryan Erb. "It represents the next step in organizational development as we move this initiative forward, which is awesome.

"As our community continues to see so many people experiencing the effects of the current housing crisis, it's important we continue building United Housing. I look forward to working with Kathy on new and existing housing projects and securing the \$543,000 in funding we need to ensure United Housing, alongside many partners, achieves our community goal of a place to live for every person in Perth-Huron."

Vassilakos brings many skills to her new role. During her time on council, she worked within the community, as well as with other municipalities, organizations and levels of government. She brings a wealth of knowledge around housing thanks to her experience with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario's housing task force and the city's Grand Trunk Master Plan.

Vassilakos was instrumental in seeing the Britannia Street Housing Project come to fruition and she's also served on many boards and committees including as co-chair of UWPH's social research and planning council and chair of Huron Perth public health.

She says United Housing's ultimate goal is to build as much rental housing as possible to fill a gap not only in our region but across the province.

"The goal is to have combination housing – deeply af-



NEW ROLE (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Kathy Vassilakos, the new director of United Housing.

fordable housing, workforce housing and market-price housing," she said.

With potential building renovations already on the horizon, Vassilakos says partnering with local businesses and companies will help them reach or surpass their goal of providing affordable housing for everyone.

"We are hopeful that we can find good community partnerships and collaborations that stretch right across Huron-Perth.

"I'm excited to take on the director's role with United Housing," she added. "Getting new, affordable housing built is critical to the health of our region. Through my time on Stratford city council, I've seen the significant amount of work being done by both the City of Stratford and the County of Huron as the Consolidated Municipal Service Managers responsible for delivering and administering housing programs and services to our region.

"We believe that United Housing is a perfect vehicle to support the existing work and further increase the amount of available, affordable housing stock."

For more information, visit perthhuron.unitedway.ca.

Grandparent scams ongoing concern in Stratford

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Police Service is warning residents to beware of grandparent scams following two recent fraud and an attempted fraud.

Stratford police responded to three recent grandparent scam reports in mid-January. In a press release from Jan. 16, police say the first occurred on Jan. 12 when a resident received a call from someone claiming to be a police officer who said that their grandson was being arrested for a drug charge and bail needed to be paid to release him. The resident paid \$8,400 in cash later that day and then called Stratford police after realizing it was a scam.

Another incident occurred on Jan. 15 when the resident heard a similar story. Later, when the scammer visited their home, they forked over \$7,300 in cash. The resident also called police after realizing it was fraud.

Similarly, a third incident happened the evening of Jan. 15 when a caller demanded \$7,000 to supposedly secure the victim's grandson's release. Knowing something was amiss, the victim spoke with their family before calling police. Stratford police later found a man who matched the description of the suspect and charged him with three counts of fraud over \$5,000, three counts of extortion and one count for resisting arrest.

The suspect, an 18-year-old man from Brantford, was held in custody to attend a bail hearing on Jan. 16.

Const. Darren Fischer, community resource and media relations officer for the Stratford Police, told the Times no other arrests have been made in relation to the incident since then however the police continue to get calls related to grandparent scams.

"We regularly receive complaints of these matters and many other scams," Fischer said. "It is hard to identify how much money is lost in our community or how prevalent these scams are as compared with others without reading through all of the individual reports, however the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre reports that Canadians across the country lost \$9.2 million to emergency or grandparent scams in 2022."

Const. Fischer said residents can protect themselves against such scam by communicating with family members and making a plan for what to do if they think they're dealing with a scammer. Creating a list of contacts to verify any information and a list of passwords or questions to verify the identity also helps.

"By being aware, they will be on the lookout," he said. "It is always encouraged that individuals prepare themselves for when or if these types of phone calls happen.

"Listen to that inner voice that is telling you that something isn't right and force yourself to ask questions to yourself, friends and family, and to the scammer."

Anyone who experiences fraud can report it to Stratford police by calling 519-271-4141. Any fraud that did not result in lost finances or information should be reported to the Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre. Visit antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca for more information.

LOCAL MATTERS.



Remember that time when **Amazon** sponsored your church fundraiser?



Remember when **Facebook** bought a case of Girl Guide cookies to support your daughter?



Remember when **Google** provided free pizza to your child's soccer team when they won the championship?

Stratford Winterfest saw some of the largest crowds in years

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

Hundreds of Stratford and Perth County residents, as well as visitors from as far away as London and Kitchener, were not only entertained with winter activities but also treated to great food at this year's Stratford Winterfest.

Temperatures that hovered around zero all day and

clear, dry weather made for a busy day for volunteers Jan. 27. They also invited the young and not so young to come out for a free skate at the Dufferin Arena Jan. 28.

Jamie Cottle, who headed up the hardworking committee of volunteers, was asked at the end of the day Saturday if he would be ready for a rest, to which he said it was a great day and he was glad for the great crowd of parents and kids, however he was looking forward to putting his feet up at the end of the day.



Danielle O'Rourke of HUR Ice Design was busy demonstrating ice sculpting for a large crowd at Stratford Winterfest Jan. 27.



The Alpacas from the TLC Alpaca Farm north of Mitchell were back again this year as owners Fred and Faye Glauser enjoy answering questions and show their alpaca-wool products like mittens, hats, scarves and sweaters.



Pictured from left are Maddie Jenner, Winterfest chair Jamie Cottle, the Stratford Winterfest Swan (Lesa Jenner) and Winterfest treasurer M.J. Thomson. (GARY WEST PHOTO)



Brant The Fire Guy is the Guinness World Record holder for the feat of eating the fire of 101 torches. He appeared at the Stratford Winterfest to adoring audiences. (LISA CHESTER PHOTO)



Shauna Cowan of the Canadian Raptor Conservancy holds a Red Tailed Hawk as she educates the crowd about the predator birds she brought. (LISA CHESTER PHOTO)



Four young, future tractor drivers – Celeste, Matei, Sawyer and Ethan from St.Mary's and Stratford – enjoy the loader tractor experience from Mayor Martin Ritsma's nearby farm.



The ice sculptures were a popular photo op for everyone that attended this year's Winterfest. (LISA CHESTER PHOTOS)

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AISIN expansion good for Stratford's economy says Councillor Mark Hunter

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

AISIN Corporation, a top-ten Tier One global automotive supplier, recently announced its plan to expand its manufacturing plant here in Stratford.

Not only does this expansion mean more job availability for locals but, as one city councillor – Coun. Mark Hunter – notes, expansions like this also help the Stratford economy and lessen the tax burden on citizens.

“When you take an already large building and then double it in size, you've theoretically doubled the value of the building,” said Hunter. “Expansions such as AISIN's means they're paying more towards municipal tax, which means citizens could ultimately pay less.

“Large businesses pay more taxes than citizens, meaning they contribute at a higher rate than individual homes. This being said, it also means those businesses contribute more while using fewer services. They also don't utilize summer camps that are run by the city, and they don't use social services.”

Hunter says growing the industrial and commercial base in Stratford is essential for property value.

“If you have a new business in a very small space, it's not going to have a big impact on the city's property tax base, but it's a contribution. But some of the larger buildings have a very big impact, and this is what investStratford is trying to work on.”

investStratford is the city's economic-development corporation and offers full advisory and support services for business expansion, relocation and new investment.

The planned AISIN expansion includes 135,000 square feet of new manufacturing and office space in their current location in Stratford.

In 2007, AISIN opened in Stratford and started manufacturing sunroofs, door-frames, power-back doors, moldings and seating components. Robert says the expansion will be utilized to increase the



CONCEPT (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

The 3D rendering of AISIN's expansion shows AISIN is not only working towards bigger goals but investing in Stratford's local economy.

manufacturing of AISIN's industry-leading panoramic sunroofs.

AISIN supplies sunroofs and other components to both Toyota Motor Manufacturing plants in Canada, which are located in Woodstock and Cambridge.

“Business is good, but we've outgrown our current home,” says company president Wayne Robert. “Fortunately, our plant is in an area that permits and promotes growth, enabling AISIN to stay in its current location on Wright Boulevard. The City of Stratford and its people are important to us. We're here to stay.

“It's exciting. We're excited,” said Robert. “Everybody at AISIN is looking forward to moving ahead and investing in our community. [The expansion] isn't just an investment for us, but an investment in the community as well.”

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Shoplifters Wanted in LCBO Theft

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Shoplifters made off with over \$5,000 in high-end liquor from two LCBO locations in Stratford, according to a recent police report.

On Saturday, January 27, 2024, the Stratford Police Service received reports of theft from both LCBO locations in Stratford.

At approximately 12 p.m. on January 27, three suspects entered the LCBO store located at the Stratford Mall at 1067 Ontario Street. The three suspects allegedly selected high-end bottles of alcohol and left the store without making any attempt to pay for the items.

Shortly after, the three suspects entered the LCBO located at 91 Wellington Street, downtown Stratford. The three suspects again selected several high-end bottles of alcohol and left the store without making any attempt to pay.

Police obtained images of the suspects involved via video surveillance.

Two of the suspects were identified. One male suspect, Stefan Botescu, a 55-year-old, and a female, later identified as Roxanne LaPierre, 38 years old.

A warrant has been issued for Botescu and LaPierre's arrest; however, the other suspect remains unknown to police.

The outstanding suspect is described as a white male with a heavy build, 65-75

years of age. At the time of the offence, he was wearing blue jeans, a black winter jacket, and a ball cap.

The Stratford Police Service is asking anyone with information regarding the whereabouts of Botescu, LaPierre and/or the identities of the unknown suspect to contact them at 519-271-4141 or contact Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS or www.p3tips.com.

At the time of this publication, all three suspects are still at large.



Outstanding suspect is described as a white male with a heavy build, 65-75 years of age.

Our Buildings Tell a Story

The Queen's Hotel 1958 -1966

The Queen's Hotel has been an integral part of Stratford life for over 165 years. Named in honour of Queen Victoria, the Queen's Arms Hotel – later changed to Queen's Hotel and today known as the Queen's Inn – was first housed in a wooden structure. The hotel has the distinction of being Stratford's oldest continuously operating hostelry business. Travellers were offered a free bus service from the train station to the hotel in 'buses' that were beetle-shaped coaches and served as taxis.

At the time, the Queen's fronted Waterloo Street and was located across from what was then J.R. Forbes Livery Stables. The first recorded owner of the Queen's Arms Hotel was Robert Johnson who purchased the land from the Canada Company and built the Queen's in 1858. The building featured an inn, tavern and stabling for nearly one hundred horses. Johnson sold the Queen's to John Corrie in March 1866. The Corrie family owned the hotel for almost 50 years.

John Corrie was known for constructing the Huron Street Bridge and his activity in local public utilities, where he promoted electric and gas lighting. Given his prominence, the Queen's was the special headquarters of county councillors and politicians. After 12 years as a hotelkeeper, John Corrie's son, Fred J. Corrie, took over ownership of the Queen's in 1904 and built the new Queen's Hotel in 1905 on the same site as the original build-

ing.

The new hotel was constructed in the Neo-Classical Revival style characterized by the cupola on the angled corner of the building that includes a doorway that led to the original tavern which, according to contemporary newspaper accounts, had "the finest bar in the province ... built of massive, quarter-cut oak." The hotel was lit through a combination of electric and gas lamps. The restaurant was decorated in an oriental style, fashionable at the time. The second- and third-floor hallways were covered in red velvet carpets and had bathrooms and lavatories on each floor with hot- and cold-running water. The floors of the 45 spacious rooms were covered with Belgian carpets. The rooms rented for \$1.50 per day.

In May of 1914, Fred J. Corrie sold the building for \$22,000 to David T. Pinkney. The Queen's Inn would remain in the ownership of the Pinkneys for fifty years. Pinkney oversaw several major changes to the hotel including a 12-room extension on Ontario Street in 1927, as well as a major renovation of the entire building in 1940 that saw both the interior and exterior modernized, and the installation of modern refrigeration, plumbing and heating. Pinkney owned the hotel until 1966. Source: Pictures Stratford-Perth Archives and Chris Rickett

Contributors: Paul Wilker and Gord Conroy



Above: A drawing of the Queen's Inn courtesy of the Stratford-Perth Archives.



Left: A photo of the Queen's Hotel courtesy of the Stratford-Perth Archives.



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Foodpreneur Advantage program expands to Stratford

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Perth Centre for Business and Perth County are teaming up to deliver seminars to help entrepreneurs looking to create and sell food products.

The Stratford Perth Centre for Business announced Jan. 24 on Facebook that the Foodpreneur Advantage start-up seminars will be provided in the Stratford-Perth area. The seminars are free, online workshops teaching participants how to create and continue a food business.

Holly Mortimer, business advisor with the Stratford Perth Centre for Business, said the London Small Business Centre created the Foodpreneur Advantage program and approached the Stratford Perth Centre for Business about it. Stratford's centre evaluated the program and found it was a great match.

"There's indeed a lot of clients we dealt with over the past 15 years that I've been here that are looking to bring their food product to market and that need some very specific guidance," Mortimer said. "It was kind of a no-brainer for sure."

After centre for business mentioned the Foodpreneur Advantage program in a press release and a newsletter, 15 people signed up within 48 hours. About 20 small businesses within the region will be accessing the program. The centre and Perth County will be launching more press releases and social media campaigns in the future.

The classes also provide a guideline for those who want to sell their products in grocery stores but are unsure how to start the process.

"This program is laid out in sessions that are step by step by step with people," Mortimer said. "They're live, so you can ask questions and really get an expert's guidance on it, understanding regulations and health-unit regulations and how to specifically access and get into local producer programs and all sorts of things. It clears that overwhelm out and gives them an actual clear pathway."

The next session, scheduled for Feb. 15, will focus on marketing and branding. Visit foodpreneuradvantage.ca for more information and to register.



Local Flavour

RESTAURANT GUIDE

The Great Pizza Debate

THE HUNGRY FAT GUY

Times Contributor

Pizza! It is the Italian cultural food icon recognized around the world. It is the last-minute grab-a-quick-bite-to-eat food. It is the favourite food for children's birthday parties. Whether you are five or 95, the odds are you like pizza.

Here in Stratford, we are blessed with a multitude of great pizza places to choose from.

One of the most frequent questions I get asked is, "What is your favourite pizza place?"

Some people just pick one pizza place and stick with it for years. Monogamy is best for relationships and raising a family, but when it comes to pizza you need to play the field a bit.

If you are looking for a quick pizza to pick up, you can order online from one of the many traditional pizza-chain restaurants we have in town. These include Domino's, Little Caesars, New Orleans, Twice the Deal and Pizza Hut. We are fortunate to have smaller chains like Gino's, Tito's and recent newcomer City Pizza.

If you have more time to sit down and enjoy a relaxing atmosphere, I recommend places like Jobsite Brewery (wood fired pizza), Pazzo Pizzeria, Boston Pizza, Pie Hole, Crisp 'n Crust and even Vinni's Pizza in the mall. There is even a monthly pop-up pizzeria called JR's Bakehouse which puts its own spin on pizza with a sour-dough crust and gourmet toppings.

Most of these great places have a menu online and you can order from the comfort of home for pickup or delivery. You can also build a pizza however you want. Combine a great crust, a flavourful sauce and fresh quality



toppings and you end up with a custom-made meal just for you.

As you can see with all of these great places, it is hard for me to pick just one, so I recently ran an online survey on Facebook. We got 1,081 votes and the top three in no particular order were Pazzo Pizzeria, Pino's Pizza and City Pizza. These are all solid choices. Be sure to try out different places.

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Jan. 31	Andy Van Geel, Lucan	\$50.00
Feb 01	Caleb Smidts, Stratford	\$50.00
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Queer Book of the Month Club

Whiteout by Dhonielle Clayton, Tiffany D. Jackson, Nic Stone, Angie Thomas, Ashley Woodfolk, and Nicola Yoon

@SPL: YA FIC White

The all-star team of Black writers who brought us *Blackout* in 2021 (six intertwined love stories set during a New York summer power outage) is back! *Whiteout* is a novel of Black teen love set against the backdrop of an Atlanta winter snowstorm.

Science enthusiast Stevie enlists the help of her friends to plan a Christmas surprise for her girlfriend Sola. But after ruining a coming-out dinner with Sola's extended Nigerian family, Stevie has until midnight to win Sola back with a grand romantic gesture at Mercedes-Benz Stadium. Secretly, Stevie's friends decide to stick to the original plan of gathering meaningful gifts for Sola to help the couple get back together. There's just one problem – Atlanta is in the thick of a Snowpocalypse, which is grinding the city to a halt! Some of the friends are stuck in stalled traffic, others at the airport, mall, theatre, and aquarium, of all places. Can



they all make it to the stadium in time for the plan to work?

This cozy teen romance has a large cast of characters and is written from multiple perspectives. Each chapter focuses on a different couple's love story in the style of the movie *Love Actually*, but the Stevie-and-Sola-Surprise is the through line that connects them together. While *Whiteout* is driven mainly by character relationships, it is a quick read with lots of dialogue, text message and group chat exchanges, and even news and weather bulletins sprinkled throughout.

Readers and viewers of feel-good, wholesome romances and rom-coms will enjoy curling up with this book and cheering for their favourite couples to make it. *Whiteout* is available at SPL as an e-book and a hardcover book in our Young Adult section.

Alida Lemieux
Public Service Librarian
Stratford Public Library

Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp expands programming for students thanks to federal grant

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp and Retreat Centre, located between New Hamburg and Stratford, received support through the Government of Canada's Community Services Recovery Fund in 2023 to expand their outdoor education programs to include winter activities for local schools.

The Community Services Recovery Fund is a one-time investment to help community service organizations, including charities, non-profits, and Indigenous governing bodies, adapt, modernize and build internal organizational capacity.

On Jan. 25, Hidden Acres invited John Nater, Perth-Wellington MP, to the camp to recognize the funding and the impact it is having on students and staff at Hidden Acres.

The event coincided with the first day of winter outdoor education programming with students from Rockway Mennonite Collegiate, who were there to enjoy the first-ever winter outdoor education programming provided in part because of the federal grant funding.

Chris Pot, Hidden Acres Mennonite Camp and Retreat Centre Executive Director, spoke to students and staff about how the \$44,000 grant helped them achieve their goals of offering year-round programming



EXPANDING WINTER PROGRAMMING

(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

John Nater, Perth Wellington MP; Chris Pot, Executive Director; Josh Penfold, Program Director; Cassie Zehr, Seasonal and Summer Camp Director and Emily Riegert, Assistant Program Director

for students.

"There's lots happening here throughout the year. Our programs and our facilities lead to most days being filled with lots of

laughter, direction and activity. However, when the weather turns colder, our spaces become quieter.

"Expanding our popular spring and fall

outdoor-ed programs to include winter activities has allowed us to explore opportunities for students and teachers to enjoy safe fun and educational programming throughout the year, not just in the spring and fall."

The federal funding helped Hidden Acres purchase new, much needed equipment, such as snowshoes, broom balls, winter outdoor skill development gear, and a storage shed.

Pot said about the funding, "It's also given our staff the resources they needed to develop all of these programs."

John Nater spoke to staff and students about his take on the grant and how it's being used at Hidden Acres to expand programming and offer kids more opportunities through the winter months.

"The word I wish was included in that fund was the word perseverance. I think that's the word that represents what was really hard on so many organizations like Hidden Acres over these last few years. They will persevere. They're persevering through difficulties, the challenges and through problems to be out here continuing to offer outdoor winter activities for students."

Pot says this funding will allow them to grow while staying true to their mission of providing a welcoming, peaceful gathering place where diverse groups experience life-giving connections with God, one another and nature.



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Stratford-and-area summer camps open for registration

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A local organization is helping parents and families navigate and register for summer camps this year.

Mindful Kids Stratford hosted its first-ever Stratford-and-area 2024 summer camp information fair at the Stratford Golf and Country Club in late January. Parents browsed more than 18 different camps in Stratford and the surrounding region, giving them a head start planning their kids' summers.

Navigating summer camps for kids can be hectic and a "rabbit hole of information," said Melissa McIntosh, a children's mindfulness coach with Mindful Kids Inc. By offering an opportunity to come together and advertise all camps throughout the area, McIntosh believes this can not only help parents feel less stressed, but also have a one-and-done shop to book and plan an entire summer of fun for kids.

"We wanted to offer parents a one-stop-shop for seeing what camps offer and make

it easier for parents to plan for summer," she said.

Mindful Kids Stratford offers summer camps that aim to empower children to live a mindful lifestyle that serves them throughout their lives. The Mindful Kids camps offer calm leadership, happy communities and focused days that begin with calm, happy and focused camp kids.

Another summer camp advertising its programming at the event was the equine-assisted learning summer camp, a non-riding horse camp located just outside of Stratford that offers leadership, mindfulness and teamwork-building skills through hands-on programs and activities with horses.

Lindsey Wilson and Alisha Wilson, certified equine assisted learning facilitators, say the camp provides game-based learning opportunities for kids five and up (ideally, eight to 12 years old) as a way to build confidence and experience in a fun way.

"We offer a non-riding camp where you're around horses all day long from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.," said Wilson. "Campers bring their



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

CAMP FOR HORSE LOVERS

Alisha Wilson and Lindsay Wilson set up and ready for campers at the Stratford and Area 2024 Summer Camp Info Fair last month

lunch and then we make crafts, go for nature walks, play and learn, all while being around horses all day."

Several other camps are available throughout Stratford for parents to sign their kids up for this summer, including dance camps, craft and art camps, tennis

camp, leadership-in-training camps and much more.

For those who were unable to make it to the summer camp fair, Mindful Kids' Facebook and Instagram pages offer highlights with several camp opportunities throughout Stratford and area.

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Warriors within reach of second in Midwest after winning four of five

STRATFORD WARRIORS
2023-24 Player Statistics
(through February 5, 2024)

PLAYER	POS	GP	G	A	PTS
Carson Harmer	F	38	24	27	51
Michael Denney	F	40	28	16	44
Braydon Stumpf	F	40	8	34	42
Camden Daigle	F	37	15	26	41
Cole Lewis	F	42	19	21	40
Joey Brehmer	F	40	12	15	27
Casey Bridgewater	D	31	6	19	25
Jaxon Broda	D	35	7	16	23
Drew Agnew	F	40	8	14	22
Haden Frayne	D	36	2	15	17
Jacob Wiseman	D	33	3	7	10
Rhyse Brown	F	30	3	6	9
Kaeden Burger	D	31	1	8	9
Liam Gorman	F	36	5	3	8
Zach Bell	F	34	5	3	8
Dylan Dundas	F	26	4	4	8
Zachary Schooley	F	35	1	5	6
Evan Hjelholt	D	34	0	6	6
Wyatt Adkins	D	16	0	5	5
Tristian Huinink	F	19	3	1	4
Bryce Grandbois	F	5	3	1	4
Tyler Kelly	F	8	2	1	3
Owen England	D	34	1	2	3
Cole Brooks	D	28	1	2	3
Stuart Sinclair	F	9	1	1	2
Keaton Bartlett	D	10	0	1	1
Ben Graham	F	9	0	1	1
Gianmarco Caringi	F	3	0	1	1
Trenten Bennett	G	9	0	1	1

PLAYER	RECORD	GAA	SV%
Carter McDougall	9-4-0-0	2.31	.909
Matthew Perdue	15-13-1-0	3.19	.910
Trenten Bennett	5-0-2-0	2.56	.901

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

Heading into a back-to-back this weekend, the Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors are not at all out of the conversation for second place in the Midwestern Conference after winning four of their last five games.

As of press time, the Warriors sat tied for third with the Kitchener-Waterloo Siskins in the conference at 55 points. The Siskins played the Ayr Centennials on Thursday after the Times went to print. Stratford sits three points back of the Elmira Sugar Kings who currently occupy the second spot in the Midwest.

A four-game winning streak for the Warriors began on Jan. 26 when Liam Gorman had two goals and Kaeden Burger tallied two assists in a 3-1 win over the Caledon Bombers. Goalie Carter McDougall made 22 stops in the winning effort.

The Warriors were back on the ice the next day for the second of three straight, this time against the Siskins. Despite being outshot 34-24, including a 17-6 shot differential in favour of the Siskins, netminder Matt Perdue and his 33-save performance guided the Warriors to a 2-1 win over Kitchener-Waterloo. Newly-signed Tyler Kelly netted his first goal since being signed by Stratford, assisted by affiliate players Colin Slattery and Carter Petrie, while Zach Bell also chipped in his fourth of the season.

In their third game of the weekend against the Sugar Kings Jan. 28, the similarities to the game 24 hours previously were striking. Once again, a strong effort in goal by McDougall paired with goals by Kelly and Bell lifted Stratford to another 2-1 victory. Head coach Dave Williams

was very happy with the way his team competed against Elmira in what was his return to the bench after missing two games due to his coaching of the GOJHL All-Star team at the McPherson Tournament.

"We played a really solid game [against Elmira]," Williams told the Times. "It was a tight game, but I thought we forechecked incredibly well. We worked really hard collectively to get above pucks and force turnovers, so we didn't have to play a 200-foot game. We just did a lot of little things well that allowed us to win.

"The first thing was that we managed the puck well. We did a good job putting pucks in behind their defencemen and trying to grind and establish a good forecheck. We defended well as a group of five and I thought Carter [McDougall] had a good game in net. It had a little bit of a playoff feel to it."

Williams added that coming out on the winning side of a post-season-style game held a great deal of significance to his young team.

"Winning those tight, close games where you're battling for every inch on the ice and you're trying to make sure you aren't committing errors for the other team to capitalize on makes you feel better and more ready because that's the type of game you'll have to do well in if you want to have success in the playoffs.

"Not only that game [against Elmira] but that whole weekend when we were missing five guys on Friday and Saturday was all positive," added Williams. "It was great to see the guys who were still there all weekend get rewarded for being able to find a way to win in the situations and different roles they were in."

Two straight games with a goal for both

Kelly and Bell was a positive sign with the post-season quickly approaching, said the bench boss.

"It's great to see us getting some goals from other parts of our lineup. In the play-offs, you typically have some moments when you need to rely on some depth scoring and get goals from guys who maybe don't put up a ton in the regular season. Any time you can get scoring from other parts of your lineup, it's great for the team and great for those guys' confidence. At the end of the day, everyone wants to contribute offensively, so any time any of those guys can do that, it's a big boost to everyone."

Stratford then had a few days to rest before beginning their final pair of inter-conference games, the first of which came at home to the Sarnia Legionnaires. Just 66 seconds after Sarnia's Anthony Tudio opened the scoring with a powerplay goal in the first period, Michael Denney responded with a powerplay goal of Stratford's own and his 28th of the season.

The two teams each had a single goal in the second period, including the 23rd of the year for Carson Harmer. In the third, Harmer added another goal to put the Warriors ahead 3-2, the eventual game-winning goal. In the final two minutes of the third, Cole Lewis tallied his 19th of the campaign before an empty netter was buried by Drew Agnew with six seconds left in the game, sealing a 5-2 win for the Warriors.

Williams credited his entire group for a strong team-wide effort.

"It was a lot of the same things and the same message we've been pushing all year. Territorially, I thought we were good. We put a lot of pucks on net and we probably

CONTINUED TO PAGE 17

GOJHL STANDINGS

Midwestern Conference

(Standings through February 5, 2024)

	GP	W	L	OTL	T	PTS
Listowel Cyclones	40	30	7	1	2	63
Elmira Sugar Kings	43	28	13	0	2	58
KW Siskins	41	25	11	1	4	55
Stratford Warriors	42	26	13	3	0	55
Ayr Centennials	41	22	18	1	0	45
Cambridge Redhawks	41	20	18	3	0	43
Brantford Bandits	41	8	32	1	0	17
Caledon Bombers	43	4	38	0	1	9

WOSHL STANDINGS

(Standings through February 5, 2024)

	GP	W	L	OTL	T	PTS
Tillsonburg Thunder	21	16	5	0	1	33
Tilbury Bluebirds	21	13	8	0	1	27
Stratford Fighting Irish	20	12	8	0	2	26
Petrolia Squires	22	13	9	0	0	26
Alvinston Killer Bees	21	12	9	0	1	25
Strathroy Jets	22	11	11	0	2	24
Woodstock Lakers	19	11	8	0	0	22
Elora Rocks	22	10	12	0	2	22
Delhi Flames	20	9	11	0	1	19
Dunnville Aeros	22	7	15	0	3	17
Orangeville Blitz	22	2	20	0	0	4

Fighting Irish enter home stretch tied for third

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

With just four games remaining in their regular season beginning Feb. 9 against the top-placed Tillsonburg Thunder, the Stratford Bentley's Fighting Irish find themselves tied for third in the WOSHL standings with the Petrolia Squires after an exciting 6-4 win over the Orangeville Blitz.

The win over the Blitz came on Feb. 3. Under a minute-and-a-half after Orangeville opened the scoring in the opening period, Spencer Mills tied the game at one apiece for Stratford. Cooper Leitch then put the Fighting Irish up by one later in the period, a lead they would carry into the second frame.

Orangeville bounced back after the first intermission, leading 17-12 on the shot clock and outscoring Stratford 2-1 in the middle period, sending the game into the third tied at 3-3. Graham Brulotte tallied the lone second-period goal



(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

FACE OFF

At the Community Day of Celebration of the William Allman Arena Jan 27, the Stratford Fighting Irish faced off against the Dunnville Aeros

for the Fighting Irish.

In the third, the Fighting Irish responded

ed to their lackluster second in significant fashion, potting three goals en route to a

6-4 victory. Justin Murray posted a pair of goals while Cameron Stokes also added one in the final minute of regulation. Zack Weir made 37 saves in the win.

The win was much needed by Stratford after a disappointing 6-1 defeat at the hands of the Dunnville Aeros. After Matt Henderson scored the only goal of the first period for Stratford, the roof fell in on the Fighting Irish in the final 40 minutes with Dunnville scoring three goals in each of the second and third to cruise to a 6-1 win. Despite losing by five goals, Stratford outshot Dunnville 44-33.

Not only are the Fighting Irish tied for third place with two games in hand on Petrolia, they are also just one point back of the Tilbury Bluebirds for second with a game in hand heading into this weekend's pair of games. First, as noted, they take the first-ranked Thunder before travelling to Woodstock Feb. 10 for a potential first-round playoff preview against the Lakers.

Warriors within reach of second in Midwest after winning four of five

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

deserved to score more than we did, but Sarnia's goaltender was excellent. We were really happy with our group, top to bottom. You always find the minutes you spend defending to be harder than the ones in the offensive zone, so it was really positive to see our guys spending so much time in the offensive zone."

Special teams were the biggest factor in the Warriors' four-game winning streak coming to an end on Feb. 2 when they visited the much more experienced Caledonia Pro-Fit Corvairs. Despite holding their own against Caledonia at even strength, the Corvairs scored two powerplay goals as well as once while shorthanded en route to a 4-0

shutout victory over Stratford.

Coach Williams credited his group for not getting overpowered by Caledonia while playing five-on-five, noting it provided his team with a preview of the physical brand of hockey that often comes with the playoffs.

"Five-on-five, I thought we played alright against them. Our play at even strength wasn't the issue. They obviously have the talent to do well on the powerplay and all year they've scored quite a few shorthanded goals. The three specialty team goals were the big difference in the game, but I think we can still take positives from that game that we, a younger team, were able to hang with an older group like that.

"They were a heavier team than we might typically play," Williams continued. "So, I think it was a good opportunity to remind our players that, as we move into the playoffs, the hockey tends to get a bit heavier and the ice feels a bit smaller. As a result, you're going to have to grind and win battles and find harder ways to make contributions in the playoffs."

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SDSS High School Swim Team Sweeps Huron Perth Championships

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Correspondent

The Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) Golden Bears swim team recently travelled to Goderich where they dominated the competition at the Huron Perth Swimming Championships and came home winners of all five championship banners.

In addition to the banners – overall boys, overall girls, overall high school, overall open and overall team – the Golden Bears brought home an astounding 17 first-place finishes, 13 second-place finishes and 11 third-place finishes along with 4 relay wins.

Silas Campbell and James Douglas led the way winning all of their individual events. Campbell competed in Open

100-metre and 200-metre Freestyle and Open 100-metre Butterfly, and Douglas competed in the Junior 50-metre and 100-metre Freestyle and the Junior 50-metre Backstroke.

Tess Weyers, Max Campbell, Emile Grimes, Calum MacLeod, Nagisa Ando, Elliot Barton, Hunter Gilbert and Molly Sharen also finished first in their individual races.

Sydney Campbell, Julia Notebomer, Yasmin Narayan and Mya Parish each took home second-place finishes while Cash Gilbert, Alina Haffner and Sean Woods took third-place finishes.

Ivan Mullar Obratov, Josh Heaton, Jordyn McLean and Kasen Ryan also swam well and picked up vital points for the team.

A total of 14 swimmers qualified for the WOSSAA Championships at the Canada Games Centre in London Feb. 14.



SDSS BRINGING HOME GOLD
Nagisa Ando swimming 50m Butterfly event.

(CYNTHIA CARTER PHOTO)



RACE TO THE FINISH
Calum MacLeod swimming 100m Breaststroke race

(CYNTHIA CARTER PHOTO)

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2024 Winter Pride Festival filled with exciting LGBTQ+ events

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The third-annual Winter Pride Festival is set to return to Stratford Feb. 15-19 with the theme, “Birds of a Feather” – a nod to the Stratford Festival’s upcoming production of *La Cage aux Folles*.

With a plethora of events planned, there is sure to be something that appeals to all. Feb. 15 kicks off the festivities with a Feast and Greet Rainbow Potluck from 6-8:30 p.m. hosted at the Stratford Pride Community Centre (SPCC). Join together for this free event to share food and fellowship with other members of the community.

“It’s a casual meet and greet, come as you are concept that’s open to anyone. It’s the day after Valentine’s day and around the family day weekend. The film festival is also the weekend before, so we didn’t want to compete. We want to be more complimentary with what we are doing.”

Those wishing to attend the Thursday potluck are encouraged to register via [Eventbrite.ca](https://www.eventbrite.ca) so organizers can get an estimate of how many people will be at the SPCC. This is a family friendly event and free to participate.

Feb. 16 is comedy night at Grayson Mills featuring two hilarious comedians, Adrienne Fish and Kyle Brownrigg.

“I’m really excited. We’re super stoked about them. I saw some of their YouTube clips and it’s going to be a great night (and) a really fun evening,” said Middleton.

Both of these artists hold a high comedic pedigree and are sure to entertain. Tickets are \$45 and doors open at 7 p.m. This is a general seating event, so come early for the best spot.

There are also two free events that evening. First is the Queer Artisan Market at Matilda Gallery and Art Bar from 5:30-9:30 p.m. and an open-mic Cabaret Night hosted by The Bunker Performance Lounge and Café from 8 p.m. to midnight. Reserve a 15-minute performance slot now by emailing info@bunkerstratford.com.

The Winter Pride Gala is Feb. 17 at Grayson Mills and embraces the festival theme – bird of a feather – by promoting unity and diversity. Celebrating uniqueness, guests are encouraged to come dressed to impress in their finest with colour and plumage, if that’s their thing.

“One of the reasons we chose that (theme) is one of the plays that the Festival is doing is *La Cage Aux Folles*, so *Birds of a Feather*. We’re expecting to see lots of boas and fascinators and all the rest of it, so it should be fun,” said Middleton.

Entertainment will be provided by the renowned mentalist Lukas Stark, bringing mystery and magic to the evening as only he can. Stark engages his audiences with a thought-provoking and often-startling blend of mentalism, suggestion and sleight of hand.

“It’s something that’s a little bit different,” said Middleton. “Local restaurants are supplying the food for the event. There’s a silent auction as well. The community has been awesome, so we have all sorts of stuff that’s up for people to bid on. We’re super excited about that as well.”

After the Gala is over, the Baby I was born this way dance party will be held beginning at 8:30 p.m. upstairs at Grayson Mills with DJ Trish spinning tunes. Tickets for both events are available at [Eventbrite.ca](https://www.eventbrite.ca). The cost of the gala is \$95 and the dance party is a pay-what-you-can event.

Feb. 18 will feature an affirming service at Avondale United Church from 10-11:30 a.m. where all are welcome.

What would a Pride festival be without kings and queens? Café Bouffon will host a Sunday Drag Brunch starting at noon featuring drag queens Messy Margaret and Gal Axy, and drag king Brattery Acid.

“You pay (\$25) to see the show and pay for your brunch separately and of

course it’s through Café Bouffon so the food is going to be fabulous,” Middleton said. “So, it’s just going to be a ride. Have some mimosas and enjoy the show. You never know what they’re going to do. There’s always going to be a song or two, and expect some shade.”

After purchasing tickets, contact Café Bouffon at 519-273-6666 to reserve a table for brunch.

The Winter Pride Empower Climb at Pursuit Climbing is also planned for Sunday morning beginning at 9 a.m. To foster inclusivity, this activity is pay what you can.

Feb. 19 will see a drag story time at the SPCC with Gal and Brattery from 10:30-11:30 a.m. As well, Matilda Gallery and Art Bar will be hosting two drop-in sessions for young artists aged 13 to 17 who will learn to paint and receive some mentorship from queer artists. The gallery and art bar will also be showing artwork. The first session is from 1-2:30 p.m. and the second is from 2:30-4 p.m. Both are free events.

There are savings afoot with the purchase of a festival weekend pass that allows entry to the comedy show, the gala, the dance party and offers an exclusive 10 per-cent discount for Drag Brunch with a promo code. The cost of the weekend pass is \$170 and is available at [Eventbrite.ca](https://www.eventbrite.ca).

Stratford Summer Music brings the world of music to our doorstep

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

World renowned musicians will descend on Stratford this summer from July 18 to Aug. 11 as Stratford Summer Music (SSM) proudly presents its 24th season.

This is the first season for Crystal Spicer as executive director and she is very excited as the music festival gears up for the summer.

“I’ve been with Stratford Summer Music before as the production manager about ten years ago and I did that for three seasons. This is my first (season) as executive director and it’s very exciting as we’re gearing up for things, and so much going on,” said Spicer.

The overall theme this year is “Leg-

ends and Ghosts,” a nod to appearances by high-profile legends tied in with history, and performances of works by artists who are no longer with us. One such legend is Ofra Harnoy, a world-class cellist who will perform with Mike Herriott, a trumpeter skilled in both jazz and classical music.

“The two of them together is going to be a powerhouse on stage. It should be a really fun time,” said Spicer.

Another burgeoning legend is Gregory Oh, veteran pianist and award-winning music director.

“There’s a lot of things to look at with Gregory Oh. It’s going to be super funny, he knows how to make fun of himself and how to make fun of classical music,” Spicer said. “He knows how to take music

and love it, but still see the humour in it. It’s not easy to be a classical musician and there are ups and downs, there are heartbreaks and there are moments where you just have to sit down and laugh. I think we’re going to see all of those in his performance.”

The opening gala on July 18 will be at Avondale United Church and will “Bring the Light” through music by festival artistic director Mark Fewer and friends including Michael Bridge and Yolanda Bruno.

“It should be a lovely evening, especially with VIP tickets which include the seat to the performance and a private reception with the artists afterward, on site at the Avondale,” said Spicer.

SSM’s program for the season features highly anticipated artists like Echo Chamber presenting ‘A World Transformed.’ Echo Chamber is a performance series intertwining live chamber music and choreographed dance.

“It consists of musicians and dancers from the National Ballet of Canada. The work is telling the story of Matthew Shepard who was a young, gay man at the University of Wyoming and he was beaten and left for dead with injuries for six days. That crime led to Barack Obama’s (anti-hate) legislation. So I think that’s a really important conversation to have and it’s exciting that coming to the arts is about being entertained but also the conversations to be had,” Spicer said.

Also of excitement is Viva Mexico Mariachi appearing at Factory 163 Aug. 1, a style of music Fewer has been trying for years to incorporate into the programme. This concert will be presented in partnership with the World In A Weekend festival by SpringWorks PuppetWorks.

Angela Hewitt is returning to the music festival after a six-year absence and the Jazz Academy is also returning, which means the SSM All Stars will be returning to teach as well as perform with the Jazz Academy at Revival House.

SSM organizers are also talking about how to keep summer music alive during the off season. They want to be remembered and offer programming for their audiences over winter. Stratford can look forward to seeing pop-up events during the off season presented in partnership with other organizations in the community. Two such events coming up are Side By Side: Winter Bach 2.0 on March 10 at Avondale and Shane Cook, Canadian and US National Fiddle Champion, appearing at Jobsite Brewing March 17.

For more information visit [stratford-summermusic.ca](https://www.stratford-summermusic.ca). Early bird pricing is available until Feb 14.



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AMDSB students earn six medals in Skills Ontario's Junk Drawer Races

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Elementary school students from the Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB) recently took home six medals from Skills Ontario's Junk Drawer Races.

Students in grades 2 through 8 from almost every AMDSB school participated in the event. The Junk Drawer Races involve students designing, testing and building a variety of projects, and recording a video to enter a contest within the region.

Avon Public School's students in grades 4 and 5 won bronze in the cardboard car challenge with their design, "The Crusher". The AMDSB schools also earned three medals in the paper-gliders competition for grades 6 and 7 with Anne Hathaway Public School taking home gold and bronze medals and Brookside Public School grabbing silver. Elma Township Public School Grade 8 students won gold and bronze medals in the hydraulic crane competition.

"It feels great just knowing that we're



WORKING AS A TEAM

(Left to right) Julia Baxter, Alyssa Walt, Landon Bennewies, and Liam Chessell of Upper Thames Elementary School working on their Junk Drawer Races project. The Junk Drawer Races is a Skills Ontario initiative challenging students to create structures based on the challenge requirements.

not checking the thing off of our curriculum list of exposing the skilled trades but providing hands-on learning opportunities for students in the classrooms,"

(TIM BICKELL PHOTO)

said Tim Bickell, student success coach for AMDSB.

Bickell ran a feedback survey after the event and most said they enjoyed the

projects.

"Just from experience with teachers and being a teacher myself, any time you put things in students' hands – ask them to design and build something – I think that engagement goes up just by taking the pencil out of their hand for a little bit and giving them the actual things to construct or to build."

Competitions like the Junk Drawer Races also expose students to skilled-trades opportunities thanks to the new Ontario curriculum featuring elementary skilled trades funded by the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP). As there is more need to cater to all learning styles, experiential learning also provide new learning opportunities to students.

"When we talk about what's good for one is good for all, I think this is a good example of those things where the students who struggle math and language-wise (have) those opportunities to excel in some hands-on stuff, and it certainly doesn't hurt those students who excel in those more traditional types of learning environments," Bickell said.

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Ontario 

Robert Buhr's artistic inspiration rooted in nature

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

A recent visit by Dr. Robert Buhr's oldest daughter has led to his work being featured at Gallery Stratford.

When Buhr took his daughter to Gallery Stratford, his daughter, who was visiting from Calgary and keeps pictures of his paintings in her wallet, showed them to Lina Jabra, the interim director and curator at the gallery.

"My daughter happened to pull out a few pictures and show them to Lina," Buhr said. "Somehow, something in it struck Lina and she liked it, so she said 'Well, have you got any more?' and 'Can I see some real paintings?'"

Jabra was looking for another exhibition to fill out the empty space nearby Sarah Kernohan's Snow-blind exhibition, which has a lot of wintery whites. The artwork found in Buhr's exhibition, Rural Views, met Jabra's vision of featuring lush green imagery that reflects the warmer spring and summer months. She went to visit Buhr's studio and selected the artwork she wanted to put on display.

Rural Views, Buhr's debut exhibition, has been on display at Gallery Stratford since Jan. 11. An opening reception was held Jan. 21 and about 80 people attended.

Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma looked at the artwork in Rural Views the day before and admired it – especially the paintings with the birds. Buhr's daughter from Mitchell came to the exhibition, and another one of his daughters from Buffalo also visited to see the exhibition.

The exhibition focuses on nature, some-

thing that has always been an inspiration for Buhr and something he's always been drawn to. He recalls being in awe with the crocuses, dandelions, ducks, geese, frogs and cattails when his mother would take him out for nature walks as a child growing up in Saskatchewan.

"When I was about two or two and a half, I wouldn't want to stay in the stroller," Buhr said. "Like any kid, I wanted to get out and she'd let me get out in the grass right away."

He also enjoyed creating with temper paints in school. When he lived and worked in Martinsville, Va., he learned oil painting skills from artist Karen KeSpot in her studio. After practicing medicine for more than 30 years, Buhr retired to Stratford to be closer with his family.

"I've always been an artist," he said. "I have been from the time I got out of the stroller."

Buhr likes to use oil and acrylic paints to paint landscapes and other nature settings with broad strokes, and he's now focusing on portrait painting. During an interview with the Stratford Times, he was looking at the fir tree outside his window and talked about painting fir trees several times, both with and without Christmas lights. He looks for inspiration in nature and paints what he likes to see.

"My wife and I are out driving around and I'll see a certain vista and I'll think, 'You know what? I can paint that,' meaning I think that's a skill of putting the colours down that would roughly match it," Buhr said.

Rural Views will be on display at Gallery Stratford until March 31.



RURAL VIEWS

Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma admires a painting of turkeys by Robert Buhr. The photo and other works can be found at Buhr's "Rural Views" exhibition at Gallery Stratford.

(LINA JABRA PHOTO)

New OnRush music festival showcasing unsigned and indie artists

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

A new music festival attempting to fill a niche in the music scene is coming to Stratford this spring.

The OnRush music festival, running from April 4-6, will feature unsigned, independent artists performing primarily original music from across southwestern Ontario.

"The festival is meant to provide a platform to independent artists who don't really have a platform," said festival founder and director Tim Harrison. "The music scene in Stratford is amazing. It's world class, there's lots of formal music and formal concerts happening, but that niche that's missing is how do you take modern music in an era when the music industry has been blown to pieces by streaming ... and provide a place for independent bands to feel like they're valued?"

Too often a musician can be found in a coffee shop, but people are there for the coffee first and the music second. It's just background noise. According to Harrison, the festivals in town don't address these artists, and there was room for one that does.

While the founders – Harrison, Tim Nicholls and Dan Rajagopalan – intended the festival to start small, the response to the call for musicians has been outstanding.

"I didn't really have expectations, but the moment we announced that we were taking auditions they came flooding in, so there's so much talent, so much opportunity, so many people looking for opportunity. There's such a variance of styles and genres. We're sensitive to the idea of being gatekeepers, but initially we have to be careful what we put out there because we want to appeal to a broad audience," said Harrison.

First, they are looking for bands and musicians that will have a broad draw, then they can bring in those lesser-known artists. They will look at some headliners, but the intention is to try to help others. They look for artists who have a social media presence. Primarily the founders will be the curators of the festival lineup, however they will also solicit the opinions of others.

"A major goal is to find ways to help artists find ways to navigate the new world. It's not like it used to be. You can't just go out and get a record deal and someone pays you to go out and develop and produce materials. It's really a handmade craft at this

point, and getting paid is really difficult. So we want to bring together those who have different and creative ideas on how to do that. We will do clinics and roundtables as part of the festival so that people can get together and talk about it," Harrison said.

Long & McQuade has offered to help put on some of the clinics and is sponsoring a stage at The Hall. The clinics and roundtable discussions will explore industry topics including how to write a grant proposal, how to make the art you want to make and get it into the public eye, how to make a living in a streaming world, and how to record music at home.

"We don't want it to be just another gig. We want it to have more value, to add more value to the scene, so that people want to be here and they want to learn and then next year they can come back and say this is what worked or what didn't," said Harrison.

One of the things that is important to the founders is to have a broad appeal to get people out to see the concerts. Genres they are looking for include indie pop, indie rock, alternative rock, folk, alternative folk, and singer-songwriter performers. The venues they are looking at right now include The Hall and The Bunker Performance Lounge and Café.

The biggest challenges for organizers so far are with venue size and application. There are some great venues in town, but they say not all of them work for the style of music or are the best fit for the type of atmosphere they are trying to create. The Hall and The Bunker fit perfectly within the size criteria and sensibilities they are trying to establish.

The Bunker has a reputation for supporting local, softer, more intimate music, while The Hall is just big enough to get enough people to have a great show, and it also has the live-music infrastructure needed.

Feb. 9 is the last day to submit video auditions, after which the curation process will begin. Organizers have plans for a podcast to introduce the selected musicians and give them a platform to explore their work, plans and desires.

"I want to do something for others. I get excited by their excitement. I'm a passionate supporter of other people's dreams. I do feel like there's something coming. I don't know what it is, but I sense that there's grass-roots efforts to make a change and this feels like an amazing time to do something like this. People seem to want it and I hope that it adds to the fabric of the scene in Stratford," said Harrison.

Revival House hosts Diamond Mine, the Blue Rodeo tribute band featuring Barry James Payne

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

Barry James Payne, the esteemed local singer-songwriter known for his work in Rant Maggie Rant and his solo work as Stringbone, is bringing his Blue Rodeo tribute band, Diamond Mine, to Revival House for its first concert of the year.

It has been close to a decade since the band's inception brought the music and style of the Canadian icons to stages around southwestern Ontario.

"When Revival House started, about a year after they had been in business, they needed a new roof. So they threw a fundraiser and I was wanting to get involved," Payne told the Times. "I was talking to Rob (Wigan) at the Revival House bar, and I guess I had mentioned to him before that I would like to be in a Blue Rodeo tribute band because I really like the music. When talking about the fundraiser he said, 'Why don't you put together your Blue Rodeo tribute band?'"

"Then I said, 'When is this?' and he said six weeks and I laughed thinking, 'You've got to be kidding me, you can't put together a tribute band in six weeks.' But I did and



PLAYING TRIBUTE

Barry James Payne leads Diamond Mine, the exceptional Blue Rodeo tribute band playing Revival House Feb 16.

(VICTOR DIHN PHOTO)

we had a blast."

It took a few tries to find the right person to sing for Jim Cuddy. Payne sings for Greg Keelor but, after some searching, he landed on Derrek Barnes who was the working at the Local Community Food Centre with Payne. After a few rehearsals together as a duo, the sound was really coming together as Barnes' voice had a remarkable resemblance to Cuddy's. They gathered up a bunch of musicians for the fundraiser and successfully performed as a band of seven on stage.

They continued on for a couple of years and played various area venues, then stopped for a year or two. They rounded people up again and played for a couple years, then the pandemic happened and there was nothing to do for three years. Ultimately, a new iteration was once again formed a year ago and is performing for audiences around the area.

Today's lineup is made up of Eric Lundgren on electric guitar, Paul Aikin also on electric guitar, Geoff Jarvis on bass, Craig Sharpe on drums, Adam Plante on keyboards, and vocals and guitar by Derrek Barnes and Barry James Payne.

"We try to recreate the sound as best as possible. There are some

iconic riffs that people want to hear; iconic solos that people want to hear. The arrangements are pretty much the same as the recordings. What we are trying to do when people come to see us is they are going to say, 'They sound just like Blue Rodeo,'" said Payne.

There are challenges to playing in a tribute band as there will always be people that don't like tributes. Luckily, there are more that do. Case in point: a Diamond Mine concert sold out the same night that Blue Rodeo was playing in the same town of Ailsa Craig.

"It's a great band to begin with, so it's always a lot of fun and rewarding to play with great players, and the music is fun to play because we all know the songs. It's great fun to play Greg Keelor for a night," confessed Payne.

They will continue their touring schedule and likely do 10-12 shows this year.

The Stratford show is Feb. 16 at 8 p.m. and tickets are \$25 plus tax. Tickets can be purchased online through the Revival House website under the events calendar, or at stringbone.ca/shows. Once tickets are purchased, ticketholders are encouraged to contact Revival House to make a reservation for preferred seating.

Disco-era Richard II featuring Stephen Jackman-Torkoff comes to Stratfest@Home

One of the hottest shows of 2023, the Stratford Festival's disco-era production of Richard II is now available for worldwide streaming on Stratfest@Home.

This revolutionary new version of Shakespeare's classic play, conceived and directed by Jillian Keiley and adapted by Brad Fraser, takes us into the glamorous and gritty world of Studio 54, at its thrilling heights in the late 1970s to early '80s – replete with glittering costumes, erotic bathhouse scenes and a dancing chorus of winged angels.

The new adaptation was commissioned by Artistic Director Antoni Cimolino in 2022 and developed at the Festival.

"It's such a privilege as artistic director," Cimolino says, "to witness the process of creativity as a director and their team interpret a great play. From my first conversation with Jillian to the closing performance by the ensemble an extraordinary journey had taken place. The production was insightful, dynamic and would have made Shakespeare delighted to see the resonance his play had provoked."

Richard II is a lesson in realpolitik, moral corruption and human fallibility. In this production, the life of Richard – whose belief in his God-given right to rule plunged his kingdom into civil war – is reimagined in the 20th century, during a period when



PROCESS OF CREATIVITY

Stephen Jackman-Torkoff (centre) as King Richard II with members of the company in Richard II. Stratford Festival 2023.

(DAVID HOU PHOTO)

culture clash gave way to dizzying freedom for the queer community.

The production features an electrifying performance by Stephen Jackman-Torkoff in the title role, supported by an extraordinary cast, including Emilio Vieira as the Duke of Aumerle, who in Fraser's adaptation has become Richard's lover. It features David Collins as John of Gaunt, Jordin Hall as Henry Bolingbroke, Sarah Orenstein as Helena Percy, Countess of Northumberland, and Michael Spencer-Davis as Edmund, Duke of York.

Rounding out the cast are Celia Aloma,

Malinda Carroll, Sarah Dodd, Thomas Duplessie, Justin Eddy, Mateo G. Torres, Charlie Gallant, Matthew Joseph, Matthew Kabwe, Wahsontio Kirby, Heather Kosik, Chris Mejaki, Marcus Nance, Debbie Patterson, Tyler Rive, Andrew Robinson, Steve Ross, Tyrone Savage, Olivia Sinclair-Brisbane, Jane Spidell, Danielle Verayo, John Wamsley, Alex Wierzbicki, Hannah Wigglesworth and Travae Williams.

The creative team includes Choreographer Cameron Carver, Set Designer Michael Gianfrancesco, Costume Designer

Bretta Gerecke, Lighting Designer Leigh Ann Vardy, Composer Rhapsodius and Sound Designer Don Ellis.

The adaptation uses Shakespeare's text but at times draws on sources beyond Richard II, including the Sonnets.

"Richard's flashes of inspiration, his boldness, confidence and ecstatic joy all felt God-sent," says Keiley. "What our Richard learns is that these feelings were not the light of God but rather a manifestation of Richard's absolute belief in himself, bolstered by others' absolute faith in God's presence in him. Richard's hell is the turning away of all of those who once saw God in him; the loneliness of one stripped of all power and the desolation of an un-crowned head."

Richard II is now available on Stratfest@Home, the Festival's subscription streaming service. Subscribe to Stratfest@Home for just \$7.99 per month or \$79.99 per year to gain access to Richard II and the best in Canadian digital theatrical productions, including more of the Stratford Festival's acclaimed Shakespeare films, selected productions from recent seasons, original digital content and selected events from the Festival's Meighen Forum, along with documentaries and original content from across the country.

Wellington County family offering local farmers a chance to make cheese out of excess milk

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

A Wellington County family is offering local dairy farmers a chance to use their extra milk to make cheese.

Farmers Cheese Inc. is a mobile cheese-making business operated by Maynard Martin from his home near Drayton. After seeing dairy farmers being forced to throw away any of the milk they produced beyond their allotted Dairy Farmers of Ontario quota, Martin launched the business that helps dairy farmers, including those in Perth and Oxford counties, turn that extra milk into cheese either for their own consumption or to give away to friends and neighbours, but not to sell.

They make cheddar cheese from their three mobile cheese-making trailers, each of which can be taken onsite to any local dairy farm to produce fresh cheese daily.

All dairy farmers in Ontario own a milk quota and sometimes, since it's hard to stem the flow of milk from a producing animal, overshooting that quota can be a regular occurrence. Rather than disposing of or dumping the milk, they call on Martin and his family to pro-



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

PROCESSING CHEESE

Maynard Martin of Farmers Cheese Inc. shows how he makes cheese from his secret recipe in his mobile cheese-making trailer on Elhaven Farms near Stratford in Perth County.

cess it into cheese.

Martin says he started the business more than a decade ago. His wife and son now work alongside him, both running their own mobile cheese-making trailers during the business'

busy times at the end of the month when dairy farmers are trying to figure how much milk

they are over quota.

"The areas of Waterloo, Wellington, Perth and Oxford are by far my busiest areas since this is the area where dairy animals are most prevalent," he said.

Recently, Farmers Cheese Inc. was at Elhaven Farms in South Easthope Township south of Stratford where the Meadows family milks roughly 100 Holstein dairy cows. They regularly call on Farmers Cheese Inc. to help turn 1,000 litres of extra milk produced that very morning into roughly 250 lbs of cheddar cheese.

Smaller dairy operations, including those that milk goats, sheep or water buffalo, usually only make batches from 500 litres. The higher the butterfat percentage in the milk, the more cheese is produced.

Martin says he learned the art of making quality cheese from a farmer from France who was producing cheese in Eastern Ontario. That farmer taught

Martin how to make high-quality cheddar and ultimately sold his old equipment and recipe to the Martin.

Farmers Cheese Inc. offers five flavours that can be added to the cheese-making process including onion and parsley, onion blend and paprika, garlic and sun-dried tomato, hot jalapeno pepper, and cumin.

New this year, the Martin family now offers vacuum packaging, allowing farmers to have their cheese cut and packaged in whatever sizes they would like. Usually the cheese should be aged for two months or more to obtain a great aged taste.

Martin says homemade cheese can sometimes have a bitter aftertaste; however, the cheddar Farmers Cheese Inc. produces is good tasting without that bitter aftertaste.

For more information on Farmers Cheese Inc. and the services offered, email maynardchristine@mwpol.ca.



(KRIS GERBER PHOTOS)

STRATFORD STAR STATUS

On Friday, downtown Stratford had some famous visitors. Hometown superstar Justin Bieber and wife Hailey were in town for a visit.

The couple were in the area for the 2024 NHL All Star celebrity hockey game.

Above: Justin Bieber is seen downtown near Features restaurant with security, friends and wife Hailey.

Below: Pictured from L to R - Chloe Everingham and Maddie Ballantyne pose with Hailey Bieber.



(SARAH CAIRNS PHOTO)

THUNDERSTRUCK

The city got to get their rock on at a sold out show with the tribute band of ACDC called Hells Bells on February 3 at The Hall. Hells Bells is the world's longest touring ACDC tribute band which they call Toronto home. The crowd got to listen to the big hits from the band such as Thunderstruck, Highway to Hell and many more.





SEEKING SUSTAINABILITY

Rethinking Mowing Farm Ditches

Welcome to Seeking Sustainability! This column is written by the Stratford District Secondary School Eco Club to share environmental news and initiatives with the public.

I have lived in North Oxford County for much of my life. I was raised on a dairy farm and went away to school only to return to teach and raise my two kids a short drive away from my home farm. Rolling hills, lush crops and fantastic neighbours surround the area in which I live. It is a pleasure to go for a hike and enjoy the beauty that surrounds my home.

Lately, I've noticed the expansion of mowing ditch lines that sometimes extend to the next county road. Mowing these areas has expanded from trimming the front of your property to making corn and soybean fields part of an extended lawn. One would think that high gas prices or the slope of the ditch would deter people from cutting such vast swaths along the roadside. It has not. In fact, the mowing of properties has even extended to cutting areas across from the farm which are not owned by the farmer. I am questioning the need for this practice in our communities and hoping to encourage folks to rethink the cutting of ditch lines along their farms.

In 1963, John Deere created the Model 110 riding lawnmower, setting off a flurry of changes in rural communities. This new technology allowed folks to make the en-

trance to their farms more attractive as people extended their lawns along their gravel driveways and out to the mailbox. For visitors, like milk truck drivers, this cleaner entrance also helped to define the roadway and kept plants and trees from obstructing vision as they entered the farm operation.

Some would argue that keeping a well-trimmed ditch also helps to drain water after a storm as these areas can become clogged with vegetation and become a cesspool for mosquitoes. And yes, there is a valid argument about controlling noxious weeds from spreading. I use my line trimmer a few times a year, cutting down thistles that grow in the ditch in front of my property, but these reasons do not fully explain the increase in cutting ditches over the past few years.

Much has been studied and documented about the importance of keeping these areas natural. Our pollinator friends are under stress and the loss of habitat which is found in so many of these ditches is part of the reason their numbers are decreasing. But the other fact is that ditches are also a host to some interesting wildflowers and grasses that are native to the area. I have transplanted many of these ditch plants into my gardens. They were free and I loved that they came from my community's landscape. This practice of using native plants from ditches can be seen in many garden centers in our community which are selling

them at sizable costs to customers. Check out your local ditch and you will find lots of free native plants to put into your gardens.

Purdue University in Indiana is a well-respected agricultural institution in the American mid-West. A couple of years back they posted a satirical piece on their forestry and natural resources website entitled, "Recreational Mowing Syndrome (RMS): What is it and how to treat it?". In this article, they posted the symptoms (queasy at the sight of an unkept ditch), and impulsive actions (jumping on your mower in search of un-mowed places) as reasons why you might be suffering from RMS. They ended the piece by providing some alternate ways to treat the condition, but I thought it was a clever way to call attention to our societal need to tidy up areas which should be left to their own devices.

When I moved back to this community, the previous owners had spent five hours a week cutting the grass around the property – ditches and lawns.

As I was on my own with two small children after my husband had died, there was no possibility of me keeping to this practice even if I had wanted to. Weeks went by and the front of the property became grassy and a bit overgrown. I planted some trees and shrubs in the front while maintaining a small lawn so my kids could play soccer and have a sandbox. At the most, I cut about 20 minutes of grass around my

property.

Towards the end of the summer of my first year, some of my neighbours became distressed by the unkemptness of my property and offered to come and cut the grass. Their gesture was made out of kindness but what they failed to realize was that I would have gladly taken an offer to look after the kids for a bit and give me some respite rather than caring about the aesthetics of my front lawn.

I offer this story not to ridicule the good folks who offered to help, but to pose this for consideration: When did manicured grass in ditches become so covetable?

I would like for us to rethink the need to mow these areas. Farms and farm fields are beautiful without the effect of mowed ditches. When I come home from the city, I am leaving the city to come to the country. I don't want to see manicured ditches that stretch for miles of county roads. I want to see nature, and I think we should consider that these areas are meant to be left alone and define our rural areas. But at least we can agree that we need and should protect ditches as they provide important habitats for pollinators that are so desperately needed in our rural areas.

Come back in April to see what's new with Seeking Sustainability!

Written by Christine Ritsma (Green Industries teacher, SDSS); edited by Elliana Morrison and Natalie Ditty

Web-crawling with Mr. Smart



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Freelance Columnist

It's a new year, it's a new day, and we have the opportunity to help the world.

In the Web-Crawling columns, we've looked below the soil, into the garden, and the worlds of climate science and advocacy. We

care about the planet, if for no other reason than because it's our life support system. We're unnerved by the changes we see: weird weather patterns, nature disappearing, urban sprawl, and climate migration.

We understand that greenhouse gas (GHG) affects nature but are unsure about the connection. We want to help, but in many cases, we aren't sure what will make a difference- or if one person can make a difference.

We aren't as isolated as we think, living in Southwestern Ontario. True, some countries around the globe have higher emissions than we do. But there is another truth: Canadians are responsible for more GHG emissions per person than all but one other country.

That means most of us have a way bigger carbon footprint than we should. Every carbon decision we make is part of the steady rise of carbon in the atmosphere, which means increased global warming and pollution- and everything that goes with it.

It's been a big part of our culture to think that because we're human, we're special. We think we stand apart from the rest, but this isn't the case. In our modern world, each person is responsible for approximately 12 tonnes of carbon annually. For example, individual transportation is worth two tonnes of carbon per year.

You may wonder, 'I do everything I can; will it make a difference?'

And the truth is – yes. Taking the train or bus, walking, or biking to work will help. Planes are huge GHG sources (around 90 kg CO₂ per passenger per hour), so consider cutting down on out-of-province travel.

Another issue is "stuff" that is in our homes. Emissions from "stuff" can reach 2 tonnes per year. We export carbon emissions when we import products from all over the globe.

If you require new items around your home, head for a thrift store to purchase items used (this can also save you money).

UPDATE:

1. Carbon parts per million (ppm) as of January 30, 2024: 421.1 (safe level 350 ppm, passed in 1990- climbing steady-

ly. In March of 2023, the level was 418.5)

2. Leafy greens can stay fresh for up to 10 days in a casserole dish with a tight-fitting lid. Check The Local Community Food Centre for fresh vegetables that are not sold in plastic bags, and remember to take your own cloth bag.

Sheila Clarke is a Stratford advocate for the environment, of our community and of our planet. She has a BSc Zoology from the University of Illinois, and a host of courses beyond in disciplines that inform ecology, the science of how everything living fits together in nature. She is a member of CFUW Stratford, Stratford Climate Momentum, and the Perth County Sustainability Hub.

From Setback to Comeback: Navigating the Art of Embracing Setbacks



IRENE ROTH

Times Freelance Columnist

Regardless in what walks of life you traverse, setbacks are inevitable. They usually arrive unexpectedly, disrupting our plans and sometimes shaking the very foundation of our aspirations. It's hard to know what to do when they hit because they usually catch us completely unawares.

However, we must remember that it's not the setback itself that defines us-- rather, it's how we respond to it that shapes our character and determines our future. Turning setbacks into comebacks is an art, one that involves embracing failure as a stepping stone to greater success.

Here are seven tips to help you navigate this transformative process and emerge stronger on the other side.

1. Cultivate a Growth Mindset

The most important tip in turning setbacks into comebacks is adopting a growth mindset. Coined by psychologist Carol Dweck, a growth mindset is the belief that intelligence and abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. Instead of viewing failure as a reflection of one's innate capabilities, see it as an opportunity to learn and improve. Recognize that setbacks are not permanent; they are just temporary roadblocks on the path to success.

2. Reframe Your Perspective

It's all about changing our narrative in relation to the setback. Instead of seeing a setback as a dead end, reframe it as a detour on the road to success. Understand that setbacks provide valuable lessons and insights that success might not offer. Ask yourself, "What can I learn from this experience?" Shifting your perspective in this way allows you to extract positive meaning from setbacks, turning it into

a stepping stone for future accomplishments.

3. Learn from the Experience

Every setback is an opportunity for self-reflection and personal growth. Take the time to analyze the factors that led to the setback. What went wrong? What could have been done differently? By examining the root causes of failure, you not only gain valuable insights into your own strengths and weaknesses, but also equip yourself with knowledge that can prevent similar setbacks in the future.

4. Develop Resilience

Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity, and it's a crucial trait in turning setbacks into comebacks. Understand that setbacks are a natural part of life, and resilience is what enables you to endure hardships and emerge stronger. Cultivate resilience by focusing on your ability to adapt, persevere, and maintain a positive outlook, even in the face of challenges. This mental toughness will serve as a foundation for future successes.

5. Set Realistic Goals

Sometimes setbacks occur because the goals we set are unre-

alistic or too ambitious. While it's essential to aim high, it's equally important to set achievable and realistic goals. Break down larger objectives into smaller, manageable steps. This not only makes your goals more attainable, but also allows you to celebrate incremental successes along the way. Adjusting your approach to goal-setting minimizes the risk of setbacks and positions you for a more sustainable comeback.

6. Seek Support and Guidance

In moments of failure, it's crucial to lean on your support network. Surround yourself with friends, family, mentors, or colleagues who can provide encouragement, guidance, and perspective. Sharing your experiences with others not only alleviates the emotional burden but also opens the door to valuable insights and advice. Sometimes, an external perspective can reveal new opportunities or alternative paths forward.

7. Channel Setbacks into Motivation

Use setbacks as fuel for motivation. Transform the disappointment and frustration into a driving force that propels you

forward. Let the desire to overcome challenges and prove resilience be the driving factor in your comeback journey. Many successful individuals have attributed their greatest achievements to the lessons learned from their most significant setbacks. By embracing setbacks as motivation to do better in the future, you can harness its transformative power to fuel your comeback.

Therefore, turning setbacks into comebacks is not a linear process; it's an ongoing journey of self-discovery and personal development. By cultivating a growth mindset, reframing your perspective, learning from experiences, developing resilience, setting realistic goals, seeking support, and channeling setbacks into motivation, you pave the way for a triumphant return from failure.

Embracing failure as a stepping stone is not a sign of weakness, but a testament to your strength and resilience. Remember, setbacks are not roadblocks; they are opportunities for comebacks. So, with the right attitude, we can embrace failure when it happens and try not to beat ourselves up because of it.

Welcoming Ukrainians: The Importance of Support

VJ KNUTSON

Times Freelance Columnist

Hosts are not trained for working with people experiencing trauma. They are kind, compassionate souls wanting to help. Exposure to the trauma of others and involvement in resolving their issues can lead to trauma transference and consequently compassion fatigue.

I met Viki Scott months into my grassroots volunteer work. She had left a message on Facebook which another volunteer answered. "You might want to speak with her," my friend said, sending me Viki's contact information. We spoke for hours that first day. Viki was and continues to be a godsend.

Viki's expertise lies in working with traumatized patients – accident victims, displaced people, those with brain injuries. At the onset of the war, she amassed a team of volunteers trained in addressing the needs of the frontline workers. Like me, she contacted the usual organizations involved with helping refugees and got no response.

"The government is leaving this one up to everyday citizens," I explained.

"Ukrainians are not coming under the umbrella of refugees. The usual organizations don't seem to know what to do."

Viki offered to get behind my team's efforts. She immediately held a seminar for our volunteers and hosts outlining the effects of trauma transference and compassion fatigue, and offering concrete ways to protect ourselves. She was right. We really didn't know what we were doing and the stress was taking its toll.

Following the seminar, we set up monthly support chats for hosts. Viki shows up every month with clear advice, and she follows up to ensure we receive the resources we need to deal with whatever issues arise.

It's been twenty-three months since the war broke out in Ukraine and many of us continue in our quest to help the displaced who have chosen to flee to Canada. The hope that accompanied the first arrivals is not as apparent in those choosing to come now. The trauma response is palpable. My heart, which you'd think would have grown accustomed, still aches. I am feeling the angst.

It's time for another seminar.

Viki Scott has agreed to offer another

Zoom session on Sunday, Feb. 4 from 2-4 p.m. Entitled "Managing Compassion Fatigue," this interactive seminar is free to hosts and volunteers working with Ukrainians. To register, email me at the address below and I will send you a self-assessment to complete before the seminar, and a link for the day. Viki invites all hosts (current or past) to attend, stressing that some of us may still need to process.

Finding the right supports has been so important in allowing Ric and I to share our home and help Ukrainians settle. When we were first investigating the possibility of becoming hosts, I reached out to many organizations offering to volunteer. One such organization was another grassroots effort that I found on Facebook: WR Grassroots Response to the Ukrainian Crisis.

I attended a meeting and encountered a well-organized and impressive group of volunteers, whose mission at the time was focused on the tri-city area. They offered a font of knowledge and I found connections through this group that I continue to nurture.

The Waterloo Region group has gone

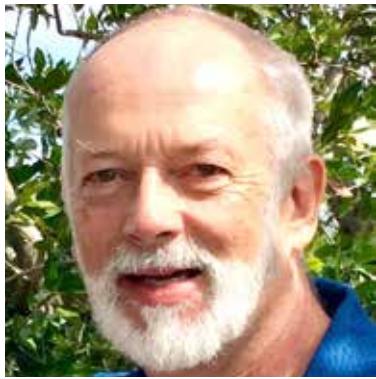
above and beyond in helping Ukrainians fleeing war. Partnering with service organizations and churches, they have created transition houses that can house up to 22 people. These homes, considered hubs, are then matched with volunteers to help with everything from adjusting to Canadian life to finding employment. WR response is now expanding their reach with homes in Palmerston, Listowel, Guelph and so on. They have recently acquired a 15-bed building in Hespeler.

Stephanie Goertz, who heads up the housing project, is a dynamo. She reached out to me lately to ask if Stratford would be interested in establishing their own transition house. I said I would share the information. You can find Stephanie on Facebook or email me and I'll connect you with her. WR Grassroots Response team also has a newsletter that reports on what is happening, where, and the number and nature of Ukrainian families looking for help.

Reach me at english.knutson@gmail.com. If you have a story to share, a topic you'd like me to cover, or a question, I'd love to hear from you.

WWW.STRATFORDTIMES.COM

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Getting up close and intrigued by rescued sea turtles



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Contributor



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

Visitors get up close and personal – and a trifle damp – during a meet and greet with a sea turtle at The Turtle Hospital.

The story of Ida the sea turtle was one of those end-of-newscast happy items a week or so ago.

Ida, a 200-pound adult loggerhead sea turtle, was rescued after she was found entangled in a lobster trap buoy line. There's a neat Canadian connection; the folks who found her and notified the authorities were a Canadian couple from New Brunswick. Ida Short and her husband were boating in the Atlantic Ocean off Marathon in the Florida Keys.

That was fortunate because Marathon is home to The Turtle Hospital, an amazing place that draws scads of tourists. But while the staff at The Turtle Hospital are very hospitable to human guests, their real passion is for the turtles.

I was interested in the story for two reasons. First, because we had the opportunity to visit The Turtle Hospital a few months ago, getting an up-close-and-personal education about the important work that institution does. And second, I've been intrigued by sea turtles ever since I was nipped on the lip by one of these enormous beasts while

swimming in the ocean off Barbados.

But that's another story. (The turtle wasn't aiming for me, by the way, but for some chum in the water the crew of the catamaran had tossed in to attract the turtles)

When the Shorts discovered Ida, they notified the coast guard and The Turtle Hospital, which carried out the rescue. That was just one of up to 200 sea-turtle rescues done by the team at the hospital every year. The staff is ready to launch a rescue at any time – there is a small fleet of ambulances parked outside the hospital's front door.

During our visit, we learned that the facility was founded by a conservationist named Richie Moretti in 1986. The staff estimates that more than 2,000 turtles have been saved since then. The original building – still part of the hospital – was a motel repurposed by Moretti to care for wounded or sick

sea turtles. Today, you can visit the operating room where necessary surgeries are done, and, out back, an array of tanks where turtles are kept, many permanently, because they have suffered injuries that prevent their return to the ocean.

Typically, the turtles' injuries are caused by boat propellers that have damaged their shells. The swimming-pool-sized tanks are home to a number of turtles that have flotation devices attached to their shells to allow them function – and not drown – in their watery homes.

Ida, the recently rescued turtle, was one of the lucky ones. Within a few days of her rescue she had received wound care, broad-spectrum antibiotics, fluids, vitamins and an anti-inflammatory, and was released back into the ocean to the delight of a small crowd of well-wishers.

There are dozens of turtles who will never leave the hospital facili-

ty, but that too is a good-news story under the circumstances. Good news for the turtles because they are incapable of surviving in the wild. Good news for visitors like me because I get the pleasure of seeing these amazing creatures and the privilege of learning all about them.

There are seven species of sea turtles in the world. Five of those species can be found in the Florida Keys. In the wild, the animals' lifespan is between 50 and 100 years.

The bad news – you knew there would be bad news, didn't you? – is that all seven species are rated as threatened or endangered.

Most common in the waters around Marathon are Green turtles, a threatened species that can weigh up to 500 lbs, and Loggerhead turtles like Ida, which top out at around 300 lbs.

The three local, endangered spe-

cies include the smaller (150 lb) Hawksbill, the giant Leatherback that can weigh up to 2,000 lbs, and the Kemp's Ridley turtle, which our guide at the Turtle Hospital says is the most seriously endangered of the five species.

It's not surprising that almost all the threats to sea turtles start with humans. Fishing line entanglement, rope-and-net entanglement, boat hits, oil spills, ingesting plastic bags and cigarette filters, and development near the beaches where turtles have traditionally nested are all threatening these turtles' existence.

So given our human culpability in the threats facing these amazing animals, it is encouraging to be able to visit a place that is trying to undo some of that damage.

During our visit, we got personally involved, feeding a number of them, including one blind turtle that had nonetheless precisely figured out the feeding process.

There is always a wide variety of things to keep visitors busy and entertained in the Florida Keys, but I would strongly recommend that you put a visit to The Turtle Hospital near the top of your list.

And by the way: unless you are dumb enough to swim in the midst of a floating stew of chum, there is no chance you are going to be bitten by a sea turtle. Not at The Turtle Hospital, anyway.

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.

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Get your bake on: Humane Society's Bake for the Animals fundraiser returns

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

The sweetest fundraiser for the Humane Society of Kitchener-Waterloo and Stratford-Perth (HSKWSP) is back for bakers and baked-good enthusiasts alike.

The local humane society announced the return of its Bake for the Animals campaign on Feb. 1. The fundraiser encourages residents to either bake treats of their choice to bring to bake sales at schools, workplaces, community groups and other gatherings, or to buy baked goods that support the cause. The bake

sales can either be offline or online, and organizers can set up a web page to accept online donations.

"Everybody loves a baked good, everybody loves a sweet treat so we always encourage people to treat themselves and then, as a result, it benefits our animals," said Leah Caravan, coordinator of events and campaigns at HSKWSP.

There are also some bakeries taking part in the HSKWSP's Pastry Path that are raising funds either through donating a portion of their proceeds or selling a special treat for the humane society. Stratford's The Barkery, a bakery selling

pet treats, and The Bunker Performance Lounge and Café are part of the Pastry Path, as well as Kitchener-Waterloo's Bellissima Cake and Pastries and Maverick's Donut Shop.

Bake for the Animals, which will run until Feb. 29, is one way to support the organization, and anyone craving a sweet treat can participate.

The HSKWSP offers several ways to fundraise throughout the year including the Paws for Laughs comedy night, kids' birthday parties and the wedding-celebration program. The organization acknowledges that not everyone has space

to either adopt or foster a pet, and everyone has their preferred way of giving back.

"Our goal in fundraising is always to appeal not just to animal owners, but to anyone who cares about animals," Caravan said. "We want them to be able to attend an event or participate in a campaign that, at the end of the day, is just enjoyable and fun to participate in and it's just an added benefit that money goes back to our animals."

More information about Bake for the Animals can be found via kwsphumane.ca/events/bake-for-the-animals.

Community of Christ Church raises money for Family Services Perth-Huron

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

A weekly church breakfast in Stratford

recently raised hundreds of dollars in support of an important, local social-service agency.

On the last Sunday of every month,

members of Community of Christ Church on Forman Avenue have been inviting their parishioners and anyone in the area to a free nutritious, full breakfast cooked up by church volunteers. At the same time, they accept donations to various local organizations that help those who need.

On Jan. 28, friends of the church and church members collected \$1,500 to support Family Services Perth-Huron, a charity that provides a wide range of family counselling and support services in Perth, Huron, Bruce and Grey counties.

The money will be put to good use by the charity located on Waterloo Street South in Stratford, which will soon renovate a multipurpose youth therapy room serving children with mental-health issues.

Family services executive director Fanis Juma said she is thankful for the donation from the church and its members. She said with spring renovations beginning soon, the money will be put to good use in renovating their multipurpose room.



The Salvation Army Stratford St. Marys Regional Community Ministries would like to express our gratitude to the community for its support in the 2023 Christmas Campaign.

We brought in **\$229,137.12** to help our local community!



BREAKFAST FUNDRAISER

(GARY WEST PHOTO)

Flanked by the Family Services Perth-Huron banner in the entrance to Community of Christ Church are, from left, April Lehman, Angie Marshall, Julie Brookshaw, executive director Fanis Juma, Angie Huehnergard, and church pastor Nancy Brookshaw.

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Quit picking on me

Why did the tree see the dentist?
To get a root canal

What did the beach say when the tide came in?
Long time no sea

What has ears but can't hear?"
Corn

What has arms but can't hug?"
A chair

What has a head and a foot but no body?"
A bed

When is a car not a car?"
When it turns into a driveway

What is the best year for a kangaroo?
A leap year

Why did the police arrest the bird?
Because he was a robin

Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 31



Pet of the Month



MARNIE

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VALENTINE'S DAY

L	K	T	W	G	L	G	D	S	D	B	E	Z	E	R	H	W	R	Y	V
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- Valentine
- Flowers
- Gifts
- Party
- Caring
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- Heart
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- Love
- Sweetheart
- Red
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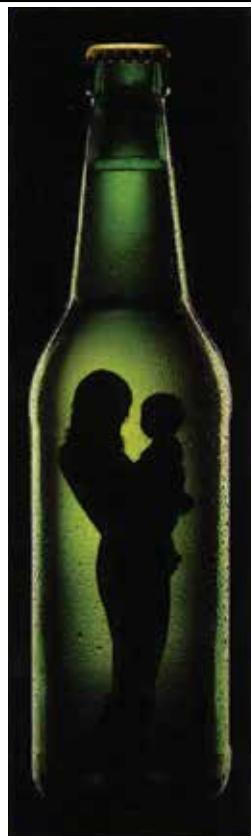
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PROFESSIONAL WINDOW CLEANING

JARED GOWAN | HEATHER GOWAN
519-854-5254
jaredsqueeks@live.ca / www.squeeksclean.com

SUDOKU

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

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Tokyo, Japan
2. 8 mins 20 secs
3. Turtles
4. 3 times
5. Palestine
6. 2006
7. Zero
8. Feb. 2
9. 10,000 hours
10. Ultraviolet

SECTIONAL \$2,469 TAX IN



SAVE 30%

Made in Canada

SOFA \$799 TAX IN



SAVE 45%

Made in Canada

SOFA \$969 TAX IN CHAIR \$739 TAX IN



SAVE 40%

Made in Canada

Lifestyle bases



STARTING AT **\$1,179 TAX IN** QUEEN

SAVE 33%

Model Refresh: Leisure Sleep, Royal Sleep, Interlude



SAVE 55%

QUEEN MATTRESS STARTING AT **\$299 TAX IN**



LOVE YOUR HOME SALE (AND YOUR POCKETBOOK)

Accent Chairs



SAVE UP TO 40%



WALL HUGGER RECLINER **\$799 TAX IN**

2023 MODEL CLEARANCE

STOREWIDE WHILE QUANTITIES LAST

\$1,599 TAX IN **COMPLETE SUITE SPECIAL BUY**



Queen bed, chest, dresser, mirror, 2 nightstands

DARCY BEDROOM SUITE



SAVE 25%

QUEEN BED **\$949 TAX IN** KING BED **\$1,139 TAX IN**

ALL PIECES

UP TO 36 MONTHS FINANCING AVAILABLE OAC. SEE STORE FOR DETAILS

Home furniture



MAIN STORE:
519-273-9330
2954 Hwy 7&8 E



OUTLET:
519-273-7453
617 Douro Street



Outlet Hours:
Thurs. to Fri. 10 to 6
Sat. 10 to 5
Sun. 12 to 4

Main Store Hours:
Mon. to Thurs. 10 to 6
Fri. 10 to 8 | Sat. 10 to 5
Sun. 12 to 4

www.stratfordhomefurniture.ca
www.homefurniture.ca