

STRATFORD TIMES

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Draft budget projects 5.9 per-cent tax rate increase for 2025

CONNOR LUCZKA
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The bottom line for the recently released draft 2025 budget is a 5.9 per-cent increase to the tax rate over last year.

According to the City of Stratford's property tax calculator, a relatively new tool available for residents on the city's website, with that rate, a home assessed at \$350,000 would owe \$5,665.27 next year. That is \$316 more than this year's total.

Though impressed with the work that staff have done, Mayor Martin Ritsma said he would like the tax rate lowered to five per cent or lower during deliberations.

"I'm being a realist," Ritsma told the Times. "Some people will say two per cent but I know that two per cent will cause us to fall behind as opposed to stay current and stay on top of issues in our community. And once again, I'm one of 11. ... That's not meant to push or cause our council to rethink what their plans are, but certainly that's my wish as the mayor of the city."

The full budget was released on Oct. 28 ahead of the deliberations Stratford city council will do in late November and early December. It is composed of three items: the operating budget, capital plan and expansion initiatives.

The operating budget composes each city department's day-to-day budget to keep the status quo service level. The capital plan consists of projects related to tangible capital assets. The expansion initiatives are initiatives staff have identified as avenues to expand services.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



LOCKED OUT
Picketers Ursula Goddard, Glen Marshall, and Kim Bailey display signs outside of the Canada Post office at 75 Waterloo St. S in Stratford on Nov. 19. The Canadian Union for Postal Workers (CUPW) initiated a national strike on Nov. 15, which is still ongoing as of press time. (CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

Bad news for Stratford police's George Street HQ

CONNOR LUCZKA
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

As Insp. Jason Clarke told the Stratford Police Services board at its Nov. 20 meeting, every day more things go wrong with the service's current HQ.

"It's nothing great," Clarke said. "It's one thing after another."

The installation of a long-awaited accessibility ramp and a barrier-free entrance was finally approved in September; however, Clarke said that, as of the meeting, the

workers installing it have not been back to finish the work in a while.

On top of that, the accessible elevator off of St. Patrick Street is down. Technicians had been working on the elevator a few days prior to the meeting and informed them a new motor is needed.

Maintenance work is ongoing, but the projects are compounding.

In November of last year, the board started the process of sourcing a new station or top-to-bottom renovation

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



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Bad news for Stratford police's George Street HQ

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

work which might see expansion in the small, vacant lot between the station and Chocolate Barr's Candies.

A new police station with more and better-utilized space has long been discussed due to the evolving needs of the local service and the area's growth. Chief Greg Skinner had earlier stated he could find minutes dated 1991 indicating the service needed more space.

Since this most recent push for more space, Skinner had met with a consultant the city is working with to explore whether a new building or a renovation to the current station would be most effective.

At the time, Skinner said that the available space downtown – which is preferable for police – that would be suitable as a station was negligible and the current station could support renovation, though likely wouldn't be able to add space on top of the building.

The recent opening of 798 Erie St., a satellite police-services hub on the edge of town, is a "band-aid" fix, Skinner said.

Additionally, during 2024 budget deliberations last year, Stratford city council approved funds for the aforementioned accessibility ramp to finally bring the historic building in compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, which mandates that all public buildings be made barrier-free and accessible by 2025.

Council, with the understanding that a major renovation may be in the near future, lowered the funds for a full concrete ramp and instead provided enough funds for a metal, removable ramp, along with an accessible door.

As Clarke said earlier, that project has stalled.

"I understand the problem; it's been a problem for 12 years since I joined the board," police services board chair Tim Doherty said about the ongoing issues with the space. "No personal correction or offence intended ... but until the politicians give us the money."

"The issue is that (if) the existing location is failing us, then that becomes a different story," Skinner said. "And if that 28,000 square feet that is currently under roof at 17 George and 100 St. Patrick, if that's no longer available to us and we're doing a demolition and full rebuild, that's an expensive endeavour. And I would suggest that if that is even close to where we're at, then we may be better off to be looking at empty, vacant land and a new building."

Skinner estimated that a \$25-30 million price tag is a conservative estimate for what the 30,000 square-foot building project would cost – though he noted there are options available to finance a big-ticket police item.

Mayor Martin Ritsma, who sits on the board, inquired about a recent update that had Skinner meet with the city's top administrator, CAO Joan Thomson, to prepare a report for council's consideration on the police station. Skinner confirmed that he and Thomson have met, but they have not gotten to the stage where a report or mock-up of a new or renovated station can be presented.

Skinner also revealed there have been over 20 complaints made to the Ontario Ministry of Labour related to the space. Although a recent investigation from the ministry and an effort from police leadership resulted in the complaints being rectified, Skinner said the complaints are indicative of service members' frustration with the space as well.

Draft budget projects 5.9 per-cent tax rate increase for 2025

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

According to the treasurer's summary included in the budget, the 2025 draft budget is focused on maintaining current service levels and incorporating goals important for the community.

Operating expenses are expected to increase by \$14 million compared to last year, sitting at \$33.5 million, and non-taxation revenues are expected to rise by \$8 million to \$20 million.

Capital projects are expected to cost \$37 million next year. The most expensive projects included are mainly road-reconstruction projects like the Avondale and Avon reconstruction priced at \$5.6 million, though the capital plan lists federal and provincial funding for said project. For that specific reconstruction, \$3 million is on tap from upper levels of government.

Expansion requests are not included in the 5.9 per-cent levy increase and, if approved by council, will raise the rates. If all requests are approved, they will add just over \$3.4 million or 2.29 per cent to the total levy.

Most expansion requests come in the form of staffing, of which 14.5 full-time equivalent positions are being suggested across multiple departments.

This year is also the first time that corporate services has structured a multi-year operating budget with the intent to focus on this year but also look at the period between 2026 and 2028.

"Council will only be approving the 2025 budget, but this forward-looking approach for operations as well as capital requirements through the 10-year forecast should assist in efforts to create cost predictability," the treasurer's summary reads. "It is the first year, so it will require a lot of additional work through the upcoming year to identify those higher-risk and more volatile revenues and expenses and set parameters around discretionary impacts."

Last year's tax rate began at 8.27 per cent

and fluctuated during deliberations, when council expanded and cut different line items, until it was approved at 7.51 per cent. This year is noticeably less, but as noted in the treasurer's summary of the draft, 2024 was a year of "higher-than-historic" inflation and general uncertainty regarding finances.

Interested residents can use the property tax calculator to see a dollar-breakdown of the budget – where each dollar of their taxes goes to.

For instance, for the average home assessed at \$350,000, \$602.39 goes towards the engineering, roads, fleet, waste and storm divisions' operations, \$625.41 goes towards the Stratford Fire Department operations, and \$848.80 goes to the Stratford Police Service's operations, the three largest pieces of the city's operating budget.

Notably, the assessed value that is key to what residents pay each year comes from the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) rather than the market value of a home.

The last time a general provincewide assessment occurred was in 2016, before housing prices exploded across much of the country. Last summer, the Ontario government amended the Assessment Act to extend the postponement of the reassessment through to the end of the 2021-2024 assessment cycle. A home's assessed value is included on tax bills.

The first full day of budget deliberations occurred on Nov. 28, after press time. Two more all-day meetings are scheduled for Dec. 3 and Dec. 9. A full report on the meetings will be included in the Dec. 13 edition of the Stratford Times.

The full, 620-page draft budget can be found at www.stratford.ca/en/inside-city-hall/resources/CORPORATE-SERVICES/FINANCE/Budget/2025-Budget/MASTER-digital-2025-draft-budget-package.pdf.



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Stratford Honda is driving the community to shop local

JULIA PAUL

Times Correspondent

From Nov. 15 to Dec. 13, everyone who comes to Stratford Honda and donates will get a chance at winning a \$100 gift card for local businesses, including Stratford Honda.

The Drive our Community to Shop Local campaign is in its fifth year and has a repeat goal of raising over \$10,000 for Stratford House of Blessing.

“The owner’s passion was for the House of Blessing,” said Janet Keen, marketing specialist with Stratford Honda. “So, we decided on the food drive. Then I came up with ‘drive’ because of the auto industry.”

Every person who makes a monetary or food donation will be entered into the prize draw for one of 10 \$100 gift cards and offered a spin at the wheel to win bonus entries.

“The goal is to fill one of our Hondas,” said Keen. “It started way back, five years ago, and it’s just grown; it’s been amazing.”

Donations can be made by bringing in cash, cheque or non-perishable food

items directly to Stratford Honda. Cash donations can also be made via the Stratford Honda website, directly to House of Blessing or through their website, and by following the QR code included with Stratford Honda’s communications. Those who donate will receive a tax receipt for all monetary donations.

“We’re going to try and fundraise as best we can by reaching out to the community,” said Keen. “I know there’s a lot of donation asking, but we’ve been actually so successful with our customers, even the community. I’ve had, just by running in (the Stratford Times), people come in that were from New Hamburg saying, ‘Yeah, I saw your ad, so I came in to donate.’”

Each donation makes a difference. House of Blessing is in need of crackers, cookies, side dishes (Sidekicks, Hamburg Helper), soup, canned ham, chicken and salmon, canned vegetables, peanut butter, kids school snacks, rice and cash donations.

If possible, grab a non-perishable and drop by Stratford Honda to do some good this holiday season and spin the wheel!



SPIN THE WHEEL

(JULIA PAUL PHOTO)

Stratford Honda is driving the community to donate to Stratford House of Blessing. Pictured, from left, are Harper Jones, Janet Keen, Deanna Oliphant, Ciara Hanley, Sally Bryant and Stefanie Walpole.



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Editorial

Anyone else on Bluesky yet?

STEWART GRANT

Publisher

The plethora of social media apps out there today provide such a wide variety of ways for people to interact with their close community or with the broader world.

What are your top social media apps? I tried this question with my family members recently and we all gave quite different answers. For years, my favourite has been Reddit with side dishes of Facebook and Twitter, while my wife is a regular on Instagram and Facebook (and Pinterest when needed) while the kids prefer Snapchat and TikTok. It's also a dynamic question that changes over time.

I recently heard about X (Twitter) users migrating to a new app called Bluesky, so I decided to take a look over there. In short, I like it because it reminds me of the way that Twitter used to be. The feed is based on my interests and the comments to posts are actually relevant to the topic – something that has been lacking at X in recent times.

Bluesky Social originated as a side project within Twitter in 2019 but became independent when Elon Musk bought Twitter in October 2022. It launched as an invite-only social app in February 2023, and only opened to the public in February 2024. Since February, it has grown from three million users to 20 million users. Currently, it's number one in the Apple App Store, ahead of ChatGPT and Threads, and is adding seven

new users a second.

For me, Bluesky is feeling like a fresh start. Because it's not full of ads (yet), I'm easily able to follow major news headlines, sports updates and people whose opinions I'm interested in. Not everyone is over there yet, but I see new additions each day. For example, on the sports side of things, I'm following The Athletic, the NHL (mirroring the NHL's Twitter account), Sean McIndoe (Down Goes Brown), Pierre LeBrun and Steve Dangle. This allows me to quickly see what's going on in sports without having to sift through all the other stuff that's in my X feed.

If you are disenchanted with X these days, or are simply looking for another social media option, you may want to give Bluesky a try.

Letter to the Editor

Trump election a scary outcome

Thank you very much for your recent editorials about the U.S. Election and its outcome (Nov. 15) and comparing its coverage with regards to the sources of information (Sept. 20). It is reassuring to read these in the Stratford Times and know that others are similarly alarmed about the situation in the States, where a self-aggrandizing, power-hungry buffoon has controlled the media to regain the platform of his life.

The results of the election were so unexpected. The reasons not to vote for Trump were so many: his history, his record in office and in promulgating division, his vicious phobias, hatreds, and need for adulation, all constantly on view.

But I believe you are right that the lack of reliable sources of information, and reliance on their opposite, Fox News, played a major role in the Democrat's defeat. When people use only one source of news, and it is biased, they are easily misled.

It seems that the American education system is also to blame in this. In the Canadian education system, information literacy and critical thinking have been prioritized (and

I hope still are) with the importance of considering balanced news sources stressed. Apparently this emphasis is absent in the U.S. educational counterpart.

Fox News, a right-wing organ, has not had its one-sided broadcasts curtailed by the government; indeed, some attribute its broadcasting freedom to Republicans of the past. Your editorials convincingly showed how its editing out of opposing viewpoints in debates and election presentations served a political purpose and restricted freedom of thought, which depends on correct information and reflection.

Democracy depends on a free and unbiased press and news sources, and now seems threatened in the U.S. We are very lucky in Stratford to have locally controlled newspapers, especially The Stratford Times, and the national CBC, which strive to provide opposing viewpoints in political and other matters.

What will happen under Trump? I live with a deep and unfortunately well-founded sense of horror and dread about what he could do, and pray he will not destroy all that he could.

Sincerely,
Julia Schneider, Stratford

Comparing apples to Orangeville

In a recent CBC article written about how Orangeville is offering free transit to city residents, it stated how much their transit system costs their taxpayers. I thought it would be interesting to compare their transit system to Stratford's. Then I became curious as to how they compared in several other municipal departments.

First, let's compare the cities themselves. Orangeville has a population of 31,000 and covers an area of 15.16 square kilometres for a population density of 1,989 people per square kilometre. Stratford has a population of 34,000 in an area of 30.02 square kilometres for a density of 1,107 people per square kilometre. So, as far as population goes, they are roughly the same size, but urban sprawl has definitely had a bigger impact on Stratford.

All figures are based on 2024 budgets.

Public Transit

Orangeville Transit has a budget of \$1.2 million and is operated for the city by First Student Canada, the school bus company, though the city doesn't use school buses. Looking at the city's transit map, it doesn't look as if its system's coverage is as great as Stratford's, but the city's website talks about expanding on-demand service to "100 per cent of the city." They also use smaller buses and once again have free transit. Stratford Transit's budget was \$3.7 million. Stratford's transit budget has definitely been negatively impacted by urban sprawl.

Fire Department

Orangeville has a hybrid fire department made up of 20

full-time firefighters and 32 volunteer firefighters. It has one fire station. Its budget is \$5.8 million. Stratford's fire department has, as far as I could find out, about 40 full-time firefighters and two stations. Once again, you've got to love urban sprawl. Its budget is \$9.8 million.

Police Department

In 2020, Orangeville decided to disband its city-run police force and hire the OPP to patrol the city. Its police budget is \$5.2 million. Stratford's police budget is \$13.8 million.

Collingwood, with a population of 30,000, has recently been upset that the amount the OPP is charging them is going up to \$7.1 million in 2025. Stratford police are asking for a budget of \$16 million in 2025.

If St. Marys got Stratford Police Services to patrol their town for less than the OPP charged them and Stratford taxpayers are paying double what the OPP would charge them, are Stratford taxpayers in fact subsidizing St. Marys' policing?

Totals

Orangeville's three departments - \$12.2 million.

Stratford's three departments - \$27.3 million.

One thing this comparison shows is that two communities with relatively the same population can arrive at drastically different budget outcomes based on the choices they make. There is more than one way to do things and perhaps it's time Stratford took a serious look at how it's running things. Stratford is a medium-sized town with a medium-sized tax base, not a major city. Sincerely,

John Lewis, Stratford

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SECOND LAST ISSUE OF 2024!

The last issue of 2024 will be December 13. Due to the staff holidays, the Stratford Times will not be publishing a December 25 paper. The first paper of 2025 will come our January 10, 2025

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Rae acclaimed as Progressive Conservative candidate for next provincial election



STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

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

“It is an honour to be acclaimed as the PC candidate for the next provincial election,” said Rae in a press release. “I remain focused on ensuring Perth-Wellington receives its fair share of provincial funding and that we continue to build a better, stronger and safer rural Ontario.”

“Matthew Rae has been instrumental in delivering results that matter to the people of Perth-Wellington,” said party leader and Ontario Premier Doug Ford in the release. “Whether it’s helping to grow Ontario’s electric-vehicle industry, investing in vi-

tal infrastructure, or expanding access to health care, Matthew’s leadership has had a real impact on his community. He’s committed to making life easier and more affordable for families and businesses, and I’m proud to have him on our team as we continue to build a stronger Ontario.”

Since 2022, the Conservative government has invested over \$161 million in health care, schools and infrastructure across Perth-Wellington.

“We have achieved a lot. However, there is more work to be done to ensure we are building the infrastructure we need, investing in our rural health-care system and ensuring that the next generation is set up for success,” Rae told a crowd of supporters at his acclamation in Monkton.

LOOKING FOR AN AGENT

With over 50 full-length murder mystery manuscripts as part of the Joel Franklin Mystery series, I am looking for an agent to promote the potential of this series. Currently 13 of these books are published and available on Amazon. The series, set in Ontario, Canada, spans a period from 1928 to 1947, has a recurring cast of characters, a continuous backstory and captures that historical era and the events of the time. It could be best described as a police procedural with a cozy feel and paranormal elements. The main protagonist, Joel, who climbs the ranks from amateur sleuth to police constable to detective, has the ability to communicate with the dead. The books are suitable for readers of all ages. It is my view that these stories will make a good foundation for a television series. If interested, contact me at ronfinch@gmail.com

(MATTHEW RAE PHOTO)

ACCLAIMED

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Annual To Stratford With Love holiday dinner a community effort for 36 years

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

With as many as 250 volunteers who sign up to help with picking up food and supplies, baking pies, setup, serving dinners, cleanup and takedown at the end of the night, Simple Dreams Ministries' annual To Stratford With Love free holiday banquet has been a community effort unlike any other for the past 36 years.

This year's event, which is intended to spread warmth and cheer among Stratford and area residents of all kinds, will be at the Stratford Rotary Complex beginning at 5:30 p.m. Dec. 14. At no cost to those who attend, the banquet will feed as many as 800 pre-registered diners a roast-beef dinner with all the fixings and a slice of one of dozens of homemade pies donated by community members. The Stratford Concert Band and Upside of Maybe are also on hand year after year to provide the live musical entertainment.

To pull off an event this large, the volunteer support is crucial. Luckily, volunteering either before, after or during the banquet has become an annual holiday tradition for many local families.

"It really has become a tradition in the community," said Simple Dreams co-founder Richard Kneider who, along with wife Ruth Kneider and their three daughters, has been orchestrating the To Stratford With Love Banquet since its inception. "... I got a phone call several days ago, and it was from a gentleman who was a grandfather. He and his granddaughter went a couple of years ago to the dinner, and the granddaughter at that time was eight years old.

"She was really impressed and moved

by what was going on, so she went and told her grandfather that she wanted to volunteer at the dinner and wanted to know what would be involved for them to volunteer. ... It's just different stories like that one that really make this event possible."

This year, Ruth Kneider spoke with a few of the people who volunteered at the dinner for the first time last year. She said they each told her how it felt good to be part of a team that can make that difference for so many people during the holiday season. Another volunteer told Ruth Kneider she volunteered with her neighbours to help set up and tear down the event, something they all enjoyed immensely and look forward to continuing in years to come.

Local pastor and Stratford Police Service chaplain Charlie Swartwood has been volunteering at To Stratford With Love alongside the Kneiders for its entire 36-year history, and he echoed many of the same sentiments.

"To me, To Stratford With Love means community and connection. Community means anyone can come and be included. Connection means a time for Stratford to come together and meaningfully connect with each other and God, and focus on the Christ in Christmas," Swartwood shared.

While volunteer spots for To Stratford With Love tend to fill fast, especially for those hoping to volunteer as part of the dinner service, the Kneiders are still in need of people to bake and donate homemade pies, and to help with cleaning up and tearing down afterwards.

To volunteer for To Stratford With Love or to register for the dinner, visit tostratfordwithlove.ca.



SPREAD WARMTH AND CHEER

(SIMPLE DREAMS MINISTRIES PHOTO)

To the To Stratford With Love free Christmas banquet returns to the Stratford Rotary Complex for its 36th year Dec. 14.

Stratford city council briefs: Council appoints new integrity commissioner

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Despite a handful of holdouts, at the Nov. 25 Stratford city council meeting, council appointed David Boghasian, managing partner of Boghasian + Allen LLP, as the City of Stratford's new integrity commissioner.

Coun. Cody Sebben had serious concerns regarding Boghasian due to recent media reports from the City of Greater Sudbury, where he was recently dismissed as its integrity commissioner.

At its Nov. 12 meeting, Greater Sudbury city council voted to terminate Boghasian after he presented a report on a number of alleged breaches of the code of conduct by Coun. Bill Leduc, Coun. Mike Parent and Coun. Natalie Labbé, with the recommendation to dock Labbé's pay for five days, which council did not move forward with.

Notably, Labbé called Boghasian's report unfair and distracting, a sentiment a few other councillors repeated at that meeting.

"Reading between the lines, it seems like a number of councillors (are) trying to keep investigations from happening," Stratford Coun. Larry McCabe said about their decision to appoint Boghasian, saying there is value in Boghasian's service.

Sebben disagreed.

"The criticism of this individual from the Sudbury council is that his commentary was not based solely on factual information," he said, pointing out that Stratford staff's decision to recommend appointing Boghasian probably occurred before Sudbury voted to fire him.

In the staff report, Boghasian is listed as the current integrity commissioner of Sudbury.

"We should be at least sending it back to staff to assess all four (applicants) again on updated metrics," Sebben said.

Sebben, Coun. Lesley Biehn and Coun. Bonnie Henderson were opposed to Boghasian's appointment.

According to the staff report provided to council, Boghasian has over 30 years of experience in providing legal services to municipalities, including integrity commissioner services.

Integrity commissioners ensure members of city council and relative boards



ACCESSIBILITY AWARD WINNER

Roger Koert, chair of the accessibility advisory committee, pictured with Meineka Kulasinghe, equity, diversity and inclusion manager at the Stratford Festival. The Festival is the 2025 Accessibility Award winner, due in part to its focus on accessibility beyond the built environment.

(CONNOR LUCZKA PHOTO)

adhere to the code of conduct and Municipal Conflict of Interest Act (MCIA). They provide advice, education and conduct investigations.

Stratford Festival is the first two-time recipient of AAC's annual Accessibility Award

The 2025 Accessibility Award goes to its first second-timer: The Stratford Festival.

Roger Koert and Andy Mark of the accessibility advisory committee (AAC) presented the award on behalf of the committee to Meineka Kulasinghe, equity, diversity and inclusion manager at the Stratford Festival.

Over the years, the festival has focused on accessibility beyond the built environment, Koert shared with council in his presentation. It offers accessible performances, including open-captioned, audio-described, American Sign Language (ASL) interpreted and relaxed performances where lighting, sound and audience codes of conduct are modified so that people can feel in place as they watch a show.

"If all the world's a stage, the festival is creating the reality that, in fact, that stage

is accessible," Koert said.

This is the 14th year an award has been given out by the committee. Each year, it reviews nominations of citizens and organizations that have gone to great lengths to make their corner of Stratford barrier-free and accessible. The festival previously won the annual award in 2012.

Over \$800,000 in revenue generated through Municipal Accommodations Tax (MAT) this year

A substantial amount of money has been generated this year through the Municipal Accommodations Tax (MAT), but not all of that money will be going to the city.

The MAT was implemented in the summer of 2023 as a four per-cent tax on overnight stays in local short-term accommodations. Local accommodators, whether they are licenced through the city or not, must remit MAT to the city on a regular basis based on what type of accommodation they are.

As of Nov. 7, for the 10 months ending on Oct. 31, \$449,453 was the revenue from the monthly reported accommodators (hotels, motels and inns) and \$368,755 was the revenue from the quarterly reported accom-

modators (short-term rentals and bed and breakfasts) – though MAT revenues from the latter are to be split with Destination Stratford.

The funds are to be held in reserve, which points to a bigger question, as Coun. Jo-Dee Burbach indicated.

"We still have the policy for how council will spend the MAT," she said. "We haven't really had that discussion yet, and it's my belief that we should probably put something in place sooner or later."

The MAT is being put in reserves as revenue and will not affect next year's budget, as the draft 2025 budget stands now. Last year during deliberations, council voted to use the revenues from MAT collected in its first few months to go towards bringing the tax levy down, though didn't make any further commitment.

"It's certainly something we can talk about through budget deliberations," Karmen Krueger, treasurer and director of corporate services, said in regards to Burbach's question.

Though the report did not cover licensing, Sebben inquired about that piece, which has historically had issues with enforcement since the licensing bylaw's inception.

Adam Betteridge, director of building and planning services, said non-compliant accommodators generally cooperate with the city well. The city has taken the approach of working with accommodators to get them licensed and he noted that many either comply and get up to code or cease operations.

Mayor asks council, gallery to keep Jim Aitcheson in thoughts

Ahead of the playing of "O' Canada" and the moment of silent reflection, Mayor Martin Ritsma asked council and the attending gallery to keep in their thoughts the late Jim Aitcheson, former mayor of Perth South and a past warden of Perth County.

Aitcheson passed away on Nov. 21 from cancer. He had been mayor since 2022, however his public service began in 2006 as a councillor – though his service went beyond politics. He served as a loyal Downie Optimist since 1981 and was also an active member of the Quadro Communications board of directors from 1995 to 2004.

City investigating early withdrawals of tax payments

STRATFORD TIMES STAFF

stratfordtimes@gmail.com

After reports of early withdrawals of pre-authorized tax payments on the morning of Nov. 26, the City of Stratford announced it is looking into the matter.

"We are investigating this matter but want to apologize to anyone affected by the error," a post on the city's Facebook page from Karmen Kreuger, treasurer and director of corporate services, reads. "The city will work with affected property owners but asks for your patience as we work through this."

The monthly payment for property taxes was scheduled for Dec. 1, notably ahead of the last day and last Friday of

the month, when many pay periods end.

Any resident who experiences a returned property tax payment through their financial institution is being asked to contact the city at 519-271-0250 ext. 5212 to make alternate arrangements. Additionally, property owners may be able to contact their financial institutions to reverse the transaction in the short term, or to discuss alternatives.

There will not be another withdrawal on Dec. 1, and property tax accounts will not be charged interest or fees through Dec. 31.

"We realize this will cause inconvenience for some residents and will try to assist you through this time," the post further reads. "We appreciate your patience as staff work to advise you."

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Friends and political colleagues remember Perth South Mayor Jim Aitcheson

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

Fond memories and words of remembrance about his no-nonsense, practical approach to municipal politics are pouring in following the recent passing of Perth South Mayor and former Perth County warden Jim Aitcheson.

According to his obituary posted to the W.G. Young Funeral Home website, Aitcheson passed away on Nov. 21 after a brief battle with cancer. He had been on leave from his duties as Perth South mayor and Perth County councillor since early October.

"I had the pleasure of working with Jim as a fellow member of county council and had the fortunate opportunity to work alongside him as deputy warden during his time as warden of Perth County," said Perth County Warden Rhonda Ehgoetz in a press release from the county announcing Aitcheson's passing. "It has been an honour to work alongside him and his voice and presence will be greatly missed around the council table."

Other members of county council who served alongside Aitcheson said they will miss his presence and leadership around the county council table, and reminisced about his passion for local politics and his ability to tell a story that illustrated any point he was trying to make.

"He was protective of our rural farmlands," said West Perth Mayor and county councillor Walter McKenzie, who worked closely with Aitcheson when McKenzie was warden and Aitcheson was deputy warden. "He was a straight shooter and you never had to guess what he was thinking. He would get a twinkle in his eye and a smile would appear on his face, and you knew that there was going to be one of Jim's one-liner statements about to be heard."

North Perth Mayor Todd Kasenberg, who also worked closely with Aitcheson as a fellow member of county council, described Aitcheson as "passionately fair, stalwart in what was important and possessing a rare mix of humour, wisdom and kindness."

"As warden, he oversaw with grace and skill some rather difficult times during the pandemic. It may be in that service that



(PERTH COUNTY PHOTO)

Perth South Mayor and former Perth County warden Jim Aitcheson died Nov. 21 after a brief battle with cancer.

we owe him our biggest gratitude. He was part curmudgeon and part storyteller, and I enjoyed every minute of our public and behind-the-scenes work together. A call with Jim was always a treat because he called it straight and was very reassuring. You knew where he stood and why he stood there."

Aitcheson was first elected as councillor for the Downie Ward in the Township of Perth South in 2006. He served as Downie Ward councillor until 2022 when he was elected mayor of the Township of Perth South.

Aitcheson spent a total of 13 years serving on Perth County council. He was elected warden of Perth County for three years spanning from 2019-2022. In his time as warden, he led the county through the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. Aitcheson was a tireless advocate for rural life and served on many committees of council.

"Jim was never afraid to speak his mind," Perth South acting Mayor Sue Orr said. "He was very good at asking the hard questions and, at times, had to make hard decisions. His decision making was based on facts and good, long-term business sense not only for Perth South but also for Perth County. Jim would always pick up the phone to talk and to listen. He was an advocate for responsible farmhouse severances, mental-health issues, Woodland Towers, Spruce Lodge Long Term Care and, most important-

ly, he genuinely cared about them all. He also cared about the farming community, best land-use practices, the Optimist Club and, most importantly, his family. He was fiercely proud of his wife, Lori, and of all his children, especially their work ethics."

Aitcheson also worked closely with his counterparts in neighbouring Stratford and St. Marys on issues of importance like paramedic services, long-term care, public-health services and regional transit.

"I appreciated his style of leadership, which was very direct, however (he was) always able to see the total picture," said Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma, who attended high school with Aitcheson at what was then Stratford Northwestern Secondary School (now Stratford District Secondary School). "His love of agriculture and his passion for farming and the preservation of our valuable farmland certainly resonated with me. ... I know that Mayor Aitcheson's work will continue to bear fruits well into the future."

"I was fortunate to work closely with Jim during the pandemic during his time as warden," said St. Marys Mayor Al Strathdee. "He offered a very cooperative and strong public front during a difficult time. I was grateful for his leadership in strong support of public-health measures. Jim was also a very dedicated member of the St. Marys and Area Mobility Service. His advocacy for seniors and those in need of medical transportation will be missed. ... Never one to shy away from a good laugh, it was always fun to be around Jim. Even in very stressful and serious situations, he had an uncanny ability to lighten the mood."

Flags at municipal buildings across Stratford, St. Marys, Perth County and Perth South were lowered last week in recognition of Aitcheson's passing.

Perth-Wellington's provincial and federal representatives spoke fondly of Aitcheson's political ability and his dedication to serving the people of his township and his county.

"Jim was a dedicated leader both in the community and on council," Perth-Wellington MP John Nater said. "During his three terms as warden of Perth County, Jim navigated some of the most turbulent times in the county's history and earned the

respect and friendship of all who worked with him. Over 13 years in municipal government and many decades of volunteer service, he demonstrated strong leadership through his hard work, wise words and sound judgement. No matter the challenge, he was ready to help. I will miss his no-nonsense advice and his deep commitment to those he served."

"During my time working with Jim, I knew him to be a devoted public servant always having the interests of the community at heart," Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae said. "From rural broadband to community infrastructure investments, it was always a pleasure working with Jim to improve our rural communities. Jim was also a proud husband, father and grandfather. I always appreciated his frankness and I know that he will be missed by myself and many others in Perth County and across Ontario."

Outside of politics, Aitcheson was a loyal Downie Optimist from the day he first joined in November 1981. Aitcheson was active as the club treasurer from 1995 until 2010. In 2014, he received Life Member status for his distinguished service as treasurer.

According to his obituary, Aitcheson's favourite pastime was telling anyone and everyone about his children and grandchildren. He wanted everyone to know how proud he was about their various accomplishments and how well everyone was doing.

Aitcheson's family thanks the dedicated staff and volunteers at the Rotary Hospice Stratford-Perth and the Perth County Paramedic Service, as well as all of his friends and family who visited to keep him up to date on everything that was happening in the community.

A celebration of life will be held for Aitcheson at Downie Optimist Community Centre (3185 Perth Road 122, St. Pauls) on Wednesday, Dec. 4 from 1-4 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, please consider donating to the Rotary Hospice Stratford-Perth, St. Marys and Area Mobility Service or the Downie Optimist Club through W. G. Young Funeral Home (430 Huron St., Stratford) or online at www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com.

New Starter Plus arts-and-culture program now accepting applications for 2025 training sessions

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

The Stratford Perth Centre for Business is inviting businesses with a focus in arts and culture to apply for support through the Starter Plus program

Applications are being accepted until Dec. 2. The accepted businesses will participate in the five-session training program running from January to February. Upon completion of the program, business owners will receive a grant of up to \$5,000 to invest in their business.

"We are looking for businesses with an

arts-and-culture focus with a certain viability and that they have a vision for what they would do with their grant," said Holly Mortimer, business advisor at Stratford Perth Centre for Business and mentor in the Starter Plus program.

"The first and last session are in-person and very much focussed on learning to network and talk about your businesses. I find that creative entrepreneurs really struggle with that. We have had a lot of success in the past where they talk to each other. We also take them out in the community and invite partners to speak with them; this is all done in a very strategic and focused way."

Throughout the course of the program, the education will be centered on traditional business plan building that will focus on cash flow, marketing and operational strategies. Mortimer says the course will provide learners the confidence to speak about their business to strangers and people they know.

The program will be facilitated by Morgan Kneider-Patterson, a previous Starter Plus program graduate who operates an education business.

"I discovered that leading this program over the past decade, we can teach them all the very traditional basic education pieces to building a business plan," said Mortimer.

"When you get a bunch of like-minded entrepreneurs in a room who typically feel isolated, lonely and overwhelmed, they discover that they have similar interests and realize that they as a group can grow together, and we found they form exciting partnerships together to help each other succeed."

Upon graduating from the program and receiving the grant, successful graduates will continue to receive the support and mentorship they require from the Stratford Perth Centre for Business.

To apply for the program and for more information, visit www.stratfordperthbusiness.ca.

More regulations may be coming to school drop zones after ongoing issues with traffic and safety concerns

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

After years of school drop zones being increasingly more chaotic, Stratford may be instituting more regulations – or more enforcement.

After a Nov. 20 presentation by Const. Darren Fischer, community resource and media relations officer with the Stratford Police Service (SPS), and Amy Pascual, deputy clerk with the City of Stratford, the Stratford Police Service Board agreed there needs to be changes to the areas around certain schools in relation to drop-offs and pick-ups.

The engineering department and clerk's office will be investigating, in partnership with police, and Mayor Martin Ritsma suggested they specifically look into signage and bring a report forward for council's consideration.

There are four areas of concern the presentation brought to the board's attention: the streets surrounding Bedford Public School, Avon Public School, Shakespeare Public School and the

Huntingdon Avenue and Hibernia Street intersection near St. Aloysius Catholic Elementary School.

Most of that is due to chaotic behaviour – vehicles parked in no-park zones, vehicles double-parked, children being dropped off and walking across roads without a caregiver, for example – but there has also been a concerning rise of aggression during these pivotal times.

“For the last two years, I would say there's been an increase of aggression from caregivers dropping students off at schools,” Fischer said. “On a number of occasions, they've had aggressive confrontations with the parking-enforcement officers, leading them to feel unsafe in attending those areas. ... Last year, one of our parking-enforcement officers, it was a minor assault, but he was assaulted by a parent who was upset in an area as he was trying to provide some education.

“It becomes difficult to attend those areas on a regular basis; there's calls for service and the lack of safety for parking-enforcement officers.”

Fischer said there is also an issue with vehicles legally parked or idling on streets that allow double parking, but it is still making areas unsafe and difficult for emergency vehicles to get through. He suggested a few changes to the on-street parking around certain schools may be sufficient in alleviating pressures faced during drop-off and pick-up times.

Additionally, drivers of illegally parked vehicles are often able to drive off before a ticket can be issued.

According to Pascual, there are four parking officers contracted to work for the city. They currently work on a complaint basis but have a rotating schedule for patrolling hotspot schools. This year, there have been over 140 complaints.

Complaints come from neighbours and school staff, she said, either in regard to the safety of children running or people parked in front of driveways, blocking access.

Fischer also highlighted the importance of reporting people that are blowing through school-bus stop signs, blocking traffic and creeping into cross-

walks. The service is anecdotally aware of traffic infractions being prevalent, but actual reporting is scarce, which makes it difficult for policy makers and leadership to properly address known issues.

In their presentation, Pascual also presented what other municipalities do for parking enforcement, such as the City of Kitchener's use of an AI license plate recognition system wherein fleet vehicles drive down streets, take photos of vehicles that are in contravention and then send a ticket by mail.

The current strategy is education, but that may change. Safety is the number-one priority, the board and staff agreed, and it will take a collective change of behaviour to promote safety.

“It's one of those things. How do you motivate people to change their beliefs?” Ritsma asked, before board member Dave Gaffney succinctly answered.

“A ticket.”

No motion was made by the board, but as Ritsma said, it will be addressed by staff and changes may be brought forward at a later date.

Stratfords of the World committee appointment sparks debate at council

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Before the lengthy Nov. 25 Stratford city council meeting drew to a close, one last debate was had regarding a previous decision made by council.

At the Nov. 12 Stratford city council meeting, Joan Ayton and Susan Kummer were not granted an exemption to exceed their term limits as members of the Stratfords of the World advisory committee when a motion from Coun. Geza Wordofa failed to get a seconder and died on the floor.

Ayton and Kummer had been serving on the committee since 2015 and 2008 respectively, and were part of the committee's work in hosting the annual international meeting between different Stratfords across the globe when representatives flocked to the Festival City just last year.

Coun. Bonnie Henderson said she was surprised the two weren't granted an exception, given their service.

According to the policy on advisory committees, no person may serve on an advisory committee for more than three consecutive, two-year terms. There were six applicants in the most recent window to fill six seats on the committee, including Ayton and Kummer.

Many councillors like Larry McCabe and Taylor Briscoe supported general term limits and maintained the previous decision not to grant an exemption, arguing fresh eyes in a committee can help and, given that it is right after Stratford was host-city for the Stratfords of the World, this was perhaps a good time to open up the positions.

“Without some compelling reason to extend terms, I don't know the point of terms if we're just not going to bother and follow them,” Coun. Mark Hunter agreed.

Others, like Coun. Brad Beatty, were frank about their opinion on what the committee does now that it won't be hosting a reunion, as it did last year.

“It's not like the committee, in my opinion, does a whole lot,” Beatty said. “I'm not even sure why it's even a committee of council.”

“I think we should not be laying the importance of individuals' time on different committees against others,” Coun. Cody Sebben replied. “I think each of our committees have volunteers who are very valuable to the city and their time is equally valuable. Then to say otherwise, I think it's clearly just not very respectful.”

Sebben further stated that many of these advisory committees struggle to get applicants. He worries that by not admitting two dedicated volunteers, they are sending a bad message to the wider community.

Henderson, who put forward the motion, said she may have felt similarly to some

of the councillors on having new people on committees, but since there were six positions available and only six people applied, she believes council should allow them to rejoin the committee.

“I know we increased that committee because of the Stratfords of the World coming here. So, whether we're considering reducing that committee, I think we need to do that, plan that, for maybe next year.”

In a recorded vote, council was split 6-5 with Sebben, Biehn, Wordofa, Henderson and Burbach supporting the failed exemption. A subsequent motion to repost the application passed unanimously, with the intention being that Ayton and Kummer could reapply.

After a question from Hunter, city clerk Tatiana Dafoe said term limits for advisory committee members are currently under review and could be changed by way of council decision.

Taxi-fare increases approved, but so far no companies have instituted a change

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Though the governing board has allowed local taxi companies to raise their prices, no company has raised them yet.

At the Oct. 16 Stratford Police Services board meeting, the board voted to permit companies to raise their regular fare prices from \$14 to \$16 and their senior fare prices from \$13 to \$15 at their discretion, changing course from the last meeting where a possible

fare increase was tabled.

Gail Cossey of Aunt Gail's Taxi and Brad Rickert of Radio Cab petitioned the board to increase fares this summer. They both argued the cost to do business was too high due to rising costs in every sector – from gas prices, insurance costs, repairs, licencing, cleaning and more. Tony Rebelo of Stratford City Cabs was the lone holdout, arguing the financial strain on their customers would be too great.

In a recent post on its Facebook page announcing it would not be raising its fare prices,

Stratford City Cabs reiterated that argument.

“Our goal is to keep your transportation costs as affordable as possible for as long as possible,” the post reads. “We are grateful for all of you, our customers, for your loyalty.”

Likewise, Aunt Gail's Taxis and Radio Cab are also not raising their prices. Neither Cossey nor Rickert provided comment to The Stratford Times before publication.

At the Sept. 18 meeting, the board also voted to have a more fulsome investigation of

the regulatory system considering a growing understanding that it is not working for local companies – a decision supported by both Rebelo and Rickert at that meeting. No report or findings have yet been presented to the board or council.

Currently, taxi companies must charge a flat fee for every ride, whether it's a ride down the block or across the city. The fares for all companies are regulated by the police services board, which also approves taxi licences.

Stratford's living wage increases to \$23.05

JULIA PAUL

Times Correspondent

The United Way Perth-Huron has been a longstanding partner with the Ontario Living Wage Network because they believe that solving poverty comes down to making sure people have enough money.

While the current minimum wage is \$17.20, the living wage in the Grey-Bruce-Perth-Huron-Simcoe region has increased to \$23.05.

"Solving poverty comes down to making sure people have enough money, income and housing," said Ryan Erb, executive director of the United Way.

"What we need to understand is that the minimum wage isn't enough. A person simply can't make ends meet when they're paid minimum wage. But the difference between the minimum

wage and the living wage is \$6 an hour. That is a lot of money."

The living wage increase is primarily driven by housing and food costs. The reason it didn't increase more is due to federal policies on the \$10-a-day daycare. Though the \$10-a-day daycare policy is not yet available for everyone, it has had some influence on the updated living wage.

The living wage is calculated by considering housing, transportation, child care, food and other expenses such as internet access, a modest annual vacation and clothing. These expenses are weighed against federal subsidies, government taxes, transfers and benefits to calculate the final living-wage amount.

LIVING WAGE

Pictured from left to right are Bill Boon, Nathalia Salas and Sophie Vanstone from Aisin Canada Inc. in Stratford. Aisin is a Certified Living Wage Employer.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 11

(UNITED WAY PERTH-HURON PHOTO)



NOTICE OF COMPLETION

Preliminary Design and Class Environmental Assessment Study Highway 7/8 and Road 111 Intersection Improvements (GWP 3083-21-00)

THE PROJECT

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation (MTO) has retained Egis (formerly McIntosh Perry) to undertake the Preliminary Design and Class Environmental Assessment (Class EA) Study for the Highway 7/8 and Road 111 intersection improvements, located in the Township of Perth East, at the boundary of Perth East and the City of Stratford, Perth County.

THE PROCESS

This study is following the process for a Group 'B' project in accordance with the *Class Environmental Assessment for Provincial Transportation Facilities and Municipal Expressways, 2024 (Class EA)*. In accordance with the requirements of the MTO's Class EA, a *Transportation Environmental Study Report (TESR)* is available for public comment.

COMMENTS

The TESR will be available for a 30-day comment period between November 20, 2024 and January 3, 2025 at the project website: www.Highway7and8perthcountyroad.com. Interested persons may provide written comments by January 3, 2025 through the project website or to the following project team members:

Steven Pilgrim, P.Eng.

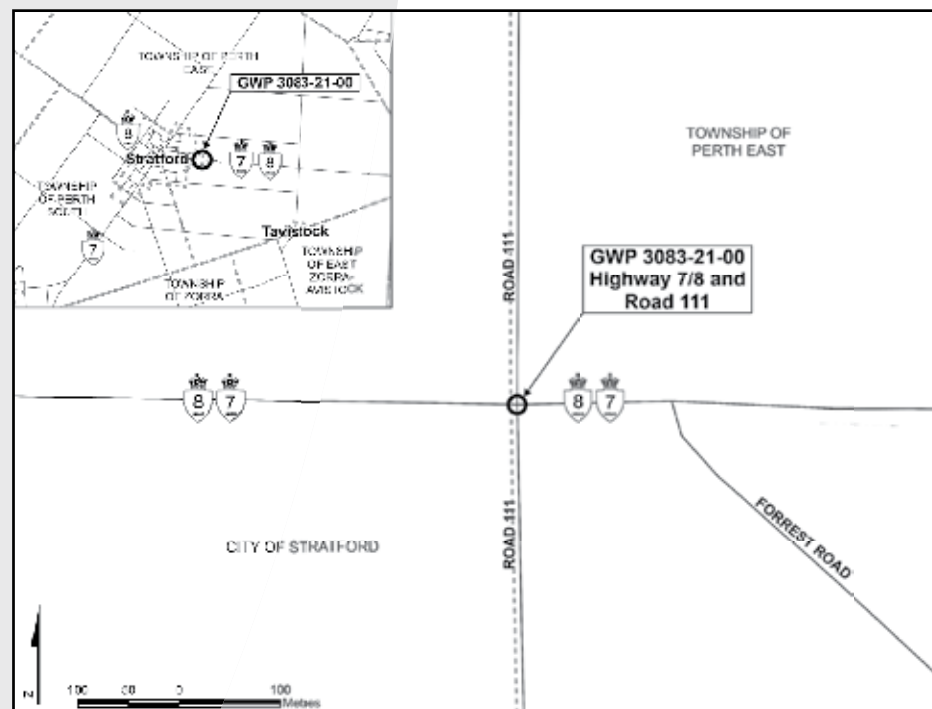
Project Manager
Egis
516 O'Connor Drive, Unit 200
Kingston, ON K7P 1N3
tel: 343-344-2629
e-mail: Highway7and8@mcintoshperry.com

Wendy Xu, P.Eng.

MTO Project Manager
Ministry of Transportation | West Region
3rd Flr, 659 Exeter Road,
London, ON N6E 1L3
tel: 548-588-1937
e-mail: Wendy.Xu@ontario.ca

In addition, a request may be made to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks for an order requiring a higher level of study (i.e., requiring a comprehensive EA approval before being able to proceed), or that conditions be imposed (e.g., require further studies), only on the grounds that the requested order may prevent, mitigate, or remedy adverse impacts on constitutionally protected Aboriginal and treaty rights. Requests on other grounds will not be considered. Requests should include the requester contact information and full name.

Requests should specify what kind of order is being requested (request for conditions or a request for a comprehensive EA), how an order may prevent, mitigate, or remedy those potential adverse impacts, and any information in support of the statements in the request. This will ensure that the ministry is able to efficiently begin reviewing the request.



The request should be sent in writing or by email to the Ministry of Transportation listed above and to:

Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
777 Bay Street, 5th Floor
Toronto ON M7A 2J3
minister.mecp@ontario.ca

and

Director, Environmental Assessment Branch
Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
135 St. Clair Ave. W, 1st Floor
Toronto ON, M4V 1P5
EABDirector@ontario.ca

Information collected will be collected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. With the exception of personal information, all comments become part of the public record. If you have any accessibility requirements in order to participate in this project, please contact one of the Project Team members listed above.

THIS NOTICE ISSUED NOVEMBER 29, 2024

Lights of Love honours the memories of lost loved ones

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

Rotary Hospice Stratford-Perth will close out the year with its annual Lights of Love Holiday Campaign to commemorate loved ones who have passed by uniting the community in lighting candles and celebrating their lives.

An outdoor lighting ceremony will take place Nov. 29 at 7 p.m. Dedication messages will be displayed on a slideshow accompanied by formal remarks presented by speakers, and hot beverages and refreshments will be available.

“For The Lights of Love Holiday Campaign, we decided to kick it off with the lighting ceremony,” said Lucie Stuart, director of fund development and stewardship at Rotary Hospice. “This event gives people a chance to remember their loved ones. It’s not so much about the size of the donation that you make, it’s the dedication message.”

Melissa McManus, social worker at Rotary Hospice and speaker at the lighting ceremony, said the role is a heavy one to fill but she’s honoured to help struggling families who are experienc-



LIGHTS OF LOVE
Pictured from left are Rotary Hospice Stratford Perth social worker Melissa McManus and Lucie Stuart, director of fund development and stewardship.

ing loss. “You never stop grieving somebody; they are always there and always a part of you. You learn over time to adapt to this new normal without them being physically here,” said McManus. “They

can always be present in your life in different ways and that’s something we will talk about at the lighting ceremony and different ways on how you can still include your loved one in your traditions.”

The Ontario Ministry of Health provides funding for only 50 per cent of Rotary Hospice’s yearly operating costs. The rest of the money is raised through donations from the community.

“You can give \$20 and send us your dedication message, and you will be put in a slideshow,” said Stuart. That \$20 is wonderful to give and we are grateful for it. It does not have to be a certain amount; donate as much as you would like too.”

Rotary Hospice aims to raise a \$1 million every year to reach the annual budget requirements to successfully run the facility with the highest level of care. Stuart said the holiday campaign is a vital component to reaching that goal. Previous campaign numbers show Lights for Love can raise \$40,000 for the hospice.

The event will also feature live music and a guest speaker who will inform the community on their experience with Rotary Hospice.

Stratford’s living wage increases to \$23.05

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

Two of the most prominent social determinants of health are income and housing. United Way works on policy issues to make sure people have the income they need to make a living.

Employers will wonder how they can pay a living wage when they are struggling, but the United Way and Ontario Living Wage Network are here to support businesses that want to provide a living wage.

“Local employers continue to tell us that actually paying a living wage has increased productivity, reduced absenteeism and turnover,” said Erb. “In the end, a number of our certified employers tell us that it actually improves their bottom line. So, there is a business case for a living wage beside the

humanity case.”

The Ontario Living Wage Network will work with any employer to put them on a path towards paying a living wage to their employees. Once a business is paying a living wage, they can apply and will be certified within two weeks.

“Some small businesses are struggling,” said Erb. “We understand that here at the United Way. But we also understand that we have to, as a society, find a way to help everyone get to an income level they can manage, whether it is because of federal policy or because of increased wages – it can happen from either direction and both is probably the answer.”

To become a certified living wage employer, visit ontariolivingwage.ca and click certify.

Contribute to your local community newspaper!
Send articles, sports or event recaps, and photos to stratfordtimes@gmail.com

Optimist Club of Downie Inc.

OPTI-CASH CALENDAR DRAW

- Nov. 17 Shelly Bennett, Embro \$50.00
- Nov. 18 Mark Monteith, St. Marys \$50.00
- Nov. 19 Ed Lalfrey, Stratford \$50.00
- Nov. 20 Myra Farquhar, Stratford \$50.00
- Nov. 21 Mary Nash, St. Pauls \$50.00
- Nov. 22 Dan & Nora Fulcher, British Columbia \$50.00
- Nov. 23 Kevin Ruston, Stratford \$200.00
- Nov. 24 Dianne Herold, Shakespeare .. \$50.00
- Nov. 25 Amy Cobberley & Derek Ruthig, St. Marys \$50.00
- Nov. 26 Emma Coughlin, North Bay ... \$50.00
- Nov. 27 Erica Riddell, Granton \$50.00
- Nov. 28 Bill & Betty van Heeswyk, St. Marys \$50.00
- Nov. 29 Gail Adams, St. Marys \$50.00
- Nov. 30 Ron & Mary Kay Whaling, St. Pauls \$200.00

ALL OF THE CALENDARS HAVE BEEN SOLD

 **Franklin E. Hinz**

196 Ontario Street, Stratford
519-273-1633



BURGER & FRY NIGHT

The Stratford Legion served burgers, fries and all the fixings to 160 hungry diners during its Burger & Fry Night Nov. 21. Pictured, grill master Ernie Jordan and Bev Hunter prepare burgers for the hungry crowd.

(STRATFORD LEGION PHOTO)

Van Loon elected for fifth consecutive term as HPCDSB board-of-trustees chair

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

With a vote of confidence from her fellow board members and the strength of her faith behind her, Mary Helen Van Loon has agreed to serve her fifth consecutive term as chair of the Huron Perth Catholic District School Board's (HPCDSB) board of trustees.

At the annual meeting of the board Nov. 18, Van Loon was re-acclaimed to the position of chair after no other board members put their names forward for the leadership position. Van Loon was first elected as the trustee for St. Marys, Perth South and West Perth in 2017 after the previous trustee vacated the position mid-term. In 2019, she served as vice chair of the board of trustees before stepping into the chair position the following year.

"I enjoy the job; I enjoy being chair and I think since we were in the process of hiring a new director (of education), I felt it might be a good consistency to stay with the same chair (to help her) learn the process of the job rather than having everybody new," Van Loon said, referring to the school board's recent announcement that superintendent of education Karen Tigani will be promoted to director of education once current director Chris Roehrig retires in February 2025.

"I was like, 'Someone else is welcome to take (the chair position),' and they were like, 'No, no, it's good. We're happy to keep you there.' So that's great. I'm very grateful for their confidence in me leading the board."

Van Loon she is excited to work with Tigani – someone she and the entire board have been working with for years – through

her transition into the director-of-education role. While she's sad to see Roehrig leave the position, she's encouraged by the opportunity to work with a new director who is already so familiar with the people, schools and policies of HPCDSB.

"(Chris) led us through some very tough times, not only in education but in the world, but Karen is one of ours'. We're very confident in having her at the helm and I think it's going to be a very good transition. They worked very well together, they worked together on our strategic plan and I'm excited about that coming up in the new year, so I think it's in good hands," Van Loon said.

The new chair of the trustee board said she is also excited to continue working with the board's new vice chair, Tina Doherty. Doherty was first elected to the board in 2014 as trustee for the Stratford

area with oversight of Jeanne Sauvé, St. Aloysius, St. Joseph's and St. Ambrose catholic elementary schools, as well as St. Michael Catholic Secondary School. Like Van Loon, she has previous experience serving in this role on the board.

"Two years ago, she was vice chair, and Tina and I are both on the St. Andre Bessette (trust fund) committee, which is a fundraiser for students in need," Van Loon said. "So, we've worked well together and it should be a good year. ... There's lots of experience on the board and thank goodness. That's really helpful when you're trying to make decisions and figuring out how you've done things in the past."

Looking ahead to the new year, Van Loon, Doherty and their colleagues on the board of trustees share Pope Francis' message of joy and hope overcoming all obstacles, whatever they may be.

Recent changes to Ontario Works concerning locally

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The difference between four and 16 days may not seem like a lot, but Coun. Taylor Briscoe noted in some instances, it could have very serious consequences.

"That's a life-or-death timeline for the women that I work with," Briscoe said. "It means returning to an abuser. It means returning to homelessness. It means a loss of contact with our front line. ... This is something that we really have to address in our community and advocate upwards for that," she said.

Briscoe made that comment at the Nov. 25 Stratford social services subcommittee meeting after Kim McElroy, director of social services, presented a report on recent changes to how government assistance will be provided in Stratford moving forward.

In 2021, the local Ontario Works office was onboarded into the provincial centralized intake initiative. At that time, a new provincial unit, the Intake and Benefit Administration Unit (IBAU), was established to automate the process of receiving financial assistance to modernize the approach. The intent is to have all applications submitted through the IBAU in the future.

A week prior to the meeting, the department discovered that the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) would be including Stratford in its second pilot rollout of an expanded centralized intake program in which the ministry would be responsible for all initial eligibility decisions, starting on Dec. 16.

In short, as McElroy explained, all current applications through IBAU are now to

apply for assistance through the province.

"So, people who apply for social assistance will need to apply online or on the phone for the Ontario Works services," McElroy said. "We will no longer be available at the local office to take the application. That being said, we are rapidly moving to put computers in the front and use our resources, our current staff, to help individuals who may need assistance so that they are assisted in applying to the province.

"We know there will be some challenges in the early steps of this, but we are working hard to make it a smooth transition and put the clients first for applying for assistance."

The turnaround for social assistance when it was local was four days. Now that it is handled through the province, it is taking longer, McElroy noted, though did not give a timeframe.

McElroy said there will likely be an increase in emergency applications given the change, and another issue is there is no definition of emergency through the province.

Additionally, her biggest concern is people who have no shelter and are unable to access online services or call to apply for assistance. The department is looking to other municipalities working through the change and are investigating a computer kiosk at their office, but the cost to operate and source that technology is through the city's budget.

"I think, in hearing our director share that we're bearing a cost to meet the needs of our individuals, ... I think that's really concerning," Briscoe said. "Because that is funding we could use for additional programming, and now we're having to kind of mediate the mess."

Mental health issues on the rise for local newcomers

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

With an alarming trend of mental-health related issues facing local newcomers in Stratford, the Multicultural Association of Perth Huron (MAPH) is asking for help from everybody in the community, but also from local police in particular.

Stratford Police Service (SPS) Chief Greg Skinner attended the conference with MacGregor Austin-Olsen, mental health, wellbeing and resilience coordinator. He agreed the issues of today hinge on mental health and the community's collective response to issues.

"Mental health is extremely near and dear to my heart," Skinner said. "When I started in policing 37 years ago, we didn't have the issues that our officers are dealing with today. ... In the old days, I was dealing with break-and-enters and traffic crashes and assaults and things like that. We're still dealing with those, but in addition, our officers are also dealing with mental health, they're dealing with homelessness, they're dealing with addiction, they're dealing with suicide, they're dealing with family violence much more often, and just conflict in general in the community.

"And those issues come with extreme complexities to them. We're not going to arrest our way out of the issues that we're in."

As highlighted throughout the conference, many of the individuals MAPH assists are refugees from hazardous and fraught environments and the organization itself doesn't have the resources to address the issues those people have.

Austin-Olsen suggested collaboration will be key to a community's response to mental-health issues and that one of the

issues is services and supports are siloed and not well known outside of those who use the programs. Additionally and especially for newcomers, there may be stigma around reaching out for help, which only makes it more difficult for service providers to offer help.

"As far as newcomers – because it is such a complex journey to Canada, to Stratford, to the snow, to a very different world – some of those old habits, those old stigmas around mental health, possibly from other cultures, from other communities, can have the negative impact of keeping individuals from reaching up for help," he said.

Austin-Olsen suggested services are available, it's just about knowing where to go and who to contact and to maintain relationships, and that his and the police's services are available to educate and help the organization.

Afterwards, MAPH founder and president Geza Wordofa thanked everyone for attending the conference and assisting with the work they do in serving the community.

Skinner later told the Times that while the organization keeps track of suicide, self-harm and other mental-health related calls, they do not track demographics of those involved in calls for service. That being said, he indicated he is aware of self-harm incidents regarding newcomers and that it is relatively low – though he stressed even one case is too many.

At the Nov. 20 police services board meeting, the monthly statistics for October were released. In Stratford, there were 40 mental-health related calls and three suicides (including attempted suicides). There were four mental-health calls and one suicide in St. Marys and there were no similar calls in Perth South, which is also in the purview of the SPS.

Local egg farmer and volunteer presented with King Charles III Coronation Medal

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

An egg farmer and local volunteer who has lent his time and efforts to countless organizations throughout the region, including with this newspaper, was recently presented with the King Charles III Coronation Medal by Senator Robert Black.

Black presented the coronation medal to Gary West during a small ceremony for friends and family at Stratford city hall on Nov. 16. Following the coronation of King Charles III on May 6, 2023, the Canadian government created the King Charles III Coronation Medal to honour Canadians who have distinguished themselves through outstanding contributions and service to Canada.

"Gary, you have worked tirelessly in many areas, contributing to and supporting your organizations and communities, professional and personal, with little fanfare or recognition," Black said. "Your unwavering commitment, driven by a deep sense of responsibility and care, is a source of inspiration for all Canadians.

"Gary, you remind us of the values that define our nation: selflessness, compassion and a dedication to helping others. Though your work may not always receive the spotlight it deserves, rest assured, it has not gone unnoticed, and is appreciated by many."

Born into a Shakespeare dairy farming family in 1952, West spent his youth involved in local sports, 4-H and junior-farm organizations. After graduating from Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School, West studied journalism and worked as a radio broadcaster. He later returned to his agricultural roots, working with Western Ontario Breeders for six years before coming home to partner with his parents on their dairy farm.



LOCAL RECOGNIZED WITH HONOURS

Area egg farmer and volunteer Gary West was presented with the King Charles III Coronation Medal by Senator Robert Black at Stratford city hall Nov. 16.

West has served in numerous local organizations, including as president of Ontario Animal Breeders, the Stratford and District Agriculture Society, the Shakespeare Optimist Club and the Shakespeare Community Athletic Association. West also volunteers with Family Services Perth-Huron visiting palliative patients in their homes and he served on the Alzheimer Society of Perth County board of directors for seven years.

In the early 2000s, West and his family transitioned from dairy farming to egg farming and, today, the family cares for 41,000 laying hens at Westlandyn Farms.

After seeing a need for greater nutrition in schools roughly a decade ago, West launched a program that provides peeled, hardboiled eggs to schools free of charge. The program now serves more than 140 schools across Perth and Oxford counties and the Region of Waterloo.

"The King Charles III award came as a very big surprise to me, and I am absolutely humbled by the recognition," West said.

"I have received so many incredible comments from friends and neighbours that I can't begin to say how emotionally happy I am that

I can live, work and help out in any way I can in the area I have grown up and still live in.

"The Perth County area and organizations that are within it certainly would be the best in anyone's books, and I am so privileged to be a small part of a very caring community."

The King Charles III Coronation Medal isn't the first accolade West has received for his volunteer service. West was named Stratford and area Citizen of the Year in 2013, he won the Perth County Federation of Agriculture's Outstanding Contribution to Agriculture Award in 2009, he was inducted onto the Perth County Agriculture Wall of Fame in 2017, he was presented with Egg Farmers of Ontario's Get Cracking Award in 2018 and he was presented with the 70th anniversary Queen's Jubilee pin in 2022.

Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma was also on hand Nov. 16 to congratulate West on receiving the coronation medal.

"What an honour to have the Hon. Rob Black, senator, in Stratford to make a presentation of the King's Coronation Award to Gary West," Ritsma said. "... We have been so blessed by the amazing community work of Gary over his many years of service. His work with the hospice, the Stratford agricultural society, the fall fair, the Stratford and District Saddle Club and the eggs to schools and other local agencies' programs are a few examples of his tireless work. I'm so proud to call Gary a very good friend and proud to have him receive and king's coronation award in council chambers."

Congratulations, Gary!

Weekend Quiz

- 1) What does Ariel give to Ursula in exchange for legs?
- 2) What do you call an animal that sleeps during the day and is awake at night?
- 3) Who was the Egyptian pharaoh known for building the Great Sphinx?
- 4) How long is a millennium?
- 5) What country has the most oil reserves?
- 6) How many dice are used in Yahtzee?
- 7) What year did Blockbuster close?
- 8) Who won the Jake Paul vs Mike Tyson fight?
- 9) What company is known for their Pumpkin Spice Latte?
- 10) What year did then US introduce 2 letter state abbreviations?

This week's answers are found on pg. 38



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

STARLITE BAZAAR

The Mary Martha Society of St. Peter's Lutheran Church is hosting its annual Starlite Bazaar Nov. 30 from 10 a.m. to noon. The bazaar will feature Christmas puddings with sauce, homemade tourtières, a bake table featuring Christmas cookie tins, a deli table, gift baskets, crafts, wreaths and treasures galore. Pictured are Mary Martha Society members Sheron Benner and Judy Neeb. All money raised during the Starlite Bazaar will go to the church fund and local charities.

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AODA deadline fast approaching and Stratford hasn't done its homework, according to accessibility advocate

CONNOR LUCZKA

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Though Roger Koert, chair of the accessibility advisory committee (AAC), spoke to Stratford city council on Nov. 26 to present the committee's annual award, it would be the last time that someone from the AAC would speak to council ahead of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)'s fast approaching 2025 deadline, when all public facilities must be made accessible and barrier-free.

Koert did not waste the opportunity.

"I'm going to challenge you, and when you want to react defensively, instead be reflective," Koert said. "People in our community, province, nation have been living this life for too long, being discriminated against or advocating tirelessly only to feel unheard or dismissed.

"Rewind to 2005, two years before I became disabled. ... In the early years of my rehab, I'm hearing the promise of this future utopia and I decided to approach my disability with youthful positivity, knowing there were better days around the corner. Well, my youthful positivity has changed to middle-aged reality."

The AODA was enacted in 2005, replacing a more limited law, as a more comprehensive standard to address the discrimination of persons with disabilities. The Province of Ontario gave itself and all municipalities a 20-year deadline. Review after review has highlighted a general lack of progress in that time across the province. The most recent review found a lack of accountability, enforcement and incentives to comply as some of the reasons it has been ineffective.

Koert also shared the stories of fellow local advocates like Diane Sims, Peter

Zein and former AAC member Mary Helen Mosterman, his aunt who, just earlier that day, passed away at the age of 65 after having dealt with symptoms of multiple sclerosis for 40 years.

"A quarter of Ontario's population, 2.9 million people, live with a disability, visible or invisible. By 2040, this number will be closer to four million," Koert said. "People with disabilities are everywhere. We, the disabled community, have been passive and accepting of people not making acceptable accommodations for persons with disabilities."

He turned to the Stratford Police Service's downtown headquarters (long known to be inaccessible), as just one hot-topic example. He said it feels as if they are "cramming before an exam," even though the AAC introduced a motion 17 years ago to make the building accessible.

He said there are many allies to those with accessible needs, but they don't need silent supporters. They need accomplices; people who are active in achieving the province's mandate and fostering a barrier-free reality beyond the AODA.

As he started his self-described "rant," Koert told councillors and the gallery it would be 20 minutes long.

When it drew to a close only a few minutes later, he asked the room to reflect on the uncomfotability they felt knowing they would have to sit for 20 minutes.

"Which would still only be one minute of every year we in the disabled community have been waiting for a fully accessible community and province."

After he spoke (and presented the AAC's annual award), Mayor Martin Ritsma thanked him for his reminder that there is still lots of work to do.

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(JULIA PAUL PHOTO)

STUFF THE CRUISER

Const. Darren Fischer collects toys outside of Walmart for the Stratford Police Service's Stuff A Cruiser Toy Drive on Nov. 23.



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

MISTLETOE MARKET

Volunteer bakers Lee Jeffrey and Joan Parson put the finishing touches on tourtières for St. James Anglican Church's annual Mistletoe Market. The Mistletoe Market will be held Nov. 30 from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the church and will feature all things Christmas including baking, savouries, homemade crafts, treasures and much more just in time for Christmas. Be sure to visit the Snowflake Café for some tasty treats.

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Nater refutes claims of hypocrisy as Poilievre vows to scrap Housing Accelerator Fund

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

As federal Conservative Party leader Pierre Poilievre continues to speak out against the Liberal government's Housing Accelerator Fund – a program he has vowed to scrap if elected Prime Minister – Perth-Wellington MP John Nater is clapping back against claims of hypocrisy related to his supposed support of the program.

In late October, Poilievre announced plans to scrap the \$4.4-billion Housing Accelerator Fund, a program that gives money to towns and cities that commit to reducing red tape to build more homes. At the time, the Conservative leader called the program overly bureaucratic and said he intends to use part of the funding from the Housing Accelerator Fund to support his plan to eliminate GST on the sales of newly built homes with a price tag of less than \$1 million.

"In Ontario today, one-third of the cost of every new home is direct taxes," Poilievre said during the Oct. 28 press conference in Ottawa. "... When you buy a new home today, more of the money you spend goes to bureaucrats than goes to the carpenters, electricians and plumbers who actually build the house.

"... The GST was not meant to apply to the basic necessities of food and housing; that's why the exemption existed in the first place. It is also why today I am announcing that a Pierre Poilievre led common sense Conservative government will axe the sales tax on new homes under \$1 million. ... Getting rid of the GST on new

homes will stimulate 30,000 new homes built every single year. ... We're going to cut two programs for sure and then more beyond that. One, the accelerator fund, has \$3 billion left in it. It has been a disastrous program that has led to less homebuilding and more local bureaucracies."

In response to Poilievre's announcement, federal Housing Minister Sean Fraser said about a dozen Conservative MPs had written to him in recent months advocating on behalf of communities in their ridings for housing support through the program. Poilievre's office then released a list of 17 Conservative MPs who had indeed written to the federal government asking for support for housing projects in their ridings.

One of the names on that list was Nater's, who says he wrote letters in support of local municipalities who applied to the program in the summer of 2023.

Following a recent party directive preventing Conservative MPs like Nater from advocating further for funding through the Housing Accelerator Fund, Nater says his correspondence with the government on behalf of those local communities proves the program did not deliver what it promised for residents of Perth-Wellington.

"Unfortunately, a lot of the public commentary on this Liberal program is nothing more than Liberal political spin and nonsense," Nater said in an email. "The letters referenced are not about current applications. In my case, they were about applications that were submitted over a year ago.

"... I do this frequently in support of local organizations and municipalities.

However, each and every application from Perth-Wellington was denied. Not a single community in Perth-Wellington benefited from this program. All municipalities in Perth-Wellington that applied for funding were rejected in March of 2024. Therefore, it is false to claim that I am withdrawing support."

At the time he wrote his letters, Nater said he shared concerns with the government about the funding-stream criteria. Nater says the fact many communities in Perth-Wellington were classified as large and urban according to the program criteria put them in direct competition for funding with cities like Toronto, Mississauga and Hamilton.

North Perth Mayor Todd Kasenberg echoed Nater's concerns in a letter sent to Fraser on behalf of North Perth council in August 2023.

"With a population of just over 15,000, the Municipality of North Perth was required to apply to the Housing Accelerator Fund (HAF) under the Large/Urban stream," Kasenberg wrote. "... Although North Perth has experienced strong growth over recent years, the municipality and our communities are still very much characterized as small and rural. North Perth does not possess the resources or amenities of our large, urban counterparts, including rapid-transit systems, financial tools, or municipal staff focused solely on grant writing.

According to Kasenberg's letter, under the large/urban stream of the program, North Perth had to develop a Housing Action Plan with at least seven initiatives compared to the five initiatives under

the small/rural/Indigenous stream. That meant numerous municipal staff had to reprioritize their regular duties and other projects to prepare a plan that could compete with Housing Action Plans from much-larger cities.

"If it wasn't so serious, it would be laughable to compare communities like Milverton, Listowel and Drayton with those of Toronto, Mississauga and Hamilton; but that's what this Liberal program did," Nater wrote in his email.

"Now that we have seen the clear failure of this Liberal program, I completely support scrapping this program. Quite frankly, it has failed to build houses. There is no hope for improving the housing crisis under the current Liberal government. Instead, our common-sense Conservative team will remove the GST from the construction of new homes under \$1 million; a tax cut which will result in the building of as many as 30,000 new homes each year and save Canadians up to \$50,000 on a new home."

According to media reports, since Poilievre has promised to cut the Housing Accelerator Fund, the federal government has written to warn more than 100 municipalities that already have made deals to secure funding.

Some Liberal MPs have claimed the Housing Accelerator Fund will lead to the construction of more than 250,000 homes in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. Minister of Defence Bill Blair, who represents a Toronto-area riding, warned that if Poilievre cuts the program, municipalities with ongoing financial agreements could be left in the lurch.



(JULIA PAUL PHOTOS)

CHRISTMAS MARKET

Below: Christmas shoppers browsed a variety of vendors, including Black Creek Flower Farm. Left: The Grinch was seen around the Stratford Rotary Complex, posing with children and adults alike!



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Post-vigil gathering aims to continue conversation on gender-based violence in Perth County

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

On the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, a local committee dedicated to ending gender-based violence encourages Perth County to keep talking about the issue.

There will be a vigil hosted by the Canadian Federation of University Women on Dec. 6 starting at 8:30 a.m. to lower the flag and honour the 14 women killed during the 1989 massacre at Montreal's École Polytechnique. Following the vigil, the Stop Violence Against Women (VAW) coordinating committee of Perth County will offer coffee and muffins inside the city hall auditorium. Attendees are encouraged to continue the conversation about prevention and action on violence against women and learn more about available resources.

"We want people to have a space to recognize that this is still an issue today, and to talk about what we can do as a community to try to end violence against women in this 40-year-long discussion that we've been having," said Jen Olenewa, coordinator of the Stop VAW coordinating committee of Perth County and Optimism Place community projects lead.

On May 23, 2023, Stratford council declared intimate partner violence an epidemic. Each year, the Stop VAW coordinating committee of Perth County puts together statistics to paint a picture of gender-based violence in the region.

"Unfortunately, I think a lot of people think that violence against women is kind of a big-city problem," Olenewa said.

"But it's very prominent in our rural communities because of the isolation that a lot of women experience, and it can be very difficult for them to get to resources, to have supports. Violence against women happens in all communities."

In 2023, there were 3,021 calls to the cri-

sis line answered, an 11 per-cent increase from 2022. The number of domestic violence reports in 2023 was 1,223, which is 15 per cent more than 2022, and nearly 100 women and children stayed in emergency shelter spaces. However, not every case of gender-based violence is recorded, as

ily and friends for support.

Olenewa said social services provide women fleeing violence with safe and secure housing and counselling, and there is support for the perpetrator as well to help them change their behavior so they don't commit violent acts in future relationships.

"We know that for the majority of men, this isn't something that they feel good about doing. This isn't something they want necessarily to continue doing," she said. "Very few people want to hurt the people that they say they love, but this is coping strategies, this is the methods that they've been taught. They don't necessarily know any other options or feel like they don't know other options or how to use other skills."

Domestic-violence incidents also perpetuate when the person experiencing it is coping with it alone.

"The trauma of experiencing violence in the relationship and carrying that and feeling like you have to keep that secret; that's harmful to your overall wellbeing and quality of life," she said. "As a community, we want to make sure that everyone has the best opportunity to have a happy, healthy, stable environment and life to lead and the best way to do that is through the social services that exist to support you."

Anyone who is experiencing domestic violence, or knows someone who is, can call the Optimism Place crisis and support line at either 519-271-5550 or 1-800-265-8598. Olenewa said reaching out on someone else's behalf can help someone experiencing violence leave the situation.

"It might be that they're scared to come to the shelter or to reach out to victim services," Olenewa said. "So, sometimes it's helpful to have their friend or their family member who makes the call first and say, 'Hey, let's go and do this together.'"

of women experiencing gender-based violence rely on fam-

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Whiter Smiles, the friendly neighbourhood dental hygiene clinic

JULIA PAUL

Times Correspondent

It's the time of year when people are looking to spend the remaining balance of their work health benefits for the year.

Whiter Smiles, a dental hygiene clinic that opened in January 2022, has been increasing staff and level of care to accommodate families with children and those who have dental anxiety. Located at 20 Cooper St. in the lower level of Spa on the Tracks, Whiter Smiles provides a calmer, more serene environment when compared to the usual smells and sounds of a dental clinic.

"A lot of people that have dental anxiety often come because we are located in a spa," said Katie Bossers, owner of Whiter Smiles. "It's a lot more of a relaxing, laidback atmosphere for them. Also, the simplicity that we do offer direct billing so that people aren't going to be out money if they have dental benefits."

Along with direct billing, Whiter Smiles also accepts the Canada Dental Benefit Plan (CDCP) and provides the option of online booking for patients to select their preferred dental hygienist.

Whiter Smiles currently consists of Katie Bossers and Helaina Greb from Baden. Two more dental hygienists will be starting in December, Lee'Anne



(WHITER SMILES PHOTO)

FLASH A SMILE

The Whiter Smiles team is happy to welcome new clients! Pictured from left are Jenny Brouwer, Helaina Greb, Katie Bossers, Lee'Anne Wraith and Taylore Bushfield.

Wraith from Stratford Dental and Jenny Brouwer from Arden Park.

"In March of this year, I hired Helaina," said Bossers. "Starting in December is when Leanne and Jenny are starting. We are expanding. We added another room so we can see families a lot quicker or do couples whitening sessions, just continuing to expand and

basically make it a lot more accessible for people to be seen for regular dental hygiene appointments."

Whiter Smiles offers great pricing, roughly 20 per cent lower than rates at a dental office. They also offer discounts when booking a standard cleaning and zoom whitening.

"We're excited to give Stratford people

of all ages better access to affordable, convenient dental-hygiene care as we strive to provide preventive services in a comfortable and welcoming environment."

To book an appointment, call 519-276-9063 or visit whitersmilesstratford.com to reserve a preferred dental hygienist.

Flash those gorgeous teeth and smile!

Beating the winter blues at The Salt Cabin

JULIA PAUL

Times Correspondent

Anyone seeking relaxation, an immunity boost and an overall improved sense of wellbeing should look no further than The Salt Cabin.

This hidden gem is quickly becoming Stratford's go-to destination for rejuvenation and wellness.

"The Salt Cabin wants to help you look, feel and live your best life," said Elizabeth Smith, owner of The Salt Cabin.

Opening its doors in April 2024, The Salt Cabin is a new addition to Stratford's wellness scene, and many are just beginning to uncover the incredible benefits it offers. Whether exploring ways to unwind or looking to enhance health, The

Salt Cabin invites clients to experience the transformative power of salt therapy.

The Salt Cabin offers a diverse range of wellness experiences, including halotherapy, an infrared sauna with built-in halotherapy, aromatherapy, guided meditation, chromotherapy and an oxygen bar. Guests can also enjoy relaxing massage tables, hand and foot salt-detox treatments, red and near-infrared light therapy, and the luxurious Cleopatra mask.

"Lots of the different things that we offer here are very unique," said Smith. "You can't find anywhere else around here. The biggest difference between us and other spas in our area is the other spas in our area like beauty spas, and we're a wellness spa. I believe we're the only wellness spa in the area. We offer

such unique services that are beneficial for so many different things."

Halotherapy and red-light therapy come together at The Salt Cabin to offer a truly transformative wellness experience. Halotherapy, derived from the Greek word "halo" for salt, recreates the invigorating sensation of being by the ocean. The Salt Cabin's serene "beach" area, complete with a sand-like salt floor and soothing backlit panels, uses a halogenerator to disperse pharmaceutical-grade salt into the air, promoting relaxation and health benefits.

Complementing this, NASA-developed red and near-infrared light therapy enhances skin health, accelerates healing, boosts mood to combat seasonal affective disorder (SAD), and supports overall

wellness. Together, these therapies provide a powerful blend of rejuvenation and relaxation.

"Everything that we have here in the spa is all hands off," said Smith, "which is another unique concept for a lot of people because a lot of times you go to a spa and somebody is providing a service to you, putting something on your face, putting it on your body, they are touching you. Whereas here, everything is touchless. I am able to take you to the salt cabin at the back, explain to you the benefits that will happen and let you sit and enjoy it."

The Salt Cabin is located at 71 Albert St. and can be reached through their website at TheSaltCabin.ca, by email at info@thesaltcabin.ca, or by phone at 519-272-0590.



Enjoy the beach this holiday season at The Salt Cabin.

(THE SALT CABIN PHOTOS)



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U15AA Warriors win gold at Waterloo tournament

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

The U15AA Stratford Junior Warriors captured the gold medal at the Waterloo Memorial Tournament Nov. 15-17.

Coach Drew Goebel explained how the tournament victory was the payoff from the team's recent revitalization. "Winning gold in Waterloo was a feather in our cap in terms of some major progression we've been making over the past couple of weeks," Goebel told the Times. "A few weeks ago, we all came together to have some honest conversations about the kind of team that we were and how we could reach our potential, and since then, we've really come together as a team. We've stuck to our gameplan and this gold medal highlighted the three words of hard work and commitment to one another."

According to Goebel, the team's recent improvements stem from simplifying their game.

"We want our boys to play simple hockey and to play as a group. To us, it means sticking to the gameplan and making things easier on ourselves by focusing on some of the fundamentals. We've found that we're at our best



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

GOLD MEDALISTS

The U15AA Stratford Junior Warriors took the gold medal at the Waterloo Memorial Tournament Nov. 15-17. Pictured laying on the ice from left to right are Max Weber and Mac Munro. Standing, from left, are trainer Donna Martin, goalie coach Mark Duchesne, Nick McGill, Colton Campbell, Liam Micks, Daxton Verspeeten, Cohen Bowles, Luke Hishon, Calling Howson, Caleb Hurley, Parker Obre, Tyler Burtenshaw, Ryan Watling, Ryder Duchesne, Caleb Pennings, Saunder Degrauw, Owen Martin, coach Ethan Adair and coach Drew Goebel.

when we get the puck down low, work our cycle game and create offence from there. When we do those things, we seem to get the results."

After going undefeated in the four-game round-robin, the Junior Warriors defeated the host Waterloo Wolves by a final score of 4-0 in the semi-final. Ryder Duchesne and Luke Hishon each scored a pair of goals, while netminder Mac Munro earned the shutout in between the pipes.

Goebel said the team's excellent goaltending was a main factor throughout the weekend.

"Our goaltenders were great all tournament long. They made a number of saves for us when it mattered and we needed them to. Mac (Munro) started the semi-final for us and shut the door against a very good Waterloo team. That was the host team and a team we play during the regular season who has given us a tough challenge in the past, so we knew they wouldn't be easy to beat. When your goaltender plays the way Mac did in the semis and you get a full team effort in the offensive zone, those elements allowed us to not only win the semi-final but also have plenty of gas left for the final."

Stratford met the Glancaster Bombers in the gold-medal game, and with goals by Caleb Hurley and Caleb Pennings, along with another stellar performance in goal, this time by Max Weber, the Junior Warriors came away

with a 2-1 win to take the tournament's top spot.

"We're really proud of the guys and how they came together," said Goebel. "Glancaster was a true test for us. We had a number of players who were a bit under the weather and had to dig deep and push through. Again, we got some great goaltending, this time from Max (Weber), who played an unbelievable game and made several game-winning saves to keep us in it."

Goebel also praised the team for its cohesiveness, which has grown along with the group's newly revamped structure and mindset.

"We are a really close group. All of our coaches and players spend so much time at the rink with each other because we all like spending time together, top to bottom. When you can create that kind of bond, play the game you love and have some success along the way, it can really help moving forward towards our goals."

"Our message every game is you must build from the ground up. Every game, no matter how things went the last time you were on the ice, you're starting fresh. When you start stringing together some positive results, you can feel momentum building and confidence growing. Considering the team conversation we had a few weeks ago, getting a result like this is really rewarding for the group."



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Warriors find different ways to win four straight

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

The Stratford Hunter Steel Ltd. Warriors have put themselves right back in the mix for the top spot in the Western Conference on the backs of a four-game winning streak.

On Nov. 15, the Warriors scored two goals in the first 64 seconds of the game before finishing with a 7-1 blowout victory over the Komoka Kings. Carter Petrie scored two goals and added an assist, while Hunter Nagge earned three helpers. Defenceman Aaron Green had a two-point night, which included a goal.

The story was very different just 48 hours later, however, when, for the second straight Sunday, the Warriors visited the Chatham Maroons who defeated Stratford 2-1 one week earlier. This time, the Warriors came away with a 2-1 victory in overtime. Nagge scored the game-winning goal in the extra frame, while Cole Lewis scored the Warriors' lone regulation goal. Both goals came on a Stratford powerplay.

The Warriors finished with a heavy advantage on the shot clock, outshooting Chatham 65-38. Head coach Dave Williams said he was pleased with the team's commitment to a more difficult brand of hockey against the Maroons. "It was a pretty gritty effort," Williams told the Times. "When you're playing teams twice within a week, the preparation for the group is always in place, and then it turns into a matter of having to execute and play with emotion. That's where we were better (on Nov. 17) than we were in our first game in Chatham. We were more competitive and more willing to play physical style, knowing we had to against a team like Chatham."

Williams added the win represents the way the team may have to win in the later stages of the season.

"It's always good when your group can win those types of games because that typically is what hockey tends to look like near the end of the season. If you're fortunate enough to be playing anywhere near the final game, it gets tight and you need to find different ways to win games. I think it's a really good confidence booster to be able to get that win, especially considering we didn't win our first trip down there earlier this month."

The Warriors returned home on Nov. 22 to host the Sarnia Legionnaires, and in the eyes of the bench boss, the game was a tale of two halves with the Warriors a bit sluggish to start before finding a groove in the second half of the game.

"Our last 30 minutes were much better than our first 30 minutes," said Williams.

"We just started playing with more pace. We think we're most effective as a group when we're really utilizing our speed and trying to get on top of teams to force them to turn pucks over. For whatever reason, I don't think we were doing that as much as we would have liked in the first half of the game. But I think midway through the second, we started dictating the pace of play and playing to our identity."

The Legionnaires took a 2-1 lead into the first intermission, with Stratford's only goal of the first 20 minutes coming from Aiden Wilson. In the second, Tyler Kelly scored his fourth of the season, which was followed by Lewis' 13th of the year just 48 seconds later. Haden Frayne added a pair of goals and Dax Vader snapped a three-game goal drought with his sixth of the year en route to a 6-2 win.

One night later, the Warriors hit the road to visit the defensively stingy Rockets in Strathroy and, on the backs of an excellent first period, cruised to a 5-1 win. Five different goal-scorers got on the board for Stratford, including Vader, Hudson Binder, Quinn Kipfer, Jack McGurn and Zachary Schooley.

According to Williams, the team's first

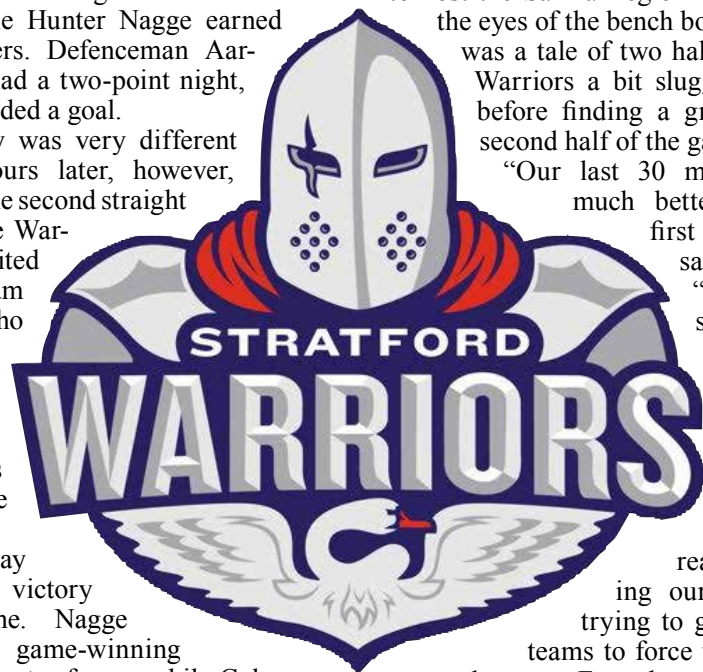
20 minutes was a template for how they want to start games.

"We got off to a good start and got two goals in the first period. It's always easier when you're playing from ahead rather than from playing from behind. I don't think we were very happy with our start the night before against Sarnia. You typically have to play differently if you don't get off to a good start. I think those two goals early on gave us some confidence.

"We recognize that the group is always learning every time we come to the rink, whether it's for a game, a practice, or a video session," continued Williams. "We're always trying to get better, but as much as we always want things to be perfect every night, we have to recognize that not every game is going to unfold exactly the way you want it to. But if we can start well like we did against Strathroy, it can go a long way in helping us win."

Williams also mentioned the team's need to stick to their system in order to maintain their recent success.

"A big piece of (building on our recent success) is getting the group to fully appreciate and understand the parity that exists in our conference. We can be a really good team if we play to our identity, but if we don't, we're going to be in for many tough nights. With how strong our conference is, winning hockey games is never an easy thing to do. The margin of error is pretty small for us on a lot of nights, so we have to play with good structure and use our speed to be effective consistently."



Stratford Warriors 2024-25 Stats (through November 26, 2024)

Rank	Player	GP	G	A	PTS
1	Cole Lewis	20	13	12	25
2	Dax Vader	15	7	10	17
3	Colin Slattery	20	7	9	16
4	Quinn Kipfer	22	9	6	15
5	Dracen Campbell	22	2	11	13
T-6	Jack McGurn	18	5	5	10
	Rhyse Brown	20	5	5	10
	Hunter Nagge	10	3	7	10
T-9	Zachary Schooley	18	6	3	9
	Aaron Green	16	3	6	9
	Heath Bogart	22	1	8	9
12	Carter Petrie	18	4	4	8
T-13	Tyler Kelly	16	4	3	7
	Jacob Wiseman	15	2	5	7
	Joseph Curtin	19	0	7	7
T-16	Hudson Binder	11	2	3	5
	Dominic Marshall	15	0	5	5
T-18	Haden Frayne	14	2	2	4
	Aiden Wilson	14	1	3	4
	Drew Hodge	17	1	3	4
21	Nolan Galda	7	1	2	3
22	Joshua Granowicz	14	1	1	2
#	Goalies	GP	GAA	SV-%	Wins
36	Carter McDougall	14	2.31	0.913	9
30	Chase Furlong	8	1.71	0.939	6

GOJHL Western Conference Standings

(Regular season standings through November 26, 2024)

Rank	Team	Record	PTS	GF	GA
1	St. Marys Lincolns	16-5-0-0	32	80	35
2	Stratford Warriors	16-6-0-0	32	81	47
3	LaSalle Vipers	16-6-0-0	32	81	58
4	Chatham Maroons	13-7-2-0	28	107	73
5	Listowel Cyclones	13-6-1-0	27	78	61
6	London Nationals	12-6-2-1	27	93	77
7	Elmira Sugar Kings	12-9-3-0	27	81	82
8	Strathroy Rockets	12-7-1-1	26	58	58
9	K-W Siskins	9-8-3-2	23	70	67
10	Sarnia Legionnaires	7-11-2-1	17	73	91
11	St. Thomas Stars	5-12-2-1	13	61	104
12	Komoka Kings	4-17-1-0	9	46	101



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Start the Holidays bids farewell to impactful founder

SYDNEY GOODWIN

Times Correspondent

When it comes to holiday shopping, many want to support small businesses and shop local, but so many talented sellers don't have a storefront and are sometimes harder for the public to find.

How would one find these sellers to purchase the adorable handmade goods they're selling? The answer is at the 12th annual Start the Holidays Art Show, a wonderful pop-up market held this year at Factory 163 on Nov. 17 where local sellers showcase their goods.

The Start the Holidays Art Show began 12 years ago as an online publication aimed to highlight the artists in the Stratford area.

"My good friend Jo-Dee Burbach and I created an online arts and culture magazine called Start Stratford. It highlighted the diverse and extremely talented community of artists and artisans that call Stratford and the surrounding area home," said Ann Baggley, co-founder of the magazine.

Start Stratford began the process of shedding light on artists and artisan sellers, but Burbach and Baggley wanted more for their project and, in 2011, they brought Start Stratford into the world and the first ever Start the Holidays Art and Show Sale was born.

Baggley is a self-taught photographer who resides here in Stratford. After 15 years as a successful actor, Baggley decided it was time to follow her passion



START THE HOLIDAYS

Some of the turn out from the successful second day of Start the Holidays

for photography, a passion that came to be thanks to her kids.

"My interest and subsequent love for photography began about 17 years ago. Through photography, I began to find real joy and satisfaction in capturing and storytelling my children's lives, the world around me and, of course, people. I love photographing people," said Baggley.

The show had many successful years under its belt, with 2019 being their largest turnout, though they had anticipated 2020 to be another huge turnout.

"We had to take a couple years off because of the pandemic. We did offer online shopping; Jo-Dee created an online marketplace that we felt could reflect a show for artists," Baggley said.

The show and sale began changing after moving to online for two years, then transitioning back to in-person once

the worst of the pandemic had passed. At this time, Burbach had to step away from Start the Holidays, focusing on her work as a Stratford city councillor, leaving Baggley as the head coordinator of the market. Once Start the Holidays wrapped up its 2023 show, Baggley was approached by two artists, Monique Lund and Laura Mowbray, who both expressed great interest in joining the organizational team for the show.

With Baggley saying her final goodbyes at this year's show, Start the Holidays was given to Lund and Mowbray.

"This year marked the beginning of a new chapter for the Start the Holidays brand as it transitioned from Ann Baggley to the care of Courtney Othen and I," Mowbray said. "We assumed the roles of organizers and curators, carrying forward the shows legacy."

The main theme for the show this year was saying goodbye and good luck to Baggley, showcasing her photography and the impact she has made on the artistic world.

"As the founder of Start the Holidays, Ann created a legacy of fostering creativity, connection and community. Her dedication to supporting artists and showcasing fine craft left an indelible mark on Stratford's cultural scene, inspiring both artists and art enthusiasts alike. This year's show served as a heartfelt tribute to Ann, reflecting her vision and celebrating her contributions to the arts," said Lund.

This send-off for Baggley was very well received with a turnout of 1,200 attendees over the weekend and \$2,289.60 raised in donations, making it one of their best-attended events. Lund and Mowbray have set new and exciting plans for Start the Holidays' future while still honouring how the show started.

"The Stratford Art Market emerges as a renewed home for this thriving artist community. It carries forward the shared vision of creativity, connection and community," said Lund. "The Stratford Art Market aims to celebrate and promote Stratford's and area artists and their work through artist-focused shows and events."

For more information about Start the Holidays, visit startstratford.com and stay up to date on their Instagram page at [@start.stratford](https://www.instagram.com/start.stratford). For more on Baggley's work, visit annbaggleyphotography.com or her Instagram [@annbaggley10](https://www.instagram.com/annbaggley10).

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Destination Stratford launches Christmas Trail for the 2024 season

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

For its tenth year, the Stratford Christmas Trail continues to add a unique twist to the holiday gift-shopping experience.

The Christmas Trail features more than 50 local businesses across Stratford, St. Marys, Mitchell and Shakespeare. Trail passes cost \$35 and can be purchased at Destination Stratford, Bradshaws and Stone Home Creatives, as well as various locations within the participating communities.

“We have been perfecting the experience for 10 years and local businesses have definitely noticed the growth and the benefits for participating during this time of year,” said April Murray, brand manager at Destination Stratford.

“It has been a fantastic way to increase foot traffic into the retailers that are on the trail. The annual event has been shown to boost sales among the shops and there is a true sense of community among the businesses as they come together to enhance those local relationships.”

Gift items such as home decor, stocking stuffers, jewelry, holidays and other seasonal material will be available

to purchase at participating businesses.

The Christmas Trail will have 36 stops in Stratford and 14 checkpoints through St. Marys and Shakespeare

Murray says the event attracts a large amount of outside community engagement in regions such as Kitchener-Waterloo, Toronto and the GTA, and London, and has made a positive impact on local business.

Thousands of people participate in the event every year with last year's event reaching its highest sales record so far. Zac Gribble, executive director at Destination Stratford, mentioned in a press release the tourism organization plans to continue to build on last year's sales numbers.

“This is certainly really rewarding. The visitor economy is vitally important to the local economy and for us to create opportunities for businesses to truly benefit from is an amazing feeling,” said Murray. “We encourage businesses to experience our trails and for our shoppers to continue enjoying the experience.”

The holiday event will run from Nov. 1 to Dec. 20.

UNIQUE TWIST

(DESTINATION STRATFORD PHOTO)

Build your own hot chocolate at Mercer Beer Hall is one of many perks for those participating in the Stratford Christmas Trail.



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<p>2021 Subaru Crosstrek</p>  <p>\$27,999 OR \$217 B/W LOW KMS - 73,580 KM + HST & lic</p>	<p>2021 Chrysler Grand Caravan</p>  <p>\$28,495 OR \$221 B/W LOW KMS - 85,938 KM + HST & lic</p>	<p>2022 Hyundai Tucson ESSENTIAL</p>  <p>\$28,999 OR \$225 B/W LOW KMS - 31,310 KM + HST & lic</p>	<p>2020 Toyota Prius Prime PHEV</p>  <p>\$29,495 OR \$255 B/W LOW KMS - 45,677 KM + HST & lic</p>	<p>2023 Volkswagen Tiguan</p>  <p>\$29,888 OR \$232 B/W LOW KMS - 36,232 KM + HST & lic</p>

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DECEMBER EVENTS

- December 1 Christmas Gala, Roasted Turkey, honey glazed ham, with all the trimmings, salad bar, dessert bar \$30 per plate; 6-14 \$10; 5 and under free. Two settings 4:30 and 6:15 RESERVATION ONLY
- December 21 Christmas Meat Draw
- January 1 New Year's Day Brunch, Scrambled eggs, sausage, bacon, hashbrowns, Roast beef, mashed potatoes, salad bar, dessert bar \$30 per plate; 6-14 \$10; 5 and under free. Two settings 10:30 and 12:00 RESERVATION ONLY
- January 8 Ladies' Auxiliary Luncheon, \$16 per person, Reservation only
- January 10 Euchre, Games start at 6:30, \$20 team of two, cash prizes
- February 7 Wine Tasting, details to follow shortly

Tuesday Morning Buddy Check, 10:00 -12:00pm OPEN to all Veterans Widows and First Responders
Friday Afternoon Weekly Social 3:00 pm - 6:00 pm
Saturday Afternoon Meat Draw doors open at 2:00 pm, meat draw starts at 4:00pm

804-B Ontario St., Stratford N5A 3K1
stratfordlegion008@gmail.com

Chair yoga is not just for the elderly, it's for everyone!

JULIA PAUL

Times Correspondent

Every Tuesday and Thursday at 9:30 a.m., Mike Odbert sets up the chairs in the Zehrs common area and waits for participants to show up.

People from all walks of life join him and sit together in community to participate in the weekly chair-yoga sessions.

"These guys that are joining are forming their own little groups," said Mike Odbert, the man behind the weekly chair yoga. "They have drinks, go for coffee; it's a good way to make friends. Everyone's kind of stuck in the house; it's a good way to get everybody to connect again."

Odbert has been practicing yoga for eight years. His idea for bringing the chair yoga to Stratford's Zehrs came from a session he led in Kitchener for a friend. After successfully leading chair yoga in Kitchener, he wanted to bring it to Stratford. With the help of the Zehrs manager, he was able to secure a spot in the common area of Zehrs for free.

"A. It's free," said Odbert. "B. It's a place they are comfortable coming to; it's not a gym. You can wear your normal

clothes, bring a friend, it's a little bit more sociable. It fits."

The benefits of chair yoga are endless. From increased flexibility to increased strength, balance, control and improved mood, the list goes on.

"They're learning now," said Odbert. "Because a lot of these people were new, they just wanted to get exercise because they're getting old. So, I've been taking them from level one to level two to level three. We're starting to get into level three now. You have to ease into it because some of this stuff is really hard. I don't want to hurt any of them because some of them have hip replacements or knee replacements, strokes. This rehabilitates them. I've heard I don't know how many times, 'Now I can do stuff! I got my license back!' Nothing but good stories from people that come here."

To join chair yoga, come to Zehrs and find the common area, near the produce section, before 9:30 a.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays. The chairs will be set up and waiting.

"It's a good way of connecting," said Odbert. "It's healthy. We can heal ourselves from anything, we just got to add the right ingredients."



(JULIA PAUL PHOTO)

FOR EVERYONE

Mike Odbert leads chair yoga every Tuesday and Thursday morning at 9:30 a.m. in the Zehrs common area.



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

ESSAYS OF LIGHT

Stratford poet David Stones performs poetry from his latest collection, *Essays of Light*, during his Stratford book launch at Revival House Nov. 25.

Dozens turn out to support launch of Diane Sims' book, "Living Beyond the Shadow"

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

It seemed like all of Stratford turned out to support the launch of local author, journalist and accessibility advocate Diane Sims' unflinching autobiography, "Living Beyond the Shadow."

The author, who is living with end-stage multiple sclerosis (MS) and has been approved for medical assistance in dying (MAiD), was joined for the launch of her latest book at Fanfare Books Nov. 15 by family, friends, her family doctor, her colleagues from the city's accessibility advisory committee, members of the Downtown Stratford BIA, current and former city councillors, Stratford Police Chief Greg Skinner and even Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma, among others.

"I was overwhelmed with the support I had!" Sims told the Times. "Every time I had a chance to peek up, the room was full of people and books, a dream for a writer! We sold out of books, which would make Bob at Fanfare very happy as it did me and my publisher."

Though "Living Beyond the Shadow" follows Sims' MS journey from her first long hospital stay in Toronto at age 14 and her eventual diagnosis in 1975 to her more recent decision to take control of her own fate through MAiD, highlighting many of the health, personal and professional challenges she's overcome along the way, its message is one of hope and joy and she says there are so many funny and endearing tidbits from her life and her work contained within those 385 pages.

Dr. Sean Blaine, Sims' family physician for the past 25 years and the man who wrote the foreword in the book, spoke at the book launch about Sims' bravery in telling her story.

"I've read the book and for me, knowing Diane for the last 25 years, there's so much I didn't know," Blaine said. "In the medical community, we see people at certain points in their journey. I thought I knew Diane, but in fact, this book was masterful, really, and the way you weave your friends and your family and Canadian events and Canadian icons through the story is just incredible.

"It was a real treat and thank you so much for your friendship."

Also asked to speak at the book launch, Ritsma, who in recent years has developed

a professional and personal relationship with Sims as they've worked to make the Stratford police station accessible, spoke about Sims' tireless efforts in her advocacy on behalf of Stratford residents with mobility issues.

"(Diane) will send me a text and say, 'Phone me now,' and guess what, I phone her now," he said. "... You're a wonderful human being. I appreciate the fact that you've chosen Stratford as your current home. Thank you and best wishes with this (book), and I look forward to more."

Skinner, who has also worked closely with Sims over the past several years in making the police station accessible, spoke at length about Sims' tenacity and passion for accessibility, even going as far as to call her a friend despite what could have been a contentious relationship.

"When I first met Diane, it was not under the greatest of circumstances," Skinner said. "She had a complaint about the accessibility of the police station. It was a rainy day, she came by to try to get into the police station to get some paperwork taken care of and, of course, couldn't get into the front of the police station. ... Everyone was trying to accommodate her to the best of their ability, however the fact that you couldn't access the police station was the issue.

"When Diane brought this to my attention, I thought, 'Uh oh, this is going to be a tough relationship,' but it's been the exact opposite. Diane has been the best advocate that any police chief can have in their community. She has been very vocal about the issues she has had with accessibility, in particular with the police station, she's made deputations to the police board, she's talked about the need for a new police station and the mayor has definitely bought in to everything she has brought to the attention of those of us who don't need to be accommodated to get into buildings."

As a result of Sims' hard work, advocacy and unwavering tenacity, Skinner told those at the book launch that the current police station is being outfitted with an accessible ramp that will be completed by the end of this year – a stop-gap solution that will make the building at least partially accessible as the police service and the Stratford Police Services Board look toward building a new police station in the future.



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTOS)

RECEIVING SUPPORT

Diane Sims signs a copy of her new book, "Living Beyond the Shadow," for fellow accessibility advocate Peter Zein as a crowd of supporters waits in line to get their copies of the book signed during a launch event at Fanfare Books Nov. 15.

Stratford Branch 008

The veterans of the area thank the community for their contributions and attendance on Remembrance Day
All veterans and First Responders are welcome at the branch Tuesday mornings 10:30 to noon for a social visit at the Buddy Check Coffee. William Rothernel is available at the Buddy Check Coffee if assistance is required.

The Stratford Branch 8 Veterans Service Officer William Rothernel, with the support of Veterans Affairs Canada continues to serve the needs of all Canadian Veterans in need of assistance or advice on all service-related situations.

Call our Branch office at 519-271-4540 to speak to Bill.

804-B Ontario St., Stratford N5A 3K1
stratfordlegion008@gmail.com



Diane Sims, author of "Living Beyond the Shadow," poses for a photo with Stratford BIA general manager Jamie Pritchard during her book-launch event at Fanfare Books Nov. 15.

Sheila McCarthy and David Rogers return with second-annual *A Stratford Christmas* variety show

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

After the success of last year's *A Stratford Christmas* variety show in support of the Stratford Arts and Culture Collective (SACC), hosts Sheila McCarthy and David Rogers are returning this holiday season with an eclectic lineup of returning and new performers.

Described as an enchanting holiday concert filled with music, community spirit and festive cheer, this one-show-only event will take place at Stratford's Festival Theatre on Dec. 14 at 2 p.m., offering audiences of all ages a way to celebrate the season together.

"It was way too much fun," McCarthy said about co-hosting last year's *A Stratford Christmas*. "I had so much fun with David Rogers. We were kind of flying by the seat of our pants and I hope the same thing happens this year. It's an afternoon of joy and love, and people just loving listening to the incredible singers and the incredible music. We have dancers and there are some nice, big surprises coming this year. It really is one of those nights that kicks off the Christmas spirit for everybody."

"My favourite part of hosting is just the audience reaction, how much they loved just the whole experience and the variety of all the different performers," Rogers added. "We hadn't seen a lot of the singers actually doing their thing on stage, so we were as impressed as the audience. Being able to host something like that and com-



(STRATFORD ARTS AND CULTURE COLLECTIVE PHOTO)

VARIETY SHOW

Sheila McCarthy and David Rogers are returning to the Festival Theatre stage Dec. 14 for the second annual *A Stratford Christmas* variety show.

ing on and saying, 'Oh my goodness, what was that?' We were genuinely moved by all the performers, so I think that was my highlight."

For this year's show, the lineup features returning performers including singer and actress Ma-Anne Dionisio, fiddler Jesse Grandmont, Stratford Festival favourites Monique Lund and Marcus Nance, performer and recording artist Michael Vanhevel, the Stratford Concert Choir, and Stratford singer-songwriters Dayna Manning and Hannah Thomas – the latter of whom is known locally for her Dock Mu-

sic performances on Lake Victoria in the summer.

Also joining the cast this year are four performers anyone familiar with Victoria Playhouse's annual Starlight Christmas show will recognize: Luciano DeCiocco, Christopher Dunham, Elena Howard Scott and Callandra Dendias.

The show, which organizers hope will become an annual tradition in Stratford similar to Starlight Christmas, is presented by the SACC in partnership with D2 Entertainment. In addition to raising money in support of the SACC's mission

to establish a dedicated space for the performing arts in Stratford's Grand Trunk Community Hub, a portion of the proceeds will also go to The Local Community Food Centre's \$750,000 My Community Includes The Local fundraising campaign.

"All of our fundraising efforts over the last seven years are helping us towards our goal to work with other local organizations to create a community-based performance space at the Grand Trunk site," SACC co-founder and director Chris Leberg said. "... We have a feasibility study we have out right now to our local organizations to find out what their needs are, what they have, what they're looking for in the future. When we pull all of that together in March, we will be able to go forward to the Grand Trunk committee, to the other organizations in town we're hoping to partner with and say, 'Ok, we're ready. Let's start talking about how we make this happen.'"

The unifying vision for this performance space is to provide an affordable and well-equipped option for community arts groups to share their work in a variety of traditional and non-traditional media. The SACC's goal is to serve the Stratford community first while generating tourism in the shoulder and off seasons as a secondary goal.

For more information and to purchase tickets for *A Stratford Christmas*, visit www.stratfordfestival.ca/WhatsOn/Play-sAndEvents/LeasedEvents/Christmas. For more information on the SACC, visit www.stratfordacc.com.

Buy a print to help a pup

SYDNEY GOODWIN

Times Correspondent

Dogs are important members of many households, filling the home with love and commotion, and when the dog falls ill, its family will band together and do whatever is possible to make them well again.

That's exactly what local artist Carlie Pearce is doing for her dear dog, Mona.

Pearce and her partner adopted the three-year-old pitbull mix, Mona, back in June. Mona was mostly used as a breeding dog, and crated her whole life, so they gave her a new home filled with loving parents and a tolerating older brother in the form of their bulldog, Charlie. They made sure Mona was up to date on all of her vaccines and made routine appointments to ensure her safety, but unfortunately, one of them did not go as planned.

"We thought her spay surgery would be the last of her difficult life, but two weeks following, she had to have emergency surgery," said Pearce.

Due to Mona's time as a breeding dog, the experience caused her organs to be completely mixed up, making her susceptible to bacteria. When Pearce and her

partner noticed bleeding, they raced Mona to the vet to get her better as quickly as possible.

"She had to have emergency surgery that came to \$12,500. But the most important thing is that she's okay and healing well," Pearce said, noting the main thing on their minds is Mona's health and wellbeing.

But a \$12,500 bill is a tough pill for many to swallow, so Pearce came up with a unique way to raise the funds.

Having worked as a full-time artist here in Stratford for eight years now, Pearce is putting her talent to use by selling prints to help fund Mona's surgery. The prints are of an adorable dalmatian puppy getting its spots blown off by a fan. It costs either \$30 for an eight-by-10-inch print, or \$80 for a 16-by-20-inch print, both of which are sure to brighten up any space and help a dog get back on her feet.

For more information about Pearce and her artwork, check her out on social media at [carlieartist](https://www.instagram.com/carlieartist) on Instagram. The fundraising prints can also be found on her Instagram profile under [linktr.ee/carlieartist](https://www.instagram.com/linktr.ee/carlieartist). Anyone interested in just donating to support Mona can email carliepearce@hotmail.com.



(CARLIE PEARCE PHOTO)

HELP FUND MONA

Artist Carlie Pearce is raising money in support of her dog, Mona's emergency surgery by selling prints of this original piece of artwork.

Avondale's Carol Fest an evening of storytelling, music and community spirit

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Get into the Christmas spirit at Avondale United Church by listening to holiday tunes and stories, and giving back to children in the community.

The annual event returns to the church on Nov. 30 at 7 p.m. It will feature four performers throughout the evening and hot apple cider and refreshments during intermission.

"It's a nice collection of storytelling and music," said Doris Barkley, co-coordinator of Carol Fest.

The Stratford Concert Band, led by Laurence Gauci, and the Community Choir, directed by Avondale's director of music, Dan Van Winden, will be performing. Local writer and award-winning director Jennifer Paquette will be storytelling at Carol Fest.

"She's apparently just a wonderful, wonderful storyteller and really captivates the audience," Barkley said.

Local indie rock band Downie Street Collective will also perform at Carol Fest. Barkley said the Downie Street Collective is a unique act compared to the concert's usual performers, but one that will entertain the crowd.

"They're very eclectic and very spirited in their performances," she said. "So, we think that they'll really engage the attendees as well. We thought we'd try something a little different and their music also resonates with all ages."

Carol Fest
November 30, 2024 7:00pm

author/storyteller
Jennifer Paquette

PLUS:
Stratford Concert Band
&
Community Choir

Avondale United Church
194 Avondale Avenue
519-271-7946

fundraiser for House of Blessing

Downie Street Collective

a free will offering will be taken - all proceeds to House of Blessing

Carol Fest will also accept freewill donations for Stratford House of Blessing's Children's Christmas Toy program. Those who write their name and contact information on the donation envelope will be eligible for a tax receipt. Aleah Graff, community engagement coordinator for Avondale, said she's looking forward to Carol Fest and is grateful to work with House of Blessing for the event.

"Because it's so festive and so geared towards Christmas, I think it's a great opportunity for people to get into the spirit of Christmas and give to such a wonderful local charity that will make sure that children have such a great Christmas," Graff said.

Barkley said the financial contributions from Carol Fest could help House of Blessing purchase more toys to fill in any gaps in regular donations. She said more children are accessing food banks and organizations like House of Blessing. Food Banks Canada's HungerCount 2024 report found that while the proportion of children under 18 accessing food banks is still 33 per cent, the number is about 700,000 visits, an increase of 300,000 visits from about five years ago.

"Children are our future and if we can give them a happy season to look forward to, that goes a long way to their development and their own sense of being and being happy," Barkley said.

Avondale's Food Shelf will be open Dec. 27 from 1-2:30 p.m.

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Stratford Film Festival presents Holiday Shorts including a public screening of *It's a Wonderful Life*

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

After the successful introduction of the Stratford Film Festival (SFF) in November, where approximately 450 people attended the four screenings, December brings Holiday Shorts in partnership with Lights On Stratford and their theme of Re-Imagine.

The Holiday Shorts will be the major highlight of a weekend of screenings before Christmas beginning Friday, Dec. 20 to Sunday, Dec. 22. While the full programming has yet to be revealed, there will be two films to look forward to from the Stratford Festival film-production arm.

"There will be some animation, comedy, drama; it will be family friendly, say about age eight-plus," said SFF director Megan Smith-Harris. "We will be including two pieces that were shot in Stratford with very strong Stratford connections. One of the films will be *The Understudy* and we are hoping to have a panel discussion. We have confirmed writer-director Peter Pasyk, producer Genna Dixon and acclaimed local actor Andre Sills."

The Understudy has not been publicly screened in Canada yet; it is currently in its film-festival run with the Canadian premiere at the Hamilton Film Festival, so this will be the second time it has been viewed in Canada. It will be released on StratFest at Home in the spring of 2025.

"This is a rare opportunity for audiences to get a sneak peek at this fabulous short film that is a story unique to the theatre. It deals with the experience of the understudy which most people don't know about. The premise of the film is the lead in a major Shakespearean play can't go on so the understudy played by Tom Rooney finally has his moment. It's a journey worth watching," said Smith-Harris. "Of special mention is Mia SwamiNathan. The young actress who plays the role of the granddaughter is an exceptional actress



HOLIDAY SHORTS

Stratford Festival actor Tom Rooney appears in *The Understudy* to be included in the Holiday Shorts programming curated as part of the Stratford Film Festival this December.

and I expect to see a lot more of her not only in television but around the world."

Also coming from the Stratford Festival is the first chapter of a six-chapter anthology called *Just Short of Reality*.

"It is a dance-movement piece with no dialogue. Some of the scenes in Stratford will be familiar to the audience. This was made during COVID, which is why there's single actors and movement. It has been shown at festivals and we are delighted to show the first chapter," said Smith-Harris.

Not many can say they have seen the film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, in the theatre as a community so SFF is offering that chance. Gather family and friends to experience this newly remastered, special-colourized version of the holiday favourite Saturday, Dec. 21 at 8 p.m. at the city hall auditorium.

The film will be introduced with a mini-masterclass presented by SFF co-founder and general manager Bill Harris. Harris was a professor of film and television and is very knowledgeable about the golden age of Hollywood and clas-

sic films. For example, Cary Grant was the first choice to play the lead but when Frank Capra came on board, he cast Jimmy Stewart. Although not successful at the box office when it opened, it is one of Capra's favourite films.

"Everyone thinks of *It's a Wonderful Life* as a holiday film and a happy family film, and there are elements of that to be sure, but it also touches on several serious themes that affect our own city of Stratford in addition to the town of Bedford Falls. People are struggling with the cost of housing, food prices are high, homelessness, addiction and despair. Those are other themes in addition to the warm, fuzzy, family holiday vibes that we get from it. They parallel some of the realities of 2024," said Smith-Harris.

The Holiday Shorts will be screened Dec. 20 at 4p.m., 6 p.m. and 8 p.m. The evening screenings will have panel discussions with Dixon, Pasyk, Sills and Rooney with the potential for more guests.

Dec. 21 will feature Holiday Shorts screenings at 4 and 6 p.m. ahead of the

screening of *It's a Wonderful Life* at 8 p.m.

Dec. 22 will feature Holiday Shorts screenings at 4, 6, and 8 p.m. All screenings are a pay-what-you-can model and will be hosting donation drives for three local charities. Bring a donation for one of the three charities listed below as the price of admission.

Founded in 1989 and located in Stratford, the Emily Murphy Centre is a second-stage housing facility for abused women with or without children, serving the Perth County and surrounding area. They are most in need of diapers, hygiene supplies (Tampons, pads, full-size shampoo, conditioner and body-wash) school supplies, new books and toys, new linens and towels, grocery gift cards, Walmart gift cards and Canadian Tire gift cards.

Stratford House of Blessing provides emergency support for people in their immediate time of need, and host multiple programs including their food bank, fresh start, community meals and specialized programs for babies, kids and adults. Items in need include crackers, cookies, boxed side dishes (mashed potatoes, stuffing, mac and cheese), canned soup, canned ham, chicken, or salmon, peanut butter, canned vegetables, kids school snacks (nut-free granola bars, apple sauce, fruit roll-ups), pasta and pasta sauce.

Shelterlink Youth Services has been supporting Perth County youth experiencing homelessness and those at risk of homelessness since 1991 through prevention, advocacy, shelter and communication connection services. Select items from their wish list include deodorant, men's underwear, Kleenex/tissues, Tampons, gift cards from McDonald's, Tim Hortons, Walmart, Canadian Tire, Staples and grocery stores (Sobey's, Food Basics, Zehr's).

Representatives of the three charities will be on hand to receive donations, share information and answer any questions attendees may have.

University of Guelph and United Way partner to research enhanced services for 2SLGBTQ+ communities

ALEX HUNT

Times Correspondent

The United Way Perth-Huron's Social Research and Planning Council and the University of Guelph (UoG) are exploring opportunities to develop services for local 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

The first step was to launch a community survey to gauge what is currently missing in the community. That survey closed on Nov. 29, after this paper's publication date.

"The partnership was the result of a number of different community conversations through different partnership tables and social planning groups that United Way is involved in," said Kristin Crane, director of community impact and research at United Way Perth-Huron.

"We have heard of increased incidents of discrimination and exclusion toward 2SLGBTQ+ members and alongside that, we have just completed our quality-of-life research where we discovered there was a lack of information among our more diverse community."

Crane says that based on advice from community advisors, future accommodations should provide a healthy space for people to share their experience of being 2SLGBTQ+ in the Perth-Huron community.

There will also be conversations taking place among United Way, UoG and community advisors on current, available services that are succeeding so they can elaborate on what a safe space looks like and to gain insight for future development-care opportunities generated by the ongoing re-

search.

"This really solidified the need to do this research in the community. There are a lot of different sensitivities with doing this research," said Crane. "Through our investigation, we realized we had a moral responsibility to do no harm with conducting further research so we thought it would be excellent to partner with a post-secondary institution that possesses the knowledge of non-invasive study methods to ensure all care is taken into consideration."

Crane says the survey was only the first step of a larger development process. The next stage will involve focus groups and interviews to gather additional data which will then be transferred into written reports expected to be released to the public this June.

"The best response to discrimination and hate is to build inclusivity and belonging. The research will provide us with an opportunity for us to provide these resources to those in need. We need to make it known that discrimination is happening in our community," said Crane. "This is an underserved population and without that research to build this case on why these services are needed, it will be difficult to get that support for individuals facing discrimination."

United Way Perth-Huron's Social Research and Planning Council consists of volunteers who dedicate their time and resources to improving the quality of life for communities facing discrimination, addiction, housing insecurity and other social-justice issues through collected research and data analysis.

Celtic celebration with Stratford Symphony Orchestra and The Bookends returns in 2025

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

The new year will bring back a collaboration between local Celtic band the Bookends and the Stratford Symphony Orchestra (SSO) just in time for Robbie Burns Day.

The Stratford Symphony Orchestra and The Bookends will perform together on Jan. 25, Robbie Burns Day, for a Celtic Celebration. There will be two shows, one starting at 2 p.m. and the other starting at 7:30 p.m., at Avondale United Church featuring a mix of traditional and contemporary music.

The 2025 Celtic Celebration is building from the 2022 Celtic Celebration concert.

Pete Watson, guitarist in The Bookends, said the post-pandemic-restriction concert was a great time, and the Celtic band loved performing with the orchestra.

"The moment we heard they were interested in having us back in January, 2025, we were like, 'Yeah! We're absolutely in,'" Watson said.

The 2025 Celtic Celebration, conducted by SSO principal conductor William Rowson, will have three new pieces, including two Bookends originals by fiddler and banjo player Errol Fischer. There will also



CELTIC CELEBRATION

Stratford Celtic band The Bookends are thrilled to be working with the Stratford Symphony Orchestra again for a Celtic Celebration on Jan. 25, 2025. There will be a matinee and evening performance.

be a slip-jig set where the music will be played in an 8/9 signature.

Watson said performing with the Stratford Symphony Orchestra is an experience

that keeps bringing more for The Bookends to celebrate. The album, A Celtic Celebration, recorded with the orchestra, was nominated for a 2024 Canadian Folk

(THE BOOKENDS PHOTO)

Music Award. Watson said listening to the orchestra perform the songs with The Bookends on stage at the concert in 2022 was one of his fondest memories in his musical career.

"It just lifted me off the ground and the audience reaction was incredible," he said. "It's a wonderful musical journey that we've enjoy so much."

A.J. Ashley, general manager of the Stratford Symphony Orchestra, said that while he wasn't part of the 2022 Celtic Celebration concert, he heard plenty of positive feedback about it. So far, he's enjoying working with The Bookends and is looking forward to the 2025 concert coming together.

"The enthusiasm and excitement for the show is really great to see when we all come together," Ashley said. "I'm looking forward, once we get to rehearsals and actually working together, to the sound that we'll be able to make as a full group. It'll be interesting to hear the orchestra play some of the Celtic songs along with some of the more classical in the same concert".

Tickets for a Celtic Celebration are \$60 for adults, \$15 for students and free for children under 12 years old. Tickets can be purchased online by visiting www.stratfordsymphony.ca.

Environmental Heroes: In service of a healthy planet

ANNA KOWALCHUK

Times Contributor

I notice almost immediately that Dr. Doug Thompson doesn't like to talk about himself; he's too modest for that. He prefers to talk about the Rotary Club and, specifically, the Rotary Club of Stratford, of which he has been a member for over 45 years.

The Rotary Club is a worldwide, universally respected service organization whose four-way test (see Rotary.org) identifies and provides for the needs of communities, both local and international. Its causes, among many, include ending polio and fighting other eradicable diseases, supporting education programs, promoting maternal and child health, supporting local economies and women's equality, assisting in and providing disaster relief and promoting world peace.

As a medical doctor, Doug's involvement with the Rotary Club of Stratford began with a focus on international health care. Working with mission groups, first in the Dominican Republic and Mexico, and then in Nicaragua, he and his teammates were able to supply medical equipment to clinics and hospitals, provide critical health care and support education training for mothers and children in rural areas of need.

In 2012, Doug helped found COMMIT (Canadian Outreach Medical Multi-Impact Team) and, in 2019, it was taken under the umbrella of the Rotary Club of Stratford Charitable Foundation. Their mandate expanded to include more impactful environmental projects.

In addition to many other endeavours, they began supporting local populations in establishing micro-businesses such as the sewing

co-ops now thriving in San Luis and Casa de Piedra, Nicaragua. Workshops are held and equipment provided to assist in promoting sustainable agricultural practices, including crop diversity, composting and bee-keeping. Life-enhancing water-wells have been drilled and electrified in several Nicaraguan villages, and these continue to be monitored and maintained. And, working with Stove Team International, clean-energy stoves are being built at minimal cost to replace more hazardous open-fires and, at the same time, locals are being trained in their future construction.

The work of COMMIT is truly remarkable and invaluable. For more information, please visit commitwithnphnicaragua@simplesite.com.

Several years ago, the environmental focus of Doug's outreach work became more central in his personal life. He recalls always having been engaged with the science of environmental issues and, like many of us, he followed the news closely. As it became clear to him that our very survival was now at stake, his concern took on a sense of urgency.

Doug decided to bring the environmental message to his Rotary Club, and a like-minded group soon formed the environment committee. As noted in previous installments, change is challenging and not always an easy sell to a complacent first world, but his club jumped right on board.

Most meetings now include an eco-moment where members of the environment committee share ideas that they have implemented, along with the positive results. There is, after all, no better recommendation than success. A green-events checklist was also devised and all their facilities and func-

tions are now single-use-plastic free, with no plastic bags, bottles or cutlery to be seen. What is to be seen, though, is a compost bin or two, thoughtfully provided.

I was invited recently to a lovely, low-key planting event at the West End Park that Doug, fellow Rotarians Jennifer and Brent, along with master gardener Don had organized in conjunction with the Stratford Horticultural Society, Tri-County Master Gardeners and Parks Stratford. The morning air was crisp, the sun brilliant and the goodwill palpable.

The day's planting was the third in a carefully planned multi-stage project. It began two years ago with the preparation of an earth-friendly seedling bed using cardboard and mulch, generously supplied by the city's parks board. The project was designed to increase the number of pollinator plants, which are essential to the promotion of healthy bee populations, and the number of native trees, which will help to reduce the carbon and greenhouse gases that our grand and great-grandchildren will have to contend with.

This year's additions include cedars and a variety of dogwood shrubs, which now sit snugly amongst the redwoods, maples, junipers, tulip trees and many others. Doug points out a sturdy little poplar tree that was planted last year and is now almost waist high. These good folk certainly know what they're about, as the survival rate of their precious seedlings has been an impressive 70 per cent! All gardens whisper hope; this little gem sings it out loud.

It seems Doug doesn't so much get hold of an idea, as the idea gets hold of him. While his wife, Val, a writer, was initially a little

skeptical, their beautiful home is now a model of green retro-fit. Their gas furnace was replaced with a heat pump and the gas water heater changed out for electric. Solar panels were installed, earning the household \$1,400 annually, which means the panels will pay for themselves in less than 10 years. Three-pane glass now covers most of the original two-pane windows and sliding doors, and even electrical outlets were insulated once discovered to be energy draining.

In their backyard, there is a pollinator garden, four raised vegetable gardens, and, eventually (he hopes), a bee-lawn. So many healthy planet projects to tackle, so little time.

Doug recognizes he and Val are in a privileged position, that not everyone has the means to go to the lengths they have in service of a clean environment. From my perspective, though, and I'm sure from yours, dear reader, it is not about how much each of us is able to do, it is about each of us doing what we are able.

Everyone has a contribution to make, large or small. Plant a native seedling tree or two, refuse to add to the massive carbon-spewing of drive-through lines, keep non-essential air travel to a minimum and, especially, walk, cycle or bus wherever possible.

In this age of self-indulgence, the motto of the Rotary Club stands as a beacon: "Service Above Self." This is not only what Dr. Thompson believes, it is who he is and what he quietly goes about doing.

If you know of an individual, company or organization that deserves recognition for their innovative and sustainable environmental practices, please contact me at frogs-a-leaping@tutamail.com.

Perth County Federation of Agriculture hands out two scholarships

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

The Perth County Federation of Agriculture (PCFA) held its annual Harvest Red Tie Gala in Stratford Nov. 21, and the evening program included presentations of scholarships to two young Perth County university students.

The first recipient of a \$1,000 scholarship was Ian Egger from the Egger dairy farm family of Gadshill.

Egger has been attending the University of Guelph and is studying and working toward his bachelor of science in agriculture.

Growing up, he said he spent countless hours in the buddy seat of the tractor with his dad. Once he got older, he realized how much science was behind farming and became an "aggie" at the University of Guelph.

Egger immersed himself in many clubs, including the dairy science club, the student Federation of OAC club and the square-dancing club.

He also enrolled in 4-H and spent time at Agrama in Switzerland.

He has also been involved in local church fundraisers and helped out with breakfast on the farm at Hill Manor Farms near Mitchell this year.

Egger says he would like to take over his family farm some day, but did work off the farm last summer at Perth Ag. Partners.

In accepting the scholarship, he said maybe someday he'll have a son or daughter sitting with him in the buddy seat of his own tractor on his own farm.

The second \$1,000 scholarship went to Greta DeWetering, who comes from her family farm outside of Sebringville raising swine, beef and growing certified-organic grains.

For the past eight years, she has been an active member of the Perth county 4-H program, participating in many clubs including crafts, baking and livestock. She has been president for the past three years of the Perth county 4-H beef club and is in her second year as vice president of her Ontario Agriculture College class.

She is studying at the University of Guelph and is working towards becoming a large-animal veterinarian.



(LAURA GOOD PHOTO)

SCHOLARSHIPS

Pictured are the two Perth County Federation of Agriculture scholarship winners, Greta DeWetering and Ian Egger, each accepting a \$1,000 scholarship cheque.

Stratford and District Saddle Club holds annual awards dinner

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

Awards were handed out recently to riders with the Stratford and District Saddle club, which saw a local Perth County teenager walk away with the grand prize for most points for the summer's competition.

Annan Murphy from St. Marys, who rides Cleopatra, finished with the most number of points and was awarded a large championship belt buckle from the Mary Murphy family for her efforts.

Coming in a close second was Avery Wilhelm with her horse, Captain Insano, while thirdrd overall went to Dustin Power with his horse named Sixteen.

Saddle Club president Martin Ritsma said the competition was another great year for western horse riders in the area that ranged in age from four to 50 years old.

Those interested in riding in next year's program should contact Helen Thomson at hmthomson95@gmail.com.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS)

Above: The high-point winners in their individual classes at this year's Saddle

Club competition are, in the front row from left, Lila Bage, Hailey Bell, Savannah Jacobs, Averie Jacobs, Dominic Power, Luke Bell and Dustin Power. In the back row from left are Ava Bage, Makayla Tinney, Charlotte Fisher, Annan Murphy and Pearl Fawcett. Absent are Ben Bell, Penelope Forester and Avery Wilhelm.

Left: Makayla Tinney and Charlotte Fisher, who both rode a horse named Spirit, are two young riders from Cherry Grove Stables in Thorndale who took home the hardware in their individual classes at this summer's Stratford Saddle Club competition.

Right: Annan Murphy from St. Marys won the championship belt buckle while riding her horse, Cleopatra, in this summer's saddle-club competition.



William H. Trethewey's early days of the Grand Trunk Railway shops in Stratford, part two

BETTY JO BELTON

Stratford-Perth Archives

A little over a century ago the Stratford Historical Society announced that a number of local people had been invited to write down their memories of life here "in the old days" of the 1800s. They preserved these manuscripts along with other historic documents and photographs until they were transferred to Stratford-Perth Archives in the 1970s.

William H. Trethewey, one of the earliest employees of the Grand Trunk Railway shops on Downie Street in Stratford, carefully penned 32 pages outlining a history of the shops and the people who had worked there. The first section of Trethewey's paper was reprinted in the November 1, 2024 issue of the Stratford Times. It traced the development from the earliest days of the Grand Trunk Railway in the 1850s to the consolidation of their main locomotive repair shops in Stratford in the 1870s. Trethewey picks up the tale and describes how the new facilities in Stratford:

"were furnished with the tools and machinery of the Queen's Wharf shops, Toronto, and of the shops at Brantford. But the new shops lacked some items of equipment which were to be found in the up-to-date shops of that day...The shops as completed in 1871 were small compared to the shops as were enlarged in 1888, and still smaller than the shops as they are today [in the 1920s].

But someone will say "Why do you continuously say "Shops" as though there were more than one." The answer is – The locomotive is the product of several trades, and the part where each trade is carried on, which part is usually walled off to itself within the great building, is called a "shop." Thus there is the blacksmith shop, the boiler shop, the fitting shop, the carpenter and patterns shop, and the time would fail me to tell them all, but finally comes the erecting shop where all the parts of the locomotive, having been operated on and prepared, like the stones of Solomon's temple, are assembled and put together, and the iron horse emerges from it perfect and complete, ready to perform its important function in our modern civilization. Thus we see, that as charity covereth a multitude of sins, the roof of one large building was ever a multitude of shops. I may say that the iron foundry is usually a separate building, and the railway has not yet had one in Stratford, though it has often been spoken of as a department to be established here in the future.

The main building of the shops erected in 1870-71 was 410 feet long by 100 feet wide, and when we consider what it contained, we are filled with wonder and amazement. Surely Noah's ark was not more closely packed.

Within its walls were the office of the General Mechanic...the reading room and library, the power room which contained the boilers and the engine for running the shop machinery, the boiler repair shop, the paint shop, the brass foundry, the blacksmith shop, the machine shop, the copper and tin shop, the carpenter and pattern shop, and the erecting shop.

The Stores Department was housed in a



Herbert Roberts from The Old Boys' Herald Aug 6 1906

substantial separate brick building. It was built at the same time as the new shops and was situated just to the north of them. It still stands [as of the 1920s] despite all the changes which have occurred during the passing years.

The office of the Mechanical Superintendent and his staff occupied a frame building near the Downie Street crossing of the Goderich line. The time keeper's office was in a small frame building close to the offices of the Mechanical Superintendent.

The Shops, of course, were manned from the Toronto and Brantford shops, which they replaced, the combined force numbering about 150 men. The lead man of the mechanical department in Stratford was T.H. Roberts, Assistant Mechanical Superintendent of the Grand Trunk. [T. Herbert Roberts, 1844-1915, is seen here in a photograph published in a special edition of the Stratford Herald newspaper in 1906]. Next to him was Thomas Patterson, father of the late Master Mechanic Robert Patterson. He was general foreman of the whole establishment. After him came the foremen of the different departments. Alex McLean of the erecting shop. William Aird of the machine shop. John Spencer of the blacksmith shop. Andrew McIntosh of the boiler shop. David Gardener, father of John C. Gardner, now so high in the service of the C.N.R., over the copper and tin shop. Andrew Fuller over the carpenter shop. Sampson Gill, over the painters. William Todd was over the running shed. This building was situated right along the south side of the new shop building. It was formerly the Buffalo and Lake Huron freight shed. It continued to do duty as a running shed until the round house was built.

The completion of the round house made this change in Stratford's railway officials, it brought here Mr. C.F. Neild as round house foreman and moved Mr. Todd to the same position at Point Edward. We old timers remember Mr. Todd as a genial mannered man whom it was always a pleasure to meet. On

his leaving, "we" presented him with an address expressive of our appreciation of him. He held his position at Point Edward until his death a good many years ago.

Mr. Neild had lost his right arm in the Company's service before he came here. He held the position of round house foreman for many years. He was a most capable official. Under his management the Stratford round house was a model of neatness and order, and roundhouse foremen from other parts of the road were brought here to see what a properly kept round house was like.

As a citizen Mr. Neild was public spirited and was a member in turn of the public school and Collegiate Institute boards.

But to return to the officials of the new shops. After the foremen of the different departments, came the gang bosses – Chris McLellan, David Lester, Robert Gilmour, T. Woodbridge, Robert Clarkson, W. Reid.

The Stores Department was presided over from 1871 until his death in the '80s by Mr. James Wright. Mr. Wright was a most worthy and conscientious man, of who it might be said that the corner stone of his character was sterling integrity. He was a diligent reader who possessed a very considerable collection of books...

Another important office was that of time keeper, which was occupied by the late James Steel. Mr. Steel came to Stratford about 67 years ago in the very early days of the Buffalo and Lake Huron being one of the first railway officials in this place.

On the completion of the new shops in 1871, he was appointed to the position of time keeper. He filled this position faithfully and efficiently for many years, when at last he was honorably retired from the Company's service. He was a man of more than ordinary intelligence, was a diligent reader – a newspaper contributor and enthusiastic gardener – especially of flowers. For years he was a member of the Public School Board, then its Secretary and finally he served on the Collegiate Board.

These new comers...were men of precision and skill at their respective trades. Indeed one has only to look at a locomotive going at full speed, when the spokes of the driving wheel are but a mist, to come to the conclusion that no sloppy workmanship must enter into its make up. One could not but be amused by what he would hear sometimes, and he would also be impressed with the workman's regard for perfect accuracy. For instance a piece of work would come from a machine to the man who had next to do with it. He would measure it and square it, and on a rare occasion, he might find in it what we would call a trifling error. He would go to the machine man and say "Why that's a mile out." The machine man would say "oh come now, how much is it?" and he would say "It's a full 32nd or 64th [of an inch]"...

Well, these new comers, many of them married men with children, constituted a considerable addition to Stratford's population. They mingled with its life, they established their houses here; they were represented in every church, and in every society, social or fraternal: the interests of Stratford became their interests, and thus they became public spirited citizens of the place which the

policy of the Grand Trunk had made to be their new home.

Of the men who came here in 1871, few are now alive, but of the few we may mention Peter McNab and Joseph Bullock of the waterworks and Maurice J. Dillon and his brother Michael, George Clark who succeeded John Spencer as foreman blacksmith in 1877, when the latter died. Mr. Clark continued to hold this position until recently, being the oldest employee of the entire Grand Trunk system. There may be others yet alive who have passed out of our recollection. But, though dead, the lives of many of them are perpetuated in our midst by their children and grandchildren.

The time would fail me to speak particularly of each man – each private in the ranks, let it suffice to say that each man knew his duty, and no matter whether it were humble or most important, he did it faithfully and well. But perhaps it will not be amiss to say a few words about those who were outstanding by virtue of their official position. And first, I will speak of Mr. T. Herbert Roberts, the highest in command.

Mr. Roberts belonged to a family of Irish gentry... To those of us who remember him he stands forth as an active smallish man with close-cropped red hair, and a pleasant face – somewhat florid – which mirrored forth the good natured genial soul enshrined within. ... We understood that for some years, in some capacity, he had sailed the seas, in proof of which was his ability to splice ropes, to tie all manner of knots, and to climb like a man accustomed to going aloft and reefing topsails in the face of a driving gale. One day a fire broke out in a house belonging to Michael Dillon senior, on Inverness Street. One of the first to respond to the alarm was Mr. Roberts. He ran with a speed which few could equal, and as soon as a ladder was raised, with coat thrown off, he ran up it as a sailor would climb the ratlines. In a trice he was astride the ridge of the roof pouring water from pails which were passed up to him. All this happening before the town fire apparatus arrived. Was this undignified? Perhaps it was; but Mr. Roberts never bothered about his dignity. He knew everybody about the Shops from the man next to him in command to the youngest apprentice, and he spoke to them anywhere and everywhere, and he had the good will of each of them. We remember the morning when he was married to Miss Sarah Daly, daughter of T. M. Daly, M.P. On schedule time, the first little Roberts arrived and all went merry as a marriage bell. [The Roberts-Daly wedding took place on October 3, 1871. Roberts died in 1915 and Sarah the next year. They are buried together near the Daly family vault in Avondale Cemetery in Stratford.]

I should have stated that Mr. Roberts' duties included supervision of the district as well as of the shops. He continued in Stratford until about the year 1880. I am not quite sure of the date, when he was given a similar position, I think on the Montreal-Brockville division."

To be continued next time. Please contact Stratford-Perth Archives, 519-271-0531 ext 259 or archives@perthcounty.ca with any questions or comments.

Musings: An Invisible World



MARK HERTZBERGER

Times Freelance Columnist

Are you TAB? Most of us are. This is an acronym sometimes used to describe healthy individuals. It stands for Temporarily Able-Bodied. When you think about it, it's the perfect label. Some people already have disabilities but the majority of us can only count on being able-bodied for an indefinite period of time. Eventually - and inevitably - ad-

vanced age, illness, or mishap will be heading down the tracks toward us all.

This became strikingly obvious when my wife Yvonne had to have a hip replacement. Trips around Stratford could no longer be undertaken casually. There were many issues to strategize around, including where to park and how to navigate stairs and uneven sidewalks. It was then we began to see a world that is often invisible to others, a world of obstacles and frustration.

Sure, one restaurant in town had a nice ramp leading to its entrance but staff there were oblivious to the fact that it was coated in ice. At the other end town, a brand new food market appeared which looked wonderful but located most of its in-store lunch and meeting area up a flight of stairs - with no elevator. There were some tables on the main level spread amidst the expensive

merchandise but these were limited. Perhaps opportunities were overlooked in the planning process here. Incorporating accessibility into new builds is generally less expensive than retrofitting after the fact.

In 2005 Ontario introduced AODA, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. AODA sets out standards for establishing and enforcing accessibility in customer service, information and communications, transportation, employment, and design of public spaces. The goal, simply put, is for people with disabilities to access and enjoy the same services everyone else does without being centered out or ushered through a rear staff entrance with a wider door.

Organizations and businesses were asked to phase in measures over time so that Ontario would be totally accessible by 2025. Yes, that's in a few weeks,



folks! How ready are we? A walk around Stratford is not encouraging: narrow doorways and aisles in businesses, inaccessible washrooms, steep steps in various states of deterioration, and cavernous, echoing dining spaces making it difficult for anyone with hearing loss to take part in the conversation.

So, after a 20 year phase-in period and tons of training and resources, what else will it take to make accessibility happen?

If conversations with some employers and public agencies fail, I foresee an escalation of complaints under AODA and the Ontario Human Rights Act. Too often it seems that this is the way things get done in reverse: wait for an injury and the ensuing lawsuit, then incorporate accessibility measures into the settlement.

Perhaps it would be a good New Year's resolution for all of us to take a practice walk in the invisible world of disability.

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

Web-crawling in the stumpery - in December!



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Freelance Columnist

Have you ever seen a stumpery? Visited a stumpery? Built a stumpery? Let's do that!

Lorraine Johnson, cultivation activist, challenged us to create stumperies last week at Nature Stratford. Returning to her theme of inter-dependency, Lorraine reminded us of the varied habitats needed by the wide range of known fellow travellers on Planet Earth. We know that insects are part of the web that keeps us healthy and fed - especially pollinators. There are approximately one million insects that have been identified, and an estimated two to 30 million that we haven't met yet!

You may think insects are a bother, but all life forms are connected on that web of life that keeps us alive! Lorraine explained the co-dependency local lifeforms have with nature in our area. The insects and birds that share our local environment have lived together for thousands of years. Their habitats (food and



shelter) are completely linked to our plants, our nesting sites, our shelter, our climate. So, what's a stumpery? What is one thing you thought was only good for burning? Wood! Dead wood is actually precious habitat for shelter, places to hide seeds and nuts, shelter for cocoons, homes for insects that are then food for birds, and a source of fertilizer for the soil as it breaks down.

Wow, all that from a chunk - or a stump - of wood!

An array of dead stumps and/

or branches can make a really attractive corner of the garden, with native plants tucked in around them, and be enormously appreciated by our necessary insects - both above ground and below!

Speaking of trees and our co-dependent Earth travellers, December is a wonderful time to reduce the use of trees that are cut down to provide wrapping paper and oil products like plastic that contribute to that blanket of pollution surrounding the planet. That blanket is trapping heat that

is leading to habitat destruction for all of us. This holiday season, be a friend of Earth by:

1) Instead of buying new gift-wrap paper, wrap in newspaper! Put a festive bow on, make some fun designs on the package, and presto, you've saved a tree and made a fun package! (Most gift wrap papers and all tissue papers go into landfill)

2) Take a tip from origami paper folding and try to use as little tape as possible - none, even! Most tape is a plastic product, and plastic is an oil product.

3) Go thrifting for fun, one-of-a-kind items to help Santa with stockings. Thrift stores are the new treasure bonanzas! Last week I complimented a young woman on her lovely camel-hair coat. She proudly told me it was a thrift find! Join the trend; Stratford has a wealth of thrift stores and consignment shops!

This year, think trees, from stumperies to gift wrap to reuse. Protect the multitude of life that needs habitat and take a walk on the wild side when you're seasonal shopping - go thrifting!

Updates:

1) Carbon ppm (parts per million) in the atmosphere: 423.6 ppm. Safe level is considered to be 350 ppm, last seen in 1990.

2) Carbon Capture is unlikely to grow fast enough to remove enough carbon (pollution) from our atmosphere in time. We still need to pursue reduction of fossil fuels and alternative-energy strategies.

3) I was taking a tree course at the Guelph Arboretum. Someone asked Henry Koch, the teacher, "When is the right time to clear the garden?" Henry paused. "What happens in the forest?" he asked. You could have heard a pin drop as, one after another, light bulbs went on above the heads of all of us.

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

Until soon. Live well: An event occurred...



STUART LENDER

Times Contributor

An event occurred on a day like any other, but the event was not like another. The day itself knew nothing of its Christmas dressings, its special choral vibration of warm hearts and hello's crackling down the wires, winding along country roads, threading joy together like festive ribbon. Those things belonged in the world of people, not in the wholeness of the natural world – birth, decline, death and rebirth. That day knew only that it was one day in a winter season – that the trees, the fields, the streams and all of the day's natural wonders were cocooned

in a silence that would, in a few short months, blossom out into the sounds of Spring, the rainbow of flowers, the smell of the green.

But for now – on Christmas Day eve, only the fading light, the grey-blue gauze of winter.

There were people moving, here to there, anticipating hugs and tracing their hopes and warm wishes under the tires of their cars that marked out their paths – the blueprint of their travels. It went on like that all day, until the day declined, silent and soft.

In a house with stitched-frost windows, the tendrils of time and snow breathed out and spread their lace onto the glass from the warm inside. In the tiny winter house, a daughter and her friend waited, on that very same day that an event occurred. They were coming – a mother and a father, a family dog – coming to share the eve with their only daughter and her "friend," all of them eager because exactly at the moment of departure, at a point in the holiday blueprint of cars and miles, (of which Mom and Dad and dog were one), the little house where the two waited

became a point of destination, a point of anticipation, the point where spirits would shake themselves free from the journey, into celebration, into a cacophony of sound and laughter and greeting. Perhaps under mistletoe. Perhaps by the warming hearth. Perhaps on the damp mat of winter wet, where the dog would be cautioned so as not to be stepped upon.

On that particular day, with all it had to offer...an event occurred...

...and when the daughter and her friend could wait no longer, they nervously stepped out into the mouth of winter and found its unforgiving teeth – the biting cold of a Christmas unfamiliar, that yawned over them and clamped the festivities shut. They got into their car to locate something they prayed they would not find; filled with thoughts they dared not mention. And in the diminishing twilight, they began to deny the day, as if it didn't exist. Just moved through it, mile after white mile, as they must...as though key players in a Christmas pageant – as though they could create something

good of it through the prayer.

And there, finally, in the distance they saw it, tacked harshly onto the end of a Christmas card day, the place where the event occurred. Up ahead. A winter manger? A refuge from the cold? No – though they had wanted the Christmas story, though they had wanted the blessed ending. Something larger there in the blue/white haze up ahead, large enough for three. It lay there... under a bridge...immersed in a stream that might as well have been an ocean...upended and silent.

...and the event that occurred, sprang up in their awareness and hurled itself at them – fast and furious. Then all jubilant Christmas trumpets faltered, and wavered in the sound of winter wind whistling through the wires, the trees, the frantic crack of ice over thinly veiled water – over the silent scream, the empty road, the crumbling holiday – before all things slowed and all sensation halted, and the roaring silence took them over.

On December 25, 2018, on the day the event occurred, an entire family took on a thick mantle of

water, snow and silence when their car slid off a country road, near a small bridge, and into a half-frozen stream – and my dear friend, a funeral director no less, became a mourner under the weight of endless days. At the time, it was incomprehensible – to so suddenly and completely become the last member of her family. It took a long time for her to realize she was not alone that Christmas night. One is never alone in tragedy. She had others – all who have suffered the loss of someone ripped from time on a day like any other. A grace-filled day, as all days are, simply for existing – a day she eventually recognized as such, despite the holiday, despite an event that occurred.

May you hold those you love close this holiday season. May your hearts be full of all things they give, for you to cherish, for you to learn.

Stuart is a celebrant and the manager of Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services. It is his privilege to serve, dispel myths, and give information concerning his field of compassionate service.

COMING EVENTS Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

MISTLETOE MARKET AT ST. JAMES
Saturday, November 30; 9:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
St. James Anglican Church, 41 Mornington Street, Stratford
 All things Christmas! Baking, savouries, home-made crafts, treasures and many more items just in time for Christmas giving. Be sure to visit our Snowflake Cafe and enjoy tasty treats as our Guest.

GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING
Monday, January 13, 2025; 7:15 – 9:00 p.m.
Army Navy Hall, 151 Lorne Ave. E., Stratford
 Featured Presentation: "Design Solutions for Small Spaces", Tom Temming, Landscape Designer, Touch of Dutch. Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

Large size portion fresh cut fries paired with a pint or draft or Po. \$20/person, Kids 12 and under \$10. For tickets call legion office at 519-271-4540 or Dave Hartney at 519-703-6544 or order online.

GOURMET POUTINE & BEER FUNDRAISER
Thursday, January 23, 2025; 6:00 - 10:00 p.m.
Stratford Legion

CROKINOLE CLUB
 Every Tuesday 2-4 p.m.
 Rec Centre, 2nd floor Ristma room
 Stratford
 For more info call Oliver Davidson 519-508-5664

STRATFORD TIMES

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

PROMOTE YOUR EVENTS WITH US! HERE'S HOW:

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

Community of Christ
 226 Forman Avenue 519-271-4539
*Proclaiming Jesus Christ
 with communities of*
LOVE, JOY, HOPE & PEACE

Worship with us
Sunday 10:00 a.m.
 11:00 a.m. – Fellowship and
 Coffee Hour

We are a Welcoming Community



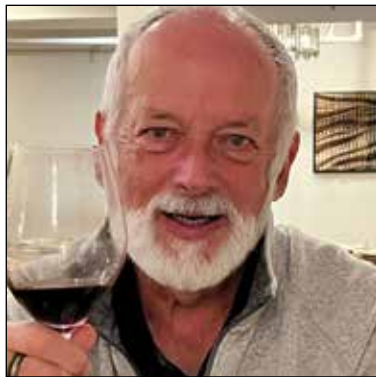
**Stratford Associate
 Reformed
 Presbyterian Church**

Quality Inn Festival
 (1144 Ontario St., Stratford)

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

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

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Museum a labour of love in New Denmark



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Contributor

Let's be honest, here; you are unlikely to travel to New Brunswick solely for the purpose of visiting the small, quaint New Denmark Memorial Museum. But if you are in New Brunswick – and I can give you dozens of reasons why this wonderful province should be included in your travel plans – you really should schedule a stop at this small-town museum, a labour of love by local folks determined to preserve and honour their legacy.

Our hosts at the museum were Shelley Partanan and Ron Hansen, both volunteers and both descendants of the original Danish settlers who came to this part of New Brunswick in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The newly refurbished museum is a product of the energy and commitment of the local community, a group of people determined to honour their heritage as proud Canadians, but also as proud offspring of some pioneering Danish immigrants.

Partanan told us that the first shipload of Danes to come to the area arrived in Saint John in 1872 and took a smaller boat up the Saint John River to found what is now New Denmark. They were lured to Canada by prom-



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

New Denmark Memorial Museum volunteers Shelley Partanan and Ron Hansen.

ises of land ready to be farmed, a road system and places to live. These promises were exaggerations at the least, outright lies at the worst.

That first ship brought 29 Danes to New Brunswick. They were given 100 acres of land each but found they had to clear the land, build the roads and live together in one common building.

They persevered and over the next five decades or so were joined by friends and relatives from Denmark until eventually, the community numbered 119 families.

This history – and subsequent events in the community – are commemorated in the museum. The exhibits include a building a few metres away from the main museum, a small-scale replica of the original communal house shared by the first Danes to arrive. That building was constructed several decades ago by a much younger Hansen, who was just 17 years old at the time the

reproduction house was built.

The museum itself reopened in the summer of 2024 after extensive reconstruction of the building and reconfiguration and redesign of the exhibits.

The reconstruction was a challenging project. Partanan notes “every single thing in the building had to be packed up and removed” because they had to remediate mould and asbestos issues. But that also presented the volunteers with an unprecedented opportunity; they cleaned and labelled every artefact before they were returned to the museum.

The museum acknowledges the agricultural heritage of the area; New Denmark was home to dairy farms, a cheese factory and potato farming. Partanan says that in the earliest days, “I have heard stories that they were planting potatoes among the trees,” for food for the pioneer families. Today, almost all the local agriculture is about potatoes.

There are exhibits about almost every aspect of life in New Denmark. The Women's Institute – once a vital organization in New Denmark, as it was in many smaller Canadian communities – has a section dedicated to its work. So does the school – which is appropriate, since the building that now houses the museum was once the local primary school, which Hansen attended in 1968 for one year. The school was closed in 1969.

It may not be a surprise considering the community's Scandinavian roots that New Denmark was once home to ski-jumping competitions and this and other local sports history is on display in the museum. One baseball team honoured bore the entirely appropriate name, The Spuds.

Hansen's grandfather was the first postmaster in the community, operating the post office out of his convenience store. His desk, chair and other memorabilia form one small exhibit at the

museum.

And there are examples of unique Danish traditions carried on proudly in the newcomers' new homeland such as brightly coloured Danish dancing costumes.

One of the most moving exhibits in the museum is the wall of photos honouring the men and women of New Denmark who were in the armed forces during the world wars. I noted that the relatively small community had contributed a surprisingly large number of young people to the war efforts, and Partanan and Hansen said this was a reflection of the love the people of New Denmark had both for their adopted country of Canada and for their original homeland in Europe.

The New Denmark Memorial Museum is a moving tribute to the Danish pioneers who came to New Brunswick to start new lives, and to their descendants who continued that commitment. But it is also a tribute to the residents of today who have devoted so much volunteer time and effort to keep that history alive.

The museum is open to visitors, June through August, staffed by students thanks to government grants, but the local volunteers would be happy to give tours in the off-season to interested people as well. In a true reflection of rural hospitality, Partanan pointed out there is a sign with contact information and, if visitors call, “Somebody will run up.” Admission is by donation.

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.



The replica of the original communal building that housed the first 29 Danes to arrive in New Denmark in 1872.



Artifacts from the earliest days of farming and pioneer life.

Wild game and fish can be a healthy part of the diet

JEFF HELSDON

Times Contributor

In today's society where the majority of Canadians live in urban centres and no longer have a connection to rural areas, more is lost than just a connection to the land.

Not that long ago, many of the people living in cities were only a generation or two away from rural living. They had parents, grandparents, aunts or uncles who lived on the farm, or were hunters and anglers living in rural areas. If they didn't know about wild game and fishing, they knew about grass-fed beef, barnyard chickens and the cycle of life.

Fast-forward a few decades and much has changed. To many today, beef, pork or chicken all comes in foam trays in the grocery store or is processed and boxed. This is also a time when eating red meat is frowned on by many health organizations due to the higher fat content, but there are alternatives.

Wild game and fish is not the same as store-bought red meat. It is lower in fat and higher in important nutrients. I also believe that wild game and grass-fed domestic livestock is what humans have eaten for centuries and our digestive systems have evolved to consider that normal.

Science has looked at this topic and backed this assertion. Bruce Watkins of Purdue University and anthropologist Loren Cordain of Colorado State University completed a study that looked at the role of dietary fat and its nutritional analysis in modern food versus what ancient hunter-gatherer societies ate. Using detailed chemical analysis, they looked at the meat people ate 10,000 years ago and compared it to modern livestock fed a diet of oilseed-based feed. Their conclusion was wild game like venison or elk, and grass-fed beef contain fats that are healthy and can lower cholesterol and reduce chronic-disease risk.

More specifically, a healthy diet should have the right mix of Omega-6 and Omega-3 fats. In the right quantity, Omega-3 can reduce cardiovascular disease, but too much can increase stroke risk. Omega-6 is an essential fat, but too much can contribute to inflammatory reactions from chronic disease.

Watkins said the fatty acid ratio in wild ruminants is similar to the Omega-3 levels in fish that are recommended by the American Heart Association to reduce cardiovascular disease. In other research, Cordain looked at the few remaining hunter-gatherer societies that remain and found heart disease, high cholesterol, obesity and diabetes are rare in those people.

Canada's Food Guide doesn't get into the detail that Cordain and Watkins' study did, but it does recommend lean cuts of meat, and mentions "most wild game, such as bison, caribou, deer, elk and moose."

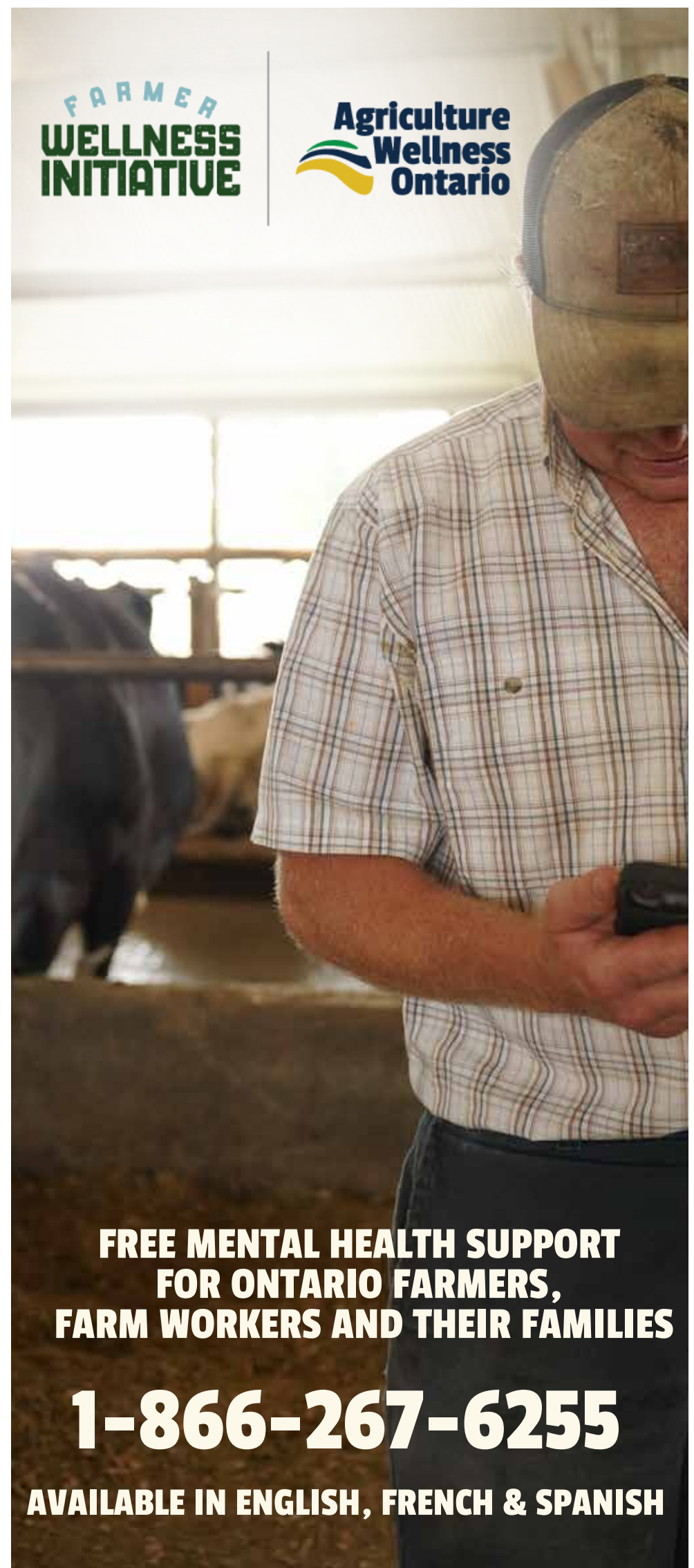
Fall is the time of the year when most harvesting takes place for hunters. It's also the time that anglers may consider cooking more of the fish they have caught over the summer. Proper preparation can be more important with leaner cuts of meat as it dries out quicker than fattier cuts. The key is not to overcook if it's on a barbecue, frying pan or in the oven.

It's hard to beat venison tenderloin, cut thin and cooked with spices on the barbecue or in a frying pan. For the more elaborate and slightly less healthy, venison tenderloins or backstrap can be treated the same as filet mignon and wrapped in bacon. This is definitely barbecue material.

A long user of Fish Crisp for fish, I discovered a superior dry breading material this summer. Taylor's One Step takes the same concept and improves on taste.

It's time to enjoy what you have harvested.

Jeff Helsdon is an award-winning outdoor writer, a columnist for Ontario Out of Doors and writes for several other outdoor publications.



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OBITUARY



DEBORAH "DEBBY" MARLENE LEGALLEE

Deborah "Debby" Marlene LeGallee, age 68, passed away on Friday, November 8, 2024 surrounded by her loving family, after bravely battling cancer for over a year and a half.

Debby was born in Chesley, Ontario to Joan and Jack Rowe. She is survived by her loving husband of 44 years, Peter. She was an exceptional mom to Adam and Cara, showing endless love, forgiveness and understanding. She was a proud and adoring nana to Hayden and Matthew, spoiling them and smothering them with her kisses. Debby will be remembered and missed by her sister Pam Rowe and brother Todd Rowe, sister-in-law Carole Rowe, niece Emelie Rowe, and nephews Alex Rowe, Spencer and Dylan Steckley, and daughter-in-law Ashley. She is predeceased by her brothers John (Jake) Rowe and Randy Rowe, and beloved niece Amy Clark (Rowe).

Debby was so incredibly special with the kindest soul and the biggest heart – adored by her family and friends. Her warmth and generosity were evident in everything she did. She was always the first to embrace you with open arms and a welcoming smile. Debby was a huge animal lover, opening her heart and home to all creatures. An adventurous spirit, a traveller, an admirer of sunsets and the best cook – she found the most joy in the simple things life had to offer like spending time with the people she loved.

Her husband, children and grandchildren were her world, and she was theirs.

While you may no longer be with us, your legacy lives on in the memories created and the love you so freely gave. You were a gift to all that knew you – the best wife, mom, sister, nana and friend. We will miss you every single day and love you forever and always.

Memorial donations may be made in Debby's honour to the Stratford Perth Humane Society (www.kwsphumane.ca) directly or through Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services (www.jarfh.com) 804 Ontario St., Stratford. 519-271-5062.

THANK YOU

FOUNTAIN, JOY DIANNA

The family of the late Joy D Fountain would like to thank everyone for their care and support in our time of need. Special thanks to our neighbours, relatives, coworkers and family friends for their phone calls, cards, flowers, food, donations, and visits during our bereavement.

Also special thanks to Dr. Langford, Dr. Vergara and Dr. Ashe for their care of Joy and to the paramedics, Stratford Police and fire department and to Dr Pope for their professionalism and care as needed. And to WG Young Funeral Home for their immense help and assistance.

Your thoughtfulness and kindness will also be remembered and was greatly appreciated. With thanks, Doug Fountain and family.

OBITUARY



HELEN KATHLEEN COOK

Helen Kathleen Cook, daughter of the late Sam and Sarah Jutzi, died peacefully with her family around her on November 23, 2024.

Helen was born February 19, 1934 and lived all her life in North Easthope Township. She moved into Stratford after her husband Allister Cook died in 2012. She was also predeceased by her son Gregory in 1969, and two grandsons, Michael (1981) and Gregory (1998). Helen is survived and sadly missed by her children Howard (Mary Anne), Jackie (Gary) and Stephen (Irene). Grandma will be fondly remembered by her grandchildren, Matthew (Sylvia), Andrea (Ryan), Dylan (Emma) and Chad (Taryn), and great grandson Ethan. Helen is also survived by sisters-in-law Elva and Selina Jutzi and many nieces and nephews.

Helen and Allister, along with Allister's brother Russell, started Cook Brothers Drainage in 1949 and ran the business until 1983 when their sons Howard and Stephen took over. Helen was an avid reader of books and newspapers. She took great interest in what was happening in the world and loved to discuss in great detail, things she had read. Before Allister died, together they traveled to every continent except for Antarctica and their home was filled with mementos that they brought back with them.

Helen had a great love for gardening and was continually expanding her flower gardens when they lived out on the Amulree Road. She knew the Latin name for every flower she planted and took great pride in showing her gardens off and for many years, she supplied the floral arrangements for Sunday service at St. Peter's Church, Gadshill.

During her last few years, she enjoyed visits with her children and grandchildren and especially loved when her grand dogs Aria and Pippin came to visit. They knew she always had treats for them.

As per Helen's wishes, there will be no public visitation or celebration of life. There will be a private family interment at a later date.

In memory of Helen, expressions of sympathy may be made to the Alzheimer Society of Perth County (www.alzheimer.ca/huronperth/) or to charity of one's choice – directly, or through Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services. 804 Ontario St., Stratford. (www.jarfh.com / 519-271-5062)

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In Death I do the same*

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But you did not go alone
For part of me went with you
The day God call you home*

*You left me peaceful memories
Your love is still my guide
And though I cannot see you
You are always by my side*

*I hold you tightly within my heart
And there you will remain
I live my life the best I can
Until that day we will meet again*

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Riddles

Why did the shopper bring a ladder to Black Friday?

To reach the deals that were through the roof!

Why don't Black Friday shoppers go to school?

Because they already know the deal!

Why did Santa avoid the mall on Black Friday?

Because he couldn't clause his way through the crowds.

How do you know it's Black Friday?

Because you can buy two TVs you don't need for the price of one!

What's the best way to avoid long lines on Black Friday?

Don't go! Just wait for Cyber Monday.

What did one shopper say to the other on Black Friday?

"Don't stand in my way unless you're 50% off!"

What's a Black Friday shopper's worst fear?

Seeing "OUT OF STOCK" right as you hit checkout!

What's the most dangerous part of Black Friday shopping?

Shopping with a full cart in a crowd is like playing bumper carts!

Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 38



CHANCE

Meet Chance, a brave and affectionate cat looking for a loving home! Once in critical condition, Chance has made an incredible recovery thanks to dedicated care. This playful and chatty boy adores chasing toy mice, batting at balls, and curling up for cozy couch time. Chance does have Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease (FLUTD), a manageable lifelong condition requiring a special diet and monitoring. His health has improved significantly, and his vet records will be provided to help ensure his continued well-being. If you're ready to give this resilient sweetheart a second chance, apply to adopt Chance today!



Pet of the Month



Word Search

BLACK FRIDAY SHOPPING

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

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- 2) Nocturnal
- 3) Pharaoh Khafre
- 4) 1,000 years
- 5) Venezuela
- 6) Five
- 7) 2014
- 8) Jake Paul
- 9) Starbucks
- 10) 1963

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

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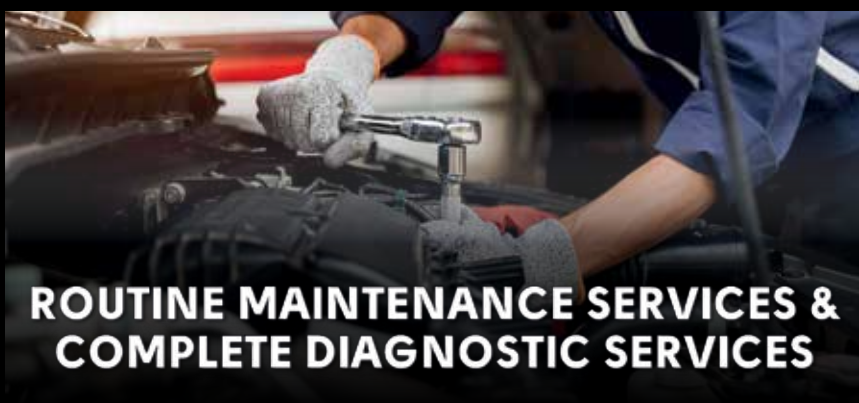
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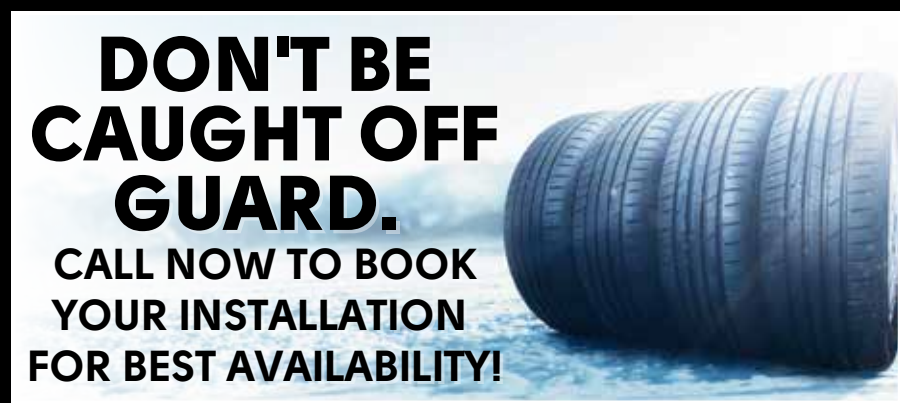

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