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2024 YEAR IN REVIEW



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Looking back on 2024, a year of uncertainty, change and forward thinking

GALEN SIMMONS

Gazette Editor

Looking back on the year that was, it's hard to believe I've only served as editor of this newspaper for 12 months – my one-year anniversary is the date this paper is published, though I'm writing this roughly two weeks before you'll be reading it.

So much has happened since I started my time as editor and there is so much to look back on as we look ahead to 2025. On the front page of this Year in Review edition of the Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette, there are four photos. After searching through every photo and every story we published in 2024, I selected these four photos as representative of a few key themes in local news over the past year.

The first photo at the top-left of the page, sent to the paper by Rory Farnan, depicts roughly 100 township landowners who attended the March 25 Wilmot council meeting to protest the Region of Waterloo's proposed acquisition of 770 acres of prime agricultural land in Wilmot Township for the construction of an as-of-yet undisclosed mega-industrial site.

The protest was one of many demonstrations, rallies, public meetings and press conferences held by groups of Wilmot citizens, like Fight For Farmland, and local politicians who spoke out against the lack of transparency from upper levels of government with regard to the land-acquisition process.

Questions like what company or industry would be moving onto the land once acquired by the region, whether the site



and surrounding township has been properly assessed for such a mega-industrial site, and why so many details around this process have been kept secret remain unanswered.

While this story certainly dominated the headlines in 2024, it illustrates the importance of civic engagement in municipal politics and holding people in power accountable for their decisions. This year, residents in Wilmot and across our coverage area have been engaging in the political process and ensuring their voices are heard when something doesn't make sense.

From Wilmot Township's unprecedented, proposed 2025 tax levy increase of nearly 51 per cent and ongoing discussions around the controversial Prime Ministers'

Path to East Zorra-Tavistock's refusal to allow the development of wind farms in the township and a Shakespeare resident's attempts to make his community safer with the establishment of a community safety zone along Highway 7/8, locals have been getting involved and decision-makers are listening.

The second photo at the top-right of the front page, taken by me, is of the ribbon cutting for the brand-new Bill Gies Recreation Centre in Wellesley Township on June 22. While you'll read more about the official opening of the \$27-million rec complex later on in this newspaper, this photo, to me, represents what a community can accomplish when everyone works together for a common cause.

In this case, the rec complex was the

result of "a two-year labour of love" as residents, service clubs, sports and community organizations, township and regional staff, and local, regional, provincial and federal politicians put their differences aside to accomplish something that simply would not have been possible for the Township of Wellesley to accomplish on its own.

By working together, they built a home for sports, community events, fitness and health, and the overall betterment of life for township residents now and well into the future. Elsewhere in the area, other communities undertook similar efforts on smaller scales, including the establishment of the Tavistock Spray Pad, the opening of the Nith River Promenade and Trail in New Hamburg and so many other upgrades, renovations and improvements to community facilities in communities from Hickson all the way to New Dundee, and everywhere in between.

The third photo on the bottom-left of the front page, a drone shot submitted by Dave Snook, shows the safety improvements completed at the notorious Punkeydoodles Corner intersection this year.

The \$1.08-million construction project undertaken by the counties of Perth and Oxford, the Region of Waterloo and Wilmot Township incorporated several new safety measures at the intersection including a new southbound left turn lane, a northbound right turn lane and deceleration lanes along the curve on Perth Road 101, as well as a realignment of Road 101A at Perth Road 101 to improve sightlines and the addition of lighting at the intersection

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of Road 101A and Perth Road 101.

While the construction was a headache for local residents and drivers in the area, and some area residents weren't entirely on board with the plan from the start, its completion represents a major step forward for traffic safety in the area. More importantly, it represents the tireless efforts of municipal staff and the difficult decisions made by elected officials that resulted in the solving of a longstanding and widely recognized problem.

Without that push and pull between the engineers and planners who come up with innovative solutions to local infrastructure issues and the local residents who fear disruption in their daily lives and the future issues that may arise as a result of potentially poor planning, major infrastructure upgrades like those undertaken this year at Punkeydoodles Corner, on Snyder's Road West in Baden and on Queen's Bush Road in Wellesley would not be nearly as effective and would cause far more upheaval than they do.

The final photo at the bottom-right of the front page, taken by our man about town, Gary West, is of Shakespeare Optimist Club members Jim Rader, Jeff Skubowius and Mike McNeil as they measure an entrant in this year's first-annual Shakespeare

Sunflower Competition.

Dreamt up by longtime Optimist Richard Smelski, the competition was an innovative way to both engage locals with the club and brighten and beautify the Village of Shakespeare.

Across the local region, service clubs, community organizations and the countless volunteers who serve as members work tirelessly to make our communities better places to live. From fall fairs and local festivals to fish fries and fundraisers, these clubs and organizations establish and carry forward annual traditions and complete projects for the betterment of their communities that shape the very character of each of our towns and villages.

Today, however, the members of these clubs and organizations are getting older and they're increasingly unable to do the sheer quantity of work they've done for decades. Now more than ever, it is crucial for younger generations to reach out, volunteer and become members to keep this foundational piece of the fabric of our communities alive and well into the future.

Looking back on 2024 has been a fun experience, but I'm even more excited to see what 2025 has in store.

Happy New Years to all the Gazette's readers, contributors and friends!

The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette Weekly Quiz

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

Answers found on page 26

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HOROSCOPES FOR THE FIRST WEEK OF 2024

METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION

ARIES - Mar 21/Apr 20

You are likely to question information you receive this week, Aries. Investigate things further, but remain receptive to what others are saying.

TAURUS - Apr 21/May 21

Taurus, it is time to solidify plans and any grand schemes you may have; otherwise, you may not know which path to take. For now, start outlining your ideas.

GEMINI - May 22/June 21

Practice your communication skills, Gemini, as you are likely to need them this week. You may need to resolve a sticky situation and serve as a voice of reason.

CANCER - June 22/July 22

Cancer, this week you may be looking to clean house, so to say. You are tossing away old beliefs and habits and are

ready to embrace something new. It might be an exciting time.

LEO - July 23/Aug 23

Leo, everything that you are going through right now is part of a cycle that has a beginning and an end. If you wait it out, you will find that patience pays off.

VIRGO - Aug 24/Sept 22

Virgo, maintain open lines of communication. Some may offer advice, while others may seek it. Be receptive to the former and do your best to accommodate the latter.

LIBRA - Sept 23/Oct 23

Do what you can to help others in need, Libra. Offer your services and insight, and be prepared to help in other ways as well.

SCORPIO - Oct 24/Nov 22

Scorpio, you are giving off an energy lately that others might be attracted to. Don't be surprised if your fan club increases in the next few days. Enjoy the attention.

SAGITTARIUS - Nov 23/Dec 21

Communication from a former friend or an old roommate may catch you by surprise this week, Sagittarius. Embrace this opportunity to reconnect.

CAPRICORN - Dec 22/Jan 20

Capricorn, you've been waiting patiently to say something and looking for an opportunity to share your input. You might need to interrupt if you feel it is important enough.

AQUARIUS - Jan 21/Feb 18

Your mind feels as if it's going in a million different directions, Aquarius. One way to alleviate distractions is to direct your energy to an assortment of small projects.

PISCES - Feb 19/Mar 20

Pisces, sometimes it seems like what you are saying is going in one ear and out the other. Don't let your frustration get the best of you. Keep trying to be heard.



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MONTH BY MONTH

2024 Year in Review By Month

January 2024

Last year got off to an interesting start as two issues that would return to the headlines later in 2024 – a proposed wind farm in East Zorra-Tavistock and Wilmot council's decision to revisit the controversial Prime Minister's Path – reared their heads for the first time.

Township revisits statues recognizing former Canadian leaders

Wilmot Township revisited the controversial Prime Minister's Path in January.

The project was originally intended to include statues of Canada's Prime Ministers next to Castle Kilbride in Baden. Coun. Kris Wilkinson asked for the project to be tabled after the statues were placed in storage in 2021. The project stalled as a result of the controversy surrounding Sir John A. Macdonald and opponents even threw red paint in his statue several times.

The statues of William Lyon Mackenzie King, Sir Robert Borden, Kim Campbell and Lester Pearson were also placed in storage after the vote, along with the remaining Prime Ministers that had not been placed on the path. Wilkinson said bringing the project forward again came out of engagements with constituents along with his desire to start a conversation. He said the underlying issue is people felt their voices weren't heard when the decision was made to pause the project.

Two wind farms proposed for East Zorra-Tavistock

A forecasted increase in energy demand in Ontario in January had an area windmill company looking at revisiting a site near Innerkip for a wind farm, and they had a proposal for a second site near Cassel.

Helmut Schneider, vice president of renewable energy development at Prowind

Renewables, an international company with an office in Woodstock, said they were looking to help the province meet its power demands in the not-to-distant future.

The original site was located between the 'Field of Dreams' and Braemar Sideroad on both sides of the 16th Line while the new proposed location was amongst the 14th and 17th Lines in the Cassel and Maplewood Sideroads area. Prowind brought the current Gunn's Hill wind farm online in 2016, a development located in Oxford Centre south of Woodstock.

Wellesley council passes \$11.6-million 2024 budget with 3.6 per-cent levy increase

Wellesley residents saw a slight increase to the township portion of their property tax bill in 2024 after township council passed a budget with a \$7.3-million levy – up 3.6 per cent from 2023 – in January.

The 2024 budget included a \$4.2-million capital budget and an \$11.4-million operating budget. The budget also includes a more than \$55,000 greening levy to help the township mitigate the effects of climate change and a more than \$73,000 infrastructure levy to help the township close the gap in its core infrastructure shortfall as identified in a 2022 asset management plan.

The 2024 tax levy was \$788,568 more than the township's 2023 levy.

Region of Waterloo mayors call for reforms to put building and development back in local hands

The mayors of all six lower-tier Region of Waterloo municipalities, representing almost 80 per cent of the region's population, called for reforms to the two-tiered local and regional government structure

to help put decision making around new housing and economic development back in local hands.

Coinciding with a meeting of the provincial standing committee on heritage, infrastructure and cultural policy's study on regional governance, which was overseen by the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the mayors of Wellesley, Wilmot, Cambridge, Kitchener, North Dumfries and Woolwich held a media conference in January at which they put their unified support behind a number of proposed reforms to the current two-tiered government structure in the region.

Out of that came several proposed government reforms, the most important of which would reduce unnecessary red tape for each municipality to help the province meet its goal of building at least 1.5 million new homes by 2031.

By removing that extra level of approval from the process, Wilmot Mayor Natasha Salonen and Wellesley Mayor Joe Nowak said the approval process for developers would be faster and more in line with the timelines set out in Bill 23. In addition, each of the local governments, which have a better understanding of their municipalities' capacities for growth in both housing and economic development and the needs of residents and local businesses, will retain more control over the development process.

February 2024

In February, East Zorra-Tavistock launched its now-defunct EZTransit pilot project and Wilmot council asked for greater financial transparency at budget time and throughout the year – a conversation that reared its ugly head once again during more recent 2025 budget deliberations.

EZT launches free transportation program

In February, we reported on East Zorra-Tavistock Township launching EZTransit, a pilot project aimed at helping locals get to appointments, social and recreational activities.

The bus hit the streets for the first time on Jan. 31, 2024. Two different routes operated from Wednesday to Saturday. Route 1 included stops in Hickson, Tavistock, Innerkip and Woodstock, and ran Wednesday, Friday and every other Saturday on even days of the month. Route 2 had stops in Hickson, Innerkip, Tavistock and Stratford. It will run on Thursdays and every other Saturday on odd days. No service was offered on Sundays, statutory holidays, or civic holidays.

The original pilot program was intended to run from Dec. 14, 2023, to April 13, 2024, but insurance obligations and requirements delayed implementation. The bus could carry 10 passengers at a time with an additional three accessibly secured spaces. Ridership was on a first come first serve basis.

From an accessibility standpoint, the bus was equipped with mobility aid ramps and multiple mobility aid spaces.

Wilmot Township council asking for greater financial transparency

Facing a 10.6 per-cent hike to the 2024 tax levy, some members of Wilmot council called for more financial information to be available to them and the public.

A pair of motions were put before council in February, one by Coun. Kris Wilkinson who asked all departments to release quarterly reports outlining key performance indicators, budget variances and other pertinent information. The second



Wilmot Mayor Natasha Salonen visited with the New Hamburg Girl Guides at the Haysville Community Centre in January. Contributed photo



Grade 8 students from Sprucedale Public School in Shakespeare held a bottle drive recently to raise funds to help pay for their class trip to Camp Celtic later this year. The students travelled a large area in and around Shakespeare gathering bottles and cans for recycling to help fund their Grade 8 trip, which is a highlight for those graduating students. Pictured are Grade 8 students Daniel Hovius, Tyler Reis, Parker Glitz and Benson Hodgson from Sprucedale Public School who were out collecting bottles and cans recently for their school's class trip. Photo by Gary West

MONTH BY MONTH

2024 Year in Review By Month

motion, tabled by Coun. Harvir Sidhu, demands a detailed, line-by-line breakdown for next year's budget deliberations that would be structured in a manner that more closely aligns with formats used by area municipalities. Sidhu's motion was passed while Wilkinson's was deferred to a May council meeting.

Wilkinson also asked the clerk's office to explore the potential of a dashboard or document the public could have access to that would provide a summary of items on upcoming agendas.

Consultants present draft recreation master plan to Wellesley council

Wellesley council considered the adoption of a plan that would dictate how recreational events and activities are administered for residents of and visitors to the township in February.

At Wellesley council's Feb. 13 meeting,

councillors heard from principal planning consultant Tracey McQueen of MGA Group, who presented a draft recreation master plan for the township. The plan, which was informed by public and stakeholder feedback collected through in-person events and interviews, and an online survey with more than 500 responses, is focused around six strategic themes.

Those themes are financial sustainability, community development and partnerships, facilities and space allocation, parks, trails and open spaces, recreation administration, and communication.

Some of the recommendations in the draft plan included establishing additional recreational revenue streams to support the programming offered; formalizing written agreements and contracts with user groups and community and other partners; the establishment of a centralized volunteer development and support

system; tracking resident and non-resident facility use; determining long-term facility needs; improving on-road and off-road trail connectivity; establishing a dog park; developing space allocation, affiliation and cost-recovery policies; and improving public engagement when it comes to the development and delivery of recreational programs and services.

Friends, neighbours and total strangers come together to support Wellesley family as daughter prepares for lengthy hospital stay

Though 12-year-old Joy Szabo was facing a long hospital stay, she and her family knew they had the love and support of the entire Wellesley community behind them.

Szabo, who returned home from Thunder Bay in February after competing in artistic swimming at the Ontario Winter Games, was born with a form of dwarfism called spondyloepiphyseal dysplasia (SED). While Joy does not have any hip joints and she has another condition affecting her neck, both of which her family and doctors have paid close attention to over the years, it was her spine that began causing problems for the soon-to-be teenager over the last few years.

To correct Joy's spine and allow her to breathe properly again, doctors performed two surgeries and Joy was required to stay in hospital, either in bed or in a wheelchair, for potentially as long as eight weeks in between those surgeries. For MacDonald, her husband and the rest of the Szabo family, Joy's lengthy hospital stay required time off work – something tricky for MacDonald, who also lives with a disability and runs an organization that advocates for people living with disabilities – as well as added expenses for travel, accommodations and food while in Toronto.

Knowing this, a group of MacDonald's friends who call themselves the pickle crew approached Miriam and Glenn Kuepfer, owners of Schmidtsville Restaurant and Gift Shop in Wellesley, to host a fundraiser at the restaurant on March 2. The event included a four-course dinner, live music, raffles and door prizes all in the name of supporting the Szabos as Joy embarked on her medical journey.

March 2024

March brought one of the biggest controversies to hit the region in 2024 – the Region of Waterloo's proposed land grab in Wilmot Township, which continues to



This was one of two displays featuring historical artifacts in Tavistock created by the Tavistock District Historical Society. This case, located inside Scotia Bank during the month of February, featured artifacts from the early days of hockey in Tavistock. Contributed photo



Chris and Kylar Wagler work last February to tap one of the 1,000 maple trees on their 20-acre Wagler Family Farm. Photo by Rosalind Wagler

MONTH BY MONTH

2024 Year in Review By Month

make headlines as we head into the new year. East Zorra-Tavistock also said no to proposed wind farms, setting the stage for neighbouring communities to follow suit.

Wilmot landowners organize over potential land-acquisition concerns

In March, a private company offered to buy land from farmers and landowners in a portion of Wilmot Township who said at the time they did not know why the offers were being made and had concerns over what might happen if they said no.

Earlier in the month, the Waterloo Region Record newspaper broke a story about the Region of Waterloo wanting to buy about 700 acres of land northeast of the intersection of Nafziger and Bleams roads in Wilmot Township. Based on the comments of an unnamed farmer, the article went on to say a representative of the management and consulting firm, Canacre, met with several farmers in person and told them the Region of Waterloo wants to buy their properties for a fair price, but if they refuse to sell, their farms would be expropriated.

At the time, the Gazette reached out to Wilmot Township, the Region of Waterloo, and Conservative MPP Mike Harris for comment. All three released the exact same statement and refused requests for interviews.

“The Region of Waterloo and Wilmot Township are collaborating to prepare land for development, aiming to establish shovel-ready sites to attract economic investments and generate employment opportunities. The process of assembling land is ongoing to create these shovel-ready sites, facilitating significant economic investments and bolstering the vitality of Waterloo Region as it progresses towards accommodating one million

residents by 2050.”

East Zorra-Tavistock rejects proposed wind-turbine projects

Prowind announced in March it would not be moving forward with its wind-turbine project in the Cassel and Innerkip areas of East Zorra-Tavistock.

A well-behaved, standing-room-only crowd of about 120 people attended a meeting in Hickson to hear presentations from Helmut Schneider, Prowind’s vice president of renewable energy, and local farmer David Cunningham from Wind Concerns EZT.

A resolution was subsequently passed by council ruling that “the Township of East Zorra-Tavistock declares itself to be an unwilling host for wind turbine developments.”

Coun. Jeremy Smith asked for a recorded vote and it was passed unanimously followed by loud cheers from most in the gallery. Schneider said he is disappointed with the resolution and was hoping for more time to build relationships in the area.

Love Your Neighbour Communities addressing local housing shortage with innovative development in downtown New Hamburg

In March, the Gazette reported on a proposed mixed-housing development planned for a more-than-a-century old mill in the heart of New Hamburg could set an example for other rural communities to follow when it comes to addressing local housing shortages.

Love Your Neighbour Communities (LYNC) is a group of local community leaders and representatives from both the Interfaith Counselling Centre and the Wilmot Family Resource Centre that

formed in early 2020 in response to the local housing crisis.

Having purchased the former B-W Feed Mill and former Waterloo Regional Police station property next door, plans were set in motion for LYNC to convert and build an addition onto the historic mill building – built in 1905 to replace the original wooden mill on the property – into a 31-unit, mixed-housing apartment building with one, two and three-bedroom units, numerous outdoor and community spaces, and attainable and affordable housing for people of all income levels.

The idea is to create much-needed housing in a way that celebrates New Hamburg’s history going back to even before the town was founded, beautify and revitalize the town’s downtown core, and provide a space where community members from all socio-economic backgrounds can live, learn and play together.

Theatre Wellesley to present *Making God Laugh* next month

The cast and crew for Theatre Wellesley’s spring production had a fun challenge ahead of them as they prepared to mount American playwright Sean Grennan’s *Making God Laugh*, a play that follows the lives of a family across four successive snapshots in time.

Making God Laugh follows Ruth, Bill and their three children over four decades. Their oldest, Rick, is a flashy ex-football player living the party life and always looking for the next get-rich-quick scheme. Their middle child, Maddie, is an aspiring actress who constantly deals with her mother’s scorn. And their pride and joy, Thomas, their youngest, has decided to become a priest. The plans they make for their lives may amuse the almighty – and audiences – but the way those plans unfold over the years will reveal the faith



Members of the cast rehearse for Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School’s production of *Emma! A Pop Musical*, which ran from April 4-6. Photo by Galen Simmons



Dianne Sparling showing her award-winning butter tarts at D&D Homestyle Cuisine & Café in March while being congratulated by Tavistock Fall Fair board secretary Chris Wiffen (left) and agricultural society director and past president Julie Kimpel (right). Sparling was named reserve champion in the Ontario Association of Agricultural Societies (OAAS) butter tart competition earlier in the year. Photo by Gary West



Jean-Yves Duclos, Canadian Minister of Public Services and Procurement (left), and Tim Louis, Kitchener-Conestoga MP, spoke to seniors in New Hamburg in March to pitch the Canadian Dental Care Plan. Contributed photo

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an ordinary family discovers they have in each other.

From using period costumes and props to employing makeup and having one character, Ruth, being played by two actors at different times in her life, co-director Rhonda Caldwell said the production was an exercise in finding creative ways to ensure the audience can easily follow the story and its characters from one decade to the next.

According to Caldwell, *Making God Laugh* attracted some of the finest talent in the region with many veteran cast and crew members helping helm a production that promised to be both fun and entertaining for its small, 30-person audiences in Theatre Wellesley's Studio Theatre above the Wellesley Public Library (1137 Henry St.).

Making God Laugh ran for eight shows in April.

April 2024

Everyone was talking about the total solar eclipse – a once-in-a-lifetime experience on April 8 – in early April. The Interfaith Counselling Centre also celebrated a huge milestone this year with its momentous 40th anniversary addressing rural mental-health in Wilmot and the surrounding area.

Waterloo Region District School Board announces schools will be closed for eclipse April 8

In a last-minute decision, the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) announced in early April that schools would be closed to students on Monday, April 8 as result of safety concerns around the total solar eclipse and students could participate in asynchronous learning opportunities on that day.

A total solar eclipse happens when the moon passes between the sun and Earth,

completely blocking the face of the sun. People who viewed the eclipse from locations where the moon's shadow completely covered the sun experienced a total solar eclipse. The sky darkened, as if it were dawn or dusk.

Looking directly into the sun at any time is dangerous and can cause serious eye damage, especially during a solar eclipse. On April 8, the eclipse began at 2:03 p.m. for the Waterloo Region and ended at 4:30 p.m. The maximum eclipse for Waterloo Region occurred at 3:18 p.m.

Brenner takes role as TAP's director

Angie Brenner began as the new program director at the Tavistock Assistance Program (TAP), a role she officially stepped into on April 3.

The new director lives just outside Tavistock with her family and is a registered social worker with 20 years of experience working with children and families in the Waterloo Region. She said she is passionate about the mandate and mission of TAP and looks forward to continuing the great work done by Sharon Walkom, Deb Wagler and Linda Holst, the three previous directors.

Interfaith Counselling Centre marks 40 years of prioritizing mental health in New Hamburg

Decades before mental health was discussed openly and as part of overall health, an organization that still operates out of the same New Hamburg church basement it started in 40 years ago was prioritizing mental-health care for residents of Wilmot Township and the surrounding rural area.

This year, the Interfaith Counselling Centre (ICC) marked its 40th anniversary, an occasion that not only allowed staff, the board of directors and the wider community a chance to celebrate everything the counselling centre does for those it serves,

but also offered reason to pause and reflect on how far rural mental-health care has come in the past four decades.

It was in 1982 and 1983 when a group of Christian pastors from Wilmot, Wellesley and Tavistock, along with two high-school guidance counsellors, an elementary school principal, a medical doctor and a naturopath doctor, a few dedicated business leaders and other community members first recognized mental health was impacting everyone from young students to patients at the Nith Valley Family Practice, and there was a desperate need for some kind of support service.

Over the years and with the fundraising support of residents and the local business community – including an annual golf tournament organized by The Erb Group that has raised more than half a million dollars over the past 30 years – the services offered by the ICC have continued to grow and expand always with the goal of meeting the current needs in the community and reducing whatever barriers to service exist at any given time.

In marking its 40th anniversary, the counselling centre first hosted a Founders Tea event at the New Dundee Emporium Oct. 4, 2023, to thank the founders and board members over the years for their commitment and service to the centre. The celebrations concluded with a 40th Anniversary Gala Dinner June 19 at the Puddicombe Banquet Hall in New Hamburg.

MP calls for a study on protecting prime agricultural land

In April, Kitchener-Conestoga MP Tim Louis introduced a motion in the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food calling on the committee to undertake a study on the protection of prime agricultural land for long-term agricultural use.

The study allowed the committee to consult with stakeholders, including farmers, on the future use of agricultural land, which was to be reported to the House of Commons for a government response. Louis said he had heard from many constituents concerned about the proposal to



More than 100 people attended a public meeting at the Wilmot Mennonite Church in early April to rally against the Region of Waterloo's proposed land grab in Wilmot Township. Contributed photo



The younger chocolate-egg hunters were keen on collecting as many chocolate treats as they could find with help from parents and the Opti-Mrs club of Shakespeare during the Easter Egg Hunt at Sprucedale Public School in April. Photo by Gary West



Let's Tree Wilmot and Tri-County Mennonite Homes partnered to plant 450 trees April 20 as part of an ecological-restoration project along the river flats of the Nith River behind Nith-view Community in New Hamburg. Contributed photo

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expropriate and rezone prime farmland in Wilmot Township for a purpose yet to be disclosed.

According to the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, 319 acres of prime agricultural land is lost every day in Ontario, despite having some of the most productive farmland in Canada. Only five per cent of Ontario's landmass is suitable for agriculture, and the riding of Kitchener-Conestoga sits in the heart of Ontario's agricultural lands.

May 2024

News items of significance in the Wilmot-Tavistock area last May included local reaction to the province limiting cellphone use in schools, policies for use of the new Bill Gies Recreation Centre in Wellesley, the grand-opening of the Tavistock Spray Pad and the commencement of a major road-reconstruction project in Wilmot Township.

Local reaction positive to provincial move to limit cellphone use in schools

In May, Ontario unveiled a plan to reduce cellphone use in classrooms across the province, the local reaction to which was overall positive.

Education Minister Stephen Lecce said the goal is to reduce distractions in classrooms and improve the health of children. Students in kindergarten to Grade 6 were required to keep phones on silent and out of sight for the entire school day unless explicitly permitted by an educator. For students in grades 7 to 12, cellphones were no longer permitted during class time unless explicitly directed by the educator. Social-media websites were also removed from

school networks and devices, and report cards included comments on students' distraction levels in class.

The Gazette had conversations with a parent and student and the feedback from both was nothing but positive. The Gazette reached out to the Thames Valley District School Board for comment and director of education Mark Fisher provided a statement saying the school board supports the measure to improve student achievement and engagement in the classroom.

The Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) also provided the Gazette with a statement, saying they are committed to providing a supportive and enriching learning environment for all students.

Wellesley council approves family walking-track membership at rec centre, reduces age for access to fitness gym and walking track during unstaffed hours

In May, Wellesley Township residents aged 16 and over were granted access to the fitness gym and walking track at the new Bill Gies Recreation Centre during unstaffed hours with the purchase of fitness-gym and walking-track memberships.

Previously, the township offered individual and family memberships for up to five family members that allowed residents aged 18 and older access to the recreation centre's fitness gym between the hours of 5 a.m. and 11 p.m. daily. As the recreation centre shifted from winter hours to summer hours when staff are required to spend more time at the township's outdoor facilities, staff were only present at the recreation centre between 7:30 a.m. and

4:15 p.m. Monday through Friday.

While the walking track is currently free for recreation-centre users during normal business hours Monday to Friday, Wellesley councillors discussed a staff recommendation to establish a \$25 annual membership at their April 23 committee of the whole meeting that would give members access to the track from 5 a.m. to 11 p.m. daily.

A discussion among Wellesley council and staff about offering a family membership for the walking track ultimately led to the approval of walking-track memberships by council at a cost of \$25 for the primary membership and key fob plus an additional \$10 for each additional person up to a maximum of five family members, similar to the fitness-gym membership.

East Zorra-Tavistock officially opens Tavistock Spray Pad

East Zorra-Tavistock's first-ever aquatic facility opened to much fanfare in May.

About two dozen elected officials and dignitaries were on hand at Queen's Park May 17 for a ribbon-cutting ceremony. The idea was first floated by residents Danny and Haley Roth back in 2019 but was delayed for several reasons including the pandemic. The couple played a major role in the spray pad's completion.

The aquatic attraction was made possible through a \$150,000 capital grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation and over \$100,000 in community fundraising efforts. The township said the project will offer a unique, inclusive and accessible play area that expands the community's outdoor-recreation options. Spray pads are

non-slip, aquatic play areas with no standing water that instead feature water sprinklers, sprayers, nozzles and games that are motion activated or on limited-run times.

Hundreds of area residents were able to cool off at the spray pad over a hot and sunny Victoria Day long weekend.

Snyder's Road West reconstruction project in Baden underway

The \$8.7-million Snyder's Road West reconstruction in Baden got underway in May.

The Snyder's Road West project includes a full road reconstruction with new sanitary and storm sewers, a sidewalk and separated cycling lanes. The contract for the work was awarded to Steed and Evans Ltd. from St. Jacobs.

The first phase of the reconstruction was scheduled to be completed by late fall 2024, weather permitting. The second phase, scheduled to begin in spring 2025, includes Foundry Street from Snyder's Road to Charles Street and the remaining section of Snyder's Road West from Foundry Street to Mill Street.

June 2024

As anger around the proposed Waterloo Region land-acquisition plan in Wilmot Township continued to simmer in June, Wellesley Township celebrated the grand opening of its brand-new, \$27-million recreation complex. Elsewhere in the area, a longtime Tavistock Public School teacher celebrated her retirement with colleagues and friends and New Hamburg's Riverside Brass was sold to a Toronto business.



Shakespeare Optimist Club president Michael McNeil is shown in his yard with 4,000 sunflower seedlings which were distributed from the middle of May to the June 1 in the Shakespeare area for the Shakespeare Optimist Club's first sunflower-growing competition. Contributed photo



A smiling and proud Connor Bayer shows off his biggest catch of the day, a 17-inch bass, while Optimist Murray McTavish and Optimist Greg Ankenmann look on during the Shakespeare Optimist Club's annual fishing derby in June. Contributed photo

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Wellesley celebrates “two-year labour of love” with grand opening of recreation complex

Wellesley Township councillors, staff, volunteers and residents joined other local dignitaries to celebrate the result of a “two-year labour of love” at the official grand-opening celebrations for the new Wellesley Recreation Complex in June.

On June 22, the township hosted the grand-opening ceremony and barbecue at the new recreation complex, also called the Bill Gies Recreation Centre in honour of the complex’s first major donor. Hundreds of residents gathered to watch as Wellesley Mayor Joe Nowak cut the ribbon alongside local councillors, Kitchener-Conestoga MPP Mike Harris, Kitchener-Conestoga MP Tim Louis, chair of the Something 4 Everyone capital campaign Chris Martin, the township staff who worked day and night to see the recreation complex completed and other local dignitaries.

The new recreation complex came about after township council decided to build a new recreation facility with the help of provincial grant funding and community fundraising instead of completing a laundry list of expensive structural repairs and upgrades at the aging Wellesley Arena. With a total budget of more than \$27 million, the new rec complex includes an NHL sized ice rink and home for the Wellesley Applejacks, a walking track, a fitness gym, a gymnasium/community centre, a youth centre, the Wellesley Community Health Centre, a skateboard park, a playground, soccer fields and outdoor walking trails.

Now fully open, more information about the Wellesley Recreation Complex can be found at www.wellesley.ca/en/living-here/new-recreation-land.aspx.

Pair of Wilmot councillors demanding transparency from the Region of Waterloo on land grab

Two Wilmot Township councillors broke

their silence on the controversial Region of Waterloo land-acquisition plan in June citing a lack of respect.

In June, Harvir Sidhu and Kris Wilkinson invited members of the media and concerned citizens to a press conference on Stewart Snyder’s farm right in the heart of the 700-plus acres of land up for potential industrial development.

Sidhu, Ward 3 councillor, said it was time for the region to talk as area residents continued to express their anger over not being treated fairly or with respect during this process. He added no one should be forced to live in such uncertain times and he challenged the region to release the technical details behind the land acquisition and tell residents why this particular site is being assembled.

Wilkinson, who represents Ward 2, explained Wilmot council is not the decision-making body on the issue, but they do represent the people directly impacted. He also called out the Region of Waterloo to be honest with ratepayers.

The media released information on the land acquisition 14 weeks prior to this press conference, yet the public knew no more details at the time about why the land had been chosen and for what potential purpose.

New Hamburg’s Riverside Brass sells to new company

In June, Gazette readers learned that after 58 years of being a family business, Riverside Brass had been sold to a new company that retained all of its original employees.

Riverside Brass of New Hamburg was founded originally in Cambridge in 1966 by Ervin Steinmann and Elmer Schlegel. They moved to New Hamburg in 1969 and became a well-known, family-owned foundry for brass, bronze, aluminum and zinc castings.

Earlier in 2024, Canerector bought the

business and its Hamilton Road location. Canerector is leasing the Waterloo Street building from Riverside Brass. The purchaser’s name for their business is now Riverside Foundry Inc. Canerector of North York, Toronto, is a third-generation Canadian company started in 1947. They now own 10 foundries and over 30 other related companies.

“Most conscientious teacher I’ve ever known,” Tavistock teacher retires in June

A teacher who spent her entire career at Tavistock Public School retired in June.

Sandra Alyea spent her 35-year teaching career dedicated to the Tavistock community. In June, her fellow teachers threw her party to celebrate her involvement in the community.

Alyea graduated teacher’s college in 1989 and started teaching in Tavistock soon after. She said the amazing staff and supportive parents are what kept her attached to the school and community. She taught grades 4, 5, 5/6 splits and then moved on to primary in 2008.

As for the future, Alyea was looking forward to staying connected with the school community and hopes to do some supply teaching if there’s room for her.

July 2024

July 2024 was a month for looking ahead to the future as three area municipalities worked together to begin construction on intersection improvements at Punkeydoodles Corners, East Zorra-Tavistock opted to extend its public transportation pilot, and Wellesley Township considered what to do with the old Wellesley Arena and Community Centre lands following the opening of the township’s new recreation complex. Two local businesses also celebrated their past

successes.

Punkeydoodles Corners construction set to begin

Last year, Oxford County council approved a \$1.08 million construction contract for intersection improvements at Punkeydoodles Corners.

The move fulfilled the recommendations of the Intersection Control Feasibility Study released in October 2023. It addressed community concerns in the area, a section of roadway bordering Oxford County, Perth County, Wilmot Township and the Region of Waterloo.

The scope of work for this project, which was planned for July to November, included several safety measures including adding a new southbound left turn lane, northbound right turn lane and deceleration lanes along the curve on Perth Road 101. It also realigned Road 101A at Perth Road 101 to improve sightlines and added lighting at the intersection of Road 101A and Perth Road 101.

EZT transportation program staying after pilot project

In July, East Zorra-Tavistock (EZT) decided to continue its transportation program, but it came at a cost and a few changes.

While not many people were accessing the service, it was made available at least until September. The free pilot program ended after nearly six months, but the township approved several modifications in July based on feedback from riders and staff input. Weekend service was discontinued and anyone over the age of 13 had to pay \$5 for a one-way ride.

The township did not receive any grant funding as the program was intended to be a pilot only. The budget for 2024 was \$53,163 and funding that was reserved



Pictured, from left, are ghosts played by Peter van der Maas, Josie Willett and Mary Lichty-Neeb during rehearsal of Watercourse Theatre’s 2024 production of *Belonging* in Wellesley Township, which was staged across Wellesley Township in June. Photo by Catherine Frid



Pictured at the Tim Hortons in Tavistock are, from left, Robbie Carter, Tim Hortons Tavistock manager Stephen Parker, Tavistock, New Hamburg and Baden Tim Horton general manager Melissa Hebert, Devin Jasztrab and Tavistock Assistance Program director Angie Brenner receiving a cheque for \$7,125.50 raised during last spring’s Smile Cookie Campaign. Photo by Gary West

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in 2021 was used to offset some of those costs at just under \$30,000.

Council votes to sit on old Wellesley Arena lands to accommodate further discussion among residents

In July, the Township of Wellesley decided it would not hire consultants – at least not at that point – to undertake a construction feasibility study and lead a public-engagement strategy to determine what to do with the portion of the former Wellesley Arena and Community Centre lands north of Maple Leaf Street.

At council's committee of the whole meeting June 25, councillors revisited the topic of what to do with the former arena lands just days after the township's new recreation complex had its grand-opening ceremony. At council's May 28 committee of the whole meeting, township staff

presented the results of an online survey that showed 202 of the 419 people who filled out the survey wanted to see the land used for a mixed-use residential development.

While staff recommended moving forward and hiring a consultant to begin the groundwork for determining exactly what kind of mixed-use development township residents would like to see and whether it would involve adaptive reuse of the community centre and arena buildings or a completely new build, Coun. Derek Brick moved to defer the decision to the June 25 meeting to give residents more time to provide feedback.

While Brick also expressed concern with the estimated \$50,000 cost for consultants not being budgeted in 2024 and how future plans for the land might affect users of the ball diamonds and parkland south of

Maple Leaf Street, township staff stressed that hiring a consultant was just the first step in a process that could stretch as long as one or two years.

Ultimately, the motion to hire consultants and move ahead with consultations on a potential mixed-use development on the old arena property was defeated 3-2 with Coun. Claude Hergott and Mayor Joe Nowak voting in favour. Louwagie said staff would bring the issue of what to do with the arena land back before council during 2025 budget deliberations.

Local eatery honoured for outdoor-dining experience

A New Hamburg restaurant made the list of OpenTable's top 100 spots for outdoor dining in Canada in July.

Puddicombe House made the annual list that was released after data was scanned from more than 1.1 million reviews on the reservation and reviewing service. General manager Nick Cressman said his staff deserves much of the credit for the recognition. He added they are constantly looking at ways to make outdoor dining even better.

Erb Transport celebrates 65th anniversary

The Erb Group celebrated 65 years of being in business and reached out to thank its employees and community.

Based in New Hamburg, The Erb Group employs 1,500 people and uses 1,000 trailers. They have expanded their terminals across Ontario, Quebec and the U.S. Founded in 1959 by Vernon Erb, the Canadian company now remains one of North America's largest privately owned refrigerated transportation providers. They specialize in distribution of temperature-controlled perishable goods across

Canada and the U.S.

During its 65 years of business, The Erb Group has kept it in the family; Vernon Erb passed the company down to his son, Wendell Erb, in 2011. Wendell Erb, now the president and CEO, introduced modern best practices for their business and believes that delivering exceptional customer service involves both uplifting and strengthening the communities they serve.

The Erbs pride themselves on an inclusive work environment and have been recognized for it by Trucking HR Canada, the Best Fleets to Drive For program and the Women in Trucking Association. The Erb Group also received the 2024 Purpose Award from the Transportation, Marketing and Sales Association (TMSA).

Wendell Erb attributes much of the company's success to its people.

August 2024

In August, Wilmot Township's mayor called for more transparency around Waterloo region's decision to plow under a 160-acre crop of corn as part of the proposed land grab, East Zorra-Tavistock unveiled its first-ever strategic plan and Wellesley Township reached a compromise with a local townhouse developer.

Region of Waterloo councillors getting report on decision to plow over corn crop; region chair says staff are not to blame

In August, the Region of Waterloo announced it would release more details surrounding the controversial move by the region to destroy a 160-acre plot of corn just weeks away from being harvested.

Wilmot Township Mayor Natasha Salonen's motion at a prior meeting was passed unanimously and a public report was to be released in early September.



Wilmot Mayor Natasha Salonen cuts the Canada Day cake during the celebrations in New Hamburg's William Scott Park July 1. Photo by Galen Simmons



The New Dundee beautification committee once again planted flowers in six barrels around town and the eight flower boxes on the bridge. The flowers are purchased with memorial donations for Beth Poth in 2022. Members of the committee also plant tulips and daffodils on the island on Bridge and Queen streets along with mulching and general maintenance. Committee members pictured from left to right in the back row are Meghan Hall, Don Poth and Rick and Charlotte Cudney. In front, from left, are Ethan Martin-Root and Ryan Rowland, the secondary school students that receive volunteer hours for watering the flower boxes. Contributed photo



A portion of the 16th Line in East Zorra-Tavistock (Ezt) had to be closed briefly in July after heavy rains flooded the roadway. Photo courtesy of Ezt Township

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She said elected officials should be kept in the loop and she wanted to find out if employees at the region attempted to keep the corn until harvest time.

She explained she does not see the investigation as a witch hunt but rather as a turning point and a step toward the public getting more information. The region paid farmers from Strathroy to plow under the corn crop. In a statement, the region said the plowing was required to complete various studies, including topographic surveys and archeological assessments, before closing land-purchase transactions as part of the proposed land-acquisition in Wilmot Township.

The destruction drew sharp criticism from local farmers and environmentalists, as well as Wilmot several Wilmot and regional councillors.

The Fight for Farmland group issued a press release and said people were “still confounded by the lack of information, the lack of answers and the lack of even a single public meeting about such a massive development in Wilmot Township contrary to all previous planning.”

Regional chair Karen Redman said the report would answer some questions including actions that were done to mitigate having to plow the crop under. She said the disposal of the corn was a result of some of the wishes the landowner had for a closing

date and some of the other requirements before the deal closed.

EZT unveils first-ever strategic plan; document recommends new fire hall in Hickson

East Zorra-Tavistock’s (EZT) inaugural strategic plan was approved by council in August, but not before a few amendments were made.

Rob Adams of Town Hall Consulting told council at its Aug. 7 regular meeting the next step is to put the plan in motion and he added township residents played a key role. He said survey results showed 73 per cent of respondents agreed with the mission, vision and values of the strategic plan, while 23 per cent provided additional feedback.

The document also laid out the township’s vision, which is “we envision a forward-thinking and connected community, rooted in a rich history, building our future together,” while the mission statement is to “serve, support and nurture a vibrant community.” Six values are also a part of the plan: accountability, inclusivity, integrity, respect, sustainability and teamwork.

The plan contains six strategic priorities including infrastructure, which identifies the need for a new Hickson fire hall. The other priorities are financial sustainability, good governance, service delivery,

community vitality and environmental sustainability. Councillors did not further discuss details on what a new fire hall could look like or when it may be built. Part of the plan is to also implement a five-year capital budget.

Councillors agreed to remove one of the items in the environmental priority. There was some discussion around changing “incentivize agricultural solar programs” but it was eventually taken out. The strategic plan was nearly \$10,000 under budget at just over \$40,000.

Wellesley Township and developer reach settlement over rejected zone-change request for stacked-townhouse development

After council originally rejected a zone-change request that would have allowed for the construction of 12 stacked townhouses on Queen’s Bush Road in Wellesley, the township and local developer Bradley & Co. reached a settlement agreement in August that instead allows for the construction of 10 townhouses.

The settlement was approved earlier that month by an Ontario Land Tribunal. The agreement, an effort by both parties to save taxpayer dollars by avoiding a costly land-tribunal hearing, came after considerable review by Wellesley council of the proposed development, public comments received and deliberation with township legal counsel and staff. The agreement allows for some increased density on the property, which is encouraged by provincial, regional and township planning policies, but not as much as originally envisioned by the developer.

The developer originally approached township staff in 2022 with a few different ideas for the property including a concept for a 15-unit building. The developer

eventually applied for a change to the zoning in March 2023 that would have permitted 12 stacked-townhouse units if approved.

Township council did not support the zone-change application as presented and chose to pass a different zoning bylaw for the site after hearing concerns from residents. The council bylaw, as originally passed, would have permitted up to eight units on the property. The developer subsequently appealed council’s decision to the tribunal and the three-day hearing on the appeal was expected to begin in October 2024. Township staff estimate that the avoided cost of the hearing would have been in the range of tens of thousands of dollars.

The proposed stacked-townhouse building was expected to include one- or two-bedroom units. Currently, over 90 per cent of the housing stock in the Township of Wellesley consists of single-detached dwellings. To support residents with different needs, township staff said in the press release that more affordable and attainable housing types are needed.

September 2024

As it normally does, education dominated the headlines in September, however East Zorra-Tavistock’s decision to end the EZT Transit program and Wilmot Township’s receipt of \$10,000 through the New Horizons for Seniors Program also made waves.

EZT ends transit program following pilot

East Zorra-Tavistock council decided to scrap EZT Transit in September.

The pilot program was extended to Sept. 27 but after receiving a report from staff, elected officials couldn’t justify the cost



Pictured at the Maples Home for Seniors in Tavistock are the now 100-year-old Lorna Gillies with Oxford MP Arpan Khanna, son Larry John Brown and Marcie Willson, assistant executive director of the Maples Home for Seniors. The mini-Canada hockey stick was presented by Khanna to Gillies on the occasion of her hundredth birthday on Aug. 6, 2024. Photo by Gary West



Pictured in front of the Limousine before leaving for the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) together in August are, from left, local 2023 fall fair ambassadors Janeen Overvest (Embrow and East Zorra), Katelyn Bartlett (Wellesley), Maddy Henhoeffler (Wilmot) and Nicole Danen (Tavistock). They all competed at this year’s CNE Ambassador Competition. Contributed photo

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to taxpayers. As of the week prior, operating expenses for the transit program had passed the \$60,000 mark. That figure included salaries, benefits, fuel, parts and insurance for the van. The total was partially offset by the \$30,000 from a previously implemented transit reserve.

EZT Mayor Phil Schaefer said he was well aware there are people in need of an affordable option to get from point A to point B, but it wasn't sustainable. He added the program would have needed about 100 paid trips daily to survive, depending on the length of the trip.

The initial pilot was offered to residents free of charge before a minimal \$5 charge was implemented.

Wellesley Public School still without permanent principal halfway into September

Wellesley Public School was still without a permanent principal more than halfway into the first month of the 2024-2025 school year.

According to a representative from the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB), a temporary principal was in place at the school since August and the board was seeking "committed educational leaders" for the position of principal.

According to the staff listing on the Wellesley Public School website, Brian Beney, who served as principal at Wellesley Public School in the past, was the interim principal.

New era of transparency at TVDSB; board chair promises greater accountability as budget shortfall continues

The Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) was under considerable scrutiny in September thanks in large part to an ill-fated staff retreat at a downtown Toronto hotel.

The three-day junket cost taxpayers close to \$40,000 and resulted in tremendous

backlash from the community and the provincial government. A release from the board stated, "This has been a learning experience for the TVDSB and will not happen again."

The board, one of the largest in the province, had a deficit of nearly \$8 million and shortly after the retreat cost was made public, its director of education, Mark Fisher, went on a medical leave of absence. Former director Bill Tucker was named interim director and shortly after that announcement, the education ministry announced it will perform an audit of the board's finances.

The Gazette sat down with board chair Beth Mai for an interview in September. Her first comment was a commitment to talking to the media when asked. Mai, a former teacher and special-education advocate, said TVDSB had a surplus several years ago, but the decision was made by the previous board to implement health-and-safety measures at schools during the pandemic above and beyond what was recommended. She added it is the director's responsibility to ensure a balanced budget is met.

Mai said in the big picture, there are two very serious challenges, not just for TVDSB, but for boards across the province. Those challenges were related to funding for staff absences and Canada Pension Plan and Employment Insurance requirements.

In 2025, the board will not be allowed to run a deficit, putting even more pressure on the organization to implement cost-cutting measures or receive more funding. Mai said there were no cuts to staff in the classroom but instead, there was tightening at the board office. If the board determines it is not able to balance its budget in 2025, the Ministry of Education would become involved in the process to ensure the budget is balanced.

Government of Canada grant helps expand senior programs in Wilmot

The Township of Wilmot received \$10,000 from the New Horizons for Seniors Program in September. The funds were to be used to add to the township's roster of active living opportunities for older adults, including shuffleboard and additional pickleball offerings, for one year.

Mayor Natasha Salonen said the cash infusion will complement the current offerings for seniors in Wilmot.

October 2024

October saw the public debate around the Waterloo region land grab boil over as the region's report on the destruction of 160 acres of corn earlier in the fall included little information on why the crop was destroyed and who was responsible. Locals also enjoyed more access to beer, wine and pre-mixed cocktails as the province's new rules for selling alcohol in convenience stores took effect.

New alcohol outlets arrive in Wilmot and EZT

Several local business owners took advantage of the provincial government's move to allow beer, wine and premixed cocktails in convenience stores in October.

Nick Cressman opened the Marian Rose Boutique in downtown New Hamburg. The store is part of the Puddicombe House umbrella. Cressman said he wanted to do something different and when the province allowed some alcohol to be sold in convenience stores, the door was open. Marian Rose Boutique has a wide variety of French, Italian and local wines but there are some rules around inventory. Marian Rose Boutique, just like so many other stores opting into the program to sell

alcohol, experienced delays in receiving products. Cressman said some of the products are shipped through the LCBO while others come directly from the producer.

Chee Peng owns Tavistock Gas and Variety and joined the growing list of convenience stores to carry alcohol. He said the store's mission statement is "proudly serving the community needs, conveniently." Peng added receiving his full stock has been difficult. Peng said his biggest challenge was finding staff older than 18, as per provincial rules, to sell alcohol at the counter. Peng and his wife work a majority of the hours in the store but do need part-time staff to achieve a work-life balance.

Chaos erupts at meeting after region releases crop-destruction report; contradictions over validity of NDA

The attempt to acquire 770 acres of land in Wilmot Township by the Region of Waterloo for a future mega-industrial reached a new level of confusion in October.

The release of the report on the controversial destruction of 160 acres of corn on a previously sold farm failed to provide the public and elected officials with any detailed information. Some councillors in the region were so disappointed they sent it back to staff to take another stab at it. Council also asked for a legal opinion on the status of confidentiality obligations.

Kevin Thomason is a Wilmot resident and part of the Fight for Farmland group. He said the report didn't answer a single question and included none of the information Salonen's motion asked for. Wilmot Mayor Natasha Salonen was also surprised at the lack of details and financial implications of the crop destruction in the report.

One of the most controversial parts of the entire land acquisition in the township



Junior Optimists appearing for their first time at a fundraiser selling popcorn and water at the New Hamburg Fall Fair Sept. 14. From left to right are Madelyn Schwartzentuber, Christian Schwartzentuber and Billie Eidt. Photo by Scott Dunstall



Lyla Wilson and Bryce Sebben share the Jimmy Roth Memorial Award which is given to U-11 players who exemplify leadership on their respective teams, as Jimmy Roth did during the summer ball season in Shakespeare. The pair was presented their trophy at the Shakespeare Community Athletic Association awards banquet in September. Photo by Gary West

MONTH BY MONTH

2024 Year in Review By Month

is, according to staff at Wilmot and the region, that a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) exists, meaning no one can discuss the majority of the details in a public setting. The details to date have only been brought up behind closed doors at in-camera meetings.

Wellesley applies for provincial funding for St. Clements Arena upgrades

In October, Wellesley council gave township staff the green light to apply for as much as \$1 million in provincial funding – or half the project costs – for upgrades to the St. Clements Arena.

At the Oct. 22 Wellesley council meeting, director of recreation Danny Roth asked councillors to approve an application for funding under the province's Community Sport and Recreation Infrastructure Fund (CSRIF). The CSRIF is a provincial fund that provides funding for repairs or upgrades to existing sport and recreation facilities. According to Roth, staff have identified the St. Clements Arena dressing rooms, washrooms and lobby as a viable project for this funding program.

In addition, the arena does not meet recommended accessibility standards. The improvements this grant could provide would greatly improve the accessibility of the lower lobby, dressing rooms and washrooms, representing a significant improvement for the users of the arena through both enhanced accessibility and as a refresh of the space.

Roth said the scope of the project would include renovations to the arena's washrooms, four dressing rooms and the lobby, and the addition of a universal washroom.

Francis Furniture closing after nearly 90 years of service

Sept. 12 marked 88 years in business for a furniture staple in the heart of Tavistock. In October, readers learned the business would be closing.

Francis Furniture was started by Peter Francis's father, James H. Francis, back in

1936. The original store, opened in 1936, housed both a furniture and a funeral business, however the funeral home was moved across the street when a home was purchased in 1945. The first addition to the furniture building was completed in 1972 and it grew larger again in 1974.

Peter Francis, who turned 83 in November, was at work every day since joining the business in 1962, including the evening before he had surgery on Feb. 8. He suffered a stroke during the operation, something tough to deal with when he worked seven days a week for so many years.

One part of the business that remained unique until the business closed is Peter Francis, since day one, has always offered exclusively, in-house financing. He said it was just the right way to do business. He added no business can be successful without good people working behind the scenes. The lack of staff turnover at Francis is a testament to positive working conditions.

There were a few other aspects of the business that aren't seen today, including no-charge delivery and setup. Another anomaly about Francis Furniture is the bookkeeping was always done by hand on ledgers and the store never accepted credit cards. Peter Francis said he was just too busy to make a change to the world of computers, something he received accolades for from his accounting firm.

November 2024

There was plenty to celebrate in November as the Gazette team reported on authors and historians Marie Voisin and Kristen Hahn – as well as the late Ernie Ritz – winning the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario's (ACO) Stephen A. Otto Award for Research and Documentation for their book, *The Historic Buildings of New Hamburg and the People Who Lived in Them*. The New Hamburg Concert Band also marked its 130th anniversary and Community Care Concepts received a

funding boost from the province.

Authors of upcoming book about New Hamburg's built history win ACO award

Even before its publication, the authors behind a soon-to-be-released book about New Hamburg's many historic buildings – those still standing and those that have been torn down – were recognized in 2024 for their exhaustive research and documentation of the town's history.

Twelve years of work by three New Hamburg authors and historians – one of whom was New Hamburg's last mayor and Wilmot Township's first mayor, the late Ernie Ritz – has resulted in the upcoming publication of a five-volume book on New Hamburg's built history, *The Historic Buildings of New Hamburg and the People Who Lived in Them*, which was acknowledged last month by the Architectural Conservancy of Ontario (ACO) with its Stephen A. Otto Award for Research and Documentation.

Co-authors Marie Voisin and Kristen Hahn hope their and Ritz's work will become a reference point for anyone looking for historical information on individual buildings and properties in New Hamburg or the town as a whole, whether they're realtors looking for information on an old house, journalists in search of background for a story or even local politicians considering the future of a heritage building.

Information about how to purchase the book once it is published in 2025 will be posted at www.historicbuildingsnewhamburg.com.

Wellesley area seniors benefit from provincial funding announcement

Seniors in Wellesley Township and surrounding areas were given a funding boost by the provincial government in November to help them stay active and healthy.

Kitchener-Conestoga MPP Mike Harris and Raymond Cho, minister for seniors and accessibility, announced new investments at the Aging Well in Wellesley

Information and Active Living Fair Nov. 13 in the Bill Gies Recreation Centre. The government said the investments reflect Ontario's ongoing commitment to seniors by enhancing services and programs that promote health, fitness and social engagement closer to home. More than 100 area seniors attended the event with two dozen booths offering supports.

Community Care Concepts (CCC) of Woolwich, Wellesley and Wilmot is getting over \$50,000 in annual investments, up from about \$42,000 in previous funding. The organization delivers services for older adults in the area.

EZT rec committee provides township with budget wish list after public consultation; chair hoping to improve communication with residents

East Zorra-Tavistock's (EZT) recreation advisory committee (RAC) has operated for over two years with what could be called a low profile, but that may change as the township prepares the 2025 budget.

Kyle Smith is a community member and chair of the committee, and he explained in November there are three projects RAC has asked council to consider: a multi-use facility, a splash pad in Innerkip and a dog park.

Currently, there is no programming offered by the township, but Smith explained some residents have come forward to organize their own. Smith added the committee has talked about the potential of the township itself offering programming directly from the township, but no suggestions have reached the council table yet. He also said improved communication is needed.

Will Jacques, former EZT clerk and current community and recreation services manager, said most recreation opportunities in the community using township facilities are run by user groups or private individuals. He added if additional recreational programming opportunities are made available in the future, it would involve council review and discussion.



Attendees at the Wilmot Family Resource Centre's 30th annual Poor Boys Luncheon are served up a meal of wieners and beans and/or hotdogs. Photo by Sharon Leis



Checking out the barrels of Sauerkraut at the Tavistock Men's Club shed last week are, from left, Brian Boland, Bob Routly and Ross Schumm in the lead-up to the club's 2024 Sauerkraut Supper in November. Photo by Gary West

MONTH BY MONTH

2024 Year in Review By Month

The New Hamburg Concert Band celebrates 130 years of music

The New Hamburg Concert Band celebrated its 130th anniversary last year.

Formed in 1894, the band has been known by many names. From the New Hamburg Community Band to the New Hamburg Citizens Band to the amalgamation of the Tavistock band to its current name, the New Hamburg Concert Band. Open to players of all ages and skill levels, registration is easily available on their website.

The New Hamburg Concert Band can be seen around New Hamburg, Tavistock, Baden and even Plattsville, getting around to local community events to bring the joy of music. It's important for the continuity and the survival of the band to continue drawing in younger players. A benefit for high-school players joining the band is the hours go towards their mandatory volunteer hours.

If interested in joining the band, check out the New Hamburg Concert Band's website at newhamburgconcertband.ca.

December 2024

Residents across Wilmot Township were shocked in December when the township released its 2025 draft budget, which included an unprecedented, proposed tax-levy increase of almost 51 per cent over last year's tax levy. Elsewhere in the area, East Zorra-Tavistock residents got a bit of good news when they learned a nearly 20 per-cent increase to the local OPP budget for 2025 was reduced by the province to just 2.2 per cent. Nearby Perth County also announced it would be discontinuing its PC Connect rural-route transit program after provincial funding runs out in March.

Massive budget hike proposed for residents of Wilmot Township; draft document carries a nearly 51 per-cent

increase

Residents of Wilmot are well aware of the township's poor financial situation, including extremely low reserves, but no one could have predicted the proposed tax increase coming out of the 2025 draft budget in December – 50.87 per cent.

The 2024 tax hike was 10.8 per cent, resulting in a \$123 increase to the average home's property taxes on \$424,800 of assessed value.

Greg Clark is the township's interim CAO and said he sees the draft document as a turning point for the township to meet current needs. The proposal includes a major, one-time boost to capital infrastructure investments. The increase will fund projects like a new fire station in New Hamburg, upgrades to the road network and improvements to the Wilmot Recreation Complex.

In total, the budget proposes a \$48.35 per month (\$580 per year) increase to the township's portion of the average homeowner's tax bill. Thirty-five dollars per month makes up the capital portion. A press release stated, "The increase will shore up the township's finances and bring the municipality closer to a sustainable level of annual funding."

Perth County council votes to discontinue PC Connect rural service after March 2025

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

As part of 2025 budget deliberations at the end of the Dec. 5 Perth County council meeting, county economic development officer Justin Dias presented a report to council on the future of the PC Connect rural-route service after the county's

\$2.47-million Community Transportation grant funding agreement with the province, which has been in place since PC Connect was launched in 2020, ends at the end of March.

In his report, Dias recommended extending the program by nine months to the end of 2025, which would cost taxpayers an additional \$225,103 on top of what is already a double-digit proposed levy increase for next year at nearly 13.2 per cent. The funding required to continue the PC Connect rural-route transit service until the end of 2025 would represent a little more than a one per-cent increase to the proposed 2025 tax levy for the county.

While ridership is increasing, the county's cost for each ride is decreasing and most regular users of the rural-route bus service indicated the importance of the service in connecting them to medical appointments, groceries and social and community engagements while reducing personal transportation costs and increasing their independence, the fact the province has not committed to any further funding for PC Connect after March 2025 was a concern for the majority of county council.

Please note PC Connect Routes 1, 2 and 3 offering service between Stratford, St. Marys, London, Kitchener-Waterloo and North Perth are not impacted by this decision.

EZT taxpayers off the hook for big increase in 2025 OPP contract

East Zorra-Tavistock (EZT), just like many municipalities across the province, was looking at a double-digit increase in its Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) cost for next year, but the province has provided millions to help out.

According to EZT Mayor Phil Schaefer, the township's OPP bill will increase by 2.2 per cent instead of close to 20 per cent, as indicated in an initial invoice. The province is reducing the increase by \$190,723. The township and all other OPP-patrolled

municipalities recently received a letter from Ontario Solicitor General Michael Kerzner outlining the areas the province would be providing dollars. It included a 44 per-cent reduction in overtime from 2023 and a 10 per-cent reduction in the overall 2025 OPP invoices.

Schaefer was invited to a video call explaining police billing for next year and had a feeling something was coming down the pipe. He added the additional money will benefit the bottom line for next year's budget. Once a municipality receives an invoice from the Ontario Provincial Police, there is no room to negotiate the final amount.

The Ontario government is providing over \$77 million in financial relief to municipalities to help offset the increased cost of municipal police services provided by the OPP. A news release from the province said the investment will help predominantly small and rural communities address the budget impacts resulting from the collective bargaining agreement that was reached between the province and the Ontario Provincial Police Association in July.

The province has also committed to looking at different options for reviewing the OPP billing model to ensure that it meets the needs of communities across the province.

Region of Waterloo to host online public meeting about future of water and wastewater in Village of Wellesley

Village of Wellesley residents had the opportunity in December to have their say on the future of water and wastewater.

As part of the ongoing development of a Water and Wastewater Master Plan for the Village of Wellesley, the Region of Waterloo hosted a third online public meeting Dec. 12. The master plan, once completed, will examine how the region provides water and wastewater services to the Village of Wellesley until the year



Pictured from left are Barbara Nowak, Beth Schlueter and Wendy Richardson, some of the volunteers who spearheaded the Wellesley Township Poppy Project this year, in front of the Wellesley Township offices in November. Photo by Gary West



The New Hamburg Legion Colour Party and parade marshal Charlie Bronson lead the Remembrance Day Parade across the Nith River in downtown New Hamburg Nov. 11 on its way to the New Hamburg Cenotaph for a short service before heading to the New Hamburg Community Centre for the full Remembrance service. Photo by Galen Simmons

MONTH BY MONTH

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2050.

Based on conversations with Wellesley Township staff, Region of Waterloo commissioner of engineering and environmental services Jennifer Rose told township council at a meeting in December that the village's population – currently 3,700 people – is expected to grow to 5,600 residents

by 2050. In accordance with those growth projections, the Village of Wellesley's current water and wastewater infrastructure will need to be expanded to meet the needs of village residents.

At the meeting, engineering staff from the region reviewed a number of options for expanding and upgrading water and

wastewater infrastructure first presented during a master plan public meeting held in June. Region staff also shared their preferred options and solicited feedback from those in attendance.

For more information, visit www.engagewr.ca/wellesleywater. Region staff will present the preferred options for

improving water and wastewater capacity in the village to council at some point early in the new year. A report on those options will be made available to the public after that.



A large crowd of onlookers listen to angels and children from the audience sing the Christmas carol, "O' Little Town of Bethlehem" during St. James Lutheran Church's Journey to Bethlehem production in North Easthope Township in December. Photo by Gary West



K&K Liquidation from outside Wellesley got in the spirit of Christmas by lightning up one of the more dazzling floats in this year's Christmas Tyme in Wellesley parade Dec. 13. Photo by Jackie Gingerich

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Is detox a dirty word?

HEAPS OF HEALTHY TIPS

By Mercedes Kay Gold



To detox or not detox? This holistic nutritionist loves when clients, “abstain from or rid the body of toxic or unhealthy substances,” but over-the-counter, chemical-derived laxatives and diuretics are not the way to go. Detox can be as simple as taking a break from alcohol, unhealthy oils or stopping sugar for a few days, weeks or hopefully forever. Mother Nature offers happy holistic herbs for body-boosting benefits but this health expert also urges you to try fabulous finds from years gone by.

The body detoxes itself daily from a continuous onslaught of toxins with the help of seven pathways. For example, sweating in the gym or infrared sauna helps rid the body of toxins through the skin, our largest organ. Filling up

on fiber helps speed up transit time to rid the body as well. There’s a great advantage to helping support the body function optimally.

Going from one extreme to another can be overwhelming. There’s no need to juice exclusively, water fast or take handfuls of herbs, but incorporating some better lifestyle choices long term is top-notch.

Abstaining from alcohol or at least limiting alcohol is lifechanging as the liver metabolizes more than 90 per cent of the alcohol you consume. Excessive drinking causes fatty liver, inflammation and scarring. When the liver – the housekeeper of the body – is overworked, functioning is less than fabulous. This busy bee organ needs to filter other wastes, manufacture hormones and store vitamins among its 500 essential

tasks.

Sleep supports health in endless ways. Shut-eye allows the brain to remove beta-amyloid, a protein contributing to Alzheimer’s disease where sleep deprivation allows toxins to build up.

Water is wondrous, allowing the body to transport wastes through blood and aiding in urinating, sweating and breathing for ongoing detoxification. Herbal teas increase water intake and extra holistic help for elimination. Dandelion and milk thistle support the liver, fennel and senna leaf for the digestive system, and tulsi cares for the kidneys.

Skipping sugar is liver love, kidney care and perfect for the pancreas. Our body thrives on fresh, whole foods.

Exercise equals sweating out unwanted substances while reducing inflammation throughout the body.

Daily detoxing means going chemical-free in the kitchen, bathroom and when choosing self-care products. Breathing-in and slathering skin with unpronounceable words impacts lungs and the key organs in our endocrine system, disrupting the endocrine system. Go green for the sake of your health inside and out.

Choosing a healthier lifestyle is a lifelong commitment but I love seeing client’s level up. Dry brushing is not new but this ancient practice of scrubbing dry skin with a firm, bristled brush from head to toe increases blood flow to the skin and, legend has it, dry brushing supports the lymphatic system.

Juicing started trending sometime in the 1920s and has gained momentum over the years as a detox, cleanse and overall feel-good phenomenon. Drinking a rainbow of nutrients floods cells with nutrients, and yes, you can lose weight quickly. Bear in mind, eliminating fiber in foods spikes insulin quickly and may not be ideal for anyone with blood-sugar issues. Anthony Willam, #1 New York Times best-selling author and known as the Medical Medium, is a celery juice advocate for 10 key reasons, from restoring adrenals to combatting chronic acid reflux. This holistic nutritionist is on team celery juice.

Colonics are regularly administered by medical doctors and involve flushing out the large intestine with liquid. Colon cleanses or enemas are not without controversy. The coffee enema is thought to have originated by German

physicians in the early 1900s as a cancer treatment, and today they are more than trendy, even considered a top-notch tool by many alternative professionals to help eliminate headaches, arthritis and even parasites.

One stellar way to support overall health is fasting. There’s more and more evidence about the benefits of long-term fasting, but baby steps. Start with intermittent fasting. Everyone should already be waiting 12 hours in between the first and last meal, better known as a “rest and digest.” That being said, the longer fast translates into more benefits. Intermittent fasting is a lifestyle and 18 hours appears to be the minimum, and some followers eat just one meal a day. When the body is deprived, autophagy or the body’s cellular recycling system or self-cleaning process kicks in. Autophagy plays an important role in preventing aging. Fasting is also a beneficial way to support a healthy weight for many.

At the end of the day, limiting processed foods, increasing water intake, moving the body, sleep, limiting stress and enjoying nature are nourishing for the body, mind and spirit but it never hurts to add something new to your daily life!

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OBITUARY

STEINMAN: Wallace



Passed away peacefully on Monday, December 16, 2024 at peopleCare, Tavistock. Wallace Steinman of Tavistock in his 100th year.

Beloved husband of the late Elda (Ruby) Steinman who predeceased him August 28, 2008. Loving father of Eileen Krampien of Tavistock. Dear grandfather of Julie (Frederick) of Cambridge

and Dale (Jenn) of Tavistock and great grandchildren Bryce, Rachel, Colin and Hunter. Survived by his sister-in-law Ruth Steinman of Clinton.

Predeceased by his parents Daniel & Catherine (Erb) Steinman, brothers Mahlon & Emma Steinman, Alvin & Ada Steinman, Laverne Steinman, Olin & Vernetta Steinman, Orval & Patricia Steinman, sisters Loretta & Elroy Lichti and Violet & Robert McCormick.

Relatives and friends were received at the East Zorra Mennonite Church, 16th Line on Thursday, January 2, 2025 from 10:30am until 12:30pm followed by the Funeral service at 1:00pm. Interment followed in the church cemetery. Reception followed in the church basement.

In lieu of flowers, donations to the East Zorra Mennonite Church or Stratford General Hospital Foundation would be appreciated by the family. Personal condolence can be posted at www.gffh.ca

WORSHIP IN WILMOT TOWNSHIP

St George's Anglican Church

Corner of Waterloo St and Byron St, New Hamburg
Weekly Sunday services at 10:15 am. All are welcome.

<https://www.stgeorgesnewhamburg.com>

St James Chapel of Ease

4339 Huron Rd Wilmot Township
All are welcome.
Rev Margaret Walker; Office: 519-662-3450
sgacnewhamburg@gmail.com

St Agatha Mennonite Church

1967 Erb's Road St Agatha 519-634-8212
Pastor Jim Brown
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Pastor Steve Hoffard

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www.trinitytavistock.com

TAVISTOCK MENNONITE

Interim Pastor Harold Schlegel.

131 Wettlaufer St., Tavistock 655-2581

Sunday Worship services begin at 9:45am, with coffee and fellowship to follow at 11am. Masks welcomed but not required.

All Ages JRSS will follow after the worship service.

Stream services online at www.tavistockmennonitechurch.ca

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www.tavistockbc.org

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Church Phone 519-276-0701

Wellington Street, Tavistock

stpaulstavistock@gmail.com

Pastor Rev. Michael Mayer

EAST ZORRA MENNONITE

677044 16th Line Road, East Zorra

Pastors Ray Martin & Mike Williamson

www.ezmennonite.ca

Service audio recordings available at:

<https://ezmennonite.ca/worship/>

TAVISTOCK MISSIONARY

77 Mogk St., Box 220, Tavistock NOB 2R0

Phone: (519) 655-3611

Email: office@tavistock.church

www.tavistock.church

HAPPY New Year 2025

Wilmot Council extends our best wishes to residents for a meaningful year ahead.

We look forward to connecting with you in 2025!

You can reach us at council@wilmot.ca.

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The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette **SPORTS**

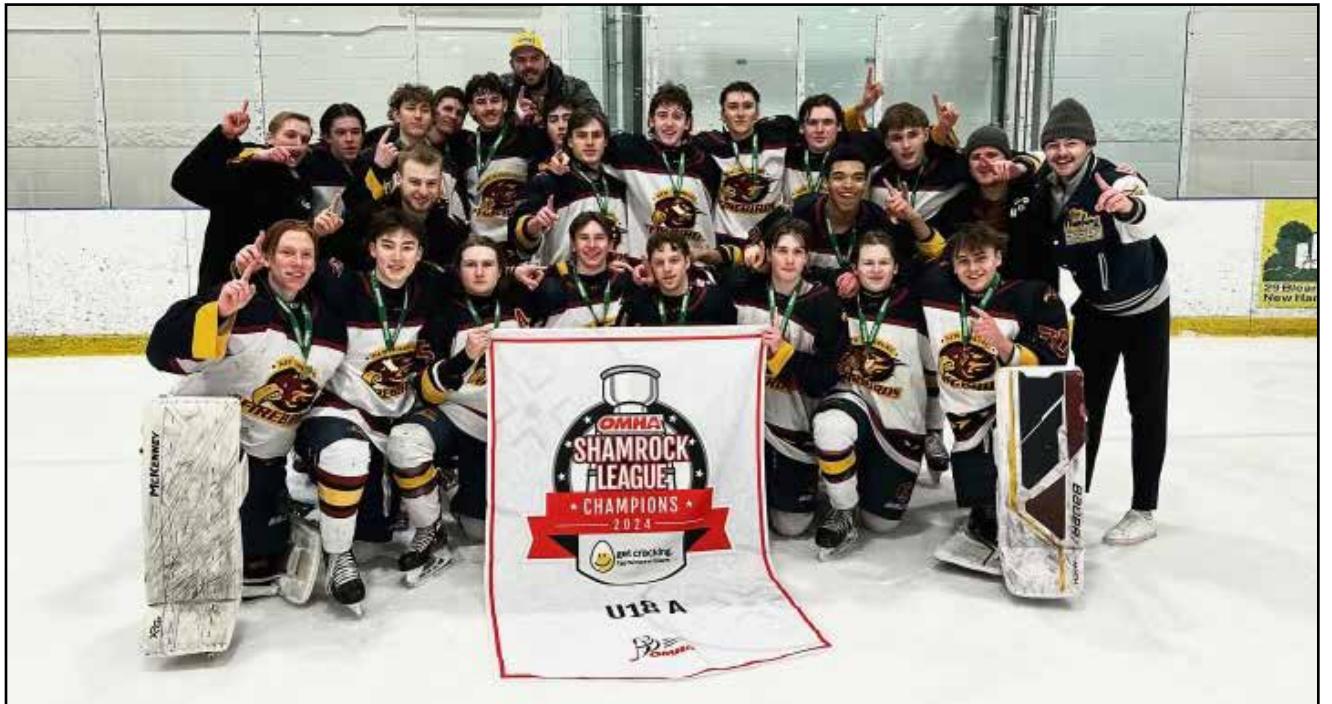
YEAR IN SPORTS

Zehr named OASA coach of the year



Tavistock's Kevin Zehr was honoured with the Ontario Amateur Softball Association's Gil Read Memorial Award, recognizing his exceptional coaching career and dedication to the sport. Zehr credits his players, coaching staff, and the community for his success, highlighting softball as a team effort both on and off the field. Contributed photo

U18A New Hamburg Junior Firebirds, Shamrock League champions



The U18A New Hamburg Junior Firebirds clinched the Shamrock League championship in a thrilling season finale, with Aydan Burns scoring the decisive goal in sudden-death overtime. The victory capped an impressive inaugural season for the league and the Firebirds, who secured their spot in the OMHA tournament. Contributed photo

Embro Senior C Highlanders hockey team wins gold in Toronto



The Embro Senior C Highlanders brought home gold at the provincial championship in Toronto, winning an exhilarating double-overtime final against Orillia. The team, featuring players from Tavistock and Oxford County, topped their round-robin pool and overcame tough competition in the quarterfinals and semifinals. The victory capped off a successful season, thanks to dedicated coaches, team captain Megan Veldman, and unwavering local support. In the front row from left are Emily Bertens, Kyra Prekup, Megan Jackson, Brooke Hartwick, Carly Wouters and Paula Wouters. In the middle row from left are Kayla Veldman, Megan Veldman, Katie Whetstone, Alyssa Habel and Jaime VanNes. In the back row from left are Tim Whetstone, Paul Prekup, Brooklyn McNab, Celina Murray, Haleigh McIntosh, Julie Van Nes, Alicia Young, Kately Sykes and Mike Oliver. Absent are Jocelyn Innes, Claire Hazeleger and Ella Wouters. Photo courtesy of Jayne Whetstone

TAVISTOCK ROYALS SR. "AA" HOCKEY



**Tavistock
Royals**

VS



**Erin
Outlaws**



**SATURDAY, JANUARY 4TH
AT 7:30PM
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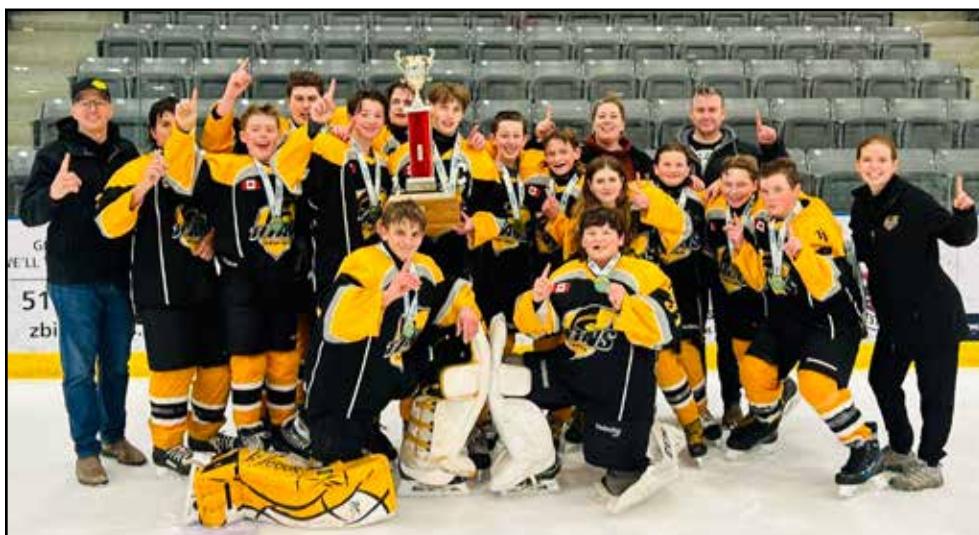


Firebirds Soar to Division Title, Advance to PJHL Final Four



The New Hamburg Firebirds claimed the Doherty Division title with a decisive 5-2 victory over Woodstock and followed it up by winning their South Conference final against Grimsby. A standout performance in game seven of the conference series saw New Hamburg dominate Grimsby 6-1 to secure their spot in the PJHL final four. Photo by Susan Mills on the left and contributed photo on the right

Tavistock Minor Hockey's only two women head coaches lead teams to divisional championships



Two Tavistock Minor Hockey teams brought home divisional championships this season. Left, the U15 LL Titans, led by Kathleen Smith, clinched the Grand River Local League Division C title, while Stacy Jordan's U11 LL Team 1, right, won gold in the B Division final. Both women coaches highlighted teamwork, discipline, and resilience as keys to their success. Contributed photos

Tavistock & District Skating Club's Youth Synchro Teams Shine in Skate Ontario Synchro Series



The Tavistock & District Skating Club youth synchronized skating teams celebrated a successful season in the Skate Ontario Synchro Series. The Pre-Novice team became provincial champions, while the Star 4 Pre-Juvenile team earned two gold medals this season. Juvenile skaters, competing at a higher level for the first time, showed steady improvement, finishing fourth at provincials. With dedicated coaching from Tara Wilkins and Lauren Holdsworth, the club continues to thrive. Pictured left are the Pre-Novice skaters from the Tavistock and District Skating Club. In back row from left are Jenna Pickering, Laina Berendsen, Hailey Minler, Eilish Moylan, Maddie Moylan, Chloe Bell, Bria Moore, Natalee Weicker and Molly Frook. In front row from left are coach Tara Wilkins, Kaylee Adam, Candace Dietrich, Kyleigh Dick, Abby Herold, Riah Wagler, Claire Rempel, Alexis Bell, Avery Brenneman and coach Lauren Holdsworth. Pictured right are the Star 4 skaters from the Tavistock and District Skating Club. From left are Paisley Wilhelm, Chloe King, Lauren Rujescu, Kadence Bell, Aubrey Lange, Katerina Schmidt, Mikayla Munro, Cassidy Weicker, Kenzingtin Cudney, Jane McCutchen and Lyla Wilson. Absent is Gracie Sutherland. Contributed photos

YEAR IN SPORTS

Black medals at Special Olympics pool events in New Hamburg



Stratford swimmer Amiera Black shone at the South-Central District's Special Olympics, winning three gold medals and a silver in her first-ever competition. A member of the Wilmot Aquatic ACES Swim Club, Amiera achieved personal bests in all four of her events, including a standout performance in the 800-metre freestyle. Beyond the medals, she cherished the camaraderie, fun, and community support, including participating in the ceremonies and athlete's village. With her family and former coach cheering her on, the event became a celebration of achievement and joy. Contributed photo

U10 Boys earn Bronze at regional tournament



The U10 Royal Blue Boys Wilmot District Soccer League team have gotten off to a fantastic start to their season, boasting a record of six wins and one loss. The team also placed third in a regional tournament over the June 22-23 weekend. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Owen McInnis, Hudson Ceaser, Kayo Kimpinski, Hunter, Mason Macdonald, and Andrew Roy. In the back row, from left, are coach Brent Taylor, Jacob Desjardins, Dominic Liscombe, Joel Kox, Ethan Szusz, Julius M-T, Mason Taylor, Alexander Farkas, and coach Justin Taylor. Contributed photo

New Hamburg Karate Club Members Excel at Chito Ryu Tournament



Pictured from left to right are Sensei Richard Hesch, Ethan Hesch, Matt Chenthil, referee Paul Kroes, Adit Singh, John Baxter and referee Joe Brenner. Baxter took first place in Kata at a Chito Ryu Association of Ontario tournament in Toronto earlier this year. At the same tournament, Chenthil and Hesch also finished first in their age groups' Kata competition. Singh grabbed a strong third place in his Kata bracket, all of which were just some of the highlights of the New Hamburg Karate Club's 45th year of operation. Photo by Tushar Singh

Tavistock U-15 boys strike gold at North Waterloo -tournament



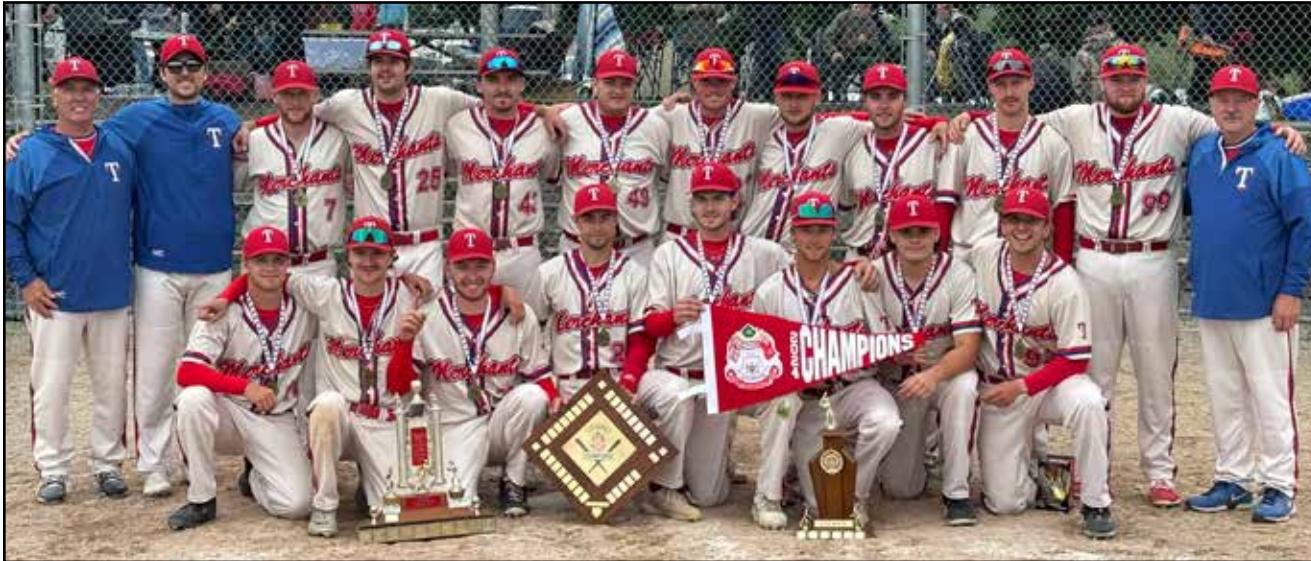
The Tavistock U-15 boys fastball team are pictured here with their gold medals from the North Waterloo fastball tournament last weekend. Championship Sunday was rained out, but the team was the #1 seed after the round robin, and the boys were awarded the gold medal. Tavistock's U-15 fastball team with their gold medals. Pictured in front from left are Cam Bartlett, Augy Marschauser, Logan Nahrgang, Jordan Zehr, Spencer Otto and Evan Nahrgang. In the back from left are Carson Gilmore, Mackiah Wagler, Jay Alexander, Peyton Christie, Grayden McRoberts, Connor Harper, Jackson MacMillan, Dylan McCann and Marshall McKay. Contributed photo

U13 Thunder earn Silver at OASA Provincials



The U13 Wilmot Thunder Majors capped off a stellar season with a silver medal in the A division of the 2024 OASA Provincial Championships. Highlights included an impressive 13-1 season record, a gold medal at the North Waterloo 50th Anniversary tournament, and strong performances at provincials in New Hamburg. Head coach Kevin Hall praised the team's development, sportsmanship, and resilience throughout the season. The event also featured community support from the New Hamburg Optimist Club and a special recognition for longtime umpire and volunteer Don Culbert. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Connor Hall, Nolan Berry and Zac Nicholls. In the middle row, from left, are Jackson Laurette, Robbie Snyder, Nate Lue, Cooper Hillar, Cameron Faulhafer, Carson Dietrich, Easton Fowler and Billy Van Gysse. In the back row, from left, are coaches Mike Carey, Kyle Hillar, Ryan Dietrich and Kevin Hall. Contributed photo

Merchants defend Ontario title



The Tavistock U23 Merchants clinched their second consecutive Ontario championship with a 5-3 comeback win over Harwood in the final, highlighted by MVP Calvin Munro's home run and Reese Yantzi's dominant pitching. The team remained undefeated throughout the weekend, showcasing depth and teamwork. Pictured in the front row, from left, are Tavistock Merchants Justin Roth, Jaxon Gilbert, Calvin Munro, Mason McKay, Andrew Van Boekel, Bo Schurink, Keenan Bateman and Jake Voisin. In the back row, from left, are Kevin Zehr, Tyson Zehr, Connor Brooks, Nate Running, Tye Boyd, Thomas Baker, Derek Erb, Kyle Roth, Jack Becker, Ben Wiffen, Reese Yantzi and Gary Baker. Contributed photo

Wilmot ACES tournament wins



The Wilmot ACES swim club had a strong showing at two of their meets. At a meet in Markham, Grace Bach, pictured top, qualified for the Ontario Swimming Championships with a gold and a new club record in the 100 fly. Austin Heinbuch, Bailey Ewanchuk, and Tess Weyers also qualified for provincials. At the U12 Ontario Championships in Etobicoke, Vasyi Kruppynin and Anna MacDonald, pictured just above, set new club records and earned multiple medals. Vasyi claimed two silver and three bronze, while Anna won two silver and two bronze. The team finished 17th out of over 70 teams.

Perth County's Levi Dill wins at Grand Bend Motor Speedway



Levi Dill, a 12-year-old from North Easthope Township, celebrated wins at Grand Bend Motor Speedway, winning his races despite facing mechanical challenges. Racing in the junior dragster division, Levi clocked speeds of 76.5 m/hr in 8.42 seconds. The Grade 7 student, who began racing at age seven, is sponsored by Advanced Drainage Solutions, W.C. Dill Co., John Bear GMC, and Wells Food Processing.

Mustangs capture silver at provincial championships



The U20 New Hamburg Mustangs fought hard at the OASA Provincial Championships, claiming silver after a weekend of thrilling games in Cambridge, August 9-11. The team showcased resilience with comeback wins over West Carlton Electric and Plattsville Lightning, and a dramatic walk-off victory against Rostock Braves in the semi-final. In the championship rematch, the Mustangs pushed the game to 11 innings but fell 9-7 despite a strong effort. Head coach Trevor Jutzi praised the team's determination as they now prepare for the Canadian Championships and Tri-County playoffs. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Isaac Roth, Ben Domm, Jake Durrer, Aiden Cloet and Evan Baechler. In the back row, from left, are Mike Van De Wynckel, Brian Heipel, Joey Durrer, Adam Roth, Cohen Christner, Brayden Van De Wynckel, Caleb Martin, Matt Freeman, Kaden Eichler, Ryan Roth and Trevor Jutzi. Contributed photo

YEAR IN SPORTS

Tavistock goalie brings home ball hockey gold from Europe



Tavistock goalie Brock Schaus, formerly of Wellesley, celebrates Team Canada's ball-hockey win by hoisting the championship trophy over his head following the gold-medal game.

U13 Falcons earn pair of Silver medals



The U13 Shakespeare Falcons won the Silver medal at the Tiffanie Parkins Memorial Tournament held on July 12-14 in Stratford. It was the second Silver medal for the team in less than a month after the Falcons also took the second-place prize at the Mount Forest ISA LL Tournament on June 21-23. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Sophia Hall and Lyric Brighton. In the middle row, from left, are Emma McCauley, Morgan Gerich, Eva Van Nes, Cora Hall, Emily Pletsch, and Leah Weicker. In the back row, from left, are coach Micheal Hall, head coach Trevor Glaab, coach Jason Lange, Teagan Glaab, coach Jesse McCauley, Kierra Mostard, Aline Smith, Peyton Rader, and Neely Lange. Not pictured is Anna Neeb. Contributed photo

U15 Thunder claim ORSA Silver



Hamburg. After a tough opening loss to Port Lambton, the team rallied with a narrow 8-7 win over Norwich and a 13-6 redemption victory against Port Lambton. In the final, the Thunder fell 5-1 to the undefeated Havelock Express. The team showcased resilience and determination, with standout performances from Averie Brooker, Dibora Roth, and Sophie Arsenault. Coaches praised the Thunder's effort and pride in earning their hard-fought Silver medal. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Kennedy Watson, Kaylee Aldridge, Rebekah East, Sophie Arsenault, Emily Snyder, Zoey Sanche, and Averie Brooker. In the back row, from left, are Paul Arsenault, Charlie Watson, Grace Piper, Kylee Jantzi, Dibora Roth, Jacquie East, Kayla Hruden, Taylor Pfaff, and Nicole Hruden. Not pictured were Maddy Becks and manager Jenn Aldridge. Contributed photo

Wilkins brings home inline hockey gold with Team Canada



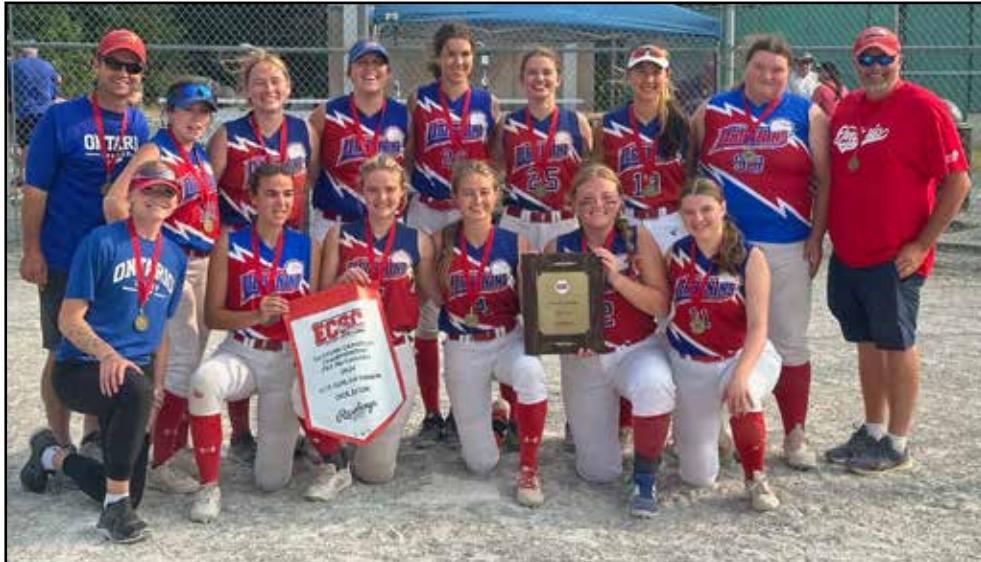
Ayden Wilkins of Tavistock brought home gold as part of Team Canada's junior men's inline hockey squad at the Pan-American Championships in Ibaque, Colombia, from August 1-7. Wilkins, the only Ontario player on the team, helped Canada secure a thrilling 4-3 victory over Colombia in the gold-medal game with just 0.2 seconds left on the clock. Known for his skill and determination, Wilkins proudly represented Tavistock, Ontario, and Canada on the international stage. Contributed photo

U13 LL Huskies One capture gold at Elmvale tournament



Pictured right, the U13 LL Boys One New Hamburg Huskies claimed the gold medal at the Orr Lake Hat-Trick Tournament Nov. 29 to Dec. 1 in Elmvale. Pictured laying on the ice in front, from left to right, are Keaton Herlick and Oliver Vusich. Pictured in the middle row, from left, are Jace Nelson, Tucker Moreau, Benn Owens, Drew Brown, Noah Murphy, Nathan Smith and Simon Carter. In the back row, from left, are assistant coach Paul Arsenault, trainer Steve Carter, head coach Matt Vusich, Caleb Rutledge, Garrett Rowley, Eric Arsenault, Lincoln Elrick, Jacob Gurney, Max Dietrich, assistant coach Jeff Herlick and Sean Gurney. Contributed photo

Rianna Forthuber wins gold in softball



Rianna Forthuber of Shakespeare added to her championship résumé this summer by winning gold with the London Lightning at the U19 Eastern Canada Softball Championship in Newfoundland, where the team went undefeated. Pictured are the Eastern Canadian Softball Champions. In the back row from left are head coach Matt Gregory, Robyn Denomme, Rylee Goodburn, Micaiah Armstrong, Christine Annette, Sofia Franceschino, Lina Dragunevicius, Kelsey Peckham and assistant coach Brian Davies. In the front row from left are assistant coach Lauren Dottori, Rianna Forthuber, Elizabeth Bailey, Sienna Gregory, Mikenna Verschueten and Kaitlyn Staeker. Contributed photo

U11 Girls Thunder claim ORSA Championship



The U11 Girls Wilmot Thunder claimed the Ontario Rural Softball Association Championship in Alvinston from July 5-7. After strong round-robin performances, they defeated Fisherville in the final, overcoming early adversity to secure a 5-run victory behind Mackenzie Hall's pitching and the team's aggressive batting. With 47 hits, six in-the-park home runs, and stellar teamwork, the Thunder showcased resilience and growth throughout the season, earning a milestone win for the Wilmot Softball Association. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Zephy Nicholls, Olivia Bardwell and Jordyn Lynch. In the back row, from left, are Meredith Steinacker, Paisley Steinacker, Layla Eddison, Terri Lynch, Mackenzie Hall, Arianna Baetz, Kirby Baetz, Avery Shantz, Susan Hall, Alyssa Smaglinski, Maddison Potvin and Gabby Hallman. Contributed photo

Wilmot Aquatic Aces shine at Walker Invitational



The Wilmot Aquatic Aces had a stellar start to their 2024-2025 season, finishing second at the Walker Invitational Meet at Brock University, October 25-26. The 55-member team earned 879 points, 71 individual medals, and three relay golds, with standout performances from medalists like Anna MacDonald and Silas Campbell.

Hendry earns triple gold Final Season with Tavistock Skating Club

Annabelle Hendry capped off her 2023-2024 season with gold levels in artistic, dance, and skills, while also skating with Team Unity Synchro. Pictured are coach Lori Hartman and Annabelle Hendry, the latter of whom earned her gold levels in artistic, dance and skill skating last season.



Duckies win OFSAA field-hockey gold

Waterloo-Oxford District Secondary School's Duckies capped an undefeated season with a 1-0 victory over Bluevale Collegiate in the OFSAA finals on Nov. 9. The team, led by experienced veterans and talented younger players, showcased resilience and tenacity throughout their dominant 26-0-2 season, outscoring opponents 84-6. Pictured in the front row, from left to right, are Lauren Fidler, Victoria Shipp, Julia Amyotte, Jaden Greenlee, Maeve Turner, Tatjana Knezevic, Leah McPhee, Samantha Wright, Leah Thompson, Lauren Leis, and Willow Harris. In the back row, from left, are Natalie Otterbein, Janine Walmsley, Payton McPhee, Katelyn Pfohl, Olivia Luchetti, Ella Kittel, Avery Schaub, Ashley Woolcott, Reese Moore, Dana Kropf, Terri-Lyn Stewart and coach Amanda Smith. Contributed photo

YEAR IN SPORTS

U18 Huskies win gold and U21 win silver in Silver Stick qualifiers



The U18 New Hamburg Huskies claimed gold at the Silver Stick qualifier in Georgina, defeating Clarington 5-0 in the final. The win secures their spot at the International Silver Stick tournament in Sarnia, set for January. Head coach Zach Mark praised the team's performance, noting their competitive Shamrock League experience will drive them toward an OMHA title. The Tavistock Titans earned silver at the Silver Stick qualifier in Lucknow, defeating Mid-Huron, Walkerton, and Huron Bruce Blizzard before falling 4-2 to the Lucan Irish in the final. Contributed photos



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2025



Gazette Puzzles

MAJOR EVENTS OF 2024

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Wilmot Ward 1 Solutions-Oriented Budget Townhall Meeting

Hosted by Councillor Stewart Cressman

Let's discuss Wilmot's draft 2025 budget & the path forward. No need to RSVP. All welcome.

Details:

Thursday, January 9, 2025
 7 PM - 9 PM
 New Dundee Community Centre, 1028 Queen St., New Dundee
 Questions? Email Stewart.Cressman@Wilmot.ca & copy Carly.Pettinger@Wilmot.ca



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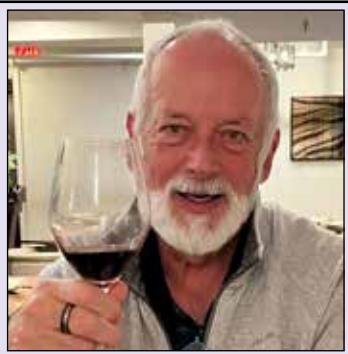


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The best of Europe, the US and Canada

OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO

By Paul Knowles



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

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



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

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



The memorial to enslaved persons at Mount Vernon.

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



Cabbage Key.

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



Bratislava, Slovakia: One of my favourite European cities in the old city of Bratislava.

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



The view from Fisherman's Bastion, Budapest.

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



St. Stephan's church, Passau.

Passau, Germany: 2024 was a tough year for Passau. Passau sits at the confluence of three rivers – ideal for trade in historic times, but a challenge when it comes to flood control. But that's part of the story in this ancient city where buildings carry historic high-water charts on their walls, and where the high ground includes the impressive St. Stephan's Cathedral with its world-record pipe organ.



A tiny house at the Hébergement aux Cinq Sens, in Québec.

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



A CF-188 Hornet at the Canadian Air Force Museum.

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



The Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.

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



John Donovan, our guide at the Sabian Cymbal factory in New Brunswick.

Sabian Cymbal factory, Meductic, New Brunswick: The most unusual of our stops in 2024. This is where the finest quality cymbals are crafted for shipment to musicians around the world. The tour takes you through the entire process of creating these amazing instruments and you will be walking in the footsteps of world-renowned drummers like Neal Peart of Rush, Tyler Stewart of Barenaked Ladies, Carmine Appice of Vanilla Fudge, and many, many more.



Jellybean Row in St. John's.

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



Along the Cabot Trail.

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



The Ceilidh at Stanley Bridge, PEI.

Stanley Bridge Ceilidh, Stanley Bridge, Prince Edward Island: There is a lot of great stuff on P.E.I., from everything Anne to amazing beaches, terrific golf, theatre in Charlottetown and, of course, lobster feasts, but a highlight was the highly entertaining ceilidh at the Stanley Bridge Hall, featuring the talented Pendergast family.



Jakub Lipinski of Big Head Wines.

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



A well-stocked stall at the St. Jacob's Farmers' Market.

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

Paul Knowles is an author and travel writer, and president of the Travel Media Association of Canada. To contact Paul about travel, his books, or speaking engagements, email pknowles@golden.net.

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TUESDAY, JANUARY 7

Wilmot Council budget meeting
7-9 p.m.
Council chambers
60 Snyder's Road West Baden

TUESDAY, JANUARY 14

Wellesley Council meeting
6:45p.m.
Council chambers
4805 William Hastings Line, Crosshill

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15

Community Care Concepts invites you to join us for lunch and fellowship
12:00 p.m.
Please register by Jan 10 by calling 519-664-1900 or Toll Free: 1-855-664-1900.
Wellesley Recreation Complex, 1401 Queen's Bush Rd., Wellesley

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 15

Community Care Concepts invites you to join us for lunch and fellowship
12:00 p.m.
Please register by Jan 24 by calling 519-664-1900 or toll Free: 1-855-664-1900.
Linwood Community Centre, 5279 Ament Line, Linwood

THURSDAY, JANUARY 16

Special Council Meeting - 2025 Budget
2-10 p.m.
Council chambers
60 Snyder's Road West Baden



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Weekly Quiz Answers

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

HELP WANTED

OXFORD COUNTY

Now hiring Public Works Divisional Assistant



Competition number: # 2024-113

Employment status: Permanent full-time

Wage range: \$28.98-\$36.22/hour

Location: Oxford County Administration Building, Woodstock

We're hiring! Oxford County is seeking a Divisional Assistant for the Transportation and Waste Management division of Public Works. In addition to performing general office duties, this role provides professional and confidential administrative support to staff, including supporting legal processes, documents, customer service, procurement and records maintenance.

To view the full job description and qualifications, scan the QR code or visit oxfordcounty.ca/careers

Please include the competition number and position title in the email subject line. Resumes will only be accepted electronically via e-mail at hr@oxfordcounty.ca.

Please apply by Friday, January 10, 2025 at 4:00 p.m.



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