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December donations helped local families in need

ROBIN KRAFFT

Post Contributor

The town of Tillsonburg turned up to take care of its own throughout the month of December.

The Salvation Army was able to provide food assistance to over 300 households and 64 children. The Angel Tree Tags ensured that children had gifts to open and the Adopt-a-Family program supported an additional 35 families with gifts and food for the holidays. Through agency partnerships, another 25 families in the Houghton area also received support.

The Salvation Army Kettle Campaign ran from Nov. 14 to Dec. 24 and resulted in contributions totalling over \$104,000. This was short of the \$185,000 goal, but didn't include mail-in donations. The Canada Post strike delayed the mail-out campaign, but it will be rolling out soon to give people who usually send in a cheque the opportunity to donate.

Lt. Drew Young said that every small donation counts but noted that "a few individual families gave upwards of \$3,000, an amazing blessing for us, and all of that money stays local and goes back into community supports."

He added: "We don't discriminate against anyone's cultural background, faith, gender, or race. Everyone is welcome and we help anyone to the best of our ability."

The Hub, a focal point for support, has been temporarily relocated to the church at 110 Concession Street West. Their normal services continue, including an emergency pantry (in partnership with the food bank), hydro bill assistance, and a daily feeding program.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2



MAYOR'S LEVEE

Tillsonburg residents Rick and Barb Aubrey talked to Mayor Deb Gilvesy, centre, during the levee at Annandale National Historic Site on Jan. 5. The event was organized by the Tillsonburg Historical Society and drew close to 100 people. Story below.

(JEFF HELSDON PHOTO)

Mayor provides insight into exciting initiatives in coming year

JEFF HELSDON

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Tillsonburg Mayor Deb Gilvesy reflected on the successes of the past 12 months and provided insight into the coming year during her speech at the mayor's levee on Sunday.

Held at Annandale National Historic Site and hosted by the Tillsonburg Historical Society on Jan. 5, the annual event provides an opportunity for the public to interact with their elected officials. It also gives the mayor an opportunity to speak on the past and future.

Speaking to the past year, Gilvesy spoke of the town's

largest initiative: the work at the Tillsonburg Community Centre.

"As we glimpse back to 2024, I wish I could stand before you to say that the indoor aquatics area at the Tillsonburg Community Centre has been opened, but unfortunately, I cannot," she said, mentioning the many unforeseen challenges, such as asbestos, that caused delays.

The good news is she said the renovated health club is now open, and the remainder of the facility should be open at the end of the month. She also mentioned the new pickleball courts, resurfaced tennis courts, and the opening of two new parks.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 4

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December donations helped local families in need



(JEFF HELSDON PHOTO)

Tillsonburg Helping Hand Food Bank coordinator Samantha Hamilton, left, and Lt. Drew Young of the Salvation Army load bags of food prior to Christmas. The two agencies work together on some programs, including an emergency pantry program. Mail donations for the Salvation Army Christmas Kettle campaign are still open.

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

On behalf of the Salvation Army, Young wishes to send out a "massive thank you to the community for financial contributions, gifts and toys. Without the community, the staff and volunteers, we wouldn't be able to facilitate a Christmas for families in need."

The Helping Hand Food Bank reported similar success. New coordinator Samantha Hamilton described it as "probably the most hectic December I've ever had, but it was awe-inspiring to see how many people came through the door with donations." A total of 17,000 pounds of food were donated in December through food drives from individuals, stores, schools and the general public, which doesn't include large corporate donations. It's an uptick from last year, in keeping with the increasing number of families in need.

There were 290 households (581 individuals) supported, compared to 204 households last year, and Hamilton has noticed that the people who use the ser-

vice are coming more frequently.

"I really want to acknowledge how amazing the community is, the support of Tillsonburg for Tillsonburg," she said, adding it wouldn't be possible without the "amazing volunteer pool who've been doing it for years."

With food insecurity on the rise, she said that "even just giving a little has an impact." As we enter the new year, the need remains.

"We need everything," Hamilton said, "with emphasis on school lunch items for kids and easy to make breakfasts (instant oatmeal, pancake mix, cereal) as well as anything warm for the cold weather such as soups."

As our population (and food prices) continue to increase, the need will continue to grow. Hamilton is hopeful that donations will continue to grow with it.

"We're seeing and caring for one another," she said. "The small town caring for the community, remaining tight-knit, even though we're growing so much."

Northgate Plaza bringing new restaurants and retail to town

JEFF HELSDON

Editor

The Northgate Plaza on North Broadway will bring more choices in eateries, a drug stores, and discount shopping.

Rob Koppert, broker of record at Royal LePage R.E. Wood Realty, told the Post the stores that confirmed for the 50,000 square-foot plaza are Roulston's Pharmacy, Dollarama, Chuck's Roadhouse, Osmows Shwarma and a No Frills grocery store. Of the 15 units in the plaza, 11 are leased, as many of the tenants will occupy more than one unit. The first of the stores to open will be Roulston's Pharmacy on Jan. 16. The No Frills is expected to open in mid to late 2025.

Koppert has been working hard trying to fill the remainder of the units.

"We've had a bunch of inquiries from daycares. We would really love to have a daycare, as Tillsonburg needs a daycare," he said.

Koppert also would like to see some a medical facility in the plaza, but said that is dependent on funding from higher levels of government.

And, to the most popular questions involving retail in town, he had an answer: "Winners is specific with the size of the building they want and our building doesn't fit the size they want."

As for Giant Tiger, he said, "The trouble is they don't generally come in newer buildings. They look for an older building or a retrofit old-

er building. With the older buildings, they don't have to pay as much per square foot."

Koppert, who advocates for supporting local businesses, said the building's construction was done entirely by local trades.

"If we can channel that locally, that's all money channeled into the local economy," he said, adding he was glad the tenants are all new businesses to town. "It's going to be all new businesses and we aren't going to move any new businesses in town. It's going to create new employment. There will be lots of new jobs."

The next business to open will likely be Chuck's Roadhouse, which will have a covered patio on the restaurant.

Kermar Holdings Inc., a Canadian company with a home base in Chilliwack, B.C, owns Northgate Plaza. The company is owned by Koppert's wife's family. The property was purchased in January 2022.

"Once they put that land up for sale, I sent it to my father-in-law, and that's where it happened," Koppert said, explaining the location was good, there was already a stoplight at the highway entrance and there hadn't been new commercial developments in Tillsonburg for a few years.

R.E. Wood Realty also sold the property on the other side of Highway 19, adjacent to Sobey's. This development is expected to take a couple of years, but Koppert expects it to be residential with commercial facing the highway.



(JEFF HELSDON PHOTO)

The Northgate Plaza will be operational soon with Roulston's Pharmacy opening its doors on Jan. 16. It's expected the next business to open in the plaza will be Chuck's Roadhouse. Other confirmed tenants are Osmows, Dollarama and a No Frills.



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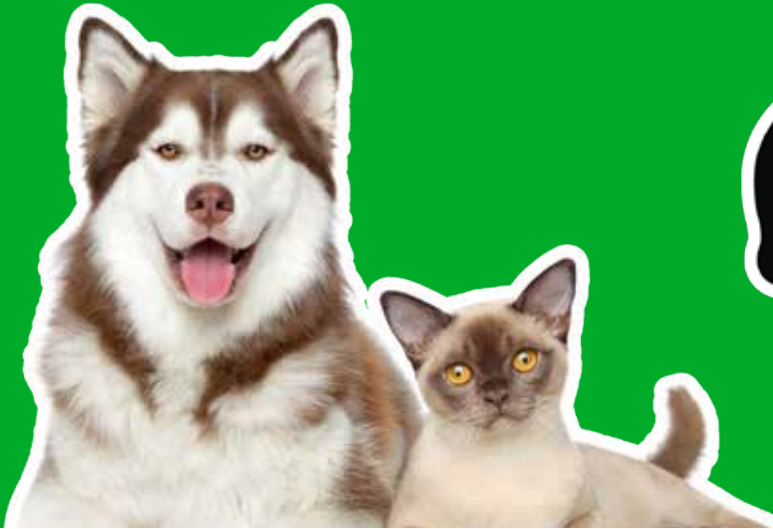
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Mayor provides insight into exciting initiatives in coming year

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

The mayor also recounted that the town had an opportunity to test its emergency preparedness system with a boil water advisory due to a false positive in a water test. She urged residents to download the town app to keep up to date on any new urgent messages.

“A great success story is the airport, which did not require tax dollars to operate in 2024,” Gilvesy said. “It is very scarce in Ontario to find an airport that is not using tax dollars to sustain operations. Growth and increased fuel sales have made this possible.”

The town having an airport was a factor for a new industry, Armtec, locating in Tillsonburg. It plays a vital role for Air Ornge as regulations only allow the helicopters to land at a lit airport or helipad from dusk to dawn. The airport also has customs clearance services.

The fire communications centre, which provides 9-1-1 services for 27 communities, is another success the mayor highlighted in her speech.

“Fire Comm was on life support and costing our taxpayers up to \$200,000 to subsidize other communities for 9-1-1 service,” she said. “In just a few years, Fire Comm is now providing a profit for future Fire Comm investments.”

The projected surplus for 2024 is \$320,382. Gilvesy credited staff for updating old contracts and seeking new contracts to turn this around.

In the coming year, Tillsonburg will celebrate the 200th anniversary of its founding. In March 1825, George Tillson made the trek from Courtland to Tillsonburg and settled overlooking Otter Creek. The town is planning an event on Oct. 18, and other activities will be planned throughout the year, including an event in conjunction with National Indigenous People’s Day on June 21.

Gilvesy has been advocating at the provincial and county levels, saying that “growth is not paying for growth” due to infrastructure costs.

“Quality of life is in erosion. Increased homelessness, mental illness and drug abuse are all too apparent,” she said, explaining there needs to be the right mix between commercial and industrial growth, which do generate revenue, and residential.

On the industrial front, 2024 was a record year for industrial growth.

Lake Lisgar may be drained in 2025 to deal with siltation



(JEFF HELSDON PHOTO)

Tillsonburg Mayor Deb Gilvesy spoke of the past year and the exciting things to come for the town during 2025 while presenting a speech at the levee. The event drew close to 100 people, including former Mayor John Armstrong, members of the historical society, a contingent from the Legion and interested citizens.

and repair infrastructure. Gilvesy explained that the lake is filling up with silt, and the drain valve is plugged. She recounted that members of the historical society told her prior to her speech that much of the lake's infrastructure is nearly 90 years old. She assured that this beautiful asset to the town will be maintained.

Continuing on the topic of historical assets, Gilvesy provided an update on the Kinsmen Pedestrian Bridge over Participark. The design phase for this connecting link to downtown is complete. The \$5-million project does not qualify for upper-level funding as there are no programs for pedestrian bridges.

“The existing stone abutments, which really serve as the main architectural reminder that this bridge was constructed well over 100 years ago, will remain in place,” Gilvesy said.

One project that bridged 2024 and 2025 is affordable housing. In March 2024, council approved a community improvement plan that provides support for multi-residential affordable housing. The Harvest Ave Inc. development, behind McDonald’s restaurant, is the first recipient of the funding outside the downtown core. It will have 29 lower-than-market-rate rental units.

“The town has been listening and now responding in providing more affordable units to our residents,” Gilvesy said. “This development is paving the way to meet those affordable

demands and will bring housing options to the citizens of Tillsonburg. This is an exceptional development with unprecedented amenities with an anticipated timeline to view model units in May 2025.”

The mayor was upfront about the challenges associated with homelessness in the town and downtown. She was hopeful of change, mentioning provincial legislation anticipated to pass in March to make drug use illegal in all public places, a rework of trespass laws and converting safe injection sites to addiction treatment centres while also creating more treatment centres.

Oxford MPP Ernie Hardeman attended the levee and spoke of the new initiatives.

“Helping people continue their problem is not near as helpful as helping with their problem,” he said of the treatment centres.

Coun. Chris Rosehart, the only councillor at the event, was impressed with the turnout.

“The mayor did an awesome speech, and we’re a fortunate community to be where we are,” she said.

Gilvesy did read out regrets from Deputy Mayor Dave Beres and Coun. Pete Luciani.

Morris, a former town CAO, was impressed with the speech. “Good to hear the mayor here with good news,” he said. “You hear so much bad news these days.”

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EDITORIAL

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



**SOUTH-
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OUTDOORS**

JEFF HELSDON

Editor

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

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

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

organizations due to the higher fat content. But there are alternatives.

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

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

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

Watkins said the fatty acid ratio in wild ruminants is similar to the omega-3 levels in fish that are recommended by the American Heart Association to reduce cardiovascular disease. In other research, Cordain looked at the few

remaining hunter-gatherer societies that remain and found heart disease, high cholesterol, obesity and diabetes are rare in those people.

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

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

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

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

It's time to enjoy what you have harvested.

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

Local resident loves to clown around for a living



**EVERYONE
HAS A
STORY
TO TELL**

ROBIN KRAFFT

Tillsonburg Post Columnist

When she was seventeen, Shelley Summers saw an ad seeking people who wanted to make money partying.

"Sounds good to me," she thought, but she was surprised when London's town crier and founder of the London Laffguards, Bill Paul, answered her inquiry. He sent her along with a team to Port Stanley for her first party, where she was dressed up as a clown and instructed to do some face painting. She continued working for Bill throughout high school and he became her mentor.

Shelley had always had a flair for the dramatic; she had taken classes in art, ballet, tap, jazz and performed in plays throughout high school. After that, she enrolled in the drama program at the University of Windsor. Students were expected to engage in all facets of acting and stage production, but Shelley loved the costume shop. She took life drawing classes in order to learn how to

fit the human frame and designed and created costumes for various eras. Her team was responsible for all of the costuming for every production - thrifting, designing, sewing, and doing makeup and styling (as well as maintenance) during production runs.

She loved her studies, but she missed performing at parties, so she started doing it on her own. It was the beginning of a business that continues to this day. Now known as Dotsy The Clown, Shelley has been living in Tillsonburg with her husband and stepchildren for the past seven years, but her store is located in St Thomas, and she grew up in Summers Corners. Her stage name came from the first costume she selected, which was covered in polka dots.

She and her team provide entertainment for a variety of celebrations and occasions. She also rents and sells costumes and carries special FX make up, including instructions on how to use it. Halloween is a particularly busy time, with appointments booked from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., as they create disguises from the monstrous to the magical.

Initially, Shelley carried thousands of rental costumes which she made herself, but eventually she needed to decide how to use her time and energy best, and she had a massive sale. She still sees some of her costumes being worn during the Santa Claus parade. Shelley says that she "kept a few favorites, including a beautiful wizard cape in gold satin with purple suns and moons" and she still carries a huge stock of costumes for sale.

Entertaining at parties has become her favorite thing

to do. Shelley says that it's incredibly gratifying "winning the hearts of the kids while you're there and making that connection." After decades in the business, she is now delighting the children of the children she once performed for at their own parties.

The pandemic was a challenge. She went from 40 to 50 parties a week to zero. She had many people calling asking if she "put things on lawns" during the time when many celebrations had to happen from a distance or through glass. Although it wasn't something she typically offered, she decided to pivot. Word spread, and sometimes she would be up all night creating lawn signs, balloon sculptures and arrangements in order to meet the demand.

She had been forced to re-evaluate and simplify things, but it was a positive change. Now, she does 20 to 30 parties a week, by choice. Her team consists of highly skilled contractors including face painters, balloon artists, stilt walkers, jugglers, unicyclists and magicians.

On her down time, she loves walking their two Bernese Mountain dogs or visiting the dog park. As foodies, she and her husband also enjoy exploring local restaurants and different cuisines, but when it's party time, Shelley happily transforms, once again, into Dotsy.

"Clowning isn't for everyone," Shelley says, "as soon as that costume goes on, you're on and you have to be prepared for that," but she wouldn't have it any other way. She has learned that laughter and bringing joy to others is work that doesn't feel like work and putting the special in the occasion has become a way of life.

SUBMIT YOUR LETTER TO THE EDITOR!

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A musician's prediction of the future of the world



**THE
STAGE
IS THE
WORLD**

LAUREL A. BEECHEY

Tillsonburg Post Columnist

"In the year 2525, if man is still alive." Remember those lyrics from, 'In the Year 2525 (Exordium & Terminus)' by Zager and Evans? It was a one-hit wonder in 1969. Was it just a fun song? If they were predicting the future, the events were amazingly accurate although the timing was off. Today, in 2025, we are 500 years ahead of schedule! Zager and Evans felt that humans needed 10,000 years to destroyed what God created. I wish that had been right, but no one knew the speed humans would change everything in the next 56 years. They were in an extraordinary cycle of affluence and change.

History shows the cycles by following the rise and fall of empires from corre-

sponding cycles of prosperity to affluence and inventions until the next disaster, and back to hard times, poverty and stagnation.

An excellent example is the 20th century. Times were looking good in the early 1900s until the First World War thundered from 1914-1918. Around the world, people pulled together at home to support and to fight the foe. Before the end the war, the Spanish Flu hit, with no vaccines and an estimated 50 million people died as it went around the world for much of the 1920s. Stock markets crashed in 1929, causing the dirty '30s depression. My father's family in Windsor grew what they could and caught anything edible in the Detroit River and city, including sparrows. Just as things were coming around, the Second World War raged across Europe from 1939-1945. Europe was destroyed, millions died, and the world was again disrupted. Half a century of disasters but people rallied, helping each other.

Both wars quickly improved old technology and introduced new mind-boggling inventions, especially in air transportation and communications. Canada was booming again! Most Canadians had a black and white television and a lot more babies by the end of the 1950s.

Every decade from the 1960s into the 1990s, had a one-year recession, but life was good. Travel became affordable; new buildings went up; people streamed to Florida for the winter. This part of the cycle garners an increase in envy, jealousy, and coveting what others have. It grows like a disease, and often turns anger against those who prospered. By the 21st century, the great financial divide between rich and poor grew quickly.

Disaster hit again with the COVID 19 Pandemic! It brought out the good in so many and should have been the catalyst to stop the downward anger cycle. But too many of the current generations chose to deny and mock the pandemic, vaccines, and controls to curb the pandemic. Instead, they followed a conspiracy theory claiming 'COVID-19 was used as a tool to usher in lockdown measures, restrict freedom, impose mass surveillance and hurt small businesses.' The pandemic's legacy seems to be a greedy, confrontational, critical, selfish and 'it is all about me' attitude, that is permeating society. Will it cause the next disaster?

What will the world be like in another 500 years when 2025 already boasts of some of those future predictions and others are not far behind! Looking further at

the lyrics of the song, hopefully "we are still alive" in 2525. In the year, 3535-right or wrong all information would come from a pill - that's here, but not a pill, it's a screen. By 4545- you "don't need teeth or eyes; there's 'nothing to chew" and "nobody looks at you". The first half works today with nutritional shakes and pills. Do we look and care for other? Come 5555- who need a body as machines do everything- we are closing in on that fast! The song predicts in 6565- "don't need husband or wife" and pick your child's sex "from a long glass tube." We're close, marriage is declining. In 1978 we saw test tube babies and you can pick the sex of your child today with science.

In the year 7510- Amazingly God is close to deciding our fate but allows another 1000 years. 8510- if God pleased with man we live; or He destroys us and tries again. 9595 is a review of what man has done, including stripping what he wanted from our planet and replaced nothing. Ten thousand years later man is gone.

In 1969 this was fantasy. From the 1970s to 2025, David Suzuki warned that if we didn't stop using fossil fuels the climate would change and alter the future of the planet. Will we even get to 2525? Don't waste this New Year.

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What I learned from completing “75 Medium”



STEWART GRANT

Publisher

Last January, I wrote about my New Year's plan to get in shape. The turn of the calendar, combined with my 50th birthday four days later, was really going to motivate me to make some positive health changes. Yeah whatever... that program lasted about two weeks.

Like a bull run on the stock market, my Fitbit's daily weight chart has ups and downs but has been on a consistently upward trend for the last decade. Whenever I hit a new 52-week high on the weight chart, I suddenly find motivation for a few days before falling back into the same old habits.

In August, the cycle repeated itself and I declared to my family that I was 'going on the program'. This time, my daughter Sydney called BS, saying, "you always say that, but you never actually do anything."

Sydney suggested that I try something called the "75 Soft" program, which has four simple rules to

follow over a 75-day period:

1. Work out at least 45 minutes every day.
2. Plan your meals each day. Regarding alcohol, only consume in social situations.
3. Drink 3 litres of water each day.
4. Read at least 10 pages of a book each day, preferably non-fiction or self-improvement

There is also a "75 Hard" program which I deemed too extreme, because it required not just one, but two 45-minute workouts per day. Another aspect of "75 Hard" is to have zero alcohol for the 75-day period.

I decided to upgrade my challenge to "75 Medium" by going with zero alcohol, and by adding in a 10,000 daily step requirement.

Long story short, I took on the challenge. I bought a special scale that not just measured weight but other factors as well (because it's not all about weight).

The results? In 75 days, my overall weight dropped from 208 to 193 lbs. while my body fat percentage dropped from 26.8% to 22.9%. Plus, I know that I can still make progress from here with some of the habits that have formed.

I thought that the no alcohol part would be the most difficult aspect, but I learned there are some excellent 0% beers and mocktails out there and this made it much easier in social situations. Some-

times you just want to feel like you have a drink in your hand.

Waking up at 5:30 a.m. and going to the gym when it opened was the best way for me to fit my workout into an already busy schedule. Even when it was hard to drag myself to the gym, it always felt worth it afterwards. When I needed extra motivation during workouts, I'd listen to David Goggins' audiobook "Can't Hurt Me". My son Jake told me once about David Goggins and listening to this guy's incredible life story is truly inspiring.

Before the 75-day challenge, I hadn't run any distance in over a year, out of fear for my bad left knee. But I eased into it, and eventually found my way again, and as my weight dropped it also became easier. By the end, I had worked my way up to doing a 10k.

The challenge of reading ten pages a day was also worthwhile because it helped encourage the concept of continuous learning. Even 15 minutes a day can make a difference in the long run.

The most impactful thing that I learned is that you don't have to be stuck in the same old rut. You can change your life and make new habits. Personally, I'm so thankful that I learned about this 75-day challenge and I know that there are certain aspects of it that I will carry on with to live a better, healthier life.

OPP investigating robbery in Norfolk County

Police appeal for witnesses to step forward

Investigators are actively investigating the circumstances surrounding a robbery involving a firearm in Langton.

At approximately 10:13 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 2, officers from the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) Norfolk County Detachment, along with Norfolk County Paramedic Services, responded to a report of a robbery involving a firearm on Norfolk County Road 23 in Langton.

Five individuals were found to have been involved in an interaction at an address on Norfolk County Road 21 in Langton, where one suspect brandished and discharged a firearm at the victim, stole a large quantity of Canadian currency, and fled the area. The victim sustained non-life-threatening injuries and was later taken to the hospital.

The three suspects were described as males with dark complexions, all

dressed in black clothing. During the incident, all three were seen carrying firearms and were driving a dark-coloured Sports Utility Vehicle (SUV).

The Norfolk County OPP Crime Unit is actively investigating and seeking the public's assistance. Anyone with information is encouraged to contact Norfolk County OPP at 1-888-310-1122. Motorists who were near the intersection of Norfolk County Roads 21 and 23 at the time of the incident and noticed anything suspicious are urged to contact the police immediately.

Should you wish to remain anonymous, you may call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477) or leave an anonymous online tip at www.helpsolvecrime.com where you may be eligible to receive a cash reward of up to \$2,000.

Updates will be provided as new information becomes available.

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153 **Legion**

The Royal Canadian Legion Varnavair Branch 153 wishes to thank the following for helping to make the 2024 Poppy Campaign another success:

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Comrade Tom Brown, C.D.

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**All Businesses that displayed Poppy Boxes, window displays, electronic messages, and sign boards.
All the Citizens of Tillsonburg and area that graciously donated.**

OPP West Region Festive Ride wrap-up

Members of Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) West Region laid nearly 300 impaired driving charges during the 2024/25 OPP Festive RIDE (Reduce Impaired Driving Everywhere) campaign.

The 2024/25 Festive RIDE campaign ran between Nov. 21, 2024, and Jan. 1, 2025. In that time, OPP West Region officers conducted 1,938 RIDE check events across 13 West Region detachments, with the following results:

- 292 impaired driving charges.
- 19 warn-range suspensions.

Last year, officers laid 353 impaired charges and 55 warn-range suspensions

following 2,446 RIDE check events during the 2023/24 OPP West Region Festive RIDE campaign.

Detachment-specific figures are available in the attached document.

The Festive RIDE campaign is an annual police enforcement and education initiative aimed at taking impaired drivers off Ontario roads during the holiday season.

The OPP remains committed to taking alcohol/drug-impaired drivers off our roads through enforcement and public education. If you suspect that someone is driving while impaired by alcohol or drugs, it is important to call 9-1-1 to report it.

Collision involving a horse drawn carriage sends two individuals to hospital

A collision in Norwich Township sent two individuals to hospital with serious injuries.

On Dec. 27, at approximately 4 p.m., members of the Oxford detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) were called to Oxford Road 13 for the report of a collision between a passenger vehicle and a horse drawn carriage.

The two occupants of the carriage were taken to the hospital with serious but

non-life-threatening injuries.

The lone occupant of the passenger vehicle was uninjured.

The horse died at the scene.

The investigation is ongoing. If you have any information that can assist with the investigation, please contact Oxford OPP at 1-888-310-1122 or if you wish to remain anonymous you can contact Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

Indecent act investigation in Tillsonburg

Police are conducting an indecent act investigation in the Town of Tillsonburg.

On Dec. 28, at approximately 1:45 p.m., members of the Oxford detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) were dispatched to an address on Queen Street in the Town of Tillsonburg, for the report of an after-the-fact indecent act complaint toward a young person.

The suspect is described as a male, age between late 20s to early 40s, with light to medi-

um-coloured skin, dark hair and a moustache.

If you know anything about this incident you are asked to contact the Oxford OPP at 1-888-310-1122.

If you wish to remain anonymous you can contact Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS) where you may be eligible for a cash reward of up to \$2,000.

If you see a suspicious person or vehicle in your community, please dial 911 or *677 from your cell phone immediately.

Tools and vehicle stolen from a business in Tillsonburg

A vehicle was stolen from a business in the Town of Tillsonburg, as well as tools left in the vehicle at the time of the theft.

Sometime overnight on Dec. 9, unknown individuals attended a business on Potters Road in the Town of Tillsonburg. The individuals entered the property and stole a pick-up truck with tools inside.

The vehicle has since been recovered. The tools are still outstanding.

The investigation is ongoing, and anyone with information regarding this inci-

dent is asked to contact the Oxford OPP at 1-888-310-1122.

Should you wish to remain anonymous, you can call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 or submit an online tip at www.oxfordcrimestoppers.com where you could be eligible for a cash reward of up to \$2000.

Police remind members of the community to not leave valuables or spare keys inside their vehicle, and to always lock their doors.

Vehicle stolen from Tillsonburg business

Police are investigating the theft of a vehicle, from a business, in Oxford County.

On Dec. 19, at approximately 8:30 a.m., members of the Oxford detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) were notified that a vehicle had been stolen from a business on Simcoe Street in the Town of Tillsonburg.

At approximately 5:30 a.m., a 2017 burgundy Dodge Ram 2500 was stolen from the property. The individuals gained entry to the vehicle by breaking the driver side window.

A male wearing a black coat, tan pants and white shoes was seen of the property as well

as a female wearing all black.

The individuals attended the address in a silver Dodge Ram. The individuals left the address in both vehicles.

If anyone has any information regarding this incident, they are being asked to contact the Oxford OPP Detachment at 1-888-310-1122.

Should you wish to remain anonymous, you may call Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-8477 (TIPS) or leave an anonymous online message at www.helpsolvecrime.com where you may be eligible to receive a cash reward of up to \$2000.

Grandparent scam reported in Tillsonburg

An individual from the Town of Tillsonburg was defrauded of thousands of dollars after becoming a victim to a grandparent scam.

On Dec. 6, the Oxford detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) was notified of a fraud that occurred in the Town of Tillsonburg.

On Dec. 5, at approximately 2 p.m., an individual received a phone call from someone alleging to be their grandchild in need of bail money. The individual thought they were speaking to a member of a police service and agreed to pay the bail money. The individual was told a bail bonds person would attend their residence and pick up the cash. The individual provided \$6,300 in cash.

The suspect is described as approximately six feet tall, 25 to 35 years-of-age, with black

hair and last wearing black clothes.

The investigation is ongoing. If you have any information that can assist with the investigation, please contact Oxford OPP at 1-888-310-1122 or if you wish to remain anonymous you can contact Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS (8477).

Police would like to remind the public that there are resources available to educate yourself and your loved ones about common scams and ways to safeguard against them. The Canadian Anti-Fraud Centre's website is <https://antifraudcentre-centreantifraude.ca> and is a great resource. Oxford OPP provides fraud prevention presentations to members of Oxford County. To arrange a presentation please contact Randi Crawford at randi.crawford@opp.ca

Report identifies revenue to offset town hall costs

JEFF HELSDON

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

As much as \$17 million in revenue could be realized through the sale of town-owned property to offset the cost of a town hall.

In a report presented to council on Dec. 9, Development Commissioner Cephias Panschow identified net potential revenue of \$9 million to \$17 million from selling town-owned property, if all opportunities are realized. The variance in the proceeds is due to market conditions at the time of sale and other factors related to what is sold. These properties include town land on Earle Street, Broadway, Maple Lane, Young Street, and William Street. While the sale of property at 25 Maple Lane is already in process, it could take until 2027 to see revenue from the other lands due to existing leases. Panschow estimated there could be \$6 million realized by the end of 2026.

The recommendation council wants a target cost of \$11 million for a new facility, with 50 per cent of the capital funds achieved prior to construction commencing.

"What we are seeing here that will minimize the impact to taxpayers," Panschow said. "We want to bring something forward that can fund this space, which is needed, but in a way that is fiscally responsible and have minimal impact to the taxpayer of the town of Tillsonburg."

Coun. Kelly Spencer said there is still a resolution council passed earlier to demolish the existing public works/customer service centre at 10 Lisgar and build a new town hall there. If that was reconsidered, she questioned what that property, which wasn't listed in Panschow's report, would be worth. Panschow estimated it was worth between \$2 million and \$3 million.

Mayor Deb Gilvesy pointed out there is a proposal to build supportive housing on part of the Earle Street housing, which would eliminate it from the potential sale list. Panschow confirmed that would reduce the potential revenue.

Coun. Chris Rosehart confirmed that the vote for the customer service building still stood, which was confirmed.

A motion was presented for the development commissioner to proceed with the sale of the identified land, to secure 50 per cent of the cost of

the town hall prior to construction commencing, and to set the target price at \$11 million.

"I still think there is no appetite in the community for an \$11 million town hall, regardless of what we fund it with, it's still an \$11-million town hall," said Coun. Chris Parker. "I think there's better uses of money from the sale of land."

He mentioned the possibility of renovating the bay portion of the existing customer service centre for council chambers and renting office space. He requested a recorded vote.

Coun. Pete Luciani agreed with much of Parker's comments but pointed out that the town hall cost only \$9 million a couple of years ago. He didn't want to see a facility underbuilt so that another council would have to deal with it in the future.

"It's going to be more than that a few years from now," he said.

Deputy Mayor Dave Beres agreed inaction by past councils has left this council with a difficult and expensive situation. He also pointed out the report doesn't include the money paid for rent over the years.

"We just have to show some maturity here for the long term future and for future councils," he said.

Luciani said the possibility of renovating the bays at 10 Lisgar was considered several years ago but was not been moved on. He said the town hall is to create a more efficient place for the employees.

"It was more efficient when it was in the mall altogether. I don't want to see this linger on for a long time. We are looking for more than just a council chamber," he said.

Gilvesy reminded council the plan to renovate at 10 Lisgar with both council chambers and offices.

Parker pointed out that with the work-at-home policy, employees aren't all in one space.

Spencer countered that staff are spread out, and the council did receive a report that morale is low.

"The point is they are in the office the majority of the time and they should be under one roof," she said.

The motion passed with Spencer, Luciani, Parsons and Beres voting for it and Gilvesy, Parker and Rosehart voting against it.

Tillsonburg council briefs

A land swap with a price

Will Hayhoe, owner of Hayhoe Homes, presented Tillsonburg councillors with requests related to the ongoing development of Rolling Meadows.

The proposal was a land swap to locate an oversized storm water management pond on land presently designated as parkland, and then provide another piece for parkland. Part of the proposal is the town will reimburse Hayhoe Homes for oversizing of the stormwater management pond with a cost of \$122,155 and, in turn, Hayhoe Homes will upgrade trails in the area from chips to concrete and asphalt.

No decision was made on the matter as it will come back to council for a decision at a later time.

County council composition

A request that originated with Tillsonburg's Economic Development Advisory Committee asking for increased town representation on Oxford County Council resulted in a response from the county saying a review will be undertaken in 2028.

Deputy Mayor Dave Beres wanted to ensure the MPP's office was aware of the response. Coun. Chris Parker said with the population growth the town has been experiencing, 2028 is too far away.

"It's a long four years to go with a lot of decisions about this municipality at Oxford County Council," he said.

Mayor Deb Gilvesy, the town representative on county council, said she didn't disagree, but she

didn't see a lot of will for change at the county level.

New grant policy

Tillsonburg has a new grant policy for doling out money to non-profit organizations. The town has traditionally granted money to non-profits as a way of recognizing the important work these groups perform for the community. The amount won't change but the policy will formalize the procedure.

Arena concession stand operational again

The arena will again have an operational concession stand, selling food to the public during hockey, skating, ringette and regular events in the facility. Council approved a tender from Crave Bites at its Dec. 9 meeting to allow the company to start operating.

Youth Vibe program grant received

The Town of Tillsonburg received a grant for \$5,680 from the Oxford Community Foundation for the VIBE program. The funding will cover staffing and supplies for this after-school program for high school students.

Fire chief resigns

The Town of Tillsonburg is looking for a new fire chief after the resignation of Shane Caskanette, effective Jan. 6, 2025.

Caskanette started as the Tillsonburg fire chief in August 2021, with experience in Oshawa and Brantford previously. He will be leaving Tillsonburg to accept a position as chief in South-West Oxford. The town will appoint an interim chief and recruit for a new chief.

Council approves funding for clinic, health measures in budget

JEFF HELSDON

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Tillsonburg is one step closer to a temporary walk-in clinic after town council gave a preliminary stamp of approval to the concept and a host of other health measures.

At the Dec. 16 budget meeting, a motion was passed unanimously to share the cost of a health care professional recruitment coordinator with the hospital, that further partnerships be explored with surrounding municipalities and organizations to jointly fund the role, that town staff create a marketing and communications plan to attract health care professionals, that the town support Discovery Week with the University of Western Ontario medical students, that the present physician recruitment incentive for doctors who locate in town be unchanged, that the town continue to support existing physicians and efforts by the Oxford Ontario Health Team and the Primary Care Network in their efforts to start a temporary clinic in Tillsonburg for unrestored patients.

The motion also spoke to funding the expenses by

using all the funds in the Physicians Recruitment Reserve and the remainder of \$141,323 be part of the 2025 budget deliberations. Although all council members voted to include the measures in the budget, it isn't finalized until the budget is passed in late January.

Much of the debate on the topic took place at the Dec. 9 regular council meeting when separate reports and motions were presented regarding the physician recruiter position and the temporary walk-in clinic. The town and Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital previously approved a physician recruiter and hired a person. That person was there a short time before leaving for another position but did lend a hand in recruiting the new nurse practitioner at the hospital.

Deputy Mayor Dave Beres, who chairs the Community Health Care Committee, told council there are currently 14 physicians in Tillsonburg and there should be 24.6. He said some communities pay doctors signing bonuses, but he doesn't feel that is the way to go.

"We feel with our research that is not the most effective way of doing things," he said, saying the doctors of-

ten leave after the contract term. "When we spoke with the Ministry of Health and the (Ontario) medical association, they said that funding positions is, they called it, 'A race to the bottom.'"

Beres suggested the solution was to create a health team with a doctor and nurse practitioner.

CAO Kyle Pratt explained the financial implications of draining the physician recruitment reserve, which had been used to provide start-up funding to new doctors to pay for office expenses and fund Discovery Week. Once the reserve is empty, funding for these programs must come from the general tax levy.

"As much as this council wants to bring a responsible budget to the community in times of restraint and economic uncertainty, we need medical professionals," said Coun. Bob Parsons.

He later pointed out close to 2,000 people don't have access to a doctor in Tillsonburg and questioned how it would work if Tillsonburg ratepayers funded the clinic and residents from neighbouring municipalities would want to use it.

Mayor Deb Gilvesy said she receives calls from res-

idents of Norfolk, Bayham, and other municipalities about health care and suggested looking into the issue of residents of other municipalities using facilities funded by Tillsonburg ratepayers.

Coun. Kelly Spencer agreed, saying the committee should look into it further.

At the budget meeting, Parsons suggested that if the community was made aware of the situation, private donations and residents' leaving money in their wills towards a clinic cost may be possible.

Coun. Chris Parker agreed the funding was desperately needed.

"It's unfortunate the municipality has to fund this," he added. "It should come down from the province, and have trickled down from the federal government."

"This to me is a kick start," Beres said. "If we do nothing, nothing will happen."

Spencer noted that the motion refers to physicians, and it should say primary care providers to include nurse practitioners, as Tillsonburg had applied for a nurse practitioner clinic like Ingersoll's.

Gilvesy was hopeful there would be a second round of funding for the nurse practitioner clinic.



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Town budget sitting at 4.78 per cent increase

JEFF HELSDON

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Although it won't be finalized until the end of January, Tillsonburg's budget is presently sitting at a 4.78 per cent increase.

On the average residence, assessed at \$242,000, this represents an increase of \$143.74 annually.

The budget started with an increase in the tax levy of 13.69 per cent. After the first budget session, council directed staff to come back with an increase of 3.08 per cent, or the equivalent to the Consumer Price Index hike, plus the increase due to policing. The town was originally saddled with a bill of \$804,481, or a 3.88 per cent increase, for retroactive police wage settlements passed down from the province. The province since cut that number drastically, taking much of the increase for municipalities. In Tillsonburg's case, the increase for policing is now only 0.79 per cent.

In the Dec. 16 budget session, staff came back with \$1.2 million in cuts from the budget to meet the target. These reductions included limiting new personnel, using 2024 surplus funds to offset 2025 labour costs, reducing overall training costs and allocations for general supplies, as well as removing funding for community grants.

At the meeting, council heard from BIA executive director Mark Renaud about the budget for the organization. The BIA is funded through a levy on downtown businesses in the core area. In addition, the town provided \$20,000 in capital funding last year for improvements in the downtown. Renaud asked for this again. He also shared the BIA plan to partner with Turtlefest, which brings 30,000 people into the downtown, and the issues associated with the unhoused.

"They're making such a mess and there is a cost attached to this. We need some help," Renaud said.

Coun. Bob Parsons asked what the impact would be if the \$20,000 grant was cut.

Renaud said the BIA would either need to find more money or cut something.

"The amount of things that are damaged because of the unhoused situation, we need to replace those things," he added.

Council later included the \$20,000 funding in the budget to date.

While looking at council's budget, Coun. Chris Rosehart asked if there is a policy on how many conventions council

members can attend.

"The mayor and deputy mayor should go to every one, they're the important ones whereas councillors should trade off who goes," she said.

Coun. Chris Parker said council members need to be aware of who is attending which function.

"I think we need to be careful and have communication amongst ourselves about who is going," he said.

Deputy Mayor Dave Beres, who sits on the board of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association, said costs of the conventions are going up. He noted costs have doubled in some instances.

"This is where our opportunity is to meet with provincial people," he said. "At the ROMA conference in January, that's where we make appointments to talk to them about funding for health care, funding for water."

Mayor Deb Gilvesy said she has had discussions with other mayors and the consensus seems to be the conventions are getting more expensive and the effectiveness is being questioned. She said booking appointments with MPPs at Queen's Park is an alternative.

"We're asking everybody to cut and I feel we should all be doing our part," she said.

Coun. Kelly Spencer asked if the budget increase requested by the Stations Arts Centre was in the budget, which she was told it wasn't. She was told she could present a motion to include the funding during that meeting or ahead of the next one. At present, the budget contains an inflationary increase to the Station Arts Centre.

Parker spoke out against the cuts to funding community events such as Canada Day fireworks and Turtlefest's movie on the lawn.

"We'll see a big uproar if we take these things away," he said.

Parsons suggested there could be other ways to fund these events through businesses or people in the community. In the end, funding for the events is still in the budget.

On the staffing front there was one Full Time Equivalent (FTE) added to the public works department. Another position for a Manager of Innovation and Strategic Innovation is also part of the budget, being funded in the short term through the labour reserve and elimination of a temporary FTE position.

It's expected the budget will be finalized during a meeting at the end of January.

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Group proposes to build a new recreation facility

JEFF HELSDON

Editor

A group of Tillsonburg residents is proposing to help build a new multi-use recreational facility in town that will include an indoor soccer field, a walking track, and multi-use courts. However, a grant is crucial to the project getting off the ground.

Jesse Goossens, president of Basketball Tillsonburg, and Shane Curtis, past-president of the Kinsmen Club, shared their vision with council for a new facility. Together with Andrew Burns and Goossens' wife Victoria Sergeant, they have talked to many people and heard there is a lack of gymnasium space and no indoor soccer field.

"We've been at this a while to pull together a pretty good view of what our options are in the community for this type of facility," Goossens said, adding Cowan Park in Woodstock is a vision of what they are trying to do.

Curtis, who has been involved with the Chamber of Commerce for more than 20 years, said a common request was for an indoor soccer facility. He recounted the Kinsmen's history of being involved in many sports facilities in town over the years, dating all the way back to the outdoor pool. He said the new facility could be good for basketball, volleyball, pickleball, gymnastics, football, soccer, lacrosse, and baseball winter training.

"If we have all these different user groups, it will allow us to touch all these groups and use their circle of influence to help raise money from this," he said.

Curtis said while the Kinsmen were aware of the initiative, the club has yet to formally endorse it as more details are needed. He did note the Tillsonburg Kinsmen Club hasn't had a large project in years, it's the second largest Kinsmen Club in Canada and one of the youngest.

It was pointed out that the Thames Valley District School Board is projecting a 33 per cent increase in Tillsonburg enrollment before 2031, but is not talking about any new facilities.

A potential layout of the facility completed by an architect was presented. It will be one story with 63,000 square feet, and everything will be accessible. There is potential for a second floor as well. The concept was also presented to a construction contractor and the estimated cost would be \$14 million. If the town received the grant, the proposal was for the town to pay \$3.5 million and fund raise \$3.5 million. Operational costs will probably be similar to the \$460,000 per year it costs to operate Cowan Park.

"This grant, it's probably a once in a lifetime chance for a community to get a facility like this because of the 50/50 funding up to \$10 million," Goossens said. "What are we going to do about that and what decisions and information do we need to make

those decisions."

Four different possibilities were presented for the facility's location: on parkland adjacent to Westfield Public School, on property the town owns on the south end, at the soccer club, with an understanding that any lost fields will be replaced, and adjacent to the community centre.

Curtis said from the Kinsmen standpoint, club members are looking at providing in-kind work. He also talked to construction companies who would donate in kind.

"There is a potential we could have some of these construction costs less than they would normally be," he said.

Coun. Bob Parsons wanted to know how Woodstock handled the operational costs and was told it was from the tax base.

Deputy Mayor Dave Beres asked if this would be a project similar to the soccer club where the group did the work and then handed the facility over to the town, except the Kinsmen would head it up. His remarks were based on recent information presented to council about the obstacles of having volunteer labour on town-owned facilities. Curtis answered that was the concept, as long as the club would qualify for the grant.

Accolades for the project also came from Coun. Kelly Spencer, who liked the walking track, and Coun. Chris Parker.

Mayor Deb Gilvesy asked Curtis and Goossens what their main ask was from council, and was told there needed to be a study to see if this is what the community

wants and for the town to consider this project as its application for the grant application.

"It really starts and stops there," Curtis said. "If we don't get that, this is dead in the water."

Since this project was also presented at the Recreation and Sport Advisory Committee on Nov. 7, Director of Recreation, Culture and Parks Andrea Greenway had a report on the topic prepared for council, and was prepared to answer questions. The town's long-term capital budget had a multi-use recreational facility in the budget for 2032. However, this was one item that was a possibility to be cut in the budget process to meet council's three-per-cent budget target.

A feasibility study for this facility and a third ice pad was removed at a prior meeting at a cost of \$155,000. Council spoke against a feasibility study, if possible, with Parsons, Spencer and Parker weighing in on the topic.

Mayor Deb Gilvesy suggested staff could come back with recommendations for location if a feasibility study wasn't compulsory for the grant.

"This is an opportunity if we have a community group that is looking to work with us to reduce cost and bring something really needed to the community," Parker said.

Council passed a motion for staff to bring back a report on the grant application process, affordability, location ideas and other potential funding sources.

Oxford County passes 2025 budget with 6.6% increase

LEE GRIFFI, *Local Journalism Initiative Reporter*

With files from JEFF HELSDON

County taxpayers won't see the sticker shock on next year's tax bill in contrast to this year. Oxford County passed a tax increase of 16.7 per cent in 2024 but this year's document is a bit easier on the pocketbook despite being greater than the rate of inflation.

The tax levy increase means was approved at 6.6 per cent which means an \$80 increase on the 2025 property tax bills for the average residential homeowner. Warden Marcus Ryan said the 2024 budget sets them up for better times this year.

"There are some municipalities who worked hard to get down to a single-digit budget increase every year going forward. I'm hopeful what we have done is made a change to manage the circumstances we are in now. We will be working our way back now to more normal increases in the range of inflation."

Ryan, who has been in municipal government for 10 years, said the budget takes care of the services residents expect.

"When you turn the tap on, the water comes out and it's safe to drink, which is in fact a good news story and municipalities generally do that quite well. When people need a paramedic and they come, that's a good news story like when the road is plowed."

He added the challenge in Oxford recently comes from the rate of growth the area is experiencing and having to fund it only with property taxes. Mental health, addictions and homelessness have also become budget issues, but he explained when normal services are being delivered no one questions reasonable tax increases.

"When government is not news, to some extent that means we are doing our job. We are getting the services delivered at a reasonable price."

The county's \$125.2-million capital plan for 2025 in-

cludes investments in water and wastewater infrastructure, roads and bridges and other infrastructure projects. It also includes a \$3 million annual contribution to affordable housing reserves, with 50 new affordable housing units expected to be built in 2025 on Dundas Street in Woodstock. Coun. David Mayberry put forward a motion to add another \$1 million into that fund and allow staff to spend it how they see fit. That spurned some heated debate before the motion was eventually defeated, something Ryan said isn't a bad thing.

"The one thing I would suggest residents take away from that debate is everyone was unanimous in the need to have better housing and their mental health and addictions addressed. Where council sometimes disagrees on this issue is by degree."

Council increased annual spending to \$3 million two years ago and Ryan admitted part of the debate was how much politicians ask taxpayers to foot the bill for housing when the supports for mental health and addictions aren't there.

"You heard all those things in that debate. \$40 million on the taxpayers of Oxford is too much, I think that is clear. Is \$3 million enough? Somewhere in between there, so where exactly? That was the nature of the debate we had."

He added the question that needs to be asked is how many more dollars should people be taxed for when the necessary supports, which are a provincial responsibility, aren't there.

"Four walls and a roof for somebody struggling with mental illness and ends up self-medicating, that's one slice of the pie they need in order to move on to a better life."

Among the new projects in the budget are money to support an automated speed enforcement program, new leadership development programs to help with succession planning for staffing and technology upgrades in the council chamber to improve sound and quality of live and recorded council meetings.

New Deputy Warden elected

Ingersoll Mayor Brian Petrie went unchallenged in his bid to back up Marcus Ryan, replacing outgoing deputy Mark Peterson, Mayor of Blandford-Blenheim.

The Tillsonburg viewpoint

Tillsonburg Mayor Deb Gilvesy was hoping for a lower increase.

"Ultimately for me, for a comfort level, I would have loved to see it closer to CPI at four to five per cent, but we're facing challenges. We are putting a lot of money towards housing," she said.

Some of that new less-than-market-rate rental housing will be in Tillsonburg. There will be 29 units at Harvest, as well as other possibilities in Tillsonburg. The county is also looking at a transitional plan for shelters. Gilvesy pointed out Ontario is one of the only provinces where housing falls on lower tier governments.

Gilvesy's wish list for the budget included removing a solar power development on county land in Woodstock. That isn't impacting the budget this year, but will in future years. She said financing is spread over 30 years and the solar panels only have a 20-year lifespan.

She was glad to see council supported a motion that she put forward with Ryan to reintroduce development charges on industrial property. The county was waiving development charges on industrial lands as an incentive to attract industry. Putting these charges back in knocked nearly four per cent off the county budget increase.

"If you are foregoing that money, it needed to be made up by the taxpayers because there's a void in the budget. Our tax base can't afford making up millions of dollars in lost DC charges," she said.

Gilvesy questioned the 21.9 FTE employees being added in the budget, asking if it was vetted for only what was needed. She also had concerns about the cost of the county's green initiatives, and made a suggestion that when council goes through a strategic planning process, they need to attach costing to the plan.



MSGR. O'NEIL FAMILIES HELP OUT (JEFF HELSDON PHOTO)
 Students in each class at Msgr. O'Neil Catholic School were assigned a food item that would contribute to a Christmas dinner for the food hampers organized by the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Enough food was collected to supply 23 families with a complete turkey dinner. Left to right are Perry Gosso, president of the Tillsonburg St. Vincent de Paul Society; Jennie Martz, school organizer and Corrie Gosso, vice-president St. Vincent de Paul Society.



Begin your family tree journey at your local library



OCL BOOK TALK

MATTHEW GRIFFIS
Oxford County Library

riety of primary records from all over the world, from birth and marriage records and census records to military and immigration records. It costs a monthly fee but offers free trials to first-time users. Also consider Ancestry Library Edition, a version of Ancestry offered free at many public libraries, including all branches of the Oxford County Library. There is also FamilySearch, a comparable online resource that is free to use anywhere you can find the internet.

One of the most enjoyable hobbies I've ever undertaken is "genealogy"—a fancy word for researching my family tree.

It sounds like work, and it is work, but once you begin, it doesn't feel like work at all. Family tree research can be a non-stop journey of mystery and discovery; and some of the most dedicated family researchers I've ever met didn't know how fulfilling the hobby could be until they tried it.

If researching your family tree is among your goals this new year, your local public library could be a great place to begin. That's how I began my family research journey 15 years ago, and public libraries typically didn't offer the same kinds of research tools then as they do today. Oxford County Library's genealogy collections, for example, offer resources useful to beginning researchers, from old newspapers on microfilm and vital records indexes to census information going back to the nineteenth century. But in the age of the Internet, online research tools are often the most useful, especially to beginners. Ancestry, for example, provides access to a wide va-

Library staff can also help you get started. We can show you how to access Ancestry on our public computers, or if you bring a personal laptop to one of our branches, we can show you how to access Ancestry's databases through our website (note: Ancestry Library Edition is only accessible inside our branches).

If you'd like more specific advice about how to use Ancestry or FamilySearch, consider booking a one-on-one appointment with me—I'm Matt, the Tillsonburg Branch's local history specialist. I can show you how to get started and which kinds of searches are most ideal for beginners. We can also connect you with other helpful organizations in the region that maintain research collections useful to family researchers.

There's no telling where your family research journey will take you, or what you'll learn along the way. For me, the discoveries I make motivate me to dig deeper and learn not just who my ancestors were but the kinds of lives they lived. My reward has been a deeper understanding of who I am and the traditions I represent.

Matthew Griffis is the Digital Literacy and Local History Technician at Oxford County Library's Tillsonburg Branch.

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ReImagine Senior Living

January is Crime Stoppers Awareness month

JEFF HELSDON

Editor

The more eyes the better could be seen as an underlying philosophy of the Crime Stoppers program.

This international program started in 1976 in Albuquerque, New Mexico when police were unable to find any tips about a murder. The idea of reenacting the crime on local television, allowing anonymous tips, and paying for tips that led to an arrest was born. The program spread and allows anonymous tips from the public about crimes and criminal activity.

In Tillsonburg, Crime Stoppers was a part of Haldimand-Norfolk Crime Stoppers until about a decade ago when Tillsonburg was grouped with Oxford Crime Stoppers.

Now, during Crime Stoppers Awareness Month, the local connections to the program are working to raise awareness of the valuable program.

"It's a public, media and policing partnership," said Jan Hauck, a South-West Oxford resident and a member of Oxford Crime Stoppers board of directors since 1998.

Laura Curtis, who lives in Tillsonburg, has been a board member since 2021.

The board is charged with raising funds for tips and deciding on how much rewards should be. Potential tipsters should know the entire system is anonymous, rather the tip is left through the 1-800-222-TIPS line or on the web at oxfordcrimestoppers.com. Tips are passed on to police and if the tips results in an arrests or charges laid, a reward of up to \$2,000 can be paid. The amount of suggested tips is generated by a computer program, but the board can pay that amount, increase or decrease it.

"In my experience, we increase it because we want to keep those tips coming," Hauck said.

In Oxford 85 to 90 per cent of the rewards are not claimed, which she said means the community are reporting crime for the right reason.

As of the end of November, Oxford Crime Stoppers



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Taking the Crime Stoppers vehicle in local parades is one way of raising awareness about the organization. Laura Curtis, left, and some of her helpers were ready for a Santa Claus parade.

received 329 tips. Those tips led to 15 arrests, 66 charges laid, \$135,540 in narcotics seized and 45 cases cleared.

Board members also work to increase awareness about the program. Curtis said in Tillsonburg one sign had to come down and they are working to have replacements put up, and finding other ways of raising awareness.

One of the big annual fundraisers is the golf tournament at Ingersoll Golf and Country Club. The group is looking for another fundraiser.

"We can't just sit back," Hauck said. "If tips come in, we need to pay those rewards."

Crime Stoppers is about more than assisting in major crimes. The program also aids in solving fish and wildlife infractions such as poaching, breaking environmental regulations and people driving with a suspended license.

Oxford Crime Stoppers is seeking new board members. The group meets monthly. Anyone interested can contact Curtis at 519-983-9300 or laura.curtis@century21.ca

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Group offer electronic recycling

JEFF HELSDON

Editor

Unsure of what to do with your old electronic devices after receiving new ones for Christmas? If this is the case, a collaboration of local groups is offering a solution that will benefit the community.

Traditionally, the Tillsonburg Scout Association, which was associated with former Camp Jackson, used to collect used electronics for recycling. When this group disbanded, the Tillsonburg Sailing Association, which was associated with the Tillsonburg Sea Scouts, ran the electronic recycling program. The Sea Scouts became a victim of COVID, and the minds behind the group decided they would continue their efforts to help the community.

With drop-off for the electronics at a container across from the Station Arts Centre, half of the money goes to that group. The other half goes to St. Paul's United Church's As One That Serves (AOTS) group. This group then distributes money to various local charities, such as the Helping Hands Food Bank.

Electronics can be dropped off anytime on a table outside the container, which volunteers collect and put inside twice per day. The range of accepted goods is diverse, from older tube televisions to radios.

"Anything with a cord we'll take," said Dave Palmer, one of the organizers. He added that no white goods, such as washers, dryers, fridges or stoves, can be accepted.

Volunteers are at the location on Saturday mornings. Palmer suggested only bringing computers or phones on Saturday mornings, as items could be taken off the table beside the container when no one is there.

"Anything with private information on it, take on Saturday," he said.

The donated items are shipped to Collingwood for recycling.



(JEFF HELSDON PHOTO)

Floyd Marshall, one of the volunteers with the Tillsonburg Sailing Association, adds a television to the pile of electronics that will be recycled. The group fills the container every two to three weeks.

Tickets on sale for Shriner elimination draw



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Dave Beres purchased the first ticket to the Shriners elimination draw to avoid disappointment of not being to get a tickets. He was too late to get a ticket to the sold-out draw last year and prepaid for a ticket a year ago so as to not miss out again.

JEFF HELSDON

Editor

Tickets are now available for the Tillsonburg Shrine Club's elimination draw.

The draw will be held at the Shriner's Fish Fry on Jan. 17 at the Tillsonburg Community Centre. Tickets for the elimination draw are \$100 each, and the person who bought the last ticket drawn will win \$20,000. The first, 100th, 200th and 300th tickets drawn will win \$100. All proceeds from the draw will go to the Shriner's Hospital in Montreal. Tickets are available at Danbrook Automotive on North Street, or from any Shriner's

member. Only 400 tickets are being printed.

"You have a one in 400 chance of winning \$20,000," said Shriner and elimination draw organizer John Danbrook.

Tickets for the fish fry are \$30 each and are available at the door. Doors open at 5 p.m.

This is the second year for the fish fry. Danbrook explained the reasoning for the launch of the event.

"As a result of not having the pork barbecue, we needed to do something to raise funds for the hospital," he said.

The event was such a success, a decision was made to continue it.

Rosehart calls for better communication to council

JEFF HELSDON

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Following two events attended by part, but not all, of town councillors, Coun. Chris Rosehart called for better communication about events.

Rosehart presented a motion, "That staff be directed to notify council of any events in which the town is to participate in an official capacity" at the Dec. 9 meeting. She explained there was a team representing the town in the Tillsonburg Curling Club's Community Service bonspiel with Councillors Bob Parsons, Pete Luciani and Kelly Spencer, as well as former Fire Chief Shane Caskenette.

"I would have loved to have been there to cheer them on," Rosehart said, adding she didn't know about the event.

She also mentioned the dedication of a purple bench that was part of an initiative to deal with domestic violence, which only included Spencer. The concept of the purple bench was presented to all of council, but Spencer brought forward a motion that the town proceed with the initiative.

Spencer said an e-mail went out about

the purple bench and she wasn't sure the curling team was a town event.

Rosehart questioned if the curling registration was paid by the town, which she didn't get an answer to.

Coun. Chris Parker also asked who paid for the registration fee and what the name of the team was.

Luciani agreed that sometimes he isn't aware of other events.

Mayor Deb Gilvesy said she always tries to share invitations, but in these cases, she didn't receive an invitation either. She said staff can only send notification if they were aware, and she understood staff wasn't aware of these events.

Director of Corporate Services/Clerk Tanya Daniels said she isn't aware of an official policy on this, but emphasized staff needs to be aware in order to share the information.

Following a back-and-forth exchange between Rosehart and Spencer about councillors sharing information, Gilvesy said, "It's moving forward, let's forget about yesterday. Let's move to tomorrow and let's try to communicate."

The motion passed with all in favour of it.

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Tillsonburg skater headed to ice dance nationals

JEFF HELSDON

Editor

A Tillsonburg skater will be competing at the 2025 Canadian National Skating Championships.

Summer Homick will be skating in ice dance with her partner Nicholas Buelow of Barrie in the event in Laval, Quebec next week. She will be on the ice on Jan. 15 for the first day of the competition, and then back on the ice the next day for the second portion of it.

Homick will be competing in the junior level, which is for qualifying competitors under the age of 21 from across Canada. The first day's competition consists of a 2.5-minute rhythm program, which is scored. This score is combined from the free dance score on the second day for a final score. This isn't Homick's first trip to the national championships. She competed in both junior and senior in pairs with her former partner Marty Haubrich, finishing second in pairs. Since then, she made the switch to ice dance and is excited for this competition.

"When you have a new partnership it changes things," she said.

She expects competition will be tough, noting, "Everybody wants that podium".

Homick's training starts with four hours of skating in the morning with the Mariposa School of Skating in Barrie. This institution has been home to national champi-

ons, Olympians and world champions, including Elvis Stojko and Brian Orser. After the morning skate session, 17-year-old Homick goes to high school for the afternoon. She is taking one class on line and receives one credit for skating through high performance education. Following school, she is back to the arena for a second session. This can include stretching, ballet, hip hop dance and other training.

"We're fortunate because our school is connected to the same parking lot as the arena so I just walk back and forth," she said.

Homick started skating in Langton at age four, and then moved to private lessons in Tillsonburg with Penny Jelsma as her coach. Her mother Jennifer skated in Ilderton and London for many years, while her father Darryl was involved in various sports. But Summer had high goals in skating since she was young. She skated in Tillsonburg until she was 13 and then moved to Brantford for pairs competition.

The main difference between pairs and ice dance lie in their focus, elements and choreography.

"You still have some lifts but they are more unique," she said.

Last March, she moved to Barrie at 16 years old to start training as an ice dancer.

"I was approached by another dance coach who I used to work with in pairs and he said, 'You should try ice dance, you would be a good ice dancer,'" she recounted.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Tillsonburg skater Summer Homick will be competing with her partner Nicholas Buelow next week in the ice dance division of the Canadian National Skating Championships.

"My pairs coach also approached me and suggested to try another ice dance at another club."

She tried out with Nick in Barrie and a week later ended up moving there.

"I came here and switched my life and my partnership for this discipline," she said.

Admitting it was a scary to move away from home at 16, she said the support received from her parents, the Buelow family and the skate club helped.

Homick and Buelow have experienced impressive progress since last spring. They finished seventh at the Next Gen Camp in July 2024, their first competition. Building on that success, they earned a silver medal at Sectionals in Kitchener-Waterloo the following month. Representing Canada at the Junior Grand Prix in Poland, they finished seventh. Their momentum continued with a first-place finish at Oktoberfest in Barrie, followed by a second-place finish at Skate

Ontario Sectionals in October. Their fifth-place result at the Skate Canada Challenge in December qualified the pair for the nationals, as the top 15 qualify for this prestigious competition.

Junior skaters are one level down from senior, where Olympic competitors are chosen from.

"My goal is definitely the Olympics," Homick said. "I'm hoping for 2030 that would be amazing. That's been a dream of mine since I was a kid, since I started in Tillsonburg."

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Senior Gemini building 'chemistry and confidence' as season develops

JEFF TRIBE

Post Correspondant

The Tillsonburg Gemini senior boys' basketball team's 62-54 overtime loss to the Woodstock College Avenue (CASS) Knights aligns with its pre-Christmas Thames Valley Regional Athletics South East season.

The 2-3 Gemini faced a tough battle, the game could have gone either way, and despite the loss, it demonstrated both growth and development.

"It's a learning process," said coach Benjamin Rickwood. "As long as you are taking lessons from the game, you can't be too mad."

The Knights led 15-12 after a quarter and 26-23 at half-time, before Glendale won the third quarter 14-10, setting up a frantic scramble in the dying seconds of a game closing out regulation tied at 53.

CASS drew first blood in an equally-intense overtime on an aggressive Craig Sutherland drive to the basket. He made the hoop, adding a free throw for a three-point lead with 2:52 to play in the extra period. Tillsonburg's Lucas Sandham, who had 13 for the Gemini in regulation, saw what would have been a game-tying three-point attempt go in and out of the basket. Rebounding and pushing the ball, the Knights' Jake Hawkeswood upped the lead to

five with a pair of free throws, fouled as he also drove strongly to the basket. A subsequent Devonte Bennett drive and pair of free throws extended the deficit to seven before Tillsonburg's Jacob Mogg broke off the run with a free throw after being fouled on an offensive rebound with 1:10 remaining. It would be the lone Gemini point, CASS rounding the final with a late offensive putback.

"Momentum builds and it's hard to stop," said Mogg, who apart from the outcome, was pleased with how the Gemini performed. "They're a well-rounded team, so are we."

"Just shots going in, shots not going in," Sandham summed up, also citing the Knights' ability to get to the basket. "Then we fouled and they got the bonus shots."

Not a fan of OT, Mogg agreed with a proposed solution.

"Take care of it in regulation, don't let it get to overtime."

Sandham added eight rebounds to his points total, Peyton Hawel had 12 points and six boards, Mogg 10 points and four rebounds, Reid Cameron two three-point field goals as part of his eight points, Nolan Prefontaine six points and two boards, and Cohen Schott five and one, respectively. Sutherland finished with 24 for the Knights, Hawkeswood adding 12 and David Kennedy 11.

With the Gemini down ear-

ly, Rickwood had been proud of their resilience and mental strength, staying confident in themselves through a tough and scrappy finish. Tillsonburg's defensive work stood out as they mounted a comeback, along with 'awesome communication' and ball distribution in the second half.

"I was happy they were able to share the ball and get everyone involved."

The Gemini were coming off a 53-39 road win over the St. Thomas Central Elgin Titans the previous day, Sandham's leadership in evidence through what was a tight contest.

"Before we pushed it out in the fourth quarter," said Rickwood.

A first-year coach, he admits to learning along with his players, focusing on building chemistry and confidence as the season progresses.

"And solidifying things we are already good at."

Gemini Sports Scoreboard

Boys Basketball

Tuesday, December 17

Senior Gemini 55, Aylmer East Elgin 41

Junior Gemini 50, East Elgin 30

Thursday, December 12

Woodstock St. Mary's 57, Senior Gemini 54

Junior Gemini 45, St. Mary's 34

With the Gemini down ear-



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Gemini Jacob Mogg boxes out against Woodstock College Avenue forward Teshaine Peach.

Tuesday, December 10

CASS 62, Senior Gemini 54 (OT)

Junior Gemini 58, CASS 44

Monday, December 9

Senior Gemini 53, Central Elgin 39

Tuesday, December 3

Woodstock CI 69, Senior Gemini 49

Junior Gemini 50, Woodstock CI 30

Girls Volleyball

Tuesday, December 17

East Elgin 25, 21, 25, 22, 15;

Senior Gemini 19, 25, 14, 25, 9

Junior Gemini 25, 23, 25, 25;

East Elgin 16, 23, 16, 25

Thursday, December 12

Senior Gemini 25, 25, 25; St. Mary's 11, 18, 20

Junior Gemini 25, 25, 25; St. Mary's 14, 24, 16

Tuesday, December 10

Senior Gemini 25, 22, 17, 25, 15; CASS 12, 25, 25, 10, 9

Junior Gemini 25, 25, 25; Central Elgin 9, 7, 19

Tuesday, December 3

Senior Gemini 25, 25, 25; Woodstock E.S. Notre Dame

21, 14, 11

Woodstock CI 25, 25, 25; Junior Gemini 20, 16, 22

Hockey

Tuesday, December 17

Gemini Boys 5, CASS 0

Lord Dorchester 7, Gemini Girls 0

Monday, December 16

St. Thomas Parkside 5, Gemini Girls 2

Tuesday, December 10

Gemini Boys 7, Lord Dorchester 2

Monday, December 9

Gemini Girls 2, Ingersoll DCI 2

Tuesday, December 3

Gemini Boys 4, Woodstock CI 1

Curling

Wednesday, December 11

Gemini Girls 5, East Elgin 5

Ingersoll DCI 8, Gemini Girls 1

Ingersoll DCI 10, Gemini Boys 7

East Elgin 6, Gemini Boys 1

Wednesday, December 4

Central Elgin 14, Gemini Boys 1

Central Elgin 5, Gemini Girls 1



(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Tillsonburg Gemini forward Logan Almeida (centre) cuts up-ice during a shutout victory over Woodstock College Avenue Knights, Tuesday, December 17th on the Memorial Arena ice surface.

Club Oxford had a full schedule in December

JEFF GWYN

Post Contributor

December 8

Distinct 4, Fody's 2

Distinct had a solid game and kept the Fody's snipers off the board. They were able to pull one out late to get the two points with some late pressure. Fody's relied on their spares for offence in this one. While they gave it a push at the end, they couldn't hold off late pressure from Distinct.

Dave VanWyk had three points for Distinct. Parker Terryberry and Jaden Vansevenant had two points each for Fody's.

Agrospray 3, ReMax 2

Agrospray have been playing better lately and it's giving them confidence. They are getting opportunities from everywhere and their goalie rotation is doing a good job. ReMax was in this one all game and had some chances off rushes. They just had trouble getting sustained pressure throughout the night.

Jesse Dunn and Travis Horvath had two points for Agrospray. Daniel Andersson had three points for ReMax.

Glass 5, Carquest 1

Glass came out flying in this one to get back in the win column. Their speed set them apart and they spread out the scoring. Carquest seemed caught off guard by the Glass speed and played catch up a lot of the game. They did have a couple times they had control, but couldn't connect on the scoresheet.

Brendan Soares had three assists for Glass. Steve Moylan had the goal for Carquest.

RND 5, Source 5

RND found their offence in this one. They played back and forth hockey and were able to get goals from different areas of the ice. Source started off slow, but found their footing with speed and pressure. They had a solid second period and earned the tie in this one.

Brett VandenBrink had three points for RND. Thomas Morgan had three points for Source.

Royal LePage 5, B-Line 3

Royal LePage had things going tonight. They pressured in different ways and it put B-Line off a bit defensively. B-Line played a good first period and had some chances. They have been having trouble in the late stages of games and shows in the standings.

Abe Friesen had two goals for Royal LePage. Wes Addley and Chris Wilson had goals for B-Line.

Precision 2, Airmount 2

Precision was playing a very solid two-way game and were keeping a strong Airmount team from getting chances. Another tie, which seems to be Precision's way this year. Airmount had a few spares in this one. They eventually found some room in the second and were able to steal a point in this one.

Matt Vanbesien and Lawrence Pettinger had two points each for Precision. Justin Levinson and Cody Colfax had goals for Airmount.

December 11

Fody's 6, ReMax 3

Fody's found scoring from different players tonight and that helped keep ReMax on their heels. Buckling down defensively in the second preserved the two points. ReMax answered back all night, but couldn't get the lead. They had some chances but were turned away late.

Chris Sanders had three points for Fody's. Peyton VanBoekel had two points for ReMax.

Agrospray 6, Distinct 4

Agrospray is finding their stride. They were able to keep digging at the end of the game which led to three goals in the final two minutes, ensuring the victory. Distinct was able to match the Agrospray energy and looked to be on their way to victory. A late penalty changed the momentum and they couldn't bounce back. Brady VanYmeren had a hat trick for Agrospray. Dave VanWyk had two goals for Distinct.

RND 3, Carquest 3

RND looked to be in control of this one early. They were able to get some solid rushes and a few rebounds. The defence was helpful offensively all night. Carquest seemed a bit frustrated early as their zone entry didn't work well. They rebounded in the second with some heavy pressure out front.

Dylan Ralf had two points for RND. Adam Matthews had two points for Carquest.

December 15

Fody's 1, Agrospray 1

A back and forth game. Fody's had to play tougher defensively as they couldn't get the offense going. Agrospray fought hard for the point keeping the top scorers for Fody's off the sheet. Both Tommy Lee and Mike Bouck played great in net for their teams.

Brady VanYmeren had the goal for Agrospray. Mason Brewer had the goal for Fody's.

ReMax 6, Distinct 2

ReMax was able to find some consistent scoring tonight. They seemed dangerous most shifts and had a bunch of clean chances. Distinct started well, but were put on their heels by ReMax. They had some chances, but not as many as they would normally get and that stifled their offence.

Daniel Andersson had four points, Ryan Dayman had three assists for ReMax. Evan DeRouck and Brandon Velda had two points each for Distinct.

Airmount 4, B-Line 3

Airmount played a strong game at both ends of the ice. They were able to create some chances and cashed in on a few. B-Line fought hard to come back in this one and had a decent defensive effort. A late Airmount goal crushed their chances of a point.

Jacob Bauman had three points for Airmount. Jake Steenson had two points for B-Line.

Source 3, Carquest 2

In a penalty filled tilt, Source was able to stop the Carquest push in the second and they kept grinding, scoring late to secure the victory. Carquest looked to have momentum in the second, but couldn't build on it with the score. A late push by Source was hard to defend.

Nate Bisschop had two points for Source. Brad Henderson and Ryan Crandall had goals for Carquest.

Glass 4, Precision 2

Glass came out strong in this one. They were able to build a lead and hold on to against a pesky Precision team. Still undefeated on the season. Precision was able to hang with the top team after being down early. They never give up and played until the end, which surprisingly didn't end up in a tie.

Parker Terryberry had two goals for Glass. Devon MacDonald had a goal for Precision.

RND 3 Royal LePage 2

RND looked to set the tone early, scoring 13 seconds in. They had some great breakouts and rush chances in this one. Some grit in front was able to swing this game for them. Royal LePage looked to be back in this one, but couldn't get any bounces to go their way in the second. A tough loss after a solid effort.

Chris VanKasteren had two assists for RND. Nathan Ryksen had two assists for Royal LePage.

December 18

Glass 7, B-Line 1

Glass had their top scorers dominating tonight. They were able to get to the rebounds and had a strong net front presence all night. B-Line did have some chances, but couldn't get second chances in close. They faced a lot of defensive pressure from a hard digging team in Glass.

Jeff Prouse had four points for Glass. Stephan Coulombe had the goal for B-Line.

Royal LePage 6, Source 2

Royal LePage finally got the offence going in this one. They were able to rush all night and get plenty of shots on net. Source looked to be matching the energy tonight, but just couldn't get rebounds in this one. Some penalty trouble changed the momentum.

Kris Bradfield and Brandon Koppert had two points each for Royal LePage. Nate Bisschop and Chris VanKasteren had goals for Source.

RND 4, Airmount 2

After an even first period, RND was able to pull ahead in the second. They controlled most of the play in the second half while getting some good chances in front. Airmount looked good in the first, but couldn't get the puck a lot in the second. They did well not to give up to many second chances to RND.

Jason Beard had two points for RND. Matthew Snow had two goals for Airmount.

CLUB OXFORD A DIVISION	GP	W	L	T	PTS
FODY'S AUTOMOTIVE	15	7	5	3	17
REMAX REALTY	15	7	7	1	15
DISTINCT EXTERIORS	15	6	6	3	15
AGROSPRAY	15	5	7	3	13

CLUB OXFORD B DIVISION	GP	W	L	T	PTS
TILLSONBURG GLASS	16	15	0	1	31
RND CONSTRUCTION	16	8	5	3	19
CARQUEST AUTO PARTS	15	6	5	4	16
ROYAL LEPAGE REALTY	16	7	7	2	16
SOURCE FOR SPORTS	15	7	8	1	15
CALIBRATED PRECISION	16	3	6	6	12
AIRMOUNT FARMS	16	4	10	2	10
B-LINE TRUCKING	16	3	12	1	7

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Derek Partlo enjoying full-circle coaching return to PJHL Norwich Merchants this season

JEFF TRIBE

Post Correspondant

Derek Partlo's working career and lifelong passion are continuing to intersect behind the bench of the 18-6 Provincial Junior Hockey League (PJHL) Norwich Merchants.

"I always loved playing the game," said the Tillsonburg native, whose natural progression led to coaching and giving back to a sport he loved. "It kind of goes hand-in-hand with teaching."

Partlo's playing career began with the Tillsonburg Minor Hockey Incorporated (THMI), progressing to Junior B with the Tillsonburg Titans and onward to what was then Junior C in Norwich and Woodstock, before suiting up with the Ohio University Bobcats.

His four-year tenure there led to American Collegiate Hockey Association titles in 1995, '96 and '97, highlighted by the championship tournament scoring crown in '96 and MVP honours in '97. Together, the two latter awards provide a window into Partlo's playing career: a talented offensive player more than comfortable with the game's physical side. Graduating as the school's career leader in penalty minutes (424), he was named to the Bobcats Sports Hall of Fame in 2014 and subsequently the Tillsonburg Sports Hall of Fame in 2015.

Partlo's coaching career has featured a lengthy term of service to minor hockey with he and wife Jody's twin sons Landon and Logan and daughter Mckenna, the Glendale Gemini high school program, junior in both Norwich and Woodstock, and last spring's Western Ontario Senior Hockey League championship with the Tillsonburg Thunder.

That title run, combined with new-found empty nest status whetted his appetite for a return to coaching at the junior level, an opening in Norwich providing an ideal opportunity.

"Kind of full circle," said Partlo. "Happy to go back and help them out."

He is familiar with the organization, crediting it as one where you are treated well for working hard.

"It's a fun place to play and a fun place to coach."

Partlo is joined on the bench by assistant coaches Tim Christo, who has coached both junior



Derek Partlo (rear, right) is happy to be back coaching at the junior level, leading the Norwich Merchants to an 18-6 PJHL regular season record through 24 games.

and high school with Partlo previously and helps run the defence, former junior teammate Bill Ebel who runs the forwards, and Zach Core who played four years with the Sarnia Sting and University of Western Ontario Mustangs.

"He brings a fresh, younger voice on the bench," said Partlo.

He also credits general manager Darren House for putting in the work to assemble a competitive roster.

Partlo's philosophical approach is assessing that roster and strategizing from there, rather than the other way around.

"You can't just go in and say 'I coach this way.'"

But, in general, he likes to build from the net out.

"And then you sprinkle in some forwards and scoring and hopefully you've got the right mix."

The Merchants' back end has been boosted by the presence of three former Junior B blueliners, Adam Barclay, Tyler Magoffin and Jacob Feijo. Up front, TDMHA graduates Brandon Balazs, who leads the league in points per game (29 in 17 games), and Owen Harris, 18 goals and 11 assists in 24 games, along with Joel Storo-schuk (18 goals and 11 assists in 24 games) carry their share of the offensive load.

"But we have a deep team,"

said Partlo, who likes to run four lines through a fast-paced aggressive approach.

Balazs is a dynamic offensive talent who a lot of the Merchants' offence runs through credits the coach, while Harris is a smart hockey player with the ability to consistently put the puck in the net.

"He brings a ton of hockey sense to the team."

Those two Tillsonburg products will be joined on the league all-star team by fellow THMI grad, Merchants defenceman Travis Lamb.

"A really good puck-moving defenceman who's been playing with a little more grit this year," summed up Partlo.

Courtland's Josh King is also on the 2024-25 roster, his imminent return from injury a welcome plus.

"Josh is a good two-way forward who brings a lot of speed and some size and strength out there in a physical game."

Working with four players he watched during their minor hockey careers and coached on the high school team has been a bonus, says Partlo.

"I know them and they know me."

The Merchants have used five TMHI AP's this year (of 13 in total) due to injuries, a list so far including Owen Ardy, Cale Arvai, Quin Lessif, Liam Nunn and Braedon Redling.

counterpart Malcolm Scott.

"They're probably the two hardest-working kids in the league," said Partlo. "Just good, hard-working, hard-nosed kids."

"You don't have to worry about effort because they bring it every day."

The Merchants' overall combination of talent and worth-ethic has resulted in success, an 18-6 record just over halfway through the 42-game regular season.

"They're a close-knit bunch," credited Partlo. "Kind of play for each other."

It has been a while since Norwich was breathing the rarified air toward to top of the PJHL South Doherty Division standings, Partlo thoroughly enjoying his return to the junior ranks behind that bench.

"Winning will do that," he laughed. "It's been bringing out the fun part of hockey, it's been going well."

The Merchants still have a ways to go Partlo cautioned, however there is an enjoyable 'buzz' around a team whose goals include a run at a league title and going on from there.

"Just happy to be part of it," he concluded.

(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

The roster also features two Norwich Minor Hockey Association products, left-hand shooting Lincoln Swerdfeger and his right-hand-shooting



Merchants defenceman Travis Lamb, left, defends the front of the Norwich net.

(JEFF TRIBE PHOTO)

Thunder 2-2 in recent play

JEFF HELSDON

Editor

The Tillsonburg Thunder are tied for fourth place with three-quarters of the season behind them.

Sitting at 9-9 for the year, the Thunder are tied with the Petrolia Squires, which have an identical record. Recent play has also been at .500 with a two and two record since mid-December.

On Dec. 14, the Thunder notched a win with an 8-6 score against Petrolia Squires. A big second period with five goals did the trick for the Thunder, after starting with a 2-0 lead at the end of the first. Tillsonburg scoring came from Sheldon Thompson (2), Jamie McQueen (2), Thomson Maia, Brandon Couto, Andrew Whalen, Chris McGuffin,

The Thunder received a lump of coal on Dec. 21 when they fell 6-2 to Dunville Aeros in a road game. The Aeros took an early lead in the game, ahead 2-0 at the end of the first. Thompson

and Maia earned the goals for Tillsonburg.

The Thunder notched another win on Dec. 28, hosting their Norfolk County rivals the Delhi Flames. They sent the birds home with a 4-3 loss. Mitchell Fitzmorris put Tillsonburg on the board with a power play goal at 14:13. Delhi tied the game before Couto put the home team back in front before period's end. Delhi tied it up in the second before Fitzmorris and Spencer Hutchison put Tillsonburg in front in the third.

Good fortune didn't continue into the new year with the Strathroy Jets shutting out Tillsonburg in a 6-0 game.

The Thunder visit first-place Alvinston this weekend. They then face Richmond Hill, which also has a .500 record, and finish the season with home-and-home games against last-place Delhi and Stratford. The Stratford games will be crucial with the Fighting Irish one win and a game in hand ahead of the Thunder.



(CHRIS ABBOTT PHOTO)

Veteran Thunder defender Mike Findlay, left, nearly gets a stick during Danny Attridge's shot on Dec. 28. The Thunder won the WOSHL game 4-3 on Dec. 28 at the Tillsonburg Kinsmen Memorial Arena.

Weekend Quiz

by Stewart Grant

1. How many combined years have Pierre Trudeau and Justin Trudeau been Prime Minister of Canada?
2. How do you spell the last name of the current Conservative Party of Canada leader?
3. What are the two zodiac signs for January?
4. How do you write 2025 in Roman Numerals?
5. What four countries comprise the United Kingdom?
6. Hydrogen is the most common element in the universe. What is the second most common element?
7. What is the Japanese word for "hello"?
8. What has been the most common baby girl name in Canada for three years in a row?
9. What has been the most common baby boy name in Canada for three years in a row?
10. True or false: the rate of left-handedness in Canada is higher than the world average of 10%.

This week's answers are found on pg. 30



HOCKEY TEAM HELPS FOOD BANK

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Tillsonburg Tornado U15 Entec hockey team sold donation bags at Metro, Zehrs and Sobeys, and unpacked them at the Helping Hand Food Bank. Team members were able to sell and collect 476 lbs of food on Dec. 11.

MUSEUM CORNER

Buildings of Tillsonburg



TILLSONBURG POST OFFICE

located at Broadway and Ridout Street where the First Ontario Credit Union is today. The building opened in 1913 and was demolished in 1951 when a new, larger Post Office and Federal Building was constructed to meet the needs of Tillsonburg's growing population. The clock was preserved and included in the Rotary Club Clock tower at the corner of Broadway and Bridge St.

(PHOTO: ANNANDALE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE'S ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS. Thank you to Laurel Beechey and Kathleen Watkin for delving into the archives to researching these images.)

WINTER WONDERLAND

Tillsonburg Skating Club presented its Winter Wonderland on Dec. 19. The annual event gives skaters an opportunity to present their latest numbers in front of an audience and to show what they have learned over the past few months. (JEFF HELSDON PHOTOS)



Station Arts Centre board looks for funding boost

JEFF HELSDON

Editor

The Tillsonburg District Craft Guild, which operates the Station Arts Centre, is seeking a municipal funding boost to expand its programming and keep up with inflation.

Sarah Senior, chair of the craft guild, appeared before council on Dec. 9 to outline the request and provide background information. The group's memorandum of understanding with the town is up for renewal.

The craft guild's mission is to promote the arts in Tillsonburg. The station offers diverse and inclusive programs for all ages.

"We strive to create a creative environment that is inclusive, progressive friendly and informative," Senior said. "We are a hub for arts, culture, community and heritage."

Predictions are by year-end, there will have been 30,000 people through the doors of the Station Arts Centre. The Station, as it's sometimes referred to, has two changing exhibit galleries, the baggage room to sell the wares of its members, workshops, pottery groups and youth programs. The Station Arts Centre is the hub of the town's Cana-

da Day celebrations. Partners with the craft guild throughout the year include the BIA, Multi-Service Centre, military history club and horticultural society.

Senior said the town is growing, and the demand for arts, crafts, and heritage with it.

Senior realized councillors may question why they should increase their investment in the arts, when there are more immediate concerns like health care. She said studies show an investment in the arts has a tangible benefit to the local community. Pointing to the town, economic development strategy, Senior provided a quote from it, stating, "the creative and cultural industries represent an untapped economic potential for the town, targeted investments are needed to ensure growth." Senior maintains an investment in the Station Arts Centre will help build businesses in the creative and cultural sectors.

Breaking down the revenue picture further, Senior said the town's grant represents 20 per cent of the guild's revenue and 64 per cent is from workshop, fundraising, donations and grants from organizations. Revenue from classes, workshops, and memberships has increased, but donations have decreased.

"We are in times of economic uncer-

tainty, and most notably, this is reflected in the number of donations received," she said.

Since 2021 when the memorandum of understanding was last renewed, minimum wage increased 20 per cent, inflation is the highest in 30 years, there are significant costs of utilities, materials, and freight on top of the lingering effects of pandemic. The craft guild wants to increase the number of workshops and maintain affordable access to the arts. Plans are to do a feasibility study to look at growing offerings and space, extend classrooms, galleries, and create an accessible pottery area.

"We want to secure the future of the Station Arts Centre in the town and grow the community we have grown with," Senior said.

The guild's 2024-25 budget is \$282,000, or a 16 per cent increase. The group is seeking a contribution of 25 per cent of its budget from the town.

Senior asked for an increase to bring the town's contribution to \$70,500 or at least \$56,400, and CPI increases annually.

"A modest increase will help bring significant cultural and economic increases to the town of Tillsonburg," she said.

Taking questions from council, Coun. Kelly Spencer said, "Tillsonburg has always been known as a sports town but there is massive cultural and arts community and I think that's indicative of all the sold-out programs."

She asked about the impact if the town didn't grant the increase. Senior said the result would be cutting back on prams and running a deficit.

The request for funding was received for information and referred to budget deliberations, but was not included after the December meeting. The budget won't be finalized until the end of January.



SOUTH RIDGE CONCERT

(JEFF HELSDON PHOTO)

South Ridge Public School held its annual Winter Concert on Dec. 18 to a packed gymnasium in the evening. A wide variety of talent was on display as the JK to Grade 8 students took to the stage.



SEASONAL MUSIC SHOWCASE

(JEFF HELSDON PHOTO)

The Glendale High School junior and senior bands and choir presented a mix of Christmas music during the annual concert held at the school on Dec. 17.

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Tillsonburg Glass & Mirror Ltd. is a full-service glass supplier, and more, now involving the fourth generation of the Heckford family.

During the entire eight-plus decades, the business has been in various locations on Tillson Ave. Sam Heckford started the company in 1940 in the basement of his house at 318 Tillson Ave. A new location was built in 1962 by Wes Heckford at 216 Tillson Ave, prior to the present location at 213 Tillson Ave being built in the plaza in 1977.

Changes have taken place since Kirby Heckford took over as president of the company. He purchased Simcoe Glass in 2001, expanding the company's geographic reach in the area.

While the company started out with a focus on residential and automotive glass, automotive was dropped in 1990s. Residential glass is still a large component of what is done.

Kirby said outside of the typical doors and windows, which are still a large portion of the business, the company does a lot more on the residential front. Glass has become part of modern design in homes. For instance, he said homeowners are taking the spindles out of their staircases and replacing it with glass.

"You don't have to get rid of it, you just modernize it," Kirby said.

Another big growth area he is seeing is in glass showers. Kirby explained the glass showers Tillsonburg Glass installs show off the tiling and make the bathroom seem more spacious. A custom install provides better quality and thicker



(JEFF HELSDON PHOTO)

glass than a kit.

"Instead of closing a shower up with a shower curtain or cheap glass door with a frame, these are all frameless," he said.

The company also does a lot of mirrors and floating glass shelves. Talking more about windows, Kirby said replacing only leaking thermal units is an option in some cases.

"You don't have to buy a whole new window," he said. "We assess if the frame is good, and if it is, we can replace the thermal unit. If the frame is rotting, you need to replace it."

Outside of residential, a growing segment for Tillsonburg Glass has been the commercial and industrial segment. The company manufactures commercial glass storefronts in the warehouse adjacent to the

Tillson Ave store. These units are sold across the province.

"Tim Hortons is one of our big customers," he said of this business. "We've done more than 2,000 of their stores."

Another portion of the commercial glass is multiple-floor buildings.

Tillsonburg Glass also supplies glass to many of the kitchen cupboard manufacturers in the area.

Now a fourth generation has joined the company with Kirby's son Warren being the vice-president. Warren's wife Chantelle is the office manager.

Throughout its history, Tillsonburg Glass has been heavily involved in giving back to the community. Many hockey and soccer players have worn jerseys with the company's name on it.



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A look back on the gardening successes of the past year



**IT'S
STILL
JUST
DIRT**

SUE HEALEY

Tillsonburg Post Columnist

In the hush of January, after all the jangle of the holidays is done, I like to sift through my garden memories of the year just past.

I take this quiet and bare time of the year to reflect on the seasons gone by and remember their glory. Every year in the garden is different. There are successes and failures, newly found treasures or old loves rediscovered. 2024 had all of that and more. And throughout the year, there were plants that regardless of what the months brought, flourished beyond all expectation. Through attention, weather, or just circumstance there were a variety of trees, and shrubs, perennials, and annuals that made 2024 a fabulous garden year.

Early heat brought the first stars of the year. Flowering bulbs in general and daffodils in particular put on a display in Southwestern Ontario that surpassed all in my memory. Daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, and a myriad of others seemed to sprout in every yard through out the area. Rural ditch-

es were splashed with the yellow of naturalized daffodils and the blue scilla. The hot, dry summer of 2023 gave most spring flowering bulbs the baking conditions they need to produce masses of blooms the following year. My show began in the still frosty days of March, with Iris reticulata nosing their way through the blanket of leaves. Their crowded spears opening to sear my eyes with fluted petals of magenta, sky blue and yellow. The daffodils were just as thick and only a few moments behind the little iris. Early, fragrant jonquils, sturdy King Alfreds in true daffodil yellow, bouquets of nameless nodding trumpets skirted in lemon, all multiplied. Each besting the late season sleet until finally, chalky white, poet's narcissus closed out my daffodil show and the month of May. Tulips, both hybrid and species sprouted in places I'd thought them lost and doubled in those I knew. Through it all hyacinths bloomed feeding those early bees and flooding the garden with blue.

Summer brought mountain ranges of hydrangeas – their huge heads packed with blossoms in every shade of creamy green, pearly white or speckled pink. Whether it was mopheads or oakleaf, paniculata or lace-cap, the early and frequent rains nourished this deciduous shrub into outlandish size and flowering. My Annabelles (*Hydrangea arborescens*) tumbled over themselves in their rush for the largest blooms. Throughout the summer, the stems toppled in waves, the rains bowing the plate-sized heads until they lay on the grass, making room for a second crop of creamy white pom poms to be brought down in their turn. Blooming in late summer, the panicle hydrangea (*H. paniculata*) requires less moisture than the most of its genus, but they too benefited from the extra moisture the summer provided. My specimens of "Strawberry Sundae" and "Limelight" were covered in dozens of cone-shaped flowerheads, some as large as my forearm. Sturdy and densely packed, they last throughout the fall and winter providing shelter for any number of small creatures. Only the last of the March winds will pry the dried panicles loose. The individual florets scattering across the yard like confetti - a sure sign of spring. The last of the hydrangeas to bloom and my favourite of all, is oakleaf hydrangea (*H. quercifolia*). A shrub I would grow if it had no blooms at all, the leaves are that impressive. A four to six foot, deciduous shrub with large leathery leaves, that are, as the common name implies, oak-leaf shaped. During summer, leaves are deep green to almost eggplant – handsome enough paired with creamy white flowers. Autumn, however, is the season in which this shrub shines. With the coming of cooler temperatures, the leaves deepen in colour, blazing in shades of red, plum, and yellow. They remain well into winter, each one like a gloved hand curled to catch the snow. When the



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

leaves do finally fall, the peeling, tawny bark is revealed adding texture and colour during the winter season. Pruning should be done in early spring to maintain size before growth begins. Shrubs do well in full to part sun with the best colouring in full sun.

And alas, I have room for only three stars of 2024, the first two having so many relations worth praising.

If I could only add one more for 2024, I would then choose the plant that has captivated me for the last few months and seems to have withstood all that the unpredictable weather has thrown at it. Miscanthus "Morning Light" (*Miscanthus sinensis*), a grass to lose your heart to. I have Morning Light growing outside my home office window and have watched her all through this year as she swayed in the wind, catching the light in every thin blade. Ornamental grasses often have bad reputations (many with good reason), but Miscanthus has never been a problem here. A warm season grass, growth begins in mid-spring and flowering from mid to late September. Neither invasive or hard to divide, this clump forming grass is fountain shaped when full grown and thrives in poor soil with full sun. Thin white edged ribbons cascade in a fountain through each season with only the briefest of gaps in April, when I cut down the dried stalks and before the new blades emerge. While other grasses will collapse or splay in the wind and weather, Morning Light is blithely untouched by rain or snow. Her limbs move with the wind, plumes tossed about like braids undone, their crimped locks still glossy at the end of October. In the heart of winter, the tiny hairs surrounding each seed head will fluff and feather catching the snow like a mane of fur. Best situated where the sun can shine through the stalks, better still, a place where you can see it well and often.

There were other stars of the year, but they will have to wait for another grey day when distraction needed. A whole new list of distractions also awaits you at your local horticultural society, with full schedule of interesting topics and excellent presentations. Our featured speaker on Jan. 7 was Sean James, "Incorporating Edibles Into a Traditional Landscape".

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(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

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Sacred Spells offers unique items for the spiritual



(JEFF HELSDON PHOTO)

Jennifer Haralampopoulos and Jodie Moon opened Sacred Spells on Broadway on Dec. 13. The spiritual shop has been doing a booming business since, attracting customers from a wide area.

JEFF HELSDON

Editor

The sign indicating Sacred Spells is open says it all: The Witch Is In.

Opening appropriately on Friday, Dec. 13 at 71 Broadway, Sacred Spells offers everything a witch could want. The store has spell kits, incense, candles, tarot books, books on witchcraft and spells, witch shirts with cute slogans and witch jewelry. The only thing missing is

broomsticks.

The store is the first business venture for Jennifer Haralampopoulos and Jodie Moon. The idea for the store came from what many consider a witch's mecca: Salem, Massachusetts. Moon had the idea to go there in September. Two weeks later they took their men and were in Salem.

"It was wonderful and all the history was amazing," Haralampopoulos said. "We came home and

have been buzzed about it."

After returning home, they were looking for some stones and discovered the nearest source was an hour away. Investigating further, they found there were no wiccan shops, or apothecaries nearby. The idea of starting their own business was born, and came together within a couple of weeks. Living in Delhi, they searched for an appropriate location and

found the storefront on Broadway.

The friends went into the venture with no prior business experience.

"We're just flying from the seats of our pants," Moon said.

Their vision was transformed into Sacred Spells.

"We try to refer to us as a spiritual shop," Haralampopoulos said.

While talk of witch's spells conjures up images from Harry Potter,

of or boiling cauldrons over a fire, eye of newt, mugwort, bat wing and snake venom, spells today are real but much more mundane, consisting of a mixture of herbs, stones, crystals and other small things, often sealed in a vial. There isn't any snake venom at Sacred Spells, but eye of newt is actually mustard seed – something to soon to be added to the shelf – and there is mugwort.

Haralampopoulos and Moon only started making spells since their Salem visit, although Moon's grandmother read tea leaves and Haralampopoulos had a passion for tarot cards. They aren't part of the wiccan religion, but are enthusiasts

of it.

Both tea leaf reading and tarot cards are in consideration for future business plans.

Getting back to the spells, prior to opening, the new owners smudged the store with sage and created two spells. One spell was a successful business spell, and the other a protection spell.

"Her and I did it to generate good luck to stay open," Haralampopoulos said.

Early indications are it worked, with opening day being a "mad house".

"It was chaotic," Haralampopoulos said. "It was the best opening day we could have had."

Maybe their spells worked.



(JEFF HELSDON PHOTO)

The spells for a successful business and protection seem to be working so far for Sacred Spells. Those wanting to know the ingredients need to visit the store.

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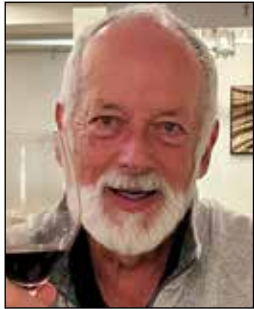
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The challenges of an historic town at the confluence of three rivers



**OH,
THE
PLACES
WE'LL
GO!**

PAUL KNOWLES

Tillsonburg Post Columnist

There is a well-worn cliché about travelling in Europe: “I’ve seen enough castles and cathedrals!” Well, I am a pretty big fan of castles and cathedrals, but I do understand there can be too much of a good thing. And there is no lack of either castle or cathedral in the historic towns and cities of western Europe.

And yes, the German town of Passau does have a castle and, in fact, a cathedral, but don’t let that stop you from including it on your itinerary. There is so much more here, including a long and dramatic history of co-existing with the three rivers that meet, right here, and the frequent crises arising from that uneasy coexistence.

We were in Passau as part of our excellent Viking River Cruise, Romantic Danube. It’s probably true that the Danube can be very romantic at a time when it is flowing peacefully through Passau, but when we were there, the Danube and the other two rivers that meet here, the Inn and the Ilz, were in flood and the lowest parts of the town were already underwater.

But that, believe it or not, is one of the most interesting reasons to visit this historic town located just west of the Austrian border.

The story here is one of perseverance and community cooperation. Passau has existed for more than two millennia, founded because of the trade benefits of the three rivers that oc-

asionally become its enemies. In medieval days, the number-one trade commodity was salt. Today, it’s tourists.

Like many of the towns located along the Danube, the community rises quickly from the riverbank into the hills round about. So, while the homes and businesses nearer the river are very vulnerable to high water, the upper levels of the community are impervious to flooding.

We saw dramatic examples of both realities when we toured Passau. Our guide admitted that, since the river had just started to rise, he could take us around the town – skirting some streets that were turning into streams – but that a day or two later, he personally would be temporarily confined to his three-floor apartment, as water would have risen a metre or two against his building. We saw many nearby homes and businesses barricaded with sandbags and metal flood barriers.

But then we ascended some rather steep but scenic cobbled streets to the square where St. Stephen’s Cathedral is located. And no, cathedral cynics, this is no ordinary church. St. Stephen’s is home to the largest pipe organ outside the United States, an instrument that includes 17,974 pipes, 233 stops and four carillons. I have heard it played and it is truly worth the trip. The temporary bad news is I didn’t hear it on this visit because the organ is being refurbished, a project that will extend into next year.

But the cathedral is magnificent in its own right and while you won’t hear the organ in 2025, you may be fortunate enough to hear the eight bells in the cathedral’s bell tower.

One of my favourite streets in lower Passau is the Artists’ Alley, where local artists have their shops and studios, and where they paint the cobblestones in bright colours and hang whimsical pieces of art above the street.

You can get a great view of Passau and its rivers from the Veste Oberhaus, the castle high atop the hillside on the opposite side of



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

Danube expert and historian Isis-Sybille Frisch, who lectured aboard the Viking Var.

the Danube from the cathedral. Other popular photo stops include the Roman Tower, the Bishop’s Palace and the oldest church.

But be sure to spend time on the river front, contemplating the dual nature of Passau’s situation – ideal for trade in times gone by, for transportation during the days of the Roman Empire and for river-cruise stops today, but also, subject to the whims of nature and the temperament of the Danube and its sister rivers.

It’s definitely appropriate the Danube was named for the great river goddess of the Celtic tribes. We learned that from Isis-Sybille Frisch, an expert on the Danube who gave an amazing lecture onboard the Viking Var. When you sail on the Danube, she told us, you

are travelling on “the major river of mainland Europe,” a waterway that stretches 2,896 kilometres from the Black Forest and to the Black Sea, and passes through 10 European countries. We visited four of them on our cruise.

As we sailed on a Danube swelled by heavy rains upstream from Passau, Frisch observed, “Despite all human intervention, we cannot control the river.” The great river goddess will have the last say, and the historic high-water markings on the buildings of Passau offer dramatic documentation of her more violent moods.

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.



Passau’s Castle, the Veste Oberhaus.



Flood heights are marked on the walls of waterfront buildings in Passau, the German town at the confluence of three rivers.

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MUSIC CORNER

SDN Comedy returns to the Copper Mug with a healthy dose of laughs



BEN ADDRESS

Tillsonburg Post Columnist

With the rush of 2025 hitting at full force as we all dive into the stressful task of achieving our New Year's resolutions, local

Tillsonburg comedy team SDN Comedy is inviting us to put all the stress aside and join them for an evening of uncontrollable laughter and top-notch entertainment.

With years of friendships and a shared thirst for laughs SDN Comedy was founded in 2023 by Ingersoll, Ontario comedian Shawn 'Creamcorn' Hughes and the Tillsonburg, Ontario comedy duo of Dalton Puhr and Nick Pressey.

"Comedy runs deep for me. Growing up in a small town you kind of have to make your own fun" Puhr said while re-

calling his inspiration to pursue comedy. "My dad. I always saw him as a funny guy and it was embedded."

Puhr's comedy partner Nick Pressey agrees that his father was also an inspiration to get on stage.

"I started watching Eddie Murphy when I was nine. I have fond memories of watching Delirious and Raw with my dad. He was always making jokes."

Pressey said that attending Glendale High School with Dalton was just the beginning of their comedy adventures.

"I always liked being on

stage and karaoke gave me the confidence to get up and perform. I would sing and tell a joke or two." Pressey explained. "I always had an interest in performing comedy. Back in 2021, I was hanging at a show that Shawn was hosting and last minute he invited me up on stage for a five spot. The laughs were the fuel to keep going."

"Reality is an inspiration and as soon as I see something that makes me laugh it gets written down. Last year we really got to hone our craft." Puhr said, adding that open mic nights were

pivotal. "Paddy's Underground was the perfect place to test new jokes out on a real audience."

With an arsenal of jokes and a strong desire to take the Southern Ontario comedy circuit by storm, Puhr and Pressey joined seasoned comedian Hughes. The trio performed countless sets including two live shows that were filmed and self-released on DVD.

SDN Comedy has plans for 2025 and there are no signs of slowing down.

"I would love to do more videos outside of the stand-up comedy. Maybe a scripted full-length fea-

ture." Dalton Puhr said, while noting his passion for film and music video production resume. "I think we could produce some high-value productions."

Come take a load off with SDN Comedy on Friday, Jan. 10 at The Copper Mug located at 79 Broadway Street in Tillsonburg, Ontario. The event starts at 9 pm. Reserving a table in advance is suggested by calling the Copper Mug at 519-842-6227. This is a free 19+/licensed event.

Anyone wanting more details can visit sdncomedy.ca or The Copper Mug's Facebook page.

UPCOMING SHOWS

JAN. 9 – OPEN MIC WITH BILLY GIBBONS
Paddy's Underground;
20 John Pound Rd,
Tillsonburg
Free – 7:30 p.m. – all ages/licensed

JAN. 10 – SDN COMEDY
The Copper Mug; 79
Broadway, Tillsonburg
Free – 9 p.m.

JAN. 11 – LOST IN JAPAN w/ HIGHTEENS
Paddy's Underground;
20 John Pound Rd,
Tillsonburg
\$15 – 8 p.m. – all ages/licensed

JAN. 15 - EUCHRE TOURNAMENT
The Copper Mug; 79
Broadway, Tillsonburg
5 p.m. -

JAN. 16 – OPEN MIC WITH BILLY GIBBONS
Paddy's Underground;
20 John Pound Rd,
Tillsonburg
Free – 7:30 p.m. – all ages/licensed

JAN. 17 – COMEDY SHOW w/ CRYSTAL FERRIER, JEFF PAUL & TYLER SHAZMA
The Copper Mug; 79
Broadway, Tillsonburg
\$20 – 7p.m.

JAN. 18 – ONE WAY STREETS w/ DUMB CRUSH
Paddy's Underground;
20 John Pound Rd,
Tillsonburg
\$10 – 8 p.m. – all ages/licensed

JAN. 18 – KARAOKE
The Copper Mug; 79
Broadway, Tillsonburg
Free – 8:30 p.m.

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Left photo: (Left to right) Chuck Matheson, Acting President Tom Brown C.D., Joe Brown, Darrell Ball and Randall Boughner C.D. take a break from the festivities to pose for a photo. Right photo: More than 100 people turned out for the Legion's annual president's New Year's Day levee. The long-time tradition features clam chowder and moose milk, which is a combination of eggnog, rum and brandy. The event also featured a disc jockey and dancing.

(ROBIN KRAFFT PHOTOS)

Hospital celebrating 100th anniversary

In 2025, the Tillsonburg District Memorial Hospital (TDMH) and the TDMH Volunteer Association are excited to be celebrating 100 years of care.

Over the next months, the hospital is planning to share milestones and memories from over the past 100 years – so much has happened since the cornerstone was laid on July 20, 1925. Everyone is welcomed to share their TDMH and TDMH Volunteer memories by email TDMH100years@tdmh.on.ca or by using #TDMH100years and/or #TDMHvolunteers100years on social media.

There will be a number of opportunities to celebrate 100 years including the Century of Caring Gala: An Evening of

Story Telling, planned for May 10. Save the date; more details to be shared soon. TDMH Foundation will also be celebrating at the Annual Taste of Summer event held May 31 at Memorial Park. Upcoming events and information will be shared on TDMH Facebook and Instagram pages.

The Copper Mug is getting everything started with a Winter Warmer Event on January 31. Tickets are \$40 with all ticket proceeds going to the TDMH Foundation, helping to purchase high priority capital equipment for the hospital. Stellar line-up of entertainment includes Chase Beres, Tim Davis and Hard Chords. It should be a great night!



A LOT OF COOKIES

(JEFF HELSDON PHOTO)

Owners of the Tillsonburg Tim Hortons locations donated proceeds from Holiday Smile Cookie sales evenly to Tim Hortons Children's Foundations and Cycles of Life. They sold 21,646 Smile Cookies from Nov. 18 to 24. Involved in the \$32,469 cheque presentation to Smile of Life are, left to right in the back row, Mike Gazley, Christina Gazley, Austin Gazley of the Norfolk Mall, Oxford Street and Tillsonburg Town Centre Tim Hortons; Cycle of Life (CL) volunteer Debbie Heywood; Mary Jane Phillips, CL co-founder; Judy Legg, CL volunteer; and Kaila van der Jagt and Drew van den Jags of the Broadway Tim Hortons. Cycle of Life provides an outreach table of food and clothing donations across Oxford County, with pick-up at the Upper Dec on Thursdays from 10:30 to 12:30. The group is also working on a 24/7 shelter with crisis beds.

SWOX Housing Opportunities Committee considers tiny homes

DEBBIE KASMAN

Tillsonburg Post Correspondent

At its Nov. 5th, Housing Opportunities Committee meeting, SWOX mayor David Mayberry informed the committee that he had met with developer Kirby Heckford to explore interest in different development options for a property comprised of 2.6 acres in the subdivision west of Highway 19 in Mount Elgin known as the "Layton property." Heckford would like to build 40-50 tiny homes on the land. Mayberry suggested a hybrid model of one row of townhouses and the rest affordable tiny homes.

Septic inspector Niels Dube expressed concern regarding undersized lots, which could become a problem in future when the properties do not have enough space for a conventional septic system.

Chief Building Official Howard Leaver noted that residents in the area might not be supportive of a tiny home community in Mount Elgin.

Mayberry suggested stacked townhouse units as another option and will follow up with Oxford County regarding the capacity in the current water system.

SWOX exceeds legal expenses budget

At its regular council meeting on Dec. 17, South West Oxford Township staff informed council of a budget over-expenditure for the township's legal expenses for 2024. This over-expenditure resulted from an independent investigation required by the township's Workplace Violence and Harassment Policy.

The township received a formal written harassment complaint from one of the township's fire halls. As required under township policy, an independent investigation was initiated to address the complaint. An independent third party was engaged to conduct the investigation.

The total cost of the investigation was \$11,911.25, plus HST, resulting in a total fee of \$13,459.71. The township's approved budget for legal expenses in 2024 was \$10,000. Due to this unexpected expense, combined with other legal services for 2024, the allocated budget was exceeded.

To address the budget shortfall, an estimated \$7,010.71 (including HST) will be withdrawn from the legal reserve to cover this over expenditure. The current balance of the township's Legal Reserve Account is \$102.29.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Line dancers from the Tillsonburg Senior Centre entertained participants at the annual turkey dinner on Dec. 18. The centre fed almost 140 individuals and were entertained by the dancers, members of the board and staff.

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RIDDLES

Why did the man sprinkle sugar on his pillow on New Year's Eve?

He wanted to start the year with sweet dreams!

What's a New Year's resolution?

Something that goes in one year and out the other!

Why did the calendar get arrested?

It had too many dates!

What's the best thing about New Year's resolutions?

No one remembers them by February!

Why don't people joke about midnight on New Year's Eve?

Because it's no laughing matter when the ball drops!

What's the most popular band on New Year's Eve?

The Countdown Singers!

Why are you supposed to take a shower on New Year's Day?

To start the year off with a clean slate!

What's a cow's favorite New Year's resolution?

To mooove more and eat less grass!

Why was the math book excited for the New Year?

It wanted a fresh start to solve its problems!

SUDOKU

by PeterS 2024

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Solutions on page 30

Basic (4)

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- Icicles
- Skating
- Sledding
- Cozy
- Snowball
- Snowman
- Cocoa
- Chilly
- Sweater
- Boots
- Mittens
- Scarf
- Toque
- Fireplace

COMING EVENTS

THE FRIENDSHIP TABLE - FREE FRIENDSHIP DINNERS
Monday, Jan. 13, Feb. 10, Mar. 10, Apr. 14, May 12, June 9, 2025;
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AND DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
 The January General Meeting will be held on Monday, January 20th at 7 pm at Annandale House NHS. Bring along a family artifact or collectable to the Annual Show and Tell Meeting. If you'd rather not bring an item, you will still hear lots of interesting stories. You won't want to miss this meeting!
WHAT MAKES WINTER SHORTER?
 Listening, dancing and enjoying 50's-70's

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WHEN: 4th Tuesday of every month
WHERE: Ingersoll Public Library 130 Oxford St., Ingersoll
TIME: 10:30AM-12:00Noon
WOODSTOCK
WHEN: 3rd Saturday of every month
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 March 13 - April 17 2025; 6:30-8:00PM
 April 10 - May 15 2025; 1:30 - 3:00PM
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Friday's 1-4 pm \$6.00 adm.
Jan. 17 & 31 Tillsonburg Legion

SUDOKU

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8	1	3	5	9	7	2	4	6

QUIZ ANSWERS

- 1) 25
- 2) Poilievre
- 3) Capricorn (until Jan. 19) and Aquarius (Jan. 20 onward)
- 4) MMXXV
- 5) England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland
- 6) Helium
- 7) Kon'nichiwa
- 8) Olivia (2nd place is Amelia)
- 9) Noah (2nd place is Liam)
- 10) True. Nearly 13% of Canadians are believed to be left-handed

Tillsonburg POST

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- Coming Events Word Ad (50 word max.) - \$10 + hst
- Coming Events Boxed Word Ad (50 word max.) - \$15 + hst
- Display Ad - Sizes begin at a classified business card size for \$35 + hst

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OUTSTANDING VOLUNTEERS

(JEFF HELSDON PHOTO)

Sheryl and Skip Chevrette were presented with the Tillsonburg Volunteer Achievement Award at the Dec. 9 council meeting by Mayor Deb Gilvesy, second from left, and Carrie Lewis, chair of the Museum, Culture, Heritage and Special Awards Committee. The couple set up a donation centre for the Helping Hand Food Bank at Baldwin Place Recreation Centre, inform residents of the items the food bank needs most, and then deliver the items to the food bank. Last year they delivered 3,353 pounds of food to the food bank last year. The Chevrettes also deliver for Meals on Wheels.

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Tillsonburg POST

Contribute to your local community newspaper!

Send articles, sports or event recaps, and photos to

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Tillsonburg POST Pick Up Locations

- TILLSONBURG**
- Annadale Historic Site
 - Apple Convenience
 - Around the Corner Variety
 - Canadian Tire
 - Chrissy's Corner Store
 - Circle K
 - Cool Convenience
 - Corner Convenience
 - Coward PharmaChoice
 - Coyle's Country Store
 - Esso
 - Goodwill Community Store

- Home Hardware Bldg Centre
- Korner Perk
- Maple View Variety
- Nectar Coffee & Bar
- Oxford Mini martes
- PetroCanada
- Pharmasave
- Pioneer Gas & Convenience
- Queen's Cafe
- R&P Convenience
- Royal Canadian Legion
- Salvation Army Thrift

- Store
- Shoppers Drug Mart
 - Sobeys
 - Station Arts Centre
 - The Country Table
 - Tillsonburg BIA
 - Tillsonburg Community Centre
 - Tillsonburg Library
 - Tillsonburg Hospital
 - Tillsonburg Senior Centre
 - Tim Hortons locations
 - Walmart
 - Zehrs

- COURTLAND**
- Courtland Variety & Cafe
 - Courtland Bakery Ltd.
- MT. ELGIN**
- Esso
- LANGTON**
- Langton Community Centre
 - Langton Pharmacy
- DELHI**
- Home Building Centre
 - Pharmasave
 - Tim Hortons
 - Wilkinson's YIG

- NORWICH**
- Shoppers Drug Mart
 - Circle K
 - Village Restaurant
 - Norwich Deli & Bakery
 - Shell
 - Home Hardware Building Centre
 - Norwich Arena
 - Norwich Feeds Country Store
 - Rivansh Gas & Variety
 - Tim Hortons
 - Foodland

Funeral

& Estate Planning



*Proudly serving the communities
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Why is it important to preplan your funeral?



Maurice J. Verhoeve,
Owner/Funeral Director



Margaret Verhoeve,
Secretary



Robert Verhoeve,
Funeral Director



Krystyna Verhoeve,
Funeral Director

Thinking about final wishes doesn't mean that a person's sad, depressed, or looking forward to death. Individuals preplan because they want to give their family and friends as much comfort as possible on that difficult, yet inevitable day. Whatever their reason may be, preplanning is a logical decision that a rapidly growing number of people make each day.

4 Key Benefits To Prearranging Your Final Wishes:

- Your wishes are known to your family
- Urgent Decisions Are Completed Now
- Your Peace of Mind
- Addressing Funeral Costs

Benefit 1 - Your family and friends are the most important parts of your life, but without your clearly expressed final wishes, it will be up to them to come together to try to reach a consensus during a difficult time. Flowers, music, readings, and other simple decisions now can create feelings of animosity and disunity. Preplanning eliminates the guesswork and lets your loved ones have peace as they focus on their own healing and remembrance.

Benefit 2 - Prearranging aims to take care of urgent decisions now and protect your family from unnecessary pain and expense. When that inevitable day arrives, you want your loved ones to be focused on the truly important things – remembrance, family support, and healing – not making arrangements and decisions about your funeral. Preplanning prevents them from having to make considerable financial and logistical choices while under emotional duress.

Benefit 3 - There is peace of mind that comes with knowing that you will say goodbye in a way that uniquely reflects you and your life. By prearranging your specific final wishes you ensure that your family will be guaranteed to have the service you would have wanted on that important day. Your decisions can shape how your family and friends remember you and can help their healing process with a personalized service that truly reflects your individuality and unique personality.

Benefit 4 - Preplanning and prefunding your funeral addresses funeral costs today and lessens the financial burden for your

family down the road. Many people assume savings or life insurance will cover their final expenses. By funding your funeral in advance, you lock in the price of your specific wishes at current prices, avoiding rising costs caused by inflation. You can then enjoy the rest of your life confident in the financial relief you'll give to your loved ones. Furthermore, there is no risk to prefunding your funeral; all prefunded trust monies remain in trust for the purchaser until services are rendered. These funds are also fully transferrable to another funeral home, such as in the case your wishes change or you relocate.

In short, prearranging your funeral allows you to show your love in a way your family will never forget. By taking care of all the details yourself – and well in advance – your preplanned funeral will exemplify the selfless love and generosity you have shown your loved ones throughout your life. Nobody is eager to reach the day of their funeral, but taking control of that inevitable step and organizing your final wishes is simply the right thing to do for yourself and for your family. Completing the preplanning process will create a great sense of clarity, joy, and pride.



Hector Verhoeve,
(1938-2015)

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