

# STRATFORD TIMES

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## Competitions jeopardized for SDSS Robotics Club due to lack of funds

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

The Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) robotics club is hard at work re-imagining and re-designing their robots from lessons learned during this season's competitions.

Their work so far has been worldclass as they have qualified for provincials and are on the verge of going to the VEX Robotics Worlds Competition in Dallas Tex., however a lack of funding could jeopardize their opportunities to compete.

The club of around 60 junior and senior students is organized into four groups identified alphabetically as Team A, B, C and D. They meet every school day after class to design, build, program and operate robots to enter into the VEX Robotics Competition.

The team simply doesn't have the money to travel to Dallas, Tex. for the VEX Robotics World competition. They have already passed on two competitions without jeopardizing their current ranking but once provincials are conquered, which they feel very confident about, their goal is to make a name for themselves on the world stage.

For that, they need the support of the student population and community at large. Mayor Martin Ritsma,

CONTINUED TO PAGE 7



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

### WINTER WONDERLAND

The snow was perfect for building a snow fort Tuesday afternoon, so that's just what Isabelle Deweerd, Camille Peper, Miriam Elmune and Shauna Deweerd did in Stratford's Lower Queen's Park.

## Proposed 2024 tax increase now at 8.5 per cent for Stratford

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

After continued budget deliberations on Jan 15, councillors have managed to bring Stratford's proposed 2024 tax-rate increase down to 8.5 per cent.

Stratford mayor Martin Ritsma said he and his fellow council members are not in a rush to sign off on the 2024 budget just yet, noting he wants to take the time to get it right.

"Let's continue to work with an open mind and an open heart," he said. "I have referred to this work as a process. I am proud of that process. We are not in a hurry to get the process done. Let's continue this process and take the time required to do it right."

The Stratford mayor also notes that he recognizes the concerns raised by residents and small businesses in Stratford but also notes that housing density plays a factor.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2

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# Proposed 2024 tax increase now at 8.5 per cent for Stratford

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

“We know that increased tax growth moving forward will come from both residential and industrial growth. The increased tax through residential growth can certainly be enhanced through increased housing density.”

All councillors seemed to feel the burden of their 2024 budget decisions. Mayor Ritsma said he’s proud of their work thus far, highlighting the importance of council hearing resident concerns.

“I am proud of the budget process thus far. It has involved staff, council and input from residents, many emails, telephone calls and meetings with residents, staff and councillors.

“We need to respect our residents and the budget needs to reflect long and short-term affordability. We know that the residents and businesses continue to feel the

impact of the pandemic, high inflation and increased interest rates. Knowing this, this budget deliberation may require us to defer certain capital items, knowing that it will come with risks, which will be discussed here today,” Ritsma said.

Councillor Mark Hunter also addressed the city and staff as chair of the finance and labour relations committee – the committee of council that oversees budget deliberations and will recommend final approval of the draft 2024 budget to council once the majority of members are satisfied with it. Hunter said he too feels the burden of a high tax increase but recognizes that services cost money and the province also mandates some.

“This document contains the list of services the city provides our residents. Some of those services are things that our residents have asked for, and some of them

are things that the province of Ontario mandates we provide,” he said, “We only have one source of money to run the city, and that source of money is you, our residents.”

As he discussed the current proposed tax rate, Hunter said he understands the pressures this budget will put on the public as he too is a resident of Stratford.

“A 8.5 per-cent increase is still a big number. Several of us [councillors] are also business owners in the community and none of us are excited about paying more, either. Unfortunately, there’s only one way to reduce costs. Reduce, eliminate, or postpone services; there’s no other option.”

Though council shut down conversations around the controversial Xinyi glass plant in 2022, Hunter noted large businesses like that one could have substan-

tially reduced the cost on taxpayers.

“Another thing we can do is change our tax base by bringing more business taxpayers into the community. Businesses pay a slightly higher rate than residents and use fewer services,” he said. “For example, had that glass plant being built here, the budget would not require a 8.5 per-cent increase. It would require a 4.3 per-cent increase.”

“I’m not trying to suggest that was the right project for Stratford, but it does illustrate the impact businesses can have in our community.”

The budget meeting concluded with residents and small business owners voicing their concerns about the proposed 8.5 per-cent tax hike. Stratford council has yet to book a follow-up meeting sometime next month to continue budget deliberations.

## Perth County OPP officer recognized for taking impaired drivers off local roads

WENDY LAMOND

Times Correspondent

A Perth County OPP officer is being recognized for his dedication to taking

impaired drivers off local roads.

On Jan. 9, the Ontario Provincial Police held a ceremony in West Perth to present accolade awards to deserving members. Awards were presented across

23 categories.

Perth County OPP Const. Mike Garniss was presented with an impaired-driving award for his commitment to preventing impaired driving in Perth County.

Garniss, who has been with Perth County OPP for six years, was surrounded by his family, colleagues and representatives from regional command when he accepted the award. According to an OPP press release, his unrelenting efforts to keep the community safe has not gone unnoticed. He has been involved in RIDE programs, traffic stops

and general patrol to protect residents and take dangerous drivers off the road.

Garniss laid 36 impaired driving charges last year, the most laid by an officer in West Region and second-most in the province among OPP officers.

“Today we presented Const. Mike Garniss with a Provincial Accolade Award for his commitment to public safety and the enforcement of impaired driving laws in Perth County. Congratulations on your achievements and being selected for this well-deserved recognition,” said Perth County OPP Staff Sgt. David Sinko in the press release.

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### AWARDED

Perth County OPP Const. Mike Garniss received an OPP impaired-driving accolade award at a ceremony in West Perth Jan. 9.

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)





**BEAR ATTACK**

(GARY WEST PHOTO)

A 10-foot-tall polar bear showed up at the Stratford Farmers Market on Saturday. Katie Gautreau, along with her children Blair, 7, and Levi, 5 were having fun with the giant bear. The white giant was there promoting the 26th annual Stratford Winterfest, which is being held Jan. 27 starting at 10 a.m.

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# STRATFORD TIMES

Stratford's Community Newspaper

Established 2021

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# Why didn't my blue bin get picked up? What can and can't be recycled in Stratford

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

It's garbage day and you took the time to ensure each of your bags were properly tagged and your blue bins were at the curb before pickup. But for some reason, the city's recycling contractors came and went without taking your recyclables and you're now left waiting another two weeks with a blue bin that's already full.

Over the past several weeks, a number of Stratford residents have taken to social media to complain after their recycling was seemingly ignored on pickup day.

"The recycling crew refused to take pizza boxes and other 'fast food' items," one poster wrote on the Stratford Connect Facebook page last week. "The crew did not take the pizza boxes, an Amazon box that was broken down and paper plates. When I asked why these items were not taken, the crew said we must throw them in the garbage. Has anyone else experienced this issue?"

According to Stratford public works manager Adam Ryan, while Bluewater Recycling Association, the city's recycling contractor, has not instituted any recent changes, they have noticed an uptick in blue-box contamination.

"The recycling program hasn't changed in a few years now, but our contractor is noticing an increase in contamination – materials put in the blue boxes that aren't accepted for recycling," Stratford public works manager Adam Ryan said. "That includes things like coffee cups, Styrofoam, soiled paper plates, soiled pizza boxes and unrinsed containers. Also, recyclables should not be put in clear plastic bags, with the exception of shredded office paper."

In addition to the above-mentioned non-recyclable items, Bluewater no longer accepts cartons including tetra packs, milk cartons and drinking boxes, aluminum foil, pie plates, lasagna trays, aerosol containers, paint cans, and small items like individual yogurt cups and apple-sauce containers because they are difficult to process and have little value on the commodity market.

The list of items not acceptable in the blue bin is so long, it's easier to list what is recyclable. Accepted items include:

- Printed paper products like newspapers, magazines, office paper, envelopes, soft-cover books, junk mail, brochures, phone books, catalogues and calendars;

- Paper packaging like cardboard, boxboard, kraft paper, paper cores (i.e. empty toilet paper and paper towel rolls) and moulded pulp (i.e. egg cartons);

- Plastic packaging including polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles and jars; PET thermoforms; PET clamshells, polypropylene (PP) bottles, high-density polyethylene (HDPE) bottles, jars, tubs, lids and pails, and polyethylene bags;

- Metal containers like aluminum drink cans and steel food and drink cans; and

- Glass products like clear and coloured bottles and jars.

"We're always trying to reduce the amount of contamination that makes its way into the blue bins and then the processing facility so that the entire system works the way it's supposed to," Ryan said.

For more information on Stratford's recycling program and what is and isn't acceptable to put in your blue bin, visit [www.stratford.ca/recycling](http://www.stratford.ca/recycling).

## Acceptable Recyclables

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Printed Paper					
Paper Packaging					
Plastic					
Plastic					
Metal			<p style="font-weight: bold; margin: 0;">Recycling World has Changed!</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">The items on this page are the only items we wish to see in your recycling bin. We can collect, process, and sell these materials day in and day out and you can feel good about it.</p> <p style="font-size: 0.7em; margin: 0;">Placing the wrong items in the recycling bins increases the cost of the program, lowers the value of the remaining recyclables, and affects the safety of our employees. Just because something is made of paper, metal, plastic, or glass, does not mean it is recyclable. Make sure you see it listed in the latest acceptable list posted on our web site, or your calendar.</p> <p style="font-size: 0.7em; margin: 0;">If you are unsure, please ask us at <a href="mailto:info@bra.org">info@bra.org</a> or 1-800-265-9799, or visit <a href="http://www.bra.org">www.bra.org</a></p>		
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# STRATFORD TIMES

## Guiding Principles

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4. A Newspaper should be a community effort (contribute to your local paper!)
5. Newspapers document history
6. Newspapers strengthen communities
7. Advertisers, big or small, should profit from their ads (meaning sensible ad rates)
8. Newspapers should be locally-owned and operated



# Food insecurity is still on the rise in Huron-Perth, new public-health report shows

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A new report by Huron Perth Public Health shows an alarming and increasing number of people living with food insecurity in the area.

Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) recently released "The Real Cost of Eating in Huron and Perth." The report indicates that low-income families in Huron Perth often face the dilemma of choosing between paying for essentials like rent and utilities or buying enough food.

Amy MacDonald, Huron Perth Public Health Registered Dietitian, says the report shows a steady increase in households experiencing food insecurities across Huron-Perth. These numbers keep rising year after year.

"We know the Canadian food price report and consumer price index have shown increasing food costs year over year, which aligns with our report," she said.

The report states that, in 2023, the cost of groceries for a family of four in the region was \$267 per week or \$1,155 per month, excluding non-food items. Com-



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

## NECESSITIES

**Grocery costs are on the rise again in 2024 and many residents in Huron-Perth are struggling to keep up.**

pare that to the cost of groceries in Huron-Perth in 2022 when it took just \$249 per week or \$1,076 per month to feed a family of four -- an increase of \$18 per week or \$79 per month.

Kelsey Lauersen, resource coordinator at Stratford House of Blessing, said they have seen a rise by 124 per cent in food bank usage since 2022, and rising food

costs seem to affect all types of families.

"There are many types of food insecure families in the area: households with two working parents, households with single parents and individuals," she said.

"We also see individuals who have not needed our services for several years return. In addition, the number of unhoused individu-

als we serve continues to rise.

"We have seen a 152 per-cent increase in the number of unhoused food visits from 2021 to 2023 alone."

Cost of living plays a crucial role in health care as well, and MacDonald says those with food insecurities are also more susceptible to health conditions due to poor living conditions.

"We know that people who experience household food insecurity are more likely to get sick in terms of infectious disease," she said. "They are more prone to chronic conditions like heart disease, hypertension, arthritis, back problems, chronic pain and type-two diabetes. Those who are food insecure are also more prone to adverse mental health impacts."

"What we know is that these conditions may result from a low income and that financial circumstances really have a huge impact on those sorts of conditions."

The report identifies income-based solutions, including adequate old-age pensions, fully funded Canada Working-Age Supplement (CWAS), fully funded Canada Disability Benefit

(CDB), lower income taxes for the lowest income households, income protection for precarious employment, implementation of a Basic Income Guarantee, increased social assistance rates, investments in subsidized, affordable and stable housing, and strategies to enhance affordable housing, childcare and public transit.

"There have been years and years of research that show that household food insecurity is a marker of material deprivation and poverty and that the most effective way to address it is income-based policy," said MacDonald.

"The board of health will send advocacy letters to federal and provincial representatives. These letters discuss the importance of adequate housing, affordable housing policies and adequate social-assistance rates that keep up with the cost of living."

The full report is available on the HPPH website. Additionally, residents are encouraged to explore available resources through 211 Ontario to support families living with low income.

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### DUMP TRUCK OVERTURNS

(SARAH CAIRNS PHOTO)

A towing crew from Elliott Motors was called to a construction site at Queensland Road and Lorne Avenue West in Stratford last week to assist with a dump truck that tipped over after trying to dump a half-frozen load.

## Residents question proposed zone change to allow short-term rentals at 245 Downie St.

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A proposed zoning amendment that would allow short-term rental accommodations at 245 Downie St. drew concerns from the public during a recent public meeting.

The City of Stratford hosted a public meeting during Monday's regular council meeting to hear all comments from the public about a zone-change application regarding 245 Downie St., located on the southeast corner of Downie Street and Falstaff Street.

This zone change aims to amend the site-specific central commercial zone, which permits a wide range of uses including retail stores, offices, restaurants, apartment buildings and inns with a maximum of 10 dwelling units. If approved, the amendment would allow the residential units to be used as short-term rental accommodations.

At the open public meeting, several residents in Stratford questioned the need for inn-style accommodations when Stratford is in need of long-term rental housing.

Barb Shaughnessy, a Stratford resident, noted her concerns about the lack of housing.

"Given the need for long-term housing downtown, does the city have a resolution for housing?" she asked.

Shaughnessy also questioned whether the people living in the building wanted to be classified as an inn.

Other concerns were brought up regarding the use of the space, and one resident, Danny Allen, questioned why

the city is not concerned about additional parking in the area due to significant challenges with downtown parking during theatre season.

"I am here to question why there's no thought about an increase in parking," he said. "I acknowledge parking across the building, but parking on Falstaff (street) can be quite confusing. It can be pretty tricky and dangerous to get out of there. I question why the city isn't concerned about the parking."

Another resident in Stratford, Tim Forster, said that he is concerned again about housing in Stratford and the use of the space as commercial property. He questions if current owners understand the amendment's implications, including potential fire code issues.

"The bylaw does not permit non-principal residences, nor are they permitted in multi-unit buildings. This may solve some problems but opens up other issues and concerns for owners.

"With 50-plus rooms, I question if this would fall under the hotel Fire and Safety Act, requiring additional regulations," he said. "Perhaps the units would have had to be built differently from a fire code perspective."

Jesse Auspitz, from NPG Planning Solutions, spoke to the questions and concerns, however, some questions were deferred to a later date when Auspitz said he could better answer in writing by email.

Further information regarding the change may be obtained by visiting the building and planning services department offices at 82 Erie St. or by calling 519-271-0250 during business hours.



# Competitions jeopardized for SDSS Robotics Club due to lack of funds

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

a former high-school principal at the school, recently met with the students to talk with them about their goals.

“The needs around finding financial support is tough because these are gifted men and women, and we need to try to support them where we can. So, my job as the mayor of this community is to advocate for them in the community as I would a multitude of things. I’m so proud of what they are doing,” Ritsma said.

“I’m a former student here and when I heard about your amazing success and the work of your teacher, I wanted to come here and see what the next generation, our leaders, the men and women that are going to be running amazing companies here and beyond, are doing. I’m proud of what you do and I’m proud to be mayor of Stratford, and with that comes the responsibility to see what you are doing.”

The VEX Robotics Competition is a worldwide program that designs engineering games to compete each year. For this season, the game is called Over and Under and is played in a 12-foot-by-12-foot arena. There are 28,000 teams worldwide competing, of which, at the time of writing, the SDSS club was ranked 156th overall.

“The main goal of the game is using robots, to try to get as many of these tri-balls under the opponents net and earn points,” said Declan O’Neill, a Grade 9 member of the robotics club. “The first fifteen seconds is autonomous and we write code to run it, which takes several months.”

Their robots feature sensors allowing them to maneuver around the obstacles in the arena.



(EVAN JOHNSON PHOTO)

## COMPETITIONS JEOPARDIZED

The SDSS Robotics Club poses with the robots they designed and engineered themselves.

Participating in these competitions is important for student development and missing out means missed opportunities for the future. Students from bigger schools and universities participate and they get opportunities to network with other students and sponsoring employers from organisations such as NASA and Google.

“There will be fundraising planned, but the problem is we don’t know that we qualify for worlds until after provincials, which is at the end of February,” said student advisor and teacher Andrew Bradshaw. “That gives about two months for fundraising, so that’s one of the biggest challenges.”

Though, according to Bradshaw, they would have to do something really wrong not to

qualify for worlds since their current standing is so strong.

“Going to worlds is great and anyone who wants to go, we know will have to pay a fair bit to go, but having some help get that far would be amazing,” said Nathaniel Smith, another student member of the club, while proudly showing the 150-page design and development book they maintain – a requirement for competition that is evaluated by a peer-review panel of professionals.

The Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB) is aware of the club’s impending plight and told the Times it would do what it could to support the students’ ability to compete globally.

“AMDSB is proud of the SDSS Robotics team who are doing well in competitions and may qualify for the world competition in Tex-

as,” a board spokesperson said. “Although the board does have small amounts of funding that could be used towards the initiative (as with other competitions that are beyond Huron and Perth), there may be fundraising efforts needed to enable the students to travel such a distance.

“The board itself (or board staff members) cannot undertake a GoFundMe fundraising initiative but students are not bound by these requirements. The board will be working closely with the school

and the students to enable this amazing opportunity should they qual-

ify. Anyone interested in helping support this initiative can donate through the Foundation for Education, which supports students and families in our schools.”

Those who donate through the Foundation for Education at [foundationforeducation.ca](http://foundationforeducation.ca) should include a note that the donation is directed toward the SDSS Robotics Club.

For more information, or to sponsor the team, email Bradshaw at [Andrew.bradshaw@ed.amdsb.ca](mailto:Andrew.bradshaw@ed.amdsb.ca).

## Weekend Quiz

1. Which house was Harry Potter in?
2. Where is the great barrier reef located?
3. What music artist has the most diamond certified albums?
4. At what temperature are Celsius and Fahrenheit equal?
5. What is the only type of rock that floats?
6. What does a red card mean in Soccer?
7. When was Earth Day first celebrated?
8. A shape with 5 sides is known as what?
9. The quinoa plant is native to what continent?
10. What is the deadliest disease in history?

This week’s answers are found on pg. 31

## LOCAL MATTERS.



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



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



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

### Neither do we!

Local businesses live here. They play here. They invest here. They need our support, now more than ever.



# 29th annual Soups On fundraiser for Alzheimer Society Huron Perth a huge success

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

The first winter storm of the year didn't dampen the spirits of over 1,600 soup lovers who warmed up with 22 vendors serving up some of the tastiest soups many area residents say they have ever tasted.

The true winner at the end of the day was the Alzheimer Society Huron Perth, which raised a total of \$48,000 to help

fund education and support programs for locals living with Alzheimer's disease and their loved ones.

Cathy Ritsema, executive director of the local Alzheimer Society, was more than excited with how the day went. Hungry soup lovers who showed up in droves despite the stormy winter weather, and hundreds of volunteers helped make the day a huge success.

Some of the soup flavours this year included: Garfield's lasagna soup, the

angry leprechaun, hug in a bowl beef barley, maple roasted butternut- squash with bacon, potato leek, corn chowder, roasted tomato creamy cauliflower, black bean salsa, blueberry blizzard, ham hock gumbo, West African peanut, sweet potato blue cheese, coconut curry, potato bacon, fire-roasted red pepper, split pea and ham and roast carrot ginger with maple ricotta.

At the end of the day, the much sought-after People's Choice Award went

to perennial winners Soup Surreal for their corn chowder.

Hyde Construction was again the presenting sponsor and Ritsema was thankful to all participating sponsors and those who donated to and bid on items at the silent auction.

If you were unable to attend and would like to support the local Alzheimer society, call 519-271-1910 in Stratford or 519-482-1482 in Clinton, or email cathyr@alzhp.ca.



Pictured from left, emcee Eddie Matthews congratulated three soup chefs from Soup Surreal while Alzheimer Society Huron Perth executive director Cathy Ritsema presented them with their People's Choice Award.



The Stratford District Secondary School Jazz Combo kept soup lovers entertained before Strings and Traps took over with their upbeat music to also entertain later during the event.



(GARY WEST PHOTOS)

Stratford Mayor Martin Ritsma congratulates Ed Illman of Stratford who won \$1,767.50 after buying the winning ticket in the 50/50 draw. His daughter, Carrie Wilson, was last year's 50/50 winner.



(EDDIE MATTHEWS PHOTO)

The culinary team from The Bruce Hotel served up a ham-hock gumbo during the 29th annual Soups On fundraiser for Alzheimer Society Huron Perth Jan. 13.



(EDDIE MATTHEWS PHOTO)

The Stratford Country Club also competed in the annual Soups On fundraiser Jan. 13.



# Small businesses in Stratford can't catch a break

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

This year's proposed tax-hike, now sitting at 8.5 per cent but was recently as high as nearly 12.5 per cent, is not good news for local businesses, representatives from the Stratford and District Chamber of Commerce told Stratford councillors at a recent city budget meeting.

Urging councillors to revisit the budget deliberation process with a focus on slimming down the budget where feasible, Travis Blum, advocacy chair with the Stratford and District Chamber of Commerce, and Eddie Matthews, chamber general manager, spoke last week on behalf of businesses across Stratford regarding the seemingly oversized tax burden.

Blum noted that nine restaurants have closed in the last six months of 2023, and several other Stratford businesses have closed their doors because of rising costs and inflation.

"The financial scars of COVID-19 are,

in fact, still fresh," said Blum. "According to Stats Canada, 56.9 per cent of small businesses expect rising inflation to be a significant obstacle over just the next 90 days."

With the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) coming due and over 70 per cent of businesses unable to pay back these loans, Stratford may see more businesses shut down in the near future.

"Seven out of 10 businesses nationally still have not repaid their CEBA loan. And almost 35 per cent of those businesses are unsure if they cannot repay their loan by the deadline," Blum said.

He spoke to councillors during the latest budget meeting of Stratford's finance and labour relations committee Jan. 15 to request the city take a hard look at what the impact of rising taxes will do to small businesses and how this will ultimately affect Stratford as a whole.

"Small businesses are the backbone of Stratford's vibrant community," said Blum. "They not only contribute to our local economy but also add to the unique

character and appeal of our city. Drastic year-over-year tax increases will discourage new investments and strain existing businesses, potentially leading to closures and a loss of the diverse services these enterprises provide to our residents and visitors."

Blum, as a financial-services business owner, understands the complexities of what the city is currently undergoing but notes this is still not going to help build the economy.

"The chamber recognizes that during these extremely uncertain and difficult economic times, the complexities of the situation we have as a community in front of us do not come with an easy solution. In fact, in 2024, when a one per-cent change in spending represents roughly \$730,000, it is clear that difficult choices are on the path ahead of us."

Blum underscored his respect for councillors for the work they've done with the proposed 2024 budget so far.

"We believe that every single one of you got into public service to impact

your community positively. For anyone to claim otherwise, I think, is an unreasonable assessment of your character and the situation at hand."

He also said the chamber of commerce is apprehensive about the feasibility of the city's 10-year capital forecast, particularly concerning the scheduled payments to the reserves.

Blum ultimately requested that the city take a hard look at spending this year and how it will affect everyone, including the small businesses that struggle the most.

"[The chamber of commerce] strongly encourages the city to continue to examine closely the strategic allocation of our existing resources to bolster the financial support for existing taxpayers, local businesses and the infrastructural framework necessary for conducting and attracting business to Stratford.

"Council's commitment to transparency will be pivotal in effectively communicating these developments to citizens and business owners alike."

## The Carbon Tax is disproportionately affecting farmers and those living in rural Ontario, says Nater

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Government of Canada introduced a price on carbon pollution across Canada in 2019 as a way to combat climate change, but farmers across Perth County say this tax is not only hurting their pocketbooks but is also forcing prices on food and goods to rise in an already trying time.

John Nater, Perth-Wellington MP, spoke at the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario (CFFO) annual general meeting at The Arden Park Hotel on Monday to discuss how he believes the carbon tax disproportionately affects rural areas in Ontario and how the opposing government is fighting back with Bill C234: An Act to amend the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Pricing Act.

"I'm opposed to the carbon tax across the board," said Nater, "especially as it relates to agriculture and the agri-food system. What I fear the government doesn't entirely recognize is the real impact of the carbon tax on the food supply chain.

"Transportation costs are not exempted, commercial grain farming is not exempted, processing isn't exempted, small businesses aren't exempted."

Pricing the carbon pollution is meant to incentivize citizens to decrease their carbon output, but Nater notes this is not actually solving the problem and, in turn, causing more harm than good.

"Each point along the food supply chain is paying the carbon tax. So, when we're looking at the cost of food specifically, every step in getting food to consumers encounters the carbon tax, making everything more expensive."

"[The carbon tax] doesn't achieve what it sets out to do and instead adds cost to everyone."

Farmers pay a carbon price on essential



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

### CUT THE CARBON TAX

John Nater, MP Perth Wellington, speaks to Christian Farmer's Federation of Ontario members during their Annual General Meeting.

farming activities such as irrigation, grain drying, feed preparation, barns heating or cooling and other agricultural growing structures.

Bill C234 would provide an exemption, limited to on-farm fuel use for these necessary farm practices, allowing farmers to invest their money in the efficiency of their operations, keep money in their pockets, and help lower the cost of goods for consumers.

During a question-and-answer period, CFFO member and local dairy farmer Gerald Pol asked Nater why the carbon tax was implemented in the first place, to which Nater expressed that he believes the

intention was there, but it's just not working to effectively reduce carbon emissions.

"The intention was to move Canadians away from fossil-fuel usage," said Nater, "From an economic standpoint, you increase the cost of fossil fuels, and the idea is to drive people away from using those fossil fuels. What the government fails to recognize is that there are no alternatives. It's just a tax. It just drives up

the cost of everything."

Ben Lobb, Conservative MP, Huron-Bruce, initially introduced the private member's bill to support farmers and those living in rural communities; he says it was important to bring forward the amendment to help keep money in Ontarian's pockets.

"There are challenges, but there are also opportunities," said Nater. "We live in one of the greatest countries on earth and we live specifically here in Perth County. Perth-Wellington has the largest number of dairy farmers anywhere in the country, the largest number of chicken farmers anywhere in the country, the top two or three for egg producers, and the top four or five for beef and pork. And we have the most fertile farmland in Ontario.

"There will always be challenges. We'll have to address those challenges, but we still live in a pretty darn good place."

Nater said that Bill C234 may take time to pass and different outcomes could occur, however he is hopeful the Canadian Government will rule in favour of the amendment.

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Donna L. Hinz

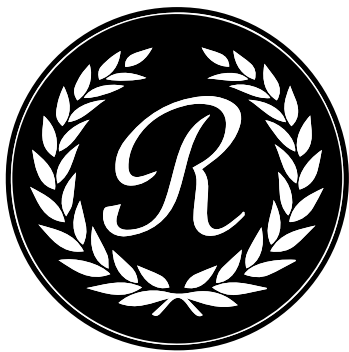


**Franklin E. Hinz**

196 Ontario Street  
Stratford, Ontario N5A 3H4

519-273-1633 franklinehinz.com





## AQUAMATION (what is it?)

Information to empower and educate people should be the first goal of funeral service to the public and the funeral home should be an advocate for it. – Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services

There is a lot of conjecture out there with folks who think they know what AQUAMATION is and questions from those who do not. It's not a secret with people who know me and my zeal for giving information, that I love questions! I have posted information about this environmentally clean and non-damaging process before, but I would like to put it into terms that are perhaps more easily understood.

The result of having an aquamation done is the same as the result of having a cremation done. Aquamation utilizes water. Cremation utilizes fire. From both, there are human remains that may be buried, kept or scattered. It is just the process that is different. The process of aquamation is a gentler process that does not burn fossil fuels, is non-toxic and there is no emission of greenhouse gases or mercury. It has been around quite some time.

Aquamation mimics what would happen if a human body is buried in the soil without a casket. The soil beneath our feet contains alkali, and alkali combined with water – breaks down organic matter. And, of course, a human being is organic!

A body, rather than being placed in a “retort” for cremation, is instead placed in a kind of stainless steel “sensory deprivation tank” similar to a tank people spend a lot of money to float, relax and listen to music in. The tank contains predominantly water and alkali. The water is then warmed with a gentle flowing motion and after the process is complete, what is left is exactly the same thing that is left after a cremation is complete – our bones. The bones from a cremation or an aquamation are then broken down further into the remains that are returned to the family for burial or scattering.

After a cremation is complete, the remains are like coarse sand. Beige because the body has been in fire. After an aquamation, the remains are like talcum powder and white. In addition, because aquamation is a gentler process, there are perhaps 15% to 20% more remains than there would be through a cremation.

Like a cremation, the remains may be placed in an urn if desired, or an heirloom, or personally meaningful container from home. It is not a necessity to purchase an urn unless desired, as it is perfectly acceptable to bury remains in a cemetery in the container in which they come. Urns are options, not necessities.

We have been offering aquamation in this region for some time now. It is a safe and clean option to consider and should be available to those who wish to exit this world in a manner that doesn't leave it worse for wear.

If you have the slightest question or would like to continue the conversation, please contact Stuart at Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services. 804 Ontario Street, Stratford. / 519-271-5062 / rutherford@jarfh.com / www.jarfh.com. We provide personalized house-call service across the region.

# Rutherford

## Cremation & Funeral Services

804 Ontario St., Stratford  
rutherford@jarfh.com | 519-271-5062

## Bradshaw Collective co-working space to open in March



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

### NEW CO-WORKING SPACE

**Bradshaw Collective will be a space for entrepreneurs, students, and business-minded people to collaborate and work outside of the distractions of working from home.**

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

*Local Journalism Initiative Reporter*

A much-needed co-working space is coming to Stratford in March and owner Jonny Kirwin is eager to get the space open for entrepreneurs and those in the corporate world who want a professional space to work from.

Kirwin, also the business owner of Breh & Wyn, a coffee and wine bar located below the new space at 245 Downie Street, has been in the hospitality industry for over 25 years and says as an entrepreneur, he understands the need for co-working space at an affordable rate.

“You know, I get it. I understand that entrepreneurs sometimes have it tough. I want to help them succeed by offering a beautiful, collective space where they can work and collaborate with others but also do it at a fair price.”

Bradshaw Collective provides co-working opportunities for businesses of all sizes. Their mission is to redefine the traditional work environment by offering a collective space with a flexible and inspiring work environment where like-minded individuals can not only have a work-away-from-home space to focus but also a space to collaborate with other creatives and business-minded individuals.

“Sometimes people just need a space to network,” said Kirwin. “Students, entrepreneurs, business owners; it's nice to have a space to network with others and bounce ideas off each other. It's also a way to connect to individuals you could work with on projects.”

The location will offer individual desks

around the perimeter of the space and a boardroom that can be rented out for a fee. The space is aimed toward those looking for an upscale and classy work environment yet still want to be mindful of their spending.

A highlight of Bradshaw Collective is the fact that members can have their own desk. These spaces will be rented out monthly and can be customized and decorated to suit that person's needs.

Noting that the corporate world has changed dramatically post-COVID-19, Kirwin says that many companies have chosen to continue to work from home, however the distractions of being at home can be hard to manage.

“Working from home is great, but sometimes kids, dishes, laundry and pets are a distraction. At Bradshaw Collective, those distractions aren't there. This is a space where you can come, get work done, and then go home to enjoy and relax.”

Bradshaw Collective plans to redefine the work-from-home environment by offering flexible membership plans and varied prices aimed at helping corporate workers and entrepreneurs who may not have lofty budgets for working outside of the home.

“We offer several different membership plans, varied pricing structures and additional services such as corporate packages, drop-in rates and half-day rentals for the board room.”

Bradshaw Collective is currently under renovation, but Kirwin plans to be open for business on March 1. For more information or to learn about pricing, please visit [www.bradshawcollective.com](http://www.bradshawcollective.com)





# Local Flavour

## RESTAURANT GUIDE

Advertise your restaurant specials here!  
Call 519-655-2341 or e-mail us at  
stratfordtimes@gmail.com

## The "Hungry Fat Guy" - Stratford's favourite food critic

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

What started as a way to share his love of food has quickly turned into an online Facebook page where community members and visitors check out reviews and pictures before stopping at a local restaurant.

The Hungry Fat Guy, as he's locally known, has not revealed his identity and goes by this name because he wants to be treated like everyone else who enters the restaurant.

"If people knew who I was, they would try and act differently. I like just walking in, eating with everyone else and seeing how the staff and everyone else operates," he said.

Noting that small businesses, specifically restaurants in Stratford and St. Marys, seem to struggle due to the financial hardships of the post-pandemic economy, The Hungry Fat Guy said he wants to do his part to support local businesses by highlighting all there is to offer in his town.

"I love to eat, so I figured I could highlight this for others. I



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

### MYSTERIOUS

He won't reveal his identity, but the internet is loving Stratford and St. Marys newest food critic, The Hungry Fat Guy.

like to try restaurants that offer good value for what you get, and people seem to like this.

"I love putting a smile on people's faces, posting about food that makes people happy and helping local businesses. It's a win-win."

Not only does the Hungry Fat Guy post about local businesses on his Facebook page, but he also retains followers by offering fun and witty surveys, such as the "Great Pizza Debate," where followers can vote on their favourite pizza in town and banter over the topic in the chat section.

Another aspect of the Hungry Fat Guy's Facebook page is the simple yet delicious recipes he posts for all to try.

"I like to put a few videos of me cooking too, simple things that are easy."

Recently posting about his deep-dish pizza, followers loved watching the process and made the recipes themselves.

Some videos are going viral. The Hungry Fat Guy says a few of his more popular videos have over 3,000 views, which he says is amazing because it's helping those local restaurants gain trac-

tion and possibly get more visitors.

Although this pseudonym is new, the Hungry Fat Guy says he has been known to play little tricks in town for years and gets a kick out of making people smile.

When asked where he gets his charm, he notes his parents are great people who taught him to be kind and always help others.

"My parents are awesome. They're always out helping others and volunteering in the community. They're never home."

He also notes that he grew up helping others and it's been part of his character his whole life.

"When I was a teenager, I started mowing my neighbour's lawn because it was just getting too much for him. He was 105 years old. I did it every other week because he still wanted to do it, but when he turned 107, he let me take care of it every week, and I loved helping him."

To follow along and check out what restaurants The Hungry Fat Guy has been trying, search for him on Facebook at "The Hungry Fat Guy" where he posts all his local restaurant reviews

## Lending a helping paw: Therapeutic Paws of Canada providing happiness boost through volunteer program

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Making a difference in someone's life can mean bringing a therapy dog or cat for a visit.

Founded in 2002, Therapeutic Paws of Canada provides free pet therapy visits to seniors, children and youth. According to the organization's website, there are more than 500 volunteers across Canada who collectively spend more than 10,000 hours a year giving their time to the programs.

Juli Balinsky, chair of Therapeutic Paws of Canada, said the dogs and cats provide stress relief and mood boosting for anyone going through a difficult time, such as a student facing exams or a senior facing loneliness in their residence.

"When they're going through these difficult times, to have the animals come in, it gives them a few minutes of respite," Balinsky said. "A few minutes of comfort, a few minutes of one-on-one connection because as much as they connect with the animal, they're connecting with the handler as well."

The National organization is entirely volunteer-run by people passionate about the cause.

There are team leaders spread across the country. Currently, there are no team leaders or volunteers in Stratford, but anyone looking to get involved can reach out to Therapeutic Paws of Canada.

After speaking with someone from the organization, the prospective volunteer and their pet would be evaluated and go through a series of monitored visits from someone in the area, usually a team leader, to demonstrate they understand the requirements. The prospect would also need to provide a list of references and a police check.

"Once we've gone through all those things, then they can start visiting on their own on behalf of the organization," Balinsky said.

Balinsky does not have a therapy dog with Therapeutic Paws of Canada anymore, but reflected on times when she made an impact with the dog she'd bring in to a nursing home. For example, when she was coming up on the fifth year of therapy dog visits at a nursing home, a non-verbal resident's first

word in years was her dog's name.

"He called out and he said, 'Lacey,' and his daughter looked at him and said, 'Lacey?' and he said, 'Lacey,' and that was my dog's name," she said.

There was another resident who said he didn't like animals and would be in a grumpy mood. Balinsky said she avoided him when she brought Lacey in, but they kept bumping into each other.

"It got to the point where we realized we were bumping into him in every hallway, because he was actually following us," she said. "The longer we visited at this facility, the closer he got until eventually we won him over."

Balinsky first became involved with Therapeutic Paws of Canada when she was seeking comfort from her dog after a rough day at work.

"I was petting the dog and my husband said to me, 'Wouldn't it be great if we

could share with everybody else what she gives to us?' " she said. "You don't realize it at the time. You're just petting your dog. You're home, you're sitting on your couch, you're deflated. You're petting your dog. In your mind, that's all you've done, but you're not realizing the benefits you're reaping from that interaction with your dog or your cat."

For more information, including how to get involved, visit [tpoc.ca](http://tpoc.ca) or call 613-632-6502.



### The Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans in Canada (ANAVETS)

Inviting all eligible Canadian Forces Personnel, Ex-Service Members, their respective spouses, widows, and dependents seeking assistance for programs and services offered by Veterans Affairs Canada to meet with our Service Officer the last Saturday of every month between 10:00am and 1:00pm (by appointment only).

All interested parties are asked to contact President Stephen Cooper at 519-271-3113 to book a date for a consultation.

151 Lorne Avenue, East Stratford, Ontario N5A 6S4



# Nominate your favourite business for the Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Nominations are now open for the 28th annual Stratford and District Chamber of Commerce Business Excellence Awards set to take place at the Best Western Plus Arden Park Hotel on May 2.

The event aims to celebrate those within the local business community and recognize excellence in business. Chamber of commerce general manager Eddie Matthews said the event specifically showcases businesses that commit to the community and show exemplary service in the region.

"It's a night for businesses in the community to get out and celebrate each other and be recognized for their hard work," he said.

Matthews also said this year is extra special as it's the second year since the pandemic that businesses can celebrate together without barriers.

"With what small businesses have been going through in the past four years and

are still coming out of, it just makes us really want to highlight what small businesses mean to Stratford and the whole community."

The chamber of commerce is proud to host the annual Business Excellence Awards, honouring outstanding achievements and commitments in the business community. The chamber's awards committee is currently looking for entrepreneurs, businesses and organizations that have demonstrated a dedication to their product or service and an ongoing commitment to their employees and the community at large.

Community members can nominate their favourite businesses in several categories that outline the work that businesses do throughout the community.

"The Business Excellence Awards are unique because someone actually has to come to our website and say that the company did such great work and take the time to nominate them," said Matthews. "It just shows how much the community appreciates the business community here



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

## AND THE WINNER IS...

Visit the Chamber of Commerce Website to nominate your favorite local business

in our area."

This year's ceremony will honour businesses across nine categories including retail, hospitality, emerging business, enterprise, professional, service, non-profit/charitable, skilled trades and trailblazing.

The Business Leader Award and Business of the Year Award will be selected by the Chamber of Commerce board.

Anyone can participate and nominate a business or community organization that has been operating for more than one year.

When nominating a business, they must be located within the geographical

boundaries of the Stratford and District Chamber of Commerce, which includes the City of Stratford, the Town of St. Marys, Perth East and Perth South, and the Municipality of West Perth.

The completed nomination form must be received by the Chamber office no later than Jan. 30. Tickets for the Business Excellence Award ceremony will go on sale to the public in March 2024.

For more information, to nominate a business or to purchase tickets, please visit the chamber website, at [www.stratfordchamber.com](http://www.stratfordchamber.com).

## Reboot Repair receives lots of support since opening

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

New IT solutions business Reboot Repair is ready to help anyone with their computer repair, upgrade, and networking-solutions needs.

Reboot Repair at 155 Erie Street came about after longtime computer store, CompuDoc, closed down. Dylan McCarthy, retail and business services manager, opened the store with business partner, service manager and system builder Cameron Russell. McCarthy said the first month of business has been positive with lots of familiar faces coming into the store.

"Everybody is really supportive and the business community especially," he said. "We have a lot of customers that used to be our customers at CompuDoc, and they came here checking out this place."

Reboot Repair also gets new inventory in every day. The business offers computer sales and services, custom-made gaming devices and pre-built systems, and hard-

ware and software repair. Reboot Repair also works with both Mac and PC computers, and Apple and Android devices, and offers customized IT plans for businesses.

"I have a couple of business clients in offices that I take care of, so we're big on business, services, and computer sales and services," McCarthy said.

Reboot Repair works with the customer to make sure they understand the issue and solution, especially if they're not familiar with the technology.

"Stratford; I feel like it's more of a retirement town, so there's a lot of people here who use computers who may need a little bit more help than others," McCarthy said. "We're really big on customer service and support so what we do is, if somebody needs a computer solution or they need a repair on the computer, we do the repair but we also make sure to sit down with the customer and make sure they're fully aware what's happening with their device."

Visit [rebootrepair.net](http://rebootrepair.net) for more information.

Perth County  
Cultivating Opportunity

WE WANT TO  
HEAR FROM YOU!

Perth County's draft New Official Plan determines how land will be used in Perth County, including: agriculture, settlement area growth, housing, employment and natural environment conservation.

The draft New Official Plan applies to all lands within the corporation limits of the County of Perth.

There will be four Public Open Houses.  
Drop in 4:30 - 8:30pm. Presentation at 5:30pm.

WEST PERTH\*

Wed. February 7, 2024

West Perth Council Chambers  
160 Wellington St., Mitchell

\*Register to attend virtually:  
[newofficialplan@perthcounty.ca](mailto:newofficialplan@perthcounty.ca)

NORTH PERTH

Thurs. February 8, 2024

Steve Kerr Memorial Complex  
Community Room

965 Binning St. West, Listowel

PERTH SOUTH

Mon. February 12, 2024

Downie Optimist Hall  
3185 County Road 122, St. Pauls

PERTH EAST

Thurs. February 15, 2024

Perth East Recreation Complex  
40 Temperance St., Milverton

For more information, including appeal rights, contact  
Perth County Planning and Development.

[perthcounty.ca/NewOP](http://perthcounty.ca/NewOP)

1 Huron Street, Stratford

519-271-0531 x449

[newofficialplan@perthcounty.ca](mailto:newofficialplan@perthcounty.ca)



# Our Buildings Tell a Story

## The Worth Block 42 Wellington

The Worth Block was the creation of Charles L. Worth in 1889-1890 when he was in his mid-30s. He was the son of William Worth, who had been a hotelkeeper at the same address from 1868 to 1884. Stretching from 38 to 46 Wellington St., the block was designed to provide retail outlets on its street level, while its upper two storeys were for offices, living quarters and meeting halls. Among the first occupants were brokers W. G. Mowat and Alex Dow. There were others who sold liquor, cheese and music supplies.

In 1897, when Stratford's first city hall was destroyed by fire, the mayor and his councillors moved their mu-



(DEAN ROBINSON PHOTO)

nicipal headquarters to rooms in the Worth Block. The Stratford branch of the Royal Canadian Legion was born in the same building. At some point, the Worths filled their third floor with a ballroom. Beginning in 1929, and for much of the next four decades, that ballroom – 44 stairs up from the street – was the city's best-known dance spot.

It began as The Classic Gardens. About a decade later it became The Royal Ballroom, then The Blue Room (1939-1951), The Melody Mill (1952-1954), The Blacksmith Shop (1955-1957), The Festive Lounge (1957-1959), the German-Canadian Teutonia Club (1959-1965) and Club 42 (1965 to March 1969). At least once during The Blue Room years, and a few times in the days of Club 42, there was roller skating on the ballroom's hardwood. At other times, there were dozens of bingo nights and euchre parties. There were political



(STRATFORD-PERTH ARCHIVES PHOTOS)

### DANCE THE NIGHT AWAY

Ballrooms in The Blue Room, New Years Eve 1949.

rallies and receptions and an art gallery. In the first two years of the Stratford Festival, founder Tom Patterson used the big room to welcome dignitaries and members of the media prior to his theatre's opening-night performances.

In 1952, after the death of Charles Worth and his wife, the Worth Block was sold to Herbert Wellington Gregory who owned and operated the Rexall Drug store at 46

Wellington St. He sold the building in 1972 and in the years since, its ownership has changed a few times.

Read more about Stratford's built history at [www.streetsofstratford.ca](http://www.streetsofstratford.ca).

Contributors: Paul Wilker and Gord Conroy

The **BLUE ROOM**  
Wellington Street and proudly presents the  
**OPENS TOMORROW**  
**MUSIC**  
of **JOHNNY DOWNS**  
And His Sophisticated Swingers  
Regular Dance Nights  
Friday & Saturday  
The Blue Room is open for Special Engagements. Apply Stan. Bannister, 88 Douro St. Phone 15754.  
35c Per Person (Four tax)  
Dancing 9 to 12:30  
Saturdays until midnight  
Opens Tomorrow

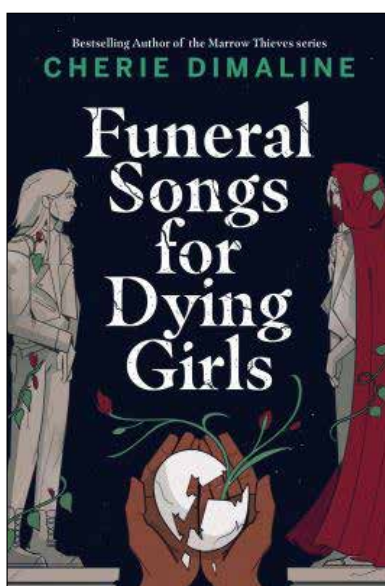
## Book of the Month

*Funeral Songs for Dying Girls*, by Cherie Dimaline

@SPL: YA FIC Dimal

*Funeral Songs for Dying Girls* is one of acclaimed Métis author Cherie Dimaline's most recent teen novels. Readers of the multi-award-winning *The Marrow Thieves* will be reacquainted with Dimaline's rich storytelling style, but set in present-day Toronto with a hint of supernatural.

16-year-old Winifred Blight lives in a cemetery with her emotionally-distant, crematorium operator dad, and the interred ashes of her deceased mom. After humiliating herself and probably ruining her friendship with best friend and crush, Jack, Win finds out that the cemetery may have to outsource her dad's job to cut costs. This would mean leaving the only home she's ever known. Unfounded rumours of Winterson Cemetery being haunted attract a local ghost tour company, which could drum up business and allow the Blights to stay. Meanwhile, Win starts receiving visits from a real ghost named Phil, a teen girl who died in the cemetery's ravine in the 1990s. Win is torn between



saving the home she feels tied to, and exploiting her blossoming love.

Vividly descriptive, this novel transports the reader to muggy summer nights abuzz with insects and attics full of dusty curios. While there are a few spine-tingling moments, some readers may find the pace a bit slow. Others will bask in the setting and small cast of quirky characters. Raw and authentic, this book does have some sex and swearing...and the odd breakfast of near-expired kimchi and Timbits! Dimaline gently weaves in difficult topics such as Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, sexual harassment, substance abuse, loss, and grief, while keeping the story ultimately one of healing. Written for teens, this book is sure to also appeal to adults who enjoy coming-of-age and atmospheric ghost stories alike.

*Funeral Songs for Dying Girls* is available from SPL as a print and e-book.

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# Breaking Gender Barriers in moto-cross

GARY WEST

*Times Correspondent*

A Perth County teen is pushing the boundaries of what girls can do in a sport once dominated by boys.

Ainsley Berendsen, 14, is taking on boys her age in the sport of moto-cross racing. In a recent interview, the young racer from Fullarton Township, said she only started racing in competition this past year, but has been a dirt biker for longer than she can remember.

She currently races with an 85 cc-2 stroke engine on the bike that has secured her many wins in just her first year on the circuit, and she'll be running on a 125 cc- 2 stroke bike in 2024.

She smiles when she says most of her competition is male, with an estimated 90 per cent of those she races against being boys her age.

Berendsen mostly races with the Thames Valley Riders, a non-profit organization with race venues at the Walton Raceway, Gopher Dunes in Norfolk County, Grilly-Mor in the Glencoe area, Swiona track in Alvinston, and Auburn Hills in Huron County.

Racers compete in different age categories ranging from five to 72, and in two distinct seasons: spring (April to July) and summer/fall (August to October).



**OFF TO THE RACES**

(GARY WESTPHOTO)

Ainsley Berendsen is shown in her father's shop on their farm west of St. Pauls in Perth South. She is getting ready with her moto-cross bike that she will race this year in hopes of bringing home more trophies.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 16

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# St Joseph's Catholic Church "Stepping Up" with gala to restore iconic front steps

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

St Joseph's Catholic Church is hosting its first gala since the pandemic to help raise funds to restore the front steps of the beautiful 157-year-old church.

St. Joseph's Catholic Church hopes to raise funds to help meet its \$1-million campaign goal, which is the total cost of fixing the front steps. Not only is the gala expected to help kickstart the funding process, but Pastor David Butler says it's also going to be a way for the community to celebrate and come together.

"We're excited to bring the community together. The support we get from Stratford and St. Joseph's has always been really good," he said. "We have a wonderful parish community that is not just for the Catholic community but all of Stratford. The church is a pillar build-

ing within our community. It's beautiful and we want to restore the steps for all to enjoy."

Butler says the steps are not only a way for community members to access the church from the main street, but they also offer a beautiful aesthetic for those seeking wedding or baptism pictures and even tourists who regularly stop to take pictures outside of the building.

"The steps make St Joe's look welcoming, which connects the community. I'll see people in front of St. Joe's just looking at the building and taking pictures in front of the statue. It's just a beautiful building and the steps are part of that."

The church underwent renovations in 2017, at which time both the interior and exterior of the building were updated. After that work was completed however, Butler noted that the steps were starting to degrade and needed attention.

"We patched and patched but we re-

alized the steps needed to be done. St. Joseph's is a welcoming church, and we want to keep it alive for generations to come, which means we need to fix the steps and make it accessible from the street," Butler said.

Stepping Up for St. Joseph's Church Silent and Live Auction Gala will take place Feb. 3 from 5-10 p.m. at the Arden Park Hotel (552 Ontario Street).

A limited number of tickets are available online and in the Parish Office. The cost is \$150 per ticket and includes a 3-course meal and a \$100 charitable tax receipt. For tickets and more information, visit <https://www.trellis.org/stepping-up-for-st-joes>.



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

## ONE STEP AT A TIME

The Pillar church needs to update its iconic front steps and is hosting a gala to kickstart the fundraising.

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## Fourth-placed Warriors still searching for consistency

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

Even as they remain in a position to have home-ice advantage in the first round of the playoffs, the Stratford Hunter Steel Warriors find themselves continuing to struggle to build consistency after winning two of their last four games.

Head coach Dave Williams said that the team's need for consistency encompasses their play from game to game and period to period.

"Our recent matchups against Ayr and Listowel highlighted the need for our team to stay sharp throughout the full 60

minutes," Williams told the Times. "In a league where every team is so closely matched, a rough period or a string of penalties can flip the game. Our conference boasts some seriously talented teams and players and they're sure to capitalize on opportunities, just like we are."

The bench boss added that solving the consistency issue was paramount as the entire league gears up for the post-season.

"The trick is navigating those tough moments and bouncing back with some strong plays of our own. In this competitive conference, being able to weather the storm is key. As we approach the playoffs, the emphasis remains on refining the consistency of our performance. Since day one, as a group, we've prioritized this aspect and addressed it on a weekly basis. To achieve success, we must remain committed to playing a hardworking, competitive style of game."

The Warriors found a big victory back on Jan. 14 when they walked into the Waterloo Memorial Recreation Centre and defeated the K-W Siskins 5-2. Cole

Lewis netted a hat-trick and Matt Perdue held down the fort in net, stopping 41 of 43 Kitchener-Waterloo shots in the Warriors' victory. Carson Harmer continued his excellent play, putting up three assists in the game.

Several days off proved not to benefit the Warriors when they travelled to Ayr Jan. 18 and lost to the Centennials 5-3. Ayr came out firing on all cylinders, caving Stratford in by outshooting the visitors 22-7 in the opening period. Bryce Grandbois scored his first goal as a Warrior and Perdue made 42 saves in the loss. Jordan Charron tallied three goals for the Centennials.

One day later, back on home ice, the Warriors stormed back against the struggling Caledon Bombers with Stratford picking up a 10-1 victory. This time, it was Harmer who scored a trio of goals while Grandbois, Joey Brehmer and Michael Denney each netted a pair. Casey Bridgewater had four assists and Camden Daigle had a goal and two helpers.

Rounding out their three games in four days, the Warriors hit the road to visit the Listowel Cyclones and, much like in their trip to Ayr, things got derailed by one incredibly poor period. This time, it was the third frame which saw the Cyclones erase a 3-1 Stratford lead with fivethird-period goals

en route to a 6-4 Listowel win. Harmer scored his 22nd of the year in the defeat which gave the young forward points in nine of his last 10 games, five of which were three-point nights for Harmer.

Other point streaks that were continued against Listowel included Bridgewater and Rhyse Brown, both of whom have points in four straight, as well as Drew Agnew who is on a five-game point streak.

Williams summarized the team's recent four-game set, after which the Warriors sit fourth in the Midwestern Conference, four points up on the Centennials and two points behind the Siskins.

"In our recent four-game stretch, we've been pleased with our overall performance. There are numerous positives we want to reinforce within the group. In the game in Waterloo, we played a very complete game from start to finish. Then in Ayr, the slow start had us chasing the game from the get-go against a team that is playing really good hockey.

"Against Caledon, our specialty teams excelled, leading to some nice goals," continued Williams as he contrasted the team's up and down performances recently. "Unfortunately, on Sunday, we let the game slip away in the third period after working hard to take a 3-1 lead into the third. The key takeaway for the group is clear - in our conference, you must compete for a full 60 minutes to give yourself the best opportunity to win hockey games."

STRATFORD WARRIORS 2023-24 Player Statistics (through January 22, 2024)						
PLAYER	POS	GP	G	A	PTS	
Carson Harmer	F	35	22	25	47	
Michael Denney	F	37	27	14	41	
Camden Daigle	F	37	15	26	41	
Braydon Stumpf	F	37	8	33	41	
Cole Lewis	F	37	17	21	38	
Joey Brehmer	F	37	12	15	27	
Casey Bridgewater	D	30	6	19	25	
Jaxon Broda	D	30	7	16	23	
Drew Agnew	F	35	7	14	21	
Haden Frayne	D	32	2	15	17	
Jacob Wiseman	D	28	3	7	10	
Rhyse Brown	F	25	3	6	9	
Dylan Dundas	F	26	4	4	8	
Kaeden Burger	D	26	1	6	7	
Liam Gorman	F	31	3	2	5	
Zach Bell	F	29	3	2	5	
Wyatt Adkins	D	16	0	5	5	
Tristian Huinink	F	18	3	1	4	
Bryce Grandbois	F	5	3	1	4	
Evan Hjelholt	D	29	0	4	4	
Owen England	D	29	1	2	3	
Zachary Schooley	F	30	1	2	3	
Cole Brooks	D	24	1	2	3	
Stuart Sinclair	F	9	1	1	2	
Keaton Bartlett	D	10	0	1	1	
Ben Graham	F	9	0	1	1	
Gianmarco Caringi	F	3	0	1	1	
Trenten Bennett	G	9	0	1	1	
PLAYER	RECORD	GAA	SV%			
Trenten Bennett	5-0-2-0	2.56	.901			
Matthew Perdue	14-12-1-0	3.24	.908			
Carter McDougall	6-4-0-0	2.59	.899			

### STRATFORD Hunter Steel WARRIORS

## UPCOMING GAMES

Saturday, January 27 - 7:30pm  
vs Kitchener-Waterloo - Allman Arena

Sunday, January 28 - 7:00pm  
at Elmira - Dan Snyder Memorial Arena

Friday, February 2 - 7:30pm  
vs Sarnia - Allman Arena

Saturday, February 3 - 7:30pm  
at Caledonia - Haldimand County Caledonia Centre

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## Breaking Gender Barriers in moto-cross

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

Points are tallied for each race with the total added at the end of the year for individual placing. Berendsen says all competitors have a transponder attached to their bikes and race by their lap time on a circular track that has jumps and moguls. She says the rutted track is very difficult to navigate, especially on turns, and sometimes competitors have to race on muddy tracks in rainy weather.

Those days, Berendsen said,

tests her skill.

Berendsen works as a welder part time to help pay for her entry fees at a neighbour's welding shop and has ever since she was a 12-year-old. She also plays competitive hockey for St. Michael Catholic Secondary School in Stratford and, over Christmas, played four games in Europe. After flying into Frankfurt, Germany, the team visited Nuremberg, Prague, Vienna and Salzburg Austria.

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# Explosive third period lifts Fighting Irish by Killer Bees

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

It may not have been the most explosive third period just looking at the shots on goal, but with fights, late-game drama and six goals on 18 shots between both teams, the Stratford Bentley's Fighting Irish's visit to the Alvinston Killer Bees Jan. 19 didn't drop off after the second intermission.

The icebreaker came at the 5:21 mark of the first when Brody Smith got the Fighting Irish on the board. Just 30 seconds later, Rylan Bowers came back for Alvinston and tied the game at one apiece. Before the first frame was done,

however, Ray Robbins potted a go-ahead goal for Stratford.

After the Killer Bees held a narrow 22-19 lead in shots in the first 20 minutes, the Fighting Irish stormed back to life in the second, peppering Alvinston with a 29-14 shot clock advantage. Despite this, the only goal of the period was recorded by Ethan Lamoureux to tie the game for the Killer Bees five-and-



half minutes into the period.

At almost the exact same mark in the third period, Dylan Buckholz found the scoresheet to put the Fighting Irish back up by one. Graham Brulotte then chipped in a goal a mere two minutes and 26 seconds later to make it 4-2 Stratford.

The Killer Bees came back with a goal from James McEwan with just under seven minutes left in regulation. Stratford responded by scoring twice in the

final three minutes, including goals from Cameron Stokes and Ryan O'Bonsawin. Bayly Fryfogle cut the Fighting Irish's lead to two in the final minute but that was as close as Alvinston came with Zack Weir hanging on in goal for a 6-4 win.

Going into this week's schedule, the Fighting Irish sat tied for fourth place in the WOSHL standings with the Strathroy Jets. Both are one point back of the Tilbury Bluebirds for third spot and two points behind the second-place Petrolia Squires. Strathroy plays the top-seeded Tillsonburg Thunder Jan. 26 while the Fighting Irish next hit the ice Jan. 27 to battle the Squires.

## U14 Warriors win Gold at Toronto Aeros tournament



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

### GOLD MEDAL

The U14 Stratford Jr. Warriors earned the Gold Medal at the Toronto Aeros tournament held earlier this month. Pictured in the bottom row, from left to right, are Graham Renton and Mac Munro. In the middle row, from left, are Ryan Watling, Nick McGill, Owen Martin, Sam Harrow, Parker Glitz, Caleb Hurley, Liam Micks, Cohen Bowles, and Trainer Donna Martin. In the back row, from left, are Goalie Coach Mark Duchesne, Ryder Duchesne, Head Coach Garrett James, Callum Howson, Coach Ethan Adair, Parker Obre, Ty Burtenshaw, Daxton Verspeeten, Saunder Degraauw, Coach Andrew Bogdon, Colton Campbell, and Coach Drew Goebel.

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

The U14 Stratford Jr. Warriors became champions at the Toronto Aeros Winter Challenge tournament Jan. 11-14, defeating the Gloucester Rangers 4-3 in the

gold-medal game.

Head coach Garrett James was thrilled with his team's effort all weekend long.

"I thought the team had an excellent tournament," James told the Times. "Every player brought a high compete level and contributed towards our team goal of

winning the championship. We had the chance to play some strong competition throughout the weekend, so it was nice getting to see how our development and structural pieces are coming together. I couldn't be more proud of our group."

CONTINUED TO PAGE 18

### STRATFORD FIGHTING IRISH

#### 2023-24 Player Statistics

(through January 22, 2024)

PLAYER	POS	GP	G	A	PTS
Ray Robbins	F	14	11	12	23
Graham Brulotte	F	14	8	14	22
Matt Henderson	D	17	4	13	17
Sean O'Brien	F	11	3	14	17
Dylan Buckholz	F	17	7	8	15
Cameron Stokes	F	11	7	8	15
Cooper Leitch	F	16	6	9	15
Warren Gorman	F	15	4	10	14
Matt Fuller	D	15	3	10	13
Ryan O'Bonsawin	D	14	6	6	12
Ben Hawerchuk	F	5	6	5	11
Justin Murray	D	9	4	7	11
Brody Smith	F	15	4	2	6
Riley Coome	D	14	3	3	6
Matt Granger	D	16	2	4	6
Mav Petrie	F	17	2	3	5
Colin Martin	F	18	2	2	4
Spencer Mills	F	12	1	3	4
Zachery Tierney	D	3	1	2	3
Steven DeGroot	F	8	1	2	3
Sebastien Nogueira	F	18	0	3	3
Calvin Thomson	D	7	0	3	3
Michael Finlay	D	9	1	1	2
Curtis Nogueira	F	11	0	1	1
PLAYER	RECORD	GAA	SV%		
Zach Weir	7-4-0	3.41	.900		
Darren Smith	4-2-0	4.00	.898		

### GOJHL STANDINGS

#### Midwestern Conference

(Standings through January 22, 2024)

	GP	W	L	OTL	T	PTS
Elmira Sugar Kings	39	26	11	0	2	54
Listowel Cyclones	35	25	7	1	2	53
<b>Stratford Warriors</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>47</b>
KW Siskins	36	22	9	1	4	49
Cambridge Redhawks	37	19	15	3	0	41
Ayr Centennials	37	21	15	1	0	43
Brantford Bandits	37	6	30	1	0	13
Caledon Bombers	38	4	33	0	1	9

### WOSHL STANDINGS

(Standings through January 22, 2024)

	GP	W	L	OTL	T	PTS
Tillsonburg Thunder	17	14	3	0	1	29
Petrolia Squires	20	13	7	0	0	26
Tilbury Bluebirds	19	12	7	0	1	25
<b>Stratford Fighting Irish</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>24</b>
Strathroy Jets	21	11	10	0	2	24
Alvinston Killer Bees	19	10	9	0	1	21
Woodstock Lakers	18	10	8	0	0	20
Elora Rocks	19	8	11	0	2	18
Delhi Flames	18	8	10	0	1	17
Dunnville Aeros	21	6	15	0	3	15
Orangeville Blitz	20	2	18	0	0	4



# U14 Warriors

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

The Rangers and Warriors finished first and second in the U14 division with the only blemish on either team's record coming when the two met in the round-robin and finished in a 2-2 tie. Stratford won their three other games before the knockout stage and scored at least five goals in each contest, an offensive output that James said was thanks to every corner of the lineup.

"One of the keys to winning was the full team effort we brought forward," said James. "The offensive contributions didn't just come from one line. Each player did their part in getting the job done, both offensively and defensively."

James said the team's months of work on their consistency at both ends of the ice bore fruit in the form of the

tournament title.

"This is our first year with the team, so we've been introducing a lot of new structural systems with the players. We've put a lot of focus on this, and it's started to show with the consistent play over the past couple of months. We take pride in our defensive structures which has really shown and been a key piece in our success."

"The players' commitment to detail and compete level is what helped us rise to the occasion," James continued, commending his team for stepping up when the lights were on brightest. "There were some challenging moments throughout the week-end, but the boys' collective compete level until the last minute helped us become champions."

# Fighting Irish hockey organizers bring wrestling to Stratford



GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

It was an action-packed Saturday night at Stratford's Rotary Complex as the Fighting Irish senior hockey team and Hammerlock Pure Wrestling of London combined to bring entertainment to the area for a sold-out performance.

Organizers Jeff Morris, Jamie Petrie, Barry Grasby and many other volunteers made the night one to remember.

For the club's first-time wrestling fundraiser, the crowd of over 300 showed their appreciation and organizers were said to have turned away over 300 more for the sold-out night of wrestling action.

## TAKE DOWN

With screaming fans in the background, Listowel's Bryce "Young Lion" Hanson, showed why he is still the reigning champion as he pins Toronto's John Atlas down for the three count in the first match of wrestling action Saturday night in Stratford.

(GARY WEST PHOTO)

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# St. Mikes Junior Girl Volleyball Team bring home Gold

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Correspondent

The St. Michael Catholic Secondary School junior girls' volleyball team came home with gold medals at the Ingersoll Blue Bombers volleyball tournament last week.

Starting the day off strong, the girls played against Saunders Secondary School, winning 25-24 in the first set and 25-15 in the second. Next up, St. Mikes played against St. Joes and won 25-20 in both sets. Later that day, playing against Woodstock Collegiate Institute (WCI), they played well in the first, winning 25-22, but lost their first and only set 20-25 in the second.

Later in the evening, St. Mikes faced Medway High School, winning 25-20 in the first and 25-16 in the second, which brought them to the gold medal game.

St. Mikes once again faced off against WCI in the finals. Evie and Liv Lepping-

ton's strong and steady serving helped them take the lead. Avery Hinds's strong net play was crucial in defending. Emersyn Miller and Hailey Modaragamage had a chance to make some incredible digs as liberos. During the first set, the girls won 25-19 and in the second, they fought hard and won 25-23, leading them to the gold medal.

"We saw strong play all around by St. Mike's Junior girls today," said Coach Madelyn Giovinazzo. "Working as a team helped them come out on top against WCI and emerge victorious as the tournament winners in the finals."



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTOS)

# U12 Warriors compete in the 64th annual Preston International Hockey Tournament



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

## U12 STRATFORD WARRIORS STRIKES GOLD

Back Row coaches L-R: Andre Gorley, Al Zordreger, Kyle Marshall, Mark Bye  
 Players: Malcolm Austin-Olsen, Marcus Atkinson, Nash Riehl, Andrew Hodgins, Louie Turpin, Nick Forman, Lincoln Rae  
 Front Row: Josef Bitzer, Sawyer Verspeeten, Nate Micks, Mason Bye, Owen Hurley, Grayson Gorley, Miles Marshall, Tyler Peck, Nash Zacher

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Times Correspondent

The U12 Warriors played against the Centre Wellington Fusion in their sixth and final game at the 64 Annual Preston International Hockey Tournament this past weekend in Cambridge.

Starting the game off, Mason Bye tied up the game with the first goal during the first period. During the second period, Louie Turpin stunned the crowd with a slapshot from the blue line, making it right to Hurley, who tipped it into the net. During the second period, Hurley also scored another goal, bringing the team into an intense

third period.

During the third, Andrew Hodgins scored a fantastic goal, and the team killed a five-on-three powerplay. This time, Nick Forman made a slap shot from the blue line that Hurley tipped in again, with 30 seconds left on the clock. The game at the end of the third was tied, 6-6.

The nail-biting, tied game finally gave way in overtime, when Hurley scored the winning goal nine seconds into overtime, and the Warriors took home the win against the Centre Wellington Fusion, whom they had been defeated against twice in the past – third time's a charm for the U12 Warriors!

## VICTORIOUS

Back row: Jayda Houben, Savanna Pereira, Lorreighn Del Rosario, Evie Leppington, Tessa Burdett, Avery Hinds, Selah Patterson  
 Front row: Jessica Lerch, Hailey Modaragamage, Marlen Marshall, Emersyn Miller, Lyla Straus

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# Perception exhibit at Gallery Stratford features a collection of students' artistic perspectives

EMILY STEWART

*Times Correspondent*

Gallery Stratford was recently full of visitors checking out the work of 30 visual-art students from Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS).

The graduating students' end-of-year exhibition, Perception, features their paintings, sculptures, collages and other pieces. The exhibition had its opening reception Jan. 20 and will run until Feb. 18.

The graduating students' end-of-year exhibition, Perception, features their paintings, sculptures, collages and other pieces. The exhibition had its opening reception Jan. 20 and will run until Feb. 18. Susan Zorgdrager, teacher at SDSS, said the students in the Grade 12 open studio art class picked a theme at the start of the semester and created six pieces under the theme. The students picked one piece that best represents their theme to go on display as part of the exhibition. They also came up with the name "Perception" for the exhibition to showcase the range of perspectives from their own experiences.

"It's a real collection of a lot of their interests, a lot of their concerns, some of their struggles," Zorgdrager said. "You can all see it sort of come out in their

artwork, so they put a lot of thought into their art pieces and how they'll be presented."

The students' bios outlining the pieces, the inspiration behind the work and their post-secondary plans were posted on a wall just before the exhibition. Several of the students opened up about personal matters such as their experiences with anxiety, ADHD and autism.

"Art remains and being creative remains such an important human dimension and as an outlet for creativity and struggles or anxieties ... and it can play a role in helping to alleviate some of those," Zorgdrager said. "Some of those pieces do a really good job teaching others and trying to show visually what it's like to struggle with a mental challenge or being disabled or something. You get to see that in the work."

The students were eager to explain their pieces and the inspiration behind the art. Eileen Lee's painting, Rooted, combined the parallel between nature and humans and the connection humans have with the Earth in life and death.

"I think nature; it's something we come across every day, but a lot of people fail to stop and really consider nature and all of its beauties and properties and everything," she said. "I wanted to let people focus on our connection that we have and really appreciate nature because it's obviously very important."

The students were also excited to present their artwork in Gallery Stratford and felt it was a stepping stone to their future. Halle Diehl plans to pursue a bachelor's degree in fine arts after taking a fifth year at SDSS and said she can talk about the Perception exhibition when she applies to universities.

"Now I can say that I've had art in a gallery, so it's very cool," Diehl said.

Abbey Aitken's art piece was a diorama of an apartment highlighting different rooms, each designed to the personality types from the Myers-Briggs personality test. Aitken, who wants to study acting, said she learned when looking at different post-secondary institutions that set design begins with creating dioramas.

"It leads to so much opportunity," she

said of the opportunity for students to display their work in Gallery Stratford. "Some people will want to purchase the art that's here today and that type of thing, so I think it's a big opportunity for exposure, especially for a community that's so focused around the arts and the theatre and the gallery and that type of thing."

Kaylynn Broda, a student artist who also works at Gallery Stratford, curated the exhibit. She began working for the gallery through the Young Canada Works grant program, which provides employment opportunities for high school students they usually wouldn't get.

"When you're younger, you don't really get to work in a facility such as an art gallery," Broda said. "Having that opportunity to work somewhere kind of unconventional, it's really eye opening, and you get your foot in a place that. If you want to go in or if you don't want to go in, you get a first-hand experience of how running it would really be. I've learned a lot and I'm really grateful for the time that I've had here."



Abbey Aitken is one of the 30 studio art students from Stratford District Secondary School whose work can be seen in the Perception exhibition at Gallery Stratford. Aitken designed an apartment inspired by Myers-Briggs personality types.



Inspired by the connection between humans and nature, Stratford District Secondary School student Eileen Lee created the "Rooted" piece that is displayed in the Perception exhibition. The exhibition features the work of 30 students and will run at Gallery Stratford until Feb. 18.

(EMILY STEWART PHOTOS)



Stratford District Secondary School students such as Halle Diehl are featured in the Perception exhibition at Gallery Stratford. Diehl's piece is nature-inspired and partly drew inspiration from seeing salmon swimming up the ladder during migration season in Port Hope.



Stratford District Secondary School student Kaylynn Broda stands next to her oil pastel piece, "Cat, Bottle, and Flowers", at the Perception exhibition opening reception at Gallery Stratford. Broda, whose work centered on postage stamps throughout the semester, along with her classmates' work, will be on display at the gallery until Feb. 18.



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# Glen Dias and Gail Selkirk showcasing new music in concert at Revival House

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

It doesn't seem so long since the sold-out, annual birthday concert featuring Glen Dias and Gail Selkirk, yet here they are again, invited back to Revival House for another show.

They have been hard at work in rehearsals these past few months to bring new music and some old favourites back to the Stratford music venue for an afternoon concert Feb. 18 at 2 p.m.

"We are thrilled to be back," said Selkirk.

"What's happening here; Gail and I customarily do one show a year, my birthday concert, and we have incorporated Gail's birthday as well. We put in all this work and preparation for the show and then we don't do another one for a year. We thought, with all the work and effort we put in, we shouldn't wait so long to do another," said Dias.

After deeming that six months was a suitable period to wait between concerts, they settled on February – perhaps Valentine's Day, but Revival House was already booked – so they thought they would book after Valentine's Day. Still in the mood for love, they have titled the concert, *Never Too Late for Love*.

It will be a different show from what fans may have become accustomed to previously, with new music and some old favourites, all in the theme of love.

"It's a new show with a lot of love of different types going on, different subjects or love objects. For example, I will do 'Af-

rica' by Toto, which is about a love for a country," said Selkirk.

The afternoon setting will enhance the experience, with the light streaming through the stained glass windows as the two perform on stage.

"This makes for a very different feeling in the restaurant and for the audience. The ambience is great. It's also good for those that have to work the next day, so it's a nod to our audience," said Dias.

There will be two sets, first a solo set by Selkirk followed by Dias accompanied by Selkirk on the baby grand piano.

"What's different from all the concerts we've done before is that Gail usually plays on an electric keyboard and stands at the keyboard. It's a different presentation, almost a rock presentation, but this time around we are using the baby grand piano. It resonates," said Dias.

It will make for a very different look and feel for the concert. It's a great spacious setting for them to play. What can fans expect of the concert this time? They are not letting the cat out of the bag.

"I normally don't let people know what I am performing. Just come and let me reveal it to you. We construct our sets in a way, sequence them in a way, that we take the listener on a little jaunt," said Dias.

Tickets to the concert are available through a link on the Revival House website under their events calendar or by visiting [ticketscene.ca](http://ticketscene.ca) and searching for Glen Dias. After purchasing tickets, contact Revival House to reserve a table for the concert, or reserve a table for brunch ahead of the show.



LOVE IN HARMONY

Gail Selkirk and Glen Dias in rehearsal ahead of their new concert Feb 18 at Revival House.

(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

# Federal grant helping Kiwanis Festival of Performing Arts become more accessible and inclusive

LISA CHESTER

Times Correspondent

A one-time grant through the Government of Canada's Community Services Recovery Fund (CSRF) has enabled the Kiwanis Festival of the Performing Arts (KFPA) to research and implement ways to make auditions and performances accessible to both performers and the audience.

"The grant is allowing us to investigate ways to make participating in the Kiwanis festival a welcoming experience and we're also trying to find a way to help people newer to our culture find their place. I am trying to find ways to let the community know that if there is a class that isn't offered to let me know, and we can add it," said KFPA executive director Pat McKinna, who is grateful the festival was the recipient of the grant, and enthusiastic about what it would enable.

Performance venues, for the most part, are accessible to audiences, but features such as stages typically are not. Among the initiatives she is pursuing is the new pilot project "The Featured Musical" starring a cast of non-professional performers of all

ages and abilities.

"Our society has become more aware of accessibility and inclusivity and certainly this event, which has been around since 1927, needs to be welcoming to everybody in society, and that means people who have disabilities. I've learned a lot. Any human being is going to become disabled. We age, our vision is affected, our mobility is affected, we wear out. What the accessibility movement is trying to do is make normal activities and things that are enjoyable to do possible for the people that are disabled. What the CSRF grant has enabled me to do is make places like Avondale, which was renovated to become the performing arts centre that it is; they never quite solved how to make the stage accessible," McKinna said, adding she hopes to find a solution.

The first ever benefit musical featured is *Anne of Green Gables the Musical*. A dream creative team of performance coaches Stephen Woodjetts and Scott Beaudin, and director Diana Leblanc has been assembled and rehearsals have begun. They have attracted a cast of about 45 comprising children, teenagers and adults.

"We gathered people over the fall. We

had a couple of sessions where people came. It wasn't an audition as much as we just needed to see what experience they had and to see where peoples' voices were. We have a couple whose voices are changing," said McKinna.

During the fall, participants were able to book sessions with Woodjetts for coaching.

Rehearsals are primarily held at Avondale United Church where the musical will be performed April 5. The choice of musical fell to Woodjetts, who has practically done the cannon of musicals, but has not done *Anne of Green Gables*. It was a perfect fit for what McKinna was hoping to achieve; a cast of all ages and abilities given that the town of Avonlea is comprised of many different townfolk.

She has found that participants in the Kiwanis Festival of Performing Arts wanted more opportunities to perform for the public. Adults who had, for some reason or another, left music behind were looking for something to reunite them with singing. Creating the *Feature Musical* was the answer and she hopes that it will be an annual occurrence.

They will be singing the story of *Anne of*

*Green Gables*, but not performing the entire musical, which features dance. There will be a warm-up act featuring the 2023 KFPA Favourite Award winners who will perform before the *Anne of Green Gables* concert.

Tickets are pay what you can this year, and proceeds will go back to support the KFPA. McKinna hopes that this will be an annual performance, and she has added classes to the festival that include the songs from the musical for the Musical Theatre category. That way, if someone wants to go on and sing one of the songs in the festival, they will have experience.

"I certainly hope that this is a recurring learning and performing opportunity. It's learning for all of us, not just the singers learning the music. We are all learning something a little bit different in the accessibility department especially, and it depends on the people that come forward to participate and what we might have to do to make the rehearsal process accessible and welcoming," said McKinna, noting there are those in the current cast that have mobility issues and vision issues.



# A Stratford Artist breaks the financial barrier between artists and their supplies

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Instead of seeing the negative aspect of his diagnosis, Sal Cucci – a Stratford-based artist who was diagnosed with stage four cancer in 2021 – has decided to live his life to the fullest and help others by providing access to artistic supplies at an affordable price all year.

“I knew that when I was looking for art supplies, I would visit several different websites to find the best deal, so I thought if I can offer supplies at the sale price all the time, this would help artists with their overhead costs and make art more accessible to everyone,” Cucci said.

After being diagnosed with cancer, Cucci set out to bring art to everyone without the financial barrier. That when his website, [www.freetheartist.ca](http://www.freetheartist.ca), was born.

“I think it's really important in our culture to have the arts encouraged but participated in by youth,” he said. “The arts influence their life. Music, books and visual art all matter, and I wanted to make a way for everyone to access art without the price barrier.”

Throughout his life, Cucci says he's been able to see the positive side of things and doesn't generally let things get him down, even if it is something as serious as cancer.

“I feel like I've been trained through other difficulties in my life to realize that I really have to look at not just the positive perspective but to find those things that are beneficial to others as well.”

“When I found out I had stage four cancer, I knew then that this can't be cured, per se, unless something miraculous happens, but I'm still looking at the silver lining. If I didn't have this diagnosis, I wouldn't be working on this project.”

Free the Artist focuses on visual-art supplies that take the pain out of constantly looking for a good deal and, instead, always offers the best prices to the con-

sumer. This initiative, Cucci found, was something he could do in Canada because of his connections with big suppliers.

“I know that when people visit my website, they will get the best price. I know that because I have done all my research and I used to be the guy searching for the best deal, and that's what I offer now to everyone.”

“From a business standpoint, I'm not necessarily concerned about max profits. I'm doing this because I love art and want others to love art too.”

Cucci notes that those who use his website include everyone from local artists to teachers, and he's happy to offer the support and supplies needed to help bring art to everyone.

“I know that in the educational world, whether you're teaching private classes or teaching at an institution, it's often common to miss out on deals because they don't know what their enrollment is until the very end,” Cucci said. “At that point, they're reaching out and trying to get hundreds of supplies at a discounted rate, and sometimes it's hard for them to do.”

“With my website, those organizations can come and get discounted prices any time of year. I thought, ‘Okay, I think I can do something that would make it easier for them.’”

Being from Stratford, Cucci notes he's surrounded by artistic support and loves to be part of a community dedicated to helping each other in art and through small business support.

Like everyone, Cucci cannot be certain about his life expectancy. Still, he believes that through his stage four cancer diagnosis, he was able to feel freer to not only be an artist but also to help others access art, regardless of income.

“I could live for three years or 10. You never know, but what I do know is I'm doing what I love and I'm helping others have access to supplies to do what they love, too.”



UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE

Sal Cucci, a local artist making art more accessible for everyone

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

## Elliott BROOD to play first-ever Stratford show at Revival House

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Longtime touring three-piece alternative country band Elliott BROOD is back on the road and will be stopping in Stratford.

Elliott BROOD will perform at Revival House Feb. 29. Casey Laforet, founder, vocalist, and instrumentalist of Elliott BROOD, said this will be the Hamilton-based band's first time performing in Stratford. He got to see Revival House when visiting his brother-in-law over the Christmas holidays and is looking forward to performing in the venue at 70 Brunswick St.

“We've felt like we've been everywhere, but there's still a few places that we've actually never played in properly, so Stratford being one of them,” Laforet said. “It's

going to be a lot of fun.”

The musician added that the band prefers to play smaller shows and finds such performances more enjoyable.

“You get to meet pretty much everyone that you play to so it's like a real sense of community in these little town halls and small venues,” he said. “As a small, independent band, we're also excited to help small promoters that are trying to bring arts and music to these smaller places as well.”

Elliott BROOD is in its 20th year of touring. The band's motto is, “Doing it the hard way for 20 years.”

“We're very lucky. It's hard for a band to last even 15 years and we've been around a long time,” Laforet said. “We're going to still keep going as long as we're still mobile.”

Laforet hopes the attendees will get up and dance during the rock-country set.

“We really try to make every show like a kitchen party or a living-room party,” he said. “We try not to have a separation between the stage and the audience as much as possible.”

Doors for the all-ages Elliott BROOD concert open at 7 p.m. with the concert starting at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$40 each and can be purchased by visiting [ticketscene.ca/events/46516](http://ticketscene.ca/events/46516). Visit [Elliottbrood.bandcamp.com](http://Elliottbrood.bandcamp.com) to check out the band's music.

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## Let me Introduce ... Dan Armstrong & Judith Harway ... A Bassist & A Poet



APRIL TAYLOR

*Times Freelance Columnist*

A few months ago, Bob, one of my hair clients, suggested I introduce you to an interesting couple fairly new to Stratford. He told me a bit about them and put them on my list. It's always difficult for me to contact someone I don't know but as luck would have it, one night we were all in the same place at the same time.

Avondale United Church is where the Stratford Symphony performs several concerts per year. My brother and his wife regularly attend and asked us to join them for an evening with Mozart. Classical music is my husband's thing, so of course we went. I ran

in to Bob, my client, and he told me, "The fellow I was telling you about is playing bass tonight."

Lucky me, I was sitting in the front row, right in front of him. At intermission, I asked Bob to introduce me and a few weeks later I visited Dan Armstrong and Judith Harway at their home. What a gracious and welcoming couple, not to mention talented, vibrant and involved.

Armstrong played bass with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (CSO) for 27 years. Oh, did I mention his bass is a rare 18th century Italian instrument? He played me a little Bach tune while I was there. I felt quite privileged. Dan was born in Kitimat, B.C. where his dad bought him his first bass made from plywood at the hardware store. I am pretty sure our old home hardware uptown didn't sell such things. I wonder if his dad knew the direction that would take his young son?

Before joining the CSO, Armstrong was assistant principal bassist for the Milwaukee Symphony for 12 seasons. He also spent four seasons as a bassist in the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra. One of Dan's special opportunities came when he was asked



to participate in a series called Concerts for Peace with the CSO where they performed in Chicago and all around the world.

"While it is deeply gratifying and a huge honor to be part of this great orchestra and to perform for wonderful CSO audiences, the opportunities to bring music to people who might never see the inside of Symphony Center have been some of the most enriching experiences the CSO has given me," Armstrong said.

Let's not forget Harway ... Who is Judith Harway?

Judith met Dan while they were both in school, he at Juilliard and she at Columbia earning her Master of Fine Arts in poetry. It sounded like such an exciting time in life; starting out in their careers, falling in love and not knowing where their dreams would take them.

Well, it took her from Manhattan to good ol' freezing cold Manitoba where she followed Dan after he accepted work with

the Winnipeg Symphony. They were married and had two kids and continued to move around settling in Milwaukee for quite some time.

Judith taught writing at Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design, which she loved. Judith is a widely published poet, memoirist and essayist. Her work has earned two Wisconsin Arts Board Literature Fellowships, the Eric Hoffer Award, the Muse Prize for Excellence in Poetry from the Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets and numerous other honors.

How on earth did they end up in Stratford, you might ask? During the pandemic, the world of live entertainment came to a screeching halt, throwing their world upside down. After regrouping, they took a three-month sabbatical in southern Ontario which gave them the chance to reconnect with old friends and meet new ones, and opportunities seemed to be coming their way.

They were drawn to Stratford. They were drawn to our walkable city with its beautiful architecture and all the creative talent that lives here. They took a leap and followed their heart. They are now settled here and are excited to become part of this great little community of ours.

What are they doing now?

Judith and Dan have retired from their jobs but that does not mean they have withdrawn from life. Not at all. Dan plays with the Stratford Symphony Orchestra and offers his many years of experience to help guide the Youth Orchestra, which I did not even know we had. Lucky kids,

having such a seasoned and talented mentor. Judith is involved with a group helping newcomers to Canada adjust and become productive citizens. What I really liked about both of them is they dove in and didn't just make Stratford their new home, but they are helping to make our city even better than it already is.

Of course, the music was wonderful, but my takeaway from my evening at the symphony was how all the musicians worked as a team. It was like watching synchronized swimming. Ross mentioned an old song by Harry Chapin when we were there, and it stuck in my head – not just the lyrics but the underlying message. A young man buys a guitar and claims it to be his monophonic symphony six string orchestra and discovers it sounded dreadful and begins to dream of other musicians joining him.

"And so I'd dream a bass will join me

And fill the bottom in  
And maybe now some lead guitar

So it would not sound so thin  
I need some drums to set the beat

And help me keep in time  
And way back in the distance  
Some strings would sound so fine

And we would play together  
Like fine musicians should  
And it would sound like music  
And the music would sound good"

It occurred to me that this is true of absolutely everything in life. Every endeavor; family, work or whatever is always better when we work together.

The Stratford Symphony Orchestra is a special thing. It is rare for a city our size to support a symphony, especially after seeing the recent decline of the KW symphony. The arts contribute a lot to our city, not just to our city but our lives. Life would be quite grey and dull without the color that music, theatre, books and dance offer us. I encourage you to go to see the symphony if you have never been or, if possible, donate a little something if you can so we do not lose this special organization. Check out their website at [www.stratfordsymphony.ca](http://www.stratfordsymphony.ca).

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# Kiwanis Festival of Performing Arts executive director grateful for federal grant

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 22

They all gathered for their first rehearsal Jan. 25 and will continue each Sunday with extra rehearsals during March Break. There are 29 roles in the cast when done typically, so what they have done is have those interested in doing a solo come forward and have made the arrangement to divide the songs for Anne, for example, in parts so that the role is shared.

Violet Promane and Georgina Hughson both have hopes to sing for the role of Anne. Promane's mother, Kate, who is a vocal coach with some students in the cast, thinks this is a great opportunity for the children to perform before an audience and learn new skills from the professional coaches. They get to spend time with other like-minded kids and make new friends.

Promane has been singing for a few years and is hoping to sing solo.

"I sang before an audience be-

fore. I sang a recital. I sang 'You Never Fully Adjust Without a Smile' and 'It's a Hard Knock Life'. I'm looking forward to making new friends and getting to sing before an audience," she said.

Hughson, whose parents are both actors has always wanted to act and likes singing.

"My friend and I sing a lot together. Taylor Swift is my favourite. I'm trying to go for Anne because that would be really fun to have a big part like that. I'm just wanting to make friends and (be part of) a nice community," said Hughson.

Jonah Manley, who just turned 17 and is blind, came out because he likes to sing and likes to tell stories.

"I'm hoping they will let me play this boy called Gilbert in the show, so I'm learning different songs and solos. I have performed before. I played Tiny Tim in the Blythe Festival's A Christmas



(LISA CHESTER PHOTO)

## PRACTISE MAKES PERFECT

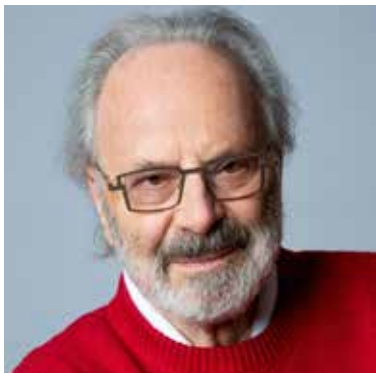
Stephen Woodjett leads the ensemble of *Anne of Green Gables – The Musical* in rehearsal Jan. 21 at Avondale United Church.

Carol. I'm not tiny enough any more though," he laughed, adding

he's looking forward to getting to sing the songs on stage and tell-

ing the story through music.

## A Short Journey into Male and Female Brains



THOMAS R VERNY, MD

Times Contributor

On Saturday mornings I am in the habit of going to the farmers' market to buy flowers. The night before, I asked my wife if there was anything special she wished me to buy. She may say "eggs" or "see if they have wild blueberries." At the market, I go directly to my favourite flower stand. Buy the flowers. Walk over to the egg stand. "A dozen large browns," I say. Pay. Look around for wild berries, in late summer only, find none. Drive home. The whole trip, on a nice day, takes me about 25 to 30 minutes. When my wife goes to the market, she can easily spend two or more hours there. I used to ask her (I have learned my lesson; I no longer ask): "What has taken you so long?" "Well," she will say, "I talk to the farmers, like where they come from and what else they are growing. I look for special vegetables like zucchini flowers or baby squash. I may ask for cooking instructions for these and expand my meal options. I like to

linger and take in the colours and smells. Sometimes I meet friends, and we chat, or we may sit down and have a coffee."

Two very different experiences, but, I think, rather stereotypical of the differences between how men and women think and act. These differences are due to many factors, primarily genetic, biological, upbringing, social, and cultural. At present, about 100 gender differences in the brain architecture between women and men have been identified. Because of space limitations, I shall focus in this article on five of these major differences.

In humans, starting in the first trimester, euro-hormonally driven brain development in males is slower compared to females, which accounts for the longer period of the development of social responsiveness and regulation of feelings in boys. In other words, boy babies' brains lag behind in development compared to their little sisters. This is reflected in their early relationships with their mothers and caregivers. At 12 months, girl toddlers display a greater preference for interactions with caregivers, make more eye contact (7), and show more emotional empathy and interest in people than do same-age boys.

Edward Tronick, examining newborns and infants up to two months old, together with the world-renowned pediatrician T. Berry Brazelton in Boston, concluded that "boys... are more demanding social partners, have more difficult times regulating

their affective states (emotions), and may need more of their mothers' support to help them regulate affect. This increased demand- ingness would influence the infant boys' interactive partner." Bonding and attachment will take a little longer and be a little more difficult for boys than girls. If a mother's first child was a girl, she would wonder why her second child, this time a boy, was so much more "difficult." This label, whether communicated by words or actions, may leave a permanent imprint on the boy's unconscious mind, with consequent emotional problems.

You can see from the above how brain differences, from an early age, lead girls to become more outgoing and more observant than boys. Adults, particularly mothers, grandmothers, aunts, etc., will respond in kind, reinforcing the prosocial behaviour of girls, while fathers and other male relatives will get more rambunctious and more physical with their male children, fostering in them action overthought and feeling.

Studying adult brains helps to explain some notable differences in the way women and men approach the world. A trailblazing research from the University of Pennsylvania found that women typically had a larger corpus callosum than men (6). The corpus callosum forms a bridge of communication between the left and the right brain. As a result, female brains exhibit extensive wiring between the left and right hemispheres. Greater interhemispheric

connectivity in females facilitates integration of the analytical and sequential reasoning modes of the left hemisphere with the spatial, intuitive processing of information of the right hemisphere. This type of structure may account for the fact that women are better at multitasking, while men excel in highly task-focused projects. Furthermore, it facilitates social communication and intuition. In contrast, male brains with a smaller corpus callosum evince greater neural connectivity along the posterior-anterior dimension, which involves the linking of perception to action.

It has been known for a long time that women, on average, have better verbal memory and social cognition, whereas men have better motor and spatial skills. Brain scans have offered an explanation: females tend to have verbal centres on both sides of the brain, while males often have verbal centres in only the left hemisphere. This is probably also the reason why women use more words when describing experiences or feelings and have more interest in talking about these things.

Analyzing data from 168 studies and 355,173 participants, Marco Hirnstein, University of Bergen, found a small but robust female advantage in verbal fluency and verbal-episodic memory. The advantage is small but consistent across the last 50 years and across an individual's lifespan. Moreover, they determined that the female advantage depends on the sex or gender of the leading

scientist: female scientists report a larger female advantage, while male scientists report a smaller female advantage.

As we review these studies, we need to keep in mind that they are statistical generalizations and do not apply to individual men and women. Every person is somewhere on a continuum between the typical male and female brain. And, regardless of gender, each person's unique experiences and environment play a vital role in shaping their cognitive abilities and behaviours. It is important to remember that all differences have advantages and disadvantages.

I think, Ruben Gur, University of Pennsylvania, said it best: "It's quite striking how complementary the brains of women and men really are."

Dr. Thomas R VERNY MD is a psychiatrist, podcaster and author of 47 scientific papers and eight books including the international best seller, *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*, published in 27 countries and the recently released, *The Embodied Mind*. *The Embodied Mind* shows how intelligence and consciousness—traits traditionally attributed to the brain alone—permeate our entire being. Dr. VERNY lives with his wife in Stratford.

In *Pushing Boundaries*, Dr. VERNY will report on pioneering research and breakthrough discoveries in science and the arts as they impact our lives. He will try to address the question of readers everywhere, "Why should I care, of what value is this to me?"



## Welcoming Ukrainians: A Life in Balance

JULIE ASHLEY

Times Freelance Columnist

Just imagine, for a moment, leaving everyone and everything you know and departing for an unfamiliar country where you don't know the language and even the alphabet looks different than yours.

We have hosted several Ukrainians in the past year, all with difficult stories but come ready to work hard and begin again to rebuild their lives.

One story touches my heart and begs to be shared. A young Ukrainian careerwoman, Svetlana, takes her hard-earned education and experience to the City of Moscow to seek a high quality of life where she can use her specialization. While there, she meets a gentle, sincere man, Stan, who has also worked ambitiously to create a good life. They fall in love and marry with dreams of advancing their careers and raising a family, much like young couples here in Canada.

Then, Russia invades Ukraine and immediately their lives are turned upside down.

She cannot stomach the thought of paying taxes to a country that is actively bombing her people. He is fervently opposed to the war and wants nothing to do with it. Neither are welcome in each other's country. Many European doors are closed to them and not supportive of such a mixed

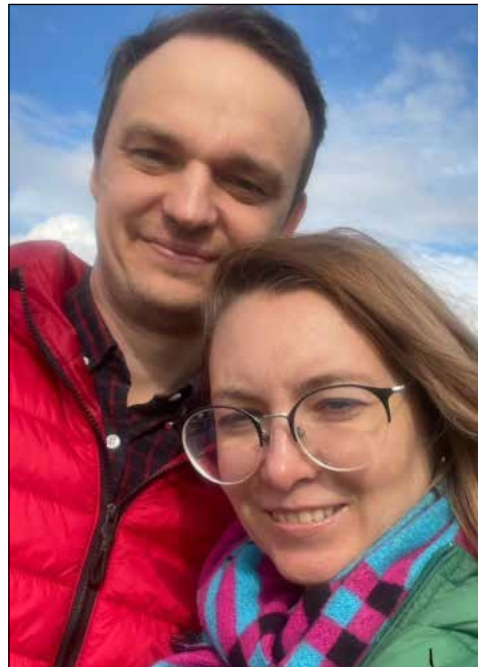
marriage.

We could imagine this cross-border romance not unlike us marrying a person who just happens to live in an adjacent country.

With time marching, they quickly flee to Montenegro, a nearby small country that holds no future but is a quick respite from war. Leaving behind a life that had begun to take shape, they travel with a few treasured belongings in a suitcase. After more research, they thoughtfully settle on making Canada their permanent home. They've heard it is a welcoming country where hard work is rewarded and doors are opened – and open, they did – but only for Svetlana.

She enters Canada through the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel (CUAET) program, is given an initial three-year work permit, and is hopeful that the government will understand their situation and Stan will follow shortly. Nearing two years since Stan's application, there is still no word on when or if he will be able to join her in Canada. Svetlana reaches out to all levels of government to express her angst, but she is given one answer – wait.

Stan continues alone in Montenegro with no family or friends. He is trying to re-tool his entire career online to improve his employability in this new land while paying an English tutor to better prepare himself. Keeping busy distracts him from loneli-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

**Married couple Svetlana of Ukraine and Stan of Russia remain separated after Svetlana immigrated to Canada through the Canada-Ukraine Authorization for Emergency Travel program and Stan waits for his application to be approved while living alone in Montenegro.**

ness.

At 39, Svetlana increasingly wonders if she will be able to bear children with her husband. She watches other younger, un-

married couples enter Canada, bound for a future together. Regardless, she continues to work, help others settle, improve her English and contribute to local culture. She smiles when she speaks of him and cries behind closed doors, fearful.

Christmas and New Years pass, and she celebrates alone, separated from her love by vastly different time zones, an ocean and an aching heart. Two well-educated people who love each other and want to contribute to a stronger Canada, not unlike the vast numbers of Ukrainian ancestors who have come before them.

It's amazing how a life trajectory rests in the hands of one or two people. Somewhere on a worker's desk, the application sits.

A number.

This number, as other numbers, has a face, a life, dreams unrealized and a broken heart. A case worker remains unaware of the impact of non-action.

For now, the answer hangs in the balance. One pen stroke, one keypad entry, one phone call. The answer remains here.

*(Disclaimer: I am a grassroots volunteer and not affiliated with local organizations raising funds for refugees. My goal is person-to-person, hand-to-hand, lifting up those in need. If you'd like to help, please message me at english.knuton@gmail.com, or reach out to the volunteers at Stratford Community Connects with Ukrainian Newcomers on Facebook.)*

## Friendship Force Stratford and St. Marys open to new members

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

With over 300 clubs and thousands of members worldwide, Friendship Force International connects people with its mission to promote global understanding across barriers that separate people.

Now, the organization is looking for local members.

In 1970, when Friendship Force was founded, it involved groups of 150-400 people known as ambassadors who would travel together to other cities around the world. A group of a similar size would then visit the partner city, where hosts would show them around and give them a true taste of what that city has to offer.

Through home-hosting and meaningful travel experiences, participants learn about other cultures, better understand the world and its people, and discover our shared humanity.

Rose Creamer and Murray Pink are two local members of Friendship Force International's Stratford and St. Marys chapter and say the program has not only allowed them to learn more about the world through cultural, food and human connections, but it also led them to meet and become friends with other locals who share the

same values and understanding of the world.

"We get to do some pretty cool things," said Pink, "We learn about local music and food, and we learn how to be sensitive to other cultural experiences by learning from each other."

Recently, 14 local ambassadors travelled to Murray Bridge, Australia. On the journey, they visited the local municipal building and met the mayor, Wayne Thorley.

"Murray and I raised the Canadian Flag," said Creamer. "During this time, the group from Murray Bridge and the Stratford-St. Marys group sang O' Canada together. It was quite a moving experience. We then went to a local park where they planted a tree with a plaque dedicated to our club.

"We also experienced life in rural Australia, visiting a farm to watch sheep shearing, having the opportunity to hold a Koala, visiting the Aussie Apricot factory (and) the Barossa wine region, and making many new friends."

When visiting other areas, ambassadors visit local farms, city halls, restaurants and other hot spots. Creamer notes that this type of travelling allows for a more cultural experience and even said she could try foods and learn about cultures she never would have experienced other-



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

### NEW FRIENDS

**Pictured are Friendship Force Stratford and St. Marys members Alyce Pink, Jean Smelski, Diane Weiler, Jan McClelland, Rose Creamer, Peg Dodds, Richard Smelski, Beverly Haggerty, Dennis Haggerty, Ken Long, Christa Ward, Murray Pink, Linda Weitzel and Glen Weitzel.**

wise.

Another aspect of Friendship Force is community service. During one exchange, visitors were interested in manufacturing in Canada, and they were able to visit and participate in packaging foods for export at a local factory.

"We just get to experience things you wouldn't get to participate in if you weren't part of Friendship Force," said Pink.

Friendship Force understands that some people may not be able to travel as much as others, so

there are no restrictions or rules about having to travel. Pink even notes that they have local members who do not travel at all, in fact, and are there to host others when visiting and enjoy the local community rather than devote their time to travelling.

"We have regular lunch meetings where we socialize with other local members," said Creamer. "We have 'Five and Dine' dinners. We have social events and a golf game every summer. We've even gone to horse races. And

sometimes, we visit in someone's backyard, so it's not just about travelling, but also friendships."

If you're interested in learning more or becoming a Friendship Force ambassador, please reach out to the Friendship Force Stratford and St. Marys club email address: ffstratfordstmarys@gmail.com or visit the Friendship Force International website at <https://friendshipforce.org>. You can also visit them on their Facebook Page at Friendship Force Stratford and St. Marys.



# OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Two must-visit beverage havens in New Brunswick



PAUL KNOWLES

*Times Contributor*

One of my favourite things about travel is the people I meet. Quirky characters, passionate activists, folks who have found their niche and are thriving in it.

And I have come to believe that some parts of the world are home to more interesting, unique individuals than others, which is a key reason why I love spending time in Canada's Atlantic provinces.

My latest sojourn in New Brunswick found me in several bars. That may sound like I am a bit of a degenerate – and there are those who might concur – but I was working. Honestly, I was looking for interesting travel stories and, at the Lunar Rogue in Fredericton and at a bar with the virtually unpronounceable name of Ka.ku.te.ru in St. John, I found them.

What I discovered were two guys – Frank Scott and Eric Scouten – who have found their happy places and have decided to share them with all who drop into these two beverage utopias.

The Lunar Rogue is named in honour of a 19th-century New Brunswick scoundrel who went



Eric Scouten, at work at Ka.ku.te.ru in Saint John.

(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

by the pseudonym Henry Moon. It was founded by Scott in 1989.

Scott's passion is single malt whisky and, in fact, all things Scottish. He's worked in the whisky industry for 44 years, he has visited over 100 distilleries, he's married to a woman from Glasgow, he lives in Scotland for three months of the year, and he played in a pipe band for 27 years.

So, it's not too surprising that he decided to import his favourite parts of all things Scottish to his home city of Fredericton. That's instantly evident in his bar and in his work as the organizer of the New Brunswick Spirits Festival in mid-November each year. That festival is attended by whisky devotees from around the world.

The bar itself is a whisky-lover's paradise. Scott told me that he carries about 970 different brands of whisky, including three bottles that sell for \$900 per ounce.

I was not offered a taste.

Scott is clearly a visionary. His

bar, he says, attracts "a lot of whisky tourists. In fact, I own the category."

But what about the bottom line? Scott chuckles and admits to "a little" profit. But the Lunar Rogue is not about the dollar. It's all about the drams.

Further south, in Saint John, Scouten's bar is tucked away in an alley a couple of short blocks from the harbour. The name – ka.ku.er.tu – is an English representation of the Japanese word for cocktail which, by the way, derives from Japanese efforts to translate cocktail into their language since they had no word for it. To further complicate the issue, As Scouten explains, "the bar doesn't have a name. ... The motto is a reminder that Japanese bartenders are way better."

He has spent time exploring mixology in Japan, and says, "Japanese culture has been a big part of my life."

The Japanese connection is not

surprising. Those expert in the creation of cocktails consistently credit Japanese mixologists as giants in the field, though Scouten is quick to say, "I hate the term mixologist. I'm a bartender."

Well, sure, but he's a unique and highly creative bartender without doubt. Kakuertu (if you're looking for the bar, leave out the periods, or GPS will not understand you) is also unique in many ways. It seats 12. That's it; 12 customers at a time and each one will get the personal attention of the bartender. It takes a while to get a finished drink from Scouten, but it's entirely worth it.

"I'm a giant nerd," he told me. "This is my kind of outlet. I'm obsessed with the micro-details." That includes a never-ending search for local, in-season ingredients for his creations. He told me he personally harvests sumac berries to create a sumac extract. He has also developed a

system by which he makes utterly clear, clean blocks of ice with all impurities removed.

Case in point; Scouten asked my drink of choice. I told him that when it comes to cocktails, I like whisky. So, he decided to serve me his take on an original old fashioned. This quaffable work of art started with a block of his completely pure ice. Scouten wielded an extremely sharp knife and fashioned a jewel of ice that fit beautifully into a crystal lowball glass. He then poured the whisky and other ingredients. My notes, scribbled on the bar, include the phrase, "This is the first time in my life I've been impressed by an ice cube."

The bar is an inherently warm and friendly place. Scouten furnished it with cast-offs from a deconsecrated church, so the bar began its life as a church pew, and the backdrop came from the woodwork around the organ. With a maximum of only 12 patrons at a time and a chatty bartender, conversation blooms. All the while, Scouten is bringing smiles to the faces of his customers.

"Cocktails are what people know me for. I choose to explore my customers' palates," he said.

And his customers are happy to explore Scouten's creative expertise.

And his customers are happy to explore Eric's creative expertise.

*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.*



Frank Scott, owner, founder and visionary behind The Lunar Rogue in Fredericton.



A window with the image of the "scoundrel" who inspired the name of The Lunar Rogue.





### SHANNON LEAH SEALEY

April 8, 1974 - January 1, 2024

Goodbye our beautiful Shannon. We didn't get to say goodbye, but I think it's because we wouldn't have known how. We will miss you, your bright light and gracious spirit. We feel honoured to have loved you and to have shared our lives with you. We will honour you by trying to create magic for our family just like you did for us. How lucky the angels are to have you.

On Monday, January 1, 2024, Shannon Leah Sealey passed away after a heroic battle with anorexia. Shannon lived with this complex disease for decades and faced each day with strength and hope like no other. Over the years, Shannon's health continued to decline and despite her courageous efforts to fight, she sadly lost her battle.

Shannon is survived by her mother, Laurie, father, Bruce, step-mother, Meredith, sister Kirsten, brother-in-law Graeme, her cherished nephew and niece, Dexter "Frog Prince" and "Miss Ruby Sunshine" Wall, and the countless friends and lives Shannon touched throughout her life.

Shannon was born in Stratford and grew up in London, Ontario. She made life long friends while attending Emily Carr and Sir Frederick Banting High School. Shannon played competitive hockey and baseball well into her teens. She was the first female graduate from the Sporting Goods Business program at Sir Sandford Fleming College in Peterborough, Ontario.

She had a successful career in the sporting goods industry primarily working for Adidas and Reebok. Shannon continued following her passions by working as a freelance merchandising consultant, training in yoga and working at Quarter Masters Natural Foods in London. Shannon moved to Victoria to be closer to family, where she was the best Auntie Shan ever to her beloved Dexter and Ruby. Everywhere Shannon went she made new friends and connections she treasured.

Shannon was known for her sense of humour, gratitude, heART art, appreciation for all the little things and love. She lived for creating joy in the lives of those around her, especially her two shining stars. We know we will see her in them every day. Shannon had a magical way of making everyone that crossed her path feel so important and special. Her creative talents shone in every aspect of her life. She believed in treading lightly on mother earth and saw the beauty in all living things. Shannon was a strong advocate for creating awareness about Eating Disorders. Our hope is that all who loved her will continue this mission in her memory.

A "Celebration of Shan" will be hosted in London, Ontario in March 2024. Detailed information will be posted by her family.

In lieu of flowers or a donation we ask that you do this...think of Shannon and take a moment to hug your child, grandchild, niece, nephew or a friend. Take a walk in the woods for a moment, an hour or a day. Time waits for no one.

## Perth-Waterloo egg farmers meet for their annual meeting in Stratford

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

Area egg farmers recently held their annual meeting in Stratford and came away with good news after learning an increase in egg production is needed.

Pullet and egg farmers in the Perth County and Region of Waterloo areas heard from their board members that consumer demand for eggs continues to be strong with sales trending higher than those average weekly sales in 2022.

Nielsen preliminary retail sales data is now available up to Dec. 2, 2023 and indications are that in the latest four-week period, 29 million dozen eggs were sold – an increase of 4.5 per cent in sales compared to the same period in 2022.

Nielsen retail sales in the last 52 weeks are up 2.4 per cent over the previous year.

Demand for eggs used for processing from the market continues to see fluctuations. This year, demand is predicted to continue to stabilize toward pre-pandemic volumes.

When it came to avian influenza, a report dated Jan. 2 stated there were 71 cases across Canada with no active cases in Ontario.

At the same time, there have been 73 confirmed flocks with bird flu in the U.S. over the past 30 days affecting 11.43 million birds in California, South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Kansas and Arizona.

Farmers at the meeting were urged to continue to be vigilant with their bio-security protocols to ensure they keep their flocks healthy and keep Ontario free from bird flu.

In December, Egg Farmers of Canada ratified a national allocation increase for eggs to meet growing demand in 2024.

Farmers were also told at the meeting that an increase in the price of eggs was held off even though the cost of production warranted it, as producers felt they would look at it in the coming spring depending on input costs at the time.

Egg farmers of Ontario board chair Scott Helps of Lambton County said the board is focusing on the strategic priorities of pricing, sustainable practices, supply management, stakeholder relations and stimulating continued market growth for eggs in the future.

The producer numbers for the Perth County and Region of Waterloo area are as follows:

- Number of egg quota holders: 67 (457 in Ontario)
- Number of laying hens: 1,003,918 (10,144,813 in Ontario)
- Number of pullet quota holders: 27 (146 in Ontario)
- Number of pullets: 1,736,378 (12,044,320 in Ontario)



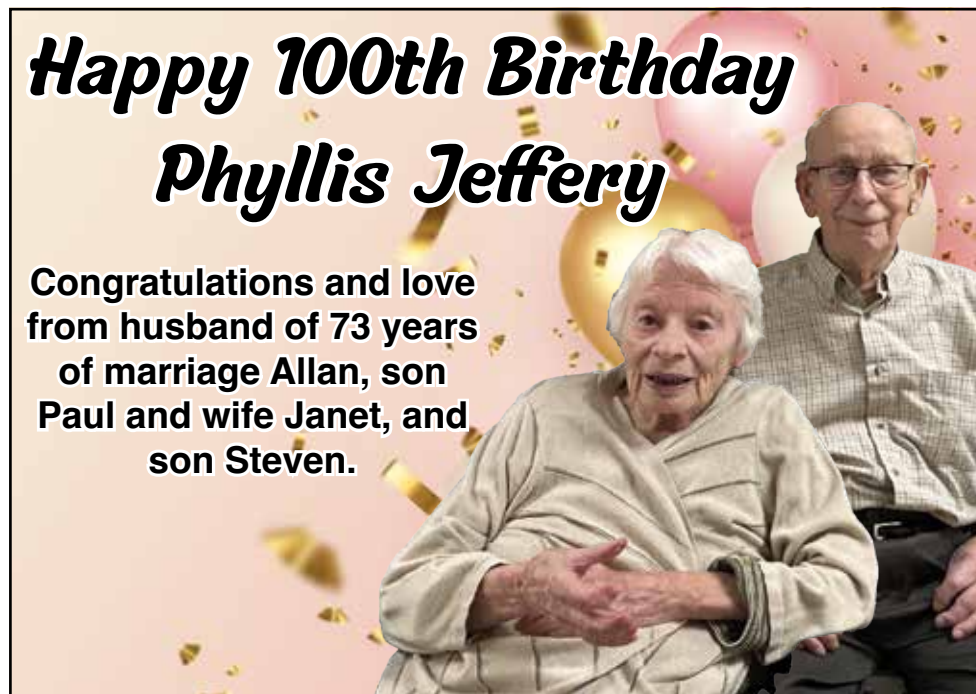
(GARY WEST PHOTO)

### GET CRACKING

Egg Farmer elected councillors from the Perth-Waterloo Zone include (back row from left) Jeff Rundle, Mike Ready, Delmer Schultz, Brett Graham, Josh Gerber and Gary West, and (front row from left) Paul Neeb, zone director Sally Van Straaten, Amanda Cook, Julie Wynette and Scott Graham.

## Happy 100th Birthday Phyllis Jeffery

Congratulations and love  
from husband of 73 years  
of marriage Allan, son  
Paul and wife Janet, and  
son Steven.



# Worship With Us



Community of Christ  
226 Forman Avenue 519-271-4539

Proclaiming Jesus Christ  
with communities of  
LOVE, JOY, HOPE & PEACE

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

We are a Welcoming Community

Stratford Associate  
Reformed  
Presbyterian Church

Quality Inn Festival  
(1144 Ontario St., Stratford)

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

stratfordarp.org





# Riddles

What's black, white, black, white, black and white?

A penguin rolling down a hill.

What did the boy octopus say to the girl octopus?

"I want to hold your hand, hand, hand, hand, hand, hand, hand, hand."

What rolls and jumps but never walks?

A soccer ball

What do you call a person with a tree for a briefcase?

A branch manager.

Why can't you borrow money from a leprechaun?

Because they are always a little short

What kind of chickens lay golden eggs?

Golden Chicks

Why did the boy take a packet of oats with him to bed?

To feed his nightmare

How do you get a baby astronaut to sleep?

Rock-it.

What happens when you throw a purple rock into a yellow stream?

It makes a splash.

# Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 31



# Pet of the Month



## THOR

Meet 3-year-old Thor. He is all about new adventures and loves the great outdoors. He eagerly embraces every opportunity to explore the world around him. Whether it's hiking through the trails, playing fetch in the park, or simply lounging in the yard, Thor's zest for outdoor activities knows no bounds. He is looking for a home with a single person, couple, or family with older children as he can be touch sensitive and lacks some basic manners. If you're an outdoor enthusiast seeking a loyal and adventurous furry companion, Thor would be your perfect match. He's looking for a patient, loving home that appreciates his uniqueness and can provide him with the outdoor experiences he craves. Submit an adoption survey at <https://kwsphumane.ca/adopt/process>.

# Word Search

## GROUNDHOG DAY

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

- Annual event
- February
- Shadow
- Prediction
- Wiarthon Willie
- Punxsutawney Phil
- Marmot
- Burrow
- Weather
- Tradition
- Superstition
- Forecast
- Bill Murray



# CLASSIFIEDS

Email to inquire [stratfordtimes@gmail.com](mailto:stratfordtimes@gmail.com)

## OBITUARY

### SHARON MARGARET MANTZ

After three quarters of a century on this earth, God called his child Sharon Margaret Mantz to her eternal home, on January 2, 2024.

Having risen above so many tribulations here, to the joy of her family and friends, she is now experiencing her "crown of life" for a life well lived, having run the race, fought the fight and kept the faith as a child of Jesus Christ.

How do we love you? Let us stop for a while and count the many ways you have touched us with hope, love, perseverance, talents, skills, beauty and a deep defining Christian faith. While you have gone on ahead of us, we are all assured that God will soon call us in the same way. Truly, you have touched the hearts and minds of so many with your sweetness, kindness and generosity that your example has raised us to new heights in our outlook and outreach. You were blessed to be a blessing – thank you.

Members of her family who miss her are Frank (Margaret), Carol Shore (Robert), nephews and niece Chandler (Elizabeth), Tamara (Robert), Nathan (Brigit), Todd (Karen), great nephews and nieces Laura, Sarah, Matthew, Michael, Skylar, Jillian, Tylar and Emily. Her father Walter and mother Merle have predeceased her.

A quiet family service has been held with an interment at Avondale Cemetery. Arrangements through Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services. 804 Ontario St., Stratford. 519-271-5062

## OBITUARY



### NIKLAUS SCHORI

A Celebration of Remembrance for Niklaus Schori will be held in the Reception Centre of the W.G. Young Funeral Home, 430 Huron Street, Stratford on Saturday, February 10, 2024 from 2-5 p.m. with words of remembrance at 3:30 p.m. Anyone wishing to share a memory is asked to do so. [www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com](http://www.wgyoungfuneralhome.com)

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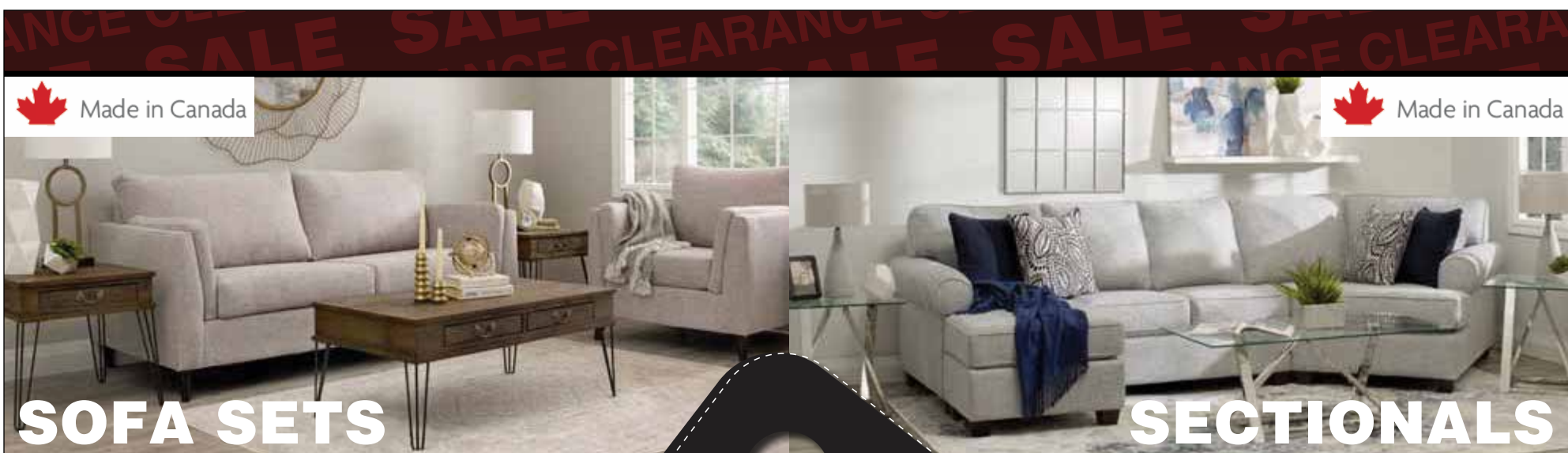
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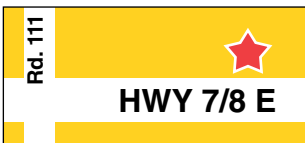


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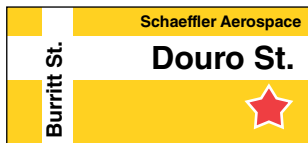
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