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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 1, 2024

FREE

## Wellesley Recreation Complex gets \$150,000 boost from province for fitness and other equipment



After announcing a \$150,000 Ontario Trillium Foundation grant in support of equipment purchases for the township's new Bill Gies Recreation Centre, Kitchener-Conestoga MPP Mike Harris, Wellesley Mayor Joe Nowak, Ontario Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport Neil Lumsden and Wellesley CAO Rik Louwagie watch the recreation centre's first-ever seniors' free skate on the recently opened ice rink. Photo by Galen Simmons

By Galen Simmons

Wellesley and area residents will soon have access to new fitness and other equipment at the not-yet-fully open Bill Gies Recreation Centre thanks to a nearly \$150,000 Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) grant announced last week.

Ontario Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport Neil Lumsden joined Kitchener-Conestoga MPP Mike Harris, Wellesley Township Mayor Joe Nowak and other

township staff at the still-under-construction recreation centre Jan. 25 to announce the funding for gym equipment expected to arrive at the centre next week, as well as sports equipment, tables and chairs for the entire facility.

"Talk about making an impact in the community. Talk about something that resonates and will be here for a long time. Talk about things that will touch everyone in the community of all shapes and ages and sizes, and be there for multiple reasons,"

Lumsden said of the OTF funding. " ... The grant is \$150,000 ... to purchase essential equipment in this fantastic facility, equipment I understand is being delivered next week.

"I was hoping to try some of it out today, but there won't be any of that."

Provincial funding received through the OTF's capital grant stream is aimed at improving the infrastructure Ontarians need

Continued on page 2

## EZT launches free transportation program

By Lee Griffi, Local Journalism Initiative reporter

East Zorra-Tavistock Township has launched EZTransit, a pilot project aimed at helping locals get to appointments, social and recreational activities.

The bus hit the streets for the first time on Jan. 31. Two different routes will operate from Wednesday to Saturday. Route 1 includes stops in Hickson, Tavistock, Innerkip and Woodstock, and runs Wednesday, Friday and every other Saturday on even days of the month. Route 2 has stops in Hickson, Innerkip, Tavistock and Stratford. It will be in operation on Thursdays and every other Saturday on odd days. No service will be offered on Sundays, statutory holidays, or civic holidays.

EZT CAO Karen DePrest said there will be no charge for riders during the pilot period.

"The funding for the program is coming from the money that was set aside in a reserve from the 2021 budget for the initial transit pilot program proposed in that year. With the onset of the pandemic and changes in councils from the election, EZT decided to obtain a used transit bus and pilot the program on its own in 2023 to see what interest arises from it," she said.

The original pilot program was intended to run from Dec. 14, 2023, to April 13, 2024, but insurance obligations and requirements delayed implementation.

"It is still our intention to run a four-month pilot program, which would see the bus running until at least the end of May. Council has reserved the right to extend the pilot if necessary and any impact on rates, dates or routes would be addressed sometime in April or May accordingly," she added.

The savings from 2021 amounted to \$33,750

Continued on page 3

**TIM LOUIS** Member of Parliament  
Kitchener-Conestoga

519-578-3777 | Tim.Louis@parl.gc.ca | TimLouisMP.ca | @TimLouisKitCon



COMMUNITY —

# \$150,000 Ontario Trillium Foundation Grant for Wellesley Recreation Complex

Continued from page 1

to thrive. Whether it's purchasing equipment, building a new space or completing renovations, retrofits or repairs, OTF capital grants support projects that are having a positive effect on communities across the province, including within the Waterloo Region.

"One of the things that really drew me to this facility was the fact we're going to have so many different opportunities for groups to come and collaborate under one roof," Harris said.

"The Wellesley Community Health Centre moving here is fantastic. We're going to have Community Care Concepts providing some seniors programming out of here as well. There's going to be some programming done for youth in the community. Of course, the beloved Applejacks have a new place to call home. And one of the big things I think is great for this community as well is the fitness centre that will be part of this amazing building."

Wellesley's Bill Gies Recreation Centre came about after township council decided to build a new recreation facility with the help of a \$16.1-million provincial grant and community fundraising instead of completing a laundry list of expensive structural repairs and upgrades at the aging Wellesley Arena.

The new recreation centre, which sits on a 40-acre property, includes an NHL sized ice rink, a walking track, a fitness gym, a gymnasium/community centre, a youth centre, a skateboard park, a playground, soccer fields, and outdoor walking trails. Currently, the rink and walking track are the only pieces of the centre open to the public. The rest of the building is expected to open over the next few months, and the township is planning on hosting a grand-opening ceremony on June 22.



Ontario Minister of Culture, Tourism and Sport Neil Lumsden was joined by Kitchener-Conestoga MPP Mike Harris at the Bill Gies Recreation Centre in Wellesley Jan. 25 to announce a nearly \$150,000 Ontario Trillium Foundation grant for the purchase of fitness and sports equipment, as well as tables and chairs for the entire facility. Photo by Galen Simmons

"I've used the word grateful, but that seems a little bit light," Nowak said. "I think the word ecstatic may be more important when describing my feelings. From the onset, our priority was to ensure the Bill Gies Recreation Centre would provide recreational opportunities for everyone. This

grant will go a long way in helping us meet that goal. The trillium grant will be used to purchase fitness gym equipment, tables and chairs for the entire facility, and gym equipment for future programming including but not limited to basketball, volleyball and pickleball.

"The opportunities for our residents to pursue an active lifestyle are endless. The prospect for enhanced social interaction is especially important in a small, rural community. With this financial assistance from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, we become a more complete community."

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COMMUNITY —

# EZTransit program to offer free transportation



East Zorra-Tavistock Township launched a new, local bus service this week, EZTransit, with stops in Hickson, Tavistock, Innerkip, Woodstock and Stratford. Contributed photo

Continued from page 1

to cover the cost of the program. The township posted for a contract position or positions in December and two people were hired to drive the bus during the pilot.

Residents of the township were notified EZTransit would be starting this week on Monday, just two days before the launch. DePrest said they will continue to educate the public.

"As far as sharing of the information, the social media news release is the first of multiple ways of getting the message out including posters, brochures, word of mouth and updates provided to council over the next several months on its status," she said.

The bus can carry 10 passengers at a time with an additional three accessibly secured spaces. Ridership will be on a first come first serve basis.

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

"We offer priority seating on all transit vehicles and allow you to ride with a service animal. In the case where a bus stop is temporarily inaccessible, riders will be able to board or exit the bus at the nearest accessible and safe location," said DePrest.

Children under the age of 13 must be

accompanied by an adult but there is no way to safely secure a car seat. The township said parents and caretakers should hold a child tightly or use a front-pack carrier and strollers must be able to fit through the front doors and down the aisles to board the bus.

EZT staff will be working with Oxford County's Rural Economic Development Corporation after the initial soft launch to do some survey work with passengers to provide some demographic information on ridership, destination, cost feasibility, and more.

The bus will not operate if weather or road conditions are deemed unsafe. Service cancellations and delays will be posted on the township's Facebook and X (Twitter) pages.

Riders will also have an opportunity to hitch a ride to Kitchener-Waterloo. The connection comes through an alternate provider that also stops in Stratford.

"The timing of stops has been set to ensure that our bus arrives and departs from the various locations in order to make these connections," explained DePrest.

More information including exact routes and timing can be found at <https://www.ezt.ca/en/resources/EZTransit-Web-Brochure.pdf>.

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## COMMUNITY —

# Parking issue holding up land donation: Two Wilmot councillors fight back over criticism from rare and Schneider family

By Lee Griffi, Local Journalism Initiative reporter

A pair of elected officials have decided enough is enough when it comes to the township being raked over the coals regarding a proposed donation of land known locally as the Schneider Woods.

The Schneider family has allowed the public to use the unique parcel of land for decades and it is a popular spot for skiing, hiking and nature watching. About 230 acres have been maintained by the Schneider family and, for the past four years, they have been trying to donate that land to the rare Charitable Research Reserve. The family and rare, a non-profit organization, have been critical of Wilmot, which requires a parking lot to alleviate safety and liability concerns.

One of the councillors decrying the criticism is Kris Wilkson who said the property is one of the most beautiful and unique you can find in the area. He added the situation isn't as simple as people may think.

"Eventually there will be a tax liability that will need to be covered because of a large estate. The Schneider family is not hiding that fact. My understanding is, through the letter they have written, they are not necessarily in a position to cover the costs associated with that."

As a result, Wilkinson said the family may need to consider selling the land, which would result in capital gains costs.

"I think part of their strategy here is they can donate the land to rare that will preserve the property. Once it has been transferred, it can't be modified in its entirety. The family will get a tax receipt they will be able to use."

Wilkinson added three homes on the site will need to be severed, which will require a zoning change that would allow the remaining land to be turned into a conservation area.

So then why is the township being criticized? One recent media report stated the township was "blocking the donation over a parking dispute." Wilkson said the Schneider family, rare and the community all win because the land will be preserved forever, but the taxpayers and Township of Wilmot inherit 100 per cent of the liability.

"The intention is it will be accessed as a recreation area. We understand we need to be following proper planning guidelines for some sort of parking solution. Currently,

parking (on the surrounding roadways) is not suitable. They are 80 and 60 km/hr speed limits, some very rural and unsafe."

None of the roads have wide shoulders.

"In my opinion and based on legal and insurance opinions I have heard so far, we have to come up with a solution that lessens the liability and takes it off the township," he said.

Wilkson said rare has suggested the roads should be widened and speed limits lowered along with speed mitigation and other safety measures.

"They are suggesting Wilmot should spend taxpayer dollars to essentially enhance a parking solution for private property. I take a bit of an issue with that. I don't think it's unreasonable for a basic parking solution to be implemented."

He suggested low-cost solutions such as a gravel-based lot with room for a dozen vehicles where the township could assist with maintenance with snow plowing and garbage collection.

"We also can't build that parking lot if cost is an issue because it would be benefitting a private citizen or a private organization."

Stephanie Sobek-Swant is the Executive Director of rare and she disagreed with Wilkinson's thinking.

"I take it with a grain of salt because I'm not a lawyer. The activities are already happening. No one at the township has taken any concern until this application was brought forward. The legal advice we have received is that if you approve this application and there is no change in use, just merely a change in ownership, there is no legal requirement in the planning act to build a parking lot."

She added if there are concerns with the existing roadside parking that has been used for 40-plus years, it's a great opportunity to work collaboratively with everyone to find solutions that improve that roadside parking.

"If we are worried about people crossing, then why don't we look at a pedestrian crossing? How can we look at the existing parking spots being built out a little more, make them wider, make sure they are always plowed?"

The second councillor standing up for Wilmot's position is Harvir Sidhu who explained there is a lot of confusion in the community which has led to many calls

and questions.

"I am being asked why we are putting up roadblocks for the Schneider donation, to which I say they are giving a great donation but it's not going to the township."

He added the land is a hidden gem that only locals mainly know about, but once it is under rare's control, that will change.

"It's only a matter of time before more and more people are going to know about it, which is great. It will bring people to our township. But when more people are coming, we will be increasing the traffic and the liability. I, in good conscience, can't just let it go through as it is and pass on the liability to our tax base and the township when we have an opportunity to do it right the first time."

Both councillors agree it would be very unsafe to have buses bringing students to the site without proper parking.

"They would have to park on the side of the road and ask students to cross it," said Sidhu.

Wilkinson added the pair visited the site at Wideman Road and Wilmot Line and felt it wouldn't be safe to park and walk across the road.

"In ten minutes, I would say 50-plus vehicles travelled in that area, so it's a busy road. With the further buildup of Waterloo, there will be increased traffic there."

As a parent of young children himself, Sidhu added there is no way he would be comfortable having his kids attend the site on a school field trip.

"If there is a small area the bus could turn into to load and unload, that's a different story."

Sobek-Swant said nothing will change when it comes to students attending as any bus trips will be able to use an existing lot.

"School trips will continue to happen only at the original property where we have purpose-built facilities with parking lots that enable those trips. I have repeatedly corrected any notion that any such activity is going to happen."

The Gazette was told by an unverified source that rare has over \$1 million in cash on hand from various sources of income including donations. The question posed was why not just build and pay for their own parking lot or other improvements?

Because of the way people make donations,

Sobek-Swant said none of that money can be used for a parking lot even if they wanted to go in that direction.

"We do not have any available funds we can allocate towards that. Anything that shows up as a surplus on our financial statements is usually funds restricted by the donors and are already dedicated to something else. We have no power to override that and use it for something else."

She added this isn't a money problem but rather an issue about how all parties can work together to find the best solution.

"It's also a matter of respect. The donors have been very clear they do not wish any of their lands to be developed in any way, shape, or form. Not even for a parking lot."

She added from an engineering perspective it would also be difficult to build a lot on the protected land.

The township itself released a statement to the Gazette upon request, saying it follows provincially regulated municipal best practices as they relate to planning policies and permit requirements.

"These best practices are applied neutrally to everyone, despite the size and scope of the project, to ensure fairness and equity. While we are immensely grateful for this generous donation to the rare Charitable Reserve, we must follow best practices and apply the same requirements we would apply to anyone in Wilmot. In this case, there has been an application for an amendment to the township's zoning bylaws and it was concluded a parking solution is required to ensure the safety of local residents and limit taxpayers' liability."

There is another player on the field here and that is the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA), which does have parking lots on some of their sites. Sobek-Swant said the GRCA has said they would likely not permit a parking lot on the site, but the conservation authority said that isn't etched in stone.

Due to the presence of several natural hazards - wetlands, watercourses, and associated floodplains, slopes - GRCA communications manager Lisa Stocco said a portion of the lands are regulated under law.

"Opportunities may exist for a parking lot outside of these natural hazards. The GRCA would provide further review and comment upon submission of a proposal. Zoning matters are the responsibility of the township."

## The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette

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Owner/Publisher: Grant Haven Management Inc. /Stewart Grant

Editor: Galen Simmons

Graphic Designer: Erin Parsons

Office Administrator/Billing: Wendy Lamond, Cindy Boakes

Sales Representative: Sharon Leis

Contributing Writers: Lee Griffi, Nancy Silcox, Gary West, Paul Knowles, Mercedes Kay Gold

Business Development: Heather Dunbar

Annual subscription:  
Canada: \$57.75 (\$55.00 + HST)  
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COMMUNITY —

# Senator Rob Black visits Quehl's Restaurant in Tavistock

By Gary West

Dignitaries and government officials who travel in and around the areas of Oxford and Perth counties always seem to look forward to having a home cooked meal at Quehl's Restaurant in downtown Tavistock.

Last week, Brian and Cindy Larsen, long-time owners and managers of the family establishment, were honoured when a Canadian senator, the Hon. Robert Black, along with his wife Julie, dropped in for Quehl's famous Friday night buffet.

Senator Black worked in the area after graduating from the University of Guelph, was Perth County's 4-H coordinator and made many lasting local friendships. He worked in many areas with the Ontario Government including serving as CEO of the Rural Ontario Institute and was instrumental in establishing the Advanced Agricultural Leadership Program (AALP).

In the past, Senator Black said one of the most-controversial and talked-about bills in recent memory has to be bill C234, the Carbon Tax Exemption bill sent back to

the Government in an amended form.

He is the Chair of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry.

According to Black, there are a number of Senators that have rural connections across Canada, and have spoken about rural issues during his time in the Senate chamber, which is coming up on six years at the end of February. There are a total of 105 Senators in the chamber on Parliament Hill in Ottawa.

He was delighted to see the Prime Minister recently appoint a rural Senator from PEI, Mary Robinson, who is Past President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, and who has significant agricultural experience and connections in her home province, across Canada, and around the world.

He also said he was pleased to have been asked to judge the Ambassador competition at last year's Tavistock Fall Fair. He truly enjoyed his time coming back to Tavistock. He and his family reside north of Fergus in Wellington County when not in Ottawa.



Brian and Cindy Larsen, owners of Tavistock's Quehls restaurant, welcomed the Hon. Robert Black, senator from Ontario, along with his wife Julie, to their Friday evening buffet. Senator Black always makes sure he buys some of their homemade salad dressing before leaving, which he says "is the best he's ever tasted." Photo by Gary West

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COMMUNITY —

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

By Amanda Modaragamage, Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

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

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

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

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

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

"There's lots happening here throughout the year. Our programs and our facilities



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

lead to most days being filled with lots of laughter, direction and activity. However, when the weather turns colder, our spaces become quieter.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# COMMUNITY —

## Tavistock's Chad Keller wins Tavistock Agriculture Society's Meritorious Service Award

By Gary West

A longtime director, volunteer and past president with the Tavistock Agriculture Society was recently honoured with the society's Meritorious Service Award for his tireless work serving the community.

At the society's recent annual general meeting, society president Kaitlin Keller presented the award – given to a volunteer, leader and committee member who has played an integral part in ensuring the agriculture society survives and prospers year after year – to her brother, Chad Keller, for his work putting on the annual Tavistock Fall Fair.

Keller's involvement with the fair began as a youth showing a calf in the 4-H show. He also had a showstopper with his entry in the pet show.

He became a member of the society in 2002 and served as president from 2015-2016.

"He is always working to make the fair an event that Tavistock can be most proud of year-round," the agriculture society directors said during the award presentation. "He is always looking for new ideas or refining community favourites."

During fall fair weekend, he is always available from set-up to tear-down. He is the convener of the homebrew class and organizes the pavilion refreshments and entertainment. He also ensures the touch-at-truck event goes off without a hitch, and always helps out wherever there is a need.

He has also taken the helm for fundraising events along with organizing the annual Easter egg hunt.

The Keller family has always been recognized as leaders and great supporters of the Tavistock Agriculture Society. Chad also has, and continues to be, one of the society's most dedicated workers.

While Kaitlin Keller guided the society through a second year as president, Kim Urlando was nominated and has agreed to be President for 2024. Val Jones was nominated and agreed to serve in the vice-president position.

**Tavistock Agriculture Society president, Kaitlin Keller, presents the 2024 Meritorious Service Award to her brother, Chad Keller, for his unwavering work and support of the society. Photo by Gary West**



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## Show Us Your Wilmot



Show Us Your Wilmot Facebook group member Lisa Marie took this photo of a moonrise from her front yard in Wilmot last fall. She said, "It was a beautiful moonrise on (a) fall evening, and we had just moved back out to the family farm. We're so happy to be back in Wilmot!" Photo courtesy of Show Us Your Wilmot

## Show Us Your Ancestors



Jen Krampien shared this photo of the children of Jacob and Sarah Laschinger on the Show Us Your Wilmot Facebook page. She said: "My Grandma Rebecca Laschinger Krampien is seated on the far right beside her Father. Her brother Irvine in back row middle was the New Hamburg Station Master for the railway and he and Aunt Tillie lived on the corner which has since been referred to as the Station House." Photo courtesy of Show Us Your Wilmot  
 Thanks for sharing, Jen. If you have photos of your local ancestors you'd like to share with the community, send them along with details about who is in the photo, where it was shot and in what year to Galen@granhaven.com.



COMMUNITY —

# Linwood Snofest returns this Saturday

By Galen Simmons

Though there's no guarantee there will be much snow left on the ground, a 35-year, annual, winter tradition is returning to the Linwood Recreation Complex this Saturday with plenty of games, activities and fun for the whole family.

According to Linwood recreation committee member and event organizer Margie Cressman, Linwood Snofest started back in 1979 when it was all but a guarantee there would be plenty of snow on the ground at the beginning of February.

"There was a dedicated Snofest committee with about 25 people on it, and at that point you knew you'd get a whole lot more snow than we get now," Cressman said. "There were a lot of things like a bathing-suit race, chainsaw events and so on. The last one (organized by the

Snofest committee) was some time in the '90s, and after the rec centre was built in 2004, the rec board committee – which is a committee of about eight people – resurrected (Snofest) in 2006.

"It's just a one-day event and we do a co-ed Snopitch tournament, and a Solo (card game) tournament and children's entertainment, face painting, bingo, a horse-race game put on by the Lions (Club) – as is the Solo tournament – and it starts off in the morning with our firefighter breakfast where our volunteer firefighters cook for us. ... There's face painting and we're also bringing back the Jello-eating contest this year."

Beginning with the firefighter breakfast at 8:30 a.m., the day-long event runs until about 4 p.m. All proceeds from Snofest, which usually brings out around 300 people including

seven Snopitch teams, goes back to the Linwood recreation committee for various projects at the recreation complex, including the planned purchase and installation of new playground equipment.

"We need to replace the playground out there," Cressman said. "It hasn't been replaced in a few years. In the past, we've done lights on the ball diamond and Christmas streetlights, so we do things like that with the proceeds from Snofest."

"... It's just a great community event. You can come out and spend the day knowing you're doing good for the community."

For more information and to see the full lineup of games and activities for Snofest, check out the Linwood Recreation Committee on Facebook.



Wellesley volunteer firefighters from the Linwood station cook up breakfast during a previous Linwood Snofest at the Linwood Recreation Complex. Contributed photo

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# COMMUNITY —

## THANK YOU



Our family is so humbled by all that has taken place since Ron became ill and since his passing. Prayers, prayer shawls, cards, phone calls, the abundance of food brought to our home and the visits from friends and neighbours before Ron's passing. The kind words and the outpouring of support given to our family at the visitation and the funeral has been an overwhelming feeling and we are filled with gratitude.

A special thank you to all of the agencies that supported us to keep Ron at home during this journey. We appreciated the knowledge, resources and care shown to Ron and our family. Our sincere thanks to Jeff Glendenning of Francis Funeral home for guiding us. Your professionalism and friendship is truly appreciated.

Thank you Pastor Harold and our Tavistock Mennonite church family for keeping us in your prayers. We so appreciated your support and all of the help given to ensure the funeral was a reflection of Ron – a husband, a father, a papa, a brother, an uncle and a friend. Ron loved his family, church and community and was affectionately known as the Egg and Wagon Man who always had time to listen, and as a family we have enjoyed hearing so many stories shared with us.

*"Grief never ends....but it changes. It's a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith...it is the price of love."*

*Thank you God for everything.*

Donna, Kim, Karen and Greg, Sandra, Jayne and Tim, Paul and Katherine and families

## CELEBRATION



Family and Friends are invited to an **OPEN HOUSE**

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# COMMUNITY —

## The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette Weekly Quiz

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

Answers found on page 26

## BIRTHDAYS AND ANNIVERSARIES

*Does someone in your family have a special day coming up? Let us know at [thewtgazette@gmail.com](mailto:thewtgazette@gmail.com) to appear in our Birthdays and Anniversaries listing or to arrange for a special announcement ad.*

**January 31:** Janey McKay of Tavistock celebrated a birthday on January 31. All her friends at Grace United Church, and at Quehls Restaurant wish her all the best.

**February 1:** Happy birthday to Remington Schultz (8) and Nicole Stolk.

**February 2:** Happy birthday to Murray Roth, Ethan Verhoeve and anniversary for Brock and Amanda Martin (11th).

**February 3:** Happy birthday to Meyer O’Hearn (6), Evyn Gladding (19), and Brianna Giroux (21).

**February 4:** Happy birthday to Gibson Ropp (14) and Emily Schwartzentruber, and anniversary for Matt and Sherri Doehn (12th).

**February 5:** Happy birthday to Wesley Hutton (9), Emily Smith (21), Keeton Jones (21)

**February 6:** Happy birthday to Blake Brooks (9), Liam Doan (16), and Ron Bender (78), and anniversary for Don and Carol McKay (56th).

**February 7:** Happy birthday to Isaiah Ruby, Tristin Barker.

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Pastor Hugh Rutledge 655-3611

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# BREAKING NEWS!

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The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette is your local trusted news source and we welcome story ideas from our readers. If you have a local story idea, email it to Editor Galen Simmons at: [galen@granthaven.com](mailto:galen@granthaven.com)



COMMUNITY —

# Public Health issues reminder about fluoride and sodium in Oxford drinking water

By Lee Griffi, Local Journalism Initiative reporter

Southwestern Public Health (SWPH) has issued a public reminder about levels of naturally present fluoride and sodium in some of Oxford County's municipal drinking water.

The organization said these may pose a concern for specific residents. Parents with children seven years of age and under should be aware of fluoride exposure to prevent dental fluorosis, while those on sodium-restricted diets should pay close attention to the sodium they may be consuming from municipal water.

Amy Pavletic, program manager of environmental health at SWPH, said the health unit is responsible for letting the public know this information.

"The drinking water in Oxford County is unique in the sense that the groundwater comes from underground aquifers that have naturally occurring levels of fluoride and sodium.

"Any drinking water that has a sodium level under 200 mg/L is considered safe. It's not that the water is unsafe for the general public, but if there are individuals who might be on sodium-restricted diets

due to various medical conditions, we advise that if they are consuming water that has sodium levels above 20 mg/L they be aware they could be consuming more sodium than their health professional may advise."

This includes people with kidney disease, heart disease, high blood pressure, or liver disease. These residents should speak to their physician or health-care provider about how sodium in the water may affect their health. Communities with sodium levels that range above the recommended level of 20 mg/L are Tavistock, Bright, Brownsville, Embro, Ingersoll, Mount Elgin, Oxford South, Plattsville, Thamesford, Tillsonburg, and Woodstock.

Pavletic said when it comes to fluoride there is no health concern, but rather an issue of esthetics.

"It is to protect against dental fluorosis or discolouration of teeth in children seven years of age and under. Because of the naturally occurring fluoride, Oxford County does not add it to the drinking water. It is low and safe for the public to drink however when the levels do get high we want to make sure people with children under the age of seven know they could have some small flecks or observed marks on



their teeth indicating fluorosis."

While fluoride levels up to 2.4 mg/L are safe to drink, a reading above 1.5 mg/L could lead to discolouring. Fluoride levels above 1.5 mg/L have been reported in the communities of Brownsville, Ingersoll, Lakeside, Mount Elgin, and Oxford South during recent sampling events. The health unit recommends households with young children in these communities cut back on other sources of fluoride to prevent fluorosis, like choosing non-fluoride toothpaste.

The Gazette asked the health unit if people would be better off drinking water from a bottle or through various filtration systems on the market, but Pavletic said that isn't something she recommends.

"You don't have to buy other sources (of water) if it's not something that concerns you. It's really about people taking their health into their own hands when it comes to these elevated levels."

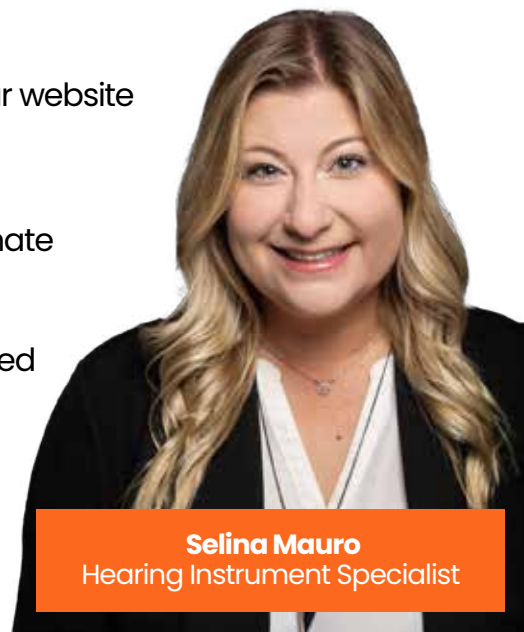
Oxford County's 17 municipal drinking water systems are continuously monitored to ensure safety and quality.

| SODIUM                           |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Bright<br>59.1 - 66.2 mg/L       | Brownsville<br>61.9 - 81.6 mg/L   |
| Embro<br>19.3 - 20.2 mg/L        | Ingersoll<br>39.7 - 79 mg/L   |
| Mt. Elgin<br>21.3 - 37 mg/L      | Oxford South<br>17.9 - 52.5 mg/L  |
| Plattsville<br>20.3 - 21.7 mg/L  | Tavistock<br>18.7 - 21 mg/L   |
| Thamesford<br>25 - 26 mg/L       | Tillsonburg<br>2.55 - 40.8 mg/L   |
| Woodstock<br>14.4 - 93.5 mg/L    |   |
| FLUORIDE                         |   |
| Brownsville<br>1.68 - 1.77 mg/L  | Ingersoll<br>0.77 - 2.12 mg/L   |
| Lakeside<br>1.59 - 1.65 mg/L     | Mt. Elgin<br>1.39 - 1.71 mg/L   |
| Oxford South<br>0.08 - 1.57 mg/L |  |

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# COMMUNITY —

## BOOK REVIEW: The Escape Artist by Jonathan Freedland

By Oxford County Library staff

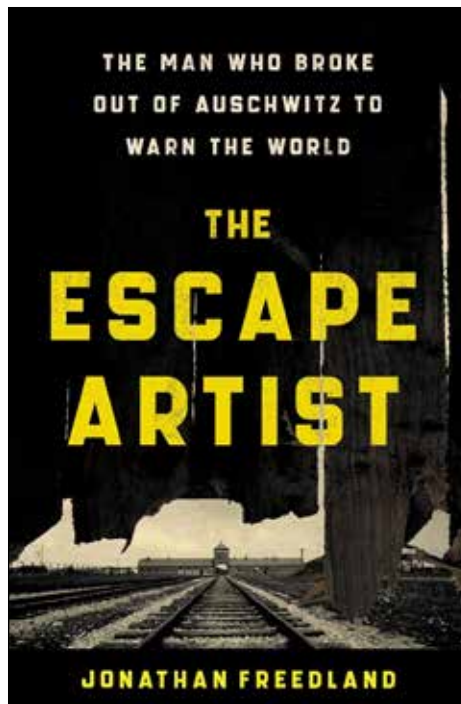
In April 1944, Rudolf Vrba became the first Jew to break out of Auschwitz – one of only four who ever actually pulled off this almost impossible task.

This true story details the account of how Rudolf and his fellow escapee, Fred Wetzler, trekked through tough terrain and hid from the Nazis hunting them. They both risked their lives to inform the world of what was really going on in the concentration camps during World War 2.

This is a chilling, emotional but necessary read. It is a reminder of the horrors of the Second World War and the strength that people had to

not only survive, but conquer them. This book pulls back the curtain on Auschwitz as we get a detailed description of what the camp was really like and how the Nazis manipulated people, including allied forces, into believing there was nothing bad going on.

Rudolf shows his intelligence through memorizing the patterns of the Nazi guards, then his perseverance and patience as he creates a detailed plan to escape the camp over a few days. It was a very informative read and I recommend this book to anyone who is interested in finding out more about World War II and would like a story of strength and perseverance.



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# SPORTS —

## PJHL Roundup

By Lee Griffi, Local Journalism Initiative reporter

### Braves putting lock on third place

Tavistock is arguably playing their best hockey of the Provincial Junior Hockey League season after downing Doherty Division-leading Woodstock 6-2 Tuesday night. The game was played after a game originally scheduled for Jan. 12 was postponed thanks to a snowstorm.

The Braves roared out to a 6-0 lead by the midway point of the third period and easily held on for the two points. Tyler Brezynskie scored a pair with single goals going to Ryan Suljack, Ian Glendinning, Felix Isert-Bender and Will Schlotzhaeur.

The win was the fourth of the season for Tavistock over their County Road 59 rivals. They have one remaining matchup Feb. 23 in Woodstock. Tavistock trails second-place New Hamburg by 10 points and has an eight-point lead on fourth-place Norwich.

On Friday, Tavistock earned a 6-2 win against visiting Paris. The Braves had a balanced attack as 11 players contributed single points with goals coming from Ethan Sharpe, Kaden Brame, Zach McCann, Nicholas Thibodeau and Brezynskie. Liam O'Leary stopped 36 of



Woodstock Navy Vet Sam Sam Barry is stopped on a breakaway by Tavistock's James Hopper during Tuesday night's game. Photo by Bill Polzin

the 38 shots he faced to earn the game's first star.

### Firebirds down Applejacks

New Hamburg picked up two points in their lone weekend game with a 5-2 home-ice

win over Wellesley. Keegan Metcalf scored twice, his tenth and eleventh of the season, while 11 other Firebirds added a point each. Goalie Graeme Noye stopped 31 of 33 shots to earn the victory, raising his record to 18 wins and just six losses.

He has a 2.54 goals-against average and a .915 save percentage.

Wellesley did the streaking New Hamburg team a big favour Saturday night as they edged division-leading Woodstock 2-1 at home. Connor Doerbecker's 10th of the campaign early in the third period was the game-winner. Owen Neomytka won in his first start, kicking out 33 of 34 shots.

Sunday saw the Applejacks complete a three-game weekend with a 5-4 loss in Paris, their third defeat in a row. Wellesley led 3-2 after 40 minutes on goals from Owen Stoddard, Stuart Sinclair, and Nolan Karger. The Titans would score three in a row to take a 5-3 lead. Carson Wicke scored his eighth of the season with eight seconds left to round out the scoring.

**Notes:** New Hamburg has yet to lose in 2024 thanks to six consecutive wins. They have outscored their opponents 36 to 16.

No one was happier to see Woodstock lose to Tavistock on Tuesday than the Firebirds who now trail the Navy Vets by a single point. They play each other once more on Feb. 21 in a game that may decide first place in the division.

The Lakeshore Canadians of the West Stobb Division have the PJHL's best win percentage with a mark of .879.

## Royals await first-round OEHL opponent

By Lee Griffi, Local Journalism Initiative reporter

Tavistock enters the Ontario Elite Hockey League post-season as one of the hottest teams in the league.

The Royals won their eighth straight game in Erin on Saturday night with a tight 1-0 victory over the Outlaws. Matt Zilke's sixth goal of the season in a setup from Drew

Gerth and Sean Kineapple. Jensen Van Boekel earned the shutout, his second of the season.

Head coach Brad Stere said his team is ready for the postseason.

"The game was a little closer than I would have liked, but the shutout was a good showing by Van Boekel and showing we are ready for playoff hockey. And eight games in a row is us gearing up. I am quite happy with our play these last few games. Our guys are ready."

He added the players are starting to get their playoff hunger again. The Royals won't know their first-round opponent until the dust settles on the last day of the regular season this Sunday.

Just like when the Western Ontario Athletic Association was in control of the senior league, the top right teams are

in the double AA division. The top seed plays the eighth, two plays seven, and so on. The second round will see the highest seed play the lowest seed. The bottom three play in the single A group.

**Notes:** The first-place Ripley Wolves have won 12 consecutive games and finish their season at home against Georgian Bay this Friday.

Kienapple is the lone member of the Royals to crack the top-20 point getters. He sits in sixth with 14 goals and 13 assists in 17 games. Gerth is 21st with 10 goals and 19 points in 19 contests.

The final regular season games are scheduled for Feb. 4, meaning Tavistock will likely have a two-week break before their playoff drive begins.



### Tavistock Royals

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# COMMUNITY —

## Celebrate local history on Wilmot Heritage Day Feb. 17

By Galen Simmons

Local history buffs, collectors and the community at large are invited to celebrate the history of Wilmot and the surrounding region at the New Dundee Community Centre for this year's Wilmot Heritage Day on Feb. 17.

Running this year from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. with free admission, Wilmot Heritage Day is a 30-year tradition held during or around the third week in February, Ontario Heritage Week. This year, along with historical displays put together by local and regional organizations and heritage groups, organizers with the heritage Wilmot and Castle Kilbride advisory committee are inviting area residents with collections of unique historical items to join in on the fun.

"It's a lot of organizations like the architectural conservancy, the Region of Waterloo and the library, but then there's also tables set up by our heritage committee on different aspects of our local heritage with a focus on the New Dundee area," said committee chair Nick Bogaert. "We usually have a bit of a theme, and this year part of the theme is we're calling all collectors. ... If they have something interesting to show off, they can call the township to have a table and bring some things

to show."

While Bogaert says a few community members have already reached out to book a table for their collections and a few of his fellow committee members are also planning to show their collections, organizers are still looking for local collectors to display their historical items of interest, share information about local history and network with one another and the wider community.

"We're looking for things related to local business history, post cards, things like that," he said. "Heritage day is part of a larger, provincial movement, so it's a good time of the year to focus on local heritage. I think it's interesting to come in and learn a bit about your community."

To book a table for Wilmot Heritage Day 2024, local collectors can email the township at [castletour@wilmot.ca](mailto:castletour@wilmot.ca) with information about the collection to go on display.

Bogaert said Wilmot Heritage Day will include interactive displays and activities with something of interest for the whole family.

"Just come ready to learn," he said.



Pictured, local history buffs and other community members learn about local history at a previous Wilmot Heritage Day in the New Dundee Community Centre. Contributed photo

| W.O.A.A. Senior "AA" Hockey  |           |           |          |          |           |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Regular Season Standings     |           |           |          |          |           |
|                              | GP        | W         | L        | OTL      | PTS       |
| Ripley Wolves                | 19        | 15        | 4        | 3        | 33        |
| Creemore Coyotes             | 19        | 13        | 6        | 1        | 27        |
| <b>Tavistock Royals</b>      | <b>20</b> | <b>13</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>26</b> |
| Minto 81's                   | 19        | 12        | 7        | 1        | 25        |
| Seaforth Centenaires         | 19        | 12        | 7        | 0        | 24        |
| Saugeen Shores Winterhawks   | 20        | 11        | 9        | 1        | 23        |
| Durham Thundercats           | 18        | 10        | 8        | 1        | 21        |
| Erin Outlaws                 | 18        | 6         | 12       | 1        | 13        |
| Georgian Bay Applekings      | 19        | 5         | 14       | 2        | 12        |
| Milverton Four Wheel Drivers | 20        | 5         | 15       | 1        | 11        |
| Lucknow Lancers              | 19        | 3         | 16       | 1        | 7         |

| PJHL STANDINGS               |           |           |           |          |          |           |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|
| South Doherty Division       |           |           |           |          |          |           |
|                              | GP        | W         | L         | OTL      | T        | PTS       |
| Woodstock Navy Vets          | 34        | 25        | 6         | 3        | 0        | 53        |
| <b>New Hamburg Firebirds</b> | <b>34</b> | <b>25</b> | <b>7</b>  | <b>2</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>52</b> |
| <b>Tavistock Braves</b>      | <b>33</b> | <b>20</b> | <b>11</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>42</b> |
| Norwich Merchants            | 34        | 14        | 14        | 5        | 1        | 34        |
| <b>Wellesley Applejacks</b>  | <b>32</b> | <b>14</b> | <b>17</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>29</b> |
| Hespeler Shamrocks           | 33        | 9         | 23        | 1        | 0        | 19        |
| Paris Titans                 | 34        | 8         | 23        | 2        | 1        | 19        |

| Tavistock Royals      |     |    |    |    |     |
|-----------------------|-----|----|----|----|-----|
| 2023-24 Point Leaders |     |    |    |    |     |
| PLAYER                | POS | GP | G  | A  | PTS |
| Sean Kienapple        | F   | 17 | 14 | 13 | 27  |
| Drew Gerth            | F   | 19 | 10 | 9  | 19  |
| Trevor Sauder         | F   | 18 | 7  | 10 | 17  |
| Deven Kropf           | F   | 18 | 3  | 12 | 15  |
| Sean Leslie           | F   | 19 | 5  | 8  | 13  |
| Jeremy Munro          | F   | 18 | 8  | 4  | 12  |
| Collin Hartwick       | F   | 12 | 6  | 5  | 11  |
| Adam Barr             | F   | 16 | 2  | 8  | 10  |
| Mike Noyes            | D   | 15 | 3  | 7  | 10  |
| Lucas Bast            | D   | 16 | 3  | 7  | 10  |
| Cam Leslie            | D   | 20 | 2  | 7  | 9   |
| Matt Zilke            | F   | 15 | 6  | 2  | 8   |
| Greg Noyes            | D   | 16 | 3  | 5  | 8   |
| Erik Robichaud        | F   | 6  | 3  | 5  | 8   |
| Callan Christner      | F   | 17 | 4  | 3  | 7   |
| Mitch Facey           | F   | 12 | 2  | 5  | 7   |
| Jon Jutzi             | D   | 7  | 0  | 4  | 4   |
| Patrick Vulgan        | F   | 2  | 1  | 2  | 3   |
| Tristan Hohl          | D   | 17 | 1  | 1  | 2   |
| Reid Ramseyer         | D   | 13 | 0  | 1  | 1   |
| Geoff Killing         | D   | 6  | 0  | 1  | 1   |
| Chad McIntosh         | F   | 7  | 0  | 1  | 1   |
| Zach Mark             | F   | 4  | 0  | 0  | 0   |
| Samson Walsom         | D   | 11 | 0  | 0  | 0   |
| Graham Kitching       | F   | 5  | 0  | 0  | 0   |

| PJHL - South Doherty Division |                    |     |    |    |    |     |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|-----|----|----|----|-----|
| 2023-24 Point Leaders         |                    |     |    |    |    |     |
| Team                          | PLAYER             | POS | GP | G  | A  | PTS |
| WNV                           | Davin Gray         | F   | 34 | 12 | 42 | 54  |
| NHF                           | Owen Fischer       | F   | 32 | 29 | 19 | 48  |
| WNV                           | Nolan Brett        | F   | 33 | 21 | 25 | 46  |
| NHF                           | Tyler Reid         | D   | 31 | 14 | 25 | 39  |
| HES                           | Boden White        | F   | 27 | 16 | 22 | 38  |
| NHF                           | Owen Bruder        | F   | 34 | 17 | 20 | 37  |
| WNV                           | Ethan Szabo        | F   | 29 | 13 | 21 | 34  |
| HES                           | Jack Restauri      | F   | 33 | 10 | 23 | 33  |
| NHF                           | Jake Thompson      | F   | 31 | 15 | 16 | 31  |
| NOR                           | Joel Storoschuk    | F   | 31 | 13 | 15 | 28  |
| NOR                           | Malcom Scott       | F   | 33 | 14 | 14 | 28  |
| TAV                           | Nicolas Thibodeau  | F   | 33 | 12 | 16 | 28  |
| NOR                           | Brandon Balazs     | F   | 30 | 14 | 13 | 27  |
| WNV                           | Chris Coulter      | D   | 27 | 12 | 15 | 27  |
| TAV                           | Ian Glendinning    | F   | 33 | 10 | 16 | 26  |
| HES                           | Andrew Harris      | F   | 31 | 14 | 11 | 25  |
| NHF                           | Matt Domm          | D   | 29 | 4  | 21 | 25  |
| WNV                           | Tyler Smeda        | D   | 34 | 9  | 16 | 25  |
| NHF                           | Antonio Pasqualino | F   | 30 | 5  | 19 | 24  |
| NHF                           | Owen Sculthorp     | F   | 14 | 5  | 19 | 24  |
| WNV                           | Brodie Kearns      | F   | 26 | 6  | 18 | 24  |
| TAV                           | Stephen Peppas     | F   | 30 | 10 | 13 | 23  |
| TAV                           | Jacob Reid-Brant   | F   | 32 | 8  | 15 | 23  |
| WNV                           | Nolan Burnside     | F   | 30 | 8  | 14 | 22  |
| HES                           | Braeden Tyler      | D   | 33 | 4  | 17 | 21  |
| HES                           | Justin George      | D   | 31 | 3  | 18 | 21  |
| WNV                           | Ty Crombie         | D   | 27 | 10 | 11 | 21  |
| WEL                           | Logan Crans        | F   | 31 | 6  | 15 | 21  |

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COMMUNITY —

# Local farmer nominated for prestigious land award

By Lee Griffi, Local Journalism Initiative reporter

Something positive can often come out of something negative, and farmers have been doing that for years.

A local landowner will win the 14th annual Oxford Stewardship Award at the February 14 meeting of Oxford County Council. The award recognizes landowners who have made exemplary contributions to preserve and enhance the natural features and areas on their properties, such as woodlands, wetlands, streams, and meadows.

East Zorra-Tavistock farmer Paul Brenneman is one of the nominees. He lost several ash trees thanks to an ash borer infestation but decided to turn famine into a feast by creating two small wetlands on his property just outside of Tavistock. Working with Phil Holst from Ducks Unlimited, Brenneman said the loss of ash trees created the opportunity to dig. "For us, it was an area in the forest that was dead that we wanted to revitalize and make into something useful that would hopefully help the farmland and increase wildlife habitat. We feel like we accomplished both."

Both wetlands capture overland run-off from adjacent fields and are shaped to allow flow through the wetlands. Brenneman notes it has also attracted more wildlife. "We are seeing the native grasses and that sort of thing revitalize and take off at the



Paul Brenneman and his wife Katherine pose in front of one of the wetlands they created on their farm just outside of Tavistock. Photo courtesy of Oxford County

wetland site. The herons are starting to land around the pond, and the aquatic life is starting to come back. It's really turning back into what it was at one point years ago." He expects to attract other types of birds such as kingfishers and he has also seen eagles and many new types of ducks on the property. "It will also increase habitat for deer, turkeys, and wildlife that is already there. I don't believe any of them really help our crops or farm, but it is what we need to do to leave things a little better than we found them. It's also enjoyable to

see them on our property," he added. "The smaller wetland was an important area to dig out for amphibians and reptiles to have a water source as well to catch the run-off. "It is a bit more of a rolling topography on this farm, so that helps that water. Instead of going directly into the stream, it gets into the wetland and gets a chance to filter before it gets into the stream."

The farmer also hopes the wetlands will catch run-off from the fields and hold the water that was pooling towards his field.

"Hopefully, it will hold it back in the wetland area and allow that water to flow naturally back to the creek that will ultimately wind up back in our great lakes."

Brenneman also worked with the Upper Thames Conservation Authority to reforest the areas decimated by the ash borer. Brenneman has planted a variety of trees and shrubs along the edge of the wetland, with around 500 seedlings in total. He also planted a 250 Norway Spruce windbreak on the property in 2023. "We have planted many trees around the wetland area to help reforest and make the area look more natural. We also took the opportunity to plant a windbreak between the neighbour's farm and ours. These trees will help with wind erosion on the soil, and many other benefits."

As far as being nominated for the award, Brenneman said it was a team effort. "It did come as a surprise to be nominated and we are very honoured. We think it's great that there are programs like this out there, it helped make the project attractive for us. There was a lot of amazing help, but Phil (from Ducks Unlimited) was a really unbelievable resource that helped bring our project from an idea to reality. I think it's at the core of what farmers want and that is to improve the land and look after what we have.

Other nominees are Greg and Marsha Litt and Cobi and Steve Sauder, both from Zorra Township.

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## TRAVEL —

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



By Paul Knowles

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

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

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

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

in the ocean off Barbados.

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

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

During our visit, we learned that the facility was founded by a conservationist named Richie Moretti in 1986. The staff estimates that more than 2,000 turtles have been saved since then. The original building – still part of the hospital – was a motel repurposed by Moretti to care for wounded or sick sea turtles. Today, you can visit the operating room where necessary surgeries are done, and, out back, an array of tanks where turtles are kept, many permanently, because they have suffered injuries that prevent their return to the ocean.

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

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

There are dozens of turtles who will never leave the hospital facility, but that too is a good-news story under the circumstances. Good news for the turtles because they are incapable of surviving



A plush toy sits on the operating table where real turtles undergo life-saving surgeries.

in the wild. Good news for visitors like me because I get the pleasure of seeing these amazing creatures and the privilege of learning all about them.

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

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

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

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

It's not surprising that almost all the threats to sea turtles start with humans. Fishing line entanglement, rope-and-net entanglement, boat hits, oil spills, ingesting plastic bags and cigarette fil-

ters, and development near the beaches where turtles have traditionally nested are all threatening these turtles' existence.

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

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

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

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

Paul Knowles is an author and travel writer, and President of the Travel Media Association of Canada. To contact Paul about travel, his books, or speaking engagements, email [pknowles@golden.net](mailto:pknowles@golden.net).



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



A sea turtle with a damaged shell is now a permanent resident at The Turtle Hospital.



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COMMUNITY —

# Stratford Winter Film Festival announces film lineup

By Lisa Chester

The inaugural lineup of the Stratford Winter Film Festival (SWFF) has been announced and promises to bring light to an otherwise dark time in February.

There are nine films, five venues, one pass to access it all. The event takes place Friday Feb 9 to Feb 11. Event space includes Grayson Mills, first and second floor, Factory 163, Revival House and Avondale Church. Little Prince Micro-Cinema will be doing some adjacent, "secret" stuff.

"We are planning something that we are keeping quiet, but it is something that is extremely interesting adjacent to our core film theatres that is on top of SWFF, so off-SWFF, kind of like off-Broadway," teased Craig Sangster, SWFF co-founder.

The films featured were curated collaboratively through sending out letters to people that have been helpful in the creation of the event, with great response.

"We sent a letter and said we are curating the films now and each film fits in the category of food, music or history; you tell us what would be super interesting for this festival in our inaugural year. We got all these responses back so part of what you'll see is derived from that. There's also things we thought were interesting and other people suggested," said Sangster.

They wanted a mix that was interesting enough but not what would be consumed on a regular basis. Some old, some new, but nothing too esoteric. Based on the theme of food, music and history, there is



From left, Leslie Marsh, Craig Sangster and Bruce MacInnis are the trio bringing the new Stratford Winter Film Festival to Stratford. Contributed photo

something for every taste and style.

"This is really about community, and getting out of our house, and something to do collectively," said Bruce MacInnis, SWFF co-founder.

"We think our films are super interesting, we've had a super response. Here's a lovely collection built by people who really care about the experience. It's the whole experience thing," adds Sangster.

The themes have been developed using both documentary style and feature films. They are intended to encompass things that everyone cares about. What they thought made sense for the festival is having very universal, not exclusionary, appeal.

In the music category, the organizers bring 'Mr. Jimmy', '32 Sounds' and 'Have you got it yet'

"These films have just been released, so for our first outing to have these, we have done well. They have been shortlisted (for awards)," said Lesley Marsh, third of the trio of co-founders. "We're really excited. We have a bit of a vibe to have something sort of exclusive."

In the food category is 'The Truffle Hunters', 'Ottolenghi and the Cakes of Versailles' and 'Percy'. In the history category is 'All is true', 'The Last Vermeer' and 'The End of Time'. Previews of each of the films can be viewed at stratfordwinterfilmfestival.ca.

There will be intentional collaborations within local business relating to each of the films that will hopefully drive audience members into accommodations, restaurants and coffee shops while attending the festival. For example, Revival House will continue to serve while the festival is ongoing and through introductions to films, local opportunity to cross-promote will be enjoyed.

Passes are available for \$99 each and are valid for all nine films. They are available online at stratfordwinterfilmfestival.ca and offers the choice of six different itineraries. Festival goers are encouraged to visit the site.

Volunteers are also sought for the event. They are actively seeking ten or twelve more volunteers to act as ushers, merch table, and greeters, for example. Those interested can contact info@stratfordwinterfilmfestival.ca



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## The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette

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## COMMUNITY —

## EZT well represented at ROMA conference

By Lee Griffi, Local Journalism Initiative reporter

No fewer than five members of East Zorra-Tavistock council attended the recent Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) annual conference.

The organization is a part of the Association of Municipalities Ontario (AMO), the largest lobby group for municipal governments in the province. Mayor Phil Schaefer, councillors Scott Zehr, Steven Van Wyk, Matt Gillespie and Jeremy Smith all attended the three-day get-together from Jan. 21-23 at the Sheraton Centre Hotel in downtown Toronto.

Zehr said there was an immense amount of information and input from speakers and experts, and he will continue to reflect and consider what he learned for weeks and months to come.

"Most impactful was the general feeling that collaboration must happen between the levels of government," he said. "Municipalities, provincial and the federal government must work together to properly address the issues and concerns that are experienced by Ontario's rural residents."

He added another important aspect was that Indigenous people must be included at the table as they bring insights and experiences that are unique and valuable.

"They are often affected deeply by issues that other, non-Indigenous folks are affected by. The consensus was that working collegially at all levels of government, and with our Indigenous neighbours, is not occurring to the extent that it should."

Some of the concerns affecting rural Ontario that were raised included the fact that over 500,000 people don't have access to primary care, and that concern is further exacerbated by intermittent emergency room closures across the province.

"These critical numbers are seen when a rural resident who needs care but lacks a family doctor can't even get into an emergency room for care. There was a call for help made to our provincial government to address these concerns and the shortage of health-care professionals in rural Ontario," said Zehr.

The rookie Tavistock councillor added an alarming issue raised by many people is the growing need for food banks.

"It was noted by session speakers that food banks were originally established to be a source of emergency provision, not a long-term solution. In rural Ontario, food banks are being used at such a high rate, not just by residents without work, but also by those with jobs. The price of food has escalated and wages have not kept up."

Zehr said the Ontario Federation of

Agriculture was involved in the discussion around food affordability.

"We know that as farmland disappears it deeply impacts our ability to provide the quantity of food necessary to feed Ontario."

The provincial government's More Homes Built Faster Act has created many impacts and challenges for residents. Zehr explained he continues to hear the overwhelming concern about the lack of the homes required for EZT residents and specifically affordable homes.

"This challenge can cause homelessness, not just those pushed onto the streets or into encampments, but also those living by couch surfing or in shelters. Rural communities are looking for solutions to the homelessness question, and one session gave solutions other communities have tried."

He added Waterloo Region's tiny home example was highlighted and other speakers suggested that as communities are developed, a shift to smaller, more affordable housing options is needed.

"Again, we need our higher tiers of government to come through with help to address this housing issue," Zehr said.

Mayor Phil Schaefer said he enjoyed the conference and was educated on a number of important files.

"It's a great way to learn about topics of interest to rural municipalities. I spent the bulk of my sessions learning about Ontario's energy system, new homes and our long-term care needs. Rural Ontario needs more long-term care beds, more homeless support, more housing, more doctors, more nurses, more schools, more infrastructure and more funding. Lots more funding.

"The municipal taxpayer is being forced to cover more and more of the costs that upper levels of government should rightly be paying."

He added the City of Toronto just secured a new financial package from the province, and he is sure many other municipalities will be seeking similar help.

Schaefer said the networking aspect of the conference proved just as valuable as the formal sessions.

"Probably the best part of the conference was the chance to speak to my peers from around the province. We all have mostly the same challenges to face, and all pretty well agree the property tax model to fund the bulk of municipal services is outdated. The Municipal Act, which was the beginning of the property tax system in Ontario, turns 175 this year. It is clearly showing its age," he said.

## Tavistock Community Health Inc. board looking for new members

By Gary West

One of the most important board of directors in Tavistock is looking for new board members.

Tavistock Community Health Inc. (TCHI) is community owned and operated and is managed by a board of 10 directors. The directors are volunteers from the community who consistently work toward maintaining a quality medical clinic in the village of Tavistock, and they also help with the recruitment of medical professionals.

Doug Green, board chair, says the directors make decisions related to the management of the building, maintenance of the grounds, finances and communication.

He said the board requires three new members to join the board as directors.

The volunteer board meets at 5 p.m. on the fourth Thursday of the month at the Tavistock medical clinic, and no meetings are scheduled in July or August.

The annual general meeting is to be held April 10. The meeting will take place at 7 p.m. at the Tavistock Men's Club on Woodstock Street North. All area residents are invited to attend.



Pictured are the current Tavistock Community Health Inc. board of directors. From left in the front row are Carolyn Kropf, Russell Huber, chair Doug Green, Darlene Zehr and Julie Kimpel. From left in the back row are Bob Galloway, Keith Wagler, Bruce Swartzentruber, Frank Meconi and Bob Zehr. Contributed photo

Anyone interested in becoming a member of the board can speak with a current board member or email [info@tchi.ca](mailto:info@tchi.ca).

To learn more about how the directors support TCHI, download a copy of the

board of directors welcome package at [www.tchi.ca/board-of-directors](http://www.tchi.ca/board-of-directors).



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COMMUNITY —

# New Hamburg Optimists begin recognizing members monthly for their service

By Scott Dunstall and Lee Griffi, Local Journalism Initiative reporter

The town's Optimist Club hands out a monthly award for a member who goes above and beyond. Gary McNeil was named the winner for Dec. 2023, and as a result, wore the winner's jacket for 30 days.

The idea came from club president Scott Dunstall.

"I couldn't think of any better way to carry on that Optimist tradition than to acquire my own jacket to award each month. I will keep the jacket after my term to have a record of all those good men I recognized. I went out and found the most garish leopard print I could find. Nothing makes me laugh more than seeing a middle-aged man from Wilmot wearing a greasy Las Vegas lounge singer jacket."

Each winner must add a patch to it, signifying something important to them.

Former president Mark Weber created the tradition of recognizing a particular member each month who had demonstrated above-and-beyond service to the community.

"Sometimes it could be as a result of work given to a community event or a fundraiser in the past month. Or it could be simply a tip of the hat to a large body of work over the years that has never been fully recognized, Dunstall said. "During that first year, I was given the honour of Optimist of the Month. That recognition manifested itself physically with the jacket of the month.

"It was an overly huge out-of-style sport jacket, and the kicker was (Mark) wanted each winner to sew a patch or some memento onto the jacket that symbolized

something the winner was passionate about. When it was time to return the jacket after my 30 days it had a patch of a microphone sewn onto the flap near the back vent at the bottom. I love karaoke and my wife suggested placing it closest to my butt because every time I sing, I make an ass of myself."

Dunstall explained there were several reasons he decided to join the club a few years ago but the most prominent one was the near loss of his grandson, Jin, at birth two and a half years ago.

"His recovery has been a miraculous journey to medical normalcy that was finally completed this past November with open-heart surgery. You see, the motto of Optimist International is 'Friend of Youth'. That child was a gift and that led to my path of service in this community and

supporting families and kids that live here. Somebody has to pay that bill and I can't think of any better way to do so."

Dunstall said the one thing missing from this story are examples of the things the club's members do.

"Delivering food hampers in a snowstorm. Spending hours covering the millions of little details needed to create a community event like the Easter egg hunt. Picking up and storing 25 benches used for the pumpkin-carving event. Managing every aspect of the massive preparation and work needed to pull off our food-service activities at events such as the New Hamburg Fall Fair.

"Oftentimes it is thankless. Presenting the jacket at our monthly meetings is not only great fun, it's also a small way to thank a big heart."



Longtime New Hamburg Optimist Gary McNeil is recognized as Optimist of the Month for December 2023 as presented at the club's Jan. 7 monthly dinner meeting. Contributed photo

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## OPINION —

**EXPERT ADVICE: *Protect your heart with the power of prevention***

**By Mercedes Kay Gold**

February marks heart month across Canada. Heart disease affects approximately 2.4 million Canadian adults, and is the second leading cause of death in our country. The power of prevention begins with lifestyle changes.

Nutrition and exercise are the foundation to overall wellness. There are no shortcuts. Fit and fabulous is earned. Consistency is key. Stop blaming genetics, as they play a much smaller role than your daily habits. There's no magic pill, but following a back-to-basics day-to-day consistent lifestyle leads to a vibrant inside and glowing outside. To stay on track, there's five health numbers you should know by heart.

Blood pressure is the pressure at which blood through your arteries. A healthy blood pressure is 120/80 or lower. The first number refers to systolic pressure and reflects the amount of pressure when your heart beats. The second number or diastolic pressure indicates the amount of pressure between heartbeats or

at rest. Blood pressure fluctuates throughout the day but begins to be concerning once it regularly reads 130/80, and 140/90 or greater may indicate it's time for medication. High blood pressure or the "silent killer" is symptom free but can damage your organs as well as increase your risk for heart disease and stroke if left unchanged. A quick blood-pressure test in your favourite pharmacy is smart, but take it twice. Nerves may alter this all-important number.

Resting heart rate is an amazing indicator of whether your heart is working harder than it should. Sitting still and stress-free for a minute, check your pulse at the side of your neck by placing your index and third finger to the side of your windpipe. Count the number of beats in fifteen seconds and multiply by four. A normal heart rate beats 60-100 times in a minute for people age 15-60. A lower heart rate at rest is the goal. Cardiovascular exercise is linked to more efficient heart function.

Cholesterol is an essential fat-like substance produced by the liver. There are two types of cholesterol, good and bad. Low-density lipoprotein (LDL) increases the risk of plaque buildup and your chances for a heart attack or stroke. High-density lipoprotein is the good guy. This number is as unique as you and depends on your age and risk factors. By adhering to a health lifestyle, you minimize risks. A healthier you

supports a lower biological age, no matter how many candles are on the birthday cake.

Blood sugar is a huge health concern. The test measures how much glucose is in your blood, and your fasting blood sugar should be less than 100 milligrams/deciliter. Yes, blood sugar fluctuates throughout the day and food is the key to avoiding the rollercoaster effect. The A1C reading is the best indicator for your diabetes risk. Sugar is the enemy. An overprocessed, packaged diet creates inflammation throughout the body and leads to heaps of health diseases. Looking at your AC1 after three months, a normal reading is between 5.7 and 6.4. Anything above increases your risk of type-2 diabetes. Food is your friend or foe. Choose wisely.

Body Mass Index (BMI) is the measure of body fat based on height and weight. A normal BMI is between 18.5 and 24.9 and between 25 and 29.9 is overweight. BMIs over 30 are considered overweight. The BMI is one piece in the ideal weight puzzle. It doesn't take into account the amount of muscle versus fat, but for the average Canadian this number is a great tool for addressing health risks.

Exercising often and eating a healthy, wholefood diet high in plants is absolutely key to overall health. Almost 60 per cent of Canadians are overweight. Managing your weight is a game changer.



**Mercedes Kay Gold, our health-and-fitness columnist, offers some helpful (and healthful) tips on keeping your heart healthy this month. Photo by Mercedes Kay Gold**

Maintaining electrolyte balance in the body supports healthy blood pressure. Magnesium, potassium and sodium are the trio in charge. Potassium and magnesium are both found in fresh produce, making a rainbow of vegetables vital in the diet daily.

More than 34 per cent of Canadians over the age of 19 are deficient in magnesium, and this mega-important mineral assists more than 300 enzymes to carry out chemical reactions in the

body. Salt is necessary but the Standard American Diet (SAD) is overly processed and the sodium content is excessive.

A diet rooted in Mother Nature means adding a sprinkle of Himalayan pink salt or fleurs de sel for optimum health. Sleep is underestimated, but restorative on every level. Deal with stress and, of course, try to avoid alcohol and smoking at all costs.

Happy Heart Month!

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OPINION —

EXPERT ADVICE: *We all feel frozen at times in our life*



**By Chip Bender  
RP(q)**

During the middle of the recent deep freeze we experienced, I was walking toward the hospital in which my father lay in what appeared to be a frozen state.

He had hip-replacement surgery

a week and half earlier, though he did not seem to be progressing as expected. He was medically stable, doing all the things humans need to do to survive like breathing, eating and sleeping. So, technically he was not dying, though he was not doing much more than the bare minimum, which made it feel like he was not really living either.

The thought caught me by surprise and almost caused me to freeze in my tracks. Instead, I put my next foot forward onto the crunchy snow-covered sidewalk, as the cold wind buffeted my face, to continue toward the hospital to visit him.

By the end of that week, my father had moved out of the hos-

pital into respite care. The following week I was laid low by a stomach ailment for a couple of days during which time I did not do much beyond the bare minimum of breathing and sleeping.

This experience made me realize that there are occasions in life in which being frozen is to be expected and not feared nor disdained. Sometimes we need some down time to recuperate and heal from physical ailments. The same can be said about the mental and emotional pain we invariably encounter on our journeys.

There may be times when we have been in a frozen state for so long it feels like the thaw and the rebirth of spring will nev-

er come. In those instances, it is possible that the time for a thaw has not yet arrived, and we need to continue to wait in the frozen state longing for the situation to change.

In other cases, we may be the ones responsible for delaying the thaw. Perhaps we are unwilling to let go of an old emotional wound, or we are unwilling to accept the new reality of a situation. Maybe we are unwilling to take the first step towards reconciliation in a broken relationship, or perhaps we just do not know the first step forward.

Being in a period of winter in one's life can be difficult. Being alone during these periods can be almost unbearable. Humans

are social creatures who rely on each other to get through these difficult times. If you know someone going through a difficult time, reach out to them. If you are going through a difficult time yourself, reach out to a trusted family member, friend, or a professional.

Sometime all it takes is one small step. The days will eventually get longer, the clouds will dissipate, and the warm winds of spring will return.

*(Chip Bender is a counsellor at the Interfaith Counselling Centre in New Hamburg. Opinions expressed are those of the author.)*

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**FRIDAY, FEB. 2**  
St. Clements Public Skate  
1-2 p.m.  
St. Clements Community Centre  
1 Green St. St. Clements

Wellesley Public Skate  
1-2 p.m.  
Wellesley Township Recreation  
Centre  
1401 Queens Bush Rd. Wellesley

**SATURDAY, FEB. 3**  
Linwood Snofest 2024  
8:30 a.m. – 6 p.m.  
Linwood Recreation Centre  
5279 Ament Line, Linwood

**SUNDAY, FEB. 4**  
St. Clements Public Skate  
12-1:30 p.m.  
St. Clements Community Centre  
1 Green St. St. Clements

Wellesley Public Skate  
12-1:30 p.m.  
Wellesley Township Recreation  
Centre  
1401 Queens Bush Rd. Wellesley

**SUNDAY, FEB. 11**  
Valentine's Drive Thru Dinner  
5-6 p.m.  
New Hamburg Royal Canadian  
Legion  
65 Boulee St. New Hamburg

**MONDAY, FEB. 12**  
Township of Wilmot Council  
Meeting  
7-11 p.m.  
Council Chambers  
60 Snyder's Rd. West Baden

Gaia's Gardens' Top 5 Essentials  
for a beautiful garden  
7 p.m.  
Wilmot Recreation Complex  
1291 Nafziger Rd. Baden

**TUESDAY, FEB. 13**  
Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper  
5-7 p.m.  
Emmanuel Lutheran Church  
1716 Snyder's Rd. E. Petersburg

Township of Wellesley Council  
Meeting  
6:45 p.m.  
Council Chambers  
4805 William Hastings Line,  
Crosshill



**WEDNESDAY, FEB. 14**  
Community Care Concepts Lunch  
and Fellowship  
12 p.m.  
Wellesley Community Centre  
1000 Maple Leaf St. Wellesley

**SATURDAY, FEB. 17**  
Wilmot Heritage Day  
10 a.m. – 3 p.m.  
New Dundee Community Centre  
1028 Queen St. New Dundee

**THURSDAY, FEB. 22**  
Community Care Concepts Lunch  
and Fellowship  
12 p.m.  
Wilmot Rec Complex  
1291 Nafziger Rd. Baden

**MONDAY, FEB. 26**  
Township of Wilmot Council  
Meeting  
7-11 p.m.  
Council Chambers  
60 Snyder's Rd. West Baden

**WEDNESDAY, FEB. 28**  
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and Fellowship  
12 p.m.  
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5279 Ament Line Linwood





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

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