

# STRATFORD TIMES

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## Carbon tax increase comes into effect this month despite controversy

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Although Ontario Premier Doug Ford and others from across the country called for a pause on the increase, carbon pricing will rise to \$80 per tonne on April 1, up from the current \$65.

Perth-Wellington MP John Nater says this increase will not help rural communities but instead make it harder for small businesses and farmers to survive in the already strapped economy.

“The carbon tax has a significant impact on Canadians, especially those living in rural communities including farmers, agribusinesses and local small businesses, because other alternatives are not available in communities like ours. Drying grain, heating barns and running farm equipment all use fuel and, unfortunately, there are no other alternatives in rural areas.

“When the carbon tax is applied to all these different aspects of rural and small-town living, it adds the cost to each and every person who lives in these communities, works in these communities and owns businesses in these communities. So that's the substantial economic impact,” said Nater.

The carbon tax increase is a “cornerstone policy of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s minority Liberal government,” said Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood, a senior researcher with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, who notes the carbon tax pricing is a fine policy, but it’s not enough to help the economy.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 4



### THE HUNT IS ON

(RHEO THOMPSON CANDIES PHOTO)

Kids enjoyed hunting 10,000 Rheo Thompson eggs at Upper Queens Park at the annual Easter egg hunt hosted by Stratford House of Blessing and 2Day FM Stratford.

## Ontario's 2024 Budget: aims to balance priorities during economic uncertainty

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Government of Ontario notes it’s committed to investing in infrastructure, healthcare and education despite economic uncertainty, focusing on primary care expansion and long-term-home redevelopment projects.

However, Ontarians have raised concerns about the deficit and the need for a prudent fiscal plan. Ontario Minister of Finance Peter Bethlenfalvy introduced the 2024 Budget in the Ontario Legislature on March 26, stressing the importance of affordability in a strapped economy.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 2

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# Ad hoc committee's youth representative delivers touching speech at the first Grand Trunk community dialogue event

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

A local high-school student and member of Stratford's ad hoc Grand Trunk renewal committee wowed attendees at a recent event focused around the redevelopment of the former Grand Trunk Railway locomotive repair shop in the city's downtown.

The first of many Grand Trunk community dialogue events to come was held on March 26 at the Stratford Rotary Complex, where more than 100 people listened to discussions about the 2018 Grand Trunk community hub master plan, the history of the Grand Trunk site, green initiatives for redevelopment, positive changes for retired adults and the economic opportunity of future building.

Though all speakers were well received, one notable presenter stood out against the rest.

Georgia Neely, a grade 12 student at Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS), is the Grand Trunk renewal committee's youth representative. She spoke about the importance of youth engagement for the future of the Grand Trunk site.

"As the youth representative of this group, I'm therefore the youngest," she said. "My age does not come with a lack

of responsibility or sense of perspective. This project affects each and every one of us regardless of generation."

Neely spoke on the importance of all community members, young and old, being involved and having their say on what they see as crucial in the coming years. She also discussed how being the youngest on the committee has given her space to reflect on youth needs within the community.

"My job is to make sure the young voices of tomorrow are heard. Thus far, our discussions and meetings have given me hope for our future. This project will try to encapsulate new gym spaces with the YMCA, new educational spaces with the University of Waterloo and a middle school, potentially library spaces and much more. It makes me excited for the kids to come, and honestly a little jealous," she joked.

"I mean, the idea of a central community hub designed for all ages; a safe space for all ethnicities, beliefs and backgrounds. Where was this when I was growing up?"

Neely's involvement in the Sustainability Club at SDSS ensures the significance of green space at the Grand Trunk site remains a constant priority. She emphasized the importance of environmental con-



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

## COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

Georgia Neely, Grand Trunk Project's Youth representative, says she takes her role seriously and is confident she can help shape the future of Stratford's largest project

sciousness, stressing the need to create a space that can withstand time and benefit future generations.

"Ensuring the spaces are as green as possible means ensuring it will be sustainable for many lifetimes and not another burden for our children to carry.

"We must maintain some elements of our history because we are nothing without those who came before us. A location like this for teens and kids can change lives. It could be the birthplace of lifelong friendships and necessary support."

Neely noted a citywide renovation of

this magnitude will impact all generations to come. She went on to discuss the impact youth have and why she takes her position as youth representative seriously.

"My goal as youth representative is to aid in this project in any way I can to give the future kids and people of Stratford the resources they need to live a happy, healthier and more supportive life so they never have to ask, 'Where was this when I was younger?'"

The next Grand Trunk community dialogue event will be at city hall on Saturday, April 13 from 2-4 p.m.



## Happy Retirement Wishes to Fritz Steigmeier!

After a successful and noble career spanning over 40 years, as of April 1st Fritz has officially retired!

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## Stratford Approves Collective Agreements with CUPE Locals 197 and 1385

On March 25, 2024, Stratford City Council approved three-year collective agreements with the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 197 and Local 1385.

"Our inside and outside workers play critical roles in delivering important services to our community, and we're happy to have reached agreements that are fair to our valued employees and to the City of Stratford," said Chief Adminis-

trative Officer Joan Thomson.

CUPE Local 197 represents 41 full-time outside workers, and CUPE 1385 represents 133 full-time and 45 part-time inside workers.

Both agreements are effective from January 1, 2023 until December 31, 2025, and have been ratified by members of CUPE Local 197 and CUPE Local 1385.

# Ontario's 2024 Budget: aims to balance priorities during economic uncertainty

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

“Life has rarely been this expensive,” said Bethlenfalvy in his address at Queen’s Park. “The Bank of Canada has repeatedly raised interest rates at a big pace for months now. The pace and frequency of the Bank of Canada rate hikes have been punishing, perhaps most of all on homeowners whose mortgages have, in some cases, increased by thousands of dollars a month.

“The pressure of managing the government budget pales in comparison to the pressures many families face because they manage their family budget in time, and everything costs more. These are the challenges of a small-business owner managing their budget in order to keep the lights on and keep local workers employed.”

In the 2024 budget, the provincial government is spending 13 per cent more in healthcare and 11.9 per cent more in education respectively. New and existing primary care teams will receive \$546 million over three years to expand the provision of primary care to an additional 600,000 people in Ontario.

Small and rural hospitals will receive \$50 million over three years to stabilize health-care capacity in rural and northern communities. An additional \$500 million over ten years will be available to support small-hospital projects and community health programs.

“Our government is investing in health care, which is vitally important to our communities in rural Ontario,” Perth-Wellington MPP Matthew Rae told Grant Haven Media. “These are import-

ant investments our government decided to continue to make despite the economic headwinds we’re currently facing as a province.”

The budget also includes investments for a new medical school at York University. This will be the first medical school in Canada focused primarily on training family doctors and training and retaining nurses and medical staff.

Ontario is also investing an additional \$152 million over the next three years to support individuals facing unstable housing conditions and mental-health and addictions challenges.

“Our government’s historic investment of \$1.8 billion in housing-enabling infrastructure will help us and our municipal partners unlock millions of homes across Ontario,” said Rae. “I hope our federal partners will join us in building the critical infrastructure that we need to get homes built.”

This year’s budget also launches a new Ontario Transit Investment Fund, which will provide annual funding of \$5 million to deliver local and intercommunity transportation projects in unserved and underserved areas in rural Ontario. The funding builds on the Community Transportation Grant Program.

Rae says that to help ease the tension surrounding transportation for families, the 2024 budget will also extend the gas tax cut until December 2024.

“Our government is focused on ensuring that we keep costs down for families,” said Rae. “I will continue to advocate for ways to improve affordability for rural Ontario in particular.”

## HPPH promoting “friendly” dental visits during Oral Health Month

April is Oral Health Month in Canada. The Oral Health Team at Huron Perth Public Health (HPPH) is using the month to highlight “friendly” dental visits – a free service offered at HPPH dental clinics for children aged three years and under.

“Children are recommended to see a dental professional within six months of getting their first tooth, or by one year of age,” says Anna Read, Registered Dental Hygienist. “A friendly visit to an HPPH dental clinic allows young children to get familiar with a dental setting and someone looking into their mouth. It is also an opportunity to spot oral health concerns early.”

At a friendly dental visit, one of the health unit’s dental hygienists will look in the child’s mouth for any concerns, such as early signs of tooth decay. They may, if appropriate, apply fluoride varnish to the teeth. Fluoride varnish helps to prevent cavities, and in some cases, may delay the progression of decay. The visit also includes oral

health education to the parent/caregiver and a chance for them to ask questions about their child’s dental care and development.

In addition, if a family meets the income eligibility requirement, staff can assist them with enrolling their child in Healthy Smiles Ontario (HSO). This provincial program provides free preventive, routine, and emergency dental services for children and youth 17 years old and under from low-income households.

Free friendly dental visits for children aged three years and under are available by appointment at HPPH dental clinic:

- Stratford | 653 West Gore St.

To book an appointment parents can call 1-888-221-2133 ext. 3561.

Oral health is important for overall health. Primary (baby) teeth are essential for eating, smiling, talking, and keeping a place for adult teeth. Starting oral health habits early can keep a child’s smile healthy for a lifetime.

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# From the editor's desk: Spreading that second-hand love

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

In a society where we're constantly inundated with advertisements for that next, new thing, buying used can be an oddly exhilarating and environmentally friendly way to save money.

Since moving into our new house in January, my girlfriend and I have been scouring Facebook marketplace and frequenting the Habitat for Humanity Restore in Stratford in search of the furniture and appliances we need (and want) to make our house a home.

On a shoestring budget, we've managed to buy couches, a dining-room table and chairs, two shelving units, three bathroom cabinets and a chest freezer – the

latter of which the seller told us was made by a company that went out of business because its freezers were too good and no one ever needed to buy a new one.

While only time will tell if that seller was just giving us a sales pitch, there really is something strangely satisfying about finding a piece for a good price that is still functional and was well taken care of, and seeing it find its place in your home.

Even better than finding that used treasure at a good price is finding something for free. Recently, I was scrolling through Facebook while at the gym when I noticed a post on a Shakespeare community page by someone giving away an espresso machine for free. It had been posted an hour before I saw it, so I figured someone

had likely scooped it up.

My girlfriend, however, wasn't so sure. The post only had three likes when I read it and no one had commented, so we jumped in her car after finishing our workout and drove out to Shakespeare where, lo and behold, the foretold espresso machine was sitting there, on a stump, waiting for us to take it.

After bringing it home, we bought some espresso beans which we ground fresh the next morning and enjoyed the first of many cappuccinos to come. I swear the coffee tasted better somehow because the machine that made it was free.

While playing the second-hand game can be a bit of a gamble – used things aren't always as functional as advertised – the benefits, in my opinion, outweigh the

risks. Not only have we saved hundreds if not thousands of dollars buying used instead of new, by giving these items a new home, we're essentially helping keep them out of landfill.

As Earth Day approaches, that ubiquitous phrase, "Reduce, reuse and recycle," comes to mind. By buying used, we've managed to both reduce someone else's waste and reuse something that might otherwise have become garbage.

While we can all do more to protect and preserve our environment, this is just enough to assuage my ever-present eco-guilt, at least until the next time I'm forced to recycle single-use plastic.

I love when saving money and saving the environment are one in the same, don't you?

## Carbon tax increase comes into effect this month despite controversy

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

Local MPs are siding with premiers across the country to try to highlight the impact the tax hike will have on all aspects of the economy. Nater notes this could not only drive up food costs across the country but also push small businesses and farmers to do business across the border.

"Unfortunately, small business folks are looking at different options because the cost is becoming unaffordable to businesses in Ontario.

"We're really seeing a huge impact on business, and we believe there can be a more reasonable approach to this."

Though the carbon-tax increase was implemented on April 1, Nater wants to see it scrapped. He says Trudeau requested "better alternatives to the carbon tax," but he isn't taking suggestions passed along from other provinces.

"A lot of other provinces have come up with alternatives, but they're basically being denied by the federal Liberals.

Meanwhile, the provincial proposals are far more beneficial to the environment and consumers.

"We've heard from other provinces that are looking at alternative methods, including nuclear-power-generation and transportation alternatives, providing all these different options that don't involve a carbon tax. However, the federal government has said that none of these alternatives are acceptable without a carbon tax or a price on carbon."

Nater said he believes the carbon tax is a political move rather than a way to promote the decrease of fossil fuels. He says studies conducted on the carbon tax show the program is a "wash" when it comes to its benefits.

"At the end of the day, I think what we're seeing is a very short-sighted approach, as they're unwilling to change direction. What we've seen in the last few months is that this is all political science rather than environmental science," he said.

## Letter to the Editor

The "If" factor:  
Stratford could be the city of environmental excellence  
"if" the "ifs" were achieved.  
"if" solar panels were installed on the roofs of the GTR

railway Buildings.

"if" GEO Thermal by heat pump using the tunnel temperature for heating and cooling. Remembering, that the GTR rail used the tunnels for heating with steam.

"if" factories could see the large installation of solar on the GTR building happen, the factories could follow.

"if" homes and businesses could see the clean electricity that solar produces, they could investigate.

"if" the city could start installing solar on municipal buildings, it would start to set an example. The city of

Bellville has certainly set an example, by installing solar on all municipal buildings.

"if" every home and business would put several plants in their facilities, they absorb CO<sub>2</sub> from indoor air and in turn provide a healthy environment.

Stratford could be an environmental leader in fighting the devastation to our climate.

Environmentalist

Lorne Bolton  
Stratford, Ontario

Just a note to say how thankful I am for your first-rate publication being made available. The major local events are given depth and comment, the columnists are interesting, the sports coverage of the Warriors and Irish has been thorough and terrific and the puzzles demanding

and fun.

I look forward to getting one every other Friday as I'm sure many of my neighbours do.

THANK YOU for filling the void with quality.  
Bob Woodley  
Stratford

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**STRATFORDTIMES**

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## STRATFORDTIMES

### Guiding Principles

1. Everyone has a story
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3. Good news beats bad news
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

# Blowes family celebrates 75th business anniversary

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Brian, Sam and Rob Blowes are pleased to have reached a significant milestone anniversary for their family-run businesses of three generations.

The Blowes family business legacy began in 1949 when Stan Blowes opened Stan Blowes' Book and Gift Shop and eventually added a travel agency. Now, the family businesses are known as Blowes Cards and Gifts, Blowes Stationery and Office Supplies, and Blowes and Stewart Travel Group. The businesses reached their 75th anniversary on March 31, and the store held draws for customers.

"I think we're pretty honoured that we're able to do that for sure, certainly as a generational family business," Blowes Stationery and Office Supplies owner Brian Blowes said.

"It's a real milestone," said Sam Blowes, former owner and son of Stan Blowes.

"Yeah, not many get there," added Rob Blowes, vice president of Blowes and Stewart Travel – Stratford. "(I'm) pretty proud of it. We're continuing to grow our businesses after 75 (years) as well. We're not sitting around just relaxing."

The Blowes family is tied to Stratford's history. The current location from 28-34 Wellington Street used to be a Loblaws grocery store. The Blowes also lent their space to the Stratford Festival in 1953 for two years to be used as its first box office.

The Blowes family businesses also give



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

## DIAMOND ANNIVERSARY

**Rob, Sam and Brian Blowes have all played a role in the success of the Blowes Stationery and Office Supplies, Blowes Cards and Gifts and Blowes and Stewart Travel Group businesses as part of the 75-year legacy of the family businesses.**

back to the community, often by donating to charities, sponsoring youth sports and selling tickets to events. Sam's brother Ted Blowes was also Stratford's mayor for 10 years. The Blowes family continues to serve customers generation after generation from the time Stan and his son Bob – Brian's dad and Sam's brother – ran the businesses.

"They had personalities they established in the city," Sam said. "We just followed suit. We picked up on their personalities and we were growing our businesses that way and, as a result, we've got a lot of people who are loyal."

Sam, known as "Sam-Sam the Travel Man" in commercials for the travel agency, retired a few years ago after 53 years work-

ing in the family business from the time he was 14-years-old. Brian and Rob also started working in the generational business when they were the same age.

The travel side of the business faced a lot of changes over the years, especially with technology. There's less face-to-face appointments and travellers no longer have physical tickets, and have digital tickets instead. When Stan opened the travel agency, he used to take his customers to and from the London International Airport.

Blowes merged with the Stewart Travel Services in Peterborough in 2019 to become Blowes and Stewart Travel Group. Rob said, along with the two main offices in Stratford and Peterborough, there are remote workers with the agency all over

Ontario.

The travel business faced lots of difficulties during the COVID-19 pandemic when several travel companies folded. Rob said although the past few years were challenging, 2023 was their first record year for business since 2019.

"Last year was better than pre-covid years. We've rebounded," he said.

"Now, when people come into travel, they say, 'Get me out of here,'" Sam added. "They don't care where because they were on lockdown for a couple of years."

The Stationery and Office Supplies store, while not as heavily impacted as the travel agency, also had to pivot during the pandemic. The retailer offered curbside pickup and closed off parts of the store so customers could only look, not touch, the cards and merchandise to be sold.

The store had to wait until the Ontario government gave the all-clear for brick-and-mortar businesses to reopen in full. Hours for the retail staff were also reduced.

"We were able to still, thankfully, operate with our commercial customers for office supplies for our online ordering system and delivery that we always offered," Brian said. "So, that helped us get us through those tough years for sure."

The Blowes businesses will continue to adapt to any and all industry changes.

"We just hope to continue to make our shopping easier for our customers and through improving websites, things like that," Brian said.

# United Way celebrates spirit of community and sets new fundraising record

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

United Way Perth-Huron hosted its Spirit of Community Celebration at the Best Western Plus Arden Park Hotel on March 21, announcing a record-breaking year of fundraising efforts.

After a record-setting campaign, United Way raised \$2,345,792 to support its efforts to address unignorable issues, including homelessness, mental health and access to support services.

"We are incredibly grateful for the support of our community throughout the campaign," said United Way Perth-Huron executive director Ryan Erb. "This has been a challenging year for everyone, locally and beyond, with costs for individuals, families and organizations continuing to rise, but donors from across Perth-Huron really stepped up to help support our work. We appreciate the generosity and caring of the place we call home."

Some key highlights include recognizing top individual and workplace donors and presenting awards to organizations with the Volunteer Spirit awards.

This recognition was presented to Lee Anne Andriessen, Andrea Bernard, Don Dingwall, Tabitha Fisher, Wendy Haggitt, Susan Moffat and Patricia Smith. Penny's of Blyth, Festival Hydro and the Hu-

ron-Perth Catholic District School Board also received Community Spirit awards.

FIO Automotive Canada topped the list of workplace-fundraising campaigns by raising almost \$96,000. FIO also provided a dollar-for-dollar, matching corporate donation to United Way.

Kathy Vassilakos from United Housing discussed an update on the new housing initiative, United Housing, which has already raised over \$72,000 from donors throughout Perth County.

Vicky Parent from Huron Safe Homes for Youth, Meagan Partridge from United Way and Kyle Betts from the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Huron Perth delivered heartfelt messages throughout the evening.

During the presentations, retiring campaign co-chairs Rob and Leslie Edney, who held these roles during the COVID-19 pandemic, were also recognized.

"It has been a pleasure and an honour to be able to work with and cheerlead for the communities within Perth-Huron," said co-chair Rob Edney. "We have met incredible individuals looking to support and advocate for the vulnerable within their communities, as well as championing policies and projects to remove impediments to housing, dispelling stigmas around homelessness and creating a more



(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

## RECORD BREAKING

**Campaign co-chair Leslie Edney, United Way Perth-Huron Executive Director Ryan Erb, and Campaign co-chair Rob Edney celebrate a record-breaking year for United Way at this year's gala event.**

equitable community in which all citizens have the opportunity to thrive."

The new campaign co-chairs, John Wolfe and Kristin Sainsbury, were introduced and will be heading the United Way campaigns for the next two years.

United Way also praised its sponsors

including Best Western Plus, The Arden Park Hotel (the Hayter Family), Chartwell Anne Hathaway Retirement Residence, Famme & Co., Horizon Solutions, KDB Law, RE/MAX a-b Realty, IATSE Local 357, investStratford, Samsonite, SBS Metals and the Stratford Festival.

# Stratford police without leads after thieves make away with frozen food from Erie Drive In

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

The owners of Stratford's iconic Erie Drive In are out nearly \$2,000 in frozen foods after a thief or thieves cut through a back gate and broke into several outdoor freezers at the rear of the restaurant overnight March 24-25.

In a press release, Stratford police said the owners of the restaurant at 634 Erie St. contacted police at 10 a.m. March 25 to report the break in. On arrival, officers noticed a chain-link fence at the back of the property had been cut. Speaking with the Times, Mike Bayer, who co-owns Erie Drive In with wife Cathy Bayer, said a gate to an outdoor freezer area at the back of the restaurant was also cut, giving those responsible for the break in and theft access to the freezers.

"We discovered it Monday morning when we came in. I pulled up around back and there was boxes of food sitting everywhere ... and I noticed the fence on our back gate was cut, so they obviously got in. We keep only our freezer-storage outside. There's no way for them to get into the building, but obviously that's an important part. It's the bulk of our inventory back there," Mike Bayer said, referring to the boxes of ice cream and other frozen foods the Erie Drive In is famous for locally.

"They took most of the stuff out of the freezers and they took whatever they could, and the rest was just sitting there."

While the Bayers initially told police they were out roughly \$500 in frozen



## BREAK AND ENTER

Erie Drive In co-owner Mike Bayer stands just inside the gate a thief or thieves cut into overnight March 24 and 25 to gain access to the restaurant's outdoor freezers and steal or ruin nearly \$2,000 in frozen food.

food, Mike Bayer said further inspection of the boxes pulled out of the freezers and left in the rear parking lot showed the restaurant's total loss from the break in was closer to \$2,000. He also said the thieves broke some of the latches and damaged the lids to some of the restaurant's freezers, something he and his staff have been able to fix themselves.

Though the Bayers and their team were

able to open on time Monday, March 25, the time required to reorder inventory and go through what they had left led to a few hours delay in the restaurant opening the next day, March 26.

Mike Bayer said many of the restaurant's suppliers offered to replace the stolen or compromised food for free, and he said the community has been supportive of the business following the break in,

with friends and customers stopping in or calling the Erie Drive In to check on the Bayers and their staff.

The motive for the break in, Mike Bayer continued, isn't clear, but he said if it was just someone looking for something to eat or drink, Erie Drive In is always happy to provide a bite to eat or something to drink to anyone in need.

Next time, he only asks they come to the front counter during business hours.

Currently, Stratford police have no suspects in this break in and they are asking anyone with security cameras in the area or those who may have seen anything suspicious near the restaurant overnight March 24-25 to contact police at 519-271-4141 ext. 2 or Crime Stoppers at 1-800-222-TIPS.

Stratford police investigated a similar break in at a nearby business on Lorne Avenue East overnight March 24-25 in which the back fence of the property had been cut and 15 acetylene and hydrogen cylinders believed to be empty were stolen from a storage area.

"There are similarities between the two in regards to how access was gained to the items stolen, but due to lack of evidence in regards to suspects, we're not able to link the two together as being completely related to one another," Stratford police Const. Darren Fischer said, noting police are continuing to seek evidence and suspects in both investigations.

Again, police ask anyone with information on this break in to contact the Stratford Police Service or Crime Stoppers.

# Emily Murphy Centre's euchre tournament to be first major fundraiser in years

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

After putting large-scale fundraisers on the backburner, the Emily Murphy Centre will host its first big fundraising event in nearly five years.

The centre will host the Euchre with Emily tournament April 19 at the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 8 at 6:30 p.m. Along with the euchre tournament, there will be refreshments, a silent auction and prizes.

"We really just want it to be a really fun night in support of our programs here," said centre executive director Lisa Wilde.

RBC Wealth Management Dominion Securities is sponsoring the event.

The Emily Murphy Centre has hosted smaller fundraisers for the past few years however the COVID-19 pandemic put a pause on major fundraising events. The centre prioritized the health and safety of residents staying in the centre, so fundraising became less of a priority.

"Now we're ready to go and we're ready to get out there and get our message out there and let people know that

what we do is really important," Wilde said.

Along with providing Second Stage Housing for women with or without children who experienced abuse, the Emily Murphy Centre offers food, transportation, furniture and other support services.

The Emily Murphy Centre has been operating either at or above capacity levels since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared. The centre also has a waitlist. Wilde said the increase in domestic-violence cases that began during the pandemic lockdown and the rising need for services at the Emily Murphy Centre are correlated.

"Folks were all of a sudden stuck at home with people that were hurting them," she said. "It really kind of sank in for a lot of people that they needed to get out. Of course, they turn to shelter, they turn to Second Stage. Those numbers haven't gone down a whole heck of a lot.

"I mean, they've gone down significantly since the lockdown, but with the cost of housing, trying to get out to try to find some place safe to live is more and more difficult now."



(EMILY STEWART PHOTO)

## LEAD SUIT

Lisa Wilde, the executive director of the Emily Murphy Centre, holds the poster for the Euchre with Emily event. The card tournament on April 19 will be the first major fundraiser for the

The Emily Murphy Centre will be celebrating its 35th year in operation in October. Euchre with Emily will cost \$25

to attend, and anyone interested can register by either calling 519-273-7350 or emailing lwilde@wightman.ca.

# Over 1,700 new library cards issued during a record-breaking year at SLP in 2023

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Stratford Public Library (SPL) recently released its 2023 annual report highlighting significant growth throughout the year, including over 1,700 new library cards issued, an indicator of substantial growth for the already-tight space.

The library saw more than 134,000 visitors last year, a 29 per-cent increase over 2022. Library material circulation jumped nine per cent from the previous year with just under half a million physical and digital items borrowed by library users.

“The increase in library usage since the pandemic has been overwhelming. Every day, over 1,200 people use the library either in person or through our online tools. The exciting thing is that each person came to us for a unique reason – whether it is for information, recreation, or a place to just be in the community – all free of charge,” said SPL CEO Krista Robinson.

In 2023, the library welcomed a new CEO, launched a new strategic plan and increased all aspects of library service including puzzles, board games and decodable books to help new readers. Programming was another area that saw significant growth. Almost 22,000 people attended 676 programs, a 53 per-cent increase over 2019.

Participation by children in the library’s summer reading club also increased last year. One in four school-aged children in



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

## RECORD NUMBERS

Stratford Public Library CEO Krista Robinson is excited to share the news of another record-breaking year at the library.

Stratford registered for the TD Summer Reading Club, and more than 5,000 attended summer programming.

Staying true to their strategic plan, popular events like Drag Storytime and eco-friendly programs like Drop n'

Swaps emphasized the library’s commitment to inclusivity and environmental stewardship.

“We strive to make our programs available to everyone,” said Robinson. “Whenever possible, our events are

drop-in, for all ages and abilities, and always free of charge. This has been a huge success, especially for our children’s programs, which allow full families to attend an event.”

The Settlement Services Program, run in partnership with the YMCA, offers free services to immigrants and helps support their transition into their new life in Canada. A total of 153 newcomers engaged with the program and found it helpful.

Other service highlights include the creation of the Snack Stop community food pantry, the Tales & Trails story walk at the Stratford Perth Museum and the unveiling of the library garden renewal project.

Several of these new services have been implemented in partnership with area organizations and groups throughout Stratford.

“By partnering with the Rotary Club of Stratford and Stratford-Perth Museum, we have been able to expand our reach by providing a number of story walks along the trails behind the museum this past year,” said Robinson. “It has been a great experience bringing this family-friendly literacy initiative outdoors in a bigger way than we would have otherwise. Also, by partnering with the Stratford Mall, we have been able to engage a wider audience. For instance, during March Break we had over 200 people attend our LEGO program at the mall.”

To read the full annual report, visit the library website at [splibrary.ca](http://splibrary.ca).

## Queer Book of the Month

*Loveless* by Alice Oseman  
@SPL: YA Osema

Alice Oseman, British author of the popular Heartstopper graphic novel series and other YA fiction, brings us another novel with LGBTQIA+ themes and relatable, funny, flawed characters.

Main character Georgia is 18 and heading off to university with her best friends Pip and Jason. A fan-fiction die-hard and hopeless romantic when it comes to books and movies, Georgia has never actually had a real crush or kiss. In an environment where everyone, including her outgoing roommate, Rooney, seems sex-obsessed, Georgia grapples with her feelings of disgust and anxiety when it comes to being romantic or physically intimate with another person. When her journey of self-discovery threatens to ruin her closest friendships, Georgia turns to mentor Sunil who welcomes her into the LGBTQIA+ student society and opens her eyes to a whole new way of seeing herself and her relationships.

Oseman’s cast of supporting characters are white,



Latine, Southeast Asian, pansexual, lesbian, and straight (with gay parents) ...and they are all loveable drama nerds who will delight readers with their charming, funny banter. Georgia’s introspection feels a bit repetitive at times, but that is the nature of figuring oneself out! The depictions of university life, sexual discovery, and drinking make this book particularly suited to older teens, but many adult readers will relate to the feelings felt, experiences had, and mistakes made during post-secondary school (even though some of the British university culture and traditions are quite different from Canadian ones). *Loveless* is a compassionate portrayal of characters with aromantic and asexual identities – a down-to-earth, accessible introduction to these oft-overlooked identities for anyone wanting to understand more. What’s more, *Loveless* is a love story about friendship as much as it is a tale about discovering one’s sexuality.

Alida Lemieux  
Public Service Librarian  
Stratford Public Library

## Weekend Quiz

1. When was the last time a total solar eclipse crossed Canada?
2. How many divisions are on an American Roulette Wheel?
3. What does SPF stand for?
4. Does sound travel faster in water or air?
5. What is the bunny’s name in Disney’s Zootopia?
6. What country has the most castles?
7. What is a group of flamingos called?
8. What are April showers meant to bring?
9. What day is Earth Day?
10. What nationality was Picasso?

This week’s answers are found on pg. 30

**SHOP LOCAL. SAVE LOCAL.**

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# Avon Maitland District School Board adapts current strategic plan and extends it for two more years

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

To help prepare area students to face and overcome the challenges of today, the Avon Maitland District School Board (AMDSB) has slightly modified its current strategic plan and will use it to guide the administration of public education in Huron and Perth county schools over the next two years.

Over the past four years, AMDSB's strategic plan has been focused around three pillars for a successful graduate: I am prepared; I am well; I am engaged. For the modified plan, the school board is maintaining those three areas of focus while expanding the definition of what it means to be prepared, well and engaged.

"It is still very relevant to the work we are doing and the work we see ahead of ourselves," AMDSB director of education Dr. Lisa Walsh said. "... That's still the core work with a few additions and modifications. Preparedness is all around the students having the opportunity to develop the skills needed to thrive in a global world. Wellness is about creating the

conditions that support and enhance the wellbeing of both students and our staff. Engagement is all about creating a community that respects individuals, as well as everyone in society. It's all about the promotion of continuous, ongoing learning."

Under the I-am-prepared pillar, the school board's strategic plan says the board will create high expectations and provide supports in all areas with particular focus on the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy; innovate by prioritizing the development of future-ready skills, including social, emotional, digital and global competencies; and provide multiple pathways for future success.

"We've developed multiple pathways to success, so we've expanded our image of a successful graduate, if you will," Walsh said. "We all believe that in this and age there's multiple pathways to success. It's not just the old image of you finish high school and after you go to university ... and other pathways fall short of that definition. We define successful graduates as students who achieve a diploma, they obtain a certificate or they transition to a

community based opportunity or pathway like skilled trades, college, university, workplace or community.

Under the I-am-well pillar, the school board's strategic plan says the board will provide and encourage physical and mental health and wellness; cultivate a sense of belonging and inclusion for all; commit to Truth and Reconciliation; and establish safe and caring learning environments and workplaces.

Finally, under the I-am-engaged pillar, the plan states the board will cultivate a sense of ownership by amplifying voices and choices in the classrooms, schools and district; enhance leadership opportunities and relevant, authentic, real-world learning; enrich and encourage positive relationships and partnerships within schools and communities; and encourage active participation in environmental-sustainability initiatives.

"These are all the things that we really have to grapple with in this world as individuals and also as a collective," Walsh said. "... When you put things down in black and white on a piece of paper, it shows a stronger commitment. It's not

just, 'Oh, well, yes, we're thinking about (these things) too.' These are our goals."

The school board has also included a framework for monitoring the strategic plan's impacts on individual students and schools, and the board as a whole. Over the next two years, the school board will review high-level data like graduation and EQUAO rates to illuminate patterns; mid-level data more focused on particular groups of students and staff like report-card data and results from feedback surveys to determine which parts of each pillar requires more focus; and specific data pertaining to individuals to help the board understand student, staff and caregiver experiences.

As Walsh is preparing to retire from her role as director of education in April and a new director will be coming onboard, she said extending this modified strategic plan for the next two years only will give the new director and the board of trustees a chance to evaluate its success and determine if it needs any additions or modifications as new challenges and issues emerge in the world such as the growing presence of AI and AI-based technology.

## Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board launches international student program

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

The Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board (HPCDSB) is expanding its efforts to bring international students to live and study in local communities.

With its launch planned for the 2024-2025 school year, the International Student Program is intended to provide students from around the world with an enriching Canadian educational experience while giving local students the opportunity to expand their worldview by having international students in their classrooms.

"The board has had students from various countries attending our schools since 2017," said International Student Program principal Chris Grace. "HPCDSB

has worked with a partner organization to recruit students from Mexico and Spain, but that changed as a result of the pandemic. The board is working with a new partner this year and it has expanded its focus to include new countries in Europe to recruit from with the help of education travel agencies in those countries."

International students will attend either St. Anne's Catholic Secondary School in Clinton or St. Michael Catholic Secondary School in Stratford. They will have access to the same educational experience and academic standards all Huron-Perth Catholic students receive while experiencing life in the local community.

"We believe we have something really special to offer here," said superintendent of education Karen Tigani. "We're very proud of our rural communities, our small towns. We feel like we have the best of all worlds; we're close to bigger centres but we can offer that kind of small-town, rural experience we think people might be looking for around the world."

Through a new partner-

ship with MLI Homestay – an organization that provides meaningful learning experiences across Canada for international students – and a continuing partnership with Red Leaf Group, another organization specializing in bringing international students to live and study in Canada, HPCDSB is initially working to attract students from European countries including Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, France, Germany and Belgium, and will look at expanding into other countries in the future.

"Having international students here in our schools will benefit all of our students," Tigani said. "I think it's a benefit for the students coming to have this experience in our communities and our schools, but also, we really believe bringing people from around the world into our schools, into our communities is going to be very enriching for our students, for our staff and for our communities."

"... As we begin, we want to make sure we can manage what we're doing. Already, there's quite a bit of interest from some of those (European) countries. My understanding is there's a lot of interest in coming to Canada, coming to Ontario, and coming to southwestern Ontario

seems like a good match for some of those people in those places. However, we know there are many other people in places around the world we would love to welcome. Students are welcome to come from anywhere around the world. It's just currently, we're pursuing and we have relationships with those (European) markets in particular. That's not to preclude anyone else."

The school board and its partners are looking for locals to serve as host families for international students while they're here. Host families are compensated and commit to include the international student in family life and to provide:

- Three nutritious meals per day and snacks;
- A private room with a door, a window, a bed and a desk;
- A shared bathroom; and
- Supervised internet access.

For more information about the International Student Program, visit [huronperthcatholic.ca/programs-and-services/international-student-program/](http://huronperthcatholic.ca/programs-and-services/international-student-program/) or contact the Catholic Education Centre directly. For more information about hosting an international student, visit [mlihomestay.com](http://mlihomestay.com).

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# Stratford's official Plan receiving positive feedback and suggestions from community members

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

As part of a provincially legislated review every five years, Stratford's official plan is now available to the public online and has already received positive feedback and ideas from residents, mainly related to arts and culture, housing, community togetherness and initiatives for combatting climate change.

Stratford's official plan is the city's overarching policy document containing guiding principles, goals, objectives and land-use policies. The plan is a roadmap for how the community will develop, where housing should be located, where to build transpor-

tation networks, where to locate employment lands, where to offer community facilities and much more.

The feedback on the plan will be instrumental in the city's vision for the future. Official plans ensure municipalities can plan for future infrastructure and other needs to support growth.

One resident wrote, "We need a cultural center for artists and potential artists to collaborate, learn and display their creations, maybe in an existing building."

Another pointed out that community togetherness needs to be considered in subdivisions.

"Small community parks need to be included in all subdivisions to help develop

community and the health and happiness of the residents," they wrote.

According to an online press release from the City of Stratford, official plans are also necessary to inform land-use decisions, ensure compatibility between different land uses, and protect cultural-heritage resources and the natural environment.

Within this scope, many comments and suggestions for the city to consider relate to greenhouse-gas-reduction initiatives and combatting climate change.

"The Declaration of Climate Emergency from 2020 and the targets for reduction of (greenhouse-gas emissions) need to be included in the plan for direction," one comment read.

As far as what's missing from the community, a common theme residents discussed was housing initiatives across the city.

One resident suggested that an affordable housing community land trust (CLT) would keep housing affordable forever.

"We should put our publicly owned property and land into a CLT for proportionally mixed income (PMI) affordable housing," they said.

Official plan amendments are considered once public suggestions are received, so it's important for community members to have their say.

For more information or to make comments or suggestions, visit [www.engage-stratford.ca](http://www.engage-stratford.ca) and click on official plan.

## L'Arche Stratford capital campaign in support of new build at 60 per cent of \$6.5-million goal

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

As momentum and local support continue to build in the second year of L'Arche Stratford's Be Belong Become \$6.5-million capital campaign, construction on a new home for the organization that supports local adults living with intellectual disabilities is almost ready to begin.

In recent weeks, two local businesses announced they were donating to the ongoing fundraising campaign. Tradition Mutual presented a cheque for \$25,000 to L'Arche on April 3, and West End Pharmacy owner Maulin Patel announced he was donating \$7,500, bringing the business' total contribution to the campaign up to \$22,500 after previous owner George Jansen donated \$15,000.

"It's community service and a good part of community service," Patel said in a press release. "The community in L'Arche Stratford, from core members to personnel, have always felt like family to me. L'Arche is a non-profit organization doing excellent work. We are always happy to support L'Arche Stratford."

According to L'Arche Stratford executive director Stephanie Calma, donations like these have helped staff and volunteers raise \$3.8 million through its first-ever capital campaign, representing roughly 60 per cent of the campaign goal and the amount needed to build a new, 13,000 square-foot building at 426 Britannia St. where the former Stratford Montessori school building was torn down last summer.

The charitable organization, part of an international network of non-profit social-service agencies that create and operate supportive communities for people



(GALEN SIMMONS PHOTO)

### THE NEXT STEPS

L'Arche Stratford executive director Stephanie Calma and fundraising leader Wendy Gray stand at 426 Britannia St. where the organization will build a new community centre for the local L'Arche community.

with intellectual disabilities, had originally planned to renovate the former Stratford Montessori school building into a new centre for the people its serves by raising the necessary funds through its Be Belong Become campaign.

During the COVID-19 pandemic however, the local board of directors realized the organization's needs had changed so decided to take steps toward demolishing the existing Britannia Street building in favour of a brand-new L'Arche Stratford community centre built in its place complete with space for L'Arche community members to live and participate in activities and programming, as well as space for L'Arche Stratford's offices and staff.

"We had a very successful year last

year with our 50th anniversary, so we're moving forward now," Calma said. "It's given us some confidence with taking the next steps around finalizing building permits and getting those submitted to the city. We're really wanting to keep the community aware that we're moving forward with the project at this time. We haven't reached our goal yet, but we wanted to keep the project front and centre for our community. We've been well-supported and we want to continue that.

"We've had some fantastic support from the neighbourhood as well as the wider community. Way back when we went through the zoning process with the city, we actually had neighbours

show up at the council meetings to support the project moving forward, which is a nice little story I like to share because it often doesn't go that way (with new developments)."

With \$3.8 million raised so far, Calma said L'Arche Stratford can now work towards securing financing to bridge the gap and get construction started before the campaign reaches its goal. Once the city approves the site plan submitted by Feltz Design Build, GB Architect Inc., MTE Engineer and NFR Engineering Ltd. on behalf of the organization, Calma said she is hopeful L'Arche will be able to celebrate the beginning of construction with its donors and the wider community later this year.

Once construction begins, she said it will likely take between nine months and a year to complete. Once complete however, the new building is expected to increase L'Arche Stratford's capacity by 65 per cent and reduce its waitlist for services by 30 per cent.

"It's about the bricks and mortar, but it's also about how we're going to be as an organization in the building and where we want to go in the future," Calma said. "The waitlists (for our support services) are really long and numbers of people in need of the types of support we want to offer have really increased throughout the pandemic, exponentially so. We're talking by 50 per cent in some cases. We're in a position where we really want to support the members we're providing services to now, but also provide more opportunity for people to receive service as well.

"... We recognize people with and without disabilities really enjoy being together, so the more we can offer that to the community ... the more we're able to meet the community's needs."

# Stratford Public Library to be considered an anchor tenant at the Grand Trunk Renewal site

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

The Stratford Public Library (SPL) board is asking the City of Stratford to consider the library as an anchor tenant of the future Grand Trunk Community Hub alongside the YMCA of Three Rivers and the University of Waterloo Stratford School of Interactive Design and Business.

Library CEO Krista Robinson said the Grand Trunk renewal project represents a significant opportunity for the City of Stratford and the advancement of library services in the community.

“As evidenced by our annual report, the library stands as a trusted institution and a pivotal element of community vitality. By endorsing the library as an anchor tenant of the Grand Trunk renewal site alongside ... partners like the YMCA and the university, we can create a vibrant hub that welcomes all residents of Stratford, fostering community engagement and enrichment.”

Robinson discussed the history of the SPL, which was first built in 1903 with a modest space of 10,602 square feet and has since seen two expansions. However, despite these adjustments, the library's current space of 12,470 square feet falls short of meeting the demands of the growing population in Stratford and Perth County.

“Our current facility opened when our population was just 11,000. Over its lifespan, library activity levels have steadily

increased as our service-area population has grown,” she said.

Referencing reports from 2022, Robinson emphasized the inadequacy of SPL's current infrastructure to accommodate the city's changing needs. She discussed challenges including accessibility, noise disturbances and limited parking, all of which hinder the library's ability to serve the community.

Robinson also pointed out that Stratford Public Library has one of the smallest square footage per resident compared to other single-location libraries serving a similar population.

She also noted the library's economic impact.

“The 2018 numbers showed that for every dollar invested in the library, there was an economic impact of \$7.87,” Robinson said.

She said the Grand Trunk Community hub would be an ideal space for the library because it would have ample space for future growth, would be in proximity to other community amenities like the YMCA and the University of Waterloo, and is in alignment with the city's official plan.

Illustrating the library board's vision for what the library could become as part of the Grand Trunk Community Hub, Robinson discussed the Lochal Library in Tilburg, Netherlands. It was built in a Dutch National Railway building back in 2018, and the old railway tracks can still be seen



STRATFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY POSSIBILITIES (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Stratford Public Library's CEO Krista Robinson referenced another library built in a locomotive building in the Netherlands to show councillors the possibilities of the Grand Trunk site library.

throughout the design.

“Despite its small size, the Stratford Public Library has served as a wonderful community access point, gathering destination, learning space and showcase for arts and culture over the past 121 years,


and staff have done their best to maximize the current space. However, we are beyond capacity and can no longer adequately serve our community in the way that residents of Stratford need and deserve,” Robinson said.

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WORLD AUTISM DAY (CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Stratford City Hall raised the Autism Ontario flag on April 2 to honour World Autism Day. The initiative aims to spotlight autism spectrum disorder and foster greater understanding and acceptance within the community.

# Jake's Bowling Social fundraiser gearing up for the third year of supporting RMHC-SCO

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Jake Sippel, a 15-year-old student at Stratford District Secondary School, is getting ready for his third year raising funds for Ronald McDonald House Charities - Southwestern Ontario (RMHC-SCO).

Sippel has raised over \$31,000 for the charity since starting his efforts almost three years ago.

This year's bowling social fundraiser will run on May 5 at Mike's Bowling Lanes in Stratford. The cost is \$20 per person and \$100 for a group of six. A ticket includes bowling for one and bowling shoes. There are three time slots to choose from, and the registration deadline is April 30.

Sippel has been raising money for this important charity since he was personally impacted by the RMHC-SCO when he was three. He explained that he stepped into a malfunctioning hot tub, which caused second-degree burns on his skin.

After being rushed to Stratford Hospital, he was later brought to London Children's Hospital, where he and his family stayed at the RMHC-SCO so they could remain together while Sippel was under-

going treatments for the burns.

Sippel noted his experience at the RMHC-SCO was nothing but positive, and this is why he chose this cause, so he could help others in the same situation.

"The Ronald McDonald House stepped up and let my family stay there while I was in the hospital," said Sippel. "They helped me feel more comfortable with my family close, and because they helped me and my family so much, I have always wanted to give back to them. They just have a special place in my heart."

This prompted him to do something to give back to a charity that had such an impact on him and his family.

"[RMHC-SCO] does a lot to make kids feel like they are at home and it felt fun, and it kept me distracted from what was going on so I wanted to give back," he said.

At this year's bowling social, there will be a penny table with donated items from businesses throughout Stratford. Sippel said the community support for his fundraiser has been instrumental in its overall success.

"We've had great community support from Stratford City Mazda, PEAK Financial Group and Samsonite," said



Sippel. "We also have so many local businesses involved in donating items and helping raise money, like Jenn and Larry's and Pursuit Climbing, which has been great."

When asked what the future holds for him, Sippel said while school is getting tough and his focus on classes and his part-time job is ultimately the most important, he continues to hold a special

place in his heart for fundraising.

"I just want to continue to spread the word about The Ronald McDonald House. It's such a great charity. It's helped so many people I know personally and I just want more awareness about how great it is there."

For more information, to sign up, or to donate, search for Jake Sippel on the Stratford Life Facebook page.



WINTER MARCH LAND

(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

Stratford Dog Walker, Ainsley, walking Charlie, Sally, Cedric and Barney near the Rotary Complex in Stratford on March 20, 2024.



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# 'If you think it, we can print it': Rad Studio opens in Stratford to warm welcome

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

A one-stop shop for customized t-shirts, puzzles, drinkware and fun socks opened a brick-and-mortar shop in Stratford this spring and, so far, locals are loving it.

The Rad Studio, short for Reaburn Anjema Designs, brought the custom-design and printing shop to 25 Ontario St. Co-owner Tammi Reaburn started the business when she and her daughter operated in a booth at the St. Jacobs Market for three years. The duo created custom masks, ornaments and t-shirts, and Reaburn said it was a fulfilling hobby.

"I absolutely loved it. It gave me a bit of a social outlet through COVID," she said.

Reaburn would also create the custom items onsite while customers would browse other vendors at the market. Several things were occurring for her last summer, and she had to make a decision about her design business.

"Do I and Freddy just close up shop or do we need to expand because we'd outgrown the two-days-a-week (market) at St. Jacobs and doing some of it out of my garage," she said.

She partnered with eventual co-owner Fred Anjema, who married her childhood best friend, and they were looking for a space to open a shop. Anjema suggested that they open a spot in Stratford and Reaburn



## GET YOUR FUN SOCKS!

The Rad Studio on 25 Ontario Street is your one-stop shop for any customized gift, and fun socks

was thrilled about the idea. She considered opening a spot where Treasures used to be, until her realtor suggested that the current location would be best suited for the Rad Studio.

The Rad Studio makes everything from t-shirts to drinkware to posters to stickers. Reaburn said customers should know "if you think it, we can print it." All of the printing happens onsite in the shop as well.

The store also sells a collection of socks and underwear with fun patterns. The Rad Studio has more than 100 different pairs

of socks featuring a variety of dog breeds. Customers can also come in with either a picture of their dog, a picture of a dog breed they like, or even drone shots of the family farm to be transformed into puzzles.

There are two types of clients the Rad Studio caters to: anyone looking for unique items and gifts and people looking for t-shirts to mark special occasions like bachelorette parties and St. Patrick's Day events.

"They don't have to go on Amazon," Reaburn said. "They don't have to have it shipped from the States and have it crazy.

Literally, we can do one to 1,000 (t-shirts) for pretty much anything that (you're) looking for."

The Rad Studio also serves small-to-medium-sized businesses, which is why Stratford is a great place for them to open a shop.

"We can do printing on their aprons and shirts and really we can do it in cost-effective pricing for them, similar to what the big guys get when they have to order 100 or 1,000," Reaburn said.

Since opening their doors, the Rad Studio has received lots of positive reception from fellow entrepreneurs and customers alike. Anjema attended some of the Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area (BIA) meetings and found a strong, supportive network.

"They've been incredibly supportive," he said. "We've got some socials that we're on and they're constantly reposting and we're getting new followers every day, which is great because that helps grow our awareness and our community in downtown Stratford."

Customers who browse around the shop also admire the work by the Rad Studio.

"You can see the creative juices flowing and the feedback of people that walk in once they understand what we do is pretty cool," Reaburn said.

The Rad Studio will run design workshops in the spring. More information can be found by visiting [theradstudio.com](http://theradstudio.com) or [instagram.com/the.rad.studio](https://www.instagram.com/the.rad.studio).

(TAMMI REABURN PHOTO)



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STRATFORD NISSAN



# Stratford Makers Market hosts successful Easter Market in support of SGH special care nursery

MERCEDES KAY GOLD

Times Correspondent

Spring is in the air and shoppers were out in full force March 23 at the Easter Market in support of the Stratford General Hospital's special care nursery.

Stratford Makers Market regularly hosts shopping-event extravaganzas at the Rotary Complex. The event was adorable, starting with a meet and greet from the Easter Bunny in a snazzy bowtie and the cutest springtime photo booth capturing family fun in a magical memento. Face-painting artists shared their creativity for a donation to the special care nursery.

Inside there were approximately 60 vendors, selling unique artisan gifts from needlepoint with a modern-day, meme twist, natural deodorant and crocheted veggies to savory home-baked pies.

Of course, Stratford is home to the Stratford Festival, honouring the most famous playwright in history, but this town has a few hidden gems deserving centre stage. This reporter is here to spread some local love and shine the spotlight on a few local small businesses I discovered while perusing the aisles of the Easter Market.

Shopping local supports small businesses with big dreams, feeds families, creates future entrepreneurs, builds community

and funds amazing causes.

## Sweets by Jess

Jess Pett, owner of Sweets by Jess, turned her baking hobby into a lucrative side-hustle. This 28-year-old girl boss baked as a young girl but discovered a real flair in adulthood. From cakes to cutesy cake pops and the ever-popular cupcake, Jess is a busy baking bee. Her bestseller item is the decorated sugar cookie – edible art to suit every occasion. Celebrate in delicious decadence and custom order sugar cookies for Easter, graduation and that upcoming summer wedding now. Missed the market? Sweets by Jess can be found at The Peach Basket, located in the Stratford Mall.

## Black Creek Flower Farm

Springtime is synonymous with fresh tulips and daffodils. Black Creek Flower Farm brightened the building with its gorgeous greenery and vibrant bursts of flower power, plus my personal childhood favorite, pussy willows. Laura and Adam Barker, along with their two children, are third-generation flower experts and run the family-owned business. Once only wholesale, the business has grown, offering readymade bouquets, planters and wreaths, as well as designing your floral fantasy for special events. Supporting other local businesses is part of their mission,

and their store carries tonnes of neat items. Nature is calling. For flower-arranging enthusiasts, the farm's U-Pick Garden is open mid-June until late September, located at 4858 Perth Line 34, Stratford. Pre-order, pick-up and delivery options are available.

## Amanda Lundrigan Fine Art Photography

Amanda Lundrigan of Amanda Lundrigan Fine Art Photography began her love of gardening at just four years old alongside her grandmother. By high school, she discovered a passion for photography. Naturally, flowers were picture perfect. Shooting a wide range of floral favorites since 2019, Amanda soon joined the New Hamburg Art Tour and never looked back. Her photographs are breathtaking and fabulous for framing. They are featured on the cutest bookmarkers and spectacular catching rays in her suncatchers. Amanda can be found behind the lens or helping others preserve their photo memories by modernizing old photographs and movies to digital format.

## With Love and Grace

Kat and Matt Cottrill, parents to fraternal twins, began their home-based business, With Love and Grace, out of a need to tell their bundles of joy apart. They sell pintsize hair bows and snappy bowties,

and the team can be found in local stores and online, too. Their thriving, handcrafted, home-based business has been donating since the brand launched. With Love and Grace gives a percentage of sales to the Stratford General Hospital Foundation, helping support families in the special care nursery who also share the experience of premature, high-risk births.

## Liz Emirzian art and illustration

Liz Emirzian is a talented artist with a passion for bringing Mother Nature from across the globe to life by combining natural elements. Since 2015, she has brought beauty to homes with original art and framed prints. Her business has flourished and Liz expanded her product line to include bookmarks, greeting cards, clay sculptures and decorative ornaments. Liz has a gift for capturing your furry friends with a myriad of magnificent mixed media.

Supporting local keeps money in the community and, after learning a small business owner's backstory, their passion is heartwarming and fulfilling for the shopper. If you missed the Easter Market, the five female organizers are back at the Rotary Complex hosting over 120 vendors on Nov. 22 and 23, just in time for Christmas.



(MERCEDES KAY GOLD PHOTOS)

Those who attended the Stratford Makers Market East Market at the Stratford Rotary Complex March 23 had the chance to have their photo taken with the Easter Bunny in exchange for a donation in support of the Stratford General Hospital's special care nursery.



Jess Pett, owner of Sweets by Jess, displaying her Easter sugar cookie at the Easter Market inside the Stratford Rotary Complex March 23.



Laura Barker of Black Creek Flower Farm at the Stratford Makers Market Easter Market March 23.

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# Our Buildings Tell a Story

## The land registry office and archives

The land registry office was designed by Stratford architect Thomas J. Hepburn. He deliberately matched the building's style with the buff brick, and plum-coloured sandstone, featured on the neighbouring courthouse and jail. Hepburn designed several buildings in Stratford including the library and St. Andrew's church close-by the registry office...

Perth County council's property committee recommended the tender from Pounder Bros. to build the "complete structure for the sum of \$10,168." The recommendation was accepted in April 1910. A plaque in the foyer commemorates the formal opening of this building later in 1910. The building, at 24 St. Andrew St., has been described as a "fireproof fortress for the preservation of public records."

At one time, the only wood in the building was a toilet stall in the basement, and wooden flooring and baseboards on the main floor. Even the door frames and doors were clad in metal. The staircase is concrete and cast iron, though is



now covered with carpet for safety and comfort. Gas lamps were never needed because the relatively new and safer option of electric lighting was available when the building was constructed. Its masonry walls and room dividers, combined with supporting metal arches in the basement, meant the building could easily support the tons of heavy documents and records housed here.

Stratford-Perth Archives

occupied the building from 1981 until 2015, when it was moved to a new and larger purpose built building on Huron St. The registry office was moved to larger quarters after the rapid increase in land sales that followed the Second World War. In the interim, the building was used as a driver's licence bureau and offices for the county health unit.

In 2024, Stratford city council approved a zoning change that will allow the county to turn the building into a small theatre space. Plans include an 80-seat performing arts studio, retail store, restaurant and special event

space.

When the Stratford and District Historical Society (2019) was established, the former Perth County Registry Office, later Stratford-Perth Archives, was selected as its logo. It was chosen because it contained over one hundred years of history stored within its walls and its heritage significance relating to its unique construction method plus its architectural link to its surroundings.

Today the Stratford-Perth Archives is a 10,000 sq.ft. state of the art research and archival facility.

*Contributors: Paul Wilker and Gord Conroy*



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## Warriors eliminate Elmira to earn shot at second straight Cherrey Cup

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

The Stratford Hunter Steel Ltd. Warriors have an opportunity to win back-to-back Cherrey Cups after eliminating the Elmira Sugar Kings in five games in their Midwestern Conference semi-final series.

Head coach Dave Williams told the Times he is thrilled for his troops on their return to the conference final.

"I'm really happy for the guys who have worked incredibly hard," said Williams.

"For us to get this opportunity to play for the Cherry Cup is special. And as we started the playoffs, we talked a little bit about the added responsibility of trying to defend the trophy after winning it last year, so I think the guys are feeling really motivated."

The Warriors opened the series with one of their strongest performances so far of the post-season, routing the Sugar Kings 7-0 in a game that included a four-goal effort by Cole Lewis. Coach Williams acknowledged his players' strong play in the opening game of the series when reflecting on the five-game series, but also noted his team's overall performance wasn't perfect.

"I think there is still room for us to be more consistent with our game," Williams said. "I thought we were really good in game one and maybe caught them a little bit flat. Then, in games three and four, we battled our way back from being down. You're going to have those moments where you're playing from behind a little bit, although it's not ideal, but you have to find ways to get yourself back into games and I like that we're able to do that. In games two and five, I thought our powerplay was influential in both those games which was solid throughout the entire series."

Michael Denney scored a pair of goals while Lewis, Camden Daigle and Haden Frayne each tallied two points in game two, which the Warriors won 5-2.

In game three, after a scoreless first period, the Sugar Kings caught Stratford off-guard with two powerplay goals in the first minute and 43 seconds of the middle frame. Despite the shock of the sudden two-goal deficit, the Warriors climbed back and evened the game at two apiece before the end of the period.

The third period played out eerily similar to the second with Elmira scoring two goals in just 72 seconds within the first five minutes. Once again however, the Warriors erased a two-goal Sugar Kings lead to tie the game and ultimately force overtime. In the extra frame, Daigle fired the game winner just two and a half minutes into overtime to not only get back on the scoresheet after a brief two-game goal drought, but also to put the Warriors ahead three games to none in the series.

To the surprise of no one, Elmira didn't stop fighting in game four with their season on the line and, with under three minutes to go in the third, the Sugar Kings were ahead 3-1. As the clock ticked down, the Warriors got goals from the most likely sources, Lewis and Brayden Stumpf, which tied the game at three apiece and, for the second straight game, sent the game into overtime.

After one full period went without a sudden-death winner, the game went into double overtime in which Brendan Gerber scored for Elmira at the 2:33 mark of the second overtime – the exact same timestamp as the Warriors' overtime winner the game previous – to keep the Sugar Kings alive in the series.

Despite the loss, the Warriors have handled the pressure of overtime well these playoffs with four of their 10 games going into extra time and Stratford winning all but one. According to Williams, finding success in overtime during the first round has helped the team build confidence in their ability to win in future sudden-death situations.

"I think a little bit of it goes back to having some success in the first couple of overtimes we played in. I know when we went into overtime in game three against Elmira, listening to the guys as they were just even coming off the bench, they were really confident as a group that we've been here before and we'll be able to find our way in that overtime in game three.

"Even in game four, in the first 10 min-

utes, we had really good opportunities to win that hockey game," Williams continued. "Their goaltender played really well and we missed out on some opportunities. Playoff games are so tight and you start to see more overtimes than during the regular season. Guys on both sides are battling that much harder to extend games and find ways to push games into overtime. Hopefully, we can find ways to win in 60 minutes but, if not, I think we're confident in our ability if it does go to overtime given how things have gone so far through the playoffs."

The series returned to the William Allman Arena for the fifth game and, after going up 3-0, the Warriors outlasted the Sugar Kings' third-period comeback for a 3-2 victory. The tight final game punctuated what was a back-and-forth series that Williams said wasn't as lopsided as the five-game series length may suggest.

"I think this series was much closer than the five games, to be honest. I'm sure (Elmira) felt even when we were up three games to one. The series very easily could have been 2-2. In the playoffs, sometimes you just need to have the right things happen at the right time and those things to be so influential in winning a game and setting yourself up to be in a better spot with respect to winning.

"With all the parity in the league, the other team you're playing against will also get their opportunities," added Williams. "For us, the big thing is just focusing on managing our game better and not creating issues or problems ourselves by mismanaging the puck, putting it into poor areas or being slow to react to situations and not anticipating. That's the focus for us making sure we're doing what we can to influence the outcome of the game."

Williams credited his powerplay, penalty kill and starting netminder for helping the Warriors get through moments of inconsistency.

CONTINUED TO PAGE 18



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# Stratford District Secondary School curling team competes at OFSAA in Kingston

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

A team of four girls from Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) is providing some excitement for local curling fans.

The curling foursome includes Addison Hyatt, Annalise Glaab, Hailey Peters and Deanna Halls, all of whom have surely made their school proud as they competed at OFSAA in Kingston recently. Their coach, Shane Restall, says they are very good curlers and excellent students as well.

He said he would have to give credit to their families for the incredible support system that they have.

"It feels like they have a team of co-coaches that travelled to Kingston to show tremendous support," Restall said.

The parents arranged extra ice time and invited them into their adult leagues in Tavistock, Milverton and Stratford to give them more time to practice.

"These families are likely behind most of the team's success," Restall said. "A

special thanks goes out to Heather Peters, Brian Anderson and the Hyatts, Paul and Kim, although all parents, grandparents, godparents, siblings and friends have gone way beyond the call of duty to help for sure."

Peters, the team lead, said the team competed at the OFSAA championship in Kingston last week and although the record wasn't what they had hoped, the scoreboard reflected just how close each game was, and that they really felt they belonged there. She said they will take the experience they gained into next year when they hope to be back together as a team again.

In the end, she said they were in a pool of four previous OFSAA participants, three of which made the playoffs again this year. Having lost to the champion team on a measure of just a quarter inch in an extra end, it was something the Stratford team was very proud of.

On behalf of the team, Peters thanked her coach, her teammates and their curling cheerleaders for a great season.



(CONTRIBUTED PHOTO)

## WOSSAA

Pictured are the members of the Stratford District Secondary School curling team. From left are skip Addison Hyatt, vice skip Annalise Glaab, lead Hailey Peters and second Deanna Halls.

# Fighting Irish eliminated by Killer Bees

SPENCER SEYMOUR

Times Regional Reporter

The Stratford Bentley's Fighting Irish's bid to become back-to-back Super League Champions came to an end this past Tuesday when they were knocked out of the WOSHL Playoffs by the Alvinston Killer Bees.

Alvinston won the series in six games with the final game ending in a 5-2 final score. Graham Brulotte scored the lone Stratford goal of the first period to tie the game after the Killer Bees opened the scoring just 67 seconds earlier.

In the second, two goals by James McEwan, one of which came with just one second left on the clock, carried the Killer Bees into the third with a two-goal lead. Rylan Bowers extended the deficit with a pair of goals while Riley Coome scored for the Fighting Irish. Nolan Dekoning turned away 30 of Stratford's 32 shots to secure the win for Alvinston in goal.

The Killer Bees took a 3-2 series lead in an explosive fifth game of the series on March 30, beating Stratford 10-7. After Alvinston jumped out to a 2-0 lead early in the first, the Fighting Irish stormed back with three goals in four minutes and 24 seconds

including tallies by Sean O'Brien, Cooper Leitch and Ryan O'Bonsawin to take a 3-2 lead into the intermission.

It was Alvinston's turn to ride the momentum in the second as they scored three straight goals, including a pair by Brennan Feasey. Warren Gorman stopped the bleeding for Stratford with a goal of his own, but Feasey completed the hat-trick to make it 6-4 in favour of Alvinston heading into the final frame.

The two teams traded goals in the third, with five of the seven goals in the period coming in the final three minutes and 55 seconds. Leitch, Matt Henderson and Justin Murray found the back of the net for Stratford.

After being blanked 6-0 in game three, the Fighting Irish rediscovered their goal-scoring touch in game four to secure a 6-5 overtime victory. Brulotte and Buckholz scored for the Fighting Irish who took a 2-1 lead into the first intermission. The game was tied at three apiece at the end of the second with the Killer Bees scoring twice in the middle stanza while Leitch scored the lone Fighting Irish goal of the period.

The Killer Bees jumped ahead by two in the final 20 minutes after



(FRED GONDER PHOTO)

## HEART BREAKING LOSS

Warren Gorman #98 of the Irish breaks in on Killer Bees goalie Nolan Dekoning #35 and tucks the puck in the back of the net to get the Irish within one goal at 5-4 for the Bees in a disappointing 10-7 loss to the Alvinston.

scoring twice in the span of a minute and 35 seconds. However, a goal by Cameron Stokes at the 7:23 mark of the third followed by the game-tying goal from Buckholz with 51 seconds left in regulation brought the game back to even at 5-5 and forced overtime. In the extra frame, Henderson fired home the game-winner to give the Fighting Irish their second and last victory of the series.

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# Warriors eliminate Elmira

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

"I thought our specialty teams were good throughout the series. Matt (Perdue) was excellent throughout the series and especially when we had moments where we weren't our sharpest. Matt was able to help us get through some of those moments when we weren't at our best and he mitigated some of the damage that Elmira was trying to inflict on us. That gives confidence to the rest of the group."

From game four of Stratford's first-round series against Brantford to game four of the series against the Sugar Kings, Daigle had points in six straight games and recorded at least two points in each of those six games. The captain's linemates, Lewis and Stumpf, are also white-hot heading into the conference final as they ride eight-game goal streaks.


"I think, as a group, that line of Brayden, Cole and Camden (is) playing with a lot of confidence. They have done a really good

job of providing timely offence for us, both at five-on-five and on the power play. As they've had that success, I think that just gives them more confidence individually and the fact that all three of them are having a really good post-season, I think they feed off one another."

Although the Warriors haven't yet fully found the consistency they've been searching for this season, they did appear to have more consistency in their game against the Sugar Kings. The bench boss said the team's ability to find success and keep building their consistency was a testament to their collective work ethic.

"I think it speaks volumes to the group's commitment to stick with it and keep battling and scratching and clawing to find a way to win hockey games. Everybody would like to win the game 7-0 and never have the game feel like it's in jeopardy. But that's not the reality of playoff hockey and you're going have to find ways to win

different ways on different nights. It's going to require different guys to step up and make bigger contributions than they did during the regular season."



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# OPP Sgt. Leanne Wilhelm now the president of the Ontario Provincial Police Association



Sgt. Leanne Wilhelm is pictured while working in the past out of the Sebringville detachment of the OPP. (GARY WEST PHOTO)

GARY WEST  
Times Correspondent

There are many well-educated youth from the Perth County community who grow into adulthood and end up giving back to the community they were raised in.

OPP Sgt. Leanne Wilhelm is one of those people.

Wilhelm grew up north of Stratford, on Airport Road in North Easthope Township of Perth County. She attended North Easthope Public School, Northwestern Secondary School, Seneca College and then the Ontario Police College. She is a daughter of David and Shirley Wilhelm who now reside in Shakespeare.

She is in her 17th year of policing with the Ontario Provincial Police.

Prior to being hired as a provincial constable, Wilhelm was a member of the Perth County auxiliary policing unit, a volunteer unit with the OPP.

She was promoted to auxiliary sergeant before being hired on as a fulltime constable in 2008 in Huron County.

For 13 years, Leanne worked out of Clinton in Huron County before being transferred back to Sebringville in Perth County for two years to be closer to her family.

After competing in a rigorous sergeant

competition, Leanne was successful and promoted to sergeant in Huron County in September 2022. She is now a frontline supervisor reporting out of the Clinton detachment.

Wilhelm has a variety of policing experience. She is a crisis negotiator and responds to crisis calls all over the western region. A crisis negotiator is called out during an integrated response in relation to a suicidal person, barricaded person and/or hostage takings.

She is also a member of the provincial-liaison team and has been a coach officer for numerous recruits. During her career, Wilhelm held various roles including domestic-violence coordinator, media-relations officer and peer-support team member. Wilhelm was elected and holds the position of area president with the Ontario Provincial Police Association.

When asked what her favourite part of being a police officer is, she would often say "the variety of different work that it brings is special, not knowing what will happen day-to-day, and helping the community."

"Some days at work are really tough," she says, "and some days are really rewarding."

She has a great team of officers that all help each other out and she loves her job and enjoys going to work every day."

She also said she enjoys supporting and mentoring her fellow co-workers.

Wilhelm is married with three boys and loves being outdoors and spending time with family and friends. Wilhelm can often be seen at community events either in or out of uniform.

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# Stratford & District Chamber of Commerce: 2024 Business Excellence Awards nominees

The Stratford & District Chamber of Commerce is excited to reveal the list of nominees for the 2024 Business Excellence Awards. These awards celebrate the ingenuity, strength, and spirit of the business community within Stratford & District. The nominees across diverse categories are:

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Paws on Patrol Stratford  
Pawsitive Difference Professional Pet Care  
Pursuit Climbing Inc.  
Town Crier Marketing  
Yoko Nail Artist

## Service Award

107.1 CJCS Radio  
Aunt Gail's Taxi  
B&C Custom Landscapes Ltd.  
Beyond Day Spa  
Conestoga College  
Fancy Expressions Face Painting & Body Art  
Illume Wellness Spa  
Jiffy Lube  
MODO YOGA STRATFORD  
Royal Customs  
Stratford Dog Walkers  
The Turquoise Mirror  
Unleashed on 42

## Non-Profit/Charitable Award

A Child's Smile  
Hamlet Non-Profit Estates of Stratford and District  
Optimism Place Women's Shelter and Support Services  
Rotary Club of Stratford  
Stratford Cygnets Cooperative  
Preschool  
Stratford Fighting Irish Hockey Club

Stratford Makers Market  
Victim Services Bruce Grey Perth  
Wellspring Stratford Cancer Support Centre

## Enterprise Award

Cleanfix North America Inc.  
Omex Manufacturing ULC  
Vicwest

## Skilled Trades Award

ACCOUNTABLE AUTOMOTIVE INCORPORATED  
Berger Plumbing  
D&S Downham Equipment Ltd  
NT PARR PLUMBING & HEATING INC.  
SBS Metals Ltd.

## Trailblazing Award

EVERMORE Compassionate Pet Aftercare  
Her Collab Co  
Human Synergetics Canada lot8

Lynn River Farm & Graze Farm Dinners  
Provocation Ideas Festival Stratford

## Hospitality Award

Annie's Seafood Restaurant  
BRCH & WYN  
Broken Rail Brewing  
Pazzo Company (operating Pazzo Pizzeria and Cafe Bouffon)  
Social Thirty-One  
The Bunker Performance Lounge & Cafe  
The Livery Yard Stratford

## Professional Award

Connection Chiropractic  
Goebel Insurance Agency - Desjardins  
MTE Consultants, Inc.  
Peter Maranger & Associates Inc. (Co-operators)  
RE/MAX a-b Realty Ltd  
South West Ontario Veterinary Services

## Retail Award

Bax Audio Video Inc.  
Daisies and Doilies Ltd  
Global Pet Foods  
Harmony Jewelry & Co.  
Lyric Flowers  
MacLeods Scottish Shop  
Poppin Kettle Corn  
Rheo Thompson Candies Ltd  
Stratford Home Furniture  
The Butcher & The Baker Inc.  
The Peach Basket and Co

We extend our heartfelt congratulations to all 73 nominated businesses and thank them for their dedication and service to the community. The winners will be honored at the Business Excellence Awards Gala, an event celebrating the hard work, innovation, and success that each of these nominees represent on May 2, 2024, at the Best Western Arden Park Gala.

## Destination Stratford looking for St. Marys businesses for seasonal trails

EMILY STEWART

Times Correspondent

Destination Stratford wants more St. Marys businesses to sign up as stops for its tourism trails, including the Chocolate Trail.

The culinary and seasonal trails run by Destination Stratford include the Chocolate Trail, the Bacon and Ale Trail, the Christmas Trail and the Sip and Savour Trail. The trails, according to the Destination Stratford website, have been part of local tourism programming for more than 15 years. The trails include businesses from Stratford and from nearby towns such as St. Marys.

April Murray, Destination Stratford's destination brand manager, said the organization works closely with St. Marys and will share what programs and trails could be of interest to businesses in the area. The 2023 Christmas Trail had 14 businesses from St. Marys participate, the most in the entirety of the trail's history.

"It's very important for us to work with communities such as St. Marys to really help provide more reasons for visitors to stay within the destination longer," Murray said.

The Chocolate Trail also saw success last year, with a 79 per-cent increase in chocolate sales at participating businesses when compared to sales before the COVID-19 pandemic. The trail features St. Marys businesses Stone Home Creatives and Snapping Turtle Coffee Roasters. People who visit ei-

ther business as part of the trail can get either a free mocha latte from Snapping Turtle or a chocolate-mint-smoothie-scented candle from Stone Home Creatives.

Sue Hyatt-Griffiths, lead creative for Stone Home Creatives, has had her business on the Chocolate Trail for about five years. She also participated in the Christmas Trail and the Bacon and Ale Trail. Hyatt-Griffiths said that the culinary and seasonal trails bring lots of tourism to St. Marys.

"People were in Stratford and heading back to Windsor or whichever direction," she said. "And then they would just stop in, and they would just say to us, 'We wouldn't have even known St. Marys was here, but we have this ticket and you're on the way home and so we thought we'd come in and check it out.'"

The most recent Christmas Trail brought in lots of traffic with some people buying the vouchers just to explore St. Marys. Destination Stratford will pay participating businesses for collected vouchers. Hyatt-Griffiths wants to see more St. Marys businesses participate to bring in more new customers visiting the town during their travels.

"Tourists will come if there's one or two stores, but as soon as there's more, there's some momentum going and it's worth a side trip," she said.

Interested businesses can get more information and sign up for a trail by sending an email to [hello@visitstratford.ca](mailto:hello@visitstratford.ca), indicating if they have a product suitable for the trails.



**Stratford Branch 8**

**ATTENTION: CANADIAN VETERANS AND EX-SERVICE PERSONNEL**

**The Provincial Service Officer Rebecca Hyndman from London will visit our Legion on Thursday, May 16 at 2:30 p.m., appointments booked through our office at 510-271-4540. Contact Bill Rothernel Service Officer.**

**804-B Ontario St., Stratford N5A 3K1**  
**[stratfordlegion008@gmail.com](mailto:stratfordlegion008@gmail.com)**

**[www.stratfordtimes.com](http://www.stratfordtimes.com)**

# Much Music VJ, Bill Welychka will be at COLES during book signing tour this month

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Bill Welychka, famous for his iconic interviews with music legends from Madonna to the Tragically Hip, is coming to Stratford this month as part of his book-signing tour.

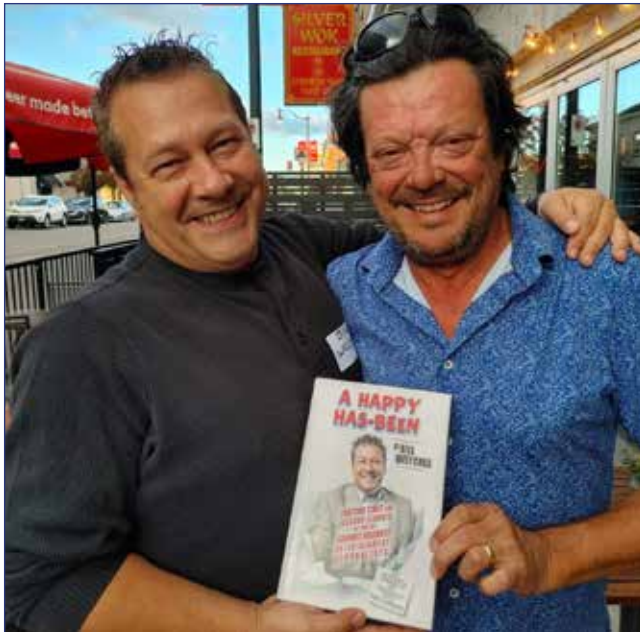
Welychka will be in Stratford on Tuesday, April 16, from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at COLES, located at the Stratford Mall, for an autograph session and pictures. Though Welychka is known across North America as an outgoing and iconic Much Music VJ, others know him as a genuinely nice guy who loves to give back to his community.

In the foreword for Welychka's new book, *A Happy Has-Been: Exciting Times and Lessons Learned by One of Canada's Foremost Entertainment Journalists*, Paul Langlois of The Tragically Hip said of Welychka, "He's a great guy. Obviously, anyone can see that whether you're watching him interviewing someone or you're talking to him on the street."

"... He graciously gives so much of his time to great causes, and he also quietly supports events financially behind the scenes in addition to what he has already been asked to lend his talents to."

Since first stepping in front of Much Music's national cameras in 1992, Welychka has become one of Canada's most enduring, recognizable and respected television personalities.

His interviews include Mick Jagger, Oasis, AC/DC, Johnny Cash, members of The Beatles, David Bowie,



## BOOK SIGNING

Bill Welychka and The Tragically Hip's Paul Langlois Nov 2023

Led Zeppelin, Garth Brooks, Prince, Britney Spears and so many more music icons.

Looking back on these interviews in his recent book, Welychka said it's ironic he had the chance to interview all of his childhood heroes over the course of his career.

"In the book, I talk about perfect circles. I have been a fan of music from kindergarten on, and growing up,

I had Ozzy Osbourne and Led Zeppelin patches on my jean jacket or Iron Maiden posters in my room and on my locker at school. I just realized one day that I have interviewed every single one of my heroes."

A *Happy Has-Been: Exciting Times and Lessons Learned by One of Canada's Foremost Entertainment Journalists* dives into Welychka's experiences spending time with Madonna at her house. He also writes about his world travels from spending time with the Maasai warriors on the Serengeti to covering the World Music Awards in Monte Carlo, Monaco six years in a row.

Despite a career that saw him mobbed at concerts and meet every idol he had, Welychka also opened up about his battles with depression and being unique compared to his school peers. When discussing this, he credits his mom for teaching him how to look past it and continue working hard for what he wants.

"I think a lot of it has to do with knowing that no one's going to give you anything. You have to work hard for things you want," he said.

Welychka will collect donations on behalf of Optimism Place during his Stratford stop, and he will top up all donations himself. He said he always finds space to make community donations, and this is a large part of how he gives back to communities across the country.

"Sometimes, being somewhat of a public figure, there are opportunities that present themselves where you can give back, and it's very simple. I watched my mom write donation cheques when I was young, and although we didn't have a lot of money, she always found a way to give back, so she inspired me to do the same."

# Made-in-Stratford Magic Windows displays continue to gain traction across the province

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

An innovative technology launched as part of the 2022-2023 Lights On Stratford winter lights festival as a way to share recorded performances by a Stratford Symphony Orchestra quintet in a downtown storefront is continuing to gain traction across Ontario.

Pioneered by Stratford production company Ballinran Entertainment, Magic Windows displays make use of projection-mapping technology and multiple projectors to display high-quality visuals on storefront windows coated in a light-sensitive film. Since its inception at Lights On Stratford, the Magic Windows technology has been promoted by Ballinran and its arts-streaming service, Stageview TV, as a way to beautify otherwise empty storefront windows in high-traffic, commercial neighbourhoods, promote local arts organizations and artists, and celebrate diversity.

Magic Windows displays have since appeared in five other communities including Port Colbourne and two Toronto communities.

"We were invited to the Ontario BIA conference in London last year and our project in Stratford was spoken about at the conference, and a number of other BIAs and organizations came up to us afterwards saying, 'How can we brighten up our own spaces?'" Ballinran executive producer Craig Thompson said. "Then we



## MAGIC WINDOWS

A performance by musician Aniq Dear can now be seen on a storefront at 388 Bloor St. W in Toronto thanks to Stratford production company Ballinran Entertainment's Magic Windows project.

did a project in Port Colbourne. Then we did a project at Eglinton and Keel that's up now. And the third one that's new is on Bloor Street at Brunswick.

"So we've got two active ones in Toronto at the present time."

The Eglinton Avenue West project is located in Toronto's Little Jamaica, near the

intersection with Keele Street, and was developed as a response to the delays and disruptions caused by the construction of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT. The windows feature the rhythmic drumming of Amadou Krienou and Djeli Sira, combining West African and Jamaican musical traditions. The second installation at 388

Bloor St. W features a musical performance by Aniq Dear.

Thompson said the production company has also been invited to come up with a Magic Windows display for a shopping mall in Toronto's Jane-and-Finch neighbourhood.

"The important aspect we decided to focus on since Stratford is we're focusing on the arts," Thompson said. "We're using the windows as a canvas to showcase arts, community arts, that kind of thing, to make that connection between main street and the arts. Sadly, with the economy the way it is, there's a lot more vacant storefronts, so it actually brightens the neighbourhood up."

"... Stageview's purpose is really to find new ways of sharing arts content on different platforms and different devices. The windows are one way to do that because the arts need a lot more exposure in Canada right now. They're going through a difficult time and arts does not get the exposure on the screens it deserves. We don't see it too much in the movie theatres, we don't see it on television, so we want to see it in the community with the windows and also put it on our (streaming) platform."

The Magic Windows project is supported by STEPS Public Art, the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the City of Toronto, the Toronto Arts Council, the Bloor Annex and Eglinton Hills BIAs, and RBC.

# Headline



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STRATFORD NISSAN



# Canada's first full-build, zero-emissions concept vehicle visits students at SDSS

AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Students at Stratford District Secondary School (SDSS) had a first-hand look at Canada's first original, full-build, zero-emission concept vehicle, Project Arrow, on March 20.

The car was displayed for SDSS students in the "Specialist High Skills Major Program in Transportation" with representatives from the Automotive Parts Manufacturers' Association (APMA) on hand to answer questions.

"The questions from the students have been excellent," said Tony Roes, Specialist High Skills Major Program in Transportation and co-op teacher at SDSS. "It's been really great to see them so engaged. They've been able to tie the concept to engineering, automotive classes and, of course, manufacturing, as well as some of our green industry classes.

"We're really lucky that the kids actually get to see something like this."

Valued at over \$20 million and launched by the APMA, Project Arrow is an all-Canadian effort designed, engineered, and built by Canada's world-class automotive supply sector and post-secondary institutions.

Paola Barahona, Project Arrow's Project Lead, said the product was initially launched at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

"We mainly travel across Ontario, but we've travelled to the USA and even Dubai. We will also be taking it to the Canadian Auto Show in Toronto later this



## PROJECT ARROW

Students Cylis Trembley, Quinn Hyde, Jayden Tipping, Nick Wagner and Derek Gropp were among some of the first students to see Canada's first original, full-build, zero-emission concept vehicle, Project Arrow

(AMANDA MODARAGAMAGE PHOTO)

year."

APMA's Project Arrow aims to inspire local high school students to become interested in mechanical design and engineering and answer the Prime Minister's call for a Zero-Emissions future by 2050.

"We just hope that students feel inspired to tap into those dreams and reach out to those partners because the opportunities are endless in the automotive field," said Barahona. "We are launching 2.0, And sooner rather than later, the high

school students here at SDSS will be entering colleges and universities throughout Ontario.

"Project Arrow aims to help students understand that there are cool experiences that they can be a part of and that there's so much opportunity out there."

This project has brought together the best of Canada's electric-drive, alternative-fuel, connected and autonomous, and lightweight technology companies.

The APMA is Canada's national as-

sociation representing OEM producers of parts, equipment, tools, supplies, advanced technology and services for the global automotive industry. The Association's fundamental objective is to promote the original equipment (O.E.) automotive supply manufacturing industry both domestically and internationally.

The City of Stratford has a long-standing special relationship with the APMA, which started in November 2017 when the Ontario government officially named the city a Demonstration Zone for Autonomous Vehicles in partnership with the Autonomous Vehicle Innovation Network (AVIN).

At that time, the province invested \$80 million over five years to create the Autonomous Vehicle Innovation Network in partnership with Ontario Centres of Excellence.

As the Province's first Demonstration Zone, the City was among the first of its kind in Canada. This allowed researchers to hone the technology and test an AV in a wide range of everyday, real-life traffic scenarios.

"I am thrilled that Project Arrow visited Stratford District Secondary," said Mayor Martin Ritsma. "As Mayor, former principal and educator, I know that the opportunity to engage with this amazing technology will encourage and inspire the students there and countless Stratford youth to dream and fulfill their potential as innovators of tomorrow."

To learn more about the project or follow along on the journey, visit <https://apma.ca/project-arrow/>

## Rotary Club Rural Urban Dinner and Stratford Perth Museum agricultural wall of fame on April 18

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

Tickets are now on sale for the Rotary Club of Stratford's annual Rural Urban Night at the Stratford Rotary Complex.

The date is Thursday, April 18 and the event begins at 6 p.m. with cheese, wine and hors d'oeuvres.

The evening's menu includes local roast beef and local roast pork with all the fixings, all of which is donated and provided by area farmers and Stratford hotels and restaurants.

The event has been held annually for close to 100 years and brings rural and urban people together to celebrate how communities continue to work together. This year's popular guest speaker is Farmer Tim, who operates a dairy farm with his family and has been involved in 4-H clubs all his life.

He has over 130,000 followers on Facebook and enjoys taking viewers on tours of his farm, from milking and birthing cows to feeding new born calves and showing how dairy farmers take care of their animals, much the same as members of their own family.

The Stratford-Perth Museum will also be inducting an Atwood Dairy Farm couple and a prominent sheep farmer from the Staffa area onto its Agriculture Wall of Fame.

For tickets call any Rotary member, visit [rotarystratford.com/sitepage/rural-urban-dinner](http://rotarystratford.com/sitepage/rural-urban-dinner), or call the museum at 519-393-5312.



## WALL OF FAME INDUCTION

Pictured is last year's Agriculture Wall of Fame inductee, Dennis Nuhn, president of Nuhn Industries west of Sebringville in Perth East.

(GARY WEST PHOTO)

# Stratford Festival approaching pre-pandemic audience numbers

GALEN SIMMONS

Regional Editor

The Stratford Festival is inching closer to pre-pandemic audience numbers according to 2023 numbers released at its recent annual general meeting.

Last season, the festival welcomed a total of 443,000 audience members across 13 productions in all four of its theatres, and more than 150 Meighen Forum events. While audiences weren't quite at their pre-pandemic strength, festival executive director Anita Gaffney says they are moving closer to that benchmark of roughly half-a-million people thanks to a 35 per-cent increase over 2022 audience numbers.

"We had about 325,000 tickets sold in 2022 and that was the year we launched the Tom Patterson Theatre and it was the first time we were back inside our buildings again (after the pandemic shutdown in 2020 and an outdoor season in 2021)," Gaffney said. "... We've been saying since the



pandemic we've been building back towards half-a-million tickets, and that's the trajectory we're on. It's a number we aspire to and sometimes achieve. It's a number that sustains the four theatres, provides employment for a large group of actors and creative teams, (and) it allows us to do the educational outreach.

"It kind of supports the organization in the right way."

In 2023, more than 30 per cent of festival tickets were sold to first-time patrons. Visitors came from across Canada and around the globe with 18 per cent of

revenue originating in the U.S. The strong demand for tickets enabled the festival to extend the runs of both Rent and Monty Python's Spamalot.

"I feel really fortunate that patrons have stuck with us through the pandemic and we stayed connected to people digitally for a couple years," Gaffney said. "I think it's wonderful people are returning ... and it's also great to see new folks coming to the festival and discovering the wonderful treasure we have here in Stratford. It's the programming. Things like Rent was a really great draw for new

theatre-goers, as was Spamalot and some other titles like Richard II, and Wedding Band also brought new patrons to the festival. We do pricing initiatives that make it really low risk to come to the festival ... with things like pay what you will, and the bus service between Stratford and Toronto makes it more accessible."

Total revenue for 2023 amounted to \$80.1 million and expenses were \$79.7 million, resulting in a surplus of \$404,000. While ticket-sales revenue was consistent with pre-pandemic levels, expenses increased by 25 per cent since 2019 as a result of rising inflation and the increasing costs of wages, food, materials and other necessities.

That gap was closed by the support of festival donors – people who supported the festival's annual fundraising campaign and the special pandemic-re-launch campaign. Contributed revenues in 2023 increased by 62 per cent from 2019.

"We're a non-profit organization, so our goal is each year we

set out to achieve a break-even budget," Gaffney said. "So, anything that's on the right side of that is a positive. (This surplus) is a very small percentage of our more than \$80-million budget, so it's a fine line. I think it demonstrates we have carefully managed the expectations on ticket sales, we've achieved incredible results with fundraising and that's really helped us close the gap, and we've also been very careful about expenses."

"All of those things have helped us to get to a surplus which really just gives us a bit of cashflow as we move from one season to the next."

While the ongoing support of donors has helped the festival build back after the pandemic, Gaffney said the festival will continue focusing on strengthening traditional, ticket-sales revenue to fully sustain festival operations while searching for a way to further engage with donors after the festival fully recovers from the last several seasons.

## Two of 2023's most popular shows now on Stratfest@Home: Much Ado About Nothing, Women of the Fur Trade

Two of 2023's most popular shows, Shakespeare's hilarious comedy *Much Ado About Nothing* and Frances Koncan's brilliant satire *Women of the Fur Trade* are now available for worldwide streaming on Stratfest@Home.

Enjoy the wit and romance of one of Shakespeare's finest and funniest plays from the comfort of your home. *Much Ado About Nothing* follows sparring partners Beatrice and Benedick, played by power duo Maev Beaty and Graham Abbey, as they trip, stumble and fall headlong into their friends' mischievous matchmaking scheme.

Directed for the stage by Chris Abraham with additional text provided by Erin Shields, this play tugs on the heartstrings while also raising significant questions about the dynamics of marriage and authority.

Directed for the screen by Barry Avrich, *Much Ado About Nothing* was captured live on the Festival Theatre stage by Melbar Entertainment Group. This show is sure to welcome you into the brightness of Beatrice and Benedick's world.

This cast also features Michael Blake as Don John, Austin Eckert as Claudio, Allison Edwards-Crewe as Hero, Patrick McManus as Leonato, Anthony Santiago as Antonio, and André Sills as Don Pedro with Anou-



### MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Austin Eckert (centre left) as Claudio and Allison Edwards-Crewe (centre right) as Hero with members of the company in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Stratford Festival 2023.

sha Alamian, Akosua Amo-Adem, Richard Comeau, Déjah Dixon-Green, Jakob Ehman, Ijeoma Emesowum, Andrew Iles, David W. Keeley, John Kirkpatrick, Kevin Kruchkywich, Josue Laboucane, Cyrus Lane, Devin MacKinnon, Jonathan Mason, Jameela McNeil, George Meanwell, Danté Prince, Glynis Ranney, Jamillah Ross, Jonathan Rowsell, Stephan Szczesniak, Jennifer Villaverde, Gordon Patrick White, Rylan Wilkie and Micah Woods.

Creating the world for this delightful romantic comedy are Designer Julie Fox, Lighting Designer Arun Srinivasan, Composer and Sound Designer Thomas Ryder

Payne, and Choreographer Adrienne Gould.

The film was produced by Susan Edwards, Mark Selby and Barry Avrich p.g.a.

Frances Koncan's *Women of the Fur Trade*

Set in "eighteen hundred and something-something," Frances Koncan's *Women of the Fur Trade* is bringing a load of laughs and lots of lessons to Stratfest@Home. This lively satire offers a delicious new take on the Canadian fur trade.

Directed by Yvette Nolan, this story brings together three women on the Banks of a Reddish River in Treaty One Territory. They devote their time to debating vastly

different views on life, love and the hottest man of their time, Louis Riel. With the audacious incorporation of 21st-century slang, this production offers viewers a look inside their fort as Koncan's writing transitions perspectives from the male gaze onto women's power in the past and present.

*Women of the Fur Trade* features Jenna-Lee Hyde as Cecilia, Kathleen MacLean as Marie-Angelique and Joelle Peters as Eugenia, with Keith Barker as Louis Riel and Nathan Howe as Thomas Scott.

This creative team includes Set Designer Samantha McCue, Costume Designer Jeff Chief, Lighting Designer Michelle Ramsay and Composer and Sound Designer Debashis Sinha.

*Much Ado About Nothing* and *Women of the Fur Trade* are now available on Stratfest@Home, the Festival's subscription streaming service. Subscribe to Stratfest@Home for just \$7.99 per month or \$79.99 per year to gain access to these new releases and the best in Canadian digital theatrical productions, including more of the Stratford Festival's acclaimed Shakespeare films, selected productions from recent seasons, original digital content and selected events from the Festival's Meighen Forum, along with documentaries and original content from across the country.

# Shakespeare Opti-Mrs host Easter egg hunt

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

The Easter eggs in Shakespeare brought out a large crowd of young egg hunters

from all over the village and surrounding townships who converged to gather chocolate delights the Easter Bunny had left.

The busy Shakespeare Opti-Mrs members were up with the sun and ready for

the enthusiastic crowd that gathered at the grounds of Sprucedale Public School. The village Easter egg hunt has been going on year after year for longer than most can remember.

Opti-Mrs president Angie McPherson thanked sponsors – the Shakespeare Men’s club and the village’s Moo’s Ice Cream Shop – that made the day one to remember for kids young and old.



The younger chocolate-egg hunters were keen on collecting as many chocolate treats as they could find with help from parents and the Opti-Mrs club of Shakespeare.



The older Easter egg enthusiasts searched the vast area of the front lawn at Sprucedale Public School.

(GARY WEST PHOTOS)



Area parents were also helping their children search for the Easter eggs on Saturday in Shakespeare.



The Metske family from Shakespeare is seen here ready to gather chocolate Easter eggs. Pictured from left is Wyatt, Aiden, Makayla, dad Tim, mom Amanda and Jackson.



## ROME AND AMALFI COAST

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## Spring Hydrant Flushing

Starting next week, the City of Stratford will begin its spring hydrant flushing.

This is something we do twice a year – typically in the spring and fall – to clean out some of the iron deposits that build up over time in the City’s water mains, and as preventative maintenance.

You may temporarily experience discoloured water as a result of this flushing process, but water quality is not affected. Discoloured water will clear, but it’s best to wait until it has cleared before doing laundry.

Please note that the hydrant flushing

schedule is not fixed. It changes every day depending on a number of factors, including the weather, availability of staff and the length of time it takes to clear the hydrants in a neighbourhood.

For more information, please visit our Discoloured Water webpage, or call the City’s Water Division at 519-271-0250, ext. 5222 during business hours.





# Moo's Ice Cream in Shakespeare opens for third season

GARY WEST

Times Correspondent

Moo's Ice Cream in Shakespeare welcomed visitors from near and far on their opening weekend at the onset of another season of serving the popular, cool treat.

A Stratford family was one of the ice-cream shop's first customers on Saturday, and came bearing gift certificates won at the Shakespeare Opti-Mrs Easter egg hunt that had just finished at the Sprucedale Public School playground.

The McLeod and Rovers family, which has roots in the Shakespeare area, is always glad to head to the village on a sunny Easter weekend, and ice cream was an added bonus.

Moo's Ice Cream Shop owner Rhonda Grubb says this is her business' third season serving 40 flavours of Kawartha ice cream and 15 flavours of fresh-fruit frozen yogurt, along with soft ice cream in flavours of vanilla or chocolate.

They are open 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekends and 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. during the summer, starting in early June.

There is also free cotton candy for the young and young at heart to top off all cones and sundaes.



(GARY WEST PHOTO)

## OPEN FOR COOL TREATS

Pictured are Moo's customers greeted by owners Seager and Rhonda Grubb. In front are Ryan and Avery McLeod with grandfather Bill Rovers, grandmother Yvonne McLeod and Mom Samantha McLeod.

## WEB-CRAWLING THROUGH PLASTIC



SHEILA CLARKE

Times Freelance Columnist

Greenwash is making something look sustainable and environmental when it really isn't. How would you feel about a month without plastic? CFUW Stratford is inviting everyone to challenge themselves to a **Plastic-Free April**. What's wrong with plastic?

It turns out that plastic was a mighty big greenwash sleeper right in front of us all the time. To be fair, when plastic began in the 50s, it was a miracle product. True, it was made of fossil fuels, but at that time, most of us had no idea that the carbon in the atmosphere was actually the Industrial Revolution's slow march to Global Warming and to the Climate Crisis. We just thought, wow, cheap and cheerful, easy to wash, unbreakable- sounds great! Does anyone out there remember Melmac? :) The industry grew like gangbusters. In 2022, Statista noted that plastic production that year was 400.3 million metric tons, only 9 per cent of which was recycled.

It's almost impossible to think of a commercial or home venue



that is minus plastic, from hospitals (it abounds) to toy stores, cars to your kitchen, and everything in between. First, we began to see mountains of plastic waste worldwide as the developed world passed its garbage on to the third world. This was followed by heartbreaking photos of marine animals trapped and dying in plastic waste and photos of whales dying from trying to eat tiny sea organisms and instead getting bellyfuls of plastic. As Pogo said, surveying a swamp filled with waste, "We have met the enemy, and he is us."

Recent studies have shown that there's more to the story. When plastic breaks down in sunlight, it becomes tiny, microscopic-particles of polyethylene, polypropylene and expanded polystyrene- fossil fuel molecules and the building blocks of plastic. If we thought plastic was every-

where, we didn't know the half of it. Those microplastic particles have become part of all of us- literally. They are found in every living organism on Earth, even in human placentas (the Guardian, The University of New Mexico, and numerous other sites). It is estimated that we ingest the equivalent of 50 plastic bags each year or the plastic in one credit card each week.

Is that a problem? The latest studies have concentrated on what effect these microplastics have on health. Studies from the World Health Organization show links to health issues such as endocrine disruption, weight gain, insulin resistance, decreased reproductive health, cancer and cardiovascular disease.

What about all that recycling that was going to turn plastic into usable items? That's where the greenwash came in. The Centre

for Climate Integrity released a blockbuster report in February of 2024. The plastics industry knew as early as the 80s that recycling plastic would be very difficult. Despite international efforts to curb plastic production, it has continued to grow like a cancer on the planet. Plastic production companies constantly look for new markets for packaging items.

Have you tried to buy items that are not in plastic? Have you tried to find an event that doesn't sell or give away water in

plastic bottles? Even metal garbage tins are now plastic!

We should all try to reject plastic for our own health and for the planet. Challenge yourself to a **Plastic-Free April** (Earth Month).

Go to this website for a terrific list of alternatives! <https://tinyurl.com/CFUWplastic> What happened? We got greenwashed.

Updates:

1. Carbon parts per million (ppm) in the atmosphere as of late **March, 2024: 421.8 ppm**. Safe level, 350 ppm passed in 1990.

2. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself"- Chief Seattle

Sheila Clarke is a Stratford advocate for the environment, of our community and of our planet. She has a BSc Zoology from the University of Illinois, and a host of studies beyond in ecology, the science of how everything living fits together in nature. She is a member of CFUW Stratford, Stratford Climate Momentum, and the Perth County Sustainability Hub.



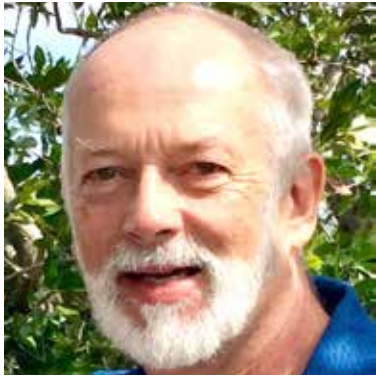
### The Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans in Canada (ANAVETS)

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

# OH, THE PLACES WE'LL GO: Exploring a real, fictional, community – and that's not a contradiction



PAUL KNOWLES

Times Contributor

JoAnne and Dennis Rogers had spent the previous day taking a lengthy mini-coach tour, visiting sites that have inspired the work of their favourite mystery writer. After a long day on the tour, Jo Anne was nothing but enthusiastic.

"It was incredible," she told me. "One of our best experiences ever."

The couple, who live in Massachusetts, had come to Quebec's Eastern Townships for the precise purpose of exploring the world of Louise Penny, the Canadian writer whose 18 and counting Inspector Gamache novels have earned fans all over the world. Those fans include former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, who liked the novels so much she conscripted Penny as her co-writer when she decided to write a fictional thriller called *State of Terror*.

Fans of Penny's books know their protagonist lives in a fictional Quebec village named Three Pines. The village and its eclectic cast of characters figure large in the Penny novels.



(PAUL KNOWLES PHOTOS)

**Brome Lake Books, where Louise Penny may be found doing a reading, is the model for one of the key locations in her Inspector Gamache books.**

I met the Rogers because, like us, they were staying at the Hillhouse Bed and Breakfast in Lac-Brome. The town of Lac-Brome actually includes seven villages, one of which is Knowlton, where Penny lives, which has provided much of the thinly fictionalized setting for her novels.

It was no coincidence we were at Hillhouse B&B. Owners Louise Cadieux and Gilles Trudel are also the operators of the Three Pines Tours which the Rogers were praising so effusively.

The day-long tours, which have been vetted and approved by Penny, take visitors to many of the sites which appear – usually under assumed names – in the novels. Even if you are not a fan of Inspector Gamache, visiting these places on your own can still make for fascinating experiences.

Take, for example, the tour of the Abbaye Saint-Benoit-du-lac on the shores of Lake Memphremagog. I wrote about this abbey, still home to cheese-making monks, in a previous feature. But what I didn't say was this monastery was the model for Penny's fictional monastery, Saint-Gilbert-Entre-les-Loups, site of mayhem and murder in *The Beautiful Mystery*. I asked our guide at the monastery if they were bothered by this link with evil. He laughed and pointed out that Louise Penny has been a faithful, financial contributor to Abbaye Saint-Benoit-du-lac and also brings her friends there – most recently Hillary and Bill Clinton. So, they quite like her, even if she did leave them with fictional corpses.

In fact, it seems everyone in the mythical Three Pines area likes her – and why not? Louise Penny

has almost singlehandedly raised tourism to a more-than healthy level in these towns and villages.

People like to dine where Gamache and his beloved wife, Reine-Marie, have enjoyed romantic get-aways. In that spirit, we had lunch on the patio of the highly rated Manoir Hovey, overlooking Lake Massawippi. The meal – scallops, a seafood wrap, corn soup, Caesar salad and a chocolate brownie – was exceptional, by the way.

We also wandered around Sutton, another point of inspiration for Penny, and enjoyed dinner at the Sutton Brouerie.

Penny's influence on tourism is very evident in the growth of the Three Pines Tours. Gilles and Louise told me while their team conducted 325 tours in 2022, in 2023 they hit at least 950. The day-long, guided, mini-coach tour costs \$335.

Visitors on the tour will stop at many Penny sites including Brome Lake Books, a shop owned by friends of Penny that has a dedicated Louise Penny corner where the author herself may sometimes be found doing a reading or answering questions from fans.

Tour participants will also get some personal information from their guides. Louise Cadieux confided in me that Inspector Gamache is based on Penny's late husband. As to other characters in the books, there is speculation in the town about some of the characters, including the elderly, rude and belligerent poet, Ruth Zardo. Cadieux laughed and suggested Ruth may be a mélange of lo-

cal personalities. No names were mentioned.

I asked Cadieux if Knowlton really has three pines. She grimaced. "They're dead." There was an effort to plant three pine trees, but they did not survive. So today, they exist only in Penny's fiction.

Louise Penny's international fame has certainly made an economic impact on Knowlton and its equally appealing Eastern Township neighbours. Most of the visitors, say Gilles and Louise, come from the United States. I think Canadian fans of Penny's work are missing a real opportunity, here.

But Penny's impact goes a lot farther than bringing tourists on a bus or diners to a restaurant. I wandered into the Pettes Memorial Library in Knowlton and chatted with librarian Ingrid Bird. She told me about a current plan to expand the library and pointed to a list of donors to the project. The number-one major donor was Louise Penny, who has donated \$600,000 to the library expansion.

The Three Pines books have brought a lot of pleasure to thousands of readers including yours truly, but they have done much more than that, bringing employment and economic prosperity to a delightful part of Canada known as the Eastern Townships.

For visitors to Penny's Three Pines country, it's a win-win.

*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).*



Hillhouse B&B owners Louise Cadieux and Gilles Trudel also own and operate the Three Pines Tours, a day following in the footsteps of Gamache.



The Pettes Memorial Library in Knowlton, a beneficiary of Louise Penny's generosity.

# Welcoming Ukrainians: An Easter Celebration and Call for Help

VJ KNUTSON

Times Freelance Columnist

Ukrainians and Canadians from Stratford, Exeter, St Marys, and even Toronto, filled the hall last Saturday at the St Marys Presbyterian church to celebrate Easter. Hosts and volunteers from both communities worked together to plan a day full of performances, good food, and surprises for all ages.

My job was to book the hall and keep a running tab of numbers, making sure we didn't go over capacity. Sadly, we had to turn a few away, so next time I'll know to find a larger venue. A group that I call the Easter Bunnies, were hard at work, behind the scenes.

Nataly, who you might know from the market, baked traditional Easter bread (Paska) for days leading up to the event. She also orchestrated the program which consisted of poetry recitals, piano, violin, singing, dancing, and a circus act. Tania of Tan.Tan Cleaning +, who currently caters for the Rotary Club meetings in St Marys, organized the menu. Vira Spivak, of Our Daily Bread Gluten Free delighted us with both her violin playing skills and goodies for those of us who can't tolerate gluten. Katya and Sasha of Good Mood Service provided the decorations, a pinata for the children, games for all ages, and the 9-foot Polar Bear who led us in dancing. (All these businesses can be found on Facebook.)

Of course, these were just some of the contributors. Everyone brought food to share. Many hands worked steadily in the kitchen, and so many pitched in to set up and clear away. There were rehearsals, and



an ongoing chat ensuring everything was in order.

The only thing they forgot was to tell me that I was to be the MC, so my act was certainly not polished. Good thing the crowd was of good cheer.

In the meantime, requests for hosts con-

tinued. Last week, I was able to place a family of two. This week I am looking for help for a couple in their 60s. Oksana and Vitali are from Lviv. They are described as an energetic couple, who have independently completed their paper work, without the help of a host. They have accommodations

until May 5th, but will need help finding employment and housing beyond that. Vitali is ready to take on any job and has experience in both construction and education. Oksana hopes to work in childcare or looking after the elderly. Both have basic English skills. Given this couple's age, the ideal setup would be as live-in caretakers, or perhaps superintendents. Message me if you think you can help.

We paused English support lessons last Saturday, in favour of the Easter celebration, but will be back on this Saturday. We invite you to gather at the Falstaff Family Centre at 12:30 for a bit of social time to get the children settled with our teen volunteers. Class will run for three hours with a tea and coffee break in between. Our class is growing, and I am happy to announce that two new volunteers have surfaced thanks to this column. All are welcome.

Also hoping to get together with individuals and organizations that are interested in helping newcomers settle in the Stratford area. The feedback from the classes and the Easter event indicates that there is a need for more. Investing in the well-being and success of new immigrants is a win-win. Watch for further information, or reach out if you'd like to be included. It takes more than just this old lady to make a real and lasting difference.

*(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.)*

## Mental Spring Cleaning: Tips to Declutter Your Mental Space



IRENE ROTH

Times Freelance Columnist

Spring is a time to declutter. Did you know that just as we're encouraged to declutter our physical environments, it is just as important to declutter your mental space? This is because when our mind is cluttered, doing and thinking too much, we can't enjoy this very moment we're in right now. Yet, this is where our life happens.

Spring can be a time to turn inward. It can be a time where we clear a few things off our schedule so that we can take that walk around the Avon River or just sit out on our veranda basking in the

sun. Spring can be such a time of renewal and hope.

Spring also offers the perfect opportunity for us to let go of negative thought patterns, emotional baggage, and mental clutter, allowing us to embrace a fresh start and renew our perspective on life.

Here are some strategies to guide you through this process of mental and spiritual renewal:

### 1. Identify the Clutter

Identify what is weighing you down. Reflect on your thoughts and emotions. Do you have recurring negative patterns? Do you find yourself holding onto past grievances or worries about the future? Recognizing these culprits of mental clutter is crucial to effectively clear them out.

### 2. Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of being present in the moment without judgment. By cultivating mindfulness, you can observe your thoughts and emotions without getting totally wrapped up in them. Take time each day to engage in mindfulness activities such as meditation, deep breathing exercises, or simply paying

attention to your surroundings. This practice can help you let go of unnecessary mental clutter and find peace within yourself.

### 3. Challenge Negative Thoughts

Negative thought patterns can sabotage your well-being and prevent you from experiencing joy and fulfillment. When negative thoughts arise, you should try to challenge them. Ask yourself if these thoughts are based on facts or assumptions. Replace negative self-talk with positive affirmations and gratitude as often as you can. By reframing your perspective, you can shift your mindset from one of scarcity to one of abundance.

### 4. Practice Self-Compassion

Be gentle with yourself during the decluttering process. It's natural to encounter resistance and setbacks along the way. Instead of criticizing yourself, practice self-compassion. Treat yourself with the same kindness and understanding you would offer to a friend facing similar challenges. Remember that healing takes time, and it's okay to take small steps towards progress.

### 5. Let Go of Emotional Baggage

Holding onto past hurts and resentments only weighs you down and prevents you from moving forward. Take this opportunity to release emotional baggage that no longer serves you. Write a letter to yourself or the person you need to forgive, expressing your feelings and intentions. Then, symbolically let go of the letter by tearing it up or burning it. This act of release can be incredibly cathartic and liberating.

### 6. Create Boundaries

Establishing healthy boundaries is essential for protecting your mental well-being. Learn to say no to commitments and relationships that drain your energy or cause you stress. Surround yourself with people who uplift and support you. By setting boundaries, you create space for positivity and growth in your life.

### 7. Cultivate Gratitude

Practicing gratitude is a powerful antidote to negative thinking. Take time each day to reflect on the things you are grateful for, no matter how small. Keep a gratitude journal or simply pause to

appreciate the beauty around you. Cultivating an attitude of gratitude can shift your focus from what's lacking to what's abundant in your life.

### 8. Embrace Change

Spring is a season of renewal and transformation. Embrace the changes happening both internally and externally. Trust in the process of letting go and allow yourself to evolve into the best version of yourself. Remember that growth often requires stepping outside of your comfort zone and embracing the unknown.

Spring cleaning for the soul is a journey of self-discovery and liberation. By decluttering your mental space, you create room for positivity, growth, and renewed perspective.

Take some time to let go of any negative thought patterns, emotional baggage, and mental clutter that no longer serves you. Then you will have the mental space to embrace the fresh start that spring offers and embark on a path towards greater happiness, fulfillment, and inner peace.

# Seasons of Professional Change

MADELINE SMITH

Times Contributor

From post secondary planning, school graduation, travel, interviewing, hiring, naming a child, moving, starting a business, getting a promotion, growing or shrinking a company, to retirement - change and decision-making form part of everyone's core life journey. After living and working through a global pandemic,

being able to navigate this journey along with the shaky foundation of what we can rely on has become a challenge.

This is the exact reason Future in Focus was launched in September 2023, to support career and academic advising and navigating uncertain times. This is the first in a set of articles which will look into the current state of the labour force, the challenges our community faces, and what each season brings when discussing career and academic planning.

Overall, the labour force has become in-

creasingly complex as recent years have fast tracked the emphasis on:

- Remote Work – which in many ways opens the door to opportunity and cross Canada (and beyond) collaboration, however, has also introduced some interesting contrasts in inter-generational values, work-life balance, and “water cooler” conversations.

- Conscious Consumerism – buyers are increasingly focused on ethical and sustainable consumption and supporting local business or those with purposeful, humane, and environmentally friendly practices.

- AI and Automation – starting to understand its potential and how we can optimize its use in the workplace. This being said, I often reflect on the Human Resource implications of trying to identify talent in a pool of candidates who may

have used AI to build their applications.

- Declining Mental Health and the pressure on a tired healthcare system.

Within Stratford specifically, we see the theatre season return and an enormous plea from the hospitality industry for experienced and dependable staff. The city, like most around the country, is still working through major workforce challenges including healthcare worker shortages, low income (50% of salaries are lower than a living wage\*), business closures, and a homelessness crisis (over 200 people are homeless in Huron and Perth right now)\*.

That being said, I can't say enough about local business owners in Stratford; they are a community of warriors and the pride and support runs deep once you've been plugged in. One visit to a Stratford and District Chamber of Commerce event and you'll see the energy and passion for local business sustainability and collaboration.

Spring in Stratford brings ... snow (apparently), but also a new fiscal year, a federal budget, and a flux of job postings, including many for the upcoming summer months. Post secondary exams have begun and many youth and young adults will return home and be available to the workforce if it's ready to take them. A neat opportunity in Stratford is the “Summer Company

Program” through the Stratford Perth Centre for Business where young entrepreneurs (ages 15-29) can seek funding and mentorship to launch a summer business.

If finishing Grade 11 or Grade 12, I might also consider using the energy boost that spring brings to start thinking about and planning your post-secondary adventure and how the fall rush will look for you.

If you're navigating career or academic changes, looking for employees or have a business idea, please reach out. Future in Focus clients include:

1. High School Students
2. Recent Graduates (High School or Post-Secondary)
3. Mid-Career Changes (or those preparing to interview again)
4. Businesses (or Soon-to-Be Businesses)

If there is something you want to discuss regarding the work force, lets talk. I hope to start the conversation and open the door to new opportunities within our beautiful community!

Madeline Smith with Future in Focus was launched September 1, 2023.

Contact Information:

info@futureinfocus.ca

613-204-4989

https://www.futureinfocus.ca/

@FutureinFocusCC (Instagram)

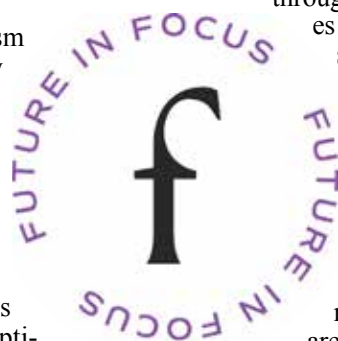
\*References Used: United Way

https://perthhuron.unitedway.ca/

your-impact/stratford-and-area/

https://perthhuron.unitedway.ca/

unignorable-issues/#unignorable-housing



## GRANT HAVEN MEDIA

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St. Marys Independent The Wilmot-Tavistock Gazette STRATFORDTIMES INDY

Woodstock Ingersoll Echo Goderich Sun NORFOLK FARMS BRANT FARMS strmarys radio

## HAVE A SPECIAL EVENT COMING UP? Let us know!

### Call 519-655-2341 or email stratfordtimes@gmail.com

## COMING EVENTS Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

**GARDEN STRATFORD GENERAL MEETING**  
**Monday April 1; 7:15 – 9:00 p.m. \*\*New Time\*\***  
**Army Navy Hall, 151 Lorne Ave. E., Stratford**  
 Featured Presentation: “Harvesting Your Crop at Peak for Flavour and Storage” with Professor Amy Turnbull, Master Gardener. Meeting Open to Everyone; Free Admission.

**OSTOMY SUPPORT GROUP MEETING**  
**Tuesday, April 2; 7:00 p.m.**  
**93 Morgan St., Stratford**  
 ‘Humour and Feeling Good’ with Dr. Ken Shonk  
 Social time and snacks. Everyone welcome.

**ST. JAMES VARIETY SALE**  
**April 25-April 28**  
**St. James Anglican Church 41 Mornington St.**  
 Clothing, Toys, Kitchen Items, Treasures, Jewelry, Books  
 Linen Goods, Music & Records, and of course our huge Yard Sale

**SPRING TEA**  
**Sunday April 21; 2-4 p.m.**  
**Legion Hall**  
 The Stratford Legion Branch 8 and Ladies Auxiliary are hosting a ‘Spring Tea’. The afternoon of tea includes finger sandwiches, dainties, doors prizes, a silent auction and lots of fun. Tickets are available by calling Anne, visiting Flowers on York 519-301-0914 or visit https://tinyurl.com/2zyb2dfv

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Worship with us

Sunday 10:00 a.m.

11:00 a.m. – Fellowship and Coffee Hour

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Worship With Us



Stratford Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church

Quality Inn Festival (1144 Ontario St., Stratford)

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

stratfordarp.org

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

# Riddles

What sound does a space turkey make?  
Hubble, hubble, hubble

What are unhappy cranberries called?  
Blueberries

What's blue and covered with feathers?  
A turkey holding its breath

What did the mom corn ask baby corn?  
"Where is pop corn?"

Why did the kid put the mail in the oven?  
Because he wanted to have hotmail

What kind of mail does a superstar vampire get?  
Fang mail

What did Dracula's teacher say when he failed his math test?  
"Can't you count, Dracula?"

What did one math book say to the other?  
"Don't bother me, I have my own problem"

What's green and makes holes?  
A drill pickle

What do you call an ice cream truck operator?  
A sundae drive

# Sudoku

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

Solutions on page 31



## Pet of the Month



### LAVENDER

Meet Lavender! She is 1 year and 7 months old large, mixed breed dog looking for her loving family. Lavender will add a splash of joy and adventure into your days! She is a big bundle of energy and enthusiasm. She loves going on walks and will be the perfect companion. Lavender is best suited to a home where she can be the center of attention. She prefers to be the only canine (No other dogs) member in the household. With your undivided attention, Lavender will flourish and shower you with unconditional love and loyalty. If you're ready to welcome Lavender to your family, submit an adoption survey today at <https://kwsphumane.ca/adopt/process>.

# Word Search

## CLASSIC LITERATURE

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

- Novel
- Protagonist
- Antagonist
- Plot
- Setting
- Theme
- Symbolism
- Foreshadowing
- Metaphor
- Allegory
- Irony
- Epiphany
- Conflict
- Resolution
- Characterization

# CLASSIFIEDS

Email to inquire stratfordtimes@gmail.com

## OBITUARY

### SEAN CASS ATKINSON

We are saddened to announce the sudden passing of Sean Cass Atkinson on March 17, 2024.

Sean was loved, cherished and will be deeply missed by his parents, Dona and Cass Atkinson.

Sean spent his childhood years in various parts of the country. After post-secondary education in New Brunswick, Sean moved to Toronto where he lived a number of years, first working in logistics and then in the golf industry. Sean was a very talented golfer and spent countless days on the golf course with family and friends. After Toronto, he then relocated to Stratford, Ontario along with his parents and began working in sales, enjoying playing still more golf, often at the Stratford Country Club. In addition, he loved attending the Stratford Festival each season.

In keeping with Sean's wishes, cremation has taken place. Memorial donations, if desired, may be made to a charity of one's choice through Rutherford Cremation & Funeral Services. 804 Ontario St., Stratford. 519-271-5062.

## WANTED

A WORKING CAMCORDER that will play Hi-8 digital tapes. Phone 519-284-3774

## FOR SALE

ATTENTION: Collectors, and doll lovers from 4 to 104. FOUR, brand new (still in presentation boxes) 20" "Reborn" brand dolls; two with blonde rooted hair, and all in quality outfits on weighted, vinyl/soft bodies with eyes that open and shut; and may include bottles, diapers, birth certificates, pacifiers and rattles. Special price of \$115.00 each box, complete. Please call (non smoking) Stratford home at (519) 305-6275. These adorable 'babies' are looking for loving 'Forever Homes'.

Royal Albert china sets - Old fashion Violet and Peach Blossom. Old fashion viewmaster discs. Roy Rieman magazines, Country Farm & Rural and Reminisce. Call 519-580-0630 (Wellesley area).

## HELP WANTED



The Boathouse is seeking a **Summer Student Dock Attendant** to assist with all things waterfront! If you're a student passionate about customer service and love being by the water, this could be your perfect fit.

Email us at [info@boathouse.ca](mailto:info@boathouse.ca) to learn more about this exciting opportunity!

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\$ Cash Paid \$ for your RECORDS and LPs. Jazz, Blues, Rock, Pop, Folk, Soundtracks, and more. Selectively buying CDs, Cassettes, Turntables, and Stereo Equipment. For more information: **DIAMOND DOGS MUSIC** 114 Ontario St. Stratford / 226-972-5750

WANTING TO BUY - All collectibles including sports cards, beanie babies, Funko pops and stamps. Highest prices paid. Free appraisals. Are you downsizing or need an estate clean out? We can help. Call or text Stan anytime 519-868-3814.

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

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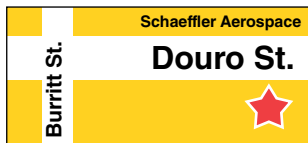
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